

# French scientists rebut U.S., Muslim creationism

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Orsay, France — With creationism now coming in Christian and Muslim versions, scientists, teachers and theologians in France are debating ways to counteract what they see as growing religious attacks on science.

Bible-based criticism of evolution, once limited to Protestant fundamentalists in the United States, has become an issue in France now that Pope Benedict and some leading Catholic theologians have criticized the neo-Darwinist view of creation.

An Islamist publisher in Turkey mass-mailed a lavishly illustrated Muslim creationist book to schools across France recently, prompting the Education Ministry to proscribe the volume and question the way the story of life is taught here.

The Bible and the Koran say God directly created the world and everything in it. In Christianity, fundamentalists believe this literally but the largest denomination, Catholicism, and most mainline Protestant churches read it more symbolically.

This literalism led Christian fundamentalists to reject the theory of evolution elaborated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Charles Darwin, the foundation stone of modern biology. Muslim scholars also dispute evolution but have not made this a major issue.

“There is a growing distrust of science in public opinion, especially among the young, and that worries us,” said Philippe Deterre, a research biologist and Catholic priest who organized a colloquium on creationism for scientists at the weekend.

“There are many issues that go beyond strictly scientific or strictly theological explanations,” he said at the colloquium in this university town southwest of Paris. Deterre’s Blaise Pascal Network promotes understanding between science and religion.

Barred from teaching creationism in U.S. public schools, some conservative Christians now advocate the “intelligent design” argument that some forms of life are too complex to have simply evolved. Scientists call this creationism in disguise.

These American concerns caught notice in Europe after Vienna Cardinal Christoph Schoenborn, a confidant of Pope Benedict, attacked neo-Darwinist theories in 2005 in what seemed to be a move to ally the Catholic Church with “intelligent design.”

## Growing Issues in France

These theoretical debates became a pressing issue in France last month when schools unexpectedly received free copies of an “Atlas of Creation” by Turkish Islamist Harun Yahya that blames

Darwinism for everything from terrorism to Nazism.

Herve Le Guyader, a University of Paris biology professor who advised the Education Ministry on the Atlas, said high school biology teachers needed more training now to respond to the increasingly open challenges to the theory of evolution.

"It's often taught in a simplistic way," he said. "We have to give them the philosophical arguments they need to respond."

Paleontologist Marc Godinot said creationists and their critics drew overblown conclusions from a theory that explains how life developed but not how it was created. The ultimate origin of life is not a question science can answer, he said.

Creationists reject evolution because some scientists say the role of chance in it proves that life has no final meaning.

"We have to decode this, but that's a job for philosophers and theologians," Godinot said. "Creation is actually a big mystery."

Jacques Arnould, a Catholic priest who works at France's National Center for Space Research, said Christians in Europe should not look down with bemusement at creationists abroad.

"They are believers, as we are," the Dominican theologian told the meeting of about 100, mostly Catholic scientists with a few Muslims as well. "There are Christian, Muslim and Jewish approaches that we have to respect."

Arnould said the question of life's purpose arose naturally in biology class but science could not answer it. Instead of offering simple creationism, he said, theologians should develop views that respect modern science and faith in a divine purpose.

He said Catholic thinkers should update "natural theology," the teachings of Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) that married philosophy and science in a view that dominated European thought until the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Enlightenment divorced the two fields.

"Natural theology was based on the knowledge of the time," said Arnould. "That knowledge keeps changing, so natural theology has to change too."

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\* Reuters/March 26, 2007:

<http://www.rickross.com/reference/islamic/islamic76.html>