

## “Quick, Let’s Discriminate Against the Creationists!”

Bert Thompson, Ph.D. and Brad Harrub, Ph.D.

It first began almost twenty years ago. A self-avowed atheist and evolutionist by the name of John W. Patterson started the fracas. Patterson (who is still living as of the writing of this article) is a professional engineer with an earned Ph.D. (1966) from Ohio State University. He spent most of his professional career as a professor of materials science and engineering at Iowa State University, from which he has now retired, and where he currently enjoys the elevated status of professor emeritus. It is at ISU that this sad story begins.

In March of 1983, Dr. Patterson authored an article for (appropriately enough) the *American Atheist*, in which he excoriated all of his fellow engineers who dared to be politically incorrect and believe in the concept of “design in nature resulting from an intelligent Creator.” Dr. Patterson labeled **any** engineer who believed in creation as “incompetent,” and charged the professional societies who accepted their credentials as being “irresponsible.”

But, as brutal as that blistering bluster was, it represented little more than Patterson’s “warning shot across the bow.” Just a few months later, in the fall of 1983, Dr. Patterson went farther—much, much farther—in his personal vendetta against creationists. At the time, he was serving as one of the members of the ISU committee on instruction in the sciences and humanities. He presented a proposal to the committee that stunned not only the committee members, but also the university’s administration, faculty, and student body as well.

Dr. Patterson suggested—in all seriousness!—that any student who was enrolled in a science-related course, and who, at the conclusion of the course, continued to maintain a personal belief in creation, **should receive a failing grade**. He also suggested that a professor—upon learning that a student had successfully completed his or her course, yet still retained a belief in creation—should be allowed to **retroactively change the grade from a passing mark to a failing one**. And, said Patterson, if the university discovered that it inadvertently had conferred a degree upon a student who, upon having graduated, nevertheless believed in creation, **the degree should be rescinded!**

Patterson’s proposal was reprinted in its entirety in the November/December 1984 issue of *Liberty* magazine (see Zuidema, 1984, pp. 16-18), and elsewhere. Here, in Patterson’s own words, is a portion of that proposal.

I suggest that **every professor should reserve the right to fail any student in his class no matter what the grade record indicates**, whenever basic misunderstand-

ings of a certain magnitude are discovered. Moreover, **I would propose retracting grades and possibly even degrees** if such gross misunderstandings are publicly espoused after passing the course, or after being graduated.... In geology and biology, **denying the facts of evolution** or an earth age in the order of billions of years, **would, in my view, be grounds for drastic action**. ...**Resorting to arguments based on religious commitments**, personal inspirations, revelations, and such **would not be acceptable defenses**; however, logically coherent arguments based on valid evidence could be. Decisions as to what is logically coherent or what is valid evidence would have to be made by appropriate faculty experts or panels who might also be called to task if their rationale(s) reflect academic irresponsibility or scholarly incompetence (Zuidema, p. 18, emp. added).

Reactions on the campus of Iowa State University to the Patterson proposal were both swift and vocal. Letters from university denizens—many of which were unabashedly critical—began to pour into the offices of the student newspaper, the *Iowa State Daily*. The paper itself ran two editorials criticizing Patterson’s proposal that students who espouse a belief in creation should be labeled as “incompetent.” Asked the editor: “Who will determine incompetence? John Patterson?” The newspaper then published a satirical piece about a futuristic scientist by the name of “Joe McCarthy” who, not coincidentally, taught a course identified as “Darwinism 324,” and who was horrified to suddenly find himself in a world filled with freethinkers and “card-carrying incompetents.”

The day after the McCarthy piece was published, Patterson submitted his resignation from the ISU committee on instruction in the sciences and humanities. But, he was not about to go gently into the night. In an interview in the fall 1983 issue of the *Skeptical Inquirer*, Patterson complained that he was extremely disappointed in the university’s lack of support, and remarked that he considered the school to be “academically irresponsible” for failing to carry out his proposals (see Frazier, 1983, 8[1]:3). A few short months later, in a February 7, 1984 letter to Kevin Wirth (a writer for the journal, *Origins Research*), Patterson remarked:

Suppose the student gives the correct scientific answers in his or her science course and suppose he/she also knows and gives the correct scientific arguments and reasons for the follow-up questions, but still



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insists on rejecting all this for reasons of incompatibility with his/her religious beliefs? In this case, I would prefer to pass the student strictly according to the usual scoring criteria **but with the proviso that his religious reasons be noted on his transcript of grades** (see Patterson, 1984b).

In a response published in the fall/winter issue of *Origins Research*, Wirth commented on Patterson's proposals:

Many educators refuse to discuss the alleged "evidences" for "scientific" creationism because they don't want to elevate the discussion of a religious matter into an unrelated arena.... Still others confidently launch into wholesale ridicule of creationist views, feeling certain that the literature is replete with evidence supporting evolution. Finally there are those, sparked by the likes of Dr. John W. Patterson of Iowa State University, who have openly called for the wholesale discrimination of any and all creationist students.... Patterson has elsewhere urged [in the letter mentioned above that Patterson wrote Wirth—BT/BH] that at the very least, **creationist students ought to have their transcripts marked to identify their creationist beliefs so that other institutions may knowingly continue to discriminate and prevent such students from obtaining a higher degree.** Discrimination against creationists has been going on behind closed doors for a number of years, as many students know all too well. It has only been recently that such open declarations of discrimination have been publicly aired and encouraged by creationist opponents (1984, 7[2]:2, emp. added).

Still, Patterson was not about to be dissuaded. Nor did he plan on changing his method of attack. Kendrick Frazier, writing in the *Skeptical Inquirer* about the ISU controversy and Patterson's part in it, observed:

As for his being a continuing center of controversy at ISU, Patterson seems resigned to playing the gadfly role. This is hardly the first public battle he has been in on the campus.... The experience has been trying and wearing for Patterson. **He has drawn the enmity of much of the university community—not so much for his views as for the aggressive way he presents them.** His outspokenness is just his style, Patterson says, and he can't change (1983, 8[1]:4 emp. added).

Patterson's "outspokenness," and the "aggressive way" in which he presented his case, were made all the more evident when, in mid-1984 (while the ISU controversy was in full bloom), he authored an article in the *Creation/Evolution Newsletter* by the title of "Do Scientists and Scholars Discriminate Unfairly Against Creationists?" Here is a portion of what he wrote in that article.

Creationists often complain that their theories and their colleagues are discriminated against by educators...

As a matter of fact, **creationism should be discriminated against**, not only because it is such pathetic science, but also because so many of its chief proponents resort to dishonest tactics and publish counterfeit arguments for public consumption. These are solid grounds for discrimination against creationism by all respectable scientists, scholars, and educators.

...[N]o advocate of such propaganda should be trusted to teach science classes or administer science programs anywhere or under any circumstances. Moreover, if any are now doing so, they should be dismissed.

Yes, creationism is discriminated against, but this is precisely as it should be. It is the responsibility of teachers and school officials to discriminate against incompetently conceived subject matter and also to discriminate against anyone who advocates that such materials be given positive cover in science classes. **I'm glad this kind of discrimination is finally catching on, and I hope the practice becomes much more vigorous and widespread in the future** (1984a, 4[3]:19,20, emp. added).

Ben Allen, the chairman of the ISU committee on instruction in the sciences and humanities, did his best to defuse the issue by crafting a thoughtfully worded, two-page response to Patterson's initial proposal. But it was too late. The cat already was out of the bag, so to speak. As one writer succinctly put it: "The Patterson proposal did have one additional dimension: **It impinged on a student's religious, if not intellectual, commitment to creationism**" (Zuidema, 1984, p. 17, emp. added).

Dr. Patterson's astonishing article—which advocated **open, continued, intentional discrimination against creationists**—appeared in the May-June 1984 issue of the *Creation/Evolution Newsletter*. In the very next issue of that periodical, well-known evolu-

tionist Karl D. Fezer wrote in strong support of Patterson's suggestion:

...[I]n hiring teachers, or in certifying them as competent,...consideration of various factors is appropriate. Where religious beliefs can affect job performance, it is appropriate to enquire as to what such effects are likely to be.... **[T]hose...who call themselves "scientific creationists," by that very self-designation and all that goes with it, demonstrate incompetence** (1984, 4[4]:22, emp. added).

So much for the famed objectivity of science.

## FAST-FORWARD ALMOST TWO DECADES

Kevin Wirth, the journalist from *Origins Research* whom we mentioned earlier, wrote the following statement, which we included above in a lengthier quote:

Discrimination against creationists has been going on behind closed doors for a number of years, as many students know all too well. **It has only been recently that such open declarations of discrimination have been publicly aired and encouraged by creationist opponents** (1984, 7[2]:2, emp. added).

The "recently" portion of Mr. Wirth's statement applied to 1984. But the "open declarations of discrimination" against creationists have neither ended nor abated. Require proof? Consider the following fascinating case study from—2002!

Micah Spradling was a student at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas. He was enrolled in the university's pre-med program because he wanted to follow in the footsteps of his father, a physician, and apply for entrance to Southwestern University's medical school. But in order to do that, Micah needed a letter of recommendation from a specific faculty member. That letter should have come from Michael Dini, an associate professor of biology at Texas Tech.

Imagine poor Micah's surprise when he discovered that Dr. Dini espoused the view that, in order to receive a letter of recommendation with his signature, a student was required to "truthfully and forthrightly affirm a scientific answer" to the question: "How do you think the human species originated?" (see Kitchen, 2002). In fact, Dini's Web site clearly detailed the requirements for students seeking a letter of recommendation (see Dini, 2002). After listing the specific academic requirements, and insisting on more than merely a "classroom relationship," Dini then listed a third criterion—**based entirely on whether or not the student accepted evolution as a fact!**

Why do I ask this question? Let's consider the situation of one wishing to enter medical school. Whereas medicine is historically rooted first in the practice of magic and later in religion, modern medicine is an endeavor that springs from the sciences, biology first among these. The central, unifying principle of biology is the theory of evolution, which includes both micro- and macro-evolution, and which extends to **all** species. How can someone who does not accept the most important theory in biology expect to properly practice in a field that is so heavily based on biology? It is hard to imagine how this can be so, but it is easy to imagine how physicians who ignore or neglect the Darwinian aspects of medicine or the evolutionary origin of humans can make bad clinical decisions....

Good medicine, like good biology, is based on the collection and evaluation of physical evidence. So much physical evidence supports the evolution of humans from non-human ancestors that one can validly refer to the "fact" of human evolution, even if all of the details are not yet known. One can deny this evidence only at the risk of calling into question one's understanding of science and of the method of science. Such an individual has committed malpractice regarding the method of science, for good scientists would never throw out data that do not conform to their expectations or beliefs. This is the situation of those who deny the evolution of humans; such a one is throwing out information because it seems to contradict his/her cherished beliefs.

In short, if you find yourself wanting to go to a professional school to study medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, physical therapy, etc., you first must abandon all facets of academic freedom, and cling **only** to those beliefs deemed acceptable by Dr. Dini.

What do you imagine would happen if Dini taught **religion**, and made similar stipulations for those in his classes, thereby demanding that each student, without exception, must believe the words of the Talmud or the Koran? Would the professor be allowed to continue teaching? Of course not! Yet this same type of discriminatory attitude is permitted in science. Why so?

For many parents, the advice they offer to their school-age children is simple: "Give your professors what they expect as the 'correct' answers on their tests, but as soon as you walk out of the classroom, 'dump' the incorrect information you've been taught

and remain loyal to your beliefs and your faith in God." In the past, this performance model worked well for students as they answered questions regarding evolution and its associated disciplines (e.g., geology).

Now, however, some teachers and/or professors are seeking not **just** the "correct" answers on examinations. Rather, their insistence is that our children "pledge allegiance" to the atheistic system of organic evolution. And in certain cases, the teachers have the perfect tools with which to exert extreme leverage on our young people—a passing grade or letter of recommendation that a youngster **must have** in order to continue his or her education (and vocation!).

Consider the dilemma facing a student who does not believe in organic evolution—as his or her degree, future graduate education, and potential employment all hang in the balance. Instead of students being evaluated on their performance, knowledge of the subject, and strength of character, they now are being exposed to an ideological "litmus test" to determine their potential worth—a litmus test designed specifically to ferret out and discriminate against a privately held religious belief.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 specifically prohibits discrimination in this country based on religious beliefs (section 703, p. 29). Have we missed something during the last 38 years? Did someone slip in and surgically remove that section of the beloved Civil Rights Act? Or has it been modified to **permit discrimination** based on religious beliefs? The answer to these questions is "No." That being the case, don't the following questions beg to be asked: Why are people like John Patterson and Michael Dini allowed to do what they are doing? And how long are they going to get away with it?

#### LATE-BREAKING NEWS

Just as this article was going to press, we learned that the American Association for the Advancement of Science announced on its Web site a new "AAAS Board Resolution on Intelligent Design Theory," approved October 18, 2002. Among other things, the resolution stated:

The contemporary theory of biological evolution is one of the most robust products of scientific inquiry. It is the foundation for research in many areas of biology as well as an essential element of science education....

Over the past several years, proponents of so-called "intelligent design theory," also known as ID, have challenged the accepted scientific theory of biological evolution.... In response to this effort, individual scientists and philosophers of science have provided substantive critiques of "intelligent de-

sign," demonstrating significant conceptual flaws in its formulation, a lack of credible scientific evidence, and misrepresentations of scientific facts.

Recognizing that the "intelligent design theory" represents a challenge to the quality of science education, the Board of Directors of the AAAS unanimously adopts the following resolution:

*Whereas*, ID proponents claim that contemporary evolutionary theory is incapable of explaining the origin of the diversity of living organisms;

*Whereas*, to date, the ID movement has failed to offer credible scientific evidence to support their claim that ID undermines the current scientifically accepted theory of evolution;

*Whereas*, the ID movement has not proposed a scientific means of testing its claims;

*Therefore Be It Resolved*, that the lack of scientific warrant for so-called "intelligent design theory" makes it improper to include as a part of science education;

*Therefore Be It Further Resolved*, that AAAS urges citizens across the nation to oppose the establishment of policies that would permit the teaching of "intelligent design theory" as a part of the science curricula of the public schools... (see AAAS, 2002, italics in orig.).

We repeat: so much for the famed objectivity of science. The discrimination continues....

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## “JAMES, SON OF JOSEPH, BROTHER OF JESUS”

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From most of the pictures that you have seen of “the box,” you might think that it was the size of a large coffin. Yet, at approximately 10 inches wide, 20 inches long, and 12 inches high, this box doesn’t fit our modern idea of a coffin. In fact, it’s more like a limestone Rubbermaid® crate than a coffin. At first glance, this “box” is not so unusual at all. During the first-century B.C., and continuing until the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, Jews used these containers to “rebury” their relatives. Generally, the bodies of the deceased were placed on a shelf or floor of a tomb; then, about one year after the original burial, friends or relatives would open the tomb, remove the bones, and place them in an ossuary. Occasionally, ossuaries contained the bones of multiple individuals. The outer decorations varied widely from one to the next. Some were bland, with no inscriptions, while others had carved designs or the names of the individuals buried therein.

The particular ossuary that has captured the world’s attention boasts of no great decoration. In fact, a small, 7.5-inch Aramaic inscription is the only thing that sets it apart from the most boring of ossuaries. Yet, that tiny inscription not only has set it apart from other ossuaries, but also has set it apart from all other archaeological finds to date. That inscription reads: “James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus.”

The first question that arises is whether this is the James of the Bible. While there are at least two Jameses mentioned in the Bible to which this inscription likely does not apply, one James is mentioned who seems to fit the description quite well. Matthew noted in his gospel regarding Christ:

...He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, “Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Josés, Simon, and Judas?” (13:53-56).

According to Matthew, then, the Jews recognized Jesus as the brother of James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas, and they also attributed at least two sisters to these brothers. Furthermore, Paul mentioned “James the Lord’s brother” (Galatians 1:19). Apparently, this same James became a prominent leader of the Jerusalem church (see Acts 15:13; 21:18-19; Galatians 2:9,12). Additionally, James the brother of Jesus very likely was the writer of the New Testament book by the same name. Secular sources also verify the idea that Jesus had a brother named James. Josephus wrote that the Jewish high priest “assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus...whose name was James” (20:9:1). The historian then proceeded to document that James was stoned.

Naturally, it first must be established that the ossuary is an authentic artifact from a time that would correspond to Jesus Christ and His brother James. In the premiere article about the inscription appearing in the November/December 2002 issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review* [BAR] André

Lemaire detailed several facts that make a strong case for the inscription’s authenticity. As an expert in ancient inscriptions, he stated: “This type of bone box is generally to be dated between about 20 B.C.E. [Before Common Era—KB] and 70 C.E [Common Era—KB].... Moreover, the cursive shape of three of the letters (*dalet*, *yod* and *aleph*) indicates an even narrower span of time: the last decades before the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E.—the exact period when James, the brother of Jesus, would have died” (2002, 28[6]:28). Hershel Shanks, the editor of *BAR*, had the ossuary’s composition tested by the Israeli Ministry of National Infrastructures, which concluded that the limestone was used extensively “during the Second Temple period,” and that no modern elements or chemicals had been used to “doctor” the box to make it appear old. In addition, the patina (dirt and other build-up on the box) passed the authenticity test (p. 29).

As far as can be proven to date, the box has all the signs of authenticity. But can we conclude that the Jesus and James of the inscription are the identical characters of the New Testament writings? While the names of James, Jesus, and Joseph were common during the first century, they would not often have been found in the exact same sequence of relationship as on the ossuary and in the biblical text. Lemaire concluded that “there were therefore probably about 20 people” who would have fit the inscription (p. 33). Yet the odds narrow even more, since only rarely would a brother’s name be included on an ossuary. In the November 4, 2002 issue of *Time*, David Van Biema reported that Lemaire believes “there is a 90% chance that the James on the ossuary was the biblical brother of Jesus” (2002, 160[19]:72). In the original *BAR* article, Lemaire stated that the ossuary “very probably” documents Jesus the Christ.

There are voices of opposition to the suggestion that this inscription refers to Christ. Since the artifact was not retrieved from its original environment, it cannot be attributed to a specific location. In the November 4, 2002 issue of *Newsweek*, reporter Kenneth Woodward quoted Bruce Chilton of Bard College: “If you cannot say where an artifact was found and where it has been for nearly 2,000 years, you cannot pretend to draw lines of connection between the object and the people it might mention” (2002, 140 [19]:48).

At present, we cannot be dogmatic about the ossuaries evidence, but we can state dogmatically that the name of Jesus Christ refuses to vanish into obscurity, and that His life, teachings, and personality continue to be the most influential of any human ever to walk the Earth.

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