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Creationism and intelligent design: Presence in the Brazilian educational policy

Heslley Machado Silva\textsuperscript{a} *, Isabelle Gonçalves de Oliveira Prado\textsuperscript{b}

\textsuperscript{a} University of Itaúna and University of Formiga - MG, Brazil
\textsuperscript{b} University of Itaúna – MG, Brazil

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Abstract

In research was found the penetrance of Creationism and intelligent design policy and education in Brazil. We analyzed political events and education that could somehow spread the creationism and intelligent design. Finally, it found educational realities that address these two theories. This movement is wide. Polls show most of the population in favor of creationism together active and influential entity in Brazil. At detriment to Evolutionism, influential politicians, large school systems and society seem willing to metaphorical supports the text of the Bible or the pseudo-scientific theories of creationism and intelligent design to be taught in schools.

Keywords: Creationism; intelligent design; education; school; evolution; media; politics.

1. Introduction

The current context is unique in relation to the teaching of evolution in Brazil. In one way, we have never spoken this much in Darwinism, whether in science magazines, television and media in general, mainly due to the celebrations related to the two-hundred anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin and one hundred and fifty years of the launch of the book \textit{The Origin of Species}. On the other hand, it is perceived that, in the previous years, a movement in favor of the fairness of the teaching of creationism, a theory that advocates the divine creation, with evolutionism in science classes and biology. Some people even held the exclusion of the teaching of Darwinism. Meanwhile, one work inspired by the British report "Rescuing Darwin" has begun in the research center at the University of Itaúna / MG. It has started in order to try to understand how the Brazilian population perceives this issue, the clash between creationism (and its intelligent design extension) and Darwinism as this same population is positioned in relation to this issue in the school environment. This article is a clipping of the first stage of this research, which seeks to raise the state of the art of this subject in Brazil, focusing on their integration in Brazilian schools. It was discussed what they are and how those who somehow position themselves in favor of intelligent
design act when it comes to politics and education. Then, the various forms of media (internet, magazines, newspapers, etc.) has been checked, how these actors who hold the approach of teaching creationism are presented to the society, noticing the degree of influence and in which offices of the government they stand out. A significant material related to an unsuspecting penetrance of Creationism and intelligent design in Brazilian educational policy has been detected. This analysis allowed to measure the scope of these agents and their impact on the school.

2. Methodology

The research was based in the means of scientific or pseudo-science dissemination used by the majority of the population in their daily lives. The Internet and print media were privileged, especially newspapers and magazines. The most relevant texts and interviews were selected. At first, therefore, we chose a quantitative approach, raising the maximum number of sources and then we opted for a qualitative methodology, in which we tried to deepen in the clearest evidence of interference by the state, educational institutions, media vehicles in science teaching, with regard to creationism and evolution. It has been tried to measure the impact of these views in the school environment.

3. Results

The creationist movement and its Siamese intelligent design are not as strongly supported in Brazil as in the United States (SOUZA, 2009), but they do exist. The Brazilian Creationist Society (BCS) is the first national group known that advocates these ideas. It was founded in 1972 in Brasilia (DF). In 1979, the Brazilian Association of Creation (ACBP) was created in Belo Horizonte (MG); and in Campinas (SP), the Brazilian Center of Intelligent Design (SOUZA, 2009) has recently been founded. These companies are often backed by renowned institutions of higher education linked to religious groups. With this support, they book regular meetings, sponsor stamp creationist books and subsidize websites. Institutions such as Mackenzie Presbyterian Institute teach their students that there is another explanation of religious background to the origin of species. Moreover, the presentation of creationist doctrine does not appear only in religion class, but also in science.

To understand the influence of that group, we may recall a ‘scientific’ congress recently held at the University Center of Sao Paulo to defend and analyze creationist issues, which, according to its organizers, was a huge hit with audience, entitled “3rd Symposium about Creationism and media” (10 to 13 January 2008). Among the participants and speakers, it is worth mentioning the presence of the former environment minister Marina Silva, who gave a lecture and an interview to some Adventists blog. This interview, which was widely disseminated on the Internet, addresses a forceful defense of the creationism teaching in schools. It is also important to mention that the previous minister was regarded as one of the 50 people who can save the world by the British newspaper The Guardian. This fact was exploited by the young interviewer right after his defense of creationism. This influential figure defends the teaching of creationism, saying that their children were educated from this approach, both at home and school environment, and that she supports this view. She adds that it could or should be extended to other Brazilian families or, at least, that the family could have the choice about the model to be adopted. At the time of the interview, she was a minister with great influence on the Brazilian government's Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. To illustrate what happened through the minister interview, access http://eoqha.net/cracionismo/111-entrevista-com-a-ministra-domeio-ambiente-marina-silva/ - access: July 19, 2009, 21:00, where the interviewer, a young man representing an Adventist blog religion, questions: Ms. Minister, do you considered yourself a creationist? And he got the obvious and expected answer:….it’s impossible to believe in God if you do not believe that he created all things. If we do not know how to explain things, we should not say that they do not exist because we do not know how they can be explained. Consistent response with the analysis that was made about creationism and intelligent design; what we can not understand, we credit to a superior and mysterious being, God. Importantly, Marina supported extending this analysis to the school environment, which is not a good vision for a minister from a secular state (LEITE, 2009). She completes her interview with the analysis of the educational aspect "It would be wrong if we were not able to [give] an education that is plural, capable of showing the different points of view". It is a proposal that aims to show the two views so that, democratically, the student may choose the approach that he deems appropriate. It is necessary to discuss two aspects of this fallacy, can we present two visions of a theme in school? A scientific one and another based on myths and allow them to choose the one that seems most appropriate? To paraphrase the
words of Sir David Attenborough, the famous English naturalist: We present two results to the two and two, may be four or five and then we tell the students that they can choose which result they want. Another issue concerns who will present these two views, a traditional school and with a confessional stamp, all imbued with a religious ideology does not seem suitable so that the student can make any democratic choice.

Brazil recently hosted (2005) The Fifth International Congress of Creationists – UNASP, that, according to its organizers, was a success, especially to defenders and representatives of the various fields of science and biology, with a clear direction to the detriment of the Darwinian Theory. In the same year, the First Seminar for Training Creationist Teachers has occurred in the same ideological bias, in order to encourage teachers to spread the doctrine of creationism in the classroom to replace the teaching of evolution.

Finally it is worth mentioning that Michael Behe’s book (BEHE, 2007), The black box of Darwin had a good acceptance and impact in Brazil. It was translated into Portuguese shortly after its launch, which is not very usual, especially when it comes to its theme and getting rave reviews here in relation to the "intelligent design theory" proposed by the author (MARTINS, 2001).

It is not only in the United States in which creationism is taught in science classes. In Brazil, it also happens, although it does not reach all schools (BRANCH & SCOTT, 2009). There seems to be a global compensation in 2009 with the celebration of the publication of The Origin of Species, we try to check the presence of the creationist movement in schools, perhaps marking opposing position against Darwinism, as this is in evidence.

Traditional colleges, such as Mackenzie Presbyterian Institute and Pueri Domus in Sao Paulo, include creationism in science classes. The Mackenzie Institute has always adopted this flea since its founding in 1870. Creationism is also taught in science classes and not in religion class in the Pueri Domus, which is a network of more than 160 schools across the country, both Catholic and Protestant orientation (BRANCH & SCOTT, 2009).

The Ministry of Education recommends that creationism should be taught only in religion classes and not in science classes, on the guidance of the Secretary of Basic Education, Maria Pilar. However, this restriction does not achieve any interference in the planning of schools, because in Brazil they have the autonomy to set their teaching grade.

The direction of these schools argue that teaching creationism and evolution would allow students a pretentious critical view, analysis and only after a position on the issue. The real goals of this educational policy can be perceived when the Mackenzie Institute, in 2008, adopted teaching material in the first three years of elementary school with only the creationist view. They justify saying that the students in this age group - around eight years - are not ready for evolution. One can then infer that the indoctrination toward creationism can be made at an early age, eliminating the argument of the presentation of the two views for a posterior position, because when people come into contact with evolutionary theory, they may be already inculcated with the creationist doctrine.

To identify the scope of the unsuspecting Brazilian creationist movement, it is worth mentioning what happened in 1999, when in the Legislative Assembly of Rio de Janeiro, one member had a bill proposing the "confessional" religion teaching, in which the teacher would have to declare their religious beliefs and direct all their lessons from their premises. The future of atheist and agnostic teachers would generate a good question for this article. The most surprising fact is that the project was approved in 2000. With this approval, the governor of Rio de Janeiro, Rosinha Garotinho, Presbyterian and a committed creationist, hired with public money, 500 teachers for religion classes, paving the way for the institutionalization of the creationism teaching funded by the state (BRANCH & SCOTT, 2009). This whole issue is on trial in the Supreme Court, which the constitutional and legal feasibility of such proposal is being analyzed (ABRANTES & ALMEIDA, 2006).

Some concerning data which show that the scientific training seems to have an insufficient range in the Brazilian educational system were published in Epoca magazine, January 2005 (No. 346) in a survey conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion and Statistics (IBOPE). It shows that 33% of Brazilians believe that we were created by God 10 thousand years ago and 54% believe that the human appeared millions of years ago, but through a process directed by God.

A recent research carried out at Londrina State University and published in the Science Today magazine, January / February 2009, had the title: "Evolution: theory has low acceptance among university students." As the title says, the article points to the resistance that still occur in relation to the Darwinian theory. It indicates that the time spent in the university does not appear to influence in a significant way the beliefs of students. It looks like the years in a Brazilian university do not affect the acceptance of a consecrated scientific theory. Therefore, we notice that the level of scientific information must be committed, both in school and in college. You can also measure the lack of
clarification regarding the use of the term "theory" that even in college the word is seen as a set of ideas with little or no support. We should remember that the research was conducted in a public university, with a high level of selection. One should doubt what the result would be in a larger and heterogeneous student universe.

The same survey shows that the rejection of biological evolution is inversely related to parental education and family income. Among the "Roman Catholics" the level of acceptance is higher than among "non-Roman Catholics", including particularly evangelicals and Protestants being more open to this subject the Spiritualists, Buddhists, atheists and agnostics (SOUZA, 2009).

This research concluded that education is conducive to Brazilian state interference, such as the ones which occurred in the state of Rio de Janeiro. Since the education and income level are crucial in the acceptance of evolutionary theory, only the improvement of educational standard and socio-economic development could have an effect in that context, given that rejection is common to virtually all religions.

On the other hand, the school is questioned if it can keep religious symbols, such as the image of Christ nailed to the cross, in a secular state. This demand is being reviewed by representatives of other religions in the plenary of the Supreme Court (STF) in Brasilia.

Finally, we see the expansion of university courses titled as religious studies. The question is whether these courses are intended to discuss the religious phenomenon and its consequences or just want to promote the dissemination of views focused on dogmas that end up interfering in the reality of the Brazilian educational system.

4. Discussion

The creation of corporate core creationists and intelligent design for over thirty years shows the range of the subject in Brazil, these entities spread and disseminate a view of education based on faith and there purpose can be noticed by the support of seminars such as Training Teacher Creationists. These organizations have widely spread on the Internet, with various mechanisms of diffusion and its events are supported and financed by institutions of higher education. They are even accepted in scientific circles, with training staff with master's and doctoral degrees, with whom they seek respectability and endorsement of their ideas. They mix religious ideas with science, intending to draw on the same basis of evolutionary theory, blowing an alleged credibility to their ideas.

The defense of the teaching of creationism in science classes and the possibility of "choice" between the theories by the former minister of environment, illustrates the objective of this work. The exploration of the international prominence of the minister, even in an area (environmental) which has no direct relation to education and even less with the religious issue, shows a clear interference in an issue that had no link to its folder. The rhetoric of the supposed lack of explanation for natural phenomena, and in response the indoctrination of the faith, is used as justification for confessional education in Brazilian schools and this defense is made by a federal authority.

The adoption of the teaching of creationism in science classes, in large networks of traditional education, shows that this issue is a reality in many classrooms in Brazil. Again, the rhetoric of the presentation of the two opinions, creationism and evolution, so that students can make their choice is the justification presented. It is worth to note that the primary emphasis to creationism is evident in these institutions, delegating to further exposure to evolution, so that students who already have a positive view of the doctrine of faith, making it less likely to accept the scientific approach. As for a possible reaction to this approach, the ministry of education considers it undesirable that happens the teaching of creationism in science classes, but ensures that the schools may have the same autonomy as the definition of the school grade to be adopted.

Perhaps the most serious events that deserve a discussion are the attempts to institutionalize the teaching of creationism through laws of educational policies. Although these movements are still sporadic throughout Brazil, they should not be disregarded. In states like Rio de Janeiro these attempts were successful in politics. The risk of this action is that it establishes a religious space in science classes, and still practically requires a doctrinal position in an academic field, hindering those who wish to teach only science. There is also the fear that the public money could used for the indoctrination of a specific religion, never forgetting that if we follow this path in a democratic way, we must teach all the supernatural visions from the life origin of all beliefs.

We can also discuss the scientific formation in Brazil, where recent data shows that one third of the local population believes that man was created only ten thousand years. It is questioned what kind of biological and historical training these millions of Brazilians had, so that they do not have a minimum of time perception of the evolutionary history of our planet. The years spent in school enrollment did not allow the slightest critical view of
this conception. It appears that the creationist view is more successful in our schools. The maintenance of this doctrine can be seen as other data show that more than half the population believes that life originated millions of years ago, but surely God was behind this process. It is not proposed the prevention of religious belief, but at least that schools, especially in science classes and biology, present evolutionary theory in a coherent way, consistent with a theory that answers most questions concerning the emergence of species and which followed an arduous path of breaks and accumulation of knowledge.

Neither those who receive higher education seem to be immune to the creationist doctrine. Recent publications point to this issue. It is shown that even in public universities, courses in Life Sciences, in which there is a selection of students and where the public would expect a more refractory to religious theories, there is a large number of students who reject the scientific view of evolution of life. The data show that Darwinian evolution is considered as a theory just like any other, letting the little insight into the appropriate use of the term theory in science. The same survey reveals that the years of biological sciences, with their subjects which invariably address the issue of evolution, are not able to raise students' acceptance of Darwin's ideas and all that it entails widely accepted by the scientific community. The data finally show that education and parents’ income seem to be factors that influence in proportion to the acceptance or rejection of evolutionary theory. Thus, the expansion of the access to education, combined with a higher income, would provide a lower level of rejection of science. From the results observed, one sees a fertile ground for policies to encourage the faith teaching. This scenario makes that ideas, such as the one proposed in the state of Rio de Janeiro, do not seem preposterous to most people, however, end up having a positive reception in believers of almost every religion professed in Brazil.

Finally, it is necessary to discuss the role of the Brazilian state, which should be secular. It should provide an academic environment in science classes free of dogmas and conceptions that hinder the ability of investigative analysis, access to established theories by the scientific community. It is up to the same scientific community to monitor and alert governments to exercise this role and allow the religious freedom, but also prevent the interference of some sectors of society committed to certain doctrines on issues related to science and education. It is necessary that all these sectors, academia and government to act together in order to provide an education based on theories that are contained in the arduous path of scientific methodology.

References

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