

# Though Men May Search

M. W. Bassford, 9-25-11

Although there are many possible candidates for the honor, it is probably true that the greatest hymn written by a Christian in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is “Our God, He Is Alive”. This is particularly true of the chorus of the hymn. Its stirring affirmation of the existence and power of God, couched in language taken from Paul’s sermon on Mars Hill in Acts 17, is one that strikes a chord in the heart of every believer. The hymn will likely be sung as long as the church exists.

However, despite its universal themes, we must also remember that the author, A. W. Dicus, wrote the hymn in a particular time and place for a particular reason, and, in the case of Bro. Dicus, we can easily figure out what that reason was. “Our God, He Is Alive” has four verses, and many songleaders, when they are presented with a four-verse hymn, will often reduce it to a three-verse hymn by leaving the third verse out. However, when Bro. Dicus was still alive, he used to insist that the third verse be led, and he most likely wrote the entire hymn as a vehicle for the third verse.

Unlike the other three verses, which deal with concepts contained in Scripture, the third verse is a discussion of something that Bro. Dicus experienced in his own lifetime. The middle part of the last century was a time of great scientific upheaval, and many men were confident that the progress of science would turn religion into a historical footnote. In 1953, two scientists conducted an experiment in which they manufactured amino acids by zapping them with electricity, and claimed that their experiment showed that it was possible for life to arise from non-life.

Bro. Dicus was a scientist too, and he quickly realized how far from justified these claims were. In response, he penned a poetic rebuttal of them, and indeed of the overarching arrogance that has led so many scientists to attempt to explain away God. He wrote, “Secure is life from mortal mind; God holds the germ within His hand. Though men may search, they cannot find, for God alone does understand.” In other words, no matter how hard we look, we are never going to find the secret to life if God wants to keep it hidden. Although Bro. Dicus was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, his words have proven accurate. Despite the scientific promise of the 1950s and ‘60s, mankind is no closer to figuring out the secret of life. Nor is this an isolated circumstance. Even though scientists are determined to reduce the universe to a series of physical and chemical relationships, there are many things all around us that science cannot explain and God can. Let’s look at some of those things today, at things that we cannot find, though men may search.

## Naturalism

Before we go on, though, it’s useful to spend some time discussing just why this is happening. By nature, I’m a man who’s skeptical of conspiracy theories. I don’t believe in shadowy plots to fake up the moon landing or to assassinate the President. However, I do believe that most scientists who work in the fields of biology and physics are actively determined to do whatever they can to discredit the God of the Bible and to mock those who believe in Him. That sounds like a giant conspiracy theory, but in reality, it isn’t. It’s inevitable based on the worldview that many hold.

The key concept here is called “naturalism”. When we think of naturalists, we think of guys who like to spend a lot of time studying nature, but that’s not what the word means. Instead, the dictionary tells us that naturalism is, “a theory that expands conceptions drawn from the natural sciences into a world view and that denies that anything in reality has a supernatural or more than natural significance.” This belief starts on logical grounds. It’s apparent to any thinking person that there are natural causes in the world. When I pick up a rock and drop it, it falls to the ground because of the force of gravity, not because there is an invisible angel hanging on to it. Science, as it studies these natural laws and how they can be applied for our good, is an extremely useful pursuit. That’s not the problem.

The problem arises when naturalists leap to the idea that because many natural phenomena can be explained without reference to the supernatural, that every natural phenomenon can be explained without reference to the supernatural, and that in fact there is no such thing as the supernatural. In other words, naturalists are saying that because they can explain the trajectory of the dropped rock without reference to angels or to God, everything in the creation can also be explained without reference to God, and there is no reason to believe that God exists. The vast majority of scientists are philosophical naturalists. The reason, then, why all of those evolutionary biologists never find evidence pointing to God is that their philosophical framework prevents them from recognizing the evidence. They start off with a conclusion, that God did not create the earth and all it contains, and they interpret every datum they collect in a way that confirms the conclusion they have already reached.

The problems that this mindset creates are obvious. Let me give you an illustration. Let’s say the police bring the local coroner a corpse. They say, “This man was murdered. It’s up to you to figure out how.” The coroner then tries to figure out how the man was murdered. He doesn’t have any visible gunshot or stab wounds, but he does have a scratch on one arm. The coroner concludes that he was scratched with a poison-tipped needle, and that’s what killed him, so he runs some tests for the presence of poison. Those tests come back negative, so the coroner reasons that the poison must

have been of a type that breaks down quickly in the bloodstream. He reports to the police that the man was killed using a fast-acting, undetectable poison, so they should confine their investigations to suspects with access to such poisons.

That all sounds logical, except that it is based on a premise that the coroner didn't test—the premise that the man was murdered. If the police hadn't instructed him to examine the body with foul play in mind, the coroner may well have concluded that the man died of a massive heart attack, and oh, by the way, he scratched his arm on the corner of the kitchen counter when he fell. That's a much more likely explanation than an assassin with a poisoned needle. However, because the coroner started off looking for the assassin, that's what he found. His premise dictated his conclusions.

On a far larger scale, the scientists who endorse the theory of evolution are doing the same. They begin with the premise that God is not responsible for mankind, they do what they must to make the evidence fit that premise, and they develop convoluted theories to explain how life arose and Man evolved without God. This all sounds very convincing, until we remember that their philosophical baggage does not permit them to consider any other conclusion.

Nor does the rigorous peer review that scientists put so much weight on help in this instance. All of the peer reviewers also have the philosophical baggage that keeps them also from interpreting the evidence in any other way. To return to our coroner example, naturalistic peer review of naturalists is about as useful as bringing in half a dozen other coroners who have also been told the man was murdered to examine the corpse. They might change some of the details. For instance, they might conclude that the man had been smothered with a pillow instead of poisoned. However, they will not challenge the central, flawed premise because the fact that they share the premise keeps them from challenging it.

Of course, none of these people will admit what they are doing. They want to make Darwinism look as logical and unassailable as they can, because Darwinism is what they believe in. They're not going to fill journals and textbooks with accounts of the flaws in evolutionary theory, any more than I'm going to get up in the pulpit and tell a congregation why they shouldn't believe in Jesus. They defend their faith in Mother Nature as diligently as I defend my faith in God.

Occasionally, however, they forget themselves and let slip some of the assumptions underlying the certain claims they make. Let me give you an example. When I was in college, I took a couple of anthropology classes, and in one of those classes, the professor was lecturing on the excavation of human remains. Her particular branch of the field was concerned with skeletal fragments from people who died 1000 or 2000 years ago, and in her field, the rule was that you could assume that bone fragments that you found within five or six feet of each other came from the same person. That makes sense. It's reasonable to assume that in a thousand years, bone fragments might drift a few feet.

However, she went on to mention that the rule in paleoanthropology, which is the study of ancient human and near-human remains, was different. When paleoanthropologists are gathering bone fragments to assemble into the skeleton of Lucy the Australopithecus and her siblings, their rule is that they can assume that any bone fragments they find within a hundred yards of each other came from the same person. Tellingly, her comment was, "That's the standard they have to use." Yes, it is the standard they have to use, because otherwise they wouldn't have any fossil data to offer in support of the idea that man evolved from monkeys. However, when they put together those charts that show the monkey learning to stand erect, and picking up the spear, and turning into modern man, they don't put an asterisk over the ape-man in the middle. They don't say, "These models are based on bone fragments found a football field apart from one another." They don't say it because too many people would see that there's no way you can assume that remains so widely scattered came from the same creature. Instead, they say, "This is what Science has concluded. Trust us."

## **Cosmogony**

In truth, however, naturalism is not and cannot be a sufficient explanation for every natural phenomenon. One of the areas where this is most evident is the field of cosmogony. That's just a big fancy word referring to the study of where the universe came from. Just about everybody, believers and nonbelievers alike, agrees that the universe has not always existed. Instead, there was a point in the past at which the universe came into existence. That poses a huge problem for naturalists. Whatever created the universe cannot be a part of the universe. After all, it predated the universe. That makes it, by definition, "supernatural." No one can argue the fact that everything that we see is the result of a supernatural event. The central premise of naturalism, that everything has a natural cause, cannot be correct.

Of course, this does not keep scientists from studying cosmogony. Physicists using supercolliders have been able to model to within thousandths of a second what happened during the creation of the universe, but they cannot re-create the creation itself. The event is not susceptible to natural analysis. Other physicists can speculate about what happened, about what kind of impetus caused the universe to come into existence, but they can prove nothing. Unsurprisingly, some of these speculations can take on religious overtones, as with Stephen Hawking's mother and daughter universes that I have mentioned before. It illustrates that naturalists believe in no-God as deeply as I believe in God, and will go to whatever lengths are necessary to defend their faith, even if that requires them to go beyond the evidence that the physical world is capable of providing. They cloak that faith in pseudo-scientific terminology, but it is still faith.

## Abiogenesis

Similar problems appear in the field of abiogenesis. Once again, this is a twenty-five-cent word that means life arising naturally from non-life. If there is no God, then the presence of life on Earth itself mandates that abiogenesis must have happened. There's a catch, though. One of the most famous science experiments of all time was performed by a French scientist named Louis Pasteur, and in the experiment, Pasteur proved that abiogenesis does not occur. Life always arises from life, not from non-life. Maggots don't come from rotting meat; they come from fly eggs.

Even as early as Darwin himself, proponents of the theory of evolution recognized that this was a big problem with the theory. Darwin's answer, which is functionally the same as the answer that evolutionists today give, is that life doesn't arise spontaneously anymore because all the microbes and bacteria that are already alive will eat the proto-life before it really gets started. That's very convenient, because it frees evolutionists from the necessity of finding examples of life arising in today's natural world, in which, of course, no such examples exist.

Instead, most of the researchers in the field prefer to conduct experiments in which they attempt to create life from non-life themselves. They conduct these experiments under "plausible" early-Earth conditions, which means that they stack the deck to make lab conditions as favorable as possible for the appearance of life, and then see if it does. The most famous experiment in this area, and probably the one that prompted Bro. Dicus to write the third verse of "Our God, He Is Alive", is the 1953 Miller-Urey experiment, in which the experimenters placed a bunch of chemicals in a sealed apparatus and subjected the chemicals to continual electric shock for five days. They analyzed the contents of the apparatus and discovered that they now included several amino acids, which are the building blocks of life. This was hailed as proof that indeed life can arise from non-life under certain conditions.

However, there are several problems with the theory here. First, in addition to creating the amino acids, the five days of electric shocks also created several chemical compounds that are hostile to life and would have prevented it from arising. Later scientists have proposed all sorts of theories for how the bad chemicals could be separated out, leaving the good chemicals to do their thing. Once again, there's no evidence that these separation processes ever occurred in nature. Second, in order for the amino acids to form peptides, and the peptides to eventually form proteins, there has to be a source of energy. Otherwise, the organic compounds will break down just like our bodies break down when we die and stop providing energy to our flesh. This problem has also provoked several scientific flights of fancy. Some scientists have opined that life arose in the cracks of underwater volcanic vents. Others claim that early life fed off the energy from radioactive isotopes washed up along the high-tide line of primordial beaches. Still others argue that life didn't arise here at all, that it hitched a ride on a space rock that crashed into the earth billions of years ago. If all of these theories are starting to sound like our coroner who dreamed up an assassin with a poisoned needle, they probably should.

We must not allow these theories, however, to obscure the bare fact of what has not occurred. Decades of scientists, with all the technology and ingenuity that they could muster, have attempted to create life from non-life, and not one of them has succeeded. However, that doesn't keep them from telling us that we should believe that something they cannot intentionally do happened as the result of pure dumb luck. They don't know how, they can't explain it, but they want us to believe it happened because they believe it happened. That's the alternative to believing in God.