

BOOK REVIEW

of

Paul Ackerman and Bob Williams, *Kansas Tornado: 1999 Science Curriculum Standards Battle*,
Institute for Creation Research, 1999.

This book is a recent addition to the Evangel Library,
and this review is presented by Larry D. Paarmann.

Dr. Paul Ackerman teaches psychology at Wichita State University and has been actively involved in creation science, evolution, and issues of origins for a number of years. When he became aware of the very significant and dogmatic changes to the Kansas Science Curriculum Standards for public schools that were being proposed by the Science Writing Committee, he followed the developments with interest, made statements of concern to the Kansas Board of Education, and in other ways attempted to halt what appeared to be a blatant attempt at public endorsement of philosophical materialism and the dogmatic suppression of all criticism of it. In Ackerman's view, this was tantamount to State enforced religion in the classroom. Fortunately, there was enough public concern expressed that the Board of Education sought a rewriting of the Kansas Science Curriculum Standards. The rewritten Standards, with philosophical materialism removed, were adopted by the Kansas Board of Education in August of 1999. The resulting hysteria in the press, and by scientists and educators, is what Ackerman refers to as the "Kansas Tornado."

Indeed, I don't believe that I have witnessed in my lifetime so much hoopla, misinformation and misrepresentation in the press about a topic as this, and so much outcry, at least in academic circles and in the press. For your information, since you wouldn't likely get it from the press, the Kansas Board of Education has merely removed all references to materialistic philosophy and unsubstantiated macro-evolutionary claims from the State standards to be assessed of all Kansas grade school and high school students. Local school boards can still require the teaching of such, but it will not be part of the State assessments, at least not in the near term.

This book by Ackerman and Williams, at least in the early chapters, reads almost like a mystery novel, or an adventure story, as the history of the new Science Standards unfolds. If the Science Writing Committee had simply listened to the concerns of Kansas citizens and softened the tone of the language, and didn't insist on such a blatant endorsement of materialism, a push for the adopted standards would have never started. As it is, the adopted standards are a much-needed move in the right direction, and contrary to public statements by the uninformed press, has the potential to advance the cause of true education in the physical sciences.

This book also contains an object lesson about how concerned citizens in a free and democratic society can have an impact on public policy. If it were not for a number of citizens of Kansas, concerned over the proposed changes to the science standards, and willing to spend time and energy for what they viewed as a worthy cause, rather a compelling necessary cause, we (citizens of the State of Kansas) would now be living in a state a little more oppressive than what it was before. The brave people who stood up, and especially those on the Board of Education who voted for the adopted standards, deserve our thanks and our prayers.

After a brief history of how the adopted science standards came about, three chapters present a defense of the actions taken by the Board of Education, in asking for an alternate rewriting of the standards, and in adopting the rewritten standards. Then, several chapters (6) present a defense of the new science standards. Some of the key ideas in the new standards are (1) deleting all statements that endorse materialism as if it were scientific fact, (2) deleting all statements of extrapolation from observed micro-evolutionary changes to macro-evolutionary assumptions of one species evolving from another as if it were scientific fact, (3) deleting all references to challenges of evolutionary claims in the classroom as though they are necessarily religious in nature and therefore not to be permitted, (4) concentrating on learning true methods of scientific inquiry, (5) encouraging critical thinking, (6) encouraging an understanding of the difference between objective data and subjective assumptions.

The last section of the book deals with becoming active in such issues, and how to go about it. Although this section is intended primarily as an aid to those in other states, we should also be reminded that although a battle has been won, the war is far from over. The presidents of all six regents universities in Kansas have condemned the adopted science standards. Many of the regents universities Faculty Senates have likewise done so. The governor has proposed doing away with an elected Board of Education. Organizations have been formed specifically to oppose the adopted standards. The new standards will be challenged, that we can count on. To become more familiar with the issues, no better starting place exists than reading this book by Ackerman and Williams.