

Myths About Intelligent Design

January 1, 2006

In December a decision by U.S. District Judge John Jones in Dover, Pennsylvania once again put the topic of intelligent design in the news. He ruled that the school board's actions were unconstitutional and merely an attempt to smuggle religious views into a science classroom.

Media coverage of the Dover case and the broader topic of intelligent design have often been inadequate. When I have spoken on this subject, I have found that many Christians don't have an accurate perspective on this subject. So let me take a moment to address some of the myths surrounding this scientific theory.

First, proponents of intelligent design are not trying to smuggle religion into the classroom. While that may have been the intent of some of the Dover school board members, it is clear that is not the desire of scientists working on intelligent design. The Discovery Institute is one of the leading think tanks in the area of intelligent design and it actually opposes the idea of requiring it be taught in the classroom. They are pursuing it as a scientific theory not as a public school curriculum.

It might be worth noting that what Judge Jones struck down was a requirement that a short statement be read in class that mentioned the phrase "intelligent design" twice. It also allowed students to look at a supplemental text on intelligent design titled *Of Pandas and People*. The students would be instructed from the standard biology textbook published by Prentice Hall, but would be allowed to also read from the supplemental text if they desired.

Second, intelligent design is not just the latest modified attempt to introduce creationism into the classroom. Judge Jones and the media make it seem like the same people who promoted scientific creationism in the 1970s and 1980s are the same people pushing intelligent design now. That is not the case. None of the leaders of the intelligent design movement have been involved with creationist groups like the Institute for Creation Research or Answers in Genesis or Reasons to Believe. In fact, if you go to the websites of many creation groups, you will find they are often critical of intelligent design because it does not specifically identify a creator.

Third, intelligent design is much more than a refutation of evolution. It provides a positive model that can be tested. Judge Jones argued that “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 a science classroom.”

Scientists pursuing intelligent design are doing much more than just criticizing evolution. They are proposing new ideas that can be tested. For example, Michael Behe (author of the book [*Darwin's Black Box*](#)) suggests that molecular motors within the cell exhibit what he calls irreducible complexity. He shows that the bacterial flagellum requires numerous parts to all be present simultaneously for it to function. It is a testable model that other scientists can verify or refute using scientific data.

The ruling by Judge Jones won't end the debate about intelligent design. But at least when we debate its merits or flaws, we should get our facts straight.

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Stem Cell Wars

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The political war over stem cell research is heating up as evidenced by two recent events in the media. For the last few weeks, Senate Democrats have blocked action on a bill that would allow the use of umbilical cord blood in stem cell research. Although the bill passed the House by a remarkable vote of 431-1, the democratic leadership in the Senate would not allow a vote on the measure. The bill was even endorsed by the Congressional Black Caucus due to the positive appeal from former basketball star Julius (Dr. J.) Erving.

Also in the news was the decision by University of Pittsburgh's Gerald Schatten to quit the human cloning project of South Korean scientist Dr. Hwang Woo Suk. Dr. Schatten cited ethical concerns about possible coercion in obtaining eggs from female project staffers. Dr. Schatten also demanded that his name be removed from an article he co-wrote with Dr. Hwang for the journal *Science* because he believes it used fraudulent photographs in the article.

Background

Stem cells are the basic cells in our body. They get their name from their similarity to the stem of a plant which gives rise to branches, bark, and every other part of a plant. Embryonic stem cells are the cells from which all 210 different kinds of tissue in the human body originate. As an embryo develops into a blastocyst, a few layers of cells surround a mass of stem cells. If these stem cells are removed from the blastocyst, they cannot develop as an embryo but can be cultured and grown into these different tissues.

Stem cells are undifferentiated and self-replicating cells that have the potential to become the other differentiated

cells in our body. And that is why there is so much scientific and political attention being paid to stem cells.

The potential for stem cell research is enormous and intoxicating. Nearly 100 million Americans have serious diseases that eventually may be treated or even cured by stem cell research. Many diseases (like Parkinson's, heart disease, diabetes) result from the death or dysfunction of a single cell type. Scientists hope that the introduction of healthy cells of this type will restore lost or compromised function.

Moral Perspective

The moral problem with the research is that to obtain human embryonic stem cells, the embryo is destroyed. Embryos needed for human embryonic stem cell research can be obtained from three sources: (1) in-vitro fertilization used to produce embryos, (2) frozen embryos which are spare embryos left over from in-vitro fertilization, or (3) human cloning of embryos.

In addition to the moral problem is the scientific reality that embryonic stem cell research has not been successful. Although human embryonic stem cells have the potential to become any type of human cell, no one has yet mastered the ability to direct these embryonic cells in a way that can provide possible therapy for humans afflicted with various diseases.

Numerous stories are surfacing of the problems with human embryonic stem cells. One example took place in China where scientists implanted human embryonic stem cells into a patient suffering from Parkinson's only to have them transform into a powerful tumor that eventually killed him.

Often the media has not been telling the truth about embryonic stem cell research. So why hasn't the media accurately covered this issue? "To start with, people need a fairy tale," said Ronald D.G. McKay, a stem cell researcher at the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. "Maybe that's

unfair, but they need a story line that's relatively simple to understand."

What has been lost in all of this discussion is the humanity of the unborn. Proponents of embryonic stem cell research argue that an embryo or fetus is a "potential" human life. Yet at every stage in human development (embryo, fetus, child, adult), we retain our identity as human beings. We are humans from the moment of conception. We do not have the right to dismember a human embryo because it's unwanted or located in a test tube in a fertility clinic.

Also lost in this discussion is the success of using stem cells from sources other than embryos. Successful clinical trials have shown that adult stem cells as well as umbilical cord blood have been very effective. These sources may provide cures for such diseases as multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis, systematic lupus, etc. Some studies seem to indicate that adult stem cells create "fewer biological problems" than embryonic ones.

No moral concerns surround the use of human adult stem cells since they can be obtained from the individual requiring therapy. And using blood from umbilical cords of newborns does not raise any significant concerns because the newborn is not harmed in any way.

In the last few years, stem cells have also been found in tissues previously thought to be devoid of them (e.g., neural tissue, nasal passages). And human adult stem cells are also more malleable than previously thought. For example, bone marrow stem cells can produce skeletal muscle, neural, cardiac muscle, and liver cells. Bone marrow cells can even migrate to these tissues via the circulatory system in response to tissue damage and begin producing cells of the appropriate tissue type.

Human adult stem cell research is already effective and raises

none of the moral questions of human embryonic stem cell research. Even biotech industry proponents of embryonic stem cell research believe that we may be twenty years away from developing commercially available treatments using embryonic stem cells.

All of this, however, seems lost on some in Congress who continue to push for additional funding of embryonic stem cell research. When democratic leaders in the Senate hold up a cord blood bill that will help people just to get a vote on an embryonic stem cell bill, they clearly have the wrong priorities. Adult stem cell research is already effective. Embryonic stem cell research is not.

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Terrorist Attack in London

July 7, 2005

The recent terrorist attack in London once again reminds us that we are still engaged in a war on terrorism. For some reason we seem to forget this fundamental fact. The March 2004 bombing in Madrid was a reminder. The July terrorist attack in London was another. Yet there is abundant evidence that we still have not learned some fundamental lessons in our war on terrorism.

I was on two different talk shows (one as host, one as guest), and I was struck by the number of times I heard comments about bringing the terrorists to justice. But let me ask a basic question: is a terrorist a common criminal?

If terrorists are only common criminals, then biblically speaking, they should merely be dealt with by their host governments. In Romans 13, the Apostle Paul says, "he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil."

Paul's teaching on government shows that criminals are those who do evil and threaten the civil peace. Any outside threat to the existence of the state is not a criminal threat but an act of war which is also to be dealt with by the government.

In other words, criminals threaten the state from within, while foreign armies threaten the state from outside. In the case of seeking domestic peace, Paul outlines how governments will approve of good works, but that governments should bring fear to those who are wrongdoers.

When terrorists attack, we should not view them as criminals but as foreign soldiers who attempt to threaten the very existence of the American government or the British government. To borrow a phrase from President Bush, we should not try to "bring them to justice," we should "bring justice to them."

Another important lesson we must learn is the need to place our governments on a war footing. That is, there are certain steps governments must take if we are to truly win the war on terrorism. At the outset, we need to develop the mindset that we are fighting a war with radical Muslim terrorists (often called Islamofascists). We can't negotiate with them as some of the callers to my talk show suggested. They are enemy

combatants willing to die for their perverted religious views.

Governments shouldn't negotiate with them or bring them to justice. Governments must fight a war on terrorism. This requires governments to press their advantages over terrorists in terms of military hardware, intelligence gathering, and technological applications. It also demands that our governmental leaders think clearly about what terrorism is and how it is being advanced by Muslim terrorists around the world.

The terrorist attack in London (as well as the bombing in Madrid) also reminds us of the role each of us can play in stopping terrorism. Each involved citizen multiplies the eyes and ears of the government. These attacks were not high tech attacks using nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons. They used bombs and timers. An alert citizen might have discovered these bombs before they went off.

To prevent future attacks, we must pay attention to our surroundings and those around us. That doesn't mean we need to be paranoid of everything and suspicious of everyone. But it does mean that we need to be alert.

One terrorist expert I interviewed said that a successful terrorist attack occurs when all the pieces of the puzzle come together. Terrorism is like a jigsaw puzzle with lots of pieces that all must be present for success. This includes funding, organizers, explosives, location, a plan of operation, research, a dry run, trusted people, etc. Alert citizens who report suspicious activity can help law enforcement thwart the plans of terrorists.

Countering terrorism in the 21st century will not be easy, but understanding, resolve, and alertness are key ingredients in our success. This is our generation's challenge. We need to meet it with wisdom and boldness.

Ten Commandments in America

June 27, 2005

The Supreme Court has spoken and has essentially stuttered. How any sane person can make any sense of their two rulings on the Ten Commandments is beyond me. A divided court struck down displays in two Kentucky courthouses, but ruled a Ten Commandments monument on state government land in Texas was acceptable.

So why was a six foot granite monument on the grounds of the Texas Capitol constitutional? Perhaps they saw it acceptable because it is one of seventeen historical displays on the twenty-two-acre lot. So five justices determined it to be a constitutional tribute to the nation's legal and religious history.

On the other hand, what is unconstitutional are copies of the Ten Commandments in Kentucky courthouses hanging alongside documents such as the Bill of Rights, the Star-Spangled Banner, and a version of the Congressional Record declaring 1983 the Year of the Bible. Anyone looking for a clear line of constitutionality will not find it in this confused muddle of court cases.

And anyone who doesn't think the members of the court are openly hostile to religion need only read just a few lines of the opinion rendered by Justice John Paul Stevens. He couldn't even accept the Texas Ten Commandments monument placed there over forty years ago by a secular institution. The monument is not a work of art and does not refer to any event in the history of the state, he wrote. The message transmitted by Texas chosen display is quite plain: This state endorses the

divine code of the Judeo-Christian God.

Fortunately, other justices noted that one monument among many others is hardly an endorsement. You can stop to read it, you can ignore it, or you can walk around it. Chief Justice William Rehnquist argued that the monument's placement on the grounds among secular monuments was passive, rather than confrontational. But that logic seemed lost on many of the justices.

The Supreme Court's inconsistency in this case shows that many of the justices have clearly lost their way. Justice Antonin Scalia addressed the lack of any clear principle in this case in his scholarly dissent. He declared, "What distinguishes the rule of law from the dictatorship of a shifting Supreme Court majority is the absolutely indispensable requirement that judicial opinions be grounded in consistently applied principle."

In 1980, the Supreme Court ruled against the posting of the Ten Commandments in the public schools in the case of *Stone v. Graham*. They ruled that the preeminent purpose for posting the Ten Commandments on schoolroom walls is plainly religious in nature. At least in 1980 we knew where the court stood on posting religious symbols in public places. This time they confused an already complex issue. According to Justice David Souter, the liberal justices were trying to establish official religious neutrality.

Justice Scalia listed various ways in which higher beings are invoked in public life, from "so help me God" in inaugural oaths to the prayer that opens the Supreme Court's sessions. He asked, "With all of this reality (and much more) staring it in the face, how can the court possibly assert that the First Amendment mandates governmental neutrality? Perhaps trying to mandate neutrality is the problem."

When we look at the Founding Fathers we see they were anything

but neutral when it came to addressing the influence of the Ten Commandments on our republic. For example, twelve of the original thirteen colonies incorporated the entire Ten Commandments into their civil and criminal codes.{1}

John Quincy Adams stated, "The law given from Sinai was a civil and municipal [code] as well as a moral and religious code. These are laws essential to the existence of men in society and most of which have been enacted by every nation which ever professed any code of laws." He added that "Vain indeed would be the search among the writings of [secular history] . . . to find so broad, so complete and so solid a basis of morality as this decalogue lays down." {2}

Notes

1. Matthew Staver, The Ten Commandments Battle Continues To Gain Steam, *National Liberty Journal*, December 2001.
2. John Quincy Adams, *Letters of John Quincy Adams, to His Son, on the Bible and Its Teachings* (Auburn: James M. Alden, 1850), 61.
3. George Washington, Farewell Address (Philadelphia), September 17, 1796.
4. William Holmes McGuffey, *Eclectic Reader* in D. James Kenney, Whats Happening to American Education in Robert Flood, *The Rebirth of America* (Philadelphia: Arthur S. DeMoss Foundation, 1986), 122.

On September 19, 1796, in his Farewell Address, President George Washington said, "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports." {3}

William Holmes McGuffey, considered the Schoolmaster of the Nation, once said, "The Ten Commandments and the teachings of Jesus are not only basic but plenary." {4}

It is more than just a little ironic that the Supreme Court that ruled against posting the Ten Commandments in public

places actually has its own display of the Ten Commandments. Engraved in the stone above the head of the Chief Justice are the Ten Commandments with the great American eagle protecting them. Moses is included among the great lawgivers in the sculpture relief on the east portico. And sessions begin with the invocation, "God save the United States and this honorable court."

So what can Christians do? First, we should be in prayer about this important issue and pray for future Supreme Court justices who will someday replace those who made these rulings.

Second, we should express our opinions by talking to friends, writing a letter to the editor, and educating people around us about the importance of the Ten Commandments in America.

Third, we should encourage Congress to pass the Constitutional Restoration Act which uses Article III, Section 2 of the Constitution to limit the appellate jurisdiction of the federal courts in areas like the Pledge of Allegiance and the Ten Commandments. Congress has the power to remove power from judges.

Judges who use their power to remove the Ten Commandments should have their power removed from them. Passing this legislation will accomplish that purpose.

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