

# Fundamentalists Still Rocking the Darwin Boat

By Gerald A. Renner  
Religious News Service

Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Then the man became a living creature — Genesis 2:7.



Special Report

Allegory or literal truth?

Allegory, responds the mainstream of Christianity and Judaism today: the biblical creation account was meant to convey the lordship, mercy and majesty of the Creator, and is not to be taken as historical or scientific fact.

But a die-hard coterie of fundamentalists says nonsense: The others have been led astray by a satanic lie that overwhelmed the world beginning with Charles Darwin's concept of evolution through natural selection more than a century ago.

Surprisingly, the biblical literalists are finding pockets of strength throughout America in their efforts to introduce their version of creation into the classes of public schools as an alternative to evolution.

They've stirred up the legislatures and school districts in at least a dozen states and aim to do the same in a lot more.

Behind the drive is a group of well-educated, highly articulate organizers who have adopted what they think is a sophisticated legal approach to skirt church-state separation problems.

"Creationists working to introduce creation into public schools must distinguish sharply between scientific creationism and religious creationism," warns a creationist attorney, Wendell R. Bird of Atlanta, a former editor of the Yale Law School Review.

He cautions that evolution must be attacked on scientific, not religious grounds.

He maintains that "just as instruction in the general theory (of evolution) does not have a primary effect of aid or opposition to religion, presentation of scientific creationism does not have a primary effect that establishes religion."

While Bird feels that "presentation of all scientific theories or origins, including scientific creationism along with evolution" is the best way to rectify the imbalance in public school biology classes, "elimination of all theories of origin, including evolution, from public school classes is another constitutionally acceptable form of relief." Evolution, he maintains, assaults the religious rights of creationists.

Energizing the creationist movement are two main resource centers: the Institute for Creation Research in San Diego and the Creation Research Society in Ann Arbor, Mich.

The San Diego institute, affiliated with Christian Heritage College founded in 1970 by the Scott Memorial Baptist Church, has issued some 100 books, all kinds of audio-visual aids and curriculum material for all grade levels. Its panel of speakers also addresses audiences in school districts on college campuses across the country with an appeal to the American sense of fair play to give at least equal time to the creationists.

One such speaker, Dr. Duane Gish, a UCLA-trained biochemist, is one of the most effective emissaries. Conducting his meetings in the style of a nineteenth-century roving evangelist, he uses a mix of comic banter and an instinct for evolutionary weak points to turn an audience of scoffing college students into serious inquirers who question him for hours.

Another creationist missionary is the chief judge of Georgia's court of appeals, a state where a creationist-sponsored bill has cleared some legislative hurdles. The judge, Braswell Deen, Jr., says that when schools teach only evolution, they force an "animal, atheistic, accidental, aimless ancestry" on young people.

"If you teach long enough that students are animals," he adds, "it should be no surprise that they act like animals."

The "equal time" approach attracts many people who might not agree with the creationists' viewpoint but feel they have a right to have it expressed.

Jerry Bergman, an education professor at Bowling Green State University near Toledo, Ohio, in a recent survey of some 500 undergraduate and graduate students — mainly in teacher programs — found a clear majority in favor of teaching both the evolution and creationist models of life origins.

Ninety-one percent of the undergraduate students and 71.8 percent of the graduate students felt both should be taught in the schools, he reported. And from this he concluded that "some direction should be taken by educators to implement a two-model approach for the teaching of origins."

While such an approach seems fair, it raises the hackles of a lot of people.



This illustration, "The Third Day of Creation," suggests the fundamentalist interpretation of man's origin as written in Genesis 2:7 — "Then the Lord

God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Then the man became a living creature."

"The suggestion that questions of scientific fact and scientific education should be settled by public debate has left most scientists amazed," commented Cornell University Professor Dorothy Nelkin in a 1976 Scientific American article.

The movement has gotten strong enough to concern the scientific community. As long as three years ago the weekly Science News remarked that "although some scientists see the resurgence of the evolution-creation debate ludicrous, the growing political strength of the creationists has alarmed others."

The American Humanist Association has been circulating a statement signed by 175 leading scientists, educators and theologians affirming evolution as a basic principle of science, without which no modern scientific discipline can be understood.

"Evolution is the only presently known strictly scientific and non-religious explanation for the existence and diversity of living organisms," according to the statement. "It is therefore the only view that should be expounded in public school courses on science which are distinct from those on religion."

The association president in 1977, Bette Chambers, was more caustic in the Humanist magazine: "Since the public is led to believe . . . 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."

Equally adamant in opposition to the creationists are the theologians, scholars and educators in mainstream Christian denominations.

W. Craig Taylor, a United Methodist minister with the American Civil Liberties Union in Atlanta, is in the forefront of opposition to the creationist bill in that state, and in neighboring Florida where a similar measure has been introduced.

Taylor points out that the scientific method begins with raw data and frames a hypothesis to explain the findings.

"Scientific creationism begins with a theory and tries to fit the facts to it," he said. "I just don't see how they call it a science. It's based on Genesis."

While most creationist support comes from Protestant fundamentalists, it can also be found among Roman Catholics — even though they find little support for the ideas among Catholic educators.

One group of parents, for example, members of the Federation of Catholic Parent-Teacher Associations of Greater Cincinnati, asked last year to have the biblical story taught as fact in local parochial school science and religion classes. They also complained that evolution was carrying the day, and invited creationist lecturers to speak to them.

Father Eugene Maly, an internationally known Cin-

cinnati biblical scholar, pointed out that most Catholic scholars today accept the ancient Hebrew account of creation as a story intended to teach a lesson, a device similar to the parables Jesus used effectively in his ministry.

Father Maly cited a 1948 letter from the secretary of the Pontifical Biblical Commission to Cardinal Emmanuel Suhard of Paris:

"These literary forms (first 11 chapters of Genesis) correspond to none of our classical categories and cannot be judged in the light of Greco-Latin or modern literary styles."

In other words, Father Maly said, "We don't have to take them as strict history as we understand history today."

He also cited the 1950 encyclical, *Humani Generis*, in which the late Pope Pius XII elaborated a permissiveness regarding evolution so long as a belief is maintained that "souls are immediately created by God," and that there is retained the doctrine of Original Sin.

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