

LET THERE BE LIGHT: A SPOTLIGHT ON CREATIONISM IN AUSTRALIA by Tony Eales

Creationists They're still out there and while they may not be a significant political force here, Australia remains one of the world's leading centres for producing creationist material. Answers in Genesis (AIG) based right here in Queensland produces a subscriber newsletter, a glossy magazine, a "technical journal" several books, many aimed at children, and AIG also maintains a major web site www.answersingenesis.org. Their biggest market is of course the US, however they also have a substantial subscriber base here in Australia as well.

Background: Who are the creationists? Creationists come in many colours and flavours. From YEC to ID but the message is the same, that is, that all science must conform to their particular interpretation of The Bible or be rejected.

Below are some of the different strains:

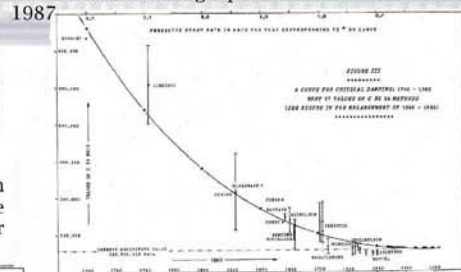
YEC - Young Earth Creationist

This is what most people think of when they think of creationism. Basic tenets are that every word of the Bible is literally true in plain interpretation. In other words if the Bible says that God created the world in six days then that is what it means, six literal, twenty-four hour days. AIG is avowedly YEC in philosophy.

OEC - Old Earth Creationist

These guys differ from the YECs in taking a more flexible approach to interpretation of the Bible especially Genesis. They point to the fact that the Hebrew word "Yom" is not only the word for day but also for a "period of time". Therefore, the six days of creation may have taken billions of years but the events are still historically true. OECs of a slightly different stripe are known as "Gap Theorists". They maintain that there is a gap between the six days of creation and the creation of humans (Adam and Eve) six to ten thousand years ago that could span millions of years.

Setterfield's CDK graph



Dating - Obviously YECs have a problem with any form of dating which gives ages older than about ten thousand years. The most basic response is to dismiss all dating as inaccurate or untrustworthy. In order to do this they cite the sometimes large sounding error ranges or refer to erroneous and inverted dates. Some try to compress the history of the Earth into their limited time-frame. One of the theories used to reconcile a 10,000 year history with radiometric dating is known as CDK (see graph). This theory states that the speed of light has been slowing since creation and therefore radiometric decay was more rapid in the past giving erroneously greater ages for the Earth.

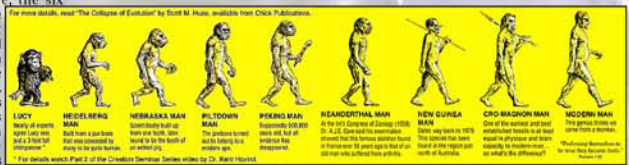
Another technique often used by AIG's Dr Andrew Snelling is to take an inappropriate sample of some poorly identified and collected material and send it to renowned radiometric dating labs for analysis. In one case he sent 40 year old volcanic rock for K-Ar dating, obtaining, of course, a date in the millions of years. In another case he sent a ferric-organic concretion obtained from the wall of a quarry from the Hawkesbury Sandstone region to Geochron for radiocarbon dating, obtaining a date of c.35,000 BP. It is obvious to us why these apparently anomalous results were obtained but for those with a limited understanding of the science involved these look for all the world like proof that radiometric dating methods are fundamentally flawed.

Some panels from "Big Daddy?" a cartoon style booklet known as a 'Chick Tract' by Jack T. Chick 2000.



ID Theorist - Intelligent Design Theorist

Many of these people eschew the tag creationist. They maintain that they are engaged in science and indeed quite a few hold degrees, some even in somewhat relevant fields like Biochemistry. Some even accept that evolution occurred. What they wish to demonstrate using various spurious arguments is that life cannot have arisen without being designed and built by an intelligent agent. Most disingenuously, they are usually shy about who or what this designer might be but the clear implication is that it is the Judeo-Christian God.



That is what makes the world an interesting place but that doesn't mean we have to put up with it. Their anti-science anti-education agenda should be challenged when you want to go looking for a fight, there are well-attended discussion boards on the net where concerned and feisty scientists and others gather and confront creationists keyboard to keyboard. Many of these boards are run by and for liberalist Christian groups and can be decidedly unfriendly but one moderated board at www.carm.org/boards.htm has a more amicable feel. A good place to get background information about and links to common creationist arguments and their refutations is found at www.talkorigins.org It also has up to date and well presented articles on hominid fossils and evolution.

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Why worry?

A fair majority of us in Australia have a healthy suspicion of overt religiosity while still maintaining a respect for other individuals' religious beliefs. This balance has allowed us to avoid the excessive political power the religious right have in the USA. However there are large numbers of creationists in Australia and their message undermines education and adds to the growing anti-intellectualism that is often just under the surface in Australian political life. There are a number of specific aspects to the creationist message that should cause concern for us as archaeologists and educators in Australia.

Aborigines and AIG - Over the years, AIG has produced some rather odd articles about Amish links to Aborigines, dinosaurs in Aboriginal rock art, the agreement between Dreamtime and Biblical stories and the role of evolutionary theory in causing the various depredations suffered by the Indigenous people of Australia. In contrast to some of the more racist fringe of Christian fanaticism, the AIG line is to promote the essential oneness of humanity by stressing that we all share a common ancestry with Noah and before that Adam and Eve all within the last few thousand years.

While AIG's analysis of recent history casts science as the bad guys their analysis of the period between the Tower of Babel and Contact leaves much to be desired. The following quotes are from Ken Ham's Article in AIG "The Australian Aboriginal"

Someone, somewhere in their history, has turned away from the true God, devalued their own religion and successfully persuaded their fellow Aborigines to accept it. They have suffered the consequences of this. Instead of being a culture regenerated by God's standards, they have degenerated from them (Ham 1983).

AIG's analysis of the complex land rights issue is even worse. In an attempt not to say anything that might be construed as being actually anti-land rights (after all who knows more about out of context quoting than a creationist) Ken Ham's polemic dissolves in a river of rhetorical questions

For instance, on the basis of a literal Biblical view of world history, aborigines [sic] have been in Australia less than 4,000 years (not 40,000). Many want land rights so that Aboriginal sacred or religious sites can be kept. Is this valid? Again, before we can decide, we must have a correct view of why they want sacred sites preserved. Is it that they want to preserve all things associated with their religion? If this is the case then to understand their religion, you have to understand their true history. Isn't their religion anti-God? Shouldn't Christians rather be telling the aborigines [sic] they need to turn to the true God of history and turn their backs on pagan worship? (Ham 1983).

Rather than use his own voice to denounce land rights he instead opts for the old chestnut of the unreferenced quote from an unnamed Aborigine,

A Christian aborigine [sic] from Western Australia said 'much of the land rights arguments are a reversal of the dominion God made to man. If we want land rights because of sacred sites, sacred kangaroos, etc., then the land and animals have dominion over man. God made it the opposite to this.' (Ham 1983).

or the old racist saw that Aborigines didn't own land anyway, to whit this footnote

1. The concept of 'land rights' (or ownership of land) is not known in traditional Aboriginal culture. It is a terminology introduced from European materialistic culture and imposed upon the Aborigines (Ham 1983).

Conclusion

Creationists are worth worrying about. They have money, support and persuasive rhetoric on their side and they aren't going away anytime soon. In general, not much can be done about it, people believe weird things, that doesn't mean we have to put up with it. Their anti-science anti-education agenda should be challenged when you want to go looking for a fight, there are well-attended discussion boards on the net where concerned and feisty scientists and others gather and confront creationists keyboard to keyboard. Many of these boards are run by and for liberalist Christian groups and can be decidedly unfriendly but one moderated board at www.carm.org/boards.htm has a more amicable feel. A good place to get background information about and links to common creationist arguments and their refutations is found at www.talkorigins.org It also has up to date and well presented articles on hominid fossils and evolution.

References:

- Chick, J. I. "Big Daddy" Chick Publications 2000 www.chick.com
- Ham, K 1983 "The Australian Aboriginal" *Creation ex Nihilo* 5(3) pp.27-29.
- Setterfield, B. & T. Norman 1987 "The Atomic Constants, Light and Time" www.idolohim.com
- Acknowledgements: To all at CARM (www.carm.org) for instructing me in the ways and habits of the creationist especially to Matt Slick for providing such an excellent debating space on the web. Thanks to all at www.talkorigins.org for taking the time to refute the plethora of nonsense out there.