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Creationism and Evolution

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Creationism and Evolution

New York State Department of Education

There are several views regarding origins and changes that have occurred on the earth over time. Six day creation, gap creation, progressive creation, theistic evolution, creationism, evolution, and planetary seeding are terms used to describe some of these views. The contrasts among these ideas, especially between creationism and evolution, have been discussed publically.

During the process of revising the Regents Biology Syllabus, suggestions for including creationism as part of this course of study were forwarded to the New York State Education Department. It was suggested that the topic Modern Evolution be replaced by a two-model approach involving creationism and evolution.

The State Education Department requested expert scientific examination of this suggestion in terms of its bases in modern science and its appropriateness for the state high school biology curriculum. The American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Institute for Biological Sciences, the National Association of Biology Teachers, and the New York Academy of Sciences reviewed the creationism materials and made recommendations as to their inclusion in the science curriculum. Department staff members met with representatives from these scientific associations to review their expert opinion concerning the use of creationism materials in high school science courses.

Their opinion was that creationism does not qualify as information generated by scientific processes and is not part of the body of scientific knowledge accepted by most scientists. Also expressed was the view that creationism can neither be verified nor refuted through scientific investigation and that models or theories which involve the supernatural are not within the domain of science. Accordingly, the following are recommended:

1. Contrasting religion with scientific theories is not the role of the science teacher. Students should be informed, however, that there are supernatural accounts of origins outside the domain of science. These accounts are derived mainly from scripture and religious authority and are beyond the scope of scientific investigation. The personal religious beliefs of an individual are safeguarded by the Constitution, and should be respected.
2. It should be understood that "scientific creationism" is not accepted as science by the majority of experts working in those fields of science related to origins. It is considered by these experts to be a field of study more closely related to religion than to science.
3. Evolution should be taught, not as a fact, but as a scientific theory which has substantial support from the scientific com-

munity. The concept of modern evolution incorporates the work of many scientists. Current dialogues among scientists are indicative of possible modifications in evolutionary theory.

4. Teachers should respect the personal beliefs of students and recognize that in a pluralistic society, the personal beliefs of some may not be compatible with all aspects of evolutionary theory.

The teaching of the supernatural accounts of origins by science teachers in science classrooms as part of the science curriculum is not a recommended procedure. Science teachers should acknowledge the personal validity of their students' beliefs and direct the student to the most appropriate counsel for assistance in questions outside the scope of the science classroom. Technical questions beyond the training and background of the science teacher about the fossil record, homology, biochemistry, etc., should be directed to specialists in those fields. Questions related to scripture, revelation and the supernatural should be directed to the religious authorities on those topics.

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Committees of Correspondence

A number of scientists, teachers and lay people have expressed interest in forming a loose correspondence network so that they may coordinate their activities at the local level while maintaining contact with people having similar interests in other states. Such committees exist in Iowa, New York and Georgia and are composed of people committed to academic freedom and separation of church and state. If you would like to be placed in contact with like-minded people in Iowa, write to: Stanley Weinberg, 156 East Alta Vista, Ottumwa, Iowa 52501.

Things to Remember

The following quote is from Cynthia Dwyer after returning from Iran.

I learned how to pray again. I learned how much I missed my husband and children. I learned how valuable our constitution is and how valuable the separation of church and state is. I also learned there are good human beings wherever you go.