

## BOOK REVIEW

### *Creationism in Europe*

*Stefaan Blancke, Hans Henrik Hjerimitslev and Peter C. Kjærgaard (Eds.)*  
Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2014, XVI+276 pp,  
ISBN 9781421415628, USD 39.95

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As its title suggests, this book aims to tackle an ambitious subject: history of creationism in Europe, filling a sizeable gap in the European historiography. In his *Note on Sources*, Stefaan Blancke (one of the authors and editors of the volume) stated that “the literature lacked a much-needed coherent study of creationism in Europe” (p. 251), all the more so because, for decades, the creationism has centred on American phenomena. That also explains why Ronald Numbers welcomes this book, considering it as a ‘pioneer’. Indubitably, the creationism definition carries a wide variety of meanings and its approach is provocative, complex, and multifaceted. So, this first comprehensive contribution on creationism in Europe skilfully traces the threads of historiography, Philosophy, Sociology, Biology and other sciences, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, focusing on the rise of and response to the creation science, intelligent design, and antievolutionism in a variety of European countries and regions.

Each of *Creationism in Europe*’s thirteen chapters identifies a key theme of history of creationism versus evolution issue, exploring how personalities and organizations came into the debate. Thomas Lepeltier’s essay on France is notable for his attempt to bring out questions such as: “How should we define French creationism when many of the very people who seem to be creationists deny being such? Which criteria can we use to designate as creationists people who said they are not?” (p. 15) However, religious, political, and cultural particularities created wide variations in French society, taking the ‘battle’ over creationism outside school, mainly in the media, magazines, and books. Lepeltier concludes that “characteristic of the French debate about creationism is the fact that very few are willing to defend a creationist position. As such, recent history of creationism in France is strongly linked to the evolution of French anti-creationism” (p. 28).

Jesús I. Catalá-Gorgues’s study about Spain and Portugal presents, in a historical and comparative perspective, the Iberian particularities of debate on creationism and evolution. Providing details on local or imported points of view and initiatives, the author believes that, in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, these two countries are placed “in between the pro-evolutionary countries in

northwestern Europe and the more antievolutionary countries of Eastern Europe” (p. 44). An interesting image of what people (individuals and organizations) in Britain think about evolution and creation is given by Joachim Allgaier. Based on both surveys and specific literature, the author brings to the fore not only the interplay of science and religion in British educational system, which has been of such value to the discussion of the media, but also the “growing, heterogeneous, and fragmented movement” (p. 60) of creationist attitudes in the United Kingdom.

The next chapters (*The Low Countries* and *Scandinavia*) have – similar to the case of Iberian Peninsula - the regional approach of creationism as their subject of study. With contributions ranging from ‘Dutch Calvinists’ of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to events of 2011 in Belgium, the essay by Stefaan Blancke, Abraham C. Flipse, and Johan Braeckman is necessarily selective and eclectic in nature. It does highlight the cultural and social dimension of ‘heated debates’, both among Christians and in the public domains. With regard to creationism in Scandinavia, the authors – Hans Henrik Hjermitsev and Peter C. Kjærgaard – argue that it “is a relatively marginalized phenomenon compared to most other European countries and especially to the United States” (p. 87). Despite the ‘early Protestant responses to Darwinism’, developed by the ‘free churches’ and supporters of scientific creationism or/and intelligent design, despite the Muslim students’ criticism of evolutionary biology (especially of human evolution), the “influence of creationism, local as well as imported, is limited in Scandinavia and is likely to remain so without strong financial and political backing and greater activism among the relatively small member of religious fundamentalists in the region” (p. 99).

Turning to Germany, Ulrich Kutschera emphasizes how “a minority of religious enthusiasts have been able to exert its influence on the teaching of evolution in biology classes of public schools” (p. 121). His investigations show that the majority of population accepts naturalistic evolution. However, the regional difference is a specific feature of creationism in Germany: in the former East Germany (“which was communist and thus atheistic”), both creationism and intelligent design are unpopular, while in the states of former West Germany “creationists and adherents of intelligent design constitute a much larger percentage of the population” (p. 119). The essay also demonstrates the importance of school curricula and how the educations and local authorities are, or are not, shaping the debate on creationism and evolution.

The discussion of the history of creationism in Poland focuses on the internal and external mechanisms that have challenged and inspired new approaches of social and religious concerns. Bartosz Borczyk asserts that contrary to the antievolutionary wave in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (when “Darwin’s theory was often associated with progressive social movements, positivism, and early socialism and communism”, in other words “a threat to the old, traditional way of life and the social order” – p. 129), the modern form of creationism in Poland was mostly imported from Western Europe and the United States. It is seen as marginal or “almost an exclusively Christian affair”, as long as the “Polish

creationists have not as yet contributed any original concept to the public debates about evolution and creation abroad” (p. 140).

The Orthodox Church point of view is a central element in the essay of Efthymios Nicolaidis on Greece and in the following contribution by Inga Levit, Georgy S. Levit, Uwe Hossfeld, and Lennart Olsson on Russia and its neighbors. In both cases, the authors deal with a traditional approach of creationism, highlighting the evolutionary theory understood as a double major danger (atheistic and coming from West). The papers demonstrate that creationism in these countries is perceived as a result of complex interactions that took place not only between Church and society, but also within the Orthodox Church.

The question of westernization is also raised in Martin Riexinger’s chapter about Turkey. The author focuses on the religious opposition to the theory of evolution, pointing out the raise of Islamic creationism and its impact on the Turkish society, as well as the global echo of Turkish Islamic opposition to the theory of evolution, which presents some “striking similarities to that in Russia and Greece”.

The next three chapters (*Catholicism* by Rafael A. Martínez and Thomas F. Glick, *Intelligent Design* by Barbara Forrest and *The Rise of Anti-Creationism in Europe* by Peter C. Kjærgaard) illuminate certain key aspects of the dense and complex relations between religious beliefs and identities, cultural contexts, social challenges and political tendencies. As Nicolaas A. Rupke reveals in his *Reclaiming Science for Creationism* (which is also the volume’s *Afterword*), creationism in Europe is not a unitary phenomenon, ‘monolithic’, and predictable, but a ‘multifaceted’ and ‘variegated’ process that can be understood “in terms of local, regional, and national contexts of sociopolitical purposes, of different histories and personalities, and, last but not least, of different religious traditions ” (p. 242)

Obviously, *Creationism in Europe* is a provocative contribution to the current European and global historiography. It offers plenty of scope for developing new ideas that European scholars could take to their own research, and use to expand or modify their own perspective.

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