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CREATIONISTS IN THE CLASSROOM?



BY CLIFFORD GOLDSTEIN

Sound good? It's about time? Evolutionists have had their way too long? Then why am I, a creationist, in such a dilemma?

I believe in a literal creation accomplished in six 24-hour days, about 6,000 years ago. I believe in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve, Noah's ark, the talking snake—the whole story just as Moses wrote it.

I also believe in the First Amendment. When it says, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion," I believe it means just that—the government has no business establishing, advancing, or subsidizing religious belief.

(President George Bush, Jr. may not have gotten the word. It was he, remember, who initiated a "Jesus

Day" for Texas. And now he's promoting a "Faith-Based Initiative" that may channel billions of dollars into church missionary programs.

But back to the schoolroom and my dilemma.) How can I reconcile my belief in Creation with court decisions that have declared teaching creation science in public schools unconstitutional? Though I rejoice that the courts are keeping

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Jefferson's wall of separation high by forbidding religious indoctrination in public school, I cringe at the specter of evolution—with all its speculation, leaps of faith, and unproven premises—being pawned off as truth—and that often to the distress of a believing student.

An example comes to mind. Anna Harvey, a straight-A sophomore in Lawrence, Kansas, raised her hand in biology class one day in early 1999. "Mr. Roth, when are we going to learn about creationism?"

Stan Roth exploded. "When are you going to stop believing that crap your parents teach you?" Anna was stunned, and within five months Roth was removed from the classroom. Perhaps it was only coincidence that three months after he was forced to retire, the Kansas Board of Education voted 6-4 to de-emphasize the speculative aspects of evolution—a move that sparked a national debate.**

It All Seemed So Simple

I haven't always been a creationist—I used to be an evolutionist. My earliest recollection of evolutionary tendencies goes back to the fifth grade, in which, under the tutelage of Mrs. Catleet, I learned math, English, social studies, history, geography, and

**The wording is taken from Nancy Pearcey's article, "We're Not in Kansas Anymore," in the May 22, 2000, *Christianity Today*.

evolution. I still remember the ages of the earth—Archeozoic, Proterozoic, Paleozoic, Mesozoic, Cenozoic—right off the top of my head.

In the eighth grade, Mrs. Rubin taught me about Charles Darwin, *H.M.S. Beagle*, and the Galapagos Islands. Her charts delineated how one species changed into another and then into another over billions of years. First she would show a single-celled creature, followed by a protoplasmic blob, then a jellyfish, then a frog, followed by a dog, a monkey, a primate (either *Pithecanthropus erectus*, *Ramapithecus*, or good old Neanderthal man—usually hairy, needing a shave, and holding a spear), and then *Homo sapiens*.

It all seemed so clear, so plain, so simple. No intelligent, educated, sensible person believed otherwise. And just as the class would laugh at the ancient myth that life spawned from inorganic matter—that a pile of dirty rags, for instance, could spontaneously generate mice and maggots—we laughed at those who didn't believe in evolution.

What They Didn't Tell Me

Neither Mrs. Catleet nor Mrs. Rubin told me that the probability of even the least-complex forms of life originating on the earth by natural processes is considered extremely remote, virtually a statistical impossibility.

Opponents claim that the term “creation science” is a misnomer—that it is not really science to begin with. Carl Sagan described it as “a small bunch of people putting out thinly disguised biblical literalism. . . in a package disguised as science.”

They neglected to mention that Nobel laureate Francis Crick—certainly not a creationist—said that the probability of life originating on the earth by chance is as remote as those of “a billion monkeys, on a billion typewriters, ever typing correctly even one sonnet of Shakespeare’s during the present lifetime of the universe.”

Neither Mrs. Rubin nor Mrs. Catleet told us that the fossil records are so sparse that reconstructing the evolution of human beings through them is, as one anthropologist put it, like “reconstructing the plot of *War and Peace* with 13 randomly selected pages.”

They didn’t read these words to us: “To suppose that the eye, with all its inimitable contrivances for adjusting the focus to different distances, for admitting different amounts of light, and for the correction of spherical and chromatic aberration, could have been formed by natural selection seems, I freely confess, absurd in the highest degree.” Nor did they tell us that it was Charles Darwin who wrote them.

They never said that the key to the evolutionary theory—the life forms that link the species—has never been found. This “missing link” is so devastating to the evolutionist that Stephen Jay Gould devised his “punctuated equilibrium” hypothesis—the belief that instead of occurring in a slow, gradual process, evolutionary changes came in relatively quick jumps and spurts—to help explain why no transitional forms exist.

They never told us about the problems in dating systems, nor did they tell us that genetic mutations (one of the supposed methods of evolutionary change) are almost always detrimental to the species; nor that. . . .

The point is that I reject evolution for a number of reasons. Primarily, I reject it because I am a creationist. But I must admit that I am a creationist *because of my religious views*—not because of creation science.

Rather than being a gradual Darwinian process, my transformation from evolutionist happened quickly. I had an experience with the Lord and accepted the Bible, including

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Genesis, as the Word of God. Later, as I read creation science literature, I saw the scientific evidence for Creation. But my belief in Creation is based on faith, not science—though science has strengthened that faith.

So do I remember that the United States Supreme Court rejected a Louisiana law that sought to give balanced treatment for creation science and evolution science in public schools? Yes. And I remember what happened in Kansas. And—but let's turn to our esteemed Supreme Court chief justice, who fantasizes that the framers of our Constitution wanted only to prevent "designation of any church as a 'national one.'" I read the First Amendment as a bulwark against government attempts to promote and advance any specific religious belief. The framers knew that when government promotes religion, oppression follows. They wanted to keep the church out of the state and the state out of the church, because they knew that when the state promotes a religious belief, no matter how benign, that belief has behind it the coercive power of the government—and the framers didn't want our nation coercing anyone regarding religion. "What has been the effect of

coercion?" asked Thomas Jefferson. "To make one half of the world fools, and the other half hypocrites."

Teaching Creation Science

But what about creation science in public schools? Does teaching it involve coercion? Can't it be taught as science and not as creationism?

Opponents claim that the term "creation science" is a misnomer—that it is not really science to begin with. Carl Sagan described it as "a small bunch of people putting out thinly disguised biblical literalism. . . in a package disguised as science."

I know that pigeonholing creation science in this way is not really fair or accurate. I know that good scientific evidence exists for the abrupt appearance of life forms, a universal flood, and so forth. And yet creation science itself, no matter how scientific, necessitates the concept of a Creator, just as Christianity inherently implies a belief in Jesus, salvation, and the cross. Postulating a Creator inevitably implies a religious belief, and no public school should be promoting a religious belief.

But though creation science implies a Creator, teaching it does not necessarily entail promoting faith in

God, any more than claiming to be a Christian entails proselytizing. I believe that creation science can be taught like a class in American religious history, which, though it involves the study of Christianity and many of its elements, such as Jesus, salvation, and the cross, does not advance these beliefs as religious dogma.

My Final Answer

For me, a literal creationist and a strict separationist, the real question is not, Is creation science a science? Nor is it, Can creation science be taught without promoting a religion? The real question is, Would creation science be taught constitutionally? Or would it be used to promote religious beliefs at government expense—as the Court said would be done in Louisiana?

As the Christian Right (and Regis) is my witness, my final answer (to the final question) is Yes. The Supreme Court rightly saw the Louisiana bill as an assault on the wall of separation between church and state. Thus Justice William J. Brennan, Jr., speaking for the majority, called the Louisiana bill a religiously motivated attempt to suppress evolution and replace it with the “viewpoint that a supernatural being created mankind.” Thus, said Brennan, the law “violates the establishment clause of the First Amendment because it seeks to employ the symbolic and financial

support of government to achieve a religious purpose.”

The Court’s decision didn’t prohibit teaching creationism, provided the aim is to give comprehensive instruction about scientific theories and not to promote a sectarian position.

Considering the militancy of many fundamentalists regarding use of public schools to promote their beliefs, the Court was most likely correct in declaring the bill unconstitutional.

No Jellyfish for Falwell

The problem, then, is balance. The chances of a pro-creationist teacher giving a fair presentation of evolution (or vice versa) are not good. Can you imagine Jerry Falwell standing before a class of fifth graders, pointing to a picture of a protoplasmic critter and saying, “Man was created in the image of a jellyfish”?

When it comes to teaching origins in our public schools, the problem is not creation science versus evolution. Rather it is the extremists on both sides. My teachers did not present evolution as a theory, but as a fact as well established as a law of thermodynamics. They didn’t tell us all the problems, the conflicting theories within evolutionary circles, or of the infighting among evolutionists themselves. Mrs. Catleet’s and Mrs. Rubin’s presentations were as dogmatic as a fundamentalist ser-

mon on Sunday morning.

"It is reasonable to suppose," wrote Irving Kristol in the *New York Times* (Sept. 30, 1986), "that if evolution were taught more cautiously, as a conglomerate idea consisting of conflicting hypotheses rather than as an unchangeable certainty, it would be far less controversial. As things stand now, the religious fundamentalists are not far off the mark when they assert that evolution, as generally taught, has an unwarranted antireligious edge to it."

And no doubt a creationist could be just as dogmatic in his presentation.

Both Genesis and Darwin?

Currently, evolution is taught as fact when in reality it is only a theory. The alternative is teaching creation science in public schools, but doing so could violate the First

Amendment. What we need is a balanced presentation of both, but who can provide that for us? A Norman Lear would be as unbalanced as a Pat Robertson. Of course, we could always try a theistic evolutionist, one who says he believes in both Genesis and Darwin, but the kids who take that class will need a class in logic when they're through.

As I hinted earlier, another perplexing scenario is emerging. If President George Bush gets his Faith-Based Initiative through Congress as is, churches may be so busy witnessing in non-school venues that evolutionists will go uncontested in the classroom. On the other hand, under the guise of the Faith-Based Initiative, creationists may breach the wall of separation so broadly that just about anything will go anywhere—including the classroom.

As I said, I'm in a dilemma. . . . □

HOW TO TEACH EVOLUTION FAIRLY

To hear it from most creationist spokesmen, evolutionists are an insensitive lot in the classroom. They mock students who believe in Creation and trash the Bible with gratuitous abandon.

To hear it from most evolutionist spokesmen, creationists are insensitive, uninformed, and evangelistic in sharing their misconceptions. They mock evolutionists and trash scientific verities with gratuitous abandon.

Whichever the case, and both have uncomfortable elements of truth,