

The "Clergy Letter Project": Evolution Shabbat, February 14



Science and religion have been part of an increasingly strident cultural debate in recent years. Some have argued that science and religion cannot coexist. There are communities that have sought to ban the teaching of evolution, and others that have introduced "creationism" or "intelligent design" into science curricula in our schools. While most of these latter initiatives have been struck down by the courts, the debate rages on.

Can a true scientist be a true believer? Can a true believer be a true scientist?

The "Clergy Letter Project" is an attempt to elevate the quality of the discussion on this critical topic, and to move beyond gripping if incendiary sound bites. The "letter" (actually two letters, one for rabbis and the other for Christian clergy) asserts that religion and science are not adversaries but complementary disciplines. They have been signed by almost 12,000 Christian clergy and over 400 rabbis, myself among them.

In order to address the issues raised, the weekend of February 13-15 has been designated as Evolution Weekend. On *Shabbat* morning, February 14, I will address these issues from the pulpit during services. Through this consideration, I know we can address this critical intellectual and societal issue in a meaningful way and afford us all the opportunity to consider how Judaism addresses these issues in a contemporary way.

For more information, you can check out the website at www.theclergyletterproject.org/.

The text of the rabbinic version of the letter follows:

As rabbis from various branches of Judaism, we, the undersigned, urge public school boards to affirm their commitment to the teaching of the science of evolution. Fundamentalists of various traditions, who perceive the science of evolution to be in conflict with their personal religious beliefs, are seeking to influence public school boards to authorize the teaching of creationism. We see this as a breach in the separation of church and state. Those who believe in a literal interpretation of the Biblical account of creation are free to teach their perspective in their homes, religious institutions and parochial schools. To teach it in the public schools would be to assert a particular religious perspective in an environment which is supposed to be free of such indoctrination.

The Bible is the primary source of spiritual inspiration and of values for us and for many others, though not everyone, in our society. It is, however, open to interpretation, with some taking the creation account and other content literally and some preferring a figurative understanding. It is possible to be inspired by the religious teachings of the Bible while not taking a literalist approach and while accepting the validity of science including the foundational concept of evolution. It is not the role of public schools to indoctrinate students with specific religious beliefs but rather to educate them in the established principles of science and in other subjects of general knowledge.

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