

**FEATURE: A Professor Changes His Mind
(Second in SERIES of 2)**

VOICE: A professor got into trouble. The administration at his university ordered him to *stop teaching something that he firmly believed was true.*

PROF.: A researcher wrote a book that convinced many scientists of a major scientific concept – but now he is convinced the hypothesis he once publicized, is wrong.

FORMAT: THEME AND ANNOUNCEMENT

PROF.: Three first-year biology students met with Dr. John Hafernik, chairman of the biology department at San Francisco State University in California. After listening to the first of three lectures on evolution, the students had two complaints to lodge against their teacher, Dr. Dean Kenyon:

First, he quoted from a poll survey that showed that a majority of the American people believe God is the creator. Ssecond, he criticized what he called “standard evolutionary thought.”

VOICE: What were Dr. Kenyon's qualifications for his research and teaching?

PROF.: He received his Ph.D. in biophysics from Stanford University and completed post-doctoral work at University of California, at the University of Oxford in England, and at NASA.

Kenyon had been teaching at San Francisco State University for 22 years. He was well-known as the co-author of a book entitled *Biochemical Predestination*.

VOICE: “Biochemical Predestination”? Does that refer to how non-living chemicals could have formed into the first living cells?

PROF.: Yes. The book was adopted at many universities as a graduate textbook and was regarded as the best work on that subject.

VOICE: What made Prof. Kenyon start doubting his own hypotheses about how living substances could have developed spontaneously from non-living chemicals?

PROF.: He and other researchers had tried unsuccessfully for years to recreate the conditions they theorized the early earth might have had. In 1976, Kenyon realized that the conditions that he and others had used in laboratory experiments were *very different* from conditions which probably existed on the ancient earth. In the *Journal of Molecular Evolution*, they wrote, “...the geochemical plausibility of many of these ‘protocell’ models is open to serious question.”

VOICE: Do you mean that, as they studied even the simplest living cell, they began doubting that non-living chemicals could have produced that cell spontaneously?

PROF.: Yes. By the 1980's, Kenyon knew his own experiments had needed a large amount of *guidance* to produce even small results. He realized that if that was true in laboratory experiments, then it must be true in nature. An intelligence must have been needed, to design and produce the first life form.

VOICE: When he says an experiment needs “guidance” in the laboratory, does he mean the researcher helps the experiment to come out the way he wants it?

PROF.: Yes. When the scientist found that his experiment was producing a compound that he thought nature could have used as a theoretical step towards producing the first living cell, he *collected that compound and preserved it*.

He realized that nature would not have been that smart and selective. Nature would have let the “good” compounds continue to be bombarded by wind, sun, lightning, etc. Those factors would probably have destroyed them before they could have developed into a living substance.

VOICE: So that's what he meant by “guiding” laboratory experiments.

PROF.: Yes. For more than a decade, Dr. Kenyon had been telling his first-year biology class that he thought nature needed “guidance” to produce the first life. The previous chairman of his department never objected.

But three students complained. Soon after, the chairman of his department called Kenyon into his office and said, “I order you not to discuss creationism in your class. You can regard that as a direct order. I have the support of the dean...and we agree on this.”

VOICE: How did Prof. Kenyon react?

PROF.: He wrote for clarification of his chairman's order, asking whether he was “forbidden to mention to students that there are important disputes among scientists about whether or not chemical evolution could have taken place on the ancient earth...” And was he prohibited from teaching “the important philosophical issues at stake in discussions of origins...?”

In his reply, the dean insisted Kenyon “teach the dominant scientific view.”

VOICE: In other words, evolution?

PROF.: Yes, including *biochemical* evolution – the hypothesis that inorganic chemicals developed into the first living cell.

VOICE: How did Dr. Kenyon answer his administrator?

PROF.: He wrote back, “I *do* teach the dominant view. But I also discuss *problems* with the dominant view and that some biologists see *evidence of intelligent design*. Please inform me of any impropriety in this approach.”

The administration's only reply was to remove him from teaching introductory biology, while continuing to teach more advanced classes. They never asked Kenyon himself what he teaches in his class.

VOICE: It sounds as if the administrators acted only on what introductory biology students thought of Kenyon's lecture.

PROF.: Yes. In fact, Prof. Kenyon had announced in class that this was the *first of three* lectures on the subject. These first-year students heard one-third of the series before lodging their complaint.

Kenyon says, “To this date, I have not received a reply to my question to Dean Kelley asking him to identify what I was doing that was improper. It's an arbitrary exercise of administrative powers.”

VOICE: Most universities claim to favor “academic freedom.” That often means a professor can say almost anything he wants in class.

PROF.: Retired University of California law professor Dr. Phillip Johnson points out that in this case, “The essential mindset creating the problem here is that in the views of people like Dean Kelley...you're either teaching science, ...[and] promoting a naturalistic philosophy, or you're teaching the book of Genesis instead of science. ...They don't want to hear the facts because they want to decide the case on the basis of a stereotype in their minds.”

VOICE: Some of my friends paraphrase that attitude as, “Don't confuse me with the facts; my mind is made up.”

PROF.: Yes. Prof. Kenyon appealed to the university's Academic Freedom Committee. It ruled that a violation of academic freedom had taken place. It asserted that the guidelines of the university “permit and encourage vigorous dialogue, even controversy. ...Students in all academic disciplines should be exposed to effective presentations of a broad range of perspectives in their area of study.”

But administrators rejected the committee's recommendation to restore him to teaching that introductory class.

VOICE: Why?

PROF.: They simply said they were free to determine what curriculum was appropriate. They reasoned that Dr. Kenyon's type of speech should be reserved for upper class students only; introductory biology students are too young and naive to comprehend and evaluate the type of statements he made. It became known as the “proper forum” issue.

- VOICE: In other words, he said the right things, but in the wrong place. Does that mean he would be allowed to say these things to students who were nearing graduation, but not to first-year students?
- PROF.: Yes. But Myers points out how inconsistent that is with the way the dispute began. In his words, “Kenyon is pulled from introductory biology based on a hearsay evaluation of Kenyon's class content *made by introductory biology students*. And yet the stated reason for pulling him is that introductory biology students *cannot accurately comprehend and evaluate* Kenyon's class speech.
- VOICE: So the same person who said first-year university students are *too uninformed* to evaluate what they hear, also said those same students are *experts* who should decide what the rest of their class should hear!
- PROF.: Right. Don't expect someone with an ideological bias to be logical.
Prof. Kenyon took his appeal to the chairman of the university's academic senate. The senate scheduled a vote for December 7 to decide their recommendation.
The day before the vote, an article was published in a newspaper that circulates throughout the United States, detailing Kenyon's problem. It influenced the proceedings the next day.
- VOICE: What did the article say?
- PROF.: In it, Dr. Stephen Meyer, professor of the history and philosophy of science, wrote, “...the teacher was forbidden to teach his course not because he taught evolutionary theory...but because he offered a critical assessment of it. The problem is that...dominant players currently insist on a rigidly materialistic mode of explanation – even when, as Dr. Kenyon maintains, explanation of the evidence requires more than the limited powers of brute matter.”
- VOICE: In other words, if someone who has spent decades researching evolutionary theory, concludes that nature alone could not have produced the first life form, some people want to silence him.
- PROF.: Yes. Dr. Myers pointed out that this kind of intellectual restriction suppresses open-minded thinking, by decreeing what thoughts are acceptable.
The university senate voted 25 to 8 in Kenyon's favor, insisting that he should be allowed to teach the class. A few weeks later, Hafernik and Kelley finally conceded, and Kenyon began teaching the course again.
- VOICE: So is the controversy finished?
- PROF.: No. These administrators still want to tell the expert how to teach his course.
Prof. Walter Bradley commented, “Some people refuse to allow any kind of compelling evidence to ever point to an intelligent cause.”

VOICE: Do you mean God?

PROF.: God is one possible “intelligent cause.” Or some scientists talk about some kind of intelligent cause within nature.

Prof. Kenyon will tell more about his ideas on our next program.

FORMAT: THEME AND ANNOUNCEMENT

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