

LITERATURE REVIEWS

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A NATURAL UNION

SCIENTIFIC THEOLOGY. Paul A. L. Giem. 1997. Riverside, CA: La Sierra University Press. 291 p. Paper, \$17.99.

Reviewed by R.H. Brown, Yucaipa, California

Individuals who are seeking a rational harmony between science and religion based on the Bible may expect fresh insight, stimulation, and assurance from this book. Dr. Giem gives a broad-based and candid appraisal of some areas of misinterpretation that has contributed to disharmony between science and religion. In the Introduction he states that:

...theology has something worthwhile to say to science,...[and] science,...in particular scientific methodology, can make a real contribution to theology (p viii, ix).

The character of the book is portrayed by the following quotations from Chapter 1:

The thesis of this book is that science and theology have profound interactions with each other (p 12).

Science and theology both approximate truth, and therefore must fit together harmoniously where they overlap. We do not have one truth for science and another for theology (p 12).

...good theology must incorporate science, and other systems of fact such as history, into its structure (p 15).

...a good theory (or doctrine) should make unambiguous, falsifiable, and yet accurate predictions (p 28).

The author sets the tone of the following chapters by his statements that

...the majority of scientists have been mistaken in the past, and there is no guarantee that the conclusions of today are free from error” (p 14),

and that

...most theologians do not have the grasp of science necessary to treat the relationship between science and theology as carefully as I believe will be done here. They either tend to be overwhelmed by science, or to ignore it (p 31).

The treatment of the nature of physical reality in Chapter 2 draws heavily on modern quantum physics theory and experiment. Readers who become overwhelmed by the technical discussion should be prepared to proceed resolutely to the conclusion that scientific evidence indicates physical reality is the ongoing expression of intelligence, rather than the consequences of innate properties of independently existing matter. This is a crucial consideration for the evolution/creation controversy.

A stimulating discussion of criteria for establishing the credibility and authority role of manuscripts (the Bible and the Koran, e.g., as well as scientific treatises) and individuals (Moses and Mohammed, e.g., as well as prominent scientists) runs through Chapters 3 and 4. In his discussion regarding the book of Daniel, Giem notes that disbelief is generally the parent, not the offspring of higher criticism that challenges the validity of historical data in the Bible (see p 99).

Chapter 5, “The Pentateuch and Joshua,” is a book within a book (80 pages of a 270-page total). It contains scientific data on radioisotope dating that to my knowledge has never been published before in creationist literature. Without hesitation I recommend it as essential resource material for everyone who is concerned with radioisotope age interpretations that conflict with the young-earth testimony of Moses. Giem’s suggestions concerning the increase of radioisotope age with depth in the geologic column will be appreciated by a wide range of readers. After reviewing all aspects of the scientific evidence, he concludes that “the difficulties of interpretation within an evolutionary time scale are far worse than those within a creationist time scale” (p. 148).

In anticipation that it will encourage reading of the entire book, I will quote a concluding paragraph from Chapter 5:

If we are committed to following the weight of evidence we are led to discount theistic evolution and multiple creations as explanations of life on earth. We may also discount the (creationist) theory that decay constants have varied significantly with time, at least back to the Flood. And if it needed any further demonstration, mechanistic evolution is thoroughly discredited. Creationism may not have solved all its problems, but it has solved the major ones, and it is not unreasonable to believe that the rest will be solved with further study, whereas theories requiring millions of years for life (including theistic evolution and multiple creations) appear incapable in principle of solving the ¹⁴C problem, and there is solid evidence that they are wrong in their interpretation of other dating methods (p 189).

In Chapters 6-10 the development of scientific theology is extended to the usual range of theological concerns — the nature of God, sin, the Ten Commandments, salvation, human responsibility, and life after death. The author's approach to these topics is intellectually stimulating, and will enhance the quality of religious experience for many readers.

The book concludes with a four-page summary (Chapter 11) in which the author says:

Throughout the book I have endeavored not only to argue for positions which I thought were sound, but to avoid overstating my arguments and to instead give alternative positions and their rationales (p 269).

[There are a number of unfortunate, minor errors in the first printing of this book. Some line drawings are difficult to understand without correction. Readers who have a copy of the first printing should obtain a list of corrections, from either the publisher, or via e-mail from the author: <PGiem@ahs.llumc.edu>.]