

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

BOOK SUMMARY AND CRITIQUE

“The Advancement”

Submitted to Dr. C Fred Smith, in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the completion of the course

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Introduction to Apologetics

by

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Bush, L. Russ. *The Advancement: Keeping the Faith in an Evolutionary Age*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Pub, 2003.

### **Introduction**

L. Russ Bush is the Senior Professor of Philosophy and Dean of Faculty at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Bush gives the current modern worldview, based on naturalistic philosophy, the name “advancement.” Essentially, throughout the book, he makes the case that one of the core beliefs in culture today is this idea that society and mankind is advancing, not just in technology and knowledge, but advancing as a species.

With culture rapidly embracing the idea of relative truth, a growing aversion to the absolutes found in Christianity, and a growing sense of superiority from these advances, Bush proposes through his book an approach for both addressing the faults in the Advancement approach to philosophy, as well as an understanding and defense of the Biblical worldview. Toward this end he writes, “The older worldview is not true because it’s old, and it too may be in need of refinement in light of better understandings of the Bible, but authentic Christianity is the best antidote for a culture that is dying from the venom of the Advancement” (17).

### **Summary**

Bush has put together a relatively short book, divided into eight chapters that open with a definition of what he means by Advancement, and build in the following chapters with his rebuttals to that worldview and his arguments for authentic Christianity. As such, chapter one focuses on the development of modern thought with looks at some of the major philosophers over the years and their contributions to the Advancement. It culminates in a breakdown of views as laid out in modern terms and the contrasting Christian beliefs.

Chapter two shifts the conversation to science with an overview of modern understandings of science and rejection of faith. He particular focuses on naturalistic evolution and its rise over the last several centuries. As evolution has grown in popularity, the approach of understanding the world without including God in the equation become much more widespread. He states that “this new viewpoint did not come about because the scientists discovered new data which forced them to this position” (ch.2). Rather, he goes to explain, their presuppositions forced them to find explanations that left God out.

From there, Bush builds on these observations by focusing on the flaws in the Advancement worldview. By making truth relative and undependable, it undermines freedom, accountability, and even intellectualism. Compounding that further is the idea that the brain is simply the product of evolution, lessening both its role and its significance. By virtue of its core beliefs, the Advancement actually argues for a lesser state of being, taking away from mankind rather than adding to it.

In chapter four, Bush takes on the issue of whether or not a believer can merge worldviews; blending aspects of Advancement with pieces of Christianity. He explores Process Theology and Open Theism, commenting on some of its growing acceptance. He makes the case, however, that such ideas are simply compromises that invalidate both approaches and are as such are not appropriate reactions or alternative viewpoints to the Advancement.

In chapter five, Bush continues to focus on naturalistic evolution and its fallacies. He presents a list of ten axioms of modern scientific thought from which evolution is based, but reveals the weaknesses in each. From there he continues the thought in chapter six, giving five simple objections to naturalistic evolution. From his perspective, the evidence is clear, but ultimately the issue was never a scientific one but a philosophical one; it is not enough to simply

reject the naturalistic viewpoints, the world cannot be understood without “a theistic form of intelligent design theory” (ch.6).

In chapter seven, Bush changes his focus in his rebuttal of Advancement by attacking the concept of inevitability of progress. He makes the case that it is false based on modern art, the types and messages of music that have gained popularity, and the levels of eroticism. He contends that this does not reveal a culture that is advancing, rather, it shows a regression. Even technological and knowledge gains have not resulted in the advances secular worldviews claim; healthcare costs are astronomical, hospitals are overcrowded, technology increases have resulted in more effective ways of destroying life, and the list goes on. Ultimately, mankind has not changed; the tools and knowledge may have grown, but the basic human nature has not, therefore the basic claim of Advancement is false.

Having rebutted the Advancement from multiple angles over the previous chapters, Bush ends his book in chapter eight by presenting his defense of the Christian worldview. For him, it boils down to three essential truths that cannot be denied by anyone; God exists, the world exists, and Jesus is Lord.

### **Critique**

“The Advancement” is a mixture of strengths and weaknesses. Regarding strengths, Bush is able to build systematically a strong argument for a Christian worldview in a relatively short work. As such, it is a strong resource for Christian leaders seeking an apologetic resource that is not overly detailed or overwhelming in length. He gives a solid overview of the development of secular thought and the history behind modern perspectives.

Another of Bush’s strengths is found in his summaries; throughout the book he is able to both present the background of each system of thought or evidence, and then communicate the

contrasts between secular and Christian interpretations of that information. His knowledge of scripture and understanding of Christian faith become apparent quickly as he presents Advancement arguments and then refutes them.

At the same time, there are some weaknesses. His argument in chapter two claiming that secular sources had not proven that God does not exist, therefore have failed in their attempts to present an alternate worldview seemed a strange perspective. The onus of responsibility falls to the Christian to prove the existence of God; for the secular philosopher, their challenge is to prove their point of view. From their perspective, in the culture of today, it is apparent that God does not exist. This is why the scriptures warn believers that the Christian worldview will be foolishness to the world around them (1 Corinthians 1:18, 23; 3:19). This seemed a weak argument, especially given many of the stronger ones he did present.

A second weakness is his coining of the term “Advancement.” Secular worldviews have named their belief systems; in creating his own name for their belief systems, he has both focused the emphasis of their beliefs, but also shaped the course of the conversation to his own terms. Yes, a fundamental belief of modern thinkers is the idea that humanity is advancing over time, but the reader would be more effectively prepared to argue for faith after reading the book if they are doing so with labels already familiar to secularists.

Finally, while Bush covered a wide range of arguments to discredit advancement thinking, he missed what may be the strongest one of all: the cyclical nature of history. He pointed, correctly, at the advances of today and questioned their actual reflection of the human condition. This shows that humanity is not yet advanced, but leaves the door open that it may be better than it has been in the past. However, any serious look at history quickly reveals that core patterns of societal build up and collapse have repeated through all of known history almost like

clockwork. More than anything else, that powerfully communicates the fundamental flaw in advancement thinking; human nature is flawed and in its sinfulness will continue to repeat the patterns of self-destruction.

### **Conclusion**

While an imperfect book, “The Advancement” does make a number of strong points. Bush accomplishes his goal of making a strong argument for Christianity as the only real option in viewing the world and humanity. His writing style is both deep and easy to read, making this a strong resource for the serious Christian looking to grow in apologetics. He effectively lays a foundation in the beginning of the book that he continually builds upon, leaving the reader with only one possible conclusion at the end: Christianity is the only viable worldview.