

## PE1530/B

British Centre for Science Education Email of 17 October 2014

I am the Rev. Michael Roberts, spokesperson for BCSE, which was formed in 2006 in response to the upsurge of creationist attempts to infiltrate education. I am a graduate in theology and geology and F.R.Hist.S, school Governor for 26 years, and Anglican priest dealing with church schools for 40 years, and have published on the history of religious responses to geology and evolution.

The vast age of the universe and the earth has been known since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and evolution since 1859 or earlier, and thus no science makes sense without these facts. Any worldview which rejects them must clearly be seen as false, including Creationism with its denial of such basic and well-proven science. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Scots Presbyterians were in the forefront of accepting both deep time and evolution, from Thomas Chalmers to Henry Drummond, to name but two.

In the past few decades, a strain of thought, variously known as creationism, creation science, flood geology, and Intelligent Design, has arisen, challenging these plain facts. This resurgent creationism has its roots in Seventh Day Adventism, but has now spread to more main-stream churches. Proponents of such creationism are well organised, well funded, and represented by such groups as Creation Science Ministries, Creation ministries International, Truth in Science, and Answers in Genesis, as well as the Seattle-based Discovery Institute, and its Glasgow-based offshoot Centre for Intelligent Design, which may allow for an ancient earth but not evolution.

There has also been an influx of US-based (and occasionally Australia-based) fundamentalist churches, such as West Mains Church, East Kilbride (responsible for the distribution of creationist texts at Kirktonholme), Westwoodhill Evangelical Church (with representatives on the chaplaincy committees of five schools in South Lanarkshire), Craighalbert Church (providing the chaplain for four schools in North Lanarkshire), and Freedom City Church (also North Lanarkshire). In addition, Seventh Day Adventists are also represented on school chaplaincy teams, as are more traditional churches (Baptist, various Presbyterians denominations) that are often influenced by creationism.

It is almost impossible to determine the extent to which such creationism has influenced classroom teaching, especially as many Local Authorities regard the identity and affiliation of school chaplains as protected confidential information for Freedom of Information Act purposes. However, we note with alarm that, in addition to the reasons for concern listed above, the extreme anti-science West Mains Church was allowed to operate for eight years without question, that the Challenger Bus, which carries literature from Answers in Genesis, makes regular visits to many

schools, and that at least two schools have organised debates or Q&A sessions with creationist speakers, thus placing creationism on an equal footing with scientific reality.

Present Scottish Government policy is to leave these things to the discretion of individual teachers. This is to place an impossible burden on them, especially as creationist utterances are liable to come from chaplains, who are not part of the teaching establishment, and may be put forward in contexts such as Religious Observance where they could hardly be challenged. Creationists are plausible, and well practice in presenting their arguments. They commonly make direct factual claims, based on spurious science, which pupils (or indeed teachers without a background in biology) will not recognise as the untruths that they are. The creationist tactic is to present their point of view as having an equal claim to be heard, thus appealing to reasonableness and fair play, and to maintain that the kind of policy sought in this petition is an unfair restriction of free speech. We would not accept such an argument in the case of Flat Earthism and should not accept it in the case of evolution denial or old earth denial either. This is somewhat blunt but it does emphasise the falsity of Creationism, and why it should not be taught in schools.

Rev Michael Roberts, M.A., F.R.Hist.S, on behalf of the British Centre for Science Education