

## PE1530/T

National Secular Society Email of 11 November 2014

I write as a Scottish representative of the National Secular Society ([www.secularism.org.uk](http://www.secularism.org.uk)) to express our unequivocal support to Petition PE 01530 seeking to outlaw the teaching of biblical creationism and the pseudo-scientific Intelligent Design in Scotland's school science classes.

In our view neither creationism nor Intelligent Design ('creationism in a lab coat') is science and so neither should be taught in science classes.

It might assist the Petition Committee's evaluation of the arguments before them that there are many leading Christian figures in the UK who actively oppose the teaching of creationism and ID in schools. For example, the Baptist minister Steve Chalke, a leading member of the Evangelical Alliance who also runs a number of faith-based schools through his Oasis Trust, has stated: ["Creationism is a load of garbage. Genesis is a poem based on a Babylonian creation myth."](#) Chalke has been supported in this by the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams. Reporting on [his first wide-ranging interview at Lambeth Palace on his appointment](#), the Archbishop was emphatic in his criticism of creationism being taught in the classroom, stating: *"I think creationism is a kind of category mistake, as if the Bible were a theory like other theories. If creationism is presented as a stark alternative theory alongside other theories I think there's just been a jarring of categories. My worry is creationism can end up reducing the doctrine of creation rather than enhancing it."*

With regard to the pseudo-scientific Intelligent Design (ID) its proponents have been found to be economical with the truth about their motives in seeking to push their position into science classes. ID was concocted by fundamentalist Christians in the US who found themselves unable to push traditional Biblical creationism into school science classes, given the US commitment under its constitution to the separation of church and state. They chose instead to claim their position had nothing to do with religion and everything to do with arguing around science, and specifically the science of evolution. It took some time for the supporters of ID to acknowledge their underlying religious beliefs.

This is a key issue.

Those who advocate the teaching of both creationism and ID are people who espouse fundamentalist Christian belief, evangelical and/or conservative. Thus the primary motivation in their lives is absolute belief in the Bible and a Creator who is the Christian God of Genesis. They accept that the Word of God through divine revelation cannot be changed or ignored by man and so it becomes immune to

critical scrutiny. This is why strong religious belief can never be temporarily relegated or suspended in favour of a secondary interest when such an overriding primary interest is at work. A higher burden of proof of independence should therefore apply to religious believers precisely because they, unlike non-religious individuals, are commanded to obey and acknowledge certain precepts, irrespective of evidence for them one way or the other.

Thus with regard to the Centre for Intelligent Design in Scotland (C4ID), which has submitted a paper countering this petition, we ask the Petitions Committee to question closely the veracity of the statement on C4ID's web site that "its (ID's) distinguishing characteristic is that it does not appeal to any religious authority, but to scientific investigation alone" while there is very definitely an "appeal to religious authority" in private. Supporters of ID in both the UK and US approach the science arguments having already made up their minds not only that there is an Intelligent Designer, but further that 'He' is the God of the book of Genesis. The C4ID argues on its web site that "It's not about religion, it's about evidence" and that "the exploration of ID within science should not be dismissed as something it is not – a disguised religious position". The Petitions Committee should be aware that this statement is designed to obfuscate - it is indeed about religion and a disguised religious position.

That this is the case is further evidenced by the well publicised attempt by fundamentalist Christians in the United States to introduce ID into US school science classes in 2005. Unable to project creationism into US schools due to the strict separation of church and state in the US Constitution, the concept of ID came about as a Trojan Horse to get creationism rebranded as a scientific proposition and so into schools. Such an attempt by a school board in Pennsylvania was rejected completely after the lengthy court case brought by parents who were deeply concerned as to the school policy and the motivation behind it. The Judge in this case, known as the [Kitzmiller V Dover School Board](#) case, was a Lutheran yet concluded ID was *"nothing less than the progeny of creationism,"* the belief that the world was created by God as outlined in the Book of Genesis. In a 139-page ruling, the Judge also criticised the local school board for its *"breathhtaking inanity"* in using ID as a pretext for what he called its real purpose, which was to promote religion in the public school science classroom in US schools. Judge Jones remarked: "To be sure, Darwin's theory of evolution is imperfect. However, the fact that a scientific theory cannot yet render an explanation on every point should not be used as a pretext to thrust an untestable alternative hypothesis grounded in religion into the science classroom or to misrepresent well-established scientific propositions."

The court case had definitive testimony from devout Christians who were also distinguished scientists and who successfully exposed the real motives of the creationist/ID lobby. In particular, the arguments for ID were systematically demolished in scientific terms in testimony on behalf of the plaintiffs by a devout

Roman Catholic, [Professor Kenneth R Miller](#), Professor of Biology and Royce Family Professor for Teaching Excellence at [Brown University](#). It is also worth noting that a very public face of the US campaign to expose the motives of the ID movement and counter its claims is a Christian cleric, the Reverend Barry Lynn of the United Church of Christ. In a work entitled '[Not in our Classrooms – Why ID Is Wrong For Our Schools](#)', Lynn states in his foreword that: *“the attack on evolution is a surrogate, and indeed a wedge, for a wide-ranging crusade against the scientific integrity of the public education system in America”*.

## **Conclusion**

The National Secular Society's position is that there is neither debate nor controversy as to whether creationism and/or ID is science - neither qualify as such. Whether in the US where ID originated or in the UK, to the extent that there is a dispute it is within Christianity, between evangelicals advocating creationism and ID on the one hand, and other devout Christians and educators exposing both as a combination of myth, superstition and pseudo-science which has no place in school science classrooms. The US education system has rejected the concepts of creationism and ID in science classes, and so should Scottish legislators and educators.

Scotland has been at the forefront of the Enlightenment, where our contribution to scientific discovery has advanced immeasurably our knowledge of the universe in which we live and the forces which shape and regulate it. Scientific discovery has rendered redundant what once were religiously-based explanations for phenomena. It is a tragedy for Scotland's standing in the world and in the scientific community that the teaching of ancient myths and pseudo-science has walked through open school doors and into its science classrooms in both denominational and non-denominational schools, and that nothing has thus far been done to protect children from the propagation of this scientific ignorance.

We commend the Scottish Secular Society's petition to the Scottish Government.

## **About the National Secular Society**

The National Secular Society was founded in 1866, with associated secularist groups also formed in Scotland in the 19th century. We campaign from a non-religious perspective for the separation of religion and state and promote secularism as the best means to create a society in which people of all religions or none can live together fairly and cohesively. We support freedom of religion and belief as well as freedom from it.

**Alistair McBay**  
**National Secular Society**