

Adventists can make a significant contribution to reawakening the Christian social conscience through both scholarship and social action. As Wirt says, "There is no escaping responsibility. Christians are to work, to plant, to build, to pray, and to bring men to God while it is day, for the night cometh when no man can work" (p. 112).

A Pilgrim's Progress

BRIAN S. BULL

76

A SEARCH FOR MEANING IN NATURE

By Richard M. Ritland

Mountain View, California: Pacific Press 1970 320 pp \$2.95

Bernard Ramm has pointed out that there are two traditions in the study of the relationship between Scripture and science. "There is the ignoble tradition that has taken a most unwholesome attitude toward science and has used arguments and procedures not in the better traditions of established scholarship. There has been and is a noble tradition in Bible and science, and this is the tradition of the great and learned evangelical Christians who have been patient, genuine, and kind and who have taken great care to learn the facts of science and Scripture."¹

A Search for Meaning in Nature by Richard Ritland is, above all things, patient, genuine, and kind — too patient and perhaps too kind for Adventists, who are accustomed to polemics in their science and to facile and spectacular answers. This is a most unusual book on science to have come from an Adventist publishing house: it is undeniably Christian, but nowhere is it identifiably Adventist.

Ritland is a thoroughly professional scientist. His areas of expertise, though broad, are not universal. His choice of subject matter seems to indicate that he feels most comfortable in the scientific disciplines of geology and comparative anatomy. *A Search for Meaning in Nature* is a "pilgrim's progress" of one man in his search for cohesiveness and order. In addition, however, it is a fascinating ramble through nature in the company of a competent naturalist who is a born teacher. Thus the book may appeal to readers on two levels. Read superficially, it will appear as a commentary on selected interesting and unique natural phenomena, a selection without obvious unity. Readers who have wrestled with problems similar to the ones that perplex the author, and who identify with his intense need for satisfying answers, will appreciate the caliber of his scholarship and the agony and soul-searching that this book represents.

Ritland opens with a brief historical sketch of why Darwinism swept the world. He lays much of the blame, and rightly so, at the feet of sincere but misguided clerics. (With friends like these, who needs enemies?)

Chapter two is an investigation into the limitations of knowledge. This discourse is fundamental to the remainder of the book, since it clearly delineates the approach that Ritland has taken to the "facts" he later quotes. The reader must appreciate the

points raised, or much of what follows will be opaque. Ritland quotes the following illustration of Karl Popper. (It is a concept referred to in one form or another by all Adventist authors discussing the life sciences. Most have let it stand as is, but Ritland commendably balances it later with a quotation from Alan T. Waterman.)

The empirical basis of objective science has thus nothing "absolute" about it. Science does not rest upon rock bottom. The bold structures of its theories rise, as it were, above a swamp. It is like a building erected on piles. The piles are driven down from above into the swamp, but not to any natural or "given" base; and when we cease our attempts to drive our piles into a deeper layer, it is not because we have reached firm ground. We simply stop when we are satisfied that they are firm enough to carry the structure, at least for the time being.²

77

Adventists manifest a peculiar schizophrenia about the reliability of science. When scientific findings agree with our practices, we quote the authorities and invest them in our minds with infallibility. When we disagree, we are quick to point out the deficiencies and inadequacies of the scientific method and intimate that those who hold contrary views are either charlatans or fools. Ritland presents the more considered approach of Waterman:

Anyone can challenge the alleged facts and theories of science. If he can prove his point within the scientific community by observations, experiments or reasoning that others can repeat and verify, then his contribution becomes an integral part of the body of science. . . . Generally speaking, and contrary to popular view, these revisions commonly take the form of refinements or increased generality and only occasionally bring about a revolutionary overthrow of existing principles. The impressive result is that the edifice of science has a strength and ability which is dynamic and resilient rather than static and brittle.³

Ritland's is not an easy book to read. The diversity of topics covered is great. Frozen mammoths in Alaska and the principle of entropy are discussed, as are *Australopithecus* and his ilk, along with the theory of recapitulation. To the uninitiated, the juxtaposition of such apparently unrelated topics must appear most confusing. Logic, however, is present. Virtually all of the topics discussed have been adduced in conservative Christian literature as proofs of the truth of Creation or as indicators of the falsity of the evolutionary hypothesis. In essence this book is a personal quest by a dedicated scientist via those channels which have been touted by others as solutions. Obviously the author found no easy answers. It is clear from the preface that he did not expect them.

Nature, as C. S. Lewis has observed, does not teach: "The tendency to take her as a teacher is obviously very easily grafted onto the experience which we call love of nature. But it is only a graft. While we are actually subjected to them, the 'moods' and 'spirits' of nature point no morals. Overwhelming gaiety, insupportable grandeur, sombre desolation are flung at you. Make what you can of them, if you must make at all. The only imperative that nature utters is, Look. Listen. Attend."⁴ Neither the creationist nor the evolutionist can ever develop from nature an open and shut argument in favor of his particular approach. Any author who fails to concede this point is not a trustworthy guide through the natural world.

As one would expect, *A Search for Meaning in Nature* is fair to opposing views. It is so fair, in fact, that occasionally the clarity of the text suffers. For example, on page 164 the author states: "The creationist should recognize . . . that the existence of gaps, the apparent absence of transitional series between major groups of animals and plants, is not in itself proof that such forms never existed. But on the other side of the picture, the evolutionist must also recognize that apparent absence of certain groups of higher animals and plants in lower strata likewise is not proof that these forms of life were not in existence at the time."

As one man's personal search for meaning, this book will not appeal to everyone. To read it requires concentration; sometimes the problems presented have not been dealt with in a compelling or gripping manner. The whole exercise may seem futile to those who have never asked the appropriate questions. To those who have personally wrestled with the problems of origins and purposes of Creation, however, and who have sought answers in the natural world by means of the scientific method, this work is invaluable.

REFERENCES

- 1 Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1954).
- 2 Warren Weaver, The imperfections of science, *The American Scientist*, pp. 99-113 (March 1961).
- 3 Alan T. Waterman, The changing environment of science, *Science*, pp. 13-18 (January 1, 1965).
- 4 C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Incorporated 1960).

Professors' Porridge

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THEOLOGICAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

Prepared by SDA Theological Seminary Professors

Edited by Sakae Kubo, Charles Sandefur, Jim Walters

Berrien Springs, Michigan 49104: Andrews University 1970 \$1.50

This list of "basic books for the minister's library" makes no reference to its purpose, beyond the implications of its title. The intent must be drawn from its content, therefore. My first impression is that the contributors have listed titles which for the greater part would tend to confirm that which the Seventh-day Adventist clergyman already believes about theological questions. The organization of the materials reflects the structure of the seminary curriculum. From the standpoint of enlarging and updating a college or seminary experience or supplementing a scanty theological education, the bibliography offers safe guidelines. On the critical side, I want to call attention to the arrogant style of the annotations: