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Review: Evolution and Christian Faith: Reflections of an Evolutionary Biologist

By Joan Roughgarden

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Joan Roughgarden. *Evolution and Christian Faith: Reflections of an Evolutionary Biologist*. Washington, DC: Island Press, 2006. 155 pp. ISBN: 1-59726-098-3 (hardcover); US\$15.95. Printed on recycled, acid-free paper.

Evolution and Christian Faith is about plants, animals, humans and the Bible existing coherently on one planet. It bridges the gap in understanding between evolutionary biology and Christian beliefs. Roughgarden, professor of biological sciences and geophysics (Stanford), believes that evolutionary biology has been poorly presented to the public and that the Bible is often misrepresented in matters of creation. The book is premised on two facts of evolutionary biology, first, all of life is related, symbolically called the one family tree, and second, species change. These do not conflict with the literal text of the Bible.

Roughgarden engages the reader through a first-person account of a Christian teaching evolutionary biology. She insists that "evolutionary science is limited to studying the origin of the body, not the soul or the basis for human dignity" (p. 55), and that "the Bible does not have a scientific end but a religious end" (p. 63). Through DNA, we know that we inherit our bodies from ancestors, including ancestors of other species; we do not inherit our souls from ancestors. She believes humanity's evolution is a willful act of God rather than a by-product of evolutionary processes.

Roughgarden analyzes Christian thinking on evolution, particularly the Catholic Church's statements on the evolutionary process, including the influences of Cardinal Schönborn and his criticism of atheistic materialism as a dominant philosophy in secular societies. Roughgarden criticizes the intelligent design movement which preaches that evolutionary biologists are foisting anti-religious dogma on innocent children. She views intelligent design as bad science and believes that it should be taught as such. The

chapter on Gender and Sexuality defends homosexuality in nature, and shows how certain Bible verses, frequently invoked against homosexuality, are not represented correctly.

Future directions are suggested in bringing evolutionary biology and Christianity together. Individuals need to avoid getting caught up in polarizing positions, for example, evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins' views of competition in nature and the selfish-gene philosophy, and televangelist Pat Robertson's preaching of a wrathful God. The book ends on a moral issue-"our Christian responsibility to care for God's creation" (p. 141).

Evolution and Christian Faith is not a scholarly treatise of the subject. It lacks references, though there is an index, and it does not build on current scholarship, which is abundant for those interested. The book is a thoughtful treatment of those issues keeping evolution and religion apart. Easily read, the book is ideal for the general public, and is recommended for personal and general library collections.

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