



A Biochemist Explains Her Faith

For more than 20 years, Dr. Paola Chiozzi has worked as a molecular biologist at the University of Ferrara in Italy. *Awake!* asked her about her science and her faith.

Tell us about your background.

My father was a cobbler, and my mother was a farmworker. But I wanted to be a scientist. The beautiful flowers, birds, and insects around my home fascinated me. I felt that they were products of superhuman wisdom.

So you always believed in a Creator?

No. In fact, my doubts about God began when I was a child. My father suddenly died

of a heart attack, and I wondered, 'Why would the Creator of so much beauty allow suffering and death?'

Did your study of science help you to find an answer?

Not at first. When I became a molecular biologist, I began to study death—the normal, programmed death of the cells that make up our body. This is very different from the uncontrolled cell death that causes inflammation and gangrene. Until a few years ago,

scientists paid little attention to this process, even though it is vital to our health.

In what way is programmed cell death vital?

Well, our body is made up of trillions of microscopic cells. Practically all of them must die and be replaced. Each type of cell has a different life span; some are replaced every few weeks, and others every few years. Our body's system of programmed cell death has to be highly controlled to maintain the delicate balance between cell death and cell formation.

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What can go wrong?

Some studies indicate that when cells fail to die as they should, rheumatoid arthritis or cancer may result. On the other hand, when cells die *before* they should, it could cause Parkinson's disease or Alzheimer's disease. My research is linked to finding ways to treat these diseases.

How did your study of cell death affect you?

Frankly, it puzzled me. This marvelous process was clearly designed by someone who wants us to be healthy. So I was still left with the question, *Why do people suffer and die?* I couldn't find an answer.

But you were convinced that the system of programmed cell death was designed.

Yes. The complexity of the whole process is mind-boggling, yet its elegance displays exceptional wisdom. I believe it's the wisdom of God. I use powerful microscopes to study the many complex mechanisms that regulate the process. Some mechanisms can trigger the destruction process within seconds if need be. The cells participate in their own self-destruction. The process is so well-designed that it's absolutely awe-inspiring.

You had questions about God and suffering. How did you find answers?

A couple of Jehovah's Witnesses called at my home in 1991, and I asked them why we die. They showed me the Bible's answer: "Through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin." (Romans 5:12) If the first man had not disobeyed God, he would have lived forever. I immediately realized that this harmonized with what I had learned from my research. In fact, it's clear to me that God didn't intend for people to die. Since nearly all our cells are regularly replaced, living forever is certainly feasible.

What convinced you that the Bible is God's Word?

I learned what the Bible says about God at Psalm 139:16: "Your eyes saw even the embryo of me, and in your book all its parts were *down in writing*." As a biochemist, I study the genetic information that is written in our cells. How did the psalmist know about such writing? The more I learned from the Bible, the more I was convinced that it is inspired of God.

How were you helped to understand what the Bible teaches?

One of Jehovah's Witnesses offered to study the Bible with me. Finally, I learned why God has allowed suffering. I also learned that, as the Bible states, God purposes to "swallow up death forever." (Isaiah 25:8) It will be easy for our Creator to make the marvelous systems of our body operate perfectly so that we can enjoy life without end.

How have you used your knowledge of the Bible to help others?

Well, I became one of Jehovah's Witnesses in 1995, and since then I have freely shared with others the things I've learned from the Bible. For example, a colleague of mine was devastated when her brother committed suicide. Her church teaches that God never forgives suicide. But I showed her how the Bible gives a hope of a resurrection. (John 5:28, 29) She was deeply comforted to learn that the Creator cares for us. At such moments, I feel that sharing Bible truths with others brings me more satisfaction than science itself! ■