

The Origin of Flowering Plants

Last October 29th Carol Yoon (1999) of the *New York Times* newspaper produced an article in which she asserted that some Harvard scientists had recently answered the tough question of how flowering plants arose by macroevolution. In making this outlandish claim, *Times* writer Yoon was referring to an article which appeared that same day (October 29, 1999) in *Science* magazine. In it, Sarah Matthews and Michael Donahue of Harvard Herbaria claimed to have discovered which flowering plant groups are the most primitive and hence the probable evolutionary ancestors for the other groups. I have read this article and am now studying it carefully along with several similar papers.

Contrary to the *New York Times* report, these botanists produced no scientific support whatsoever for macroevolution among the flowering plants. Instead they have analyzed the DNA sequences of two genes known as PHY A and PHY C, genes coding for very important phytochrome pigments governing the production of flowers in plants.

They propose that a bush called *Arborella* (found only in New Caledonia) is close to the ancestral prototype for all other flowering plants and that the water lilies as well as the spice star are quite ancestral. But this research demonstrates nothing more or less than the degrees of similarity among certain plant groups for these pigment genes. The researchers ignored the fact that *similarity* can be the result of *design* rather than *kinship*.

Along with studies of other genes and research on morphology, the data of Donahue and Matthews may help improve our systems of plant classification. An outline of plant taxonomy, however, does not show which plants evolved from others. It is merely a helpful scheme of classification. These DNA resemblances in phytochrome genes may have resulted from the systematic and non-evolutionary work of a Divine Creator, as the fossil record strongly suggests.

Apparently neither the *Times* writer nor the Harvard researchers have read the very important book, *Evolution:*

Theory in Crisis by biochemist Michael Denton of Australia. Denton shows that all such biochemical homology points to separations between living groups, a view that Denton calls “typology”. Comparative studies of DNA or protein, like this one, simply emphasize and entrench boundaries between groups and do not demonstrate a tree of macroevolutionary descent. The data support evolution only for those workers who start with evolutionary preconceptions.

Perhaps an illustration here involving our own species—*Homo sapiens*—will help. If we wondered which animals should be classified closest to humans, we would find that DNA has a greater than 99% similarity with the DNA of pygmy chimpanzees. This demonstrates that people and chimpanzees should be put close together in the outline of primate taxonomy. But since chimps are so obviously different from humans, it also shows that DNA similarity and closeness in the outline does not indicate kinship or relatedness. Human fossils do not show connections to chimpanzees.

I close the matter by wishing Matthews and Donahue the very best in their skillful analyses of similarity patterns in plant genes. But I also wish that they and their *New York*

Times spokespeople would stop equating similarity with evolutionary relatedness. We still know nothing about which plant group actually produced the first flowering plants and nothing about which flowering plants then produced other groups of flowering plants. The fossil record shows no such transitions. The Bible says in Genesis 1:11–13 that on the third day of creation God made flowering plants according to their various kinds. Nothing from empirical science conflicts with this precise statement about events on day three of creation.

References

- Matthews, Sarah and M.J. Donahue. 1997. The root of angiosperm phylogeny inferred from duplicate phytochrome genes. *Science* 286: 947–950.
- Yoon, Carol K. 1999. How does your garden grow? Scientists may have an answer. *Daily News of San Fernando Valley*, News p.12.

George F. Howe
24635 Apple St.
Newhall, CA 91321-2614