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The Advancement: A Book Review

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The Advancement: Keeping the Faith in an Evolutionary Age. L. Russ Bush. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2003, *xii* + 148 pp. Retail \$19.99.

Introduction

Christians today, find themselves living in a world that appears to have changed overnight. Foundational institutions such as marriage are being “redefined,” gender is as much a matter of preference as it is a biological reality, and the idea of “absolute truth” seems to be extinct. As L. Russ Bush asks, “Where did this new approach to life come from, and why did things change so drastically from one generation (pre-1950) to the next (post-1975)?”¹

Bush attempts to answer this question in his book *The Advancement: Keeping the Faith in an Evolutionary Age*. The text explains that this worldview did not just happen overnight, but began developing during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Relativism began to rise in the late twentieth-century during what some scholars and philosophers refer to as the Postmodern era. Bush refers to this worldview as the “Advancement.”

Summary

Bush proposes in his text that the world has adopted a philosophy that has replaced reality with “illusion.” This illusion has permeated every area of the Western society. Bush argues that, “Courts no longer rule according to original intent. Even our Preachers no longer seem to know for sure what a biblical passage actually teaches. Decisions seem to be *ad hoc*, and moral standards seem to be relative.”²

In chapter 1, Bush defines this new worldview. He asserts that during the nineteenth century, emphasis continued to be placed on morality and religious convictions stemming from the Enlightenment. However, a sense of inevitable progress was added to this worldview. Bush states, “Individual freedom became a high priority...but this new secular freedom ultimately

¹ L. Russ Bush. *The Advancement: Keeping the Faith in an Evolutionary Age*, (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2003), ix.

² Ibid.

refused to submit even to God, and thus it destroyed the only possible basis for guaranteeing rights and values and freedom.”³

Bush contrasts this new worldview with that of Christianity which focused on stability of the universe and that changes were brought about by God Himself. Fossils that had been discovered on mountaintops were believed to have been placed there as a result of the biblical flood. Nature itself, “However, was thought to have remained essentially constant as a system, fixed, stable, and orderly since the beginning. The Christian view also believed that humanity was constantly involved in spiritual warfare.

In chapter 2, Bush explains in detail the rise of the new advancement worldview. Initially the theory of cause-and-effect was applied to physics, chemistry, and astronomy. Bush argues that today, “The cause-and-effect theory has been applied to sociology, psychology, economics, history, and even religious studies.”⁴ This shift was not due to new scientific data. The shift was made by just applying the cause-and-effect theory to all academic disciplines.

Bush does credit the works of Ernst Haeckel and Charles Darwin in the middle-to late nineteenth century, as feeding in on the growing materialistic assumptions of the Western society. Darwin’s *Origin of the Species by Means of Natural Selection* in 1859, became a best-seller even though,

Mathematical studies of the probability factors involved—perhaps improbability factors would be a better term—indicate that random chance could not have produced the complexity known to exist in modern biological systems in any amount of time currently being suggested even for the age of the universe.⁵

Chapter 3 focuses on the theory of knowledge. This advancement in thought, according

³ Ibid, 8.

⁴ Ibid, 21-22.

⁵ Ibid, 29.

to Bush, has resulted in a loss of truth and of freedom. Bush argues effectively that the advancement worldview has resulted in the loss of political freedom, moral accountability, and intellectual freedom.

Bush then argues modern theistic alternatives. One dangerous alternative is called Open Theism. Some evangelicals hold this view. This view asserts that God is not a liar however, “He does not know the future infallibly because he cannot know the free acts of moral agents. He can say what he will do “*if*,” but he could not know which *if* will occur since the choices are real.”⁶

Bush uses the remainder of the book to give the assumptions of evolutionary biology, and why these assumptions are incorrect. The text also does a good job in pointing out why technological advances do not guarantee advancement to the society. Bush asserts that Christian thought can benefit from true scientific and that Christianity is not antiscience.

Critique

Bush does an effective job at giving the history and evolution of the modern worldview. His discussion of key figures such as Ernst Haeckel, Charles Lyell, and Charles Darwin educate the reader on how the advancement theory developed. The narrative of Herbert Spencer was of particular interest to this reader. Bush describes Spencer’s theory that, “Individuals gain particular, specific bits of knowledge, but there is also an intuitive knowledge that is learned unconsciously. This, he claimed, was the inherited knowledge or the collective experience of the human race.”⁷

Not only does Bush present the history of the advancement theory’s key originators, he also does a good job in refuting their arguments. The text illustrates how the historical notion of Christian thought of charity and giving was replaced by the idea of strength over weakness. This

⁶ Ibid, 63.

⁷ Ibid, 30.

ethic was readily embraced by Marxists and Nazi Germany. Bush points out that, “Individual values were pushed aside for the good of the collective state, the communist commonwealth. The Nazi movement in Germany was one of the logical conclusions of these ideas. For some people racism was scientifically justified on evolutionary biological grounds.”⁸

The biblical worldview stands in stark contrast to these types of ideologies. The text points out that the Bible does not distinguish between the races. Bush stresses that the Bible, “Does make distinctions on the basis of religion, nationality, language, and other tribal difference, but consistently the Bible argues that all people are of one blood and that all humans are one race, the human race, mankind created in the image of God.”⁹

Bush makes further credible claims that technological advances does not produce inevitable progress. Bush stresses, “One cannot ignore the implications of the rise of modern art and hard rock music. Loss of meaning, random abstraction, dissonance, and pagan eroticism are not signs of advancement even upon advancement assumptions. It signifies rather the loss of order, a return to randomness, the destabilization of life, a degeneration from the past. Do advancement theories adequately explain this widespread phenomenon?”¹⁰ The advancement theory has produced little in the form of inevitable advancement for the society as a whole.

Bush also does a very good job in pointing out false assumptions throughout his text. One such assumption is the idea that ancient people were primitive in their mental capacity. Bush explains that, “Ancient people were not primitive in their mental capacity. They simply had not yet developed sophisticated energy sources. They had no history of technological development,

⁸ Ibid, 31.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, 88.

no effective methods of informational publication, storage, or retrieval, and no distribution system for the preservation of their discoveries.”¹¹

If there is a problem with the work, it would be the lack of footnotes within the text. Bush states in the preface, “The publisher decided to move all of my footnotes to the end, supposedly to make the pages “more readable.” Some of my better arguments are found in those notes, and a good deal of supplementary information is found there.”¹² The potential reader should keep this in mind if considering this text.

Conclusion

Although intended primarily for seminary students, *The Advancement* is a book that any Christian could benefit from reading. It gives an excellent short history on the development of modern thought and worldviews. The book gives a great history lesson on how the Western culture found itself in the “illusion” of reality that we now face. The book is an easy read with language that is easy to grasp and understand. The facts that are presented can be easily applied to ones Christian walk and defense of the faith.

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¹¹ Ibid, 90.

¹² Ibid, x.

