

NEWS AND COMMENTS

CALIFORNIA SCIENCE TEXTBOOK CONTROVERSY

Three years ago when the California Board of Education approved new guidelines for science textbooks, it called for the inclusion of theories that life may have been created by a “designer.” Since this term has generally been interpreted to mean a supreme being in a religious sense, a battle between science and religion evolved.

BOOKS SCREENED

Some publishers, in an effort to comply with the Board’s ruling, submitted special books for adoption in California which included the creation theory, but the Curriculum Development and Supplemental Materials Commission screened them out. Board members favoring insertion of the creation theory then vowed to make editorial changes conform to their view in the adopted books. Legal clearance was obtained to bypass the Curriculum Commission to include the creation theory — alongside the customary theory of evolution. This was made possible when chief counsel Thomas M. Griffin of the California Department of Education reversed an earlier ruling by other staff lawyers that had legally prohibited the Board from adopting any book not recommended by the Commission.

His decision set the stage for what many writers termed another Scopes Trial. The controversy was debated by scientists all over the United States and Europe.

SCIENTISTS PROTEST

When the scientific community learned what the Board was trying to do, there was a storm of protest. The British scientific magazine *Nature* (Oct. 20, 1972) called the Board’s consideration of creation “an especially foolish course.” It went on to say, “The issue is, of course, absurd. Even religious scientists no longer find it necessary to their position to deny the essence of the doctrine of evolution.”

Scientific American (Aug., 1972) reported in its Science and the Citizen section, “The stage is set for the mandatory teaching of divine creation as

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a scientific theory on the same footing as evolution in the public schools of California.”

William Bevan editorialized in the Sept. 29, 1972 issue of *Science* magazine, “...if the state can dictate the content of a science, it makes little difference that its motivation is religious rather than political. The consequences will be the same. Many will recall the condition of Russian genetics during the heyday of Lysenko when Russian biologists defended an erroneous theory on the grounds that it must be true because it was Marxist.”

Nineteen California Nobel Prize winners asked the Board to keep religion’s story of creation out of science textbooks.

TEACHERS UNITE

The National Association of Biology Teachers (NABT) used its annual meeting to examine the issue. The meeting was held one week before a Board of Education public hearing on the textbooks (see separate story on meeting) and teachers were urged to attend the hearing and testify. Legal counsel was retained by the NABT to assist California teachers whose academic freedom was endangered by the adoption of a science framework requiring textbooks to include the creation theory. The Fund for Freedom of Science Teaching was established in an attempt to blunt concerted attacks on the rights of teachers to instruct from a scientific point of view.

The Biological Sciences Curriculum Study’s November, 1972, Newsletter was devoted to the crisis. The BSCS Executive Committee felt that interest in the situation had been deliberately fanned by distortion and rumor. Noted evolutionists Bruce Wallace of Cornell University, G. Ledyard Stebbins of the University of California at Davis and William V. Mayer of the University of Colorado contributed articles to the Newsletter damning creation.

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES ACTS

In an unprecedented move, the National Academy of Sciences (October 17, 1972) urged that the religious creation concept of the origin of life be kept out of California’s proposed new science textbooks. The action was taken, a spokesman said, because of the “national implications” if the State Board of Education goes along with proposals to include the creation concept with the scientific theory of evolution in school books. The resolution by the Academy stated that religion and science are “...separate

and mutually exclusive realms of both scientific theory and proper segregation of the teaching and understanding of science and religion nationwide.”

The Commission on Science Education of the American Association for the Advancement of Science adopted a resolution saying it “is vigorously opposed to attempts by some boards of education, and other groups, to require that religious accounts of creation be taught in science classes.” Creationists tried to show that evolutionists were being close-minded in their position, and that creation could be the basis for a valid scientific theory. Vice-Chairman of the Board of Education John R. Ford, M.D., a graduate of Loma Linda University, led the crusade for including creation in California’s textbooks.

ACADEMY CHARGED WITH PREJUDICE

The *Los Angeles Times* ran an opinion article (Nov. 15, 1972) by Arlie J. Hoover, Professor of History at Pepperdine University, which charged science with joining religion in the ranks of the prejudice. “Many observers on the Western intellectual scene have been saying that we are coming out of the period of aggressive scientism that we have been in since the last century, but if this resolution (by the National Academy of Sciences) is any indication, scientism has just launched a counterattack,” he said. “If the academy is trying to tell us that science can’t deal with the nonempirical, or spiritual, that’s fine. But if it is suggesting that rational men, in their comprehensive efforts to understand the total universe, can’t postulate nonempirical explanations for things in their experience that can’t be accounted for on empirical grounds, then the academy is being unscientific itself.”

During the triennial assembly of the National Council of Churches in Texas, December, 1972, evolutionists came under fire by anthropologist Margaret Mead and theologian Rev. Dr. David Hubbard, president of Fuller Theological Seminary.

“Some scientists are as dogmatic about evolution as some preachers are about religion,” said Margaret Mead. “I don’t approve of the dogmatism of either.”

While declaring that Darwin’s theory frequently is presented as an unquestionable absolute despite many loopholes and contradictions in it, Dr. Hubbard said, “It’s not Christians who have caused the problem, but the scientific writing that goes beyond real knowledge.”

CREATIONISTS SPEAK OUT

The correspondence to *Nature* put the issue right on the line. A. T. J. Hayward said in a letter printed Dec. 29, 1972, "The majority of biologists accept the prevailing views uncritically — just as a great many competent Russian biologists were once brainwashed into accepting Lysenko's quackery. Others have thought for themselves and come to realize the flaws in contemporary Darwinism. But for them to speak out would be to invite ridicule, and probably ruin their careers. Can you blame them for keeping silent?" Hayward also told *Nature* that not all Bible-believers think the Earth was created in six literal days a few thousand years ago. "Such fundamentalists are right at one end of a long spectrum of belief," he said. "Others — probably a much larger number — accept the facts of geology, but think that the idea of many successive creative acts over the ages fits those facts better than the theory of natural evolution."

Public interest grew as the issue became hotter. Creationists were suddenly in demand for speaking engagements, especially to academic groups. Duane T. Gish, of the Institute for Creation Research in San Diego, addressed the National Association of Biology Teachers in San Francisco. He gave seminars on college campuses. A class entitled "Creation: A Scientific Alternative" was begun in the free university on the University of California's Irvine campus. Biologists at Loma Linda University gave lectures at the University of California's Riverside campus and at local public schools. Efforts were begun in Washington, D.C. to get government funding for research on creation. California's newspapers reflected the interest. Papers such as the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Santa Ana Register* carried two and three page spreads on the issue.

Other states were also looking into the creation issue. In Michigan a bill was passed by the State Legislature which decreed that public school children should be exposed to various religious and evolutionary theories. The Legislature passed the measure Dec. 12, 1972, but the bill died when the Senate failed to act on it before the year was out. Three similar bills have been introduced since then.

The Texas Education Association had ruled that life science textbooks must contain a statement on an introductory page that any material on evolution included in such books is presented as theory rather than fact.

The city school board of Columbus, Ohio, passed a resolution which called for the proper treatment of the creation view of origins along with evolution. The State of Tennessee has ruled the same thing.

STATE BOARD HEARING

In November, 1972, the California State Board of Education held a public hearing on the matter. Testimony at the hearing was about evenly divided between evolutionists and creationists.

Ariel A. Roth of the Geoscience Research Institute and Professor of Biology at Loma Linda University told the Board, “Good science is an open-ended search for truth with reevaluation as new information comes forth. To say that one will exclude the creation model because it can be associated with religion is unnecessarily restrictive and imposes a bias that should be avoided.”

Loma Linda University’s Department of Biology chairman, Leonard R. Brand, was also at the Sacramento hearing. During Brand’s five minutes before the Board he said, “When we deal with the past history of life, creation and evolution are on the same philosophical basis, since the farther we go back in time, the less satisfactory is the evidence for any theory of origins. Since this is so, how can the state presume to dictate which theory will be taught in the public schools?”

Members on the Board of Education were split over the issue. Board Vice-Chairman Ford again led the fight for creation. When the Board met to vote on the issue in December, the proposition to include creation theory into the textbooks missed by one vote. *Nature* called it a remarkable, if partial, victory for the creationists, because the Board did adopt a requirement that the textbooks should qualify all statements about evolution, relegating them to theory and not fact.

A Board committee was created to make revisions in the books which had been formally adopted by the Board without any mention of creation. These revisions downgraded evolution. The matter of origins was considered to be beyond the scope of these science textbooks. Later the Board did approve unanimously a resolution stating that the philosophy of origins should be dealt with in social science textbooks, causing some observers to say another uproar would develop if this were tried.

So the creation theory continues to be considered. No matter what happens it will continue to be discussed, whether or not it is included in science textbooks.

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