

## IS SCIENTIFIC TRUTH TRANSIENT?

were published. An example of this was the change from 48 to 46 chromosomes in human somatic cells (about 1960), but this is not the denial of a fundamental principle such as the fact that human cells do have chromosomes which are duplicated in the process of cell reproduction.

### Reasons for our Confidence in the Enduring Nature of Scientific Truth

1. We need first to recognize that there is a biblical, reasonable basis for believing that man can discover some of the permanent physical and biological laws which God originally ordained. This basis rests upon the fact that man was created "in the image of God."<sup>2</sup> What do we mean, "created in the image of God"? This term refers to several spiritual and mental characteristics that man has, but the trait that concerns us here is our possession of a rationality that is fundamentally like the rational nature of God, except in lesser degree. It is true that man lost some of his "image of God" characteristics at the time of the Fall described in Genesis Chapter 3, but the Bible makes it clear that man still retains fundamental God-like abilities.<sup>3</sup> These abilities enable man to know the same kinds of relationships, laws, and principles as God knows, and thus to comprehend God's creation to some degree. Possessing this ability, man is thus able to gain objective knowledge of the created world—which means that our knowledge of created objects, laws, and relationships can correspond to (be fundamentally similar to) God's knowledge of the same, except to an incomplete degree.<sup>4</sup> The scientist must of course seek to exercise honesty, persistence, and breadth in his research, so as not to violate the rationality that God has given him. We do not maintain that a scientist has to be a Christian in order to discover enduring scientific truth, but it is necessary for him to be an honest seeker of truth with a recognition of rational, cause-effect relationships that have been established by an Authority greater than himself.

2. We have, in the inspired Scriptures, several statements that Christ made while He was here on earth concerning man's ability to make reliable observations of the natural phenomena around him. These should be taken as highly significant, and relevant to the ability of man to collect reliable scientific data today. In Matthew 7:9-10 Jesus referred to the people's ability to accurately distinguish between bread and stones and between fishes and snakes. (Perhaps you say, "Of course those distinctions are obvious." Yes, but it is highly significant that they *are* obvious to man, and that Jesus had no question concerning man's ability to make such observations.) Some other human observations of the natural world that Christ recognized as valid are: (a) the distinction between old cloth and new cloth, and between old wine and new wine (Matthew 9:16-17); (b) time distinctions (John 11:9); compare John 4:53 for an inspired assertion of a particular man's ability to make time distinctions; and (c) the recognition of clouds as precursors of rain (Luke 12:54-56).

3. Science has already made many time-honored discoveries that give no prospect of ever being fundamentally altered. We referred in a general way to this principle, in the discussion of the content of science textbooks above,

*Holding to a view that scientific truth is only transient will render us powerless in the task of helping those who claim that scientific observations on the history of the earth are not dependable.*

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but should now consider some specific cases of discoveries which are undeniably permanent, and thus indicate to us that in these cases God has allowed man to discover principles that have been known to and upheld by Him from the earliest times.

The first of these to be considered here are discoveries concerning the make-up of the human body. There was a time when man did not know that the elemental components of his body are the same as those found in sea water and elsewhere on the earth (Ca, O, H, Mg, etc.). At least most of the elements in the human body have now been identified and shown to be the same as those which are found in the ocean, in limestone beds, in phosphate deposits, and elsewhere in the earth. Even though one or more rare elements now thought to be present in human tissue may eventually be eliminated from the list, there is no chance that we will one day discover that calcium is not present in human bones, or that the water in the human body contains no oxygen or hydrogen. The same validity of man's discoveries applies to such characteristics of the body as cellular organization, and the presence of muscle fibers, connective tissue fibers, and functioning organs.

Over 300 years ago, the famous physiologist William Harvey conducted detailed experiments and observations regarding blood flow and the function of the heart in mammals. These experiments and observations were carried out over a period of 20 years, and resulted in the discovery of the primary function of the heart and some laws of blood circulation—such as that blood flows out of the heart through vessels and back to the heart through a different set of vessels. God had known these laws ever since the creation of mammals, but now He allowed man to discover them for himself. Thus, these are part of the body of scientific truth known to man which is *not* transient. We accept this fact, whether we will admit it or not, since we realize that the function of the heart as discovered 300 years ago is being faithfully redemonstrated on operating tables in many hospitals every day.

Some other examples of scientific discoveries that are in no danger of being shown to be erroneous or a mere part of man's cultural bias at this point in history are the following: (a) mosquitoes carry malaria, (b) many green plants take in CO<sub>2</sub>, give off O<sub>2</sub>, and synthesize sugar and other organic compounds, (c) mammals are dependent upon oxygen as one of the elements needed in metabolism, and give off CO<sub>2</sub> as a by-product, (d) sea urchins reproduce by eggs that they release into the water, (e) some sharks bear their young alive, (f) the globigerina ooze of the ocean really is produced by living organisms, (g) the sun is farther from the earth