

GENESIS AND SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY by Aldert van der Ziel. T. S. Denison and Company, Inc., Minneapolis, Minn., 1965. 209 pp., \$4.50. (Also see related article entitled "Science and Beginning" by the same author in JASA 18:15-18, Mar. 1966)

There are many of us in the ASA and indeed in the church at large for whom reconciling Genesis and modern science is still very much a problem. We want fervently to hold the line on an inspired, inerrant Bible and yet we are - too often secretly - convinced that the findings of science in the areas of evolution, paleontology and anthropology are not to be refuted. Many conservatives who have dealt with this problem have suggested views that can best be called temporary, and there is still the quest for a final, overall viewpoint competent both to hold the historic faith and to meet without fear any new finding by science. In "Genesis and Scientific Inquiry" author van der Ziel points the way to what may well be a possible final viewpoint that meets the above criteria. There will be some disagreement as to whether or not the solution is conducive to holding the faith, but the author's thesis is internally consistent and is quite capable of fielding new as well as old scientific results.

The first two chapters of the book are critical, as they give the author's basic approach to reconciling

Genesis and science and his ground rules for exegesis of the biblical text. These views are then applied to Genesis 1:1 to 12:9 in chapters 3 to 11. Chapters 12 to 16 present a summary of the methods of science and many of the findings of science in the various fields relating to the Genesis account of creation, and a concluding chapter draws together the most significant contributions of the book.

The key to overcoming problems generated by early Genesis, according to van der Ziel, is to let Genesis speak for itself - a tantalizingly simple formula. In so doing, one must accept the fact that it was written within the framework of thought of the ancient middle east. Neither science nor necessarily reliable history can be expected from the framework, but this is no matter. The writers were not primarily interested in the framework but in recording the "Heilsgeschichte," or account of God's dealings with man in working out His plan of salvation. They saw as their task the need to explain such things as the origin of the sun, moon, stars and the creation of living creatures, especially man. Their explanations, though not scientific in the sense that the question "what happened" can be answered, are nonetheless binding because they convey the proper relationship of the world to God, declaring Him to be its creator and our creator. In fact, the first 12 chapters of Genesis are intensely theological, bringing message after message of God as creator, and as initiator of a relationship of grace with a desperately sinful human race.

The author points out that science gives an entirely different approach to the problem of beginnings, and is really not able to answer questions the Bible deals with but instead must limit its answers to the questions "what is happening now," and "what happened in the past." The result, says van der Ziel, is a more perfect view of reality because the two approaches are complementary. Modern science comes into the theological picture because it is our task to transmit the biblical message within the framework of the modern world. For example, instead of appearing as a threat to the biblical view of creation, evolution emerges as the best answer yet to the "how" of creation, thus clarifying the Christian concept of creation.

To bring out the theological message of the text, the author draws heavily on the results of the German Old Testament scholar Gerhard von Rad. Early Genesis is seen as several literary traditions joined together by an unknown editor, all dating from 950 B.C. and younger. Far from being apologetic for using the results of higher criticism, van der Ziel claims that the method helps to avoid conflicts between science and the biblical message because it distinguishes between the message and the framework.

The author emphasizes repeatedly that the distinction between the theological message and the ancient framework may give the "solution to most of the seeming conflicts between science and the Bible . . ." (p. 199). He labors over the text in calling forth the theological message, careful to give meaning to details that are often overlooked or misinterpreted. One instance is the account of Eve's creation. It is suggested that the purpose of the story of the rib is to show the God-instituted basis of the strong attraction between the sexes, rather than an attempt at explaining the method whereby God created woman. The flavor of the story is admittedly magical and mythological, but the message transcends the language and the flavor so that it is incorrect to speak of the story as simply a myth. Similarly, Adam is not seen as a historical person but as the representative of the human race and was introduced to bring the message that we are God's

creation, that we have a God-given task in our work and a God-given marriage relationship, and that sin is as ancient as the human race.

At the end of each of the chapters dealing with relevant areas of science there is a section entitled "Theological Conclusions." Here many of the controversial issues are joined, as the author examines a number of ideas currently held by many Christians. Especially singled out for criticism are those who are so anxious-to defend the integrity of the Bible that they will misrepresent science, e.g., giving the impression that dating methods are quite unreliable and that the evidence does not favor acceptance of the evolutionary theory.

The author is occasionally guilty of oversimplification. This is perhaps inevitable in attempting, as he does, to present literary criticism to the conservative theologian, modern science to the non-scientist, and an interpretation of early Genesis to everyone - all in 194 pages of text. For example, the account of the various literary traditions found in chapter 2 would hardly satisfy an Old Testament scholar, especially concerning the dating of the traditions. And in this regard, the author on p. 17 may well be engaging in wishful thinking when he asserts that "quite conservative Old Testament scholars" commonly accept the view "that the first six books of the Bible are composed of large blocks of different literary traditions."

"Genesis and Scientific Inquiry" is hardly a book that will warm a staunch conservative heart. It isn't intended to be. Largely, because of the present doctrine to come to grips with the crucial issues presented by van der Ziel. As the author says, a new interpretation of the doctrine is needed, one that will allow us to distinguish between the message and the framework. Until this is done, science will continue to appear as a threat to many Christians, especially clergy, because it is obvious that early Genesis and modern science will never be truly harmonized. (To this end, the article "A Perspective on Scriptural Inerrancy" by Richard H. Bube [JASA 15:86-92] is quite relevant.)

Those who are not satisfied with their present viewpoint regarding science and early Genesis may find van der Ziel's presentation a reassuring, live option. On the other hand, they may be greatly disturbed by the apparent sacrifices one must make in order to solve (or, dissolve) the centuries-old problems confronting the Christian church in these areas. In the long run, however, the kind of approach suggested by the author is bound to have a healthy influence on the Christian community. Reducing the tensions in the area of the Bible and science, and removing the onus of mistrust from the heads of the scientists are certainly worthy of much effort. When this effort is clearly made by a believer and given as much thought as is evident in "Genesis and Scientific Inquiry," then we must pay very careful attention to what is said.

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