CREATION SCIENCE: NEWSPEAK BEFORE ITS TIME

DELOS B. MCKOWN*

ORWELL WROTE THAT some of Big Brother’s minions would be using Newspeak by 1984. Actually, a religious variant of it appeared as early as 1963 with the founding of the Creation Research Society. (1) Following that came The Creation-Science Research Center and The Institute of Creation Research. (2) Nor is that all. Some observers have detected as many as fifty creationist groups. (3) Each of these is zealously trying to smuggle biblical cosmology into the public schools under the honored guise of science. I propose herein to refer to the members of these groups and of such like-minded organizations as the Moral Majority (plus a host of television evangelists and legions of lay evangelicals) as “Powerful Parson.” Powerful Parson and Big Brother are tempted similarly, succumb to temptations similarly, and act similarly, granted sufficient political power. Each has a totalitarian twinkle in its eye, each knows what is really good for people, and each uses language deceptively to further his ends.

* Delos B. McKown is professor emeritus and the former chairman of the Philosophy Department at Auburn University. Originally printed in the Winter 1981 ETC.
It is tiresome to add “so-called” to “scientific creationism” or to enclose it in quotation marks every time one uses the term. But, if one leaves “so-called” out, one is left with a misnomer the effect of which is to do Powerful Parson’s work for him, i.e., in using the terms one tends to legitimize what is taken on faith to be its referent. Here I am reminded of a student who announced in class that trolls are “gross, ugly, little things.” It seems that she had not distinguished between Kewpie dolls or other statuettes purporting to be of trolls and trolls in the flesh, as it were. One has only to think of “Creation-Science” in “Creation-Science Research Center” to get the point. Remove the hyphen, and out pops “creationscience,” a perfect entry in the lexicon of Newspeak.

Presently, science allows us to regress no further than the Big Bang. Perhaps the primordial atom that then exploded was but a cyclical episode in the eternal career of matter/energy. Perhaps a supersensuous first cause created that atom just before it blew up. Perhaps the primordial atom came into existence spontaneously, i.e., out of nothingness without cause, or perhaps it was self-created, whatever that might mean when applied to a primordial atom bent on exploding. Although scientific sobriety would seem to counsel a suspension of judgment, pending further information, people are obviously free to place their faith in whichever alternative is most attractive. But, to call any of these metaphysical alternatives scientific is to misunderstand science and to misuse the word. Clearly, there are creationists and non-creationists respecting cosmology and scientists and nonscientists respecting expertise, but there are no “scientific creationists” in proper English despite those who call themselves that in their brand of Newspeak.

“Scientific creationists” believe in neither the Big Bang nor in its remote occurrence ten or more billion years ago. They believe more nearly in the “Big Wash” and think that it happened no more than ten thousand years ago. (4) I say Big Wash, because according to Genesis, Chapter One (a literal reading of much of which they covertly peddle), water was already present when God began to create the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1-2). Then the firmament appeared separating the waters above it from those below it (Gen. 1:6-7; Ps. 24:2, 148:4). Finally, the dry land emerged from the waters and set bounds to them (Gen. 1:9). Loath to believe nowadays that there is an ocean of water above the sky, Powerful Parson has created the term “vapor canopy” expressly to explain where the rain originated for the biblical flood (of which more later). (5) But, alas, vapor canopy is not scriptural. Thus, there is outright deception whenever Powerful Parson uses it to refer to a supposed atmospheric source of that flood. More Newspeak!

To bolster this unbolsterable “science,” Powerful Parson misstates the second law of thermodynamics (which still sounds scientific) and maintains a non-
event by continuing to name it as though mere naming could underwrite the alleged event. (6) Powerful Parson takes it on faith that evolution has not occurred, because Genesis says otherwise. The problem is to find a scientific reason for this article of faith. Taking evolution to be the spontaneous generation of life forms from the simplest and least ordered to the more complex and more ordered, (7) Powerful Parson casts about for anything with which to negate such a process and comes up with entropy according to which the universe is always and everywhere tending from the complex to the simple, from the ordered to the disordered. (8) Thus, evolution is made impossible — supposedly. Calling this a “kindergarten level” formulation of the second law, Isaac Asimov writes that our sun is indeed running down but that in the process it delivers more than ample energy for evolution to occur, and he is seconded by legions of thermodynamicists. (9)

It horrifies Powerful Parson to hear that Earth was formed about four and a half billion years ago, that life began around four billion years ago, and that evolutionary processes have been working on organic matter ever since. (10) Dr. Henry Morris, sometimes called the foremost “scientific creationist,” (11) has attributed the idea of evolution (together with its immense time scale) to the devil. (12) To combat this satanic lie, Powerful Parson utilizes the non-event known as Noah’s flood. I call it a non-event, because geology knows nothing of a deluge occurring less than ten thousand years ago that inundated Earth’s highest mountains. (13) The selection of the date for Noah’s flood (which depends entirely on the ages of the biblical patriarchs and the times of their begetting) is as dubious as is the alleged event. (14)

Powerful Parson, nevertheless, clings to this non-event, because there has to have been a planetary catastrophe disruptive enough to nullify all radiometric or other attempts at dating anything prior to ten thousand years ago, the approximate date of creation according to “scientific creationists.” (15) Any technique establishing much earlier dates would be a disaster, because Powerful Parson is committed to the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. (16) So, since Noah’s flood is biblical and since it alone qualifies to render the uniformitarian premises of science (together with the dating techniques based thereon) invalid, it must be maintained, despite a cacophony of scientific nays.

Such, in nuce, is “creationscience,” a non-empirical, miracle-laden system of beliefs expressed in a variant of Newspeak designed to make the ideas in question seem scientific rather than religious. How, you may wonder, is it doing? In the muddled minds of many Americans, it is doing fabulously, all the way from the White House and the halls of Congress to state legislatures and on to individual churches and school systems nestled in the grass roots. Consider the following four reasons for this unhappy, frightening appraisal.
First, Powerful Parson has us talking and writing pro and con about “creationscience,” has us voting for or against it, trying to get it into the public schools or trying to keep it out, and trying to block it in state legislatures or trying to ram it through. This national embroilment is a major achievement. It is as though the Flat Earth Society had suddenly revived (becoming rich, populous, and politically potent in the process) and had embroiled the country in geocentrism. This too is biblical and may be on the docket next, if current tendencies continue. Robert J. Schadewald, denying that it is a parody, has already written a bill entitled, “The Balanced Treatment for Flat-Earth Science and Spherical-Earth Science Act.” (17) It parallels “The Balanced Treatment for Scientific Creationism and Evolution Act” which Powerful Parson has been introducing into state legislatures.

Second, speaking of legislatures, 1981 was a banner year for “creationscience.” After a decade of frustration in a dozen or more states, Powerful Parson finally won in Arkansas and Louisiana. There was also a close call in Alabama and an even closer call in Georgia in 1980. In 1978, South Carolina approved of local option leaving individual public school systems free to offer “balanced treatment” of origins. Similar triumphs can be expected elsewhere unless or until the federal courts quash “creationscience.” (18)

Third, Powerful Parson takes advantage of the scientific illiteracy afflicting the United States. Speaking glibly of paradigms (a term made famous by Thomas Kuhn) and quoting Sir Karl Popper’s opinion that evolution is merely a “metaphysical research programme” (as though Popper were infallible), Powerful Parson confuses all but scientific sophisticates. (19) The Creation Research Society Quarterly continues the bamboozlement. It is produced by a society all of whose full members have at least a master’s degree in some science or other, including engineering. (20) What wonderful mileage Powerful Parson gets out of credentials nowadays! John Q. Public can be depended on not to know how to distinguish between credentialed people. If Dean David Boylan, of the school of Engineering at Iowa State, says that entropy prevents evolution and Isaac Asimov of the School of Medicine at Boston University says that it does not, how can a scientific simpleton like John Q. tell the difference? (21) In addition to the aforementioned journal, there are also what look like bona fide textbooks (of “creationscience”) pouring off Powerful Parson’s presses. (22) If John N. Moore (Ed.D. Michigan State) says in one of these that the universe is only about ten thousand years old and Carl Sagan (Ph.D., Chicago) says that it is billions and billions of years old, how can innocents (including college graduates) be expected to know who tells the truth? Meanwhile, Powerful Parson successfully censors offensive textbooks. One such says that humans developed language over the long centuries of the Old Stone Age. This was removed
from use in Alabama on the ground that man possessed language from the outset; otherwise Adam could not have named the animals on the day of creation (Gen. 2:4 and 19). (23)

Fourth, Powerful Parson appeals to much that is deepest in the American psyche. In addition to being scientifically illiterate, we are anti-intellectual as a people, and pious. We also believe in democracy to a fault and in fair play. When these characteristics coalesce around an ideologically sensitive issue (such as creationism versus evolution), we choose up sides and vote on it, naively unaware that science is not an enterprise that can be determined by popular referenda. An English commentator (whom I can no longer identify) once remarked that though the industrial revolution originated in England, the English really do not like machinery, preferring instead horses and dogs. To speak of Americans in parallel fashion, one would have to say that though we have carried technology to great heights, and like the resulting gadgets, we really prefer the old-time religion. In light of recent tendencies in the United States, this observation should have a chilling effect on those who create the science behind the technology. Not only are they less honored than technologists, they are Powerful Parson’s real enemy.

Currently, Powerful Parson is misled about this, whether due to ignorance or to the confusions of Newspeak I cannot say. In any case, Powerful Parson thinks that the enemy is secular humanism. Recently, Newsweek treated its readers to an exposition of this befuddled belief in its article, “The Right’s New Bogeyman.” (24) This article was enriched by a drawing and a caption, each deserving comment. The drawing was of an octopus identified as secular humanism. With one tentacle it encircled television, with another the capital of the United States, with another a church, with another a school, and with another an American family. More worrisome, perhaps, was the fact that three tentacles were left unoccupied, tentacles which, like idle hands, were no doubt seeking even then to do the devil’s work. What next? one wonders. The caption in question, referring to a prominent “creation science” preacher, said, “LaHaye: Making humanism a dirty word.” It suffices to note that changing the connotations of words was one of the original tasks of Newspeak as Orwell conceived it.

Even though secular humanism is the target of Powerful Parson’s broadsides, it is science which will absorb the greater punishment. Even if secular humanism suffers a direct hit, the damage will be slight compared with the demolition science education will suffer. Despite the modernity of the United States and the power of American science and technology, our public schools have been unable to produce minds generally congenial to and appreciative of the basic assumptions and procedures of scientific inquiry. Surely, this borders
on the disastrous! Given that we now produce hordes of scientific simpletons, imagine the greater disaster in the astrophysical, earth, and life sciences were “creationscience” to be incorporated in the public schools as a valid model of origins. Then add the fact that private Christian schools endorsing “creationscience” are currently pullulating like rabbits. It boggles the mind! One can see a time a decade hence when most, if not all, science during the first two years of college will be remedial. What an enormous waste of time and money that would be; what a crushing indictment of primary and secondary education! Moreover, science at the college level would be increasingly alienated from society in general. Nor would scientists at that level necessarily be safe. Presently, primary and secondary education preoccupy Powerful Parson, but it need not always be so. It does not even tax the imagination to foresee a time when research monies in ideologically sensitive areas may dry up in favor of what Powerful Parson takes to be theologically innocuous.

Orwell was wrong about Big Brother — in the United States at least. Big Brother is not going to take over here by 1984. But, Powerful Parson may. Orwell was more nearly right about Newspeak. It is flourishing, flourishing before its time, even though it is being accented more in holy tones than in the overtly political ones he expected.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See any copy of the Creation Research Society Quarterly.


16. See any copy of the *CRS Quarterly*.


20. See any issue of the *CRS Quarterly*.


