

NEWS AND COMMENTS

THE CUPERTINO STORY

Attempts to include creation theory in the science classes of the public schools continue in the state of California. Largely through the efforts of a dedicated group of citizens in Santa Clara County, the question of inclusion of scientific creation in science classes has become, according to local newspapers, “one of the hottest controversies to hit the area in years.”

CITIZENS FOR SCIENTIFIC CREATION

In January 1974, some of the same individuals who had polled Del Norte County (see *Origins* 1:94-95) conducted a state-wide workshop on scientific creation, resulting in the formation of “Citizens for Scientific Creation” (CSC). The primary interest of this group was in developing a program whereby creation theory could be taught to students in the science classes of the public schools. While realizing that children should be made aware of the concept of evolution, they believed it should be presented only as one of several possible explanations for origins. To avoid religious controversy and denominational doctrine, only *scientific* evidence for creation theory should be included.

A similar CSC was set up in Santa Clara, and a poll of nearly 2000 residents in the Cupertino Union School District, the largest elementary school district in California, revealed that a total of 84.3% agreed that creation theory should be included with evolutionary theory. When the respondents were asked about their personal convictions regarding origins, 44.3% believed in creation, 32.4% were unconvinced either way, and 23.3% believed in evolution. On the night of May 14, the results of this poll were presented before the Cupertino School Board, with the recommendation that a committee be formed to develop a curriculum for teaching concepts of origins. The report of the poll was then sent to the district staff for review.

PROTESTS BY RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND THE ACLU

Shortly thereafter, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) protested the plans to develop such a curriculum, arguing that the teaching of the Biblical story of creation would be teaching religion in the public schools, which was unconstitutional. Local ministers also sided with the ACLU, saying that Genesis was a theological myth which could not be supported by science. Other letters to the school board questioned the validity of the poll, charging it with being ambiguous and misleading.

On June 13, the trustees discussed the letters, then voted 4 to 1 to support the teaching of “the major theories of the origin of life in the public schools.” Superintendent Donald Todd was asked to implement the decision, perhaps with the assistance of a citizens’ advisory committee. With the absence of the teachers during the summer, productive work was delayed until the fall.

DISTRICT RULING

Late in September 1974, the deputy county counsel, Robert T. Owens, issued his decision concerning the legality of teaching scientific creation:

The State Board has indicated that the science course of study should not include considerations pertaining to the origin of life. The district’s course of study for science, therefore, should not include this topic.

In order to comply with the district guidelines, the administration decided to adopt instructional materials in the social sciences that present creation as an alternative theory of origins, but from a philosophical or religious base, not a science base. The CSC remains actively involved in gathering possible teaching materials together for this purpose.

The CSC has also taken another approach, by presenting the concept of scientific creation before the public. This is being done by community education programs, such as lectures and a debate between a creationist and an evolutionist, at a local college. The CSC is considering a future seminar and a possible workshop for teachers.

Nancy Stake, Cupertino poll-coordinator and member of the Santa Clara CSC, reports that action for creation theory in the public schools has been initiated in seven other California school districts, and that letters asking how to instigate similar appeals for scientific creation have been coming in from other parts of the United States.

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