



The Bible and the Problem of Knowledge

by W. R. Downing

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W. R. Downing serves as a pastor as well as director and president of the Pacific Institute for Religious Studies. He is also the author of numerous books and papers. As anyone who has done a thorough study of apologetics will acknowledge, the subject of epistemology is unavoidable in such an endeavor. Pastor Downing takes on this weighty topic as it relates to apologetics in a scholarly yet accessible way.

I appreciated his repeated appeal to Genesis history in making his case for the default epistemological condition of fallen man. He asks, "What would the implications be if the Genesis account of the fall of man were only myth, legend, or religious symbolism?" (p. 39). Upon noting some insights in the book (that a universe rather than a "multiverse" implies God [pp. 32, 40]; that 2 Peter 3:1–10 alludes to the rise of uniformitarianism [p. 98]), I was reminded of how I was first introduced to them by the late Henry Morris (2002, pp. 28, 114). That does not mean, however, that Downing would endorse Morris's apologetic methodology.

Creationists will appreciate Downing's argument that "unbelievers unconsciously ... assume the laws of God's ordered universe, without which no scientific research could take place or scientific conclusions could be reached.

Indeed, the unbeliever could not function at all without assuming (unconsciously and inconsistently) the realities of Divine creation and order" (p. 119, footnote 228). "Secular Humanism has necessarily built upon this traditional Christian base (built on the borrowed capital of Christian principles)" (p. 19, footnote 26). This is another insight previously pointed out by Morris (2002, p. 22) and reiterated often in creationist literature.

In this short book, Downing brings to the layman an integral yet often neglected component of apologetics. Frankly, a lack of epistemological groundwork and consequent underdevelopment of a consistent apologetic methodology has been a major setback for biblical creationists. I am convinced that the early days of the modern creation movement neglected some important theological considerations in an effort to convince unbelievers of the doctrine of creation. Fortunately, the movement in general has matured since then; our presuppositions have moved more to the foreground, and our approach seems to be less fragmented. Still, Creation Science Fellowship Chairman Robert Walsh's assessment that, "the underlying methodology of most creationists today can be shown to be fundamentally flawed" (Walsh, 2008, p. viii) remains, in my opinion, an accurate one.

While Downing's small book may only serve as an introduction to epistemology, the author explains why an understanding of this subject is crucial

for a biblical approach to apologetics. I think it is safe to assume that many Christians—myself included—were enthusiastic about "scientific creationism" as a major weapon to be used in defending the faith, not realizing that we were lacking the necessary methodology to properly employ this newly acquired storehouse of "evidence".

Too often apologists in general (and biblical creationists in particular) have been guilty of either promoting physical evidence in a vacuum, or admitting to certain presuppositions but still lacking consistency in how physical evidence should be presented within the context of a biblical view of post-Fall man. Without attempting to address the many issues related to the various apologetic approaches (which Downing reduces to only two), I would simply challenge my fellow creationists to consider whether our apologetic method has been the one employed by Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament (Robbins, 1996), and whether such a method takes a comprehensive theology of the Fall into consideration. The irony is that while the biblical creationist has made every effort to defend the *historicity* of the Genesis record, he has unwittingly denied the *theological ramifications* of the Fall if he fails to consider the effect it had on Adam's progeny, particularly with regard to the intellect. Put another way, the historicity of the Fall event has been consistently affirmed by creationists, but the same cannot be said for the theology of the Fall. We must remember

that when we proclaim biblical truth, we are not interacting with a “very good” (Genesis 1:31) Adam today (who incidentally still could not depend solely on general revelation) but with his fallen, finite, fallible, and epistemologically futile descendants.

Apologetics is not separate and distinct from the rest of theology. Therefore, an approach that does not interact with other key doctrines will tend to be faulty, unbiblical, ineffective, or at the very least, inconsistent. Downing assesses the various theories of knowledge and philosophical systems, showing that they all fail the test of logic and consistency. He then reduces the many nuanced apologetic systems simply to presuppositionalism and evidentialism. This means that readers acquainted with

the multiple apologetic systems and associated objections will not have all their questions answered here. But the author makes this simplification, not because he is unfamiliar with the variety of opinions within those apologetic camps (the extensive bibliography and his other writings testifies to that fact), but because his emphasis is on the crucial issue of the “epistemological futility” of the natural man versus the “revelational epistemology” of the regenerated man.

Pastor Downing brings the unavoidable apologetic component of epistemology to us in a way that is easily understandable with more technical points, original language text, and detailed references set in 245 footnotes. The book is loaded with Scripture and would greatly benefit biblical creationists willing to

reconsider the way in which evidence is utilized in light of a comprehensive theological system.

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References

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