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Wedding bells are ringing in Seattle, Washington, and Richardson, Texas: the Discovery Institute and the Foundation for Thought and Ethics are getting hitched! They've had a long and surprisingly secretive courtship, but we at NCSE are glad to see these crazy kids doing the honest thing.

The Disco. 'tute is, as regular readers likely know, the institutional home of “intelligent design” creationism. But the concept wasn’t originated there. The *Kitzmiller* trial brought out a lot of that history, and [Nick Matzke wrote up a lot of those new discoveries in 2009](#) [8] (PDF).

To summarize, back in 1981, as many states considered bills which would mandate equal time for “evolution-science” and “creation-science,” creationists realized schools would need textbooks to fulfill the laws’ requirements. Jon Buell and Charles Thaxton left Probe Ministries (a creationist campus ministry) to create the Foundation for Thought and Ethics (FTE). Among its first projects was a supplementary textbook referred to early on as *Creation Biology*, later as *Biology and Creation*, and then as *Biology and Origins*, but ultimately published as *Of Pandas And People*, the first “intelligent design” textbook.

In its founding documents, filed with the state of Texas and the IRS, FTE made its agenda clear. Its Articles of Incorporation—signed by founder, current president, and publisher Jon Buell—declares:

The purposes for which the corporation is formed are, 1) the primary purpose is both religious and educational, which includes, but is not limited to, proclaiming, publishing, preaching, teaching, promoting, broadcasting, disseminating, and otherwise making known the Christian gospel and understanding of the Bible and the light it sheds on the academic and social issues of our day.

(Asked about that statement in the preliminaries to the Kitzmiller trial, as FTE sought to intervene in the case, Buell insisted under oath that this religious proclamation was mere “boilerplate” inserted by the lawyers or accountants preparing the documents.)

In an IRS filing, FTE supplied a promotional pamphlet, “What is the Foundation for Thought and Ethics,” which declared:

The Foundation for Thought and Ethics has been established to introduce a Biblical perspective into the mainstream of America’s humanistic society, confronting the secular thought of modern man with the truth of God’s Word.

The pamphlet also describes the project that became *Of Pandas and People* as “a two-model high school biology textbook that will fairly and impartially give scientific evidences for creation side by side with evolution.” Elsewhere in those founding documents [they proclaimed plans](#) [9] for a book “showing the scientific evidence for creation.”

The Discovery Institute wasn’t founded until 1990, and the Center for the Renewal of Science and Culture, its creationist wing, wasn’t formed until 1996. But the two have been intertwined from their earliest days. Charles Thaxton is a Disco. 'tute fellow, as are Dean Kenyon and Walter Bradley, co-authors of FTE’s first book. Bill Dembski and Jonathan Wells, both Senior Fellows closely associated with the DI since its early days, were tapped to write the successor to *Of Pandas and People*; Dembski is also a Senior Fellow at FTE, and is listed as its academic editor. Michael Behe and Nancy Pearcey, both DI Fellows, contributed to drafts of *Pandas*, as did Disco. 'tute honcho Stephen Meyer (who credits a conference organized by FTE with introducing him to the idea of ID, and thus to his establishing the DI’s

creationist wing)

FTE pioneered the idea of “intelligent design” as a way to implement the two-model approach and circumvent the First Amendment, but the DI took the idea and ran with it. Unlike FTE, DI has tried hard to obscure its religious agenda, so it made sense that they’d keep their close relationship on the down low.

But in a fundraising e-mail last week, the FTE made a big announcement:

Friends, rejoice with us as we share with you the most exciting development for FTE since our founding 35 years ago.

The opportunity to move full speed ahead lies directly before us! FTE may be small in size, but our future is big—in every way. A few weeks ago, our Board of Directors unanimously approved an exciting proposal to expand our culture-changing work by becoming an arm of Discovery Institute.

The e-mail also includes a note from Stephen Meyer, celebrating the union and explaining:

I am delighted about the opportunity to help Jon continue his work by starting Foundation for Thought and Ethics Books as an arm of Discovery Institute.

The two groups promise to continue publishing and promoting not just FTE’s creationist books, but also its book of pseudohistory, *Never Before In History*, which claims that the US was founded as a Christian nation.

For a long time, the Discovery Institute has had a hard time being open about its religious agenda. It’s nice to see the ‘tutors coming out of the closet and committing themselves to this new partner. While I can’t bring myself to wish them success, I do hope this partnership brings them joy. And if they need any tips, they can always consult FTE’s *Sex and Character* (the stork seems to have lost the long-promised second edition).

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