

"CREATIONISM," PLEASE HELP ME ON!-----Elliott #1649

Today (6July82) a pastor's letter to me bore the burden of this thinksheet's title: "Most of what I've run across is half-baked and, in any case, not for laity." This thinksheet is my reply:

Dear _____ --

Sure, I've done some thinksheets (as you guessed) on evolution/ism-creation/ism-- #809, #1610, #1611, #1617--but for laity? At least semi-popular, #809 is my REVIEW OF BOOKS AND RELIGION review of Theo. Roszak's 1975 book, UNFINISHED ANIMAL-- which I begin with a quote from him: We must abandon "evolution," "the theory (that) replaces the old God with an even more incredible deity--omnipotent chance." This highly sophisticated post-modern gentlemen said that four years before the latest edition of the ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA said just the opposite: "evolution is accepted by all biologists and natural selection is recognized as its cause."....I have for you two suggestions: (1) That you group-test with your concerned people Huston Smith's "Evolution and Evolutionism" (755-57, 7-14July82 CHRISTIAN CENTURY), and (2) That you work up for your own use with them something like this thinksheet, whether or not in this propositional form:

1. As schools are for education and training institutes are for indoctrination, "isms" should be limited to the latter. This rules both "creationism" and "evolutionism" OUT from the public schools. On the positive side, this rules both "creation" (as our nation's primary explanation of origins) and "evolution" (as scientific description of exigents, bio-history) IN. Note that this is a four-way proposition.

2. "CreationISM" has no place in public education because it is anti-scientific dogma, and "EvolutionISM" has no place in public education because it is anti-religious. These opposing dogmas violate truth, logic, reason, and the rules of public discourse which are so important to democracy, a doctrine our public schools are committed to teach. "Creationism" claims to be scientific, and so calls itself "scientific creationism" (as Marx, equally erroneously, called his theory "scientific materialism"); but its claims is an overclaim (e.g., the earth being provably older than these dogmatists aver), and its spirit is that of proclamation rather than inquiry, that of proud knowledge rather than that of humble and reverent searching and re-searching. "Evolutionism" is as serious a sinner in overclaiming: while true science limits itself to description/theory/testing/redescription, scientISM (of which evolutionISM is an instance) arrogantly (1) limits "knowledge" to the products of scientific methodology and (2) overextends from description into explanation and exclusivism. (E.g., note that while creationists want the two views taught in the public schools, the advocates of the theory now taught in the public schools want to exclude other views.)

3. "Evolution" as taught in our public schools is not just scientific description of bio-historical advance in complexification but is also, as is the beginning of Genesis, an explanation of origins: i.e., it is "evolutionISM." At age 10 I was perplexed by what to me was then, and is to me to this day, the irreconcilable conflict between the origin-story I was getting in Sunday school and the origin-story I was getting in weekday school: a theistic story diametrical to an atheist story. Five days per week for atheism, 20 minutes on Sunday for theism: no wonder the 1982 American media are atheist, after generations of tax-supported public-school official atheism.

4. In my theological education, I encountered shameful bowings and scrapings to the atheist of Darwin, Marx, and Freud. "Secularism" (a perfumed name for atheism) subverted and then dragooned the intellectual and even the "mainline" religious establishment! I felt the shamefulness of this betrayal of the biblical God, and lashed out--largely ineffectually--against it, at cost of being called "fundamentalist.".... Pastor, here I'm suggesting you tell your folk your own struggles with the problem.

5. Consider the virulent atheism in the Darwinian language: (1) "Chance" is a logical notion only over against "purpose," and science does not deal with purpose--but since Darwinism does, it's not scientific but only antireligious; (2) "Natural selection" is a nonsense phrase: "selection" implies purpose, and "natural" is antonymic to "supernatural" (i.e., God)--TWO attacks on religion; (3) "Spontaneous generation" is a dumb putdown: "It happened by itself, 'God' had nothing to do with it."

6 July 82

FRANK PIRAZZINI

Frank, as part of my answer to your letter received today, I did #1649 (herewith, but only as a poor carbon: I didn't want to delay till I could photocopy the original). Here, too, are #809 (referred to in #1649) and #1617, which I think useful for working with laity because it makes column-clear the DIFFERENCES between Darwinism and the Bible (the brief descriptions being only suggestive, not definitive). (~~###~~/508)

Part of the public-school (and all other schools!) problem is the inflationary tendency of every academic discipline--the temptation to overextend, to go beyond the proper limits of the subject, and not to quit till everything and its grandmother has been explained (in a technical word, the panhermeneutic Tendenz). When the origins-question is asked by a child (or anybody else), the parent (or other adult) either shushes or story-tells: there's no third way to go. If the answerer pretends to know beyond human possibility of knowledge (ICor.13: "if I understand all mysteries"), s/he will try to upgrade story into science (i.e., knowledge). This is one of the pressures on the public-school teacher vis-a-vis origins-questions. Instead of saying "We just don't know" or (better) "It's not in the domain of science, for its unreachable by scientific methodology," Teach expostulates about "chance" and "Spontaneous generation" and "natural selection" and other such nonsense notions and phrases. Occupational hazard: Teach is terrified to admit ignorance, (1) for fear of self-demotion, face-loss, actual reduction of social status, and (2) for fear that "the Answer" will pop up elsewhere, in-from some other discipline/department (worst of all, Religion!). The Church can help teachers be more humble about truth-claims, and so both better scientists and better teachers--and better Christian witnesses; and the Church can help parents and their children by teaching the Faith intelligently and without sinful-proud overclaims.

More broadly, the congregation can help educate a highly influential segment of the American population by communicating a Christian apologetic that sets the Gospel over against its #1 rival of the past two centuries, viz., the antitheistic Enlightenment, which has successfully foisted upon our general culture a handful of illusions--e.g., opposing knowledge/belief (as though knowledge could be free of presuppositions-assumptions-beliefs), imagining an aseptic, neutral, value-free kind of knowledge and process and therefore pedagogy, believing that "the individual" is a global-general truth rather than a Western construct dependant on the biblical and hellenistic visions, the notion that America is not a Christian society but a pluralistic society (this being the illusion "the Moral Majority" and "the New Christian Right" most weightily attacks), liberal accomodationism to "the world's agenda," the egregious overreading of "the separation of Church and State" to mean the separation of religion from public life both politically and morally, the false surmise that a society can cohere enough to solve its

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problems without a common culture with a common rel. at its heart, the notion that people will be more human (rather than less) as they become more educated & thus (under Enlightenment ed.) less religious.