

Journal of the Adventist Theological Society, 23/1 (2012):155-158.
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Book Review

Understanding Creation: Answers to Questions on Faith and Science

Reviewed by Joe Galusha

Edited by L. James Gibson and Humberto M. Rasi
(Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2011, 224 pages, hardback).

Understanding Creation: Answers to Questions on Faith and Science, recently published by Pacific Press, will stand the test of time. It addresses important questions being asked by scholars, students of science and religion, and the public-at-large about where things come from. The editors, L. James Gibson and Humberto M. Rasi, have done a masterful job of keeping the 20 chapters by 20 different authors in a similar style and length. In fact, a significant reason the book will be read carefully and appreciated by many is that it is designed to be easy on the eyes and naturally absorbed.

Initial Observations

This is a book of essays, and there are very few figures or tables included. At first, my scientific perspective led me to expect this would be a deficiency, but as I continued to read, this fact clearly became a strength. I was regularly drawn to larger questions and considerations that could not be answered or summarized in charts. Details are common but do not detract from the main themes of each chapter.

Another positive feature is that at the end of each chapter there is a paragraph or two that serves as an explicit, succinct conclusion. This alone makes the book readily accessible to non-technical readers and aids for understanding of the sometimes very complicated topics.

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Finally, I really liked the expanded biographical sketch for each of the authors. It was nice and helpful to know something about them, and it also lent credence to what was presented in each article.

Now to the content of the book itself

I thought the editors chose a good place to start: “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that we are without excuse” (Romans 1:20, NIV, and p. 8). They also identify the shared assumptions of the contributors: “. . . that the biblical record contained in the book of Genesis is an essential component of Christian doctrine, that Christian faith and empirical science can work fruitfully together, that there is a basic difference between data and interpretation, and that our comprehension of truth is progressive” (p. 9).

I have always liked the writing and presentations of Humberto Rasi. His introductory chapter, “Why do different scientists interpret reality differently,” lays the ground-work for the rest of the book. His several-page summary of key concepts and their exhibition in biblical Christianity and secular humanism is laid out in tabular form. This clarity is very helpful prior to a development of the worldview as held by Seventh-day Adventists.

There are several content themes in the book itself that are both broad and specific at the same time. For instance, Gibson, along with Ekkens and Standish (chapters 2, 3, and 5), draws our attention to aspects of the creation activity itself. Regular reference is made to complicated, even unknowable and sometimes miraculous, parts of the creation model. We are reminded that it is not possible to return to an historical miracle and replicate it. By default, we must consider it from a distance. And yet we as Christians have implicit confidence in Christ’s miracles as recorded in the Bible. Furthermore, the time and culture of the audience are important to understand. I found the insight of these chapters to be a very important setting for the next few.

Chapters 8 through 15 provide familiar summaries to most of the questions asked by traditional Adventist Creationists for example, when did creation occur (Geim), where did life come from (Javor), how reliable is radiometric dating (Webster), was the flood worldwide (Roth). Having them together in one source is valuable and probably worth more than the list price for the book.

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One really interesting chapter is by Roberto Biaggi, in which he addresses a number of creationist misconceptions. I found myself smiling as I was reminded that authentic footprints of humans and dinosaurs are not really found alongside one another in the bedrock of the Paluxy River in Texas and that Adventist creation scientists were the ones who debunked this claim some years ago (misconception 4, p. 135, and Neufeld 1975).

Secondly, many creationists would hold that the entire fossil record was laid down during the one year of Noah's flood. I must admit to liking that explanation myself. But in this chapter, Biaggi asserts that we now know that the "record is more complex than a single event could produce." He continues with explanations involving pre-flood rocks, major aquatic catastrophe, and post-flood rocks. Later in the same chapter, he summarizes the best evidence he can think of for a short-age geological model. I found some of this fresh and especially worthy of further careful study (pp. 136-142).

Next, Clausen and Esperante cover two topics of great interest to the informed creationist believer: dinosaurs and plate tectonics. On both of these topics, the authors conclude with summaries of what is known and a call for considerable humility about what is not. It is clear that much more study is needed on these topics soon. I applaud the integrity and insight of these two chapters.

I was impressed by the tone of the last several papers. Each deals with a general topic of import to creationism of broad significance. Are there moral implications of evolution (Aagaard), is the theory of evolution scientific (Brand), and how to live without final answers (Burdick) are crucial issues to resolve no matter what perspective one has on creation.

Endthoughts

This book is one of the best creation sources I have read. There is a straightforward honesty and humility about it. The editors have kept the tone of openness and forthrightness consistent throughout. Information is an important purpose of the book but not an end in itself.

The summary of conclusions the reader will finish with can serve as a safe guide for years to come. I will recommend it to my friends.

As the editors closed their introduction, I conclude these reflections with the ancient prayer:

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*From cowardice that shrinks from new truth,
From laziness that is content with half-truths,
From the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth,
O God of truth, deliver us!*

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