

Outline Notes for a Teaching Block on Engaging with creationist worldviews in the classroom and congregation

Length: 3 contact hours

Level: 5

Resources include: teaching notes, video clips, assessment suggestions, reading lists.

Aim: To help students engage with creationist worldviews, whether expressed in the classroom or congregation

Source: Professor Michael Reiss, **Professor** of Science Education at UCL Institute of Education



Objectives: By the end of the block students will be able to:

- a) Understand the positions of both creationists and those who are not creationists
- b) Appreciate how creationism might be addressed in schools in both science lessons and religious education lessons
- c) Deal, whether in sermons or conversations, with issues raised by creationism.

Session 1: Creationist arguments and the scientific and theological response

Pre-session viewing:

- Watch the 'What's the Best "Proof" of Creation?' video (3 min 37 s) featuring Ken Ham, President/CEO of Answers in Genesis available at <https://answersingenesis.org/creationism/>. You might also like to look at some of the other material on the Answers in Genesis website.
- Watch the 'Top Ten Creationist Arguments' (7 min 55 s) video from The Thinking Atheist available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSxgnu3Hww8>.

Issues for discussion in the session:

- What did you think of the Answers in Genesis video? Are the arguments Ken Ham uses scientific, theological or other?
- What did you think of The Thinking Atheist video? Are the arguments it uses scientific, theological or other?
- Can someone be a scientist and a creationist?
- How convincing are the scientific arguments against creationism?
- Can someone be theologically informed and a creationist?

Post-session reading:

- Read some or all of National Academy of Sciences and Institute of Medicine (2008) *Science, Evolution, and Creationism*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press, available at <http://www.nap.edu/catalog/11876.html>.

Post-session viewing:

- Watch the Denis Alexander 'On the Barriers to Traditional Creation Theology' video (2 min 48 s) on the BioLogos website at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XwxlrN9ICnE>.

Session 2: Engaging with creationism in the classroom

Pre-session reading:

- Look at the official 2006 guidance from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in England (disbanded in 'the bonfire of the quangos' after the Coalition Government came to power in 2010) *How Can We Answer Questions About Creation and Origins? Learning from religion and science: Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Humanism – Year 9*, available at https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/sites/default/files/assets/documents/examplar_unit_y9_science_religion.pdf.
- Read Poole, M. (2008) Creationism, intelligent design and science education, *School Science Review*, 90(330), 123-130, available at http://www.issr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/SSR_Sept_2008_Poole.pdf.

Issues for discussion in the session:

- What do you think of the suggested year 9 scheme of work (for 13-14 year-olds) from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority?
- Should the approach to engaging with creationism in the science and religious education classroom be consistent or is it acceptable for there to be differences?

- What should be the aims of teaching about creationism in secondary science education and in secondary religious education?
- Imagine you are a head teacher or chair of governors at a secondary school. You are interviewing for the post of secondary biology teacher. The strongest applicant on paper is someone whom you are fairly sure holds creationist views. Can you / should you bring this up at interview and if you do, what difference would the answers make?

Post-session reading:

- DCSF (2007) Guidance on creationism and intelligent design, available at <http://webarhive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20071204131026/http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/docbank/index.cfm?id=11890>.
- Reiss, M. J. (2008) Teaching evolution in a creationist environment: an approach based on worldviews, not misconceptions. *School Science Review*, 90(331), 49-56, available at https://www.academia.edu/490861/Teaching_evolution_in_a_creationist_environment_an_approach_based_on_worldviews_not_misconceptions.
- See the resources at <http://www.faradayschools.com>.

Session 3: Engaging with creationism in the congregation

Pre-session reading:

- Read Spencer, N. & Alexander, D. (2009) *Rescuing Darwin: God and evolution in Britain today*. London: Theos, available at <http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/files/files/Reports/RescuingDarwin.pdf>.

Issues for discussion in the session:

- Did any of the findings in the Theos publication surprise you?
- The youth group in your Church has been revitalised over the last year, thanks largely to the time and effort of a young husband-and-wife team, Seth and Sara. One of the teenagers in the youth group who is studying science 'A' levels tells you that she is a bit concerned because Seth and Sara seem to be advocating a literal reading of the early chapters of *Genesis*. What should you do?
- How would you react to the suggestion that the rise of science has made it more difficult to have a traditional religious faith than was once the case?
- How might you respond if a member of the congregation asks you what we are supposed to conclude from the *Genesis* account of the Garden of Eden?

Assessment ideas

- Essay: How might creationism be addressed in the primary classroom where the clear-cut distinction in secondary schools between science lessons and religious education lessons, nearly always taught by different individuals, does not hold?

- Essay: How can congregations examine creationism in a way that is true to modern science without denigrating creationists?
- Practical/liturgical task: Write a prayer suitable for the Sunday nearest the birthday of Charles Darwin (February 12, 1809).
- Practical/liturgical task: Write a sermon that addresses issues connected with the scriptural account of the Fall, given the rise of evolutionary biology.

References

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