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## Christianity and the Age of the Earth (Book Review)

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approaches is that they fail to lay the claim of Christ's lordship over all of life, including sociology. The positivistic approach can be readily recognized as unacceptable because its assumptions and methods are so forthright, but the "gleaning" strategy can be equally dangerous. For under the name of Christian, a whole field of endeavor is literally allowed to go to hell accompanied by sincere, but ineffective, comment from Christian scholars.

Grunlan and Reimer in *Christian Perspectives on Sociology* have fallen victim to the "gleaning" strategy. The reader they have compiled is useful in itself, but is designed as a supplement to secular texts. Consequently the book is brief in some areas, such as on economics, status and roles, and silent on other important sociological issues, such as women, aging, and less-developed cultures. Of course, there is no need to set up a straw-man here. Grunlan and Reimer never intended their reader to be comprehensive, and that is the problem! *Christian Perspectives on Sociology*, if it is to live up to its title, and Christian sociologists, if they are to be obedient to Christ's lordship, must press His claim on the whole discipline of sociology. And here lies the very basis for my disagreement with Grunlan and Reimer. They admit at the outset,

That while the authority of the Bible must be respected, it is not a Christian sociology that is advocated. The discipline of sociology is in itself neutral and descriptive, not normative. (p. 20)

It is at this point that Reformed students and scholars must point to the dangerous dualism implied in any such assumption of neutrality, and present instead the Biblical imperative for obedience in every part of man's endeavor. For Christian sociologists that means biblically-based assumptions, theoretical constructs consistent with Christianity, research motivated by

*Christianity and the Age of the Earth*, by Davis A. Young. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982. 188 pp. Reviewed by Russell Maatman, Professor of Chemistry.

One might expect this book to be concerned with evolution. But Young means just what he says in the title of the book: he discusses the age of the earth, not evolution. Young maintains that one can accept a great age of the earth without accepting evolution (this is his position) and so, unlike many authors, he focusses on only the one issue: age.

The book consists of three sections. In the first section Young traces the earth-age ideas of the Christian church from early in the New Testament era up to the present. He displays a very broad knowledge of the literature on this subject. Next, he discusses scientific evidence concerning the age of the earth. The last section consists of a treatment of earth-age philosophical questions debated for several decades. The first two sections com-

prise about eighty percent of the book.

Christian ideals, and texts which comprehensively present sociological knowledge in the light of God's truths—and, of course, Christian readers in sociology.

Grunlan and Reimer do offer some useful insights, provided we keep in mind the previous caveats. A key chapter on Biblical authority and cultural relativity is excellent. The Scriptures are termed "supra-cultural" because the truth of its contents are absolute and not dependent upon cultural contexts. The cumbersome term, but useful concept, "relative relativism," is proposed to help explain how different cultures can have different standards of behavior and not transgress Biblical norms. For example, names in a Canadian Indian tribe are private property and it is considered theft to use a name until its holder dies and bequests it to you. In contrast, personal names in the dominant culture of North America are part of the public domain and can be used at will. In such cases, Grunlan (the author of the article) recommends a four-step process of evaluation based on cultural norms and Biblical authority.

Grunlan and Reimer have presented a well-organized reader with 20 articles representing major sociological topics. It only briefly touches upon major sociological theories, however, and has heavily drawn its contributors from fundamentalist Christian colleges, e.g. seven of the twenty articles are written by staff at St. Paul's Bible College in Minnesota. Discussion questions are listed at the end of each article, including suggested readings, which could be very useful for college classroom application.

Grunlan and Reimer have produced a helpful reader for Christian students and sociologists, but only when selectively considered and critically read. The reader should be recognized as tentative and out-of-sequence, first step in the development of a truly distinctive Christian approach to the study of society and social interaction.

prise about eighty percent of the book.

The historical section is not polemical. It explains well the background of the various modern answers to the age question. This first section is necessary, but it is the second section which will be quoted. The heart of the book lies in its scientific arguments.

Young argues in two ways. He claims that scientific evidence indicates an earth age of billions of years; and he also claims that the scientific arguments which have been offered to refute this position are not valid. Thus, on the one hand, he carefully explains the radioactive dating method and how its results point to a very great age. Anyone who wishes to discuss this method must comprehend what Young says about the potassium-argon (pp. 99-103) and the rubidium-strontium whole

rock (pp. 103-110) decay methods. It may well be that there is no refutation of Young's arguments on decay methods.

On the other hand, young-earth authors also cite scientific evidence, such as the existence of fossil graveyards. The near-simultaneous death of many animals could take place, the argument runs, only if there were a catastrophe such as a universal flood. Given such a flood, argue the young-earth adherents, one could account for many other geological phenomena ordinarily taken to be evidence of great age. Young is not opposed to a universal flood (p. 178), but he shows there is no need to postulate that any fossil graveyard is the product of such a flood. He lists seven kinds of modern mass mortalities (pp. 76-78) which are the causes of the formation of graveyards similar to the fossil graveyards.

Another argument often used to show that the earth is young depends upon the rate of change of the earth's magnetic field (pp. 117-124). Advocates of a young earth maintain that the recent decrease in this magnetic field indicates that if such a rate of change were extrapolated back for billions of years, the magnetic field would once have been impossibly large. But Young shows quite adequately that the magnetic field of the earth has fluctuated and that the extrapolation is not

warranted.

Young has presented us with a thorough treatment of the subject. Very likely his conclusions would be universally accepted if the subject were not so controversial and if many persons did not suspect a hidden agenda. Yet, it is difficult to see how Young could be proven wrong by anyone attempting to answer his arguments. Because he covers many aspects of the debate very well, it will be necessary for future young-earth authors to deal with his arguments.

In the third section of the book, Young probes the meaning of uniformitarianism, of miracles, and of the relation between Biblical and "natural" revelation. He also discusses the relationship between Christians who differ on the earth-age question.

The book is clearly written and suitable for its intended audience, those who are interested in the earth-age debate. The scientific arguments are not too difficult for the average reader.

A passage which is more technical than any other part of the book (pp. 106-109) would be easier to follow were there not typographical errors in a figure, an equation, and a table.

Because this book was written in a good spirit, the Christian community can obtain a significant benefit from it.

*Herinneringen aan de Unie Waarin We Ons Thuis Voelden: Christelijk-Historische Karakteristieken* ed. by A.J. van Dulst, The Hague, The Netherlands: Stichting Uniepers, 1980. 128 pages, \$7.00. *De Groei Naar Het CDA: Momenten en Impressies uit Dertien Bewogen Jaren* ed. by H. Borstlap and C.J. Klop, Franeker, The Netherlands: T. Wever, 1980, 205 pages, \$10.00. *Voor de Duvel Niet Bang: Mr. Dries Van Agt Van Weerzin Tot Wellust* by Jan Tromp and Paul Witteman, Haarlem, The Netherlands: De Haan, 1981, 202 pages, \$10.00. Reviewed by McKendree R. Langely, Associate Professor of History.

The three books under discussion are representative of contemporary Christian Democratic politics in The Netherlands largely outside the Kuyperian tradition. The first volume concerns the history of the Christian Historical Union, the second narrates the fusion of Protestants and Catholics in the Christian Democratic Appeal and the third is a popular presentation of the career of Premier Dries Van Agt who held office from 1977 to 1982. Taken together, these volumes give us an idea of the "open" or non-confessional approach to practical Christian Democratic politics.

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The Christian Historical Union (CHU) was formed between 1894 and 1908 when Count Alexander F. de Savornin Lohman refused to support the widening of the right to vote advocated by the leader of the Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP), Abraham Kuyper. Lohman, a nobleman and a long-time member of parliament, rejected Kuyper's populism and personality

cult. The CHU was made up of a significant number of aristocrats who were devoted to the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*. Lohman, as much as Kuyper though in a different way, was a friend and student of Groen van Prinsterer, author of *Unbelief and Revolution*. The CHU, like the ARP, was an heir to the revitalized Calvinism of the early 19th century, represented by Groen. Some of the other leaders of the CHU were the theologian Ph. J. Hoedemaker, parliamentarian and education minister J. Th. de Visser, long-time cabinet minister of labor and education, J.R. Slotmaker de Bruine, the parliamentarian Frieda Katz, parliamentary leader H.W. Tilanus, and the next to last chairman of the CHU, Baron van Verscheur.

True to its Groenian beginnings, the CHU wanted to base politics on Evangelical principles. The CHU always was an open party, in distinction from the confessional Anti-Revolutionary Party, comprised in its last years of confessionals, ethicals, and Barthians. In this diversity there was a kind of unity based on mutual toleration. In rejecting a clear-cut organizational antithesis, Christian