

# You Say You Want an Evolution?

## A new PBS series serves it up slanted

by Benjamin Wiker

Pope Pius XII issued *Humani Generis* on August 12, 1950. Among other things, the encyclical declared that, as long as one distinguished carefully between "clearly proved facts" and unproved and contested "hypotheses," "the Teaching Authority of the Church does not forbid that ... research and discussions ... take place with regard to the doctrine of evolution."

"However, this must be done in such a way that the reasons for both opinions, that is, those favorable and those unfavorable to evolution, be weighed and judged with the necessary seriousness, moderation and measure."

Insofar as we are concerned with the judgment of natural reason, that is the fundamental statement of the Catholic Church's approach to the doctrine of evolution, and it is eminently reasonable.

Sadly, PBS' new seven-part series "Evolution," which begins airing this month, fails in regard to these obvious dictates of reason. For starters, we hear nothing about the serious and well-known controversies within the evolutionary camp itself, nor do we hear of any scientific criticisms of Darwinism from without. Also not surprisingly, Christianity is set up for a most unsubtle drubbing.

It seems that Clear blue Sky Productions, which produced the series, was bent on offering a remake of the movie *Inherit the Wind*, where the cool, calm voice of reason (favoring evolution) is pitted against the fevered ravings of irrational biblical fundamentalism (opposing evolution). The *Inherit the Wind* caricature in "Evolution" is most clearly seen in the first and last episodes. "Darwin's Dangerous idea," the first episode, opens with a docudrama depicting Darwin slogging through South America with Capt. Fitzroy of the HMS Beagle, the ship on which Darwin made his great voyage of discovery in 1831. The two come into immediate conflict – a fictionalized conflict which represents neither Darwin's nor Fitzroy's actual beliefs at the time of the voyage. In a village, Darwin finds the skull of an animal species obviously no longer among the living. "I wonder why these creatures no longer exist?" he muses. Capt. Fitzroy offers an explanation: "Perhaps the ark was too small to allow them entry, and they perished in the flood." Darwin is barely able to suppress his laughter.

### Faith of the Apes

In "What About God," the series finale, the laughter is no longer suppressed. Biblical literalist Ken Ham and his sidekick, a singing fundamentalist cowboy – I am not making this up – are trotted out as the only critics of Darwinian evolution. Ken Ham thumps his Bible; the singing cowboy thumps his guitar and belts out intellectually challenged anti-evolution songs; clapping parishioners thump their hands together in wide-eyed approval.

For those thinking folk who still must have their religion, we are assured that, as long as they accept the Darwinian account of evolution as orthodoxy, they are free to have any belief they want. To support this position, Catholic biologist Ken Miller, author of *Finding Darwin's God*, is introduced. "I'm an orthodox Catholic, and an orthodox Darwinist," he tells us. "I believe that God works in concert with the principals of evolution."

But the viewer is left dangling, waiting for an explanation of just exactly how "God works in concert with the principals of evolution." This lacuna is all the more ironic because Miller is first shown sitting in Mass listening to the strains of children singing "All things bright and beautiful / The Lord God made them all." But orthodox Darwinism declares that chance and chance alone governs natural selection, and that human beings and all other living things "bright and beautiful" are the accidental result of countless, random variations. The Catholic faith declares that God's creative power and wisdom govern creation, and that all living things, including human beings, are the intended result of His divine plan. How can the two fit together? We are not told.

To take another, even stranger example, one of the scientists featured prominently in the series is Richard Dawkins, whose books are all written to show that Darwinism leads necessarily (and happily, for him) to atheism. How can Miller and Dawkins both be orthodox Darwinists and come to opposite conclusions about the effect of Darwinism on religion? We are not told that either.

There's still more wrong with "Evolution." Anyone familiar with the history of evolutionary theory and the current controversies among proponents of evolution will be surprised to find no hint of any disagreement among those within the evolutionary community -- and no mention of any scientific opposition to Darwinism from without.

So careful is the series to present a united front of unambiguous, unanimous support for evolution among scientists, that it never mentions the well-known disputes among evolutionists (There are many). Where is the discord over the lack of transitional species in the fossil record? The tussling over mapping to show which species descended from which? The debate over the role of DNA in selection and inheritance? We are led to believe that serious difficulties, sharp disagreements and heated controversies simply do not exist among proponents of evolution. In reality, nothing could be further from the truth.

### **Silencing the Credible Critics**

As for the scientific opposition to Darwinism, the serious criticisms of his theory by scientists of Darwin's own day do not appear in the docudrama of Darwin's life, nor do we hear from proponents of the intelligent-design theory, with their compelling, scientifically sound criticisms of evolutionary theory.

Adherents of intelligent design are not biblical literalists; they are not fundamentalist preachers; they do not sing hokey anti-evolution songs. They have PhD's in evolutionary biology, chemistry, biochemistry, molecular and cell biology, biophysics, nuclear physics, microbiology, physics, mathematics and astronomy -- and they have come to doubt, on scientific grounds alone, the fundamental tenets of Darwinian evolutionary theory. Further, as their name suggests, they argue that the evidence of science actually points directly to an intelligent designer of nature.

Why doesn't anyone from the intelligent design community appear in "Evolution"? As it turns out they were asked to appear, but only in the last episode, where they feared they would be miscast as fundamentalists. According to Jay Richards from the Discovery Institute (the leading think tank for intelligent design), it soon became clear that the series producers "weren't going to allow any reasoned dissent from any aspect of Darwin's theory of evolution. They certainly weren't going to allow any empirical evidence that contradicts Darwinism to see the light of day. Ultimately we decided that the series was going to be an expensive piece of propaganda." As a result, the Discovery Institute advised Discovery fellows and other intelligent-design proponents not to participate.

Well, with all these defects, is the series worth watching? Yes. There are a lot of well-done segments interspersed throughout and strong arguments are made for evolution of which every thinking person should be aware. But in order that the viewer not confuse facts with hypotheses – and that "both opinions, that is, those favorable and those unfavorable to evolution, be weighed and judged with the necessary seriousness, moderation and measure" – some additional resources should be used. Viewers can obtain a copy of the Discovery Institute's "Viewers Guide," which has been prepared specifically to supplement the PBS series. This guide is designed to help sort out fact from hypothesis and fiction, and contains a very thorough bibliography for those who wish to do further reading on evolution. It is available from the institutes web site, [www.discovery.org](http://www.discovery.org).

I've already watched it once, in preview, and I'm sure I'll watch it again. It may have its share of monkey business – keep the kids out of the room for part 5, "Why Sex?" – but we who know that we are more than evolutionary gifted apes owe it to both reason and faith to know both sides of this debate.

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Ben Wiker, a fellow at the Discovery Institute, teaches philosophy of science at Franciscan University of Steubenville (Ohio)

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