

# LITERATURE REVIEWS

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**Creation Reconsidered: Scientific, Biblical, and Theological Perspectives.** James L. Hayward, editor. 2000. Roseville, CA: Association of Adventist Forums. 384 p. Paper, \$19.95.

*Reviewed by Paul Giem, Loma Linda, California*

This book grew out of a conference organized by the Association of Adventist Forums in 1985 in West Yellowstone, Montana. Several papers presented by Seventh-day Adventist authors at that conference are reprinted in this book, along with a reprinted essay by A. N. Whitehead which was recommended reading at that conference. Among the authors are theologians (e.g., R.F. Cottrell, F. Guy, and J.W. Provonsha) and scientists (e.g., P.E. Hare, R.M. Ritland, S.C. Rowland, and R.E. Taylor).

The subject of the conference, and therefore of the book, is the concept of creation. Perhaps the one subject where the book appears united is that all authors believe that science has proved that life on Earth is hundreds of millions, if not billions, of years old, and that theology will have to adjust to this fact. This book is perhaps the most comprehensive exposition of that position by Seventh-day Adventists. The book is divided into two main parts. The first 14 chapters deal with scientific evidence, and the next 12 chapters deal with theology, including the one by Whitehead. There is also a final poem (Chapter 27) and a conclusion, as well as an introduction and a dedication. The book's dedication is to R.M. Ritland, who dominates the book. Four of the chapters and roughly 3 of the pages are written by Ritland. The style of the book is fairly smooth and surprisingly even for a symposium volume.

The book has some good arguments. Ritland's two chapters on the history of geology (Chapters 2 and 3) indirectly but effectively argue for his point of view. He (p 31-32) also notes: a) the absence of many modern life forms (e.g., teleost fishes) from the earlier deposits; b) the increasing abundance of extinct forms in the earlier deposits; and c) the massive quantities of biomass, some of which is well-preserved and

appears not to have been transported great distances because of the preservation of fine structure. Chapter 8 by R.E. Taylor is a quite clear and well-presented explanation of carbon-14 dating and the challenge it poses to young-life creationists.

Some arguments are reasonable, although not quite as strong as the book makes them. In Chapter 12, the author notes that the Cenozoic mammal fauna of South America is endemic, then with time diverges from African fauna, while later families from North America are found in South America. He makes the case that this pattern is easily explained on the basis of a combination of evolution and plate tectonics. The model fits some of the data fairly well, but is remarkably difficult to test. He also believes (p 127) that evolution to the family level takes a long time. He compares the flora and fauna of Britain, which was established after the ice age and is similar to that of the mainland, with that of Japan and Hawaii. However, the example of dogs suggests that change within the family level can happen rapidly, at least under the right conditions. (The morphologic difference between bulldogs, greyhounds, poodles, and chihuahuas is at least as great as the difference between wolves, coyotes and foxes, and occurred within the last few thousand years.)

On the other hand, the point of much of the book is simply not clear. The author of Chapter 4 does not indicate what relationship plate tectonics has to the creation-evolution controversy. The same is true for the discussion of carbon-14 dating of bone (p 94-97). The chapter on fossil reefs (10) is short and not well argued or well documented. Chapter 11 is also not well documented. The argument likening the John Day to the Yellowstone fossil “forests” (p 158) could actually be considered an argument against the author’s position.

The book does not present an integrated, or even a unified position. Chapters 16-19 and 21 (on theology) do not clearly recommend a position, although the fact that they occur in this book strongly suggests that the authors have one. For example, on p 251 the author notes, “Their [the Biblical authors’] purpose was therefore apologetical and historical”; yet he never explains what he means by historical. He goes on to say that “This paper looks at Genesis 1 and 2, therefore, from the traditional Christian viewpoint that they constitute the oldest biblical data about creation...” (p 252). In Note 4, p 261, he states that he holds to the “Mosaic authorship of Genesis”, certainly different from his later stated position. However, in his conclusion he states that “I am willing to live with mystery and ambiguity” (p 261). One author (p 32-34) lets slip a

golden opportunity to argue for, or at least state, a definitive position. An exception appears on p 19-20, where S.C. Rowland appears to be a supernaturalist. He presents the conjecture that while Adam and Eve were at a heavenly council, a few microbes were left on Earth, and the devil engaged in genetic engineering for a billion years or so. The author emphasized that he did not put much stock in the theory.

The book usually does not address Creationist literature, and often seems dated when it does. This may partly be explained by the fact that the papers were originally presented in August 1985. Some papers are updated, some not, according to J. L. Hayward (p 14). One author still appears to be targeting George McCready Price. This leads to a logical flaw, when he labels rejection of the geologic column as “*Creation in Six Literal, 24-hour Days*” (p 32). His second category, “*Ecological Zonation*”, also accepts a creation in six literal 24-hour days. But he somehow sees the first position as the “real” creationist position. Similarly, another author (p 119) still seems to be fighting “[a]ttempts to explain away the evidence for an ‘ice age’”. Chapter 6, which discusses radiometric dating, completely ignores the work of John Woodmorappe and myself. My work (1997) is relatively recent and not well known, but Woodmorappe’s work (1979) has been around for some time and is worthy of at least passing mention. Chapter 9, on amino acid dating, does not reference R. H. Brown’s excellent article (1985) on amino acid racemization “constants”.

I found two exceptions to this observation. R.V. Gentry (1986) is referenced on p 77, and the author appears to have read Gentry’s 1976 article in *Science*, although he seems to miss the significance of that article. On p 92, the author, albeit indirectly, addresses the claim in Giam (1997) that residual carbon appears to have been detected in geologically old samples where it should no longer be present.

The book tends to ignore theological and historical difficulties. On p 48, the author points out that Buckland tried to deal with the problem of pain and suffering in animals, but doesn’t comment on how successful (or rather, unsuccessful) he was. Chapter 20 recognizes that “If it [*kol-ha’arets*] were the only phrase implying universality in the [Flood] narrative, it could easily be taken either way. Numerous other expressions denoting universality, however, almost certainly imply that *kol-ha’arets* in the flood narrative was likewise intended to express all-inclusive universality — from the limited ancient worldview” (p 270-271). The author fails to give a model where historical events could be

interpreted by reasonable witnesses in the way described in Genesis 6-9. He also ignores the fact that the Ark is recorded as landing in the mountains of Ararat, or Urartu. This account, if true, should have left some geologic traces, which he does not even attempt to deal with.

The same is true for another author who states: "It is a fallacy to elevate the Deluge narrative to the level of a Bible doctrine, or to suggest that any doctrine is dependent on it" (p 286). He simply does not deal with Jesus' apparently uncritical use of the Flood story. In an oddly titled chapter (the reverse of Mark 2:27), a theologian argues that the Sabbath can be supported without reference to a six-day creation. However, he misses the more important question: Can the Sabbath be supported in the face of the denial of a six-day creation?

The one major exception to this avoidance of theological difficulties is Chapter 23. J.W. Provonsha tackles head-on the problem of suffering in the presumably pre-Adamic world, and concludes that the only realistic theological option if the geologic column extends back beyond Adam is that the life forms recorded in the geologic column are essentially demonic in origin. Provonsha makes a cogent case for his position.

The book is sometimes condescending. Chapter 25 seems to imply that short-age creationists are at a lower level of spiritual development than those accepting a longer age for life on Earth. The conclusion (p 350) also illustrates this condescending attitude. The writer implies that the conservative is a "weaker brother" and is "still on a milk diet" and has not yet "advanced to solid food." The book can also be triumphalistic, as in some comments on p 13 and the comments on Ritland (e.g., p 7). In some of these passages Ritland's more conservative colleagues are denigrated, unfairly it seems to me.

Some papers show a lack of scientific imagination. For example, one author (p 66) notes that modern carbonates deposit in clear water. It is at least possible that deposits from a Flood would not be strictly analogous to modern deposits. The same is true for halite (p 69), which may indicate modes of deposition not operative today. Another author (p 107) assumes that the bottom of the ocean has always been around 1° or 2° C. Most flood models would strongly indicate a warm (if not hot) ocean bottom. A third author (p 275) wants someone "to explain where all the water deep enough to cover Mount Everest went in about seven months (Genesis 8:1-14)." Standard creationist models have Mount Everest rising during the Flood, so the much lower land initially could easily have been covered with water. Some parts of the book use

Scripture rather loosely. The same goes for Ellen White (e.g., Chapter 15) and recent history (e.g., p 13). At some points the theological reasoning could use some improvement, as in Chapter 22.

The book makes one unintentional point. In Chapter 3, the story is told of William Buckland, and the author shows how the acceptance of previous ages (even with special creation for those ages) gradually led, and presumably will continue to lead, to the abandonment of any kind of Flood geology. Buckland did not think he was giving up on the historicity of the Flood when he started, but he did eventually give up. Those contemplating following his footsteps may wish to consider the eventual destination.

The book was a bit of a disappointment for me. I had hoped to read a carefully written scientifically informed document that thoughtfully evaluated alternative viewpoints and attempted to be objective. Instead, the book exhibited little rigor in its thought, little understanding of opposing viewpoints, little consciousness of its own weaknesses, and too much of a triumphalistic tone. It did have a few points to make, and it will be helpful because of that. I especially appreciated the chapter by Provonsha. But overall, the book is not nearly the book it could have been.

## **LITERATURE CITED**

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