

A Plea for Tolerance

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**Note: This paper was written October 3, 1978 in reference to the creation evolution issue when I was teaching at BGSU.*

It has often amazed me that many people—my colleagues and as well as many other people that I know—are anxious to convey the appearance that they know just about everything about most everything. On most any topic that one may discuss, the profound profundities flow from their lips sound as if they just completed extensive research on whatever topic happens to come up in conversation. This often includes everything from politics in Afghanistan to the creation/evolution controversy, from rape to capital punishment, and even the problems of using point bi-serial correlations or if *Woolite Spray Foam Rug Cleaner* works better than other brands. Many people are so anxious to tell everyone everything that they know that they often do not listen to what others have to say.

While riding in the university elevator one day, I had the good fortune of meeting someone who had just returned from an extensive stay in Russia expound on life and culture there. Ironically, although another passenger person had never spent a day there, rather than listen to someone who obviously had extensive firsthand experience, he chose to display what he thought was his vast store of knowledge about the country.

Only a week ago, at a faculty get-together, a friend of mine, a teacher for many years (and extremely well read in the problems of education) was asked what he did for a living. His answer, a public school teacher, was met by a barrage of solutions to both real and imagined problems in the public schools! I'm sure most readers have heard the following rhetoric:

What is wrong with the public schools? They need to get back to the basics. They should study reading, and learn spelling and how to write a decent sentence.

This lady, who happened to have not been inside a public classroom for over a quarter of a century, probably knew as much about nuclear physics as she did about education (namely nothing). Yet she had **all** the answers. If she only knew how foolish she sounded to most educators. Research study after study has found, for example, that there is *little* relationship between the time spent studying spelling words, and one's spelling ability. Spelling ability seems to be related more to one's inborn innate memory ability and study *habits* instead of study *time*. Her solutions were simply wrong and, in view of the fact that the suicide rate among adolescent students is already epidemic, her solution may prove disastrous for some students if fully implemented.

In the past couple of years, I have written several dozen articles about the creation/evolution controversy. I recently received a nasty note from a colleague who severely chastised me for what I thought was a minor point in one of my monographs. The main thrust of his letter seemed to be I didn't take a solid stand *on the side he knew was correct* (the anti-creation side) so obviously I didn't know what I was talking about. I may have overreacted, but tried to convey to him the following ideas:

I used to think I knew a lot, but I know enough now to know that I don't. There is simply so much I have yet to learn that I find it difficult to take a firm position on *anything* except the few narrow areas that I have carefully looked into and, of course, moral issues. I am only in my 30's and read an average of only about two books a week, so I can not be expected to have all the answers in some *broad field* of study. I simply have a lot more reading, thinking, studying and learning to do, and it would be presumptuous for me to say that I have the answers when I do not. Because I have read dozens of books on creation and evolution and related topics, I have some knowledge of this area. Maybe when I complete a couple more Ph.D.'s, I will form some definitive answers—but as I'm now only completing my second, I still have a ways to go.

I now have about two thousand books on this topic in my library, many of which I have read. And there are many, many, others which I do not own yet. Actually, I probably have several thousand books yet to read on cosmology, and more are being published each month, hopefully, someday I will know as much as everyone around me *think that they know!*

My position on teaching about creation and evolution in the schools is that it *should be openly talked about* and even debated, and not censor one side as is often presently the case. A one-sided approach is very common, and should be avoided. I have some good ideas on the topics that I have looked into, including vestigial organs (several years of study on this topic leads me to conclude there isn't "any such animal," in humans at least) and atavism (there are no documents, clear cases of atavism in humans) and nascent organs (I could not locate any clear nascent organ) and a few other areas. So much for these proofs of evolutionism.

Aside from this, it is not always easy to throw myself in with *any* lot (or, actually, "box"), although emotionally and philosophically I have a position. What my affective domain concludes, though, does not really matter to anyone except me. Someday maybe I will be able to fully understand and comprehend reality based on my research of the empirical data—but not at this point in time. I am simply too young of a researcher (if I deserve such a title). Unfortunately, witch hunts are common—and are not uncommon in academia either—and the hunters are often not more knowledgeable than the hunted.

There should be more tolerance on **all sides**, and I find that, unfortunately, defense mechanisms surface far too easily everywhere, especially when discussing such topics as creation-evolution. Most scientists are theistic evolutionists of some sort and obviously, all of us fall somewhere between the two extremes—and I have a feeling that most of us are not all that far away from each other, even though the labeling process seems to create chasms out of what are actually comparatively small differences on this continuum. The basic question is, "Is there a creator?" If so, how did He create? Given the evidence against evolution, the question is open.

In short, I am trying to say that, "When I was younger, I thought that I knew all the right answers, but now that I am a little older, I'm not so sure." There is a lot out there we don't know. And the more we learn, the more we **realize** just how much we don't know!

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