

August 2016

With Respect to the Origins Debate, Dr. Schweitzer is Right, We All Need to Put God First By Jeff Gift

As many Christians interested in the science of creation know, Dr. Mary Schweitzer is the paleontologist who published a 2005 article in *Science* magazine, "Soft-tissue vessels and cellular preservation in *Tyrannosaurus rex*,"¹ that has perceptively altered what scientists think about fossils and the history of life on earth. Many also understand that she is a steadfast defender of the theory of evolution. What most may not know, however, is that Dr. Schweitzer is a Christian with interests and convictions about God that many of us share, including myself. In a 2014 interview with *Biologos*,² she made the following statement (emphasis added) about her life as a Christian to which I hope we can all agree:

I go to church because I want to learn and be held accountable. I want to learn more and more about what the Bible teaches, and in a lot of progressive churches you don't get that as much—you get politics, building projects, etc. Everyone has to figure out what they need and why they go to church. *The hunger in me which is fed in the churches I go to has to do with the fact that they preach right out of the Bible*, and I need that. I guess I don't go to church to hear political views and hear about how they need money—I go to hear about God.

Dr. Schweitzer is right. Our first priority with respect to church, or even outside of the church building, including work and home, should always be to grow closer to God. This is an attitude that is not easy to obtain, even for our Christian leaders. There are so many distractions in today's world, so many forms of entertainment, and so many people and priorities pulling on us that it takes a strong conviction not to begin idolizing something above God.

Bible history tells us this has always been the case. My church's focus this year has been on "The Whole Story," and our congregation has been on a year-long reading

¹ Schweitzer MH, Wittmeyer JL, Horner JR, Toporski JK (2005) Soft-tissue vessels and cellular preservation in *Tyrannosaurus rex*. *Science* 307(5717): 1952–55

² Ruppel, E (2014) Not So Dry Bones: An interview with Mary Schweitzer. <<http://biologos.org/blogs/archive/not-so-dry-bones-an-interview-with-mary-schweitzer>> Accessed 2016 Jul 26

program that takes us through the entire Bible. Two of the most common themes in the Old Testament are that God's people are attracted to idols and God is a jealous God. He wants our love and He wants us to love others, but He does not want us to idolize any person, place or thing but Him. There are many examples of this, but two passages stand out to me, the first from this morning's reading and the second from this morning's sermon.

Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride on horses; and we will say no more, "Our God," to the work of our hands.
In you the orphan finds mercy. (Hosea 14:3)

Three sins of Israel that are related to their trusting in people, places, or things other than in God are re-nounced in this passage: trust in Assyria, application to Egypt for its cavalry (forbidden by God; see Deuteronomy 17:16), and idolatry.

From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the Lord. But the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid. (Ezra 3:6)

This passage from Ezra demonstrates how the Israelites put their worship of God first, even before beginning work on rebuilding the ruins of His temple.

I started to write this article about findings of soft tissue and carbon-14 within dinosaur bones described in a recent publication by Dr. Kevin Andersen, head of the Creation Research Society iDINO project.³ However, after reflecting on the *Biologos* interview with Dr. Schweitzer in relation to today's sermon and Bible readings, I was moved to a different direction. I feel the need to encourage all sides of this origins debate to carefully examine the word of God to ensure that everything we are doing and saying is accordance with scripture, our touchstone for truth and for accomplishing every good work (2 Tim 3:16-17), and helps us to grow closer to

³ If you would like to read a very good 56-page summary of soft tissue and protein findings in dinosaur fossils that challenge the evolution-biased timescale, Dr. Andersen's book, *Echoes of the Jurassic*, is available for the very reasonable price of \$6 at www.crsbooks.org.

Him. To accomplish this, there are a few things I think we need to work on.

Be respectful:

Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor (1Peter 3:15)

In the Biologos interview, Dr. Schweitzer points out that she has had some abusive interactions over her findings that she suggests may have been from Christians who do not share her evolutionary viewpoints.

One other thing I might say is that I've gotten a lot of pretty cruel, harsh, judgmental emails over the years—and if you're a Christian saying things like that, it's no wonder my colleagues don't want anything to do with faith. Christianity is about love, and these are not really loving responses to anything.

There is no excuse for this type of disrespectful rhetoric, regardless of your opinion about origins, and especially given that most of the comments were likely made with no foreknowledge of Dr. Schweitzer's faith. Of course, this street runs both ways. Creation scientists have been the constant butt of jokes and ridicule from evolutionary scientists, Christian and otherwise. Dr. Schweitzer herself makes a comment in this interview that is somewhat condescending and dismissive of creationists' ability to analyze the evidence when she says,

If you believe 24/7 creation is really the only interpretation possible and ignore tons of evidence that the earth is billions of years old and that life was a simple construct that got way more complex over time,⁴ that's fine—we may be wrong about the science (I don't think we are, but as a scientist I have to leave that minute possibility open).

Regardless of where you stand on the subject of origins, we all need to remember that we are ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). And as Christians, we have all been called to

... walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1-3).

⁴ Of course, creation scientists have the same amount of data to observe, but view it from a different perspective regarding earth's age (<https://answersingenesis.org/evidence-for-creation/the-10-best-evidences-from-science-that-confirm-a-young-earth/> and <http://creation.com/age-of-the-earth>) and whether the fossil record reflects an ascent of complexity over time (<http://creation.com/cambrian-explosion-and-animal-biodiversity>).

Be humble:

When pride comes, then comes disgrace,
but with humility comes wisdom. (Proverbs 11:2)

Another important theme that resonates throughout the Old and New Testaments of the Bible is that God loves a humble, not haughty heart.

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. (Ephesians 4:2)

Scientists on all sides of the origins question have made mistakes. We need to own them, even laugh with others about them, for it is largely through our mistakes that we learn.⁵ A couple of other statements by Dr. Schweitzer suggest that she accepts the possibility that she might be wrong.

So, that leaves us with two alternatives for interpretation: either the dinosaurs aren't as old as we think they are, or maybe we don't know exactly how these things get preserved.

The thing is, if you go with the scientific evidence and it turns out to be wrong, I don't think God is going to punish you for that; God made us curious people. I believe we should step back a little bit and consider other views equally—anything less is doing God and your child a disservice.

We don't have all the answers and never will. And I think that when God says that he is revealed in his creation, I think that means we need to take care of what we have and understand where we came from.

The verse Dr. Schweitzer is referring to here is likely to be Romans 1:20,

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

This verse is likewise very important to me and many other creationists. However, as will be discussed below, creationists see the world God created through a different lens.

Share our testimony:

Be ready to give a reason for our hope, but with meekness and fear (1Peter 3:15)

⁵ I found several creation websites that list mistaken or uncertain arguments creationists should avoid, e.g., <http://creation.com/arguments-we-think-creationists-should-not-use>. I also found lists of old, untenable evolutionary arguments, but only on creation websites. I'm sure they exist on evolution websites somewhere; I just could not find them in the limited time available.

We each have our own personal testimony. It is ours. It is what gives us strength and hope in our walk with God. It is personal, and it is not something that is debatable, and it is something that we are encouraged to share with others. Dr. Schweitzer sees the world through the lens of a Christian and a scientist trained to understand that the qualities of God that are referred to as “invisible” in Romans 1:20 can actually be observed and understood. At the conclusion of her interview with Biologos, she suggested that her study of evolution played a large part in forming the reasons for her hope, and the strength of her Christian faith.

The more I understand how things work, the bigger God gets. When he was just a magician pulling things out of a hat, that doesn't even compare to how I see him now!

As a scientist, I understand the excitement of discovery, the thrill of deciphering a complex biological system. As a toxicologist, understanding a chemical's biological mode of action can be very important towards interpreting *in vivo* or *in vitro* bioassay results and relating them to humans. For me, that excitement is not diminished by not knowing how a complex biological system came into existence. I can understand why this is important to Dr. Schweitzer, but for me at least, it is not troubling that God's qualities, the qualities that allowed Him to create the world, might indeed remain “invisible.”

Thus, while I respect Dr. Schweitzer's ambitious pursuit, my hope is not in understanding the “invisible” methods of a God of “eternal power” and a “divine nature.” My hope is in knowing that God is indeed a magician, one who is magical beyond our comprehension, a true miracle worker. If millions of years of evolution through natural processes was indeed God's method of creation, what would that say about the numerous, virtually instantaneous, *ex-nihilo* creation miracles Jesus performed in the New Testament (changing water to wine, producing food for thousands, healing countless sick, bringing Lazarus back to life, His own resurrection)? Are we to believe that those miracles happened virtually instantaneously, yet God through Jesus (John 1:1; 1 Corinthians 8:6) took millions of years to create life as we know it?

Put God first:

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men (Colossians 3:23)

When Dr. Schweitzer made her discovery of soft tissue and remnants of blood cells in a *T. rex* bone, she realized that it would be controversial. Her mentor, well known paleontologist Dr. Jack Horner, was concerned about the ammunition it would give creationists. Her peers were skeptical and suspicious of her methods. She was “terrified” of the reaction that might ensue from her discovery and didn't publish for over a year. Yet, to her credit, she set aside those fears, and as the scientific method would dictate, she set about trying to prove that what they had

discovered was not red blood cells. After over a decade of published results, her careful research strongly indicates that what they had discovered in a dinosaur bone was indeed soft tissue, remnants of red blood cells and protein.

Yet, despite the efforts of Dr. Schweitzer and her colleagues, and despite multiple reports of similar evidence by other scientists,⁶ scientists remain skeptical. From her interview with Biologos:

Even now, I wouldn't say it's widely accepted that what we're seeing is soft tissue from dinosaurs. What I wish would happen is more people would follow up on this.

Amen! Though we may have differing expectations as to what that research would find in fossils, I share in Mary's frustration. Her scientist colleagues and we as fellow Christians need to join her in the pursuit of the truth, whether that be conclusive evidence that soft tissue can be preserved for millions of years or that dinosaurs did not become extinct as long ago as they thought. We should commend Dr. Schweitzer for the brave research she has pursued, largely on her own. However, as she indicates, there is much to be learned, and she needs the support of her fellow Christians and evolutionary scientists alike in the pursuit of the truth.

Finding soft tissues that responded to our tests like modern materials in many ways suggested that after three hundred years of looking at this stuff, we don't know as much as we thought. It's also hard because, being a Christian evolutionary biologist, I receive a lot of mail that is not fun—fellow Christians suspect my faith, and scientific colleagues suspect my science. But I have no agenda, except to produce data.

In other areas of research, scientists have found evidence in the fossil record that challenges traditional views concerning the history of life on earth. In addition to soft tissue, scientists have detected carbon-14 in dinosaur bones (largely by creationist research labs, but some secular as well), and other evidence that suggests fossils are thousands, not millions of years old.⁷ Additional research is needed to confirm or refute those findings. Can we let the data speak for itself? Will we do the research that needs to be done for the sake of good science and to resolve issues that hold the promise of exciting, meaningful discoveries about the history of God's creation, our planet earth? I pray that we are indeed able to do our work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, for

The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe. (Proverbs 29:25) ❧

⁶ Gift, JS (2015) Carbon-14 in dinosaur bones challenges evolution theory and supports Genesis flood account, TASC August 2015 Newsletter

⁷ Spears J (2016) Fossils. TASC Newsletter, February 2016.

COMING EVENTS

Thursday, August 11, 7:00 pm, Providence Baptist Church, 6339 Glenwood Ave., Raleigh, Room 207

Please plan now (plus see BONUS below!) to come out to our August meeting for an informative question-and-answer panel including our TASC board members. Bring the questions that you would like further understanding on the creation versus evolution debate and possibly help us answer some yourself in the discussion. Some questions concerning current issues already on the table for discussion are: Race and Racism, Dinosaurs and Faith, Can we believe a literal Genesis account?, etc.

Bonus: For a complimentary copy of the exciting, informative new book, *Echoes of Jurassic*, bring a first-time guest to the meeting. The author of the book, Dr. Kevin Anderson believes that recent reports of soft tissue and proteins in dinosaur fossils may represent the most significant paleontology discovery this century. Please come out and bring a first-time-guest get your complimentary copy of this new book.