

Sunday, December 23, 2007

## **In Defense of Evolution Science**

[By David E. Thomas](#)

*President, Coalition for Excellence in Science and Math Education*

So much is wrong with the infomercial for the upcoming movie "EXPELLED," which was disguised as an opinion column (Rio Rancho Journal, Dec. 16) by producer Mark Mathis, that it's hard to know where to begin. Let's start with his oft-repeated creationist (aka Intelligent Design) assertion that the modern sciences of biology, geology and paleontology are mere "isms." Although Darwin's landmark "On the Origin of Species" was important in its day, and still highly regarded, a huge number of new findings over the last 150 years all provide compelling evidence that evolution produced the diversity of life. It is as wrong to dismiss modern evolution science as "Darwinism" as to label physics "Newtonism," or genetics "Mendelism."

The worst mistake Mathis makes is his repeated claim that evolution science is equivalent to atheism. Science is neither theistic nor atheistic. It is a method for understanding nature by observation, posing possible explanations, and testing those ideas. Perhaps, there is a higher purpose for everything, but that is outside the scope of science. Science cannot explore supernaturalism because, by definition, it lies outside of nature. By resorting to supernatural explanations, Intelligent Design advocates have left the realm of science where natural phenomena are understood in terms of naturalistic explanations.

Mathis promotes a false choice: One can accept atheism, or "Neo-Darwinism", or one can accept Intelligent Design. He declares "There is no middle ground," thereby dictating what we all should think about the origin and purpose of life. Mathis uses the emotionally charged label of "atheist" as a fear tactic, demonizing not only scientists, but anyone who accepts their findings. This is highly insulting to many religious people, including over 11,000 Christian clergy members who have joined the Clergy Letter Project to support evolution as a "foundational scientific truth."

Mathis' argument is unacceptable.

These clergy are hardly atheists. They believe in God, but also believe that God is powerful enough to have created a universe that unfolds by natural processes. In hearings on New Mexico's Science Standards, when they were adopted in 2003, the Rev. Dr. Barbara Dua, executive director of the New Mexico Council of Churches, which represents over half a million religious New Mexicans, spoke eloquently in support of teaching evolution in public science classes, and against inclusion of the Intelligent Design beliefs of a sectarian minority.

Mathis insists that Intelligent Design is "purely scientific," but it doesn't even come close. Intelligent Design simply consists of the unsupported assertions that (a) If science has not yet fully explained some feature of the observable world, then a supernatural Designer must be

responsible, and (b) modern science is plainly wrong about evolution, fossils, genetics, geology, physics, and molecular biology.

On Mathis' movie Web site, Intelligent Design proponents claim to be victims of a non-existent atheist science conspiracy. Moreover, they repeatedly claim that they want scientists and students to be free to "follow the evidence where it leads."

Nothing could be farther from the truth. Intelligent Design proponents, like the Creationists they evolved from, want to deny any evidence that supports evolution. They deny that the recent discoveries of fossil fish with amphibian features or whales with clear remnants (i.e., legs) of their land-based ancestors have anything to say about evolution. Intelligent Design proponents even deny the evidence that shows humans and apes are related—evidence acquired by the same DNA techniques used to settle criminal or paternity cases!

The claim that they are "following the evidence where it leads" is simply hypocrisy.

While Mathis was careful to avoid any reference to Creationism, that's exactly what Intelligent Design encompasses. As recently as Dec. 14, top ID theorist William Dembski told Focus on the Family that "The Designer of intelligent design is, ultimately, the Christian God," apparently excluding the God of Jews, Muslims, Native Americans and others. It's clear that ID-related material would turn science classes into religious war zones. For that reason, the Rio Rancho policy was opposed by the district's science teachers, the New Mexico Academy of Science, and many other scientists and science organizations in New Mexico, as well as the Rio Rancho board itself. Does a media consultant know better?

The board was correct in rescinding the divisive Science Policy 401. Thanks to the rational majority of board members, Rio Rancho's science classes will be spared from the doublespeak presented so insidiously in the Mathis opinion piece.

David E. Thomas is the president of the Coalition for Excellence in Science and Math Education ([www.cesame-nm.org](http://www.cesame-nm.org)).

Editor's note: Thomas' letter was also signed by the Rev. Stuart McLean, Ph.D.; the Rev. James Gustafson, Ph.D.; Dan Barbour, SciMatics teacher; Cindy Chapman, math teacher, retired; Pauline Eisenstadt, former state senator; Dr. Marshall Berman, SNL, retired; Dr. Marvin Moss, SNL, retired; Kim Johnson, Industrial Research Scientist; and Jim Stuart, biologist.

<http://www.abqjournal.com/west/opinion/271777westoped12-23-07.htm>