

any answers to the question of how society can be engaged in a debate beyond Darwinism and ID. And West fails to explore how practices like private schooling, homeschooling, and church attendance may serve as an effective firewall to the Darwinian reductionism that infests our society.

This book demands a sequel.

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The Eternal Dog

by Ronald F. Maxwell

We Give Our Hearts to Dogs to Tear: Intimations of Their Immortality
by Alston Chase
Edison, NJ: Transaction;
235 pp., \$34.95



When Tibbie came into my life, I was already past my 40th year. After a few weeks I marveled how I had ever lived without a dog. As a first dog, this 14-pound West Highland terrier would set the standard for those to follow—kindhearted, gentle, loving, spirited, playful, patient, trusting, intelligent, obedient, mischievous, a beauty to watch, and a joy to snuggle with; but also strong willed, determined, and a born ratter. She and her pal Willie, also a Westie and six months her junior, would corner and kill many a field mouse at their various homes in California, Maryland, and Virginia. At nine years of age, she survived a coyote attack, but her life hung in the balance for 48 hours. When she recovered, she was the same old brave and loyal dog, and when she finally succumbed to cancer a week shy of 17, we still wanted to hold on to her. I will never be the same person for having known her and will keep her in my heart to my dying day.

For this reason, reading Alston

Chase's new book, *We Give Our Hearts to Dogs to Tear*, was a cathartic experience. Anyone who has shared his life with a dog knows the unique joy and intense grief inextricably bound up in the relationship. We console ourselves that the dogs, whose life spans are so much shorter than ours, at least don't have to endure our loss, the loss of their master, the primary focus of all their devotion, care, and affection.

Chase's book chronicles more than a quarter-century of a family's history with three main characters: the dogs, the humans, and the land. The dogs are mostly Jack Russell terriers, and as we get to know each one, from birth to death, sometimes slowly from disease, sometimes suddenly from a wild predator or a human vehicle, Chase uses their lives to reflect on the two-century history of the Jack Russell terrier in America and the British Isles.

The humans are the author, his wife, Diana, and individuals raising and caring for these dogs widely scattered across time and place. What emerges is a portrait of this particular type of dog, the hunting Jack Russell, and the people devoted to him or her. The land is Montana—in the late 70's, still a wild and rugged place. By the time the book closes in the first decade of the 21st century, the land has undergone much of the massive shrink-wrapping that is suffocating wild places and the quality of life outdoors everywhere. The Jack Russell is not a hothouse flower. He revels in the open space, the wildness, and even the danger. The more we watch him in Chase's narrative, the more we come to see ourselves. For we, human animals, also need these things to thrive.

Chase says it best:

No matter where we live or what we do, love of the land lies in our blood. For twelve millennia, dogs and people lived on the land, working, herding, defending, rescuing. And when, beginning two hundred years ago, people began moving to cities they yearned for the pastoral way of life all the more. They still do. Dogs preserve for us an emotional connection to our bucolic past that remains in memory and imagination. And when they demand we take them for walks, they reawaken this connection. They become guides in a journey to rediscover our own genetic roots.

I shouldn't have been surprised that woven throughout the narrative is an existential contemplation on eternity. Not surprised, because each time a dog leaves, as with the loss of a beloved human, we are forced to confront the unanswerable questions we spend most of our time ignoring. Finally then, this book is a philosophical memoir, a heart-rending meditation on the extraordinary mystery that is the bond between dog and man.

Immediately upon closing the book, I said a prayer for Tibbie, Willie, and Yum-Yum, who had recently been taken by a black bear—then settled down on the faded and much-abused oriental rug with Tobey, Doogie, Penelope, and Patou. They were waiting.

Ronald F. Maxwell is the director of several films, including Gods and Generals and the forthcoming Western, Belle Starr.

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Merry Christmas, Pinhead

Twelve long months ago, America was in the throes of Holiday Shopping Season '07. It was a simpler time. The Dow was safely over 10,000, and we were all wondering whether it would be Hillary or Giuliani in the White House come January '09.

I push my cart carrying 250 pounds of chicken feed up to the feedstore counter. The pretty girl behind the register nods and says hello. It's hard for her not to remember the giant white man with a beard and a Stetson who always guides five 50-pound bags through the narrow checkout lane. As she hands me the receipt, I say reflexively, "Merry Christmas."

She looks directly at me, smiling, eyes narrowed, and nods. "Yes. Merry CHRISTMAS!"

It wasn't a bright, elven "Yes! *Merry Christmas!*" She spoke with a knowing, *in your face, liberal America* air of defiance. And that made me smile.

Then it made me wonder. Heading back to the farm in my pickup truck, I turned down Haggard and relit my pipe when the thought occurred to me: Wonder what she thinks about the Incarnation?

I was in no position to go back to the store and assign a 500-word essay, "What Christmas Means to Me," to the girl in jeans whose name tag I am careful not to stare at, so I was left to my own musings. She's probably no theologian. Not many folks are these days. I'm guessing she couldn't tell me why the words *unconfusedly; immutably; indivisibly; and inseparably* were so important at the Council of Chalcedon. Depending on the church she attends, or attended, she may say the words Athanasius whispered to his bishop, Alexander, at Nicea—the words that drew a line in the sand that Arius could not cross: "begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father." She may say them, or might have said them. But does she know what they mean?

You're expecting too much, I re-

ply, puffing. The Baptists you grew up with didn't say the Nicene Creed, but they knew that Jesus is fully God and fully man—and that He was born of a virgin.

So she's a Baptist now?

Maybe—I really don't know. I'm guessing probably not. That *Merry Christmas* seemed more like a countercultural protest statement, the kind that says, yeah, you're one of us, or yeah, I'm one of you.

One of you . . . *what?* Believers in Christ Jesus? One of you who celebrate the Word Become Flesh? One of you who worship a Baby? The One Who made the world in six days, the One Who bore our sins in His Body on the tree, the One Who crushed the serpent's head, the One Whom death and Hell could not hold, the One Who is returning on a white horse, Whose vesture is dipped in blood, Whose name is Faithful and True?

Or perhaps it was *one of you proud white Americans*.

The War Against Christmas is very real, and many brave Christians have sounded the alarm like Paul Revere, before riding out to the front to fight back. But others seem more interested in nativism than in the Nativity. Over there on *that* side are the enemies of America, "Western Civilization," apple pie, baseball, democracy, Judeo-Christianism, heterosexualism, and low taxes. Over here on *my* side, we know that we are the greatest nation on earth, that America is great because America is good, that religion belongs in the public square and Christ belongs in Christmas. We don't say "Ex-muss," or "Ramadan," Frenchie.

FOX News's Bill O'Reilly agrees. In fact, according to himself, he is "fighting for the soul of America." On his website, there are numerous products to purchase, including his book, *Culture Warrior*, in which "He examines why the nation's motto '*E Pluribus Unum*' ('From Many, One') might change



to 'What About Me?'" and

shows how the culture war has played out in such high-profile instances as *The Passion of Christ*, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, the abuse epidemic (child and otherwise), and the embattled place of religion in public life—with special emphasis on the war against Christmas.

Christmas, you see, just like Harriet Miers, has been rejected by the leftist media, because of its "anti-Christian bias." And this is outrageous, because "85 percent of Americans say they're Christians" and "Christmas is a federal holiday, signed into law by [President] U.S. Grant."

If 85 percent of Americans believe that that Baby was God, then Bill is right: The War on Christmas is "insane." Perhaps eight-and-a-half out of ten shoppers really are "absolutely offended" when they hear "Happy Holidays." How dare these retailers deny the great majority of Americans the opportunity to confess Christ because some surrender monkey has the ACLU on the line?

In addition to *Culture Warrior*, defenders of Western civilization can purchase "The mug Bill calls 'The Best Mug in the World!'" "This was a birthday present for my husband," writes Jodi of Rockton, IL, "and he thought it was great. He showed it to my Dad and my Dad was jealous. I guess I know what to get my Dad for Christmas!" Nothing alleviates jealousy *and* says "veiled in flesh, the Godhead see" like a 16-ounce coffee mug that shouts DON'T BE A PINHEAD. ◊