

Does “Intelligent Design” *belong in Science class?*



By Dennis Gordon

In the last couple of years the concept of Intelligent Design (ID) has really hit the news headlines. Articles in major weeklies like *Time* and editorials in other magazines and newspapers have discussed the pros and cons of the controversy, which has been raging especially in the United States.

What is Intelligent Design? It is the idea that, because the universe and life are so complex, they must be the deliberate creation of a higher power. That power is not usually named as God by ID enthusiasts — the point of Intelligent Design theory is merely to introduce the notion of a Designer into the science classroom, as a counter to evolutionism, without necessarily making a statement about who the designer may be.

Predictably, the scientific community has reacted very strongly against this. They say it is merely a ploy to introduce the creationist interpretation of origins into education. [Strictly, Creationism is a particular interpretation of Genesis 1, the first chapter in the Bible. What might be called “young-earth creationists” argue that the universe, earth, and all life were created in just six days about 10,000 years ago. But the term is usually also applied to “old-earth creationists”, who accept scientific evidence that the universe is billions of years old but nevertheless argue that God created all there is by separate acts of fiat (“Let there be ...”) during those billions of years.] Most scientists, on the other hand, including many Christian scientists, point out that science cannot prove the existence of God, therefore invoking him to

explain something in nature that we may not yet understand, in fact explains nothing. To do so brings all scientific enquiry to a halt.

Ironically, these scientists may have scripture on their side. Jesus Christ himself specifically said, “God is Spirit”. What this means is that God, who created time, space, and matter, is himself outside time and space and is non-material, therefore he cannot be detected by the tools of science. He cannot be seen, measured, weighed, quantified, or objectified.

Science is simply inadequate to the task of pointing to any one difficult-to-explain gap in scientific knowledge and saying, “There, this definitely, measurably, objectively proves beyond all doubt that God is responsible for the existence of ... the fundamental forces of nature, star formation, proteins and nucleic acids, living cells, complex organs like the eye, species, and so on.” This doesn’t mean God may not be behind all these things — it’s just that the scientific method cannot prove it one way or the other.

This actually poses no problem to Christianity. Christian scholars and commentators note that the Bible itself points out that God can only be known spiritually and relationally. While the Bible does clearly say that the creation is God’s handiwork and gives evidence of his existence, this is in terms of general revelation. This is why some Christian scientists have no difficulty with, say, the concept of biological evolution, arguing that God fully gifted the creation with the ability to be and to become. These scientists make a distinction between evolution (a natural process that may itself have been created) and evolutionism (an

atheistic philosophy that denies the possibility of a creator). Whatever the case, many theologians are themselves agreeing that the idea of Intelligent Design does not belong in the science classroom, though it certainly belongs in classes on religion or cultural history.

This is why, on 18 November 2005, the Vatican’s chief astronomer, astrophysicist George Coyne, himself stated that “Intelligent Design” isn’t science and doesn’t belong in science classrooms. While reaffirming God’s role in creation, he said that science explains the history of the universe. Even the conservative US ministry group *Reasons to Believe* recently stated, “As it currently stands, we believe ID should *not* be taught in biology class. That is not to say we think there’s a lack of evidence in the record of nature for the work of an Intelligent Designer. Far from it! ... However, at this juncture, ID isn’t formulated as a scientific theory. To date, ID has not developed an origins model with scientifically testable assertions and falsifiable predictions. No ID theory accounts for the history of the universe and of life. There are no ID predictions about what scientists should discover when they examine the record of nature. Without a testable model, ID cannot guide future scientific investigation.”

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