

Ayala, F J 2006 – *Darwin and intelligent design*

Publisher: Fortress. 116 Pages. Price: Unknown

Reviewer: Prof Cornel du Toit (University of South Africa)

Ayala is the Donald Bren professor of biological sciences at the University of California and a prominent figure in the science-theology debate.

The book deals with the controversial topic of ID (Intelligent Design) in an intelligible, fascinating way. It explains ID with reference to Paley's work (ch 1), contrasting it with Darwin (ch 2): Darwin's greatest accomplishment was to show that the complex organization and functioning of living beings is the result of a natural process of selection, without any need to postulate a creator or other external agent (p 19). Chapter 3 deals with evolution, explicating the fossil record and radiometric dating (measuring the residual amount of natural radioactive atoms in certain minerals). With reference to the old argument of missing links to account for evolutionary development, Ayala cites links that are constantly being found, confirming and reinforcing the existing model. Thus a recently discovered fossil (announced in April 2006), known as *Tiktaalik*, goes a long way towards bridging the gap between fishes and tetrapods (p 32). Continuing, he describes the *Archaeopteryx* (p 33), which displays a mixture of avian and reptilian traits. Thus, he confidently avers (p 41): "It is now possible to assert that gaps of knowledge in the evolutionary history of living organisms no longer exist."

Ayala mentions the known fact that most species display 'design errors', which suggest natural selection rather than ID: "[I]t is 'imperfect' design, accomplished by natural selection, rather than 'intelligent' design" (p 34). He refers to archaic similarities manifesting mainly at embryonic level, then turns to the universal tree of life: "molecular biology has made it possible to reconstruct the universal tree of life, the continuity of succession from original forms of life (ancestral to all living organisms) to every species now living on earth" (p 41). In chapter 4 he gets down to hominid evolution and the development of the hominid brain and mind. Chapter 5 explains natural selection and how it differs from the ID model. Darwin defined the basic principle of natural selection as follows: "This preservation of favorable variations and the rejection of injurious variations, I call Natural Selection" (p 56). He explores evolution in the form of genetic change and DNA mutations (p 57-60). "At the end of the long process of evolution, we have organisms each exhibiting features 'designed' for their survival in the habitat where they happen to exist" (p 64). The flaw in the ID case is that complex organs originated over a relatively short period. Another fallacy is that some species could not evolve because they were dependent on other species in the food chain. Ayala counters this as follows: "But we can readily understand that the accumulation of millions of small, functionally advantageous changes could yield remarkably complex and adaptive organs, such as the eye" (p 64). He elaborates on the example of the evolution of the eye (p 66-68).

Chapter 6 outlines the ideas underlying ID, citing proponents of this approach such as Dembski, Behe and Johnson. Ayala highlights the court verdict on ID in December 2005, in which judge Jones (quoted on p 77) said: "ID is at bottom premised on a false dichotomy, namely that to the extent evolutionary theory is discredited, ID is confirmed.... The same argument ... was employed by creationists in the 1980s to support 'creation science'." Some of the logical inconsistencies of ID are analysed (p 80ff). The book concludes with a chapter on religious belief (90 ff). Ayala again cites judge Jones in support of his own view: "Many of the leading proponents of ID make a bedrock assumption which is utterly false. Their presupposition is that evolutionary theory is antithetical to a belief in the existence of a supreme being and to religion in general" (p 90-91). Ayala affirms the neutrality of science, then confesses: "Successful as it is, and universally encompassing as its subject is, a scientific view of the world is hopelessly incomplete. Matters of value and meaning are outside its scope" (p 102).

The book highlights the biases of ID, affirms the evolutionary model and developments in this regard and underscores the place and value of faith and religion.



Drobner, H R 2007 – *The fathers of the church: A comprehensive introduction*

Publisher: Hendrickson. 1vi + 632 Pages. Price: Unknown

Reviewer: Prof G A Duncan (University of Pretoria)

By compiling this work, Drobner has done Church History a great service. In it he introduces readers to the life and work of the most significant writers of the early church and the early medieval church. In so doing, he offers a fairly comprehensive history of the growth and development of Christianity in the first seven centuries CE. As an overview, it presents the work of the most prominent authors and covers important works and themes. This allows him to locate the early fathers in their political, social, ecclesiastical and cultural contexts, using the latest available scholarship. It also focuses on movements, creeds and councils of the period. This, however, results in rather an incomplete survey of the contexts themselves which are necessary for a full understanding of the history of Christianity.

The prefatory material considers sources and bibliographies in an extensive list of headings. An introductory chapter, which explains the subject matter of Patrology as a theological discipline, follows. He does so by examining the title of Father given to significant churchmen who were the intellectual and spiritual teachers, leaders and philosophers of early Christianity, and he relates it to Church Father and Doctor of the Church which have to be distinguished from Church writer (of a later period) according to the traditional criteria of orthodox doctrine, holy life, recognition by the Church and location in the Early church period. Drobner continues his examination of concepts by discussing the nuances in meaning of patrology, patristics and their relation to literary studies in general, although currently they are used interchangeably. Sections on literature from the apostolic and Post apostolic periods, the period of persecution, of growing imperial power and influence, the transition from late antiquity to the early Middle Ages (fifth to mid-eighth century), and the literature of the Eastern Church then follow.

This work is a substantial revision of an earlier work published in German in 1994. The scholarship has been completely updated, as has the supporting material. Material has been added on Tertullian, Basil the Great, Eusebius of Caesarea and the innovative section of literature from the Eastern Church. These include detailed lists of works on general bibliographies, editions of the primary texts, translations, reference works, introductions and surveys, theology, encyclopaedias, journal articles, studies, collections of essays, biography and cultural contextual material. The book includes a number of helpful timelines to explain the timescales involved and the relationship of the Fathers to one another, a supplementary bibliography and indices of subjects and ancient sources. Although, on first appearance, it appears to be a work for the specialist, it will be of great value to students beginning their studies in early Church History, as well as to theologians and pastors. Although it is a substantial work, it is attractively presented and offers great encouragement to engage in further deeper study of the fathers of the Church.

