

books



The Art of Debating Darwin

HOW TO INTELLIGENTLY DESIGN A WINNING CASE FOR GOD'S ROLE IN CREATION.

DOUBTS ABOUT DARWIN:

A History of Intelligent Design

Thomas Woodward

Baker, 304 pages, \$19.99

IN 1990, the anti-Darwin crusader Phillip E. Johnson sent me a manuscript of *Darwin on Trial* and asked for my advice about its publication.

I deferentially cautioned the chaired professor at the University of California's respected Boalt Hall School of Law that he could encounter problems finding a mainstream publisher and attracting a popular audience. I thought there were too many books that made essentially the same arguments against Darwinism for there to be much of a market for *Darwin on Trial*, even if it articulated those arguments far better than most.

I was decidedly wrong. After InterVarsity Press published the paperback edition, it became a standard in evangelical households and churches.

As Thomas Woodward's new *Doubts About Darwin* shows, *Darwin on Trial* not only became a bestseller within the evangelical Christian community but helped revive popular interest among conservative Protestants and Catholics in Intelligent Design (ID) as an explanation for innovation in biology.

ID is the hypothesis that highly complex organs (such as the eye) and func-

tionally interdependent organisms (such as butterflies and flowers) reflect the handiwork of an intelligent designer (such as God).

This traditional biological concept of an intelligent designer fell from favor during the late 1800s with the ascent of Darwinism, which relied on random variation and natural selection to fine-tune organs for their uses and organisms for their environment. But some nonscientists clung to the notion of a designer behind nature, especially evangelicals who took seriously the words of Romans 1:20: "For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made."

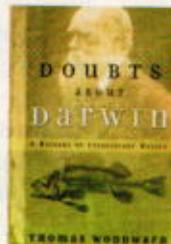
With the publication of *Darwin on Trial* in 1991, Johnson conferred a Berkeley pedigree on such thinking by marshalling evidence against the sufficiency of evolution to account for the origin of species. *Doubts About Darwin* concentrates on Johnson's argument and traces its impact on a core group of followers in academia. Woodward counts himself among this group.

Although (like many books based on dissertations) it's laced with technical

terms, *Doubts About Darwin* demonstrates that Johnson is a master rhetorician. As Johnson himself explains in the book's forward, "Rhetoric is the art of framing an argument so that it can be appreciated by an audience." He calls it "a noble art."

Woodward analyzes the rhetoric associated with the modern ID movement that began in 1985 with the publication of *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* by Australian physician and biochemist Michael Denton; that spread throughout the U.S. evangelical community through Johnson's writings and speaking during the 1990s; that peaked in 1996 with the publication of mathematician David Berlinski's article "The Deniable Darwin" and biochemist Michael Behe's *Darwin's Black Box*; and continues with the subsequent publication of *The Design Inference* by William Dembski and *Icons of Evolution* by Jonathan Wells.

Woodward measures the rhetorical effectiveness of each of these major ID works. More than anyone else in the ID movement, Johnson highlighted the effect of scientific materialism (or methodological naturalism) in shaping the debate over origins. By their own definition of their field, modern scientists investigate only natural causes, not



| reviewed by EDWARD J. LARSON |

supernatural ones. In his various popular books and public statements, Johnson denounces such reasoning as circular.

"We define *science* as the pursuit of materialist alternatives. Now what kind of answers do we come up with?" he noted in a 1997 interview with Tim Stafford for CT. "By gosh, we come up with materialist answers." Darwinism may be the best naturalistic answer to biological origins, Johnson stresses, but it is still wrong.

As Woodward illustrates, the writings of other key ID proponents have broadened the critique of Darwinism. Unlike Johnson, Behe does not deny the core evolutionary concept of common descent for all organisms, but in *Darwin's Black Box* he does assert that some biochemical

processes (such as the cascade of multiple proteins required for blood clotting) are too irreducibly complex to have originated in the step-by-step fashion envisioned by modern Darwinists. Recalling the old claim that the eye could not have evolved piecemeal because it only functions as a whole, Behe maintains that something intelligent must have designed certain functional systems into organisms.

For his part, Dembski invokes mathematical probability filters (like those used to sift radio signals from outer space for messages sent by intelligent beings) to suggest that life's complexity is more likely the product of design than chance. In *Icons of Evolution*, Wells debunks various outdated bits of scientific evidence still invoked by some to support evolu-

tion theory, such as long-discredited pictures illustrating similarities in the embryonic development of various species and dubious experiments demonstrating the power of natural selection in transforming the peppered moth.

FIGHTING FOR STATUS

Woodward's own rhetoric artfully advances his argument, but his book tells little about the status of evolutionary theory within the wider scientific community. In surveys of scientists and studies of federal support for scientific research, I have not detected any appreciable impact of ID within core biological disciplines. Although funding for biological research has soared under the Bush administration, for example, none of it is going to

bookmarks

quick reviews of new books

THE CATCH:

Families, Fishing, and Faith

William J. Vande Kopple
Eerdmans, 228 pp., \$15

Fish Tales

Is there fishing in heaven? If William Vande Kopple, professor of English at Calvin College, has anything to say about it, heaven will be an angler's paradise.

In 20 diverse essays on the fishing life, Vande Kopple takes nostalgic looks at the role fishing played in his childhood, the way it has tied generations of his family together, and his own inner conflicts about the guilty pleasures of fishing on the Sabbath. Like a fisherman who likes to embellish his tales, Vande Kopple confesses that although the stories are factually based and somewhat autobiographical, they are primarily fiction.

The second half of the book contains some of the best essays, with conflicts

among three generations healed through fishing. In "Through the Ice," Vande Kopple's son is unable to face his grandpa's failing health; the fishing they shared continues to connect the two. "Still Fishing" is a lovely vignette of three generations still striving to understand each other—through angling for the big one that got away.

Vande Kopple's detailed descriptions of rigging should appeal to fishermen, and general readers will find a plentiful catch of poignancy and nostalgia.

THE EVER-LOVING TRUTH:

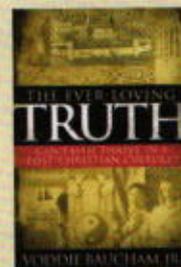
Can Faith Thrive in a Post-Christian Culture?

Voddie Baucham Jr.
Broadman & Holman, 212 pp., \$14.99

Fighting Zealous Tolerance

Truth is under attack in our culture, preacher and teacher Voddie Baucham believes, and neutrality is not optional for Christians. Baucham objects to the ways our culture has taught us to think and offers practical ideas for Christians to "speak the truth in love."

He examines the media's stereotypes of Christians, as well as their resistance to the mention of Jesus' name in the public square.



He then lays out a case for the Bible as a reliable, authentic source of truth.

Baucham, a speaker at conferences, seminars, and churches, urges Christians to take a stand against relativism and overzealous tolerance. However, this African American author will likely draw criticism for his surprising assertion that "diversity is not a biblical mandate. Nor is it realistic."

His call to engage the culture with the gospel includes the nuts and bolts of giving a good testimony. "It is not our job to convict sinners of sin! The goal of a witnessing encounter is to introduce someone to Jesus."

Baucham's ideas invite discussion. He writes, "Will we bow before the god of culture? Or will we . . . give an account to all those who ask us not just what we believe but why?"

| reviewed by CINDY CROSBY |

any projects pursuing an ID paradigm, and much of it flows into evolutionary research. When it comes to where the U.S. government puts its money in science, evolution still wins.

Nevertheless, the ID arguments, together with other products of the movement, have found a ready audience among many Americans who either accept the Genesis account of origins as literally true or at least believe in a God who superintends his creation.

By all accounts, most Americans respond favorably to the central ID plea that science should not *a priori* exclude supernatural explanations for natural phenomena. To do so, ID partisans argue, imposes an atheistic filter on answers to the question of origins. This is particularly

insidious, they stress, when it limits what students learn in public school science classrooms. Such rhetoric helped rekindle the long-running debate over teaching evolution—with most recent effectiveness in Kansas, Alabama, and Ohio.

Woodward's book is based on his 2001 doctoral dissertation (in speech, not history) for the University of South Florida. A minor criticism of *Doubts About Darwin* is its subtitle, which misrepresents Woodward's focus: It's actually less on the history and more on the rhetoric of the movement.

To be sure, the history of the rhetoric contains some history about the movement. But the book never mentions, for example, the Seattle-based Center for Science and Culture, which has served as

the institutional home for the ID movement over the past decade, or the Fieldstead and Stewardship Foundations, which have sustained the ID movement by generously supporting its major players and conferences.

These institutional partners and their patrons deserve their place in the modern history of Intelligent Design. Indeed, when that larger story is told, Woodward and his book may themselves appear in the narrative. 11

Edward J. Larson, winner of the 1998 Pulitzer Prize in history, is the Russell Professor of American History and Talmadge Chair of Law at the University of Georgia. His latest book is *Evolution: The Remarkable History of a Scientific Theory*.

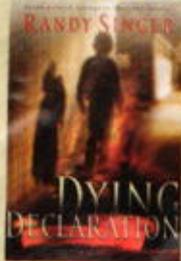
DYING DECLARATION: A Novel

Randy Singer

WaterBrook Press, 417 pp., \$13.99

Courtroom Thriller

Move over, John Grisham. Street preacher and lawyer Randy Singer excels at legal thrillers, and in this newest offering, he shows why he is one of faith fiction's best suspense novelists.



Singer (*Irreparable Harm, Directed Verdict*) unfolds the story of a conservative Christian family that prefers prayer to seeking medical attention. "Just have faith," Thomas

Hammond says to his wife. "God'll heal 'im."

Their young toddler dies, and powerful politics come into play as the parents lose their two other children to the courts and face charges that could land them in prison. The white couple hires the likeable, divorced African American law professor Charles Arnold to take their case.

Racial tensions, consequences of well-inten-

tioned yet misguided belief, collisions between the law and religion, and a dollop of romance make the pages turn quickly. In the end, the case may hinge on one character's "dying declaration."

Singer knows how to incorporate just enough legal details to make things interesting without overdoing it. Readers of his other novels will recognize many of his previous, multifaceted characters, and enjoy the introduction of some new ones.

SURVIVING INFORMATION OVERLOAD:

The Clear, Practical Guide to Help You Stay on Top of What You Need to Know
Kevin A. Miller

Zondervan, 240 pp., \$12.99

Clearing the Clutter

Another book of information on dealing with too much information? This one is different. I knew I'd like it when I read Christianity Today International vice president Kevin Miller's opening words, "You don't have to finish this book."

For making sense of the overwhelming



amount of information that bombards us, this book is a good place to start. A well-organized table of contents allows readers to target the particular area of information overload they are experiencing. Miller

offers systematic ideas for dealing with a variety of types of information overload.

One section deals with e-mail, voicemail, finding information online, and filing and storing information. It is worth the price of the book. Other sections target more subtle but profound problems, including the underlying need for approval that may keep us overwhelmed. The book includes a section for church leaders on information stresses peculiar to ministry.

Those drowning in an information deluge will find that this refreshing, humorous book is chock-full of practical ideas to stay afloat. 12

Cindy Crosby is the author of *By Willoway Brook: Exploring the Landscape of Prayer* (Paraclete, 2003).

Theological Tango

DEBUT NOVEL FOR ADULTS REFLECTS BIG THEMES IN A SMALL TOWN.

THE DUET

Robert Elmer

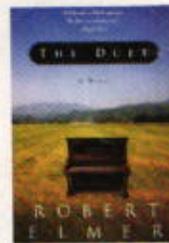
WaterBrook Press, 290 pages, \$12.99

RETIRED dairy farmer Gerrit Appeldoorn, a nearly 60-year-old Dutch Reformed widower, finds himself inexplicably drawn to the new piano teacher from the East Coast. Homegrown fellow that he is, Gerrit tries to erect mental and spiritual blockades against this fresh-faced city woman.

Though he wants to honor the memory of his dead wife, Gerrit is increasingly eager to escort his granddaughter to her piano lessons—puzzling as this flimsy pretense is even to himself.

Thus begins *The Duet*, the debut adult title for youth series author Robert Elmer. The tempo picks up as the Calvinist worldview of Gerrit clashes with that of Joan Horton, the also-widowed piano teacher whose Nazarene roots emphasize actively “doing” rather than letting life unfold around her. Gerrit and Joan’s theological conversations give their relationship a spark. Casual debate turns to verbal sparring.

This is no tract, though. Elmer draws his readers in for a closer look, then teases them with a bit of introspection or laughter before unveiling another truth. Like writers such as Jan Karon, Elmer avoids theological lectures in favor of



prudent, timely, and telling remarks from his characters.

With this work, Elmer—the author of *The Young Underground*, *Adventures Down Under*, *Promise of Zion*, and *AstroKids*—also reminds us that many new Christian fiction writers are crafting their work more skillfully than ever.

Elmer mainly teaches by example. As the widower and the widow stumble into a tenuous friendship revolving around 9-year-old granddaughter Mallory’s piano lessons (which she abhors), they journey, often comically, into places of deeper understanding. The author expertly unfurls a story in which both characters

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