

A rose by any other name

A review of
Biblical Classification of Life
by Chard Berndt
Elihu Publishing, 2000

Don Batten

This is one incredible, very original book.

On the cover it says, 'Prevailing taxonomies (classification systems for living things) disregard the Creator and much of His revealed criteria. *Biblical Classification of Life* provides literal creationists with a solid biblical and scientific alternative.'

The book grew out of the author's desire as a Christian high school teacher to teach biology from a thoroughly biblically-integrated framework. The book is thoroughly creationist in its perspective, and well-written.

The author acknowledges the work that has been done on baraminology, but regards that as purely empirical. His approach is to develop criteria from the Bible for classification, based on word studies in the Hebrew. Berndt recognizes that modern taxonomy does not try to define *miyn*, or created

kinds, and this is a major deficiency. He identifies breeding barriers as the main measure of the limits of kinds. Often the kind is at the level of family in the modern classification system (after Buffon). Berndt's approach is basically to ignore all patterns of biological similarity above what could be considered as created kinds. Above this level, Biblical categories for classification are defined.

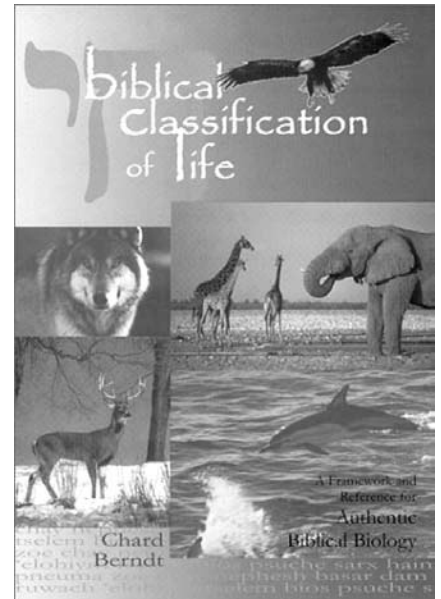
Comments on the cover:

"... an extraordinary contribution to the field of biology. Unwavering in its biblical integrity..."—Christian Overman, author of *Assumptions That Affect Our Lives*.

"... biblical integration at its best."—JuLee Davis, M.Ed.

"... an indispensable resource for teachers and students looking for an alternative to evolutionary taxonomy."—David Hornbacher, Hugh O'Brien Youth Leadership Alumnus.

The author attempts to classify *everything*, including such things as angelic beings. The book classifies mankind into Christians (spiritual believers and carnal believers) and non-Christians (Jews and Gentiles). Some of these categories would find some dissent (e.g. 'spiritual' and 'carnal' Christians) and some would say that both Christians and non-Christians can be divided into Jews and Gentiles.



However, I wonder if this book is useful biologically.

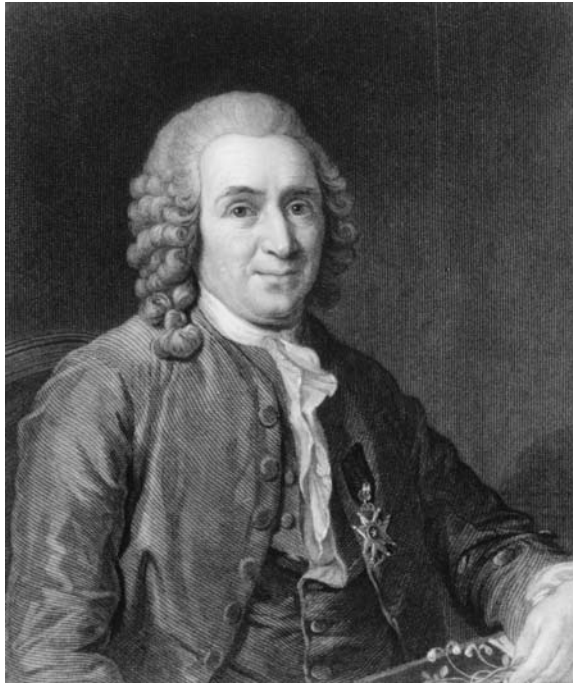
Berndt classifies insects as 'birds', which he defines as flying creatures, based on Leviticus 11:13–20. He also classifies pterosaurs as 'birds'. So, Day 5 would see the flying birds, the flying insects, the flying mammals and flying reptiles created. Separately, the author would have penguins, which are aquatic, created along with other sea creatures. He says, 'if the penguin is a bird, then it must have once flown'. His classification is, in other words, functional, rather than 'natural'. Since the penguin is obviously designed for an aquatic existence, it supposedly never flew and so is not a 'bird'. He suggests that flightless birds such as emus once had ancestors that flew and so they do not have to be classified as land creatures. On the other hand, would a flying fish be a sea creature or a 'bird'? I would say it was designed to do both. Likewise, many insects appear to be designed never to fly—some are entirely aquatic, for example.

My first impressions of this book were a bit like the comments on the cover: How incredible! However, having sat on it for a little and pondered it further, my reaction is now, 'This is incredible, but is it any use scientifically?'

A basic assumption of the book is that modern classification is basically



Berndt suggests that flightless birds such as emus once had ancestors that flew and so they do not have to be classified as land creatures. On the other hand, Berndt classifies penguins as sea creatures.



Carl Linnaeus (1707–1778) developed the biological classification system that was a fore-runner to the one that is used today. Linnaeus was a staunch believer in the Bible and Creation, hence it would be inappropriate to state that the Linnaean system of classification is based on evolutionary assumptions.

evolutionary and that it is therefore incompatible with Biblical Creation. However, although some evolutionists will claim that classification is evolutionary, or even that evolution is indispensable to classification, this is far from the truth. Classification is primarily based on nested patterns of biological similarities. The hierarchical pattern of nested similarities is not a prediction of evolution, but is not unexpected from creationist thinking. In fact, using the standard classification system and mapping the phyla through time according to uniformitarian geological concepts, the pattern that emerges is decidedly non-evolutionary, with all the phyla present in the Cambrian. Evolution predicted that life began as a singularity and then diversified into all the categories seen today (living and extinct via fossils). The classification system applied to the fossil record does not show this. Denton (*Evolution: Theory in Crisis*) goes into some detail about the non-evolutionary nature of the hierarchical classification system.

Furthermore, Linnaeus, a creationist, invented the basics of the modern classification system. Also, cladists,¹ many of whom take pride in not considering supposed evolutionary relationships, carry on much of modern systematics.

I have come to the conclusion that this book is an incredible curiosity; certainly of interest for Biblical study, but not much use for developing a creationist taxonomy. That the Bible uses different categories to today's biologist for classifying things does not mean the biologist is wrong. There are different purposes. For example, things can be divided into 'clean' and 'unclean'—categories related to eating (Berndt discusses these categories). These categories do not necessarily have to colour our approach to biology. We often categorize things today on a non-biological basis also, according to the uses we have for them, or where they grow—for example, hard timbers, and soft timbers, frost tolerant or frost resistant, termite resistant and susceptible timbers, climacteric

fruits (e.g. banana, avocado, papaya) and non-climacteric fruits (grapes, citrus, lychees), oily and non-oily fish, leafy vegetables and root vegetables, etc. In short, as a creationist basis for classification, the book is based on a confusion of categories.

The book delves into areas that could be contentious—creatures and the afterlife, and classifying angels, for example. Assumptions are made about eschatology, such as the millennial kingdom in the future (Chapter 11, p. 140). Creatures are said to possess a soul- or spirit-life (Chapter 12)—on the basis of being described as living souls (*chayyah nephesh*).

On p. 32 the term 'polyploidy' is misused to apply to the hybrid of a horse and donkey. Polyploidy applies only where the number of chromosomes is increased by a whole number (e.g. a triploid has three times the chromosomes as a gamete of the species). Commercial strawberry varieties are polyploid, for example.

Conclusion

This is an interesting book from the point of view of Biblical studies; an incredible achievement, but I don't see it being very helpful in furthering a creationist approach to biological classification.

References

1. Cladistics: a method of classification based on the number of shared characteristics. It is a quantitative, statistical approach, rather than qualitative/descriptive. It places objects into a nested hierarchy that maximizes the number of characteristics that are shared and minimizes that number that are not shared. Strictly applied, it ignores evolutionary notions and the fossil record. Because the classifications so derived often conflict with evolutionary phylogenies derived from other methods, most cladists today do not use a purely statistical methodology.