

“GENESIS LAW” DECLARED UNCONSTITUTIONAL

In 1973 the Tennessee State Legislature inacted a law pertaining to the publication of textbooks which was destined to have far-reaching effects of teaching biology in public schools. This law, which has come to be known as the “Genesis Law” demanded that the State Textbook Commission review all texts dealing with the origin of man to determine if (1) all theories on the subject were given equal consideration or (2) a disclaimer would be included on the contents of any publication, scientific or otherwise, in which theories were not considered on an equal basis. Many felt that the law would virtually guarantee that a significant body of scientific knowledge associated with “evolution” would be excluded from basic school texts. The fear seemed to be that the Textbook Commission would elect to exclude texts dealing with the origin of man and creation rather than attempt to find texts in which all theories would be presented on an equal basis.

Volume XLIX, No. 3, of the Journal of the Tennessee Academy of Science contained a book review by A. W. Jones pertaining to the only text that has been published to date which is purported to represent the subject of the origin of man from the “creationist” point of view rather than the “evolutionist” point of view which has characterized biology texts for many years. This controversial textbook entitled *Biology, A Search for Order in Complexity* was developed by the Creation Research Society and edited by John N. Moore and Harold S. Slusher. Dr. Jones, former President of the Tennessee Academy of Science, gave the book a scathing review and viewed it primarily as an anti-evolution text attempting to stifle accepted practices of biology education rather than an attempt to get fair play for religious views on the origin of man. The debate for and against such texts may become moot however in view of recent actions by the courts. On September 9, 1974, Chancellor Ben H. Cantrell ruled Tennessee’s “Genesis Law” unconstitutional. Chancellor Cantrell cited the law as being in violation of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution by attempting to place the biblical account of creation above all other theories, thereby restricting thought and the adequate separation of church and state. Although Chancellor Cantrell’s decision may be appealed to a higher court, his ruling does seem to give immediate relief to biology and science teachers in the State to resume teaching all phases of classical biology including the theory of evolution. Chancellor Cantrell’s decision may prove to be an extremely important decision in that it may set a precedent for decisions in Georgia, Washington and other States where similar anti-evolution laws have been inacted.