

Evolution Weekend and the Clergy Letter: Faith and Piety



This will be the third year that we are participating in Evolution Weekend, which will be marked during services on **Shabbat morning, February 12**. This observance, which unites 406 congregations in 48 states and the District of Columbia, and ten additional countries, is dedicated to the proposition that science and religion do not contradict one another.

I have again signed the Rabbi Letter associated with Evolution Weekend, joining almost 500 rabbinic colleagues.

A separate ministerial letter has been signed by almost 13,000 Christian clergy.

The Rabbi Letter urges “public school boards to affirm their commitment to the teaching of the science of evolution.” In addition it affirms that “It is possible to be inspired by the religious teachings of the Bible while not taking a literalist approach and while accepting the validity of science including the foundational concept of evolution.”

To most of us, these propositions are not controversial. But the continuing effort of some school boards to introduce as science religious dogma in the guise of “creationism” is a source of concern as a violation of the first amendment, and, even more, as a distortion of science and a threat to the education of our nation’s children.

Last month, I began a series of articles based on my sermon on the second day of *Rosh HaShanah*, exploring the profundity of the *Credo* of Edmond Fleg, who was born in Geneva in 1874 and died in 1963. Fleg grew up as an assimilated Jew but had a spiritual awakening. He wrote the *Credo* as a testament to his then unborn grandchildren as a way of explaining his own transformation into a person committed spiritually as a Jew.

One of the principles of Fleg’s *Credo* which is particularly apt for Evolution Weekend is the following:

I am a Jew because the faith of Israel demands of me no abdication of my mind.

I often hear something akin to this cited by individuals, especially Jews by Choice, as explaining what they particularly appreciate about Judaism. Judaism does not ask you to check your mind at the door! Judaism does not allow Biblical imagery to be introduced as a substitute for science. Indeed, Judaism encourages us to use our mind, as well as our heart and soul, to serve God by probing the secrets of the universe. We are encouraged to use our mind in a scientific way, confident that when we understand the truth of how the universe works we will better understand God’s ways in the world. And we will help perfect the world for all humanity.

I do not believe that knowledge can ever be in conflict with religion. Because at the heart of religion must be truth. Without truth, there can be no piety. Truth inspires the greatest awe of all about the universe, and awe and wonder are the sources of the religious impulse.

I will discuss these themes on *Shabbat* morning, February 12, and hope you will be with us to affirm the place of science in the life of a religious individual, and our appreciation of Judaism because this faith of ours “demands of me no abdication of my mind.”

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