

FAITH INTEGRATION IN THE NATURAL SCIENCES

Creation and Biology

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The Church of the Nazarene believes in the biblical account of creation (“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth . . .” [Genesis 1:1]). We oppose any godless interpretation of the origin of the universe and of humankind. (By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible [Heb. 11:3]).⁴⁵

The above Creation Statement from the *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene* affirms God as Creator but does not attempt to give an explanation for the moment-by-moment details as to what it means to say, “God created.” The universe and all of life was formed at the command of God. All that exists, the laws of the natural world and the processes that govern the operation of the universe, are a reflection of the ongoing activity of God. Life exists because God called it into existence, and life persists because He sustains it. “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Col. 1:16, 17).

The fact that the *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene* is purposely vague regarding the details of creation is, not surprisingly, reflected in the diverse views of students and faculty at Nazarene educational institutions. Nazarenes fill in those details in various ways. This diversity is fitting for a group of

Wesleyans. After all it was John Wesley himself who wrote, “[T]he inspired penman in this history [Genesis] . . . [wrote] for the Jews first and, calculating his narratives for the infant state of the church, describes things by their outward sensible appearances, and leaves us, by further discoveries of the divine light, to be led into the understanding of the mysteries couched under them.”⁴⁶

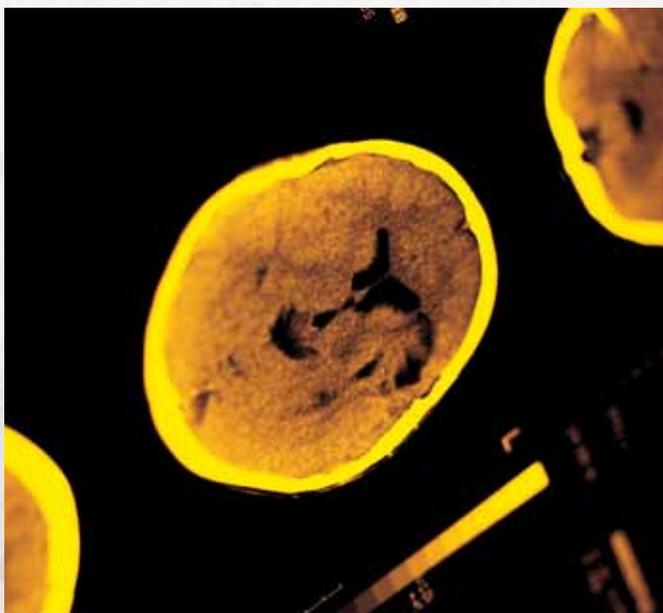
And diversity of views is especially fitting for the Church of the Nazarene, a denomination founded as an amalgamation of church bodies, not all of whom viewed matters exactly the same way. Phineas Bresee, a key founder of the denomination, has often been quoted as saying, “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.”⁴⁷

The question of how God created the universe is one of the non-essentials in the Kingdom of God, and differences of opinion about the details need to be discussed in a spirit of love. So in regards to creation, one of the hallmarks of being Nazarene is that no position is taken on the details.

The source of our diversity rests largely in how Genesis 1-3 and other creation passages in scripture are understood. The official position of the Church of the Nazarene regarding scripture follows: “We believe in the plenary inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, by which we understand the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, given by divine inspiration, inerrantly revealing the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation. . . .”⁴⁸

Nazarenes do not believe that scripture is “God-dictated”; they believe it is “God-breathed.” Furthermore, Nazarenes do not refer to the Bible for authoritative statements regarding science. The purpose of scripture, Nazarenes believe, is to bring us into relationship with God through our salvation.

We in Nazarene education believe that the methods of science provide tools to discover important truths about God’s



world. Through scientific methodology we gain reliable information about how creation works and even how creation came into existence. Insofar as science does not lead into godless interpretations of the natural world, we cautiously trust science. It has proven wonderfully reliable as a window into an understanding of how God's world works. Science can be viewed as a gift of God that enables us to see certain aspects of Him and His workings more clearly. Nazarenes do not fear science.



The science of biology (supported by findings at the core of geology, physics, and astrophysics) has led almost all biologists to conclude that life has arisen gradually over a long period of time. If this is true, it is God's process carried out in response to "God's creation command"

(Heb. 11:3), "created by and for [Christ]" (Col. 1:16), "who was with God in the beginning" and "without whom nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:2, 3). This is God's world, and the magnificent beauty that is revealed through the science of biology is, in part, a reflection of the beauty of God.

So science seems to clearly point to some specific details about how God chose to create life. Still, we are Nazarenes, which almost by definition means we are a diverse group of Christ-followers. So, given the diversity of thinking, we in Nazarene higher education have a pastoral responsibility to nurture one another's faith, to build each other up as we sojourn together in a world filled with complexity. We respect the truth that not all will view the details regarding creation in the same way, and we celebrate that fact.

Nazarene science professors have found that it is at least as important that we get our pastoral responsibilities right as it is that we get our science right. We are responsible for nurturing and strengthening the faith of our students. We have a responsibility to let students work through the issues of how to understand scripture, how God created, and how to put all this together in a manner that strengthens and enriches faith. Above all else, we strive to help students retain a commitment to a life grounded in holiness through personal relationship with God and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

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As Nazarene educators, we recognize that the data that seem to point to a gradual creation process are not clearly seen by all in the fellowship. The evidence is complex and multi-faceted. It is easy to understand why there are many students, board members, faculty, administrators, staff, and even fellow science faculty members who do not see the same picture as most biologists do when they look at the history of life. To be Wesleyan, to be Nazarene, to be members of the Body of Christ, means that we will accept that we are all on a journey together, and we will love and support each other on this journey no matter how different our perspectives on how God created the universe.

Nazarene science faculty should feel free to present the scientific data and to discuss it as they think best as long as it is within the context of a biblical view of creation as currently defined in the church manual with the full recognition that this means different things to different people: “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and in all things, charity.” ■

ENDNOTES

⁴⁵Church of the Nazarene, *Manual 2009-13* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2009), 29.

⁴⁶John Wesley, *Wesley's Notes on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1987), 22.

⁴⁷It is likely that this statement originated with Augustine about 1500 years earlier, although that is largely beside the point. It remains important in the Church of the Nazarene regardless of who first made the statement.

⁴⁸Church of the Nazarene, *Manual 2009-13* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2009), 29.

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