

A CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO BIOLOGY

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Introduction

Biology is an important part of the curriculum in today's society. Its subject matter touches our lives in important ways-- ranging from molecular biology to principles of health, and from the diversity of plants and animals to concern for the environment. But the philosophical context in which these topics are presented can make an important difference in their meaning for the student. The philosophical worldview of the biblical Christian is quite different from that of the non-Christian. The biology teacher may have a profound influence on the development of worldview by the student.

Naturalistic worldview. The typical secular scientist views nature as a self-sustaining system, controlled by its own inherent properties which are expressed in the form of the "laws of nature." God is at best irrelevant and at worst a deceptive concept that hinders real progress in understanding nature. In this naturalistic context, there is little basis for finding meaning in life or for moral responsibility. Adoption of this philosophical viewpoint implies a naturalistic, evolutionary explanation of origins.

Biblical worldview. In contrast, a biblical Christian will view nature as the handiwork of the Creator God. Thus the biblical Christian adopts a creationist viewpoint of biology. The study of nature has the potential for revealing some of the attributes of its Maker. As pointed out in the scriptures, nature has been damaged by the effects of sin, so God's reflection may be dim; yet He is the creator. This perception may have little influence on the facts of biology, but it will have a profound impact on the meaning one sees in nature. The Christian teacher who presents nature in the context of biblical creationism may be a powerful influence for good in the lives of his students.

Theistic evolution. Many scientists are neither naturalists nor biblical creationists. Theistic evolution is probably the most commonly held theory among this group. I find little support for the theory of theistic evolution in nature or in the scriptures. The evidence from nature against naturalistic evolution is also evidence against theistic evolution. The evidence from scripture for God the creator is evidence for biblical creationism. Thus I will not focus on the theory of theistic evolution. Those who are interested in the subject may wish to read the article on theistic evolution in the January, 1992 issue of Ministry magazine.

Science. "Science" is a word that has been used with a variety of meanings. At present, the word is often used to mean the systematic study of nature from within a naturalistic worldview. This is a restrictive definition that seems to have been deliberately chosen in an attempt to discredit any worldview other than the naturalistic worldview. In this paper, I will use "naturalistic science" or "secular science" to refer to science interpreted in a naturalistic philosophy. "Science" may also mean simply a systematic study of nature, without restricting its interpretation to a naturalistic philosophy. When I use the unmodified term "science," I refer to the systematic study of nature, without implying the restrictions of philosophical naturalism.

"Neutrality." Christian teachers may face the suggestion that they take a "neutral" stance regarding worldview. But there is no such thing as a truly neutral stance. The secular worldview is not a neutral stance, but is distinctly antagonistic to Christianity. The biblical worldview demands its own adoption, and to refuse to adopt it is to reject its claims. Adoption of a "neutral" stance is not only impossible, but is also contrary to the words of Christ to "go and make disciples." I believe it is the privilege of every Christian science teacher to show his students how to interpret nature from a biblical perspective. Biblical creationism is the foundational premise for this perspective. I will present some reasons why I believe biblical creationism is a reasonable position to adopt in a biology class. Then I will attempt to develop some implications of creationism for discovering the meaning of nature.

A scientific perspective on creationism

Is creationism credible in an age of science? Many educated people in today's society believe that creationism is not a credible belief. They believe that scientists have shown that biblical history is incorrect and that the evolutionary theory is true. What about this? Is creationism credible in the late 20th century? How can one answer such a question? I will examine one aspect of each of the four general areas of biology: molecular biology, organismal biology, environmental biology, and human biology. I will attempt to show that there is evidence in each of these areas that supports the concept of creation. In addition, I will examine some evidence I believe is hostile to the notion of evolution. I will conclude that creationism is a credible position in this age.

Molecular biology shows that life as we know it could not have originated without a Creator. "How did life begin?" This is the title of an article in the October 11, 1993 issue of Time magazine. It is also the title of a lecture I presented in August to a group of secondary teachers. Needless to say, the two papers come to different conclusions. The details of the argument would require more space than is available here, but one of the main arguments can be quickly explained. Each living cell contains materials that are built according to instructions contained within the cell. The instructions are contained in molecules of nucleic acids such as DNA and RNA. Proteins are one kind of material produced in the cell. Information stored in the nucleic acids specifies the structure of the proteins. Without this information, the proteins would not be produced. But the information to produce the proteins cannot be used unless numerous proteins are present to help translate the information. This raises a "chicken and egg" problem. Which came first, the DNA or the proteins? Without the DNA, there would be no proteins. Without the proteins, there would be no DNA. How can such a system begin? Both DNA and proteins must be present simultaneously, along with many other kinds of molecules, in order for life to exist. Such a system cannot evolve piece by piece. It must appear as an entire unit. It seems that a Creator is required to explain the origin of life. There is no plausible alternative.

Naturalistic scientists have attempted to devise other explanations for the origin of life. One of the most widely discussed proposals has been the idea that certain nucleic acids, called RNA, may perform both tasks of providing the information of the nucleic acid, and acting as a catalyst like a protein. However, this proposal is not at all realistic. There is no plausible source of RNA without a creator. RNA is a difficult kind of molecule to produce

experimentally. The materials required to produce RNA are not easily produced, and do not easily combine to form RNA. It would require a clever chemist to produce the RNA molecule itself. The RNA world model of the evolution of life is no more plausible than the protein model, and both should be discarded. Several other naturalistic speculations have been proposed, but none are satisfactory to naturalistic scientists, much less to creationists. In my judgment, the question of the origin of life points to the necessity for a Creator, and strongly favors a theistic worldview rather than a naturalistic worldview.

Environmental biology. *The earth appears to be designed to support life.* Several features of the Earth appear to have been modified to permit life to survive. No other planet in our solar system has an atmosphere suitable for life. The actual composition of our atmosphere is anomalous, and would not be predicted from knowledge of the atmospheres on the other planets. No other planet in our solar system has water present in significant quantities. Water has certain properties that promote the survival of living organisms. It is a valuable medium for transporting minerals and other materials, both on the surface of the earth and within living cells. It can exist in all three phases: solid, liquid, and gas, within the range of temperatures found on the surface of the earth. Water's ability to change phases readily under conditions commonly found on the earth provides a mechanism for replenishing water sources by transporting water back to high altitudes despite the force of gravity. This process prevents the water from accumulating in the ocean basins, which would leave the land high and dry. Characteristics of earth's position, mass and surface promote temperatures favorable to the survival of life. The anomalous composition of the atmosphere, the presence of much water on Earth, and the favorable range of temperatures support the concept that conditions on the planet have been modified to promote the survival of living organisms.

Organismal biology. *Direct experimental evidence indicates that there are limits to the extent of change a species can undergo.* Organisms appear in a great diversity of form and size. Each group of organism is characterized by specific structures ("adaptations") that appear to be well designed for their needs. A bird's adaptations for flight are well-known and impressive. Birds appear to be designed for flight (except for a few large flightless species). Numerous other examples could be given. The origin of adaptation is a significant question in biology. It does not seem plausible that a complex organ could originate by itself. Creationism offers an explanation as to why living organisms appear to be designed. They appear to be designed because they were designed. God was the designer of all that is good in nature.

According to the theory of evolution, all organisms are linked by common ancestry, through the process of descent with modification. However, all experiments done so far result in limited change. There is no experimental evidence showing that one kind of organism can develop from another kind. Instead, experiments invariably show that organisms lose their vigor and ability to survive when they are selected for traits that differ too widely from the ordinary conditions of the species. Evolution of new organs is not supported by experiment. It is merely a logical necessity of a naturalistic philosophy. Creationism provides a more satisfactory explanation for organismal diversity. God created many kinds of organisms in the beginning. Since that time, diversification has undoubtedly occurred. Complex organisms may lose

information and degenerate, but it appears that simple organisms do not spontaneously become more complex. The actual data from experiments attempting to produce change in organisms does not suggest the common ancestry of all organisms, but supports the idea of the existence of many separately created groups of organisms.

Human biology. *Man's uniqueness suggests he is a special creation.* Man has several unique qualities that distinguish him from any other organism. Man's unique qualities include his capacity for abstract thought and speech, his sense of morality, of good and evil. Only man has the capacity to choose to worship God. Only man has a mind capable of contemplating his own existence. These capabilities seem more than mere extensions of the characteristics of other creatures, but appear qualitatively different. Man is truly unique. There is a discontinuity between humanity and the rest of nature. Evolutionary theory has no ready explanation for this discontinuity. The creation story provides the explanation: man was created in the image of God. Man's special qualities can be seen as evidence of intelligent, purposeful planning by God.

The fossil record seems contrary to evolution. The principal competitor of creationism is evolution. Some have proposed that God used the process of evolution as a method of creation. By evolution, I do not mean the idea that species can vary. It can be demonstrated that species have the capacity to vary, and this point is not in question. By evolution, I mean the theory that all species are related by common ancestry. I contend that this theory is not compelled by the actual data, but is a requirement of a naturalistic philosophy. The theory of evolution is maintained despite the evidence, not because of the evidence.

Naturalistic scientists hold that the fossil layers contain a record of the changes in the fauna and flora of the earth over the passage of millions of years of time. Biblical creationists do not accept this interpretation of the fossil record. However, for the sake of discussion suppose we tentatively allow such an interpretation. Does the fossil record then show that all organisms have a common ancestry? The answer seems clearly to be "No."

If all organisms have a common ancestry, one would expect to find many series of transitional fossils in the sedimentary layers. By transitional fossils, I mean fossils that show intermediate stages in morphological development between two distinct types of organisms. Such transitional fossils should form a long series of steps connecting different groups. The fossil record does not provide the series of transitional fossils connecting the various groups of organisms necessary to support the general theory of evolution. This result is well-known among evolutionists. For example, Stephen Gould of Harvard has called the lack of transitional fossils the "trade secret of paleontology." Antoni Hoffman has stated there is nothing in the fossil record to indicate that each species could not have been created separately, although he does not believe they were. The fossil record does not support the theory that all organisms are linked by common ancestry. This applies whether evolution is thought to be naturalistic or theistic. It appears that evolution was not the method by which God created.

Conclusion. *Belief in a Creator is credible in this age of science.* The evidence I have reviewed indicates that a Creator is necessary to explain the origin of life. The survival of life appears to be dependent on the special features of the earth, features that appear anomalous in comparison with other planets, and seem to have been designed. The apparent design of organisms for their environment suggests an intelligent creator. The special qualities of humans seem inexplicable except by special creation. Further evidence from fossils and living organisms indicates that evolution was not the method of creation employed by the Creator. It appears that all organisms do not have a common ancestry, but that there are many groups with separate ancestries. I therefore conclude that it is credible to believe in special creation by an intelligent Creator. I do not mean to imply that every aspect of biblical creationism is supported by science. There are some aspects of nature that remain unexplained. However, there is no alternative theory that explains all the data. The fact that scientists with naturalistic presuppositions do not accept creationism is not a valid argument against creationism. Naturalistic scientists could not possibly accept creationism and still retain their naturalistic philosophy.

A creationist perspective on biology

A creationist will approach the study of biology from a perspective different from that of an evolutionist. A creationist will find a meaning in biological facts and theories that will not be evident to a secular scientist. This is not to say that the evolutionist will respond in inappropriate ways. For example, the importance of caring for one's environment is obvious to anyone, regardless of one's philosophical worldview. However, the motivation for action, and the meaning seen in the attempt, will differ between the two. I present some examples of how a creationist might view biology, without meaning to imply anything about how an evolutionist would respond.

Molecular biology and the origin of life. Recent studies in molecular biology have revealed that the chemical operations of a cell are incredibly complex. The precise control of reactions by enzymes, the complex manner in which genes are regulated, and the marvelous complexity of embryological development can be seen as evidence of God's creative wisdom and power. The more deeply a creationist studies the complex chemical reactions of the cell, the more his understanding of God's wisdom increases. Surely, we are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14). The complexities of cellular and molecular biology provide an opportunity for the Christian biology teacher to point his students to the wisdom and power of the Creator.

The realization that life comes only from God should give the creationist teacher a sense of wonder in every observation of living organisms. A creationist will not expect to ever be able to fully explain the phenomenon of life, but this will not inhibit him from attempting to learn as much as is possible. By studying the mechanisms of life, the creationist may gain a better appreciation for the skill of the Creator. The world of every biology student will be enlarged as the Christian teacher imparts his sense of wonder at the complexity of life.

Environmental biology. Environmental degradation appears to represent one of the greatest long-term threats to society. Our air is tainted with poisonous exhausts. Our water supplies are contaminated with toxic chemicals. Our farmland is being polluted with pesticides or converted to cities and highways. Our wildlife is declining due to habitat destruction. How long can this trend continue without disaster occurring?

Students need guidance as to the appropriate way to respond to the problem of environmental degradation. Many "New Age" followers have reacted by elevating nature to the status of a god. Some even see no difference in value between a human life and a tree or insect. Other people consider nature to be an enemy to overcome, a resource to exploit without regard for the consequences. Some have confidence that human intelligence will find a way to deal with the problem, but this number is decreasing as the problem becomes worse. What is the proper response of a creationist?

In Genesis, the completed creation is described as "very good." Man was given responsibility for the newly created world. A creationist will view nature as a gift from a Friend, caring for it as would a responsible steward.

"Then God said, 'And now we will make human beings; they will be like us and resemble us. They will have power over the fish, the birds, and all animals, domestic and wild, large and small.'"

"Have many children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under their control. I am putting you in charge of the fish, the birds, and all the wild animals." (Genesis 1:26, 28 TEV)

Man's accountability for his treatment of nature is implied in the following text:

"The time has come to destroy those who destroy the earth!" (Revelation 11:18 TEV)

Nature is neither a god nor is it an enemy. It is God's handiwork, defaced by the results of human choice, but capable of sustaining us and revealing some of God's character. A creationist will respect nature, but will not worship it. As a steward of creation, a creationist will care for nature responsibly. A creationist can feel free to use nature's resources, but not to abuse them. Because he is responsible, He will not take the attitude that he can make as much of a mess as he wishes, and leave it for God to clean up when He comes. The Christian biology teacher has the opportunity to guide his students away from extreme reactions to an outlook of responsible environmental stewardship.

Organismal biology. The creationist sees the diversity of living organisms as reflecting God's creative love for order and harmony in diversity. Diversity is not the result of chance, but of planning. In the diversity of nature, a creationist sees the handiwork of Jesus his Friend and Creator. When a creationist walks in the woods or by the shore he walks with Jesus. As the Christian biology teacher presents this view of nature to his students, their world will become richer and more meaningful. As they are led to consider the works of the Creator, they will be attracted away from the artificiality of corrupt society.

Psalm 104:24 "Lord, you have made so many things! How wisely you made them all!
The earth is filled with your creatures.

Genesis 1:24 "Then God commanded, 'Let the earth produce all kinds of animal life: domestic and wild, large and small'- and it was done."

As the student studies diversity, especially of flowers, butterflies or birds, he may be led to learn some important lessons. He will see that God appreciates color, shape and texture. Apparently, God does not will for nature to be uniform. Yet in the diversity, there is a dynamic interaction, seemingly designed for ecological stability. The creationist can see the "balance of nature" as further evidence of design. Despite the intrusion of sin, causing death and conflict, God was able to devise a system in which interactions among diverse organisms lead to ecological order and relative stability. Similarly, He wills for humanity in its diversity to cooperate and produce order and harmony.

Recognizing that sin has defaced the creation, the Christian teacher will have the opportunity to teach his students to treat other creatures with concern. Conservation of diversity will be a significant concern. The creationist must recognize that nature is not the way God intended it to be. It has been spoiled by rebellion. Nature must be regulated. It may be necessary to destroy some organisms in order to maintain order. But, when such regulation is necessary, a creationist will not destroy unnecessarily. Nor will he take pleasure in such destruction. Even in dissection exercises, a proper respect for life may be promoted.

Human biology. The principle of self-preservation should lead any intelligent person to care for his body, regardless of his philosophy. However, the creationist worldview provides special motivation for maintaining good health. The creationist understands that man was created for the purpose of communion with God. This is accomplished through the mind, which is housed in the body. Any damage to the body threatens to hamper communication between God and man. The creationist will value that communication and act to maintain the body and mind in the best condition possible.

1 Corinthians 3:16 "Surely you know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you!"

Psalms 139:13 "You created every part of me; you put me together in my mother's womb."

Students today face considerable pressure to engage in practices that are harmful to the body. Through the study of physiology, the student may be led to understand the complexity of the system that supports his mind. The interrelationship of the body and mind, the effects of the various organs on each other, and the benefits of good health are all topics that should appeal to each student. The most important influence that a Christian biology teacher can have on his students may well be in the area of healthful living. In the workings of physiology, the Christian biology teacher may emphasize the care and wisdom of the Creator.

Significance of a Christian approach to biology

Society's need. The Christian approach to biology differs from the naturalistic evolutionary approach by viewing nature as a creation. Evolutionary theory interprets biology as the result of chance and competition, implying no meaning in existence. One of the chief problems in secular society today is the lack of purpose and meaning in life. Students may feel alone without God, powerless in the face of environmental deterioration and without hope for anything better in the future. Many people are fighting back with crime and violence. Others find escape through drugs and the entertainment industry. A Christian approach to biology can contribute toward reducing these problems by pointing out man's relationship to his Creator.

A basis for hope. By adopting a Christian approach to biology, the biology teacher can provide the basis for each student to realize that he or she was created by a God who has a purpose and plan for their life. The implications of this worldview are profound. Students will be able to see that their life does have meaning and purpose. God is more powerful than death, and good is more powerful than evil. We have not been abandoned, but we have separated ourselves from God. There is hope for a better future as we work to restore our relationship with God.

Making a difference. The unique understanding that comes from the creationist worldview offers great benefit to society. Acceptance of a creationist worldview will translate into differences in behavior. Because life does have meaning, how we treat our bodies and minds makes a difference. Healthful living habits contribute to a better life, and are worth the effort. Because God gave us responsibility for the environment, we can and should do our part to care for it. Because God is bigger than His creation, there is hope for a better future. Because God is the creator of all mankind, we are all of one family. Because life comes only from Him, it is to be regarded as precious. If the full implications of creationism were understood and practiced, it would prove a great benefit to society.

The presentation of biology within a creationist viewpoint has special spiritual significance. Creation is part of the gospel, as shown by the first angel of Revelation 14:6,7:

" . . . having the everlasting gospel . . . 'worship Him that made heaven and earth

. . . "

The Christian biology teacher has unique opportunities to spread the gospel. He can contribute to the enrichment and purpose of the lives of his students, and impart to them an understanding that will strengthen their Christian faith, through a Christian approach to biology.