

Creation is myth, not Science

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I've heard some people say that in Los Alamos schools, the biblical story of creation should be taught alongside evolutionary theory in science classes. Not only that, but they say they want these two concepts given equal airtime and equal weight.

"Children should hear both sides to the story," is the argument I've heard.

The biblical story of creation is a myth, and if myth is presented as a plausible alternative to the theory of evolution, it will be a slap in the face of higher education.

In his book "Occidental Mythology: The Masks of God," Joseph Campbell, one of the greatest religious historians, said, "The world is full of origin myths, and all are factually false."

He went on to say that mythologies "serve to validate the customs, systems of sentiments, and political aims of their respective local groups...On the surface they may appear to be composed as conscientious history. In depth they reveal themselves to have been conceived as myths: poetic readings of the mystery of life from a certain interested point of view. But to read a poem as a chronicle of fact is--to say the least --to miss the point."

The story in Genesis is one of the world's many ancient tales of how life began, and it has no more scientific respectability or acceptance than the creation tales of the Australian Aborigines, Hindus, or Native Americans.

The Bible's tale of how life began is a beautiful story -- I'll never forget looking at the Dore Illustrated Bible I got one year as a Christmas present, turning page after page of gorgeous representations of this very old story.

I also remember reading Greek myths with equal fervor. Yet I've never heard anyone consider getting up in front of a classroom and giving the students a choice of Darwin vs. Pandora's box.

The creation story that certain people want taught in Los Alamos schools belongs to one cultural/religious group -- Judeo-Christians -- who don't even all agree on one interpretation of the story.

Many Christians and Jews don't take the creation story as a literal, factual account of the Earth's creation; some even believe the creation myth is a piece of very old fiction, and that evolution is a true account of the Earth's history: The Catholic church, as well as other major Christian and Jewish groups, hold that the evolutionary theory is perfectly compatible with religious beliefs.

In the book "Catholic Answers to Fundamentalists' Questions," author Philip Romain answered the question of how Christians can believe anything in the Bible is a myth by saying, "You are equating myth with falsehood...An entirely different definition of myth (see a dictionary) applies to traditional stories, parables, and allegories. As such, myths communicate truth, but in a symbolic or metaphorical vein; they are not intended to be interpreted literally."

Science that is presented in public, government-supported schools should be backed by facts and research, and should cut across the lines of ideology.

To promote a culturally based myth as scientifically respectable is to tread on very dangerous territory. The Nazis, for example, promoted what they called "Aryan science," meanwhile preventing the teaching of what they called "Jewish science," which included Einstein's theory of relativity.

When we elevate the ideological beliefs of one group above others, we are undermining the very basis of American society. Citizens of this country, not having one unified cultural background, rely on political compromise to unite us. By advocating one ideological account, we sacrifice the rational balancing of powers we need to keep a democracy.

Speaking of democracy, I believe one of the foundations of this country is the separation of church and state.

The First Amendment of the Constitution states that, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Several Supreme Court cases have sent a very clear message to American schools: Religion and government do not mix, and schools are part of the government.

In *McCullum vs. the Board of Education*, 1948, the Supreme Court set a precedent that tax-supported schools may not disseminate religious doctrines, and compulsory-education law may not promote sectarian causes.

In another important case, *Grand Rapids Schools District vs. Ball*, 1985, the Supreme Court mandated that state-paid instructors may not indoctrinate students in particular religious tenets at public expense.

Our own school district's Religion-in-School policy narrows the First Amendment to state specifically that the schools will not promote any religion.

Therefore, teaching any myth of creation as scientific fact is a violation on both a federal and local level, if not a moral and ethical level.

Let's keep education democratic: When we teach science, we have to teach rational, well-researched, fact-based science.

Leave the myths to literature courses, homes, and Sunday schools.