**Telegraph Herald**

**Science, religion can coexist, speaker asserts**

**He says the debate over whether evolution should be taught in school is harming both science and religion.**

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Michael Zimmerman

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To Michael Zimmerman, people who insist religion and science can't coexist are missing the point about both.

An educator with a background in biology, Zimmerman is the founder of The Clergy Letter Project, an organization of scientists and religious leaders who aim to demonstrate that science and religion can be compatible.

"Religion and science need not be at odds," Zimmerman said Sunday at Clarke University, speaking about the continuing controversy about the teaching of evolution in public schools.

The controversy claimed the national spotlight earlier this month, when creationist education proponent Ken Ham debated television personality Bill Nye, "The Science Guy" about evolution.

To Zimmerman, the controversy is doing great damage to science education.

"It's driving people away from the understanding of science," he said.

Science proceeds by gathering data to prove or disprove theories, Zimmerman said, and scientists know ultimate truth to be inherently elusive, as knowledge continues to expand.

"Nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evolution," he said.

Religion also is harmed, Zimmerman said, because of misunderstandings.

"Religion is a different way of understanding -- religious precepts must be taken on faith," he said.

Science was founded on the concept of investigation of the natural world, not the supernatural.

"The promotion of high-quality science education does not mean religion should be dismissed or demeaned," Zimmerman said.

Zimmerman sees the evolution controversy as a tool used by a narrow group of religions to define belief in their own terms.

"Ministers who demand people choose between religion and modern science are not speaking for all religious leaders," he said.

Clarke Assistant Professor of Religious Studies Bill Gregory said Catholic Church teachings agree with Zimmerman's assessment.

"The kind of truth in the Bible is the truth humans need for salvation, not scientific truth," Gregory said.

Evolution has become a potent political term, and Zimmerman said diffusing the strong emotions surrounding the controversy should come from better communication.

Zimmerman's organization advocates raising the level of discourse on the subject of science and religion's coexistence.

"We have to engage in meaningful dialogue, we can't just shout at each other," he said.

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