

# NEWS AND COMMENTS

## A NEW JOURNAL ON CATASTROPHISM

In 1785 James Hutton of Edinburgh published the epoch-making book *Theory of the Earth* in which he proposed that present geologic processes were responsible for past changes in the surface of the earth. This concept is in contrast to the then-prevailing idea of one to several major catastrophes as the most important past geologic agents. In 1830 the English geologist Charles Lyell originated the term "uniformitarianism" to describe Hutton's views. The concept is succinctly stated as: the present is the key to the past. This uniformitarian principle has dominated geological thought in a fairly strict way for nearly two centuries while the opposite view, called "catastrophism," has been considered unacceptable.

Recently, however, there has been a serious trend towards catastrophism in geological thinking. Though not a return to the classical catastrophism consisting of a few major worldwide events, catastrophes are now commonly being accepted as geologic agents, while strict uniformitarianism is being downgraded largely by redefining the term so that it applies to the principles of science rather than to geologic processes. It is no longer considered that the present geologic processes represent the only way geologic features were formed in the past.

Evidence of this trend appears in a new journal entitled *Catastrophist Geology*. Published in Brazil by Johan B. Kloosterman, the journal has an impressive list of editors and assistants mainly from Europe and the U.S.A. It is "dedicated to the study of discontinuities in earth history." This journal does not intend to be conventional. It also aims at publishing on subjects neglected or tabooed in the mainstream geological literature; its tone sometimes indicates that its editors would not mind causing a catastrophe themselves. Only two issues have appeared thus far. The first one deals more with basic issues of conventional science, while the second one has more information dealing with catastrophes.

Included in the contents of the first issue are articles entitled: "Scientific Censorship and Thought Control" and "Whimsical Aspects of Scientific Theory." This issue also contains a long section of interesting, though somewhat redundant, responses to the announcement of the publication of the journal. The second issue starts with a significant section in readership response to the first issue. Articles include: "Catastrophism and Uniformitarianism," "Mass Movements in Level Areas," "Overnight Valley Formation in São Nicolau," and "The Martian Deluge."

The journal is to be commended for breaking away from traditional constraints. It is of great interest to anyone concerned with catastrophism

or seeking for new geological ideas and explanations. It is hoped that its editorial policies will not take it too far from the control of empirical data.

*Catastrophist Geology* can be obtained by writing to the publisher, Johan B. Kloosterman, Caixa Postal 41.003, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Cost for “four biannual issues” is U.S. \$10 (NOTE: Thus far *Origins* costs less!).

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