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Teaching the Truth

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In March of this year a meeting held in the buildings of Emmanuel City Technology College in Gateshead provoked an extraordinary reaction in the media and even in parliament. The College was initially involved simply because their building was the venue for a conference on creation science. However, as a Christian College they were also prepared to teach their children that evolution is a theory with much evidence against it and that there are alternative theories of origins. The ensuing furore, apparently largely orchestrated by prominent atheist Richard Dawkins, was evidence that the subject touches a raw nerve. What particularly concerned Church Society was that six Bishops decided to wade into the fray by signing a letter along with various academics and addressed to the Prime Minister. The letter gives all the appearance of attempting to censor the teaching of science in schools so that scientific criticism of aspects of evolutionary theory is suppressed.

The Bishops' letter did acknowledge that evolution is merely a theory and open to being '*refined, confirmed and even radically altered*'. Whilst this may seem true many scientists will attest how much resistance and opposition they have experienced when they have questioned evolutionary theory and associated ideas. However, the statement is also inadequate as a definition of a scientific theory. A scientific theory must be capable of being falsified. Being able to radically alter a theory may sound much the same, but it is not. Therefore the question arises, is the theory of 'particles to people evolution' (the theory that present day people evolved from simple particles over a period of billions of years) capable of being falsified? Once the question is pushed it becomes clear that many people cannot allow it because to do so would require them to accept a different theory of origins. At present the only viable alternative is Divine creation (though there are other theories such as that found in Eastern religions which may well catch on as evolution loses credibility more and more). Richard Lewontin wrote in 1997 in *The New York Review* '*We take the side of science in spite of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs... because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism.... Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.*'

Because of this prior commitment to materialism and the non-falsifiable nature of the theory it is more proper to describe 'particles to people evolution' as a faith position.

For scientific advancement this has important consequences. The prior commitment to evolutionism means the necessity of accepting that the universe is billions of years old (direct evidence supporting such an age is largely lacking). It is particularly the supposed age of the earth that is pushing areas of science into a cul-de-sac. It is not hard to find scientists (whether creationists or not) who claim that the advancement of science is being hindered by an unwillingness to accept that such theories may be wrong.

In the field of education it is important that children are taught the truth. As a parent I despair at the number of times apparently innocuous television programmes such as Blue Peter trot out the billions of years old theory as if it were proven absolute fact. Rarely does a presenter say 'scientists believe...', it is simply stated as fact and so children are misled. Yet in schools the National Curriculum requires that theories of science should be taught as such and where there are disagreements over evidence this should also be taught (Darwinian natural selection is actually mentioned). Theories of origins must be handled differently. Where they rely on a prior commitment

this should be acknowledged (whether that be Biblical Christianity or materialism). Nevertheless the theories can still be assessed in the light of available evidence, and this should be done whilst recognising our tendency to be biased in how we handle data and that new evidence is constantly being accumulated whilst old evidence often has to be reconsidered.

It is vital that education is not censored in the way proposed by the Bishops; this will be harmful to the Christian faith and to scientific endeavour. Having initially responded to the Bishops' letter, Church Society has arranged a fringe meeting at the forthcoming General Synod. In advance of this we have distributed literature to Synod members. We are delighted that Professor Edgar Andrews (retired Professor of Materials Science at St. Mary's College London) has agreed to speak to this under the title 'Teaching the Truth about Evolution'. Our hope is that this will provide a good opportunity for people to hear why it is important for science that opinions contrary to the majority are not suppressed and also why many scientists reject 'particles to people evolution' because the evidence is against it.