

Creationists' 'science' doesn't stand up to facts

I was reading my morning Gazette last week when an ad caught my eye: "Back to Genesis Conference: The Battle for the Bible is the Battle for the Beginning." What would it be like to attend a meeting sponsored by the Institute for Creation Research, for people who believed the Earth is 6,000 years old?

A few days later, I put on my most professorial-looking coat and tie, walked in to Rocky Mountain Calvary Chapel, and took a seat near the front. What's life if you're not open to new experiences?

Everyone was very nice. Unfortunately, I only had time to stay through lunch. But what I saw, heard and read brought out some very passionate responses in me. Anger. Embarrassment. Shame. Pity. Then finally, kindness and determination.

The anger and embarrassment came from what groups like the Institution for Creation Research do in the name of science. Faith didn't always need to wrap itself in the trappings of something else. But somewhere along the way, faith stopped being "hope in the unseen" and became "certainty about everything." These days, if you want to be certain, you need the credibility of science.

I brought home a color brochure with the best creationist arguments for a young earth. I then went online and looked around. Every single one of them has been addressed, with great clarity and patience, by the scientific community. But the very first argument jumped out at me.

The brochure said that if the universe were really billions of years old, spiral galaxies wouldn't look the way they do. Truthfully, I don't know much about galaxies. But I just happen to know someone who does.

My son is a physics and astronomy major. This semester, he is taking a class from Dr. Debra Elmegreen, one of the world's leading authorities on galactic structure. I e-mailed her everything. She wrote back in less than an hour.

Her full reply, unfortunately, is too detailed to be repeated here. In a nutshell, the creationist argument about spiral galaxies is years out of date. Newer theories have been tested experimentally. They show quite nicely how spiral galaxies form in a very, very old universe.

When dealing with creationists, Elmegreen wrote, "My issue with such peo-



OPINION
BARRY FAGIN
Contributing columnist

ple is that they tend to think words are adequate to replace data and derivations." That, ladies and gentlemen, is how a real scientist thinks.

Creationists selectively sample, ignore overwhelming evidence to the contrary, and never do outside reading. They just start with the answer and then say stuff. It's very frustrating. Frustrating, and sad.

It's sad because behaving ethically seemed important to everyone I met at "Back to Genesis." Creationist Christians clearly want to do the right thing with their lives. But if you want to be ethical in your use of science, you cannot start with any particular idea about how the world actually is. If you do, you're not doing science. You're doing wrong.

The saddest sights of all were the children in the audience, none of whom will know the beauty of the world as we find it. I cannot find it in me to tell creationist Christians how to raise their kids. If we have anything in common, it is a willingness to treat the other side with kindness and respect — despite their belief that, as an evolutionist, I am incapable of such things.

But I fear for a world where children grow up having been taught their parents' world view as the complete and whole truth. Particularly when it is so at odds with the evidence.

Somewhere on the other side of the world, parents are teaching their children that Muslims defeated Christians in every medieval Crusade. The evidence says otherwise.

Somewhere in America, parents are teaching their children that the Holocaust never happened. The evidence says otherwise.

Somewhere in Colorado Springs, parents are teaching their children that the Earth is 6,000 years old. The evidence says otherwise.

I understand what is wrong with too little faith. Thanks to the Institute for Creation Research, I now understand what is wrong with too much.

(Note to readers: This column, like all my columns, does not necessarily reflect the position of the Independence Institute).

Fagin, of Colorado Springs, is a senior fellow at the Independence Institute. His column appears on alternate Thursdays. Readers may e-mail him at barry@faginfamily.net.