
Shifts in Adventist Creationism

by W.W. Hughes

No enlightened Adventist ought to have a shadow of doubt that this theory, that the fossils are capable of being arranged off in a definite sequence for the world as a whole, is one of the "theories that are of Satanic origin." . . . Incredible as it may seem, some Adventists are now saying that this definite order of the fossils is a fact after all, and that we will have to face this fact as a scientific reality and must shape our views accordingly.

George McCready Price,
Theories of Satanic Origin, 1950

Little did Price appreciate how true his subtle prediction would turn out to be. Within less than three decades many of the tenets of geological science would receive general acceptance within the Adventist scientific community and appear in the authoritative 1978 *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*.

In the half century (1900-1950) prior to the founding of the Geoscience Research Institute, Price was the major creationist champion within Adventism. At a time when geologists recognized order in the geologic column, thrust faults, the value of index fossils, and continental glaciation, Price denied their existence, as did Adventists generally.

When did such "theories of Satanic origin" become acceptable to Adventism? While Price's views were considered acceptable to the editors of the 1953 edition of the *SDA Bible Commentary*, other SDA views on geology were also present at the time when

that edition was prepared, notably those of Harold W. Clark. Price's pamphlet, "Theories of Satanic Origin," directed against Clark, his most illustrious student and fellow Adventist professor, was elicited by the favorable response Clark's views were receiving. Clark, still living, is today generally considered a stalwart conservative, a model of orthodoxy, and what Price would consider "revolutionary" and "satanic" ideas form the basis of the most widely used Adventist geological theory today—ecological zonation. That theory, one of several varying substantially from the views of Price, was first published by Clark in *New Diluvialism* in the spring of 1946.¹

Clark's contributions represent the largest single step taken by Adventism in understanding Earth history. For half a century Adventist apologists viewed the presumed order of the fossil-bearing rock strata as imaginary—something invented to bolster the supposed evolutionary procession of life through the ages. Then, within a generation almost all of the data had been used to support the "imaginary order" were now used to support the ecological zonation theory. "Infidel schemes" are no longer considered infidel.

Perhaps the most accurate and impressive documentation of the significant changes in Adventist interpretation may be seen by carefully comparing the introductory chapters on science and religion in the 1953 and 1978 editions of Volume 1 of the *SDA Bible Commentary* referred to above. The synop-

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sis of the two editions (see page 51) illustrates major changes in geological interpretations, most of which are a replacement of Price's views by a development with those proposed by Clark.

Two areas, therefore, that illustrate drastic changes in Adventist thinking are the recognition of order in the geologic column (including the reality of thrust faults and the

value of index or guide fossils) and continental glaciation. The basic interpretations that form the backbone of Price's numerous books (and also his *SDA Bible Commentary* article) are now almost universally rejected by both the Geoscience Research Institute staff at Loma Linda University and other Adventist geologists and biologists. Of Price's interpretations, a short chronology

Life of George McCready Price in Outline

George McCready Price was born in eastern Canada in 1870. When his widowed mother joined the Adventist Church, he too embraced that faith. During the early 1890s, young Price attended Battle Creek College in Michigan for two years and subsequently completed a teacher-training course at the provincial normal school in New Brunswick.

The turn of the century found him serving as principal of a small high school in an isolated part of eastern Canada, where one of his few companions was a local physician. The doctor and the teacher enjoyed discussing scientific matters, and the former almost succeeded in making an evolutionist of his fundamentalist friend. He was saved by prayer—and by reading Mrs. White's book *Patriarchs and Prophets*, which attributed the fossil record to the Noachian Flood. As a result of this experience, he decided on a scientific career championing what he called the "new catastrophism."

By 1906, Price was living in southern California and working as a handyman at the Loma Linda Sanitarium. That year he published a slim volume entitled *Illogical Geology: The Weakest Point in the Evolution Theory*.

During the next 15 years, Price taught in several Adventist schools and authored six more books attacking evolution, particularly its geological foundation. Shortly after the fundamentalist controversy entered its antievolution phase, Price published his *New Geology*, the most systematic and comprehensive of his two dozen or so books.

Despite attacks from the scientific establishment, Price's influence among non-Adventist fundamentalists grew rapidly. By the mid-1920s, the editor of *Science* could accurately describe Price as "the principal scientific authority of the Fundamentalists," and Price's byline was appearing with increasing frequency in a broad spectrum of religious periodicals: *The Sunday School Times* and *Moody Monthly* each published about a dozen of his articles, and such diverse journals as *Bibliotheca Sacra*, *Catholic World*, *Princeton Theological Review* and *The Bible Champion* eagerly

sought his literary services. Through his numerous articles and books, Price significantly altered the course of fundamentalist thought, in the direction of the traditional Adventist interpretation of Genesis.

On the eve of the Scopes trial in July 1925, in which a high school biology teacher in Dayton, Tenn., was found guilty of violating a state law prohibiting the teaching of evolution in public institutions, the high priest of fundamentalism, William Jennings Bryan, invited Price to assist the prosecution as an expert witness. Price was a logical choice, being both an acquaintance of Bryan's and the best-known scientist in the fundamentalist camp. Unfortunately, Price was teaching at the time in an Adventist college outside London and could not attend the trial. Instead, he wrote Bryan a letter advising him to avoid any scientific arguments and to charge the evolutionists with being un-American for compelling parents to pay taxes to have their child taught something that they considered anti-Christian.

Late in 1928, Price returned to the United States. He came to realize by the late 1930s that he was fighting for a lost cause. Not only was the public losing interest in his crusade, but even his own students were beginning to defect. The most traumatic defection was that of Harold W. Clark, who had studied with Price and then succeeded him as professor of geology at Pacific Union College.

In 1941, Price filed formal heresy charges against Clark with the Pacific Union Conference. A committee of leading Adventists met to investigate Price's charges, but the result proved inconclusive.

However, despite the rise of his students, Harold W. Clark and Frank Lewis Marsh, who themselves disagreed on the limits of speciation and the role of amalgamation, Price continued to influence Adventist science until his death in 1963 at age 93.

This outline is taken from " 'Sciences of Satanic Origin': Adventist Attitudes Toward Evolutionary Biology and Geology," by Ronald L. Numbers, Spectrum, Vol. 9, No. 4 (January 1979), pp. 22-26.

and the view that the Genesis Flood was an event with profound geological results in the crust of the earth are retained. But few of the arguments he used to support these conclusions are now considered valid. Although it is somewhat unsettling to those not in geology to discover how much Adventist views have changed, it is nevertheless a matter of record. Aside from the commentary articles it may be constructive to compare, for example, Price's *New Geology* or *Evolutionary Geology* of 1923 and 1926 with Clark's *New Diluvialism* of 1946 or Harold

G. Coffin's *Creation—Accident or Design* of 1968.

Clark may have recognized some of the philosophical implications of his ecological zonation theory. He was aware that his theory might indeed raise additional questions for Adventist scientists.²

Price believed that "Adventists have been saved from the maze of delusions and inconsistencies"³ resulting from the study of geology. History does not bear this out. Most of the fundamental points introduced by H.W. Clark, which caused G.M. Price

Life of Harold W. Clark in Outline

Harold W. Clark was born November 6, 1891, in a farmhouse near Melbourne, Quebec. When he was six, the family moved to Vermont, and shortly thereafter to South Lancaster, Massachusetts. While attending a public high school, Harold was urged to take the teachers' examination. This he did, and was certified to teach at age 17. Orvil O. Farnsworth hired Harold to teach church school in one room of his home in Jamaica, Vermont. Without formal teacher training, Harold "simply did what I had seen my teachers do in their schools." This was the beginning of a productive academic career lasting until 1956 at Pacific Union College and continuing at present from his home in Calistoga, California.

After eight years of teaching primary and secondary school in the Manitoba-Saskatchewan Conference, Clark was eager to complete a college education, so he moved his family to Angwin, California, where he could teach academy biology while attending college classes at Pacific Union College. It was during his first year that he enrolled in the course that was destined to profoundly influence his future career. The course, geology, was taught by George McCready Price. Clark received a great inspiration for study of the problems of creation vs. evolution,⁴ an inspiration that never faded.

Two years later, after Professor Price left Pacific Union College, Clark began to teach the geology class, a class that he taught for the next 25 years in addition to his regular biology courses.

In 1931 the Pacific Union College Board voted to allow Clark full salary and to pay all fees for graduate study at the University of California. He received his Master of Science in biology during the summer of 1933.

"In 1936 I was teaching the geology class one day and remarked about how the fossils were arbitrarily arranged (this was the common understanding of

SDA teachers at that time). One of my students, Otey Johnson, son of an oil promoter in Oklahoma, raised a question about that view. The fossils do occur in order, he asserted, and said this could be proved by the borings made for oil.

I wish you would come down to my home in Oklahoma and see this for yourself, he said.

I would be happy to do so, I replied, if you will pay travel costs.

Otey wrote to his father, and he sent the money for the railroad fare and paid my salary for a month. Otey and I traveled over 1500 miles in Oklahoma, and in northern Texas, visiting oil wells, interviewing oil geologists in their offices, and studying stratification in general. The result was that I came back with a much better understanding of geology than I had ever had. . . My favorite quotation had been that of Agassiz: Study nature, not books. . .

I immediately began intensive studies on geological literature and reports and continued this line for several years. In the spring of 1945 I gave a talk in the chapel on the geological evidence for the Flood. After it was over a student came to me—he was a mature man engaged in distribution of oil and gas—and said:

Why don't you publish something on that subject?

I would, I replied, if I had time.

How much time do you need?

Well, to do it right, I would need to spend a whole summer studying and writing, I answered.

Go ahead, he told me, and I will pay your salary while you write.

The result of this was that by the spring of 1946 my *New Diluvialism* was published. I distributed it myself, and during the next few years sold about 2000 copies."

This outline draws on the "Autobiography of Harold W. Clark" Heritage Room, James White Library, Andrews University, 13 pages.

such deep concern, are now incorporated into Adventist interpretations of Earth history. Additional questions arising from Clark's ordering theory must now be answered.

As stated by H.W. Clark, the book set out three propositions differing somewhat from Price's interpretation of geology. Price wrote that the fossils represented the remnants of life provinces in the ancient world, but he did not recognize any sequence in the rocks. They were buried haphazardly. However, in Clark's study, he found evidence that the geological column—that is, the order of fossils from bottom up—was valid, and must be accounted for. It was one of two things, either by ages of slow deposition or the burial of the ancient world by rising waters. Since I was an ecologist, I saw that the eco-

logical zones gave an answer to the problem, and called my interpretation the ecological zonation theory.

Price did not recognize the presence of huge ice sheets over the northern part of North America. He attributed most of the so-called glacial phenomena to the Flood waters. However, Clark had been in the Sierras and other mountains, and traced these very phenomena to glaciers themselves.

Price did not admit of great lateral geological movements, known as overthrusts. He taught that the reverse order of the fossils in these rocks was natural, and that they had actually been laid down as we now see them. But Clark found enough evidence on this line to convince that there had been terrific movements of rocks, and he attributed them to the action of the Flood.⁴

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Harold W. Clark, *The New Diluvialism* (Angwin, California: Science Publications, 1946), p. 93. "It must not be supposed that the ecological zonation theory affords no questions nor possesses no unsolved problems. For that matter, neither does the popular geological theory. But the test of a theory is to a large extent its ability to explain the facts; in this respect the ecological zonation theory of geological sequence is seriously suggested as an alternative to the commonly accepted theory of long ages of time for the deposition of the fossiliferous rocks."

2. Although Clark's book *Genes and Genesis* (Pacific Press) was chosen by the Seventh-day Adventist Ministerial Association as the ministerial reading course selection for 1941, it was necessary for his *New Diluvialism* five years later to be published privately (Science Publications, Angwin, CA.)

3. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Volume 1 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1953), p. 74

4. For the development of Clark's views, compare his *Signs of the Times* articles of the 1920s and 1960s.

Appendix A

Table: Interpretation of the Geologic Column

	Founders 1820-1850	Price 1900-1950	Clark 1937-
Order of Strata	Yes	No	Yes
Guide Fossils	Yes	No	Yes
Species Change (Evolution)	No	No	Yes
			(lower table)
Species Change (Successive Creations)	Yes	No	No
Time (Long Ages)	Yes	No	No
Glaciation (Continental)	Yes(1837)	No	Yes
			(Post Flood)
Pleistocene (Flood Deposit)	Yes	Yes	No
			(Post Flood)
Biblical Flood	Yes	Yes	Yes
	(limited effect, surface deposits)		(vast effect) (virtually all of the geologic columns)

The Table compares interpretations made by geologists responsible for establishing the geologic column with the subsequent interpretations made by George McCready Price and Harold W. Clark.

Appendix B

Comparing the 1953 and 1978 Commentaries

The Writers

1953. The chapter entitled "Science and a Literal Creation," pp. 46-63, can be attributed to Frank L. Marsh, and the next chapter, "Evidences of a Worldwide Flood," to George McCready Price.

1978. The two chapter titles, "The Creationist Model of Origins" and "Genesis and Geology," can be attributed mainly to several new contributors to the revised edition—namely, Robert H. Brown, Harold W. Clark, Harold G. Coffin, and Ariel A. Roth.

Apologetic Approach

1953. The authors frequently attack the integrity of those with whom they disagree—primarily evolutionists. Statements such as "men were not capable of comprehending" (p. 47), "irreverent scientist merely feeds his ego" (p. 48), "peculiar sort of 'faith'" (p. 60), "twisted and misinterpreted" (p. 65), "fanciful speculations" (p. 66), "little better than fools" (p. 67), "so completely lacking in general education" (p. 70), "did not know enough mineralogy" (p. 70), "crude and unscientific ideas" (p. 74), "never think out what they are doing" (p. 79), "he forgets" (p. 80), "tricky argument" (p. 85), "dogmatic system of thinking" (p. 93), "no one with knowledge. . . will have the audacity" (p. 97), and "subterfuge" (p. 97).

1978. Personal attacks are absent. It is the interpretation of the data, not the men, which is questioned.

Serial Arrangement of Fossils

1953. The order of fossils was rejected: "from the beginning of their work in this field Adventists have refused to accept the serial arrangement of the fossils as true science" (p. 75).

1978. The authors accept the order of fossils: "the degree of uniqueness of fossils at different levels in the geologic column makes the ecological zonation model the best explanation for the fossil sequence in the context of a flood model" (p. 87).

Index Fossils

1953. "But crude, unscientific ideas about the value of index fossils as time markers still prevail in geology, in spite of a multitude of discoveries on all continents and in the deep ocean that plainly contradict them" (p. 74).

1978. "It (ecological zonation) also explains the presence of index fossils" (p. 87).

Stratified Oceanic Deposits

1953. "There are no stratified beds of any kind now forming in the deep waters of the seas and oceans" (p. 91).

Since the deep-sea drilling project (DSDP) began in the 1950s, sedimentary deposits have been found in all ocean basins studied. This knowledge is used in Flood modeling in the 1978 edition.

1978. ". . . isostatic adjustment would raise the original highlands higher, facilitating further erosion, while thicker sediments accumulated in pre-flood seas" (p. 84).

**Plate Tectonics
(Continental Drift)**

1953. "Hence, even if fossils were forming in the deep ocean, there is no method now operating by which the bottoms of the seas and oceans could be made into dry land on a large scale" (p. 91).

1978. "Tentative suggestions" 1. Subsidence of continents model, 2. Reversal of continents and oceans model (pp. 83-85). (Both models invoke plate tectonics and require the vertical and possible horizontal motion of the continents).

Continental Glaciation

1953. "Agassiz shouted 'Glaciers'; but few scientists then, and none since, have been sufficiently the slaves of a fanatical theory to try to imagine continental glaciers under the broiling tropical sun at or near the sea level" (p. 84).

1978. "Evidence of glaciation is found in a number of places in the geologic record of the past. The most important and least questionable evidence for glaciation is found in the Pleistocene, the Permian-Carboniferous and the Precambrian. The Pleistocene, the most important and least questioned of all, is assumed by many creationists to be a post-flood glaciation phenomenon" (p. 93).

**Thrust Faults
(Out of Order Strata)**

1953. "The many notorious cases called 'thrust faults' complete the proof that the fossils were contemporary, not consecutive. They are simply reversed 'deceptive conformities,' and were deposited as we find them. The fantastic fables invoked to account for them are wholly unscientific in spirit and incredible in respect to fact" (p. 97).

1978. "A number of creationists have denied the sequential arrangement of fossils in the geologic column by pointing out that in some places this arrangement does not hold and that so-called older rocks rest on top of younger ones. They argue that since there are exceptions to the general order of fossils in the geologic column, the theory of evolution is invalidated. Unfortunately, the examples usually given are from geologically disturbed areas such as the Rocky Mountains and the Alps. These can be explained by uplift and sliding of the older rocks over the younger, a scenario supported in some cases by convincing field data" (p. 77).

Taken from the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Vol. 1, 1953, pp. 64-97; and Vol. 1, 1978, pp. 46-97.