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State's Authority Upheld

ACTION of the Supreme Court of the United States to consider a lawsuit over television rights to football games received more attention, but another decision relating to state authority over educational policies may be more important.

This ruling by the Louisiana Supreme Court upheld the right of that state's legislature to require balanced treatment of evolution and creationism in public schools. In 1981, the Louisiana Legislature enacted a law requiring balanced treatment of the two views.

The court's decision has two significant aspects. First, it reflects a step, however small, back toward a state's authority to govern in local matters. The trend for the past half-century has been to concentrate increasing authority in agencies of the federal government and Congress.

Second, the decision is a turn-about from previous rulings that have permitted the teaching of non-theistic theories of evolution while barring creationist ideas from public schools.

The ruling stated that, regardless of other legal questions, "We are focusing on the Louisiana constitutional authority to provide an educational policy to be carried out" by the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

The Louisiana law indicated an open, inquiry-oriented approach to the creation/evolution issue. Many scientists adhere to the creationist point of view.

They say that, as with other questions, this matter should be looked upon as an opportunity to stimulate thought through the educational process.

Anti-creation groups have opposed any arrangement that permits such a comparative treatment. Most notable in recent years was a suit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union when the Arkansas Legislature enacted a balanced treatment law.

After a stormy hearing, U.S. District Judge William Overton of Little Rock declared the presentation of creationism called for "introduction of religion disguised as science," the ACLU view.

In a nationwide poll made by the Associated Press and NBC in October 1981, it was found that 86 percent of those interviewed want to have creationism taught in public schools. This included 8 percent who wanted evolution only; 10 percent who wanted only creationism; and 76 percent who wanted both views presented.

Absolute scientific proof of the origin of life on earth is lacking. Evolutionists affirm that all life originated from non-life materials in "organic soup" and evolved into man. Creationists hold that an omniscient God created the earth, the living cell and various forms of plant and animal life, including mankind.

It would seem that scientists on both sides would want all the evidence presented, if they really are seeking the facts.