

Creation Wars

Alan Watson

WAR IN THE CLASSROOM

THE *Guardian* newspaper recently carried a front-page story headed: 'Revealed: rise of Creationism in UK schools'. Apparently, dozens of schools are using creationist teaching materials condemned by the government as "not appropriate to support the science curriculum". The packs, sent out by the group *Truth in Science*, promote the creationist alternative to Darwinian evolution called intelligent design and the group behind them said 59 schools are using the information as 'a useful classroom resource'.

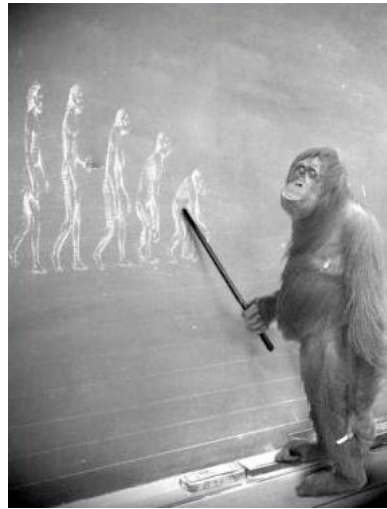
A teacher at one of the schools said it intended to use the DVDs to present intelligent design as an alternative to Darwinism. Nick Cowan, head of chemistry at Blue Coat school, in Liverpool, said: "Just because it takes a negative look at Darwinism doesn't mean it is not science. I think to critique Darwinism is quite appropriate".

But the government has made it clear that "neither intelligent design nor creationism are recognised scientific theories". The chairman of the parliamentary science and technology select committee, the Lib Dem MP Phil Willis, said he was horrified that the packs were being used in schools. "I am flabbergasted that any head of science would give credence to this creationist theory and be prepared to put it alongside Darwinism", he said. "Treating it as an alternative centralist theory alongside Darwinism in science lessons is deeply worrying".

When you look at it closely, the truth is we are already teaching our children two totally contradictory versions of our origins - we have moved on from the Dark Ages and given up on blood letting and leeches - and the myths of religion should be restricted to Sunday Schools. I would contend - if pushed - that otherwise we're talking child abuse!

The Theory of Evolution is true - just like the Theory of Gravity. We are NOT talking here about 'a man in the street type theory' - like 'aliens are visiting the earth regularly' or 'the earth is flat'. A scientific theory is a proposed description, explanation, or model of the manner of interaction of a set of natural phenomena, capable of predicting future occurrences or observations of the same kind, and capable of being tested through experiment or otherwise falsified through empirical observation. It follows from this that for scientists 'theory' and 'fact' do not stand in opposition.

These criteria do not apply to creationism nor the flat earth idea. The only possible place for untested and untestable beliefs is in a religious setting which is totally divorced from education. Creationists/ID supporters rarely offer the tiniest fragment of any 'science' which backs up creationism. All they can do is quote ancient books.



WAR ON RADIO ULSTER

SOME of you may have heard the special edition of *Sunday Sequence*, named 'The Creation Wars' with presenter William Crawley. Brian and I attended the live debate with an audience in Belfast, with Richard Dawkins on a link from Dublin - hot from something similar on RTE1's Friday flagship *The Late Late Show*. It is probably not the time to comment on the different attitudes to this subject by BBC and RTE-Friday evening peak time TV versus Sunday morning steam radio!

Dawkins's main adversary on the panel was creationist Andy McIntosh from 'Truth in Science'. He is a Prof. of Chemical Engineering at Leeds, a committed Christian and,

like most other creation scientists, not really from a speciality involved with 'origins'. Also on the panel were a couple of historians of the evolution versus creationism debate, a Catholic school headmistress and a fundamentalist Christian.

There was a pre-recorded report from the *Answers in Genesis* Creation Museum in Cincinnati, Ohio - 27 million dollars spent on hogwash! The audience of about thirty were a fairly diverse bunch of teachers, the professionally religious and scientific, lay Christians and a few odd atheists and Humanists.

Dawkins was his usual combative self - strong in his defence of evolution as the only true science of the diversity of life on Earth. He had a spat with McIntosh on his capability of teaching any science when he clearly thinks that evolution is not compatible with the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics.

Of course most people had their own predictable views so the things that stand out are the unexpected. I was slightly surprised by a number of believers who accept evolution even though God will still be invoked to kick start the process.

There was also an insert report from an Independent Christian School but many on the panel and audience emphasised that children's minds should be opened up to different world views and my impression that Catholic schools are more committed to this than state schools, was reinforced. Shamefully, however, Humanism is still absent from the RE Core Curriculum. Most teachers and academics seemed to think creationism should be restricted to the religious classroom.

No one pointed out that proper evolution science is critical to medical research and without it the promised cures and prevention of the remaining human diseases, which are mostly genetic conditions, will not materialise. Or that the 'old earth' concept is necessary for the investigation and prediction of climate change which is perhaps the most important problem facing the survival of life on earth.

We didn't really get on to the origins of altruism and morality or the future of humanity when humans, with our pretty advanced brains - and genetic engineering - will go beyond natural evolution. That's for another debate. □