

MECHANICAL ENGINEER ON CREATION

Lita Cosner chats with Dr John Cimbala



BIO: Dr John M. Cimbala is a Professor in the Department of Mechanical and Nuclear Engineering at Pennsylvania State University (Penn State), a position he has held for more than 31 years. John received a B.S. in Aerospace Engineering from Penn State and an M.S. and a Ph.D. in Aeronautics from the California Institute for Technology (Caltech). He is a well-known author and co-author of several textbooks used in universities all over the world. He has been married to Suzy for more than 35 years and is the father of two adult sons, Andy and Luke. He is very active in his local church and enjoys swimming, working out in the gym, Bible study, and reading.

JOHN GREW up in a Christian home and learned about God and the church there. However, during his high school and college years, he abandoned the faith. “My biggest stumbling block was the creation account in Genesis, since it greatly contradicted what I was learning in science classes. I could not believe the first page of the Bible, and so I could not believe the rest of it either. I always

saw a clear choice between creation and evolution; these two worldviews are mutually exclusive; one had to be right and the other wrong. I never could buy into any of the attempts at reconciling the two. Back then and to this day I believed that the Bible is a package deal—it is either God’s true Word or it is hogwash.”

Initially, John believed evolution was the correct view, that the earth was

billions of years old, and that God did not exist. But unlike many, he kept an open mind about creation, and in the 1970s and 1980s, he became interested in the work of the Institute for Creation Research (ICR). “For the first time in my life I was exposed to credible scientific evidence for creation and against evolution, and it made sense. I was particularly influenced by the classic book *The Genesis Flood* (1961) by Henry Morris and John Whitcomb.”

He was impressed by the scientific cogency of their arguments for creation. “My major area of research was fluid mechanics. So I was particularly interested in the hydrology associated with the worldwide flood and how it could explain the geological strata, fossils, and so on. After much reading, studying, and listening to talks on these issues, I finally came to the point of believing in the Creator God. Once I could believe the first page of the Bible I was easily able to believe the rest of it. At that point I surrendered my life to Christ and became a Christian.”

A passion for science

John first became interested in fluid mechanics as an undergraduate at Penn



From left: John, Melissa (Andy’s wife), Andy, Suzy, Luke.

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State. “I had a part-time job working at the Garfield Thomas Water Tunnel, where they were conducting some really fascinating experiments in fluid flow, and I became enamored with that field of study. I decided to pursue fluid mechanics for my graduate studies, and was honored to have been accepted at Caltech to work with one of the most famous fluid mechanics of our day, Anatol Roshko. After receiving my Ph.D. in Aeronautics in 1984 I accepted a faculty position at my alma mater Penn State, and have been teaching here ever since.”

His scientific work has involved some interesting research projects. “I led a team of faculty and graduate students at Penn State in a four-year research study of how to improve the performance of large hydroturbines like those at Hoover Dam. They are designed to work their best at a certain flow rate, but in the real world, they often need to work at other flow rates, both greater and lesser, called ‘off design’ conditions. Our work modified the turbine design

to make them more efficient under these non-ideal situations. ‘Efficiency’ in engineering means the ratio of output to input energy; so our modifications, if implemented, could result in greater electricity production for a given amount of water flow.”



Dr. Cimballa with a scale model of a hydroturbine.

Fluid mechanics and the global Flood

Dr Cimballa believes fluid mechanics can explain Noah’s Flood. “The key to understanding the creation/evolution controversy is the great global flood of Noah’s time. If the Bible is true and there really *was* a global flood, the fluid mechanics associated with the tremendous volume and flow of water

over the whole earth offers a much more believable explanation for the fossil record and most of the geological features found on earth.”

He points to the Grand Canyon as an example. “The colorful strata are perfectly horizontal for hundreds of miles. A one-time catastrophic worldwide flood provides a much more plausible explanation for this than do millions of years of being laid down slowly by local flooding. For instance, how could the strata remain so flat for millions of years without any significant erosion?”

Now that I understand the physics of how water flows and how sediment is transported and deposited, the rocks cry out that there was a worldwide flood!”

I asked John how his colleagues react to his views on creation. “I have a few colleagues who are young earth creationists like I am, but most of my colleagues disagree with my view. However, just as I tolerate their evolutionary views, they tolerate my creation/worldwide flood view. In my



Andy's wedding in 2013. From left to right: Luke, John, new daughter-in-law Melissa, Andy, Suzy, and Suzy's mother Miriam.



Aerial view of Hoover Dam.

field, belief in creation or evolution does not greatly affect our research or how we teach our engineering courses, such as fluid mechanics.” This underscores the fact that origins science is a different kind of science from the sort of operational science that is repeatable, testable, and observable.

Evidence for design

When one accepts the Bible as true and begins to view the world through that ‘lens’, it is surprising how much evidence for design we really can see in nature. “When you start thinking as a creationist, you notice design features in our bodies and in the animal kingdom that offer amazing evidences for design by an all-wise and all-knowing Creator. For example, fish eyes are typically located at the point of zero gauge pressure along the side of its body. At that one unique location, the pressure force exerted by the surrounding water is constant regardless of how fast the fish is swimming. At any other location, the eyeball would get either pressed inward or suctioned

outward and distorted, which would greatly inhibit the fish’s vision. I can explain the physics of why that one spot on the side of the fish’s head is the ideal spot for the placement of an eye, but how does one explain why the eye is actually *located* there? Evolutionists say that the eyes just happened to migrate to that spot by trial and error and survival of the fittest over millions of years. I say that God designed it that way from the beginning! God understands fluid mechanics!”

Writing about creation

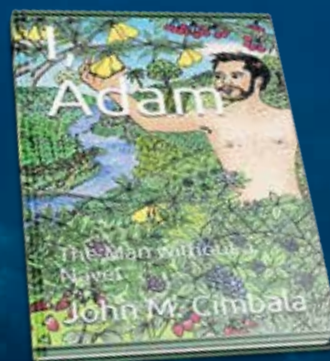
John’s passion for creation led him to write a short novel about the life of Adam entitled *I Adam: The Man Without a Navel*. “Adam was an incredible human being, more intelligent and physically superior to anyone alive today. I have always had the desire to write a book about creation, but there are already many good creation books available and I wanted to write something unique. So I wrote about Adam from his own perspective—as an autobiography by Adam just before his death at 930 years of age. I had a

great time writing the book. Although I embellish the biblical account, I made sure not to stray from the Genesis narrative.” His book also has a Gospel focus: “I also wrote about how Adam greatly regretted his sin against God, and his prayers that the Promised Seed would come soon to accomplish what he failed to accomplish. That Promised Seed—Jesus—is a theme that is threaded throughout the entire book.”

It is commonly thought that people cannot be scientists and believe the Bible at the same time. However, accomplished scientists who are also dedicated Christians, like Dr Cimbala, continue to prove that idea false. ■

References and Notes

1. See ‘Millions of years’ are missing: Jonathan Sarfati interviews biologist and geologist Ariel Roth, *Creation* 31(2):46–49, 2009; creation.com/roth.



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