

Another Look At the Problem Of Origins

Review by Molleurus Couperus

The Two-Tailed Dinosaur

by Gerald W. Wheeler

Southern Publishing Association, 224 pp., \$7.95

One striking aspect of this book is its cover. The title makes one stop for a moment, but it is the photograph on the cover that causes astonishment. It shows a human footprint within that of a three-toed dinosaur. Anyone acquainted with fossil footprints knows that such an association of superimposed human and dinosaur tracks has never been found, but a layman might easily be deceived in believing that such a fossil imprint actually exists. Without an explanation that this is a photograph of a man-made mud preparation, the picture is deceptive for many.

This is a book on the relation of science and religion, or rather theology. The author limits his subject to "one aspect of science and its history—the problem of origins," and he expresses the hope that it "will help both evolutionists and special creationists understand some of the factors which have led to the present situation in the controversy between the two concepts."

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Wheeler first mentions briefly the various extant evolutionary theories, and then does the same for several theories of special creationism. He follows with a historical overview of scientific theories relating to the origin of life and the earth, moving rapidly from the early Greek philosophers to modern times, and relating these theories to the Christian views of creation. The author has selected his material well, and discusses the problems with considerable insight. He finds himself here in the midst of the dilemma that is really the central issue of the book, namely the relation of the words and interpretation of scripture to the facts and theories of science and history. Writes Wheeler:

Such biblical evidence, especially the first few chapters of Genesis, provided the basis for the Christian doctrine of special creation. But the human mind is not content with just accepting basic statements or principles. It wants to interpret them, to determine their implications, to explore further. Without such a trait, man could not advance intellectually, materially, or spiritually. Unfortunately, others may later find an interpretation to be misleading or mistaken when tested against subsequent discovery. Certain pre-Darwinian interpretations of the Bible turned out to be one such case. . . . Since special revelation claims a higher authority than the usual chan-

nels of information and since it often ventures into areas beyond the scope of known historical and scientific methods of study, we have a smaller body of evidence to guide us to its correct meaning. Ordinarily, we have historical or physical data as clues to how we should interpret and understand a phenomenon, an event, or a message. Such evidence points out many erroneous interpretations and conclusions. But special revelation lacks such guides. Most of the time, we cannot test it through the senses or compare it against known reality.

Here perhaps the author has limited the student of scripture too much in his search for meaning. Certainly, modern philology and linguistics are able to shed a great deal of light on the meaning of scripture, as does the study of its contemporary culture, history and literature. Wheeler seems, however, to agree that new scientific facts and insights may cause a change in faulty interpretations of scripture.

The author then suggests that in a world created with the appearance of an age far greater than its real age no laboratory tests, or field or historical research, could be used to find an answer as to its correct age. He then states:

Trapped as we are within our limited experience, we can judge special revelation only within its own framework. We look at it for internal logic by checking to see if its various parts harmonize with or contradict each other. To evaluate an interpretation of a statement of special revelation, we test the interpretation for internal consistency and logic. Also we can await further revelation to clarify parts we don't understand or have misinterpreted.

We must ask a question here. What if this theory of a deceptive age of the earth is all wrong, and the earth is really as old as laboratory tests and historical research indicate? Would it be God who keeps us from learning this, or are our own preconceived opinions or misinterpretations doing it? Wheeler at least mentions such a possibility. The struggle is often not so much between science and revelation as between presuppositions and science. The author recognized this problem when, apparently referring to the pre-Darwinian period, he states: "Special creation lost its influence because it refused to reexamine some of its beliefs in the light of new data."

After discussing the failure of the doctrine of the fixity of species to survive, Wheeler concludes: "Time proved the rigid, pre-Darwinian concept of special creationism to be incorrect." In the next chapter dealing with the history of conceptual frameworks, he adds the following observation:

Before Darwin, creationism had been long nurturing the seeds of its own destruction. Their sprouting went comparatively unnoticed, and it was slow at first. An example of the development of one seed appears in how pre-Darwinian special creationism handled the problem of evil in a world supposedly created by a good God.

Most of one chapter in the book is devoted to the weaknesses in the theory of evolution as acknowledged by Darwin and Huxley, and as reemphasized and elaborated later by others. Two chapters deal with "the mighty power of science textbooks" and "the California creation controversy." The last chapter, entitled "Science Is No Greater Than the Scientist," precedes two long appendices, one dealing with the Genesis creation account, the other presenting a "flood theory paradigm."

One might wish that the author had given more space to a discussion of the current views of creationists which differ from those of Wheeler, and that he had presented and discussed the difficulties which face the particular flood theory which he favors. Wheeler does briefly review in the early part of the book some of the flood theories that were developed and later rejected, but he might have discussed more adequately the reasons for their rejection. Although the book is not devoted primarily to a discussion of the biblical deluge, the author makes it clear that his views regarding it are crucial to his concepts of creation, and thus they become exceedingly important.

This book, dealing historically with the conflict between scientific observations and theories, and theological persuasions, suggests also an ongoing struggle within the author himself for ever better insights in this area. As he writes in the preface: "This book is offered only as a beginning. . . . Glancing over the galleys, I see topics and areas I now wish I had explored or developed further. Additional research has slightly modified some of my views. . . . If I started over again I am sure that I would revise

some of my historical conclusions even further.”

This is a stimulating, well-written book, and well documented. If there should be a second edition, this reviewer would look forward to it with deep interest.

Adventist History

Review by Gary Land

Windows: Selected Readings in Seventh-day Adventist Church History, 1844-1922
Compiled by Emmett K. Vande Vere
Southern Publishing Association, 319 pp.,
\$10.00

As Ron Graybill wrote in a recent SPECTRUM issue, a new Adventist history is in the making. Whereas most previous histories have been either memoirs or apologetics, now the professional historians are getting into the act, casting a critical eye at the sources as they attempt to reconstruct the Adventist past. Such an evolution, it should be noted, is a common occurrence in the development of historical writing.

One of the historians who has played a role in creating this new Adventist history is Emmett K. Vande Vere, whose *Wisdom Seekers*, published in 1972, told the story of Andrews University. Having taught denominational history for many years, Dr. Vande Vere has become familiar with the primary sources. Out of these materials, he put together a collection of readings for use in his teaching. Although the manuscript was not originally intended for publication, when Southern Publishing Association learned of it they expressed an interest in putting it before the Adventist public. Titled *Windows*, a not very informative name apparently implying “windows on the past,” the resulting book should have wide use in denominational history classes; it should be of interest to the general reader.

Organized topically within a generally chronological framework, *Windows* addresses the prin-

cipal movers and developments that shaped Adventism. While many of the subjects—the Disappointment and doctrinal positions such as the Sabbath and Conditional Immortality—have traditionally appeared in Adventist histories, others—geographical expansion and organizational growth—reflect the broader interests of the professional historian. In other words, Adventist historical writing is moving toward a greater appreciation of Adventism’s development as a social institution, although much remains to be done. The readings have been drawn from a wide variety of sources, both published and unpublished. As one would expect, the majority are from the *Review and Herald* and Ellen White writings, but letters, diaries, and even the Pitcairn Logbooks make frequent appearance.

Although the author has not organized his work within a general interpretive framework, his selections indicate that he is primarily interested in Adventist history as it was acted out by and as it influenced individual people. Rather than only printing official statements on tithing, for instance, he focuses on Rufus A. Underwood, president of the Ohio Conference, giving several selections that reveal Underwood’s growing understanding and acceptance of the tithing principle which led to his active support. This approach has the advantage of attracting the reader’s interest and reflects history’s traditional humanistic orientation. But it has limitations as well; much could be told about tithing’s impact, in this case, by the inclusion of statistical tables. One of the challenges to future writers of Adventist history will be to take advantage of the social science techniques that will deepen our understanding of Adventist history while writing our history humanistically so that it will attract readers.

Windows illustrates one other challenge to Adventist historical writing: it ends in 1922. Although Dr. Vande Vere goes beyond the usual stopping point of the move to Washington, D.C., the twentieth century remains virtually untouched. Admittedly, the denomination becomes more complex in the present century but that very complexity necessitates our search for understanding. The largely completed first volume of *Studies in Adventist History* and Richard Schwarz’s forthcoming textbook will sketch the broad outlines of this century’s

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