Pinhook Rotarians Hear Attack On Creation Law

By CHERYL HOWELL
Advertiser Staff Writer

A law requiring the theory of creationism to be taught in public schools is an attack on the First Amendment to the U.S. constitution, says Dr. James R. Oliver, retired vice president of USL and director of planning and research for the Diocese of Lafayette.

He spoke to the Pinhook Rotary Club Monday night about creationism and the possible consequences of its being taught in public schools.

"This country has been very jealous of its freedom of religion," Oliver said. "We've struggled to keep religion out of government and government out of religion since the beginning of the country, despite pressures from other powers. But now the emotionalism of the controversy between the theories of evolution and creationism is causing us to back down on that policy by passing laws requiring a religious belief to be taught in the schools."

Oliver said that the First Amendment to the constitution included freedom of religion and prevented the government from interfering with it because people feared government oppression.

"Creationism infringes on that first amendment," Oliver said. "At best, it's a poor science — it's actually not even a science at all. It involves poor educational processes, as well, because it's not well enough defined for teachers to be able to teach it with any degree of accuracy. And none of the teachers are capable of teaching it — they haven't been given the training it would require, he added.

"This is an emotional issue, and that's why these well-meaning people aren't realizing what can happen when religion is required in the schools," Oliver said. "If religion is allowed to be mandated by a governing body, it will become a tool of the one who mandates," he warned.

Oliver said that if the law requiring creationism to be taught in schools is allowed to stand, he anticipates that lawsuits will arise.

There are four tenets about creationism that are commonly accepted by both pro and con sides, according to Oliver. They are:

- Creationism comes from the Bible and its teachings;
- Since it comes from the Bible, then it is based on religion;
- It comes from a particular religious belief — that of the Judeo-Christian religion,
- And that creationism as a science cannot be tested, and therefore cannot be proved.

"This country has been very jealous of its freedom of religion," Oliver said. "We've struggled to keep religion out of government and government out of religion since the beginning of the country, despite pressures from other powers. But now the emotionalism of the controversy between the theories of evolution and creationism is causing us to back down on that policy by passing laws requiring a religious belief to be taught in the schools."

Oliver said that the First Amendment to the constitution included freedom of religion and prevented the government from interfering with it because people feared government oppression.

"Creationism infringes on that first amendment," Oliver said. "At best, it's a poor science — it's actually not even a science at all. It involves poor educational processes, as well, because it's not well enough defined for teachers to be able to teach it with any degree of accuracy. And none of the teachers are capable of teaching it — they haven't been given the training it would require, he added.

There are several (many of them vague) definitions of creationism, according to Oliver. But a general consensus agrees that "creationism teaches that the earth, including all of its living and non-living parts, were produced at one instant, and that everything existing in the earth now was created at that time," he said. Creationism also gives a time limit on this, estimated literally from the Bible, of approximately 4,000 years ago, he added.

"This is an emotional issue, and that's why these well-meaning people aren't realizing what can happen when religion is required in the schools," Oliver said. "If religion is allowed to be mandated by a governing body, it will become a tool of the one who mandates," he warned.

Oliver said that if the law requiring creationism to be taught in schools is allowed to stand, he anticipates that lawsuits will arise.