

New title, same old arguments

A review of
Honest to Genesis
by Margaret Towne
PublishAmerica,
Baltimore, MD, 2003

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‘There is no reasonable foundation for insisting on the mythical stories of Genesis whose truths are profoundly theological rather than scientific’ (p.28). This is Margaret Towne’s message in her book *Honest to Genesis*, which claims to be a challenge to creationism not only scientifically, but biblically as well. She is concerned that ‘there remain ... many books and curricula that do not teach a scriptural interpretation that is consistent with the voluminous data of modern evolutionary theory’ (p.17–18). Her book aims to lay out the theistic evolutionary case in a scholarly, understandable way which will simplify the issue for many Christians. However, there is nothing particularly innovative or challenging in Towne’s book for anyone who is familiar with the issues involved,¹ and it has flaws that should disqualify it as even being worthy of being considered a scholarly resource.

Chronological snobbery

One doesn’t have to read far before wondering why Towne is concerned with what the Bible says about origins at all. In the evolution debate, ‘What was and is in conflict is modern science and the prescientific beliefs of the ancient Hebrews’ (p. 88). She talks about the ‘prescientific Hebrews’ in chauvinistic terms throughout her book, as if the fact that they didn’t have test tubes and Bunsen burners would have somehow kept God from

telling them about the timeframe and order of events of His creation. It’s not actually that hard to communicate long ages and evolution if that’s what God had intended.²

Pseudo-scriptural sophistry

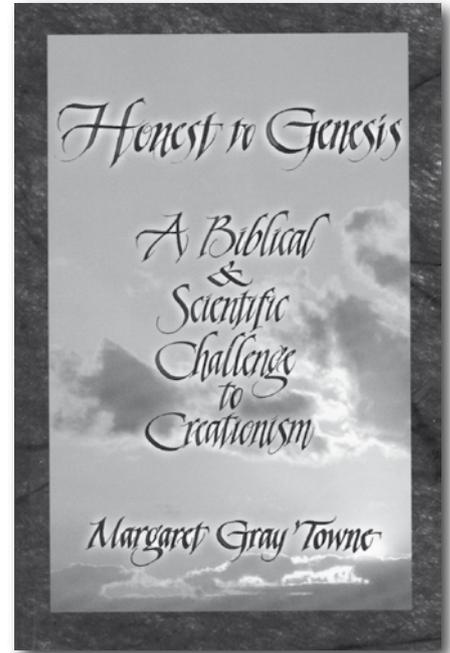
She makes such confused statements as,

‘The Bible ... is the word of God ... However, it is not the actual words of God’ (p. 116). She claims to affirm inerrancy of Scripture (p. 225), but says that it contains errors. She encourages her readers to ‘demythologize Scripture, that is, to identify the profound truths found therein, *remove them from their context in an ancient world view*, and see them come alive in a present world of reality and personal experience, [emphasis added]’ (p.123).

This is in direct conflict with standard practices of biblical interpretation, where context is key to understanding the meaning of Scripture.

Towne boasts that she attended seminary, but her knowledge of the Bible would merely be on par with the average layperson. She reveals her ignorance on nearly every subject she speaks on. Talking about the canon, she says, ‘The writings that compose the Hebrew Scriptures were eventually chosen from among the common literature and canonized, that is elevated to the status of holy, sacred writings’ (p. 105). Canon expert F.F. Bruce pointed out that the Church merely formalized what was already recognized as divinely inspired and authoritative; i.e. they *discovered* canonicity, they did *not* confer it.³

She is a proponent of the discredited JEDP theory,⁴ and says that, ‘Moses’ authorship [of the Pentateuch] is questioned for many reasons, not



the least being the description in Deuteronomy 34:5–12 of Moses’ death and burial!’ (p. 118). It is truly a blessing that Mrs Towne has finally come along so she can notice these profound problems that all the great theologians and Bible scholars of the Church have overlooked until now. A reasonable explanation would be that a later editor (Joshua, perhaps) added the details of Moses’ death to wrap up Deuteronomy. Similarly, my edition of Shakespeare has his date of death, but it doesn’t mean that he didn’t write all the plays therein.

She complains about the use of figurative language, saying

‘The prescientific world view of the Bible is seen when people seek with their *heart* It appears that emotions and wisdom reside in the heart ... it is clear such activity occurs in the mind and the heart is ... a muscle whose function it is to pump’ (p.108).

One hopes that she never tells her husband, ‘I love you with all of my blood pump’.

‘Lord, Lord ...’

Towne makes the statement, ‘Jesus Christ, not the Bible, is the infallible, inerrant Word of God’ (p. 116), so the

reader might at least expect her to have a higher view of Jesus than of Scripture. However, she shows the same sort of schizophrenic reasoning. In explaining why Jesus thought Genesis should be taken literally (she never tries to argue that He did otherwise), she says,

[Jesus] was not only confined to human flesh and blood but also to human understanding and was limited to the knowledge available to the culture in which he was born and raised ... In becoming a frail human he was limited to all that encompasses ... Jesus was bound not only by the physical but the mental restrictions of the human condition' (p. 238).

However, in the Gospels we see several times where Jesus has knowledge that no ordinary human could have (for instance, Matthew 9:4, 12:25 where Jesus knows the thoughts of His opponents) and where Jesus proves that He is above the laws of nature, e.g. walking on water (Mark 6:45-51) and multiplying the loaves and fish (Mark 8:1-8). Jesus also said that He spoke with the authority of His Father (John 5:30, 8:28), so Towne must logically accuse God the Father with error as well. So she would do well to heed Jesus' warning, 'If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels' (Luke 9:26).

Atheistic creationists?

By far the most curious statement in her book is,

'Can there be creationists who are not religious? Can creationism be arrived at by scientific means alone? Then there should be young earth atheists. Are there any?' (p. 264).

It would almost be an insult to one's intelligence to have to state that creationism requires a belief in a supernatural creator, thereby prohibiting one from logically being an atheist and a creationist at the same time.

Double standards

She shows blatant hypocrisy when she complains that 'Most creationist leaders do not have theological credentials,' insinuating that one cannot come to a proper understanding of Scripture without a degree from a seminary. Quite aside from ignoring the immense testimony from Hebrew scholars through the ages that the author of Genesis really *did* intend it to be taken plainly,⁵ she herself does not lay claim to any theological credentials. Rather, she attended Princeton Seminary, but apparently did not complete a degree. Simply attending a seminary does not make one a theologian any more than walking into a hospital makes one a doctor.

Her training is in biology, so we could expect her to show basic biological knowledge. However, with such comments as '[vertebrates] all contain gill slits and tails as embryos, even though these structures are not necessarily retained after birth,' (p. 194) one wonders what kind of biological training she actually got.

She does not restrict her ignorance to biology; she is generous enough to spread it to areas outside her discipline. She uses a self-serving circular definition of fossils as 'any recognizable remains of life or direct evidence of animal or plant existence *greater than 10,000 years old* [emphasis added]' (p. 67).

Towne makes many claims in *Honest to Genesis* that are simply unable to be verified or disproved, because she does not cite any sources. Statements such as 'carved seasonal records on bone go back 30,000 years' (p. 67) are made without any attempt to give the reader a source to check. She apparently expects us to trust what she says more than she wants us to trust Scripture!

Conclusion

Towne has invited the readers of her book to 'apply [critical thinking] skills to this text and its assertions and

conclusions ... the reader's peer review is welcomed' (p. 141). This review is an attempt to address the numerous serious problems in Towne's book. She is obviously sincere in her beliefs, but the way in which she has tried to present and defend those beliefs makes her come across as either disingenuous or inexcusably ignorant of what is supposedly her area of expertise.

References

1. A new concise reference is Batten, D. and Sarfati, J., *15 Reasons to Take Genesis as History*, Creation Ministries International, Brisbane, Australia, 2006.
2. For example, see Mortenson, T., Genesis according to evolution, *Creation* 26(4):50-51, 2004.
3. Bruce, F.F., *The New Testament Documents: Are they reliable?* Downers Gr, Ill.: IVP 1960; see also the articles under <www.creationontheweb.com/bible>.
4. Phelan, M.W.J., *The Inspiration of the Pentateuch*, Twoedged Sword Publications, Waterloo, UK, pp. 163 ff., 2005; review by Holding, J.P., *Journal of Creation* 19(3):37-40, 2005; and articles under <www.creationontheweb.com/genesis#jedp>.
5. E.g. as documented in Sarfati, J., *Refuting Compromise*, ch. 3, Master Books, Green Forest, AR, 2004.