

CREATION, EVOLUTION, AND CATHOLICISM: A DISCUSSION FOR THOSE WHO BELIEVE

by Thomas L. McFadden, Sr. reviewed by Graham Wright

Noah's Ark on Mount Ararat by Simon de Myle

Creation, Evolution, and Catholicism: A Discussion for Those Who Believe is a new book purporting to identify why the Catholic Church is struggling to retain youth in the modern day and what can be done to arrest this modern development. The Church's own failures with modern catechesis notwithstanding, the theory of Evolution is specifically identified by the author as a major cause of lapsation. Indeed, the teaching of evolution as fact is claimed to be a form of indoctrination which is accelerating the loss of faith among young Catholics.

I approached the book with an open mind. I am someone who has never before been greatly interested in the evolution debate. Nevertheless, the book did capture my imagination on two accounts: (1) what has the Church traditionally taught in this field? and (2) how does evolution stand up to an impartial and dispassionate analysis?

The book begins with a review of the type of depressing statistics which we have all encountered at

some point: that is the familiar tale of woe for the Church in the Western world, a litany of stagnation and decline. These particular statistics concern the USA and, while the Catholic share of the population has remained steady in recent decades (likely propped up by immigration), the figures also reveal that approximately one-third of the people raised as Catholics abandon the faith. This leads to the remarkable statistic that approximately 10% of Americans are lapsed Catholics. And those Catholics who remain reject an ever increasing amount of Church teaching.

The author identified that this scale of lapsation is against a context of increasing acceptance of evolution among Catholics and also Protestant groups. The teaching of evolution in schools as scientific fact is highlighted as a common denominator across these demographics, which helps explain why people of

“no religion” is the faster growing religious group in the USA today. This movement has its own high priests, such as Richard Dawkins, who claim that evolution has made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist. And so people begin to regard God as “unnecessary” and so drift away from the faith.

This is a major problem for the

Church, that its adherents have been taught to implicitly affirm Humanist belief regarding evolution. The author boldly asserts that a rejection of the questionable scientific base of humanism is what will turn this situation around.

This dubious science underpinning humanism is then exposed by the author, using many examples. I was surprised to learn how much discussion of evolution in the public domain is couched in very speculative, grasping language, yet this guessing game is regarded as completely

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sacrosanct by many people. Empty phrases such as “scientists agree that...,” or “scientists suspect that...” are commonly used by evolution text-books to convey authority and credence.

The book moves on to consider Big Bang Cosmology and Evolutionary Biology. I admit to having been impressed by the Big Bang theory, especially because it was originally suggested by a Catholic priest, who was also a Physics Professor (George Lamaitre). Yet the author’s consideration of the topic leaves it looking far less impressive. In particular, when we see how much of the science in this model of the Universe is speculative, such as the existence of “Dark Matter,” which scientists claim makes up over 80% of the Universe, despite never having observed it. And this “Dark Matter” has been credited with both holding the Universe together and also pulling it apart - two opposite effects. The book quotes Jake Herbert, Ph.D, who explains that these muddles arise through scientists attempting to shoe-horn their ideas into the dominant big-bang model, even if they don’t fit!

Through the chapters, the book provides an eye-opening review of how evolutionary theory actually stacks up against humanity’s established knowledge: from Louis Pasteur proving that life cannot spring from non-life, to Darwin’s own observation that his theory is greatly undermined by the fossil record discovered in the earth’s sedimentary layers. (It should be noted that in 1999, Professor Steve Jones, of University College London, conducted a review of how Darwin’s theory had panned out over the decades and stated that the big problem

Darwin himself identified remained. And in 2008, the University of Rome published a document describing how experiments in stratification do not support the theory of Evolution.)

It was entertaining to read of the various “bloopers” made by scientists when they have prematurely rushed to congratulate themselves over some important discovery, only to be proven wrong. From “ripples of the big bang” which turned out to be just dust, to “Piltdown Man” – originally hailed as the missing link in human evolution – which turned out to be a hoax using orangutan bones. But of course scientists make errors – for, as Theodore Roosevelt said, there is no effort without error and shortcoming. But reading of these false starts reminded me of how credulous people are

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when it comes to “science” and how its errors are glossed over by a “we are always right” attitude from its more zealous devotees.

I enjoyed the book because I

found it to be personally challenging to me. As stated, previously I had never really cared for the debate around this topic. “What does it matter?” I thought. However, I now have a greater appreciation of why this matters thanks to the author highlighting the cognitive dissonance experienced by Christian students who are subtly taught to believe that science and scripture are enemies. We are all forced to take an interest by this reality and its implications.

The book also challenged me by highlighting how a Pope (Saint Peter) has taught authoritatively about Noah’s flood. The author astutely notes the irony (in this

specific case) of Protestants putting more stock in papal teaching than Catholics do. And never mind Saint Peter. Our Lord Jesus Christ taught of the flood – yet many Catholics who (for example) take His teaching on marriage verbatim will scoff at His referencing the flood. The author cleverly uses these juxtapositions to take the reader out of his/her comfort zone and really make him/her think.

The book ends with the author’s advice on what Catholics must do to achieve a “fourth quarter comeback” (that being a reference to American Football, for the benefit of Europeans). He gives good, solid advice, not the least, “Have faith in the Magisterium.”

The book has an appendix which deals with the case of Galileo – I commend the author for the inclusion of this, because that name is often thrown in the face of Catholics as evidence of the Church being anti-science (by detractors who know nothing more about the matter than the name “Galileo.”)

I heartily recommend this book as a thought-provoking and inspiring read. I will no doubt refer to it regularly, because it contains so much useful information that one cannot possibly digest it all in a single read-through. Mr. McFadden can be well pleased with his effort. ☩

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