

The Evolving God: Charles Darwin on the Naturalness of Religion. By J. David Pleins. New York: Bloomsbury, 2013. xiv + 171 pages. \$29.95 (paper).
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Given the flurry of activity and publications in 2009 coinciding with the bicentenary of Charles Darwin's birth and the sesquicentennial of the publication of the *Origin of Species*, it could be supposed that there would be little more to say about Darwin's contemporary significance. This book proves that supposition wrong. There have been many myths about Darwin that have been successfully debunked, not least the notion that his theory of natural selection led to his loss of Christian faith and subsequent reconversion on his deathbed. Such caricatures are worthy of a resounding rebuttal, especially in a pedagogical context. The life of Darwin as research scientist and his religious beliefs were more interwoven than a simple tortured struggle between his faith and science. Drawing primarily on Darwin's *Descent of Man*, this book argues, convincingly in my view, that more can be said about Darwin's search for explanation with respect to religious beliefs.

In this book David Pleins explores the historical world of Darwin in an attempt to understand the gradual shift in Darwin's perspective, and concludes that Darwin's so-called loss of faith was less the result of faith-fracturing events than a tentative struggle to arrive at a positive explanation of evolution in relation to religious beliefs. Inasmuch as Pleins has successfully presented a new angle on this issue, this book is to be welcomed. I am less sure, however, that the positive religious motivation for explanation eclipses other factors already dealt with by Darwin's biographers. Although Pleins hints at such nuance, students reading this book need to be aware of the contemporary intellectual background in which he is situating his own novel contribution.

What is striking, however, about Pleins's account is the extent to which historical details are used to inform his position. This makes for a lively and readable account that will be attractive in a teaching context. For example, he is not afraid to discuss the confrontation and bloodletting that has taken place in the name of religion, thus resisting any simplistic account that an evolutionary model results in the gradual moral progression of religious beliefs. But the tussle between humanity's higher rational "instincts" and basal lower "instincts" that Darwin believed was shared by other animals shows the extent to which he also held the view that immorality was animalistic. While this undercuts a sense of moral responsibility, it also still blames animal instincts for moral turpitude in humans in a way that is somewhat unfortunate. Pleins is more concerned, however, to highlight Darwin's search for explanation of religious beliefs, including belief in God as well as

a construction of evolutionary ethics. Pleins recognized that Darwin also, more positively, rooted positive moral instincts in the social instincts and the development of conscience rather than selfishness. He also shows that Darwin is more honest in raising questions about his own theory than later ultra-Darwinian atheist interpreters, for Darwin was prepared to admit the paradoxical doubt that enters into the judgment of science itself, emerging as it does according to his view from the evolved mind. Overall this book needs to be read and widely appreciated in both scholarly and pedagogical contexts.

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Catholic Perspectives on Sport: From Medieval to Modern Times. By Patrick Kelly S.J. Mahway, NJ: Paulist Press, 2012. 224 pages. \$19.95 (paper).

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This recent book by Patrick Kelly, SJ, addresses a topic little known outside of a very small group of dedicated scholars. When the subject in question is that of sport and its place in our lives, it is commonplace to claim that sport's importance can be traced back to the growth of industrial society, and before that, to a particular Protestant spirit associated with "muscular" Christianity and asceticism. Sport could justifiably claim to be the new religion in many countries, especially those in the Western world. It dominates whole sections of the media and the conversation of a very sizable segment of the population. And in the ivory towers, academic courses abound in such areas as sport psychology, physiology, kinesiology, and leisure management studies. It seems that sport is highly valued, and as a consequence there is little we don't know about it.

Reading Kelly's book fundamentally challenges this idea. His thesis is that the roots of modern sport do not lie in Puritan and Protestant foundations but in the soil of medieval Catholic culture. His work adopts a historical perspective to reveal how the Catholic Church supported the development of sport and the playing of games. The historical argument is backed by numerous examples from medieval sources to show how Catholic culture and the church provided the milieu within which people were encouraged to give praise to God through their leisure pursuits.

Although primarily a history, there is much here for the theologian to admire. Kelly traces the church's understanding about the virtue of play as it sought to advance a balanced view whereby leisure and recreation were seen as ways to keep work in its place, and as vehicles for contemplation and joy. In carrying out this task, Kelly refers to the church fathers and classical Greek thinkers. Moreover, and significantly, since his work is often