

Debate Goes On Over Evolution

Educators who subscribe to the theory of evolution are finding themselves on the defensive in a growing number of disputes in the old "science vs. Scripture" controversy.

Although scientists who hold to an evolutionary view of human origins are in the vast majority, an increasing number of those who favor a biblically based "creationist" theory are writing books and giving lectures to promote their view as one that is based on scientific evidence and is intellectually respectable.

Regulations which required public schools to teach only the creationist view have long disappeared into history. But texts which feature both the creationist and the evolutionist account of life or which stress that evolution is a theory rather than established fact are becoming the focus of renewed debate in education circles and school boards throughout the country.

Whereas in the 1920s persons who supported the creationist account were generally portrayed as anti-intellectual and close-minded, creationists argue that this description would be more appropriately applied today to those who say that only evolution is an acceptable description of human origins.

Dorothy Nelkin, a Cornell University researcher, has cautioned that "it is not accurate to dismiss the critics of science textbooks as being merely an anti-science fringe group."

In a 1976 article in Scientific American, she wrote that "most textbook controversies issue not from rural folk in Appalachia but from middle-class citizens,



Evolution versus Creation?

most of whom are technically trained." Ms. Nelkin concluded that a drop in the level of federal funding for pre-college curriculum projects since 1970 is "directly connected with the science-textbook controversies."

A statement by 175 leading scientists, educators and theologians affirming evolution as a basic principle of science is being circulated to major school districts by the American Humanist Association, which says it was prompted by the "steady assault on the teaching of evolution in the public schools and the demand that the theory of creation be given equal time."

According to the humanist statement, the principle of evolution "is so important for an understanding of the world we live in and of ourselves that the public in general, including students taking biology in school, should be made aware of it, and of the fact that it is firmly

established in the view of the modern scientific community."

Adherents to the creationist view generally are not opposed to acquainting students with the evolution theory. But they assert that it is intellectually dishonest to maintain that evolution is the only legitimate account of human origins.

Dr. David A. Kaufmann, associate professor at the University of Florida at Gainesville, declares that "the argument that the doctrine of special creation is a religious belief because it is based on faith in Biblical presuppositions, and that the doctrine of mega-evolution is scientific because it is based on facts, in an intellectual absurdity."

Writing in Christian Life magazine, Dr. Kaufmann says that "proponents of this view are not being honest in their argument. Both special creation and mega-evolution are beliefs

that, in the final analysis, are accepted by faith."

The seeming even-handedness of such a view led the humanists to circulate their statement. Bette Chambers, president of the American Humanist Association, explained in the group's magazine: "Since the public is led to believe, thanks to the creationist clamor so characteristic of this century, that an open choice between these two alternatives exists within the science itself, it becomes imperative to state that this view is rubbish, lest science education in America become the laughing stock of the civilized world."

Just as not all evolutionists hold strictly to the Darwinian theory, so not all creationists have precisely the same views. Some believe God created the world in six literal days, while others hold that God created the world in a greater length of time.

Some scholars are attempting to find a synthesis that would provide a "Christian evolutionary theory." Many of those taking this path have turned to the writings of the late Jesuit paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

In his most famous book, The Phenomenon of Man, Teilhard wrote, "Though frightened for a moment by evolution, the Christian now perceives that what it offers him is nothing - but a magnificent means of feeling more at one with God and of giving himself to him."

Ironically, although some Protestants have accepted Teilhard's ideas, the Vatican has expressed strong

reservations. The latest papal pronouncement on evolution, issued in 1966, stated that the "theory of evolution should not seem acceptable unless it accords decisively with the immediate creation of each and every human soul and unless it considers as decisive for the fate of mankind the disobedience of Adam..."

A text prepared by the Creation Research Society of Ann Arbor, Mich., has been the focus of debate in several public-school districts. Entitled, Biology - A Search for Order in Complexity, it describes both creation and evolution and suggests both as alternative explanations for origins, although it is critical of evolution and stresses creation as the more plausible account.

In Texas, trustees of the Dallas Independent School District have adopted the book for use as a research source, and state commissions have approved it in Alabama, Georgia, Oklahoma and Oregon, but a Superior Court judge in Indianapolis has ordered it removed from the approved list of books for public-school use in Indiana.

Although the Indiana Textbook Commission had argued that the book merely presents both biblical and evolutionary creation theories, Judge Michael T. Dugan said it clearly seeks the "promotion and inclusion of fundamentalist Christian doctrine in the public schools."

In 1973, the California State Board of Education approved revisions of science textbooks to refer to evolution as a theory rather than proven fact. Although the agreement reached at the time provided for the inclusion of creationist accounts in the books, this has not been carried out. But proponents of the creationist view consider it significant that the board's action has removed the aura of unquestioned authority from textbook presentations of evolution in California.

Why is "science vs. Scripture" still a topic of debate. Prof. Nelkin found three themes underlying objections to most biology texts being used in public schools.

First, she said, "the protests reflect the fact that a non-negligible fraction of the population is disillusioned with science and is concerned that it threatens traditional religious and moral values. Second, the protests reflect the fact that many people clearly resent the authority represented by scientific dogmatism, particularly when that authority is expressed in an increased professionalism of the school science curriculum."

And finally, Prof. Nelkin commented, "The protests reflect the fact that many people are afraid that the structured meritocratic processes operating within science threaten more egalitarian, pluralistic values."

Although the proponents of creationism are not winning all their textbook battles, they are being taken seriously by school boards and evolutionists.

Space scientist Wernher von Braun reflected the thinking of a significant number of scientists who are Christian when he told a symposium last fall that "insistence on an inflexible type of religion, holding to a literal interpretation of every word of the Bible as ultimate truth, will tragically delay reconciling some of the Biblical references to scientific interpretation."

The continuing controversy thus has implications that may be far-reaching for religion as well as education.

COURIER-CALENDAR

Picnic, Field Mass - St. Boniface parish, dish-to-plate lunch Sunday, June 26, following 1:30 p.m. Mass at Stewart Lodge, Mendon Ponds Park. Bus service for those who reserve seats.

Garage Sale - Benefit of Corpus Christi School, at school hall, East Main at Prince, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Friday, June 24; 10-6 Saturday.

Parish Festival - On grounds of St. Thomas the Apostle, rain or shine, Thursday through Saturday, June 23-25, 6-11 p.m. Strawberry social first two nights; new attractions, abundant food.

Garage Sale - Ninth annual, sponsored by St. Margaret Mary's Altar-Rosary Society at rectory garage, Scholfield Road, Friday, June 24, 10 a.m.-7 p.m.; Saturday, 10-4. Take-in until 7 tonight, 10-4 tomorrow. Bake sale 10 a.m. Friday and Saturday.

Folk Festival - Seventh annual International Festival at Rochester Museum and Science Center, East Avenue at Goodman, noon to 6 p.m. Saturday, June 25, rain date June 26.

Calendar items should be mailed to the Courier-Journal Calendar Desk, 67 Chestnut St., Rochester, N.Y. 14604. Deadline is Wednesday noon, one week ahead of the publication date.

First Parish Council Started in Leicester

Leicester--A tri-parish council, representing St. Thomas, Leicester; St. Lucy, Retsof; and St. Raphael, Piffard, was formally installed here on Sunday, May 29. This is the first parish council established at the churches.

The council is made up of five community representatives: James Cicero and Mrs. Mary Welch, St. Thomas; Donald Delaney and David Dermody, St. Lucy; and Anthony Vitale, St. Raphael. Standing committee heads are Mrs. Ann Marie Cipriano, education; Mrs. Yvonne Jacobs, finance; Mrs. Mable Treadwell, human development; Walter Purtell, liturgy; and Mrs. Carol Farruggia, parish life.

wright, pastor, will serve as ex-officio council member.

At the first meeting, June 5, Donald Delaney was elected council chairman, James Cicero, vice-chairman, Mable Treadwell, recording secretary and Yvonne Jacobs, treasurer. The new council will meet on the third Monday of each month.

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