



Defending the Teaching of Evolution & Climate Science

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Creationism in Europe, Part 1

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Discussing creationism in 1999, Stephen Jay Gould contended, “This controversy is as locally and distinctively American as apple pie and Uncle Sam.” But even before Gould offered his view, the historian of science Ronald L. Numbers had already devoted a section of his monumental history of creation science, *The Creationists* (1992), to the global spread of creationism, observing, “By the 1990s scientific creationism, though made in America, had become a small-scale international phenomenon.” When Numbers returned to the topic in the 2006 update of his book, he added, “Although Gould remained oblivious to it, the worldwide growth of creationism by 2000 had already proven him utterly wrong. Antievolutionism had become a global phenomenon, as readily exportable as hip-hop and blue jeans.”



In the spring of 2007, I found myself in the strange position of having to try to adjudicate the dispute between Gould and Numbers. Richard H. Robbins, a professor of anthropology at SUNY Plattsburgh, had asked permission to reprint a handful of news stories about creationist activity in foreign countries that had been posted at NCSE’s website in a book, *Darwin and the Bible: The Cultural Confrontation* (http://www.pearsonhighered.com/pearsonhigheredus/educator/product/products_detail.page?isbn=0205509533) (2008), that he was editing along with his fellow anthropologist Mark Nathan Cohen. I was a little reluctant, since those stories were quickly written and mainly derivative: nothing that seemed to deserve the dignity of publication in a book. Before I knew it, though, I had agreed to write a new article for the book. I spent a couple of weeks—including several all-night stints—working on it. ([Drop me a line \(http://ncse.com/contact\)](http://ncse.com/contact) if you want to see the end product.)

Entitled “Creationism as a Global Phenomenon” (echoing Numbers’s phrase), my essay examined public opinion with regard to creationism and evolution, the presence of organized support for creationism, and the occurrence of controversies over the teaching of evolution all around the world. The United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand: these were easy. But (as I observed), “the further away from the United States, the closer the treatment verges on the anecdotal.” As I discovered, there is a distinct paucity of information about creationism in,

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for example, sub-Saharan Africa (except for South Africa), South America, and the greater part of Asia. A handful of polls, a handful of news reports when there was a controversy over the teaching of evolution, a handful of scattered remarks here and there: that was about it.

Europe occupies a midway position, though. Where I allocated a paragraph each to sub-Saharan Africa, South America, and the Far East and India, I allocated a little more than four paragraphs to Europe: one to Britain, one each to (speaking loosely) Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Europe, and a sentence or two about Turkey in a paragraph about the Islamic world. (Doubtless there are alternative ways in which the treatment could have been organized, but religion is so important to shaping the way in which creationism is manifest that it seemed like a natural choice to me.) I found the material I was summarizing for my essay to be fascinating, since Europe overall is culturally close enough to the United States that creationism is a salient phenomenon, but far enough that creationism is understudied.

Understudied, yes, but not altogether unstudied. Even in the spring of 2007, there were signs that European scholars were beginning to take creationism in Europe seriously, primarily as a threat to science education: consider the Council of Europe's resolution on "The dangers of creationism," proposed in October 2006, discussed in a report dated June 2007, and finally adopted in October 2007 (and subsequently included (<http://ncse.com/media/voices/council-europe>) in NCSE's *Voices for Evolution*, of course), or the 2007 publication of the anthology *Kreationismus in Deutschland: Fakten und Analysen* (<http://www.lit-verlag.de/isbn/3-8258-9684-3>) (Creationism in Germany: Facts and Analyses), edited by the University of Kassel biologist Ulrich Kutschera. But where were the scholars who were taking creationism in Europe seriously as a social phenomenon meriting study in its own right? As far as I could tell at the time, nowhere.

I was pleased and excited, therefore, to see a new paper: "Creationism in Europe: Facts, Gaps, and Prospects," by Stefaan Blancke, Hans Henrik Hjermitsev, Johan Braeckman, and Peter C. Kjærgaard, forthcoming in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* and already available (<http://jaar.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2013/08/22/jaarel.lft034.full.pdf>) (PDF) on-line (with subscription). In the abstract, they explain:

The purpose of our article is threefold. First, we present and discuss the extant literature on creationism in Europe (the "facts"). Within this section, we offer a review of the literature as well as an overview of the most remarkable developments and events recorded therein. Second, we indicate which material is missing from the literature (the "gaps") and signal which gaps we think should first be filled. Third, on the basis of a forthcoming international historical study, we outline the possible factors that affect the popularity of creationism in Europe (the "prospects"). We also sketch how a sustained study of European creationism can contribute to other research domains such as the study of cultural evolution and the relation between science and religion.

The lead author Stefaan Blancke, a postdoctoral researcher in the department of philosophy and moral sciences at Ghent University in Belgium (and a member of NCSE, I'm pleased to say), kindly agreed to answer a few questions about the article for the Science League of America blog. The interview with him will be in part 2.

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Looking forward to Part II!

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Why would biblical creationism be popular in non bible believing peoples??
YEC creationism comes from bible believers. Evangelical Protestants, other protestants, some Catholics, mormons etc.
thats the equation. where those people are in greatest numbers there is the greater rejection of anti-genesis concepts. Simple.
Europe has been as unevangelical as can be for as long as can be.
Thats the difference between the english speaking civilization and the rest.
About seeing gods fingerprints in nature is another subject.
Easily people accept that everywhere. I hear in Asian countries yEC is doing well relative to the hugh numbers there in population.

The important thing is not just bible believers however.
Its the general and historical intelligence level of the different peoples.
so scepticism of evolution would be higher in a more intelligent nation if evolution was untrue and this seen by sharp people regardless of religious identity.

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