

BOOK REVIEW

of

Phillip E. Johnson, *Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds*,
InterVarsity Press, 1997.

This book is a recent addition to the Evangel Library,
and this review is presented by Larry D. Paarmann.

Phillip E. Johnson is a graduate of Harvard and the University of Chicago. He was a law clerk for Chief Justice Earl Warren of the United States Supreme Court and has taught law for thirty years at the University of California at Berkeley. Johnson was an agnostic for much of his life, and was not called to faith in Christ until after he was a law professor at Berkeley. He is the author of *Darwin on Trial* (dealing with scientific evidence in a non-technical way), published in 1991 (2nd edition, 1993), and *Reason in the Balance* (dealing with naturalism in science, law and education), published in 1995. This book, *Defeating Darwinism*, seems particularly relevant to Kansans due to the recent changes to the State Science Standards by the Board of Education, and the resulting hoopla over those changes.

This short book (about 130 pages) was written primarily for high school students, conveying the basic message of Johnson's earlier two books, but with considerably less detail. However, Johnson suggests that the message of the book is as much needed by professors, scientists, and adults in general as well. Indeed, the book is a good read, with a lot of stimulating ideas about how to perceive what is really at issue in the debate about evolution going on in our society. Johnson's main approach is to make a clear distinction between (1) scientific methods and the true findings of scientific investigation, and (2) philosophical materialism, or, evolutionary naturalism. A main mission in Johnson's life, perhaps *the* main mission in his life, is educating people that evolutionary naturalism is distinct from true science and is false.

The thrust of *Defeating Darwinism* is to expose how evolutionary naturalism is everywhere assumed in our society and is never proved, nor even supported by credible evidence. He illustrates again and again where these assumptions have become part of the American world-view, and even among Christians. In fact, educating Christians seems to be one of his principle concerns.

He begins by referring to a letter by a Christian university student who, while continuing to be a creationist, has been won over to Darwinian evolution, and expresses his wish that ill-informed Christians would cease making Christianity look bad by opposing scientific advances. Johnson then illustrates basic mistakes that this student has made in logic, and concludes that he has been won over not by the truth, but by propaganda.

Propaganda is further illustrated by Johnson's detailed description of it in the movie *Inherit the Wind*. Since this movie was made in 1960, it seems questionable as to its impact upon high school students today, but Johnson seems to think it reflects society's current attitude. His claim is that the movie, by design, promotes "a stereotype of the public debate about creation and evolution that gives all virtue and intelligence to the Darwinists", and that the movie "is a bitter attack upon Christianity, or at least the conservative Christianity that considers the Bible to be in some sense a reliable historical record." Analysis of the movie is therefore, apparently for Johnson, something of a case study for society in general. As in the movie so in our society, Johnson states "I have found it practically impossible, for example, to get newspapers to acknowledge that there are scientific problems with Darwinism." As we have recently seen here in Kansas, Johnson further states that "When evolution is the subject, questioning whether the official story is true is enough to make you an enemy of education."

The book then develops ways in which to tune up your "baloney detector", that is, ways to recognize baloney when you hear it in the classroom, and in the press, when evolution is the subject. He suggests ways in which evolution can be discussed (that is, evolutionary naturalism, or scientific evidence for or against evolution) in public classrooms, and bemoans the fact that such a subject that is obviously of great concern to the majority of Americans has been essentially ruled out of the classroom (along with God, we may add). He ends the book on a note of optimism, noting that "Darwinism in the West is in much the same condition as was Soviet Marxism in its last days. Its power and prestige rest not on any real scientific accomplishments but on the theory's role in upholding the ruling philosophy." Perhaps Darwinism will soon fall as suddenly as did Soviet Marxism.