

Book Review

The Advancement: Keeping the Faith in an Evolutionary Age

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Bush, L. Russ. *The Advancement: Keeping the Faith in an Evolutionary Age*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003.

Introduction

L. Russ Bush, former academic dean and professor of philosophy of religion at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary is the author of *The Advancement*.¹ The book is an apologetic work describing history's so-called "progressive development and advancement."² Bush argues that naturalistic evolution and these supposed progressive advancements have led to "advancement thinking," which is antithetical to Christianity and a Biblical Worldview. Furthermore, it has resulted not in real progress but in a deterioration of modern society.³ Consequently, it has led to a world without truth and meaning, and the only way back is through "authentic Christianity" and Christ.⁴ *The Advancement* is an excellent source for Christians who need a quick study understanding the naturalistic worldview, its origin, its implications, and how to refute it. Nonetheless, it could have been a little stronger had Bush left out his parenthetical attack on Open Theism.

Summary

The Advancement is a short book that can be read in one sitting. Its ten chapters are a little over a hundred pages, not including the endnotes and index.⁵ Bush begins the Introduction with God's creation of a world with beauty, order, power, and meaning.⁶ He then traces the

¹ Lauren Crane, "L. Russ Bush Dies following Cancer Battle," *Baptist Press*, January 23, 2008, accessed July 26, 2018, <http://bpnews.net/27242/1-russ-bush-dies-following-cancer-battle>.

² L. Russ. Bush, *The Advancement: Keeping the Faith in an Evolutionary Age* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 14.

³ *Ibid.*, 87, 94.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵ The ten chapters consist of an Introduction, eight numerical chapter divisions, and a Conclusion.

⁶ Bush, *The Advancement*, 1.

history of man from innocence, to conscience, to civil law, to God's law, to faith, and to the advent of the promised Messiah, Christ. Next, Bush traces civilization from Roman rule, to the Middle Ages, to the Renaissance and the Reformation, to Post-reformation and the Enlightenment, to the Modern era, and then to the Postmodern era. Due to *modern* versus *postmodern* confusion, Bush chooses to label the current era as the "Advancement."⁷

Chapter One - Two

In chapter one, Bush describes the worldview of the advancement era as a result of a belief in evolutionary progress, anti-supernaturalism, secular freedom, and the secularization of science and history as setting the stage "for modern thought."⁸ Bush then gives a brief history and explanation of the Christian Worldview based on an unchanging Creator and the stability of nature contrasted with the advancement's belief in evolutionary change and progress. He finishes with his belief that "authentic Christianity is the best antidote for a culture that is dying from the venom of the Advancement."⁹

In chapter two, Bush describes "The Rise of Advancement Science" and its shift away from a belief in a "natural universe" that possesses the possibility of "supernatural influences."¹⁰ Instead, the more modern naturalist worldview denies any "supernatural influences" and insists that everything must be explained by the "natural cause-and-effect system."¹¹ This mindset eventually led to a philosophy of science that applied this evolutionary theory to every academic

⁷ Ibid., 4.

⁸ Ibid., 9.

⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁰ Ibid., 19-21.

¹¹ Ibid..

field, including “sociology, psychology, economics, history, and even religious studies.”¹² Consequently, this naturalistic evolutionary worldview has not only resulted in a decline in science and academia in general, but it has also resulted in a decline in ethical norms and the “disappearance of humanness.”¹³

Chapters Three - Seven

In chapters three through seven, Bush focuses on some of the flaws of this naturalistic evolutionary worldview. He also explains the theory of knowledge, the loss of freedom and truth, and the impact of advancement thinking on theology. Next, Bush has a parenthetical chapter on unnecessary and unbiblical compromises with advancement thinking. In chapters five and six, Bush returns to his refutation of naturalistic evolution with “seven assumptions of evolutionary biology,” “ten axioms of modern scientific thought,” “four basic beliefs of modern thinkers,” and “five simple objections to naturalistic evolution.”¹⁴ Then, in chapter seven, Bush finds flaws in advancement thinking because, ultimately, it does not always result in human progress or advancements in human life.

Chapter Eight and Conclusion

In chapter eight, Bush focuses on the solution to advancement thinking. The key is to focus on three fundamental truths listed and described by Bush: God exists, the world exists, and God has “revealed himself within it.”¹⁵ He concludes with a prayer that believers will not be

¹² Ibid., 22.

¹³ Ibid., 32.

¹⁴ Ibid., 65, 72, 78, 80.

¹⁵ Ibid., 101.

“ashamed” to defend their faith against advancement thinking but will tell the world about the Lord and Savior, Jesus.¹⁶

Critique

The Advancement has several strengths and a few weaknesses. Unfortunately, some strengths might also be weaknesses (i.e., double-edged swords). For example, the book’s overall brevity, short chapters, and the use of endnotes as opposed to chapter notes make it easy to read. However, this concision and organization also result in some unanswered questions.

Weaknesses

One of the unanswered questions is also the result of another two-edged sword (brevity being the first). Although Bush does an excellent job of explaining that advancement thinking in a purely naturalistic worldview results in the loss of freedom because it eliminates choice and free will, he fails to answer the question of free will related to God’s sovereignty. Bush explains that if naturalism and evolution are correct, there is no free will because every thought is simply a result of “chemical laws and processes” reacting to its environment.¹⁷ He even makes the statement, “It is *much easier* to explain how God can sovereignly choose to maintain uncoercive knowledge of a free moral action than it is to explain the intentional creation of an unknowable and/or unpredictable process, mystifying even to its Designer” (*emphasis added*).¹⁸ Nonetheless, some skeptics also claim that if Christianity is true *and* God is sovereign, people have no real freedom, including no freedom to choose to believe. This objection is alluded to in one of Bush’s endnotes: “God does not deny our freedom because he knows our future.”¹⁹ However, his answer

¹⁶ Ibid., 109.

¹⁷ Ibid., 40.

¹⁸ Ibid., 64.

¹⁹ Ibid., 126

to this objection is that it “would only be the case if naturalism were true.”²⁰ If that is true, and I agree that it is, then where is the argument for proving man’s freedom of choice despite God’s sovereignty? Admittedly, this is not an easy question to answer.

Nevertheless, based on the amount of time spent shattering the idea of freedom as a result of naturalistic evolution,²¹ it seems that more time should have been spent proving that “God does not deny our freedom because he knows our future.” Especially since, according to Bush, free will is “easier to explain” in a biblical worldview.²² I would very much like to have seen this simple explanation!

Furthermore, this leads to a third double-edged sword. Bush says that the “church has greater spiritual power than all of her enemies combined, but compromise is her Achilles’ heel.”²³ This statement is one of the book's best quotes, and it’s an excellent point. However, Bush includes *open theism* as an example of Christians compromising with advancement thinking. Open theism *is* guilty of compromise when it denies God’s sovereignty to explain pain and suffering.²⁴

Consequently, Bush was a vocal opponent of open theism throughout his life. He even spoke about God’s sovereign election and plan for his life when he learned he had cancer that would eventually take his life.²⁵ Nonetheless, Bush presents no actual link with advancement thinking and open theology. Bush is correct that open theists deny God’s sovereignty to explain

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ 32, 46, 49-50, 52, 56-63, 116, 127, and 142.

²² Ibid., 126.

²³ Ibid., 5.

²⁴ Clark Pinnock, *The Openness of God a Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 115, 143.

²⁵ Crane, "L. Russ Bush," paragraph 17-18.

free will and the existence of evil.²⁶ Pinnock, a prominent openness theologian, mentioned in Bush's endnotes but not in any of his chapters, writes: "If God knows everything that is to happen, then everything will happen in accordance with divine foreknowledge – which would remove human freedom."²⁷ Open theism is guilty of compromising God's sovereignty; however, Bush does not prove that open theology has compromised with advancement thinking. Bush may be correct that open theism does not solve the tension that exists between God's sovereignty and man's free will, but then again, as already stated, neither does Bush. Furthermore, Bush presents no proof that open theists believe in naturalistic evolution. Professing Christians that argue in favor of abortion, same-sex marriage, and transgender identities are much more guilty of advancement thinking and would have illustrated Bush's points far better.

Strengths

Nonetheless, Bush's argument that Christians should not compromise with advancement thinking is an excellent point. According to Bush, the first such compromise led to Deism which is "inconsistent and unstable" and promotes an "irrelevant" God.²⁸ All such concessions with naturalistic evolution eventually lead to similar inconsistencies and must be avoided. However, for Christians to be ready to defend Christianity against naturalistic compromises, they need to understand the "nature of the evidence."²⁹ Bush not only accomplishes this goal, but he also does an excellent job illustrating that there are numerous philosophical, scientific, and logical problems with naturalistic evolution. Still, it could have been a little stronger if Bush had left out

²⁶ Pinnock, *The Openness of God*, 68, 115.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

²⁸ Bush, *The Advancement*, 22.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 92.

his parenthetical attack on open theism and used better examples of advancement thinking in Christendom.

Other strengths include his defense of the historical worldview and its link to Christian scientists, his refutation of the Galileo objection, and his arguments against the so-called fossil records. Another vital point that Bush brought out involves the inexplicable process of the philosophy of naturalistic evolution flowing into other academic fields. For example, “Berra’s Blunder,”³⁰ the idea that the *design changes* in a 55 corvette, from a 54 corvette, from a 53 corvette,³¹ proves or even illustrates *undesigned evolution*, is still being pushed by academia today.³² It’s called Berra’s Blunder because it proves just the opposite; nonetheless, it’s still taught. For example, as recently as 2014, Duke University’s Professor of Mechanical Engineering wrote a research article promoting naturalistic evolution based on the so-called evolution of planes.³³ Consequently, Christians need to understand, as Bush makes clear, that evolution is now being applied “to every academic discipline” and that it can supposedly be used and demonstrated in other areas of academia.³⁴ However, it cannot “actually be demonstrated by science” or by any of these phony models.³⁵

³⁰ Randy J. Guliuzza, “Major Evolutionary Blunders: Berra’s Blunder,” *Acts & Facts* (April 29, 2016): 15-17, accessed February 1, 2019, <http://www.icr.org/article/major-evolutionary-blunders-berras>.

³¹ Tim M. Berra, *Evolution and the Myth of Creationism: A Basic Guide to the Facts in the Evolution Debate* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 117.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Bush, *The Advancement*, 22.

³⁵ Ibid.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Bush does an excellent job of giving Christians evidence against these philosophical models that push an imaginary naturalistic evolutionary worldview. Nonetheless, the book could have left out its attack on open theism and chosen more illustrative examples of advancement thinking among professing Christians. Or else, Bush could have spent more time defending man's freedom related to God's sovereignty. It, nonetheless, is an outstanding apologetic resource for a quick refutation of advancement thinking. It is also an excellent source of encouragement for believers who are constantly bombarded by naturalistic evolutionary philosophies.

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