

CREATIONISM

As you know, there is an effort to include Judeo-Christian creation belief in the California public school system, in order to counter the theory of evolution. Consideration should then be given to other creation beliefs, some of which preceded the Judeo-Christian belief in this part of the world.

According to Haida Indian belief, for example, the great flood which had covered the earth for so long had at last receded and the sand lay dry. The Raven had flown there to gorge himself upon the delicacies left by the falling water, and so for a change wasn't hungry. But his other appetites, lust, curiosity, the unquenchable desire to interfere and change things, to play tricks on the world and its creatures, these remained unsatisfied.

The long beach lay quiet and deserted, and to the Raven, infinitely boring. He walked along the sand, his shiny head cocked, his sharp eyes and ears alert for any unusual sight or sound. In frustration, he called petulantly to the empty sky and to his delight heard an answering cry, though from his great height it was no more than an obscure muffled squeak.

At first he saw nothing, but as he looked again, a flash of white caught his eye, and there right at his feet was a gigantic clamshell. He looked more closely and saw that the shell was full of little creatures cowering in terror in his enormous shadow. Well, here was a diversion, something to break the monotony of the day. So he leaned his great head close and produced, out of the clamshell -- the first humans.

This legend is woven into the spiritual belief of Northwest Indians. There were ancient legends also woven into Jewish religious beliefs about the creation of man. According to these Jewish legends, for example, God consulted with the angels before He created man. The angels were less than enthusiastic, and asked Him: "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?" They were told: "The fowl of the air and the

fish of the sea, what were they created for? Of what avail a larder full of appetizing dainties and no guest to enjoy them?"

When the angels grudgingly assented, God sent Gabriel out to collect the dust, of all colors, in the four corners of the earth, from which dust man was to be created. At this early moment, the Torah interfered, saying to God: "The man Thou art now creating will be few of days and full of trouble and sin. If it be not Thy purpose to have forbearance and patience with him, it were better not to call him into being." God was reassuring on that point.

These popular legends extended the understanding of Jews about their biblical revelations: the human being is the center of God's loving concern; all human beings are equally so; and all human beings must treat each other accordingly.

The Indian beliefs tend to have a different approach: not so much the centrality of man but of nature at large. The Raven suggests some of the properties of nature out of which man emerged -- in this case, the creative power of boredom and the constant necessity of change.

The point is that both of these approaches are quite compatible with the scientific description of the evolutionary process. But they both go much further in their religious beliefs about origin and meaning. Those beliefs are *not* compatible with each other. Nor, as religious beliefs, are they subject to debate. They are given, revealed -- in the one case, to Haida Indians; in the other, to Jews. The American political society has no business endorsing either.