

Review

Jonathan Kane, Emily Willoughby and T. Michael Keese, *God's Word or Human Reason? An Inside Perspective on Creationism* (Portland: Inkwater Press, 2016). 389 pp. \$39.95 (hbk). ISBN: 978-1-62901-372-5.

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Creationism, the belief that God created the world with a strong anti-evolutionary streak, remains a formidable problem in the United States. Christian fundamentalists who adhere to a literal interpretation of the Bible manage to rally quite a few citizens and politicians for their cause and as such continue to damage American education and society. One of the largest and most visible young-earth creationist organizations is *Answers in Genesis*, which has built both the *Creation Museum*, a fancy natural history museum look-alike that displays humans living next to dinosaurs, and, more recently, the *Ark Encounter*, where you can visit a “life-size” replica of Noah’s ark as described in the book of Genesis. Confronted with such eccentric manifestations of religious bigotry, a group of former creationists thought it was time to react with the book under review here as a result.

The title of the book provides some indication of how the authors approached the matter. Pitting the word of God against human reasoning is one of the basic tactics in creationist discourse. *Do you, a mere fallible mortal being, really want to pretend that you know better than the all-wise and almighty God?* By tackling such specific arguments that play a key role in creationist rhetoric, the authors avoid adding to the list of comprehensive critical discussions of the many problems inherent in creationism. As the authors rightly note, such – undoubtedly valuable – discussions are widely available. Furthermore, they might only reach the people who are already convinced that creationism is an intellectual dead-end. Instead, by addressing a few central themes, the authors hope to persuade creationists themselves to abandon their antievolutionary views. And it is their hope that others will use the book to the same end.

There are good reasons to suspect that this admirable project might have some success. One is that the contributing authors, whether they write about the fossil record, radiometric dating or the evolution of the human body, take creationism seriously. They formulate the strongest possible creationist position, subsequently explain what is wrong with it and formulate strong counterarguments over the course of six chapters.¹ Furthermore, as former creationists, they fully realize the significance of religious beliefs in people's lives. Another reason is that facts work to convince people. This is wonderfully illustrated by the short life stories of the authors that follow each of the chapters. Each author relates how he or she changed his or her mind about the origins of life and what is clear is that facts indeed play a key role. Confronted with evidence such as fossils that contradicts the creationist beliefs of their community, they sometimes slowly, but steadily, abandon their former beliefs, often with a big impact on their personal and social life.

What might also help is that the book is religion-friendly, even to a point that, for a Western European atheist as myself, it becomes somewhat puzzling. The idea behind this approach is to show that the acceptance of evolution does not necessarily entail atheism. This is further attested by the fact that some of the authors identify as Christians. The main message is that science does not and cannot say anything about the existence of the supernatural, because science is only concerned with the natural world. However, this strategy depends on a strange inversion: the reason why science does not deal with the supernatural is that science has consistently and continuously forced God out of all domains of reality. In other words, science is natural because the supernatural does not exist. Religious people then can either deny the science (as creationists do) or make one's religious beliefs more or less compatible with science. However, one can only do the latter by placing God in a domain of reality that is not under consideration at the moment and is often difficult to understand (quantum physics or the human mind are often helpful here), or by making God entirely redundant. It remains remarkable how resilient religious beliefs are, adapting to the challenges posed by modern science and society.

By directly engaging with some of the main creationist arguments against evolution, *God's Word or Human Reason* makes a significant contribution to the enduring battle against Christian fundamentalist anti-science. In the same breath, it provides us with a clear, well-structured and beautifully illustrated exposé of important aspects of evolutionary theory. The book's position on religion is debatable, but somewhat understandable in light of what the authors aim to achieve, i.e. to convince creationists to surrender their antievolutionary convictions. One can only hope that they succeed.

Endnote

1. Here are the titles and the authors of the chapters: “God’s Word or Human Reason?” (Jonathan Kane); “The Flood and the Fossil Record” (Glenn Morton); “Radiometric Dating and the Age of the Earth” (Emily Willoughby); “Created Kinds and the Origin of Birds” (Jonathan Kane); “Three Histories of the Human Body” (T. Michael Keesey); “Calling Worlds into Being” (James Comer). The book also includes two appendices (“A Catalogue of Feathered Dinosaurs” and “Traits Shared by Humans and Great Apes”), and a Glossary.