

EDITORIAL

SCIENTIFIC CREATIONISM?

The United States public is becoming increasingly aware that there is no justification for evolutionary dogma to have exclusive domination of the public schools, whether on the basis of sound science, academic principles, or constitutional rights. But the opportunity to attain a scientifically sound, academically fair, and constitutionally just treatment of origins in the public schools is placed at hazard by some creationist literature and by the attitudes of some creationists.

Opponents of a balanced treatment of creationism and evolutionism in the public schools rightly affirm that the public schools should not foster any uniquely religious teaching. At all costs the public schools must be preserved from becoming instruments for religious indoctrination. On the basis of the contention that creationism is a religious doctrine promoted by only certain segments of the Jewish and Christian communities, it is effectively argued that creationism has no proper place in public school curricula, particularly in science instruction.

Abundant examples from the creationist literature indicate that the motivation for promotion of creationism is often religious, rather than scientific, philosophical or academic. A recent example is provided by a paper entitled "The Creationist and Neo-Darwinian Views..." by Dennis W. Cheek that appears on p 93-110, 134 of the *Creation Research Society Quarterly* for September 1981. Note the following excerpts: "The creationist model rests on the premise of the primacy of Scripture as the absolute standard in all matters of life and conduct" (p 95). "The creationist model also postulates the occurrence in the earth's recent past of a global flood as recorded in Genesis" (p 96). "...the creation model postulates a youthful earth, and thus would necessitate a complete rewriting of earth history from a creationist perspective" (p 96). Efforts to achieve an appropriate treatment of origins in the public schools would have been better served if the author of these statements had properly qualified his terms by saying "Biblical creation(ist) model," for the salient idea in each of these statements is derived from the Bible and is not a natural product of scientific observation or inductive reasoning from such observation.

Creation by a superior intelligence is a valid scientific and philosophical concept — just as valid as the concept that all current features of the universe may be accounted for by the random, undirected, natural behavior of eternally existent matter-energy. With equal philosophical justification, one can base his cosmogony on an intelligence with the capability for creating the universe, or on mindless matter-energy with the inherent property of evolving the universe. Reasoning based on principles derived from the Second Law of thermodynamics and on information theory, and also the conclusions from chemical thermodynamics, probabilities of

molecular structure, design at all levels of the universe, molecular biology, genetics, and some aspects of paleontology clearly favor the creation account.

Creationism can be treated on a basis that is neutral with respect to religion, including religion based on the Judaeo-Christian scriptures. Such treatment of creationism belongs in the public schools if science is to be taught soundly, in a climate of academic freedom and fairness, and with proper regard for constitutional guarantees. Such creationism may be identified as Neutral Scientific Creationism. Neutral Scientific Creationism operates independent of religious concepts and traditions. It may involve hypothesis and deduction, but it places principal emphasis on inductive logic. Individuals who follow this approach to creationism see in the available data abundant evidence for a designer.

Creationism that derives its basic ideas from the Hebrew-Christian scriptures, and then uses science to further develop those ideas, is Biblical creationism, a subcategory of Apologetic Scientific Creationism. In contrast with Neutral Scientific Creationism, the emphasis of Apologetic Scientific Creationism is on deductive reasoning. It begins with a religion-based theory and uses that theory as an aid in interpreting scientific data. In my judgment, it would be inappropriate to include Apologetic Scientific Creationism in a science course offered by a public school that serves a pluralistic constituency. A public school social studies course that aims to acquaint students with the history of human thought and develop an understanding of the contemporary culture could appropriately survey Apologetic Scientific Creationism.

Having pointed out a distinction that I am convinced should be made with respect to teaching creationism in public schools, I should express an additional conviction, which is that Apologetic Scientific Creationism, when functioning on a rigorous basis of sound scientific principles and methods, can be a superior instrument for arriving at truth. This superiority is elucidated by contrasting two reconstructions of an event (such as an automobile accident, an explosion, a bank robbery, the demise of dinosaurs, or the origin of life, e.g.), one based on only after-the-event consequences, and the other based on both after-the-event consequences and the testimony of reliable eyewitnesses. The individual who believes that the narratives of the Hebrew-Christian scriptures are reliable eyewitness accounts can have confidence that these accounts are helpful in correctly interpreting data that pertain to earth history.

Neither the discredit that has resulted from efforts to force data in an unscientific manner to support a religious viewpoint nor the misidentification of creationism as a purely religious concept should be allowed to obscure a sound approach to scientific creationism.

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