‘Origin of the Species’ Sesquicentennial Reflections
St Mark’s Review
No. 211, February 2010 (1)

‘Origin of the Species’: Sesquicentennial Reflections

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Behind the façade of confident self-assurance that Britain projected to the
world, English society was thrown into turmoil on 24 November 1859. The
upheaval was caused not by fears of invasion, a declining monarchy, col-
lapsing respect for the rule of law, disintegrating political institutions or
spreading contagious disease but by the publication of a book. The initial
printing of Charles Darwin’s monumental work *The Origin of Species* was
modest. On the day of publication the entire run of 1250 copies were sold
although it was not a cheap title. The purchase price was 15 shillings and all
copies were pre-subscribed. A second edition comprising 3000 copies was
published on 7 January 1860. *Origin* was to go through six editions (1859,
1860, 1861, 1866, 1869 and 1872) and several not insignificant changes were
made to the text in Darwin’s lifetime (1809-82). The sixth is usually the
edition reprinted because it is the version that Darwin intended should be
preserved as the fullest statement of his views. By 1876, more than 16,000
copies had been bought and, it would seem from the debate it created,
probably read as well.

It was a scientific text whose ideas and meaning could be appropriated by
an educated general audience prepared to engage in careful reading. Darwin’s
genius was in bringing order to a tangled mass of facts which he was able to
arrange and assess. He was able to identify connections and similarities by
asking the right questions. His answers began with theory and ended with
practical illustrations. After explaining recent theorising on the origin and
forms of life, Darwin unveiled his ‘one long argument’. His entire theory was
derived from three basic facts: living things vary; groups of living things
tend to increase; the size of a species remains relatively constant. Darwin
contended that ‘as many more individuals of each species are born than can
possibly survive; and as, consequently, there is a … struggle for existence,
it follows that any being, if it vary … in a manner profitable to itself … will
have a better chance of surviving, and thus be naturally selected’.

Darwin did not claim to be the first scientist to propose a theory of
evolution. Indeed, the term ‘evolution’ cannot be found in the text of *Origin*
until the sixth edition and only then was it used by Darwin and with some
hesitation. He preferred the phrase ‘descent with modification’ over the word evolution. Similarly, the well-known and widely misunderstood phrase ‘survival of the fittest’ was not coined by Darwin but by the philosopher Herbert Spencer five years after Origin appeared. The scientific significance of Darwin’s work was the identification and explanation of a mechanism by which evolutionary changes could occur. Darwin gave that explanation the name ‘natural selection’.

Although he did not deal specifically or in much detail with human beings, Darwin was convinced they were included in evolutionary processes. He told readers that from the pages of Origin ‘much light will be thrown on the origin of man and his history.’ Darwin did not think human beings were either unique or special. He remarked in a letter to the American biologist Asa Gray: ‘I cannot believe that there is a bit more interference by the Creator in the construction of each species, than in the course of the planets.’

Darwin went to some lengths to avoid a confrontation with the tenets of religious orthodoxy. Commenting on his theories in a letter to the eminent geologist Sir Charles Lyell dated 28 March 1859, Darwin said: ‘my book is not more unorthodox than the subject makes inevitable … I do not discuss the origin of man … I do not bring in any discussion about Genesis.’ His views did, however, have a direct bearing on theistic belief. Put simply: the argument for God’s existence from design was rivalled by the mechanism of natural selection. In distinguishing design from function, Darwin explained that because something appeared to serve a specific function it should not be assumed that it was actually designed for that particular purpose.

Although Darwin used the word ‘Creator’ in his writings, his theories did not require a creating or sustaining deity for their coherence. In the fifth chapter of Origin which concentrated on the laws of variation, Darwin touched briefly on the problem of cosmogony and noted possible conflicts between evolutionary theory and conventional religious belief. If God created animals and designed them to be perfectly adapted to their environments, Darwin mused, why did he provide them with rudimentary organs such as the human appendix? Why did upland geese have web-feet although they never swam? In Darwinian theory, God was pushed out of the ordering of nature and was relegated to the origins of life. Darwin’s work involved a three prong clash with the principal elements of theistic belief: nature was constantly changing and was not made once for all time in a state of perfection; change involves chance variations on which natural selection
acts; natural selection meant nature was not benign but a venue for the struggle to exist and survive.

Darwin was also amazed at the inefficiency of nature and believed this constituted yet another ground for discounting divine intervention. He mused: ‘what a book a devil’s chaplain might write on the clumsy, wasteful, blundering, low and horribly cruel works of nature.’ Although Darwin could not join the Psalmist’s proclamation that the heavens and the earth disclosed and declared the majesty and glory of God, Darwin was filled with a sense of wonder at the magnificence of the natural world. His enthusiasm for the study of plants and animals was overwhelming. Darwin concluded *Origin* with perhaps the most excited prose to be found in the entire book:

There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.

The sesquicentenary of the initial publication of *On the Origin of Species* was marked in Australia by a one-day symposium held at St Paul’s College in the University of Sydney on 25 November 2009. It was organised by Professor Alan Atkinson and hosted by the Warden of St Paul’s, the Reverend Dr Ivan Head. The symposium brought together a number of scholars from diverse backgrounds and perspectives. The papers presented have been edited and given a wider audience in this special edition of *St Mark’s Review*. We are most grateful to Dr Atkinson and Canon Head for making these papers available exclusively to this journal. The only paper that does not appear in this collection was delivered by the Reverend Dr Stephen Ames, a Lecturer in the Department of the History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Melbourne, entitled ‘Why would God use Darwinian evolution to bring life into existence? Is this a fair question? If so, is there a fair answer?’ Dr Ames’ paper was already committed for publication elsewhere. Readers should be aware that Professor McDowell’s paper was the keynote address and that Canon Head’s remarks took the form of an after-dinner address.

The publication of *Origin of Species* a century and a half ago was the first in a series of reverberations that was about to shake the mindset of Victorian England. Darwin’s book appeared in the same year as John Stuart
Mill’s political treatise *On Liberty* which was an attempt to set strict limits on the state’s prerogatives and powers. Mill stressed the standing of the individual, rejected state paternalism and elevated personal liberty to the highest of all social goods. In March the following year (1860) a group of Anglican theologians, described by one reviewer as ‘Seven against Christ,’ published *Essays and Reviews*. This collection was intended, in part, to show that Christianity was not necessarily hostile to Darwin’s new book. Reading these papers reveals why *Origin of Species* created such a stir when it first appeared in late 1859 and why Darwin’s conclusions still excite questions and incite controversy. I am sure the papers you are about to read will inspire some to examine *Origin of Species* for the first time and provoke others to return to a work that routinely appears on lists of the ten most important books ever written.

Tom Frame
(on behalf of the Editorial Team)
Dead dogs, Darwin and the design of the Divine

John C McDowell

In his theological prolegomena to his massive *magnum opus*, the *Church Dogmatics*, the Swiss theologian Karl Barth makes the following claim:

> God may speak to us through Russian communism, through a flute concerto, through a blossoming shrub or through a dead dog. We shall do well to listen to him if he really does so. ... God may speak to us through a pagan or an atheist, and in that way give us to understand that the boundary between the Church and the profane world still and repeatedly takes a course quite different from that which we hitherto thought we saw [CD, I.1, 60f.].

My contention is that the work of Charles Darwin may well prove in certain respects to be something of an ambiguous *extra ecclesial ‘word’* that may fruitfully aid recovery of theology’s proper subject matter, but only through critical reflection identify many of the muddles we have fallen into. Thus the task is not to ask first and foremost ‘what would a theological account look like if Darwin is taken seriously?’ That would theologically be an improper start, an example of which can be found in a claim made by Arthur Peacocke

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to the effect that ‘The aim of ... [his] work is to rethink our ‘religious’ conceptualizations in the light of the perspective on the world afforded by the sciences.’ Rather, the question is this: can Darwin’s account help the theological reading of the scriptures? The distinction is crucial: theology as Wissenschaft (or critical study) does not follow the winds of scientific fashion, but seeks to provide an account of the matter appropriate to it. That it does follow fashion unselfconsciously is testimony not to good theological order but to a certain unnaturalness or disorder, a cultural captivity that results in rational domestication and thus distortion. Yet in order to reason well about its subject-matter theology is to be attentive, firstly, to the enculturation of its students, and, secondly, to the vast range of possible overlaps with ‘other’ ways of attempting to tell the truth of things. Thus theology does not engage with science in order to prevent it from operating in “a cultural ghetto” as Peacocke claims, but rather because ‘all truth is God’s.’ And critically observing these moments of correlation do not emerge from ‘compromises’ as young-earth creationists John Whitcomb and Henry Morris had earlier accused Bernard Ramm of doing when speaking positively of Darwin. This, for someone like Barth, then, is not theology’s securing its voice but rather developing its properly fragile witness to the grace of God.

The Scope of Darwin’s Trial: ‘Don’t Make a Monkey Out of Me!’

In a recent BBC documentary entitled *Charles Darwin and the Tree of Life*, Sir David Attenborough, made the particularly grand claim that ‘Two hundred years ago a man was born who was able to explain this astonishing diversity [of life]. In doing so he revolutionised the way we see the world and our place in it. His name was Charles Darwin.’ That, being able to use hindsight, forms quite a contrast with a prediction of WC Wilson of Dickinson College in 1861: Darwin had failed, Wilson argues, ‘to re-establish on a scientific basis the often rejected theory of the transformation of the species,’ and accordingly his thesis would soon be consigned to ‘the appropriate place in the museum of curious and fanciful specialities.’ In the next scene of the Attenborough documentary, the English naturalist opens a Bible and proclaims, ‘This book ... explains how this wonderful diversity came about. ... That explanation was believed, literally, by pretty well the whole of western Europe for the best part of two thousand years.’

Perhaps the most significant term in Attenborough’s claim is that of ‘revolutionised.’ Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*, published in 1859 twenty-
eight years after departing England in HMS *Beagle*, involves something of a seismic shift in our understanding of the world, and especially in relation to the Christian account that had been dominant. It is in this vein that Peacocke can talk of needing to re-conceive theology ‘after Darwin’, rhetorically paralleling the more recent talk of doing theology ‘after Auschwitz’. Wilson’s comments, however, hint at three ways at least in which the ease of that popular reading of the situation requires to be subverted, and more meaningful interrogation about what the intellectual questions properly are can be opened up.

In the first place, his mention of ‘the often rejected theory of the transformation of the species’ indicates that Darwin’s thought had not developed in a vacuum. Georges-Louis Leclerc in the mid-18th century, for instance, had advocated an evolution in the natural world, albeit he was unable to specify its method. Perhaps most importantly for Darwin, in the late 18th century of his paternal grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, had read David Hume’s attacks on the design argument through an assumption that ‘nature’ is not a passive mechanical or fixed system, but a dynamic, self-activating system with inherent powers of activity. Life originated from a ‘single living filament’. French biologist Jean Baptiste de Lamarck (1744–1829) in his *Philosophie Zoologique* (1809) had maintained both that all plants, animals and human beings share a common origin, and that organisms slowly ‘transform’ in developmental progression or ‘perfection’, thus moving from primitive blobs to the more complex and sophisticated human being and the diversity of organisms. Moreover, the development assumes the inheritance of acquired characteristics in adjusting to changes in circumstances, so that transmutation arises from a varying response in an existing group. Furthermore, lineages did not only change but they branched off to produce separately developing lines. In 1844 the anonymous *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* appeared (being revealed in 1884 to have been the work of Scottish geologist Robert Chambers). All of these studies, together with the likes of Ludwig Büchner and Heinrich Friedrich Link, among others in Germany, enable Hans Schwarz to argue that ‘the stage was amazingly well prepared for Darwin’s evolutionary ideas’. Along with the emerging geology, there was evolving in the 19th century a contesting of the natural theology that assumed the givenness of things.

In the second place, while not indicating the personnel involved, Wilson’s claim that the ‘theory of the transformation of the species’ had
been ‘often rejected’ is telling of the type of opposition that Darwin faced in the years following 1859. The *Origin* was certainly greeted with some eagerness, apparently the first print run of 1,250 copies selling out on the day of publication with 3,000 following soon after. Yet there was also considerable outrage. Initially, the disputes were largely with other scientists over the notion of ‘random variations.’ For instance, Louis Agassiz of Harvard, the leading American biologist of his time, argued that Darwin’s theory was ‘a scientific mistake, untrue to the facts, unscientific in its methods, and mischievous in its tendency.’\textsuperscript{10} Agassiz’s science was, however, according to Harvard botanist Asa Gray, ‘theistic to excess’ in that he attributed the origin and distribution of species directly to the divine will, consequently opposing Darwin’s more naturalistic scientific proposal.\textsuperscript{11} For Gray, otherwise commonly known as ‘Darwin’s theist,’ the Englishman’s ‘work is a scientific one, rigidly restricted to its direct object; and by its science it must stand or fall.’\textsuperscript{12} One might argue that rather than simple naturalism opposing theism here, Darwin’s theory was a contention regarding the proper subject matter and means of discourse from within mid-to-late-19th century debates over the character of scientific description.

In the third place, following on immediately from this, the fact that Wilson does not raise theological objection to Darwin’s work at this point is significant. The relations between the theologically minded and the biologist postulating his ‘tree of life’ were far from those popularly assumed to have been simply conflictual, and in many places any repercussions for theology took some time to be perceived.\textsuperscript{13} Some, like the American CH Hitchcock when referring to the works of James Dwight Dana, went as far as proclaim that Darwinism actually strengthens belief in the existence of God.\textsuperscript{14} What does this mean? A clue can be found in an article of 1871 in the *Quarterly Review of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*:

> It would require the same infinite intelligence to create a universe out of nebular matter and primordial conditions, by the long process of development, as by a direct exercise of creative power. A development theory might be held, in harmony with a certain kind of theism.\textsuperscript{15}

Of course, the phrase ‘a certain kind of theism’ is highly revealing, as we will see later. With a divine guiding hand on the process, natural selection
has often been proclaimed to be ‘God's way of doing things,' or at least not opposed to divine creativity as BB Warfield and James Orr suggest.16

Darwinism, it would appear, had largely become intellectually acceptable in the United States by 1890, even being 'applied to [reading of] the Bible.'17 So Schwarz observes that ‘with relative ease Darwinism became accepted in America in a thoroughly theistic fashion,' although Marsden suggests that this was not quite as smooth as happened in Britain.18

Even if this situation has somewhat changed with more recent English-speaking reception, the simple tale of the revolutionary scientific discovery of truth concerning speciation that conflicts with Christian theology needs to be properly complexified. So, in 1887 Thomas Henry Huxley declared his being impressed with both the knowledge of, and generous ethos towards, science expressed in recent sermons by three senior Anglican bishops.19 Yet, not only do his comments suggest that in mainstream British churches evolution was beginning to be accepted, but also reveals that such an acceptance had not been widespread until at least this point when he refers to the opposition that hitherto often been the case.

However, even one’s ability to recognise what passes for occasions of real conflict requires that one carefully handles matters so as to enable appropriate distinctions to be made. In the first place, initially shock was expressed over the perceived implications of Darwin’s work for considerations of human dignity. On the Origin of Species mentions humanity rarely, and tends to avoid reflecting on the origins of the human species, something attended to more in The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex of 1871. Nonetheless, not only did he have human being in view ‘from the beginning of his theorizing about species,' but the implications of his account had become quickly clear. In 1860 the Anglican Bishop of Oxford Samuel Wilberforce complained to the British Association for the Advancement of Science that for Darwin ‘humanity is descended from the monkeys.’20 Similarly, at a meeting in 1873 of the American Evangelical Alliance Englishman George W Weldon declared that Darwinism and Biblical Christianity were utterly incompatible. The reason he suggested was that ‘If man is sprung from primeval matter, he can not be the man spoken of in Genesis.’21

An interesting response was provided by David Friedrich Strauss. He questioned whether it is more of a slight to human dignity to be descended from apes than created in the image of God but excluded from paradise.22 Moreover, he extolled the notion of the ascension of life forms, and, in
accordance with Hegel, claimed that while humans are natural beings they nevertheless sublimated the higher goal implanted in them.

More recently, there has been a turn toward refusing to separate humanity qua creature from other types of creatures, recognising that talk of dignity and identity-status is theological, and therefore not a way of evading the deep symbiotic connections between all creatures whose being is blessed in the creativity of God.

In the second place, and most prominent in many contemporary debates, is the concern over the relation between Darwinism and design. It was this that prompted the geologist Charles Lyell, whose *Principles of Geology* influenced Darwin (the first volume appeared in 1830), to plead with Darwin to introduce just a little divine direction into his system of random selection. This was contrary to the earlier advice that the English botanist had followed, ‘never to introduce anything about religion in my works, if I wished to advance science in England’.23

Now Darwin may have been strategically avoiding religious questions as a result, or he may have been studiously maintaining the distinct nature of scientific questions from the theological. Not all theological accounts will let Darwin get away with either of these moves, however, and would name them both as improper avoidance. Darwin will be forced into either the agnosticism of Huxley, Darwin’s so-called ‘bulldog’,24 or the considerably less nescient atheism of Richard Dawkins, Darwin’s so-called ‘rottweiler’. One of the most famous objections to Darwin in this vein was learned from Charles Hodge’s *What is Darwinism?* The naturalism of the account of natural selection, according to Hodge, ‘intends to exclude design, or final causes’.25 Of course, there is an important question to be asked regarding Darwin’s intentionality in relation to such a confident accusation. Darwin’s own hesitations in making too grand claims for his hypothesis is certainly a modesty of approach that is lost on several of our contemporaries for whom, in the words of philosopher Mary Midgley, evolution has become a form of religion itself, the ‘creation-myth … [that] tells us how we got here, … [and] what we are’.26 Yet, the problem it would seem for Hodge was evolution’s naturalism, that it ‘was explained in natural terms instead of supernatural ones’.27 Consequently, Hodge claims, this ‘denial of design in nature is virtually the denial of God … virtually atheistical’.28 It is unclear from this whether this critique is a modest one, that reconnecting stories of origins to the notion of purposes is in order, or whether it is stronger,
that Darwinian evolution is necessarily naturalistic. The use of the term ‘virtually’ would certainly support the former. And yet Hodge’s pamphlet proved to be influential in suggesting the latter.29

The third main area of concern was arguably, historically, the one that drove the earliest mobilisation of anti-evolutionary sentiment – the concern over ethical implications. The most famous clash occurred in 1925 in Dayton, Tennessee, the facts of which are quite contrary to Stanley Kramer’s later movie portrayal Inherit the Wind (1960). Christian groups had successfully pressurised the state legislature to outlaw the teaching of ‘any theory that denies the story of divine creation of man as taught in the Bible.’30 Local high school teacher John Thomas Scopes was persuaded to become the test case, when standing in for the regular biology teacher on one occasion.

William Jennings Bryan, a three-times defeated Democratic presidential candidate, actively attempted to ‘drive Darwinism from schools’ and availed himself of the opportunity to act as the state representative in the high profile court case.31 It is important to notice that despite the corner he was too easily put into by opposing counselor Clarence Darrow, Bryan was neither defending biblical literalism, a literal six-day creationism (he was more a day-age creationist), nor rejecting the importance of science as such, and in these he largely considerably differed from the anti-evolutionists in the region.32 In fact, he may even have believed in evolution as accounting for the world’s origins in God’s creating up until humanity.33 However, what was particularly urgent for Bryan was the connection between Darwinian evolution and the ethical and cultural crisis of the time. As early as 1905 he was warning that ‘such a conception of man’s origin would weaken the cause of democracy and strengthen class pride and the power of wealth.’ By the end of the Great War of 1914–18, the feeling was that the whole course of moral civilization was involved. Influenced by Vernon Kellogg and Benjamin Kidd, Bryan came to believe that German barbarism was sustained by what was perceived as being a ‘might is right’ doctrine. One creationist announced at the time that

the German soldiers who killed Belgian and French children with poisoned candy were angels compared with the teachers and textbook writers who corrupted the souls of children and thereby sentenced them to eternal death.34
Consequently, Bryan came to assert that not only did Darwinism ‘destroy the faith of Christians’, but it even ‘laid the foundation for the bloodiest war in history’ by committing German culture and consciousness to Nietzscheanism, a brutal materialist philosophy of competition and struggle. Consequently, Bryan came to assert that not only did Darwinism ‘destroy the faith of Christians’, but it even ‘laid the foundation for the bloodiest war in history’ by committing German culture and consciousness to Nietzscheanism, a brutal materialist philosophy of competition and struggle.35 “The objection to evolution is not, primarily, that it is not true. The principal objection … is that it is highly harmful to those that accept it.”36 Therefore the need to remove atheistic materialism from American schools was felt to be most urgent.

Ironically, then, although Darwin himself seems to have ‘shared the optimistic mid-Victorian view that humankind had proposed and would continue to progress from barbarity to civility’, historically it was less Darwin’s work that specifically was of concern than the form of social Darwinism popularised in the United States by Herbert Spencer largely through Harvard librarian and popular writer John Fiske, with his cosmic theory of an all-encompassing evolutionary process, described as a ‘beneficent necessity’, and of the ‘survival of the fittest’.37 By the 1850s, even before his encounter with Darwin, Spencer had conceived of nature and society as a lawful and ordered system of rewards and punishments that promoted material and moral progress. As a consequence, poverty is the fruit of individual improvidence, and wealth a sign of individual worth and naturally ordered success. From this he advocated a politics of ‘small’ government concerned with promoting an economic laissez faire and the space for individual freedom, albeit a liberty itself subjugated to the common good of social competition. From this philosophy of progress through competition, that which he describes as non-accidental ‘beneficent necessity’, Spencer opposed not only market regulation, but also welfare policies, and universal public education.38 Of the ‘unfit’ he declared, ‘The whole effort of nature is to get rid of such, to clear the world of them and to make room for better. … It is best that they should die.’39 It was this perspective on social improvement of ‘the best stock’ that came to underpin the social ‘eugenics’ of Darwin’s own cousin Francis Galton.40 Accordingly, Schwarz argues, ‘the course of events might have been considerably different’ if Darwinism had not been equated in the ‘American mind’ with Spencer and his interpreter Fiske.41

The Grammar of Creation: No More Theological Monkey-Business

By now, it should be clear that there was a differentiated and complex reception of Darwin’s work. Even the hostile approaches were diverse in what
they opposed and thus in their theological reasoning. To be sure, there were issues of biblical interpretation, and the relation of theological to scientific description; but the difficulties were mainly over human dignity, the nature of design, and of evolutionary ethics. As John Hedley Brooke indicates, ‘the conflict thesis was largely a product of the nineteenth century, its champions having personal reasons for mocking ecclesiastical authority.’

It has often been claimed that Darwin hammered home the final nail in the coffin of the 18th century argument from design. While Hume sophisticatedly began the process it was Darwin’s observations that were crucial for many thinkers. It is possibly this that underlies Dawkins’ much cited comment: ‘Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist.’ There is something of the philosophical ignorance of a scientist here in this exaggeration, and a note of scientific positivism which is culturally revealing. Nonetheless, the funeral rites have been offered for teleology only prematurely, and it has, in the form of new considerations of design, emerged with considerable energy over the past few years – first as part of the development of a cumulative argument for the existence of God (Richard Swinburne, among others), and more recently in a different, scientific, setting with ‘Intelligent Design’ (ID). Whether this is an Indian summer for design or something more sustainable remains, however, to be seen.

According to biochemist Michael Behe, nature offers to view features of ‘irreducible complexity’ that suggest they were designed. He, like other Intelligent Design theorists, wants to continue to speak, with epistemic foundationalists, of ‘evidence’. Explicitly with William Dembski this is the ‘evidence’ God ‘has given of his interaction with the world.’ Life is evidently the product of ‘intelligent design’, and this claim is supposedly scientific, and thus testable, rather than religious as such. And yet it is precisely something more than the process of observation (and observationally testable theorising) that Behe laments is missing from science: ‘Because they [viz., evolutionists] think that science should avoid a theory that points so strongly beyond nature, they want to rule out intelligent design from the start.’ Behe’s is, at least, a relatively modest claim that contrasts with Phillip Johnson’s and Dembski’s assertion that evolutionary theory is necessarily naturalistic. For Dembski, even theistic evolutionism is an insufficiently theological product of ‘baptising’ (here meaning failing to transform) naturalistic Darwinian evolutionary science. On this he may not be entirely wrong, as critical reflections on a comment of John Haught’s
suggest may be the case with his approach: ‘It is not yet evident that theology has thought about God in a manner consistent with the data of evolution.’

Behe’s own critique is a warning to the likes of Dawkins and Dennett among others over their grand and totalising discourses, the so-called ‘religion of evolutionism,’ that cannot be sustained and supported scientifically since they covertly, or even in places explicitly, makes theologico-philosophical judgments.

Many critical responses to Intelligent Design focus on the nature of the claim of design and the evidence for it – blood clotting and the eubacterial flagellum, for instance. Other critical responses ask Hume-like questions about the nature of the claim being made – is it really scientific or is there a non-scientific philosophy involved? Certainly what Intelligent Design does not do is challenge the epistemic hegemony of science, especially in its positivist mood. And there is something ironically materialist in this, in that ‘contemporary scientific theory is the source of solutions to philosophical problems.’

The suggestion is that for all the talk of the science of design it is really only quasi-science since it imports philosophico-theological assumptions. It is one thing to proclaim that scientific description is an incomplete way of engaging with the world – for instance a discussion of the biomechanical movements of the brain is a distinctly insufficient way of reflecting on the nature and significance of romantic love. But it is quite another matter to say that romantic forms of description are appropriate to science qua science. Here Midgley’s worry about Dawkins’ anthropomorphism serves as a warning – design, as with purpose, is not a simple observation of states of affairs but an interpretation. In that Intelligent Design, despite its claims for some kind of scientific sophistication beyond religious or philosophical foundations, belongs firmly within the stable of older versions of the design argument, with all its difficulties concerning the nature of the analogy. For instance, do we have any way of comparing complex ‘natural’ systems with watches, or even bio-machines? But, particularly, do we know what to look for without arbitrarily evading those features more suggestive of dysteology?

Moreover, there is a further difficulty – if things had evolved without cosmic design then one would expect existence to appear designed. That is the way things have come to be. In other words, Intelligent Design and all forms of the argument from design need to reflect more not only on how things appear, in a synchronic sense, but develop a deeper sense of the diachronic or, more simply, time, development, and change – ‘deep time.’
There still remains tremendous scope for pressing, and reflecting on, these critical considerations further. Simple assertion and rhetorical bluff will not work – more philosophical work needs to be done. But philosophical work and not scientific work is what enables the move from design to designer, lack of design to a cosmic ‘accident,’ to work.

Yet too infrequently does one hear a more disturbing theological question: how does ‘God-talk’ function, and is it fittingly descriptive of the complex history of dogma? One cannot enquire into the ‘evidence’ for divine action without asking concerning what kind of ‘thing’ it is that one is speaking of with regard to the divine agency that one is looking for evidence of. That entails, moreover, doing some difficult and complicated theological work in conversation with the history of the usages of ‘God’ in Christian discourses.

Intelligent Design is suggestively less materially demanding than young-earth creationism, yet these two share one crucial element in common, and in fact do so with atheistic Darwinism – the action of God is something explanatory, and therefore conjoined with ‘ordinary’ talk of causality, particularly causal intentionality. Behe and others suggest that the invocation of God precisely does the kind of descriptive work that the sciences do, and examples of the likes of Dawkins, Kenneth Miller and Stuart Kauffman are offered of scientists who slip into attempting to make theological statements scientifically (also, Paul Davies and Frank Tipler could profitably be mentioned in this vein). Consequently, in effect, to contest the very theology (the Designer broadly conceived to be akin to other designers) that underlies the Intelligent Design’s evidentialism is to cast theological suspicion on the arguments that also drive the disputes between creationists and evolutionists. So Nicholas Lash’s theological questioning of Dawkins can be extended fruitfully to Johnson, Dembski, Behe, and company.

There are three main claims Lash makes against Dawkins’ approach to the theological. First, the Oxford evolutionist is insufficiently acquainted with the ethos and work of the disciplines and histories of the humanities. While this is a criticism of Dawkins’ ‘cavalier disregard for adequate description’ it is simultaneously a charge about Dawkins’ inability to deal fittingly with different subject matters, adopting instead a one size fits all approach. Not only does Dawkins’ exhibit a pronounced ‘ignorance of the literature’, but his approach is then, Lash declares, an ‘ideology’.57
Secondly, Dawkins entirely misunderstands theology’s subject matter. The ‘God’ of *The God Delusion* is ‘a superhuman, supernatural intelligence who deliberately designed and created the universe and everything in it, including us’. God here becomes ‘a scientific fact about the universe’. The reason, of course, for Dawkins’ popularity is that his critique does indeed fit a considerable number of Christians, but only precisely because they have fallen into the same trap of undermining the complex history of theological grammar.

Thirdly, because of the way he understands the term ‘God’ Dawkins imagines that religion offers explanations, explanations of course that are now scientifically obsolete, as Laplace had famously informed Napoleon. The problem, according to Lash, is that this is a distortion of the Christian confession of creation, changing into a story of origins, causes and effects, the story that begins with *nothing*. It has become here something less than a self-disposing story, what David Kelsey calls ‘a self-involving utterance’, orienting a distinctive way of life and being in the world fitting before the God confessed to be the Creator of all things.

Only a deep critical engagement with what the traditions have been doing when confessing ‘God’ will suffice, recognising what Lash terms the intensive ‘difficulty’ of speaking of God. Without that, the use of ‘God-talk’, while thinly papered over with Christian discourse, will not ultimately be recognisable as much more than the baptising of ideas that bear little relation to their theological setting-in-life. The theological difficulty, then, is that which David Burrell detects in much modern philosophy of religion, that ‘without a clear philosophical means of distinguishing God from the world, the tendency of all discourse about divinity is to deliver a God who is the “biggest thing around”’. It will be a materially problematic short-cut that will serve self-critical theological confession badly. ‘How much more deadly to theology’ in generating a superfluous God-of-the-gaps, Amos Funkenstein claims of several early modern philosophers, ‘were such helpers than its enemies.’

To affirm the imperceptibility of *God’s* action, then, becomes not a concession to modernity and thus to scientific reductionism. Even Hodge could admit in good conscience that the church’s proper altering of her biblical interpretation in accommodating scientific discoveries ‘has been done without doing any violence to the Scriptures or in any degree impairing their authority.’
Instead, crucially, it is reflection on the very nature of a prominent set of theological traditions in which divine agency is not reduced to the agency of some Thing, whether that be a Thing plugging the gaps of scientific explanation or more broadly a Thing that is confessed through what is perceived about the features of the world. Moreover, an important flipside to this notion of divine incomprehensibility is the theology of the transformation of perception. So Piet Schoonenberg argues for ‘a very radical correction of our representations.’ Such a claim is built from the Christian traditions maintaining that knowledge, all knowledge, is in some ways illuminated knowledge. Moreover, it implies the disorder that distorts our attempts to know and make judgments without grace reordering our knowing, what John Calvin hyperbolically would call the mind as a factory of idols, or, with a whole set of other theological conditions in tow, what Luther would describe through the ‘theology of the cross’ that attests to the very hidden-ness or imperceptibility of divine action in the world. Of course, these are complex theological matters, and the attempt to address them would need to be both lengthy and intellectually sophisticated. Yet debates on Darwinism tend not even to acknowledge their relevance.

For this reason there is considerable room for further fruitful reflections on the Thomistic discourse of ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ causalities. The point is to provide an analogy between divine and human agencies, and because it is the operations of analogy (likeness-in-greater-unlikeness) it serves to distinguish the two. As ‘primary’ cause, God’s action (creativity) is the ground of all other actions (makings). But God is not merely the primary cause as the foundational event of establishing secondary causes as in Deism, the first cause only, but rather the primary cause in each and every event. According to Herbert McCabe: ‘Failure to grasp this difficult truth has ... accounted for a great deal of the muddle that western theology has got itself into during the last few centuries.’

Making such a theological claim, of course, may raise the spectre of two particularly thorny issues: determinism and the problem of unjust suffering or evils. The account, then, needs to provide a description of divine causality in a way that indicates that both sets of causes are present in any event while not negating each other. In this sense, helpful are Kathryn Tanner’s reflections on the non-competitiveness of divine agency, and Burrell’s on the qualitative form of divine difference, a difference neither like any difference specifiable among creatures so that ‘God differs differently’
nor a difference that is simple indifference.\textsuperscript{68} Moreover, the distinctions of ‘willing’ and the willing that is ‘non-willing’ in Barth’s broadly Augustinian account suggest that while all events are caused both by God and creature, nonetheless God does not cause, in any simple sense, wickedness. In a way, wickedness is not an action but a non-action, and thus non-willed by God. So Thomas claims, 

\begin{quote}
Whatever takes place in the world proceeds from the plan of the divine intellect: except, perhaps, in voluntary agents only, who have it in their power to withdraw themselves from what is so ordained; that is what the evil of sin consists in. \textit{[ST} \textbf{1a.17.1.96]}
\end{quote}

In other words, in all of this there is no sense of flattening divine action into a form of ‘monocausality’ that would enable either simple perceptibility or a causality among causalities or makings.\textsuperscript{69} God’s intentionality cannot be simply read off what comes to pass, but relates differently to different features of occurrence.

This discourse is not an attempt to obfuscate embarrassing questions, or generate an esoteric metaphysics, but rather constitutes a reflection of what may be more theoretically appropriate to what is meant by ‘God’. And the theo-grammatical implications of this are pronounced, especially for understanding creation. God’s action is not speakably patterned univocally on creaturely action, does not compete for causal time and space, and cannot be identified with creaturely action. Consequently, Ingolf Dalferth, among others, argues, that creation – and by implication the dependency of the world on the agency of divine creativity – is not an object of possible experience, but ‘a reflective judgment that expresses an implication of the confession of creation, God is my creator’.\textsuperscript{70} Thus it is a statement ‘of theological orientation ... [that] interprets everything as the place of God’s presence and so situates every created thing within the horizon of the work of God, whose intention is the best for his creatures.’\textsuperscript{71} Of course, this account will not be acceptable to those with a different understanding of ‘God’, those who assume that the work talk of divine agency does relate to causal features of our world. Yet for a significant strand of the Christian tradition, that comes very close to what is named ‘idolatry’. Consequently, this is something that requires concrete and detailed conversation of the type not yet occurring in the debates over ‘Darwinism and the church’.
Darwinian Superabundant Life or Abundant Death?

Soon after the publication of *On the Origin of Species* Asa Gray claimed that the work was not a metaphysical treatise. Instead, he remarked, ‘the work is a scientific one, rigidly restricted to its direct object; and by its science it must stand or fall.’ On the one hand, there is considerable sense in this proposal. Theological claims about creation are arguably not doing the same kind of work as scientific descriptions of the origins of the species, or of the ‘Big Bang’ or any other kind of cosmo-genesis. Yet, on another it is somewhat naïve. Theology, while it needs to sit lightly to scientific fashion, cannot evade the implications of reflections on the phenomenal. Equally, as Dennett argues, there is no such thing as philosophically neutral, footloose and value-free science. There is, he claims, ‘only science whose philosophical baggage is taken on board without examination.’ If it is a theological mistake to simply conflictualise the doctrine of creation and Darwinian evolution, the latter acting as the acid on theology’s soft body, it is no less a theological mistake to simply conflate them, since in so doing a number of difficulties and value-judgments have been run roughshod over. Not least is the aseity of God and concomitantly the mysteriousness of divine action as non-categorisable among causes. And here are Dennett’s mistakes, those which lead him to regard Darwin as not only scientifically revolutionary, but directly philosophically too, and which claims that evolution eats away the life and existence of the theological. In fact, the relation between science and theology is neither one of conflict nor of studious avoidance, but something messier, more complex and more ad hoc and more difficult to detect.

This is, however, far from being the very interesting and urgent intellectual work on the Darwinian controversy. Certainly Darwin, with his sense of species change, growth, adaptation and transmutation, aids in interrogating the ‘pop-up’ version of an instantaneous species creation too neatly offered both by many teleological accounts focused on ‘design’ and by those insisting on applying a modern historical hermeneutic to the ‘overexploited texts’ of Genesis 1–2. Moreover, the form of the change, characterised by competition and death as it is, can help contest the glibness of appeals to *evident* design, supporting the critique by Hume. ‘What a book’, Darwin exclaims, ‘a devil’s chaplain might write on the clumsy, wasteful, blundering, low and horribly cruel works of nature.’ Of course, ‘cruelty’ in itself is an anthropomorphism, and consequently needs to be handled very carefully. But put
most theologically promisingly, Alister McGrath contends, Darwin enables us to see that William ‘Paley was quite wrong to suggest that Christianity taught that things were created as we now find them.’ Paleyianism, along with the ‘damnable doctrine’ of the eternal punishment of non-believers, had caused the English botanist considerable theological trouble, especially when intensified with the personal turmoil caused by the early death of his beloved ten year old daughter Annie in 1851.

Yet, there is a glib progressivist Darwinism too, that of various biological and sociobiological accounts which claim that natural selection is responsible not only for shaping conduct, but for devising morality which is, in the end, that of self-interest, even if that be so-called ‘enlightened self-interest’. As Gregory Radick argues, ‘Machines, competition, empire and progress fascinated the Victorians.’ Darwin’s work did not transcend this as some culturally unconditioned set of observations, for, Radick continues, the theory of natural selection ‘tells of machine-like organisms that compete, colonise and improve.’ Darwin was, for instance, receptive to Alfred Russel Wallace’s argument that selection guaranteed that primitive peoples become extinct when encountering superior Europeans. And while the means of colonial conquest often appalled Darwin, nonetheless he believed that the results would be ultimately beneficial. In this regard, what is to be done by the connection, too frequently elided by Darwinian apologists, between Darwinian science and deathly eugenics programmes such as those most evident in the National Socialist regime in Germany during the 1930s and 1940s?

Arguably those progressivisms firstly, miss the general spirit of Darwin himself which, despite the occasional ambiguity, had learned readily from Thomas Robert Malthus’ ‘Essay on the Principle of Population’ published in 1798. He frequently opposed Lamarckian progressivistic perfectionism as well. Moreover, he was sickened by, and deeply opposed to, the practices of slavery and understood his work as promoting the equality of the races. But equally, and secondly, Darwinian progressivisms depend upon the logical fallacy of making neat moves from empirical observation to normative metaphysics and subsequently prescriptive ethics, an evident projection, in Huxley’s and Spencer’s cases, of their own values. Even so, Darwin himself does not always have the courage of his convictions and himself lapses into the kind of self-reflective judgment characteristic of existential statements,
and thereby moves from observations to claims about emotional solace, a psychological version of the ‘naturalistic fallacy’.84

At his best, Darwin raises the so-called problem of suffering in an intensive form without providing an anti-tragic perspective, such as that of Hegelian resolution of the tragic conflict, or certain theistic evolutionary accounts predicated on the non-coercive and ‘self-absenting’ kenosis of ‘divine pathos’ that involves the process of God’s ‘letting the world be itself’.85

At its worst, however, Darwin’s account of natural selection becomes an ideology and thus a cultural value system, a surreptitious mode of power that proclaims a (concealed) ethical choice about what really is to count as ‘human’ (in self-interest survivalism).86 So Stephen Jay Gould declares that ‘Darwin transformed the paradoxical argument of Adam Smith’s economics into biology.’87 And earlier Engels understood Darwin to have adopted, among other things, Hobbes’ doctrine of ‘bellum omnium contra omnes’.88

In fact there is a question of whether Darwin himself has actually been arbitrarily selective in his identification of ‘evidence’. For instance, several critics indicate that the numerous signs of co-operative species, even where there appears to be no apparent self-gain involved, complicate the Darwinian picture of natural selection.

Evolution can become, then, a way of exerting the dominion of a rational control that has the force of supporting an explanatory worldview that naturalises suffering and wickedness, even while it may lament such conditions, and of exalting conflictual survivalism (of self, or at best of the group) as ethically regulative. Moreover, there is the question of whether violence is written into its system, and thus becomes primordial. This goes not merely for Darwinism per se but also for much theistic evolutionism, such as that of Haught who speaks about the ‘tragic aspects of divine creativity’.89 Take the theodicy-like claim of Dawkins:

In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won’t find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice..., nothing but blind pitiless indifference.90

What is going on in the rhetoric of ‘blindness’, ‘pitilessness’, and so on? Midgley detects a philosophical fuzziness and laziness in the anthropomorphism: ‘Genes cannot be selfish or unselfish, any more than atoms can be jealous.’91 McGrath, however, believes this to be only a weak argument
about the nature of analogical talk. But this misses a deeper concern about
the nature of the discourse – that it can enable, wittingly or unwittingly,
metaphysical and moral judgments to be made concerning the way things
are. Looking ‘selfish’ is the way things appear to be, as Edward O Wilson’s
sociological argument from the non-human to the human indicates, and
therefore a naturalistic ethic of self-interest is *legitimated* by the course of
nature.\(^9\) Of course, such reasoning is questionable in terms of GE Moore’s
philosophical warning about the ‘naturalistic fallacy’. Yet the analogy can
and does invariably tend to be heard as rhetorical and discursive.\(^9\)

The question is whether Darwinism, or at least whether many of its
various forms, fails to understand and respond to, or weakens the sense of
affront at the way the world currently runs. The ways in which the question
remains needing to be asked has to do with forms of Darwinism that inap-
propriately verge on becoming theodicies and even harmartiodicies, and
potentially close off the ethical question as confronted by issues of patterns
of injustice, exclusion and impoverishment by resorting to pragmatic and
utilitarian proposals, or at best the self-interest of the so-called ‘enlightened’.
The issue, then, becomes one of how far it is appropriate to urge Darwin
and Darwinians that the scientists tell stories of our past that will not elide
matters of responsibility for shaping the modern moral imagination. The
theological may become an important way of asking the likes of Dawkins,
Dennett, Barrow, Tipler and Davies to be more honest about the contexts,
nature and range of their discourse for the sake of a truth-telling ordered
towards the ends of human flourishing.\(^9\)

On the one hand, social Darwinism is never too far away, even if it does
owe as much to various forms of post-Hegelian progressivism as to Darwin.
On the other, a form of Darwinism can equally move toward non-progres-
sivistic late-capitalist neo-liberalism. It has become particularly ‘difficult for
us today to discriminate between evolution as a scientific research program
and evolution as a religious ideology’.\(^9\) As Diane Paul argues,

> Darwin’s followers found in his ambiguities legitimation for
> whatever they favoured: laissez-faire capitalism, certainly,
> but also liberal reform, anarchism and socialism; colonial
> conquest, war and patriarchy, but also anti-imperialism,
> peace and feminism.\(^9\)
Given this, it is exceptionally glib, potentially irresponsible, and theologically misdirected to claim without qualification that ‘the challenge by Darwin to theology ... may prove to be not so much peril as gift,’ as Haught does, or to assert with Peacocke that the thing that differentiates theoligian from sociobiologist is belief in ‘God as the agent in, with, and under this process of creation through time.'

According to Darwin, ‘the theory of evolution is quite compatible with the belief in a God; but ... you must remember that different persons have different definitions of what they mean by God.’ That comment is perceptive, and it is suggestive of why generally the controversies over Darwinism have hardly even begun to scratch the surface of the intellectual issues requiring substantive critical reflection.

Notes


11. On saying that, however, according to Schwarz, Agassiz ‘rejected Darwin’s theory for strictly scientific reasons.’ [see *Theology in a Global Context*, p. 215]


Dead dogs, Darwin and the design of the Divine


192–230 (p. 205).


Dead dogs, Darwin and the design of the Divine

48. See Behe, *Darwin’s Black Box*, p. 196.
55. Behe does at least admit that ID, as he entertains it, has no need ‘to doubt that the universe is the billions of years old that physicists say it is.’ [*Darwin’s Black Box*, p. 5] Cf. William Dembski, *No Free Lunch: Why Specified Complexity Cannot Be Purchased Without Intelligence*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham 2002, p. 314.
56. According to McGrath, ‘The view that Dawkins [among others] demolishes becomes significant only in the eighteenth century, and is not typical of the Christian tradition as a whole.’ [*Dawkins’ God*, p. 60]
63. Burrell, p. 76.
64. Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination From the*


67. Herbert McCabe, God Matters, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1987, p. 11. Linguistically, dual forms of descriptiveness are not uncommon in ordinary discourse (I am a conscious agent who loves my wife, and simultaneously I am a bundle of electrons colliding in a particular circumscribed space and time), or in ordinary theological discourse (I am the son of my mother who gave me birth, but simultaneously I am a creature of the God who created me).

68. Citation from Kathryn Tanner, Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 2001, p. 13.

69. On modernity’s flattening causalities into the ideal of mono-causality, or the elimination of all but mechanical causes, see Funkenstein, p. 18.

70. Dalfeth, p. 130.

71. Dalfeth, p. 137.

72. Gray, p. 56.


75. Citation from Phyllis Bird, 'Genesis 1–3 as the Source for a Contemporary Theology of Sexuality,' Ex Auditu, no. 3, 1987, p. 31.

76. Darwin, cited in Frame, Evolution in the Antipodes, p. 79.


78. Citation from McGrath, Twilight, p. 104. Cf. McGrath, Dawkins' God, 74f.; John Hedley Brooke, 'The Relations Between Darwin's Science and his Religion,' in Durant (ed.), pp. 40–75 (p. 67).

79. See Patricia Williams, Doing Without Adam and Eve, Fortress, Minneapolis, 2001, p. 134.

80. Gregory Radick, 'Is the Theory of Natural Selection Independent of its

82. See Richards, pp. 96ff.


84. Equally, Darwin frequently makes aesthetic statements: ‘from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.’ [Origin, p. 403]


89. Haught, p. 5. ‘The randomness, struggle, and seemingly aimless meandering that the evolutionary story of life discloses as the underside of its marvelous creativity is consistent with the idea that the universe is the consequence of an infinite love.’ [p. 113]


94. There is also an issue of power and responsibility among Christian creationist groups whose efforts and finances focus on the issue of biblical cosmo-genesis. A letter to the *Scientific American* exclaims: ‘the same
energy that goes into the science-religion debate could be redirected to improving the world.' ['Letters to the Editors, Scientific American, January 2000, p. 6]

95. Peters and Hewlett, p. 21.
Science today forms such a central part of our intellectual landscape that we forget that in its infancy the scientific movement needed sponsors to bring its achievements and possibilities to the notice of a society dominated by an aristocratic and clerical elite. Though this is not something that one hears a great deal of from the ‘evangelical atheists’ of our time one of the major such sponsors was the Church in the form of theologians arguing for the merits of a form of natural theology based on the assumption that one could come to know the mind of the Creator from studying Creation. A traditional image was that of the two books of Revelation, the Bible and the Book of Nature, a well-worn topos that was used, for example, by one of Darwin’s contemporaries, ML Phillips, in his 1840 introductory discourse ‘On Physical Science and Natural History’ to the Manchester New College: ‘Nature is the book spread out by our Creator, before us his children, from which we can form some idea of his nature and attributes’.¹

From the time when the study of Aristotle became established at the University of Paris in the thirteenth century there was a strong tradition, which survived on both sides of the Reformation divide, to link the fruits of reason with those derived from the study of Scripture. Indeed, part of the difficulty of the early scientific movement was that it proposed a new

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form of reasoning which, with its emphasis on observation and experiment, ran counter to the deeply-engrained syllogistic forms of reasoning which were so deeply rooted in the universities. Despite such obstacles many in the churches realised the apologetic potential of forms of natural theology based on the new sciences and many in the early scientific movement came to realise that such forms of theology offered a way of popularising their own work and underlining its significance. The lectures founded by that devout scientist, Robert Boyle, for example, provided one of the earliest forums for popularising the work on Isaac Newton and Newtonian natural theology provided one of the benchmarks by which other forms of natural theology were judged. It was natural theology in its Newtonian guise which was, for example, the target of David Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (published posthumously in 1779) and, as will see, the Newtonian example coloured Darwin’s views on natural theology and its possible linkage with his work.

The incentives to link science and religion together in the form of natural theology were many. European society had been built on the ideal of Christendom with Church and State integrated together and this intertwining flowed through to its intellectual life. If science were to flourish it was in the context of a society which, until well into the nineteenth century, assumed that education should be shaped by religious imperatives. More fundamentally still, it was commonly assumed that political authority in the form of monarchical power rested on religious sanctions. All of this was a strong spur to persuade the largely clerical universities to devote themselves to the task of weaving together amalgams of science and religion in the forms of natural theology. Such works set out to demonstrate the consonance between reason and religion and, with it, the secure ideological foundations of the union of Church and State. Such was the intellectual tradition which shaped the curriculum of the University of Cambridge at which Darwin was steeped in various forms of natural theology most evidently in his close study of William Paley’s 1802 work of crystalline clarity, *Natural Theology*, but also in the lessons he learnt at the feet of such outstanding clergymen-scientists as his mentors, the botanist, John Henslow and the geologist, Adam Sedgwick.

The uses of natural theology went even further than the defence of the established order. By its emphasis on the essentials of theistic belief and its eschewal of fine doctrinal debate it provided an ecumenical form of theology.
which could embrace a religiously divided nation. Natural theology shaped the curriculum of that bastion of the established church, the University of Cambridge, but it also loomed large in the dissenting academies, institutions set up because non-Anglicans had been excluded from Oxford and Cambridge after the Restoration of 1660 and the bitter outcome of the Civil War. Indeed, the doors of Oxford and Cambridge were not fully open to non-Anglicans until the *Universities Test Act* of 1871 though the need for separate dissenting academies became less significant after the foundation of University College, London in 1826 which eschewed all religious tests. The morals to be drawn from the two books of Revelation were a regular refrain at such dissenting colleges: in his lectures on botany in 1803 at Homerton College, London, for example, John Pye Smith, Congregational minister and resident tutor there from 1800 to 1850, expatiated on the clear evidence of design in nature arguing that it was impossible that it was the work of chance because of ‘the innumerable marks & proofs of thought, design, contrivance & arrangement which are found everywhere in the objects around us’.

In the dissenting colleges, as in the British society more generally, the emphasis in natural theology had fallen increasingly on natural history. The Newtonian form of natural theology based on the design of the cosmos more generally and the order apparent in the principle of gravitation still enjoyed considerable prestige but, for most, it was too remote and lacked the immediacy of the first hand study of Creation which natural history brought with it. Indeed Paley argued in his *Natural Theology* that astronomy was ‘*not* the best medium through which to prove the agency of an intelligent Creator’ though he did concede that, once the existence of God was established, astronomy ‘shows beyond all other sciences, the magnificence of his operations’.

Significantly, only one of the Bridgewater Treatises, a series of major works devoted to linking the different forms of science to natural theology, published in the 1830s, dealt with astronomy.

It was through the medium of natural theology that educated British society largely came to know of recent developments in natural history, a trend reflected again in the lectures given at the dissenting academies – underlining the point that natural theology provided what Young terms a ‘common context’ to which all Protestants and, indeed, all Christians could relate despite the continuance of at least the outward forms of Anglican ascendancy. Natural history was considered a pursuit which brought one
closer to the Creator and hence helped to make one a moral being. One student at the Manchester College in 1829 discoursed on the way in which natural historians ‘are generally distinguished by piety of feeling and uprightness of conduct’. Proofs of the handiwork of an intelligent Designer were thought to be abundantly supplied by natural history often in the forms against which Darwin was later to react when he argued that apparent design was the result of the chance operation of the principle of natural selection. This same student essay spoke of the way in which ‘Nature abounds with marks of design and contrivance, of the adaptation of every part of creation to the circumstances in which it is placed.’

John Pye Smith’s 1803 lectures spoke of the way in which intelligence and design were evident both in the ‘laws of the solar system’ and in three important aspects of Nature: ‘the adaptation of plants & animals to their situation’; ‘conformation of their members & organs to their respective uses & mutual relations’ and, finally and most evidently at variance with Darwin’s later views, ‘The distinction of species. Constantly preserved, while outward causes are ever producing new varieties. Yet no new species is produced.’

As the nineteenth century wore on this amalgam of science and religion in the form of the popular genre of natural theology needed to confront the ways in which scientific accounts of the history of the world – particularly in the form of geology – were at variance with that provided by Genesis. The fact that this issue had been dealt with by many natural theologians is an indication that the literal interpretation of Scripture was not for many the major issue when Darwin’s work again posed the problem of how Scripture should be interpreted. After all, this bridge had been crossed long ago by the Church Fathers including Augustine and, with some bumps, had been addressed again in the debate surrounding the Copernican world view. In his lectures on geology John Pye Smith responded to the developments in geology (as Augustine had to the fundamentalists of his day) by urging the need not to abandon ‘the cause of revealed religion to the calumnies of those who have assiduously propagated the notion, that the assertions of scripture are totally overthrown by unquestionable facts in nature.’ In 1858, the year before the appearance of the Origin of Species, James Martineau, in his opening address at the Manchester New College, could confidently assert that the ‘Mosaic Cosmogony … has yielded to the advance of the Natural Sciences, leaving us with its sublime Theism unharmed.’
This, then, was the mental universe in which the young Darwin was reared and which shaped much of his view of the workings of Nature – so much so that the *Origin* was shaped in many ways by the traditions of natural theology.\(^{14}\) John Greene’s *Debating Darwin* brings out well how, for Darwin, the process of natural selection bore a fundamental analogy with the way in which human breeders had shaped the species of animals and plants in ways which best met human needs. His drafts from 1842 and 1844 even suggest that he saw an intelligence at work in the process of natural selection writing of the way in which ‘such a Being might rationally … aim at almost any result’\(^{15}\). Though, as he moved to the *Origin*, Darwin emphasised more and more chance rather than design there are still echoes in that seminal work of some notion of an underlying intelligence. There is, for example, a strong emphasis on the way in which natural selection promotes ‘improvement’ rather than being entirely arbitrary.\(^{16}\)

In his famous ending, too, Darwin wished at least to offer the possibility to others of incorporating his work into the familiar fold of natural theology gesturing towards an analogy between the Newtonian form of natural theology and the workings of natural selection. Thus he alludes to the way in which ‘whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity … endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved’\(^{17}\). The analogy was made plainer still in the second edition where the phrase ‘by the Creator’ was added to the passage referring to the way in which ‘several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one’\(^{18}\).

The point was also prefigured at the beginning of the book by the inclusion of two mottos drawn from the literature of natural theology: one from Francis Bacon on the theme of the need to study both ‘the book of God’s world’ and ‘the book of God’s work’ and another from the Bridgewater treatise on astronomy by William Whewell, the polymath Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, which referred to the operation of ‘Divine power’ through ‘the establishment of general laws’\(^{19}\). This was a line of thinking on which Darwin had long pondered. In his 1837 notebook he had ruminated on the analogy between God’s use of the general laws of gravitational attraction to control the Universe and a possibly providential understanding of the workings of the larger laws of evolution in shaping the world of Nature: ‘let attraction act according to certain laws, such are inevitable consequences,
– let animal[s] be created, then by fixed laws of generation, such will be their successors’

Though Darwin himself moved further and further down the path of agnosticism there were some who took up his invitation to construct forms of natural theology using the principle of evolution as its basis. One such was the future Archbishop of Canterbury, Frederick Temple, whose sermon of 1860, a year after the appearance of the *Origin*, argued for the importance of maintaining harmony between science and religion, and by implication at least, that the Darwinian emphasis on the workings of general laws of the kind that formed the basis of evolution remained a secure foundation for natural theology. Yet, despite the continued advocacy of figures such as Temple, this form of natural theology did not take root. This prompted the astronomer and popular science writer, Richard Proctor, to bemoan in 1882 the fact that while Newton’s work had been rapidly linked with theology ‘when the Newton of our own time advanced a theory which bears to biology ... the same relation that the law of gravity bears to astronomy ... an unreasoning fear possessed many lest this natural sequel of the universe should alter men’s conceptions of the government of the universe.’

This failure of a Darwinian natural theology to develop despite the endorsement (though not the actual practice) of Darwin himself no doubt owes a great deal to the sort of intellectual difficulties which prompted Darwin himself to stray further and further from the paths of natural theology which had shaped his intellectual upbringing. But there were also other external forces at work. The need to link Church and State and, with them, secular and religious discourse was increasingly in decline. Science, too, had grown more specialised and more self-confident and was less in need of the clerical supporters who had, in earlier times, helped to give it respectability. An increasingly professionalised science also had its own avenues for disseminating its findings which were less and less reliant on the common context provided by popular forms of natural theology.

Ironically, today, it is often irreligion which provides the common context for evolutionary popularisation giving a polemical edge to scientific works which otherwise might not attract general readers. While Darwin never totally abandoned some sense that the majesty of the universe suggested some element of purpose and even, possibly, design and certainly maintained an awe at the diversity and creative powers of Nature the most prominent popularisers of Darwinian evolution emphasis its bleak
purposelessness. 'The universe we observe', writes Richard Dawkins, 'has precisely the properties we would expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference.' That is a long way from Darwin's claim at the end of the *Origin* that there is a 'grandeur in this view of life.' There remains the central paradox, however, that such forms of evolutionary evangelical atheism are linked with a strong moral impulse: to promote the truth and, in a post September 11 world, to destroy religious intolerance. Quite how this promotion of the Good and the True can be combined with a world view which denies them any ontological footing remains one of the great conundrums of our age.

**Notes**

9. 9 John Kenrick, 'On the effects of the physical structure of the globe on the circumstances & history of man', Harris Manchester College, Oxford, Ms.
WR Wood 1, pp. 78, 70.


12. Dr William’s Library, L18/30 (Pye Smith MSS, New College, London), Lectures on Mineralogy and Geology, p. 3.


Theodicy and animal suffering in Darwin’s world

Scott Cowdell

The claim that Christians reject evolution as incompatible with belief is a canard. Mainstream theology sees evolution as the means of God’s ongoing creation through the within of natural processes, viewing science and religion as compatible. Evolution resonates with today’s typically historical understanding of revelation, also with a Christological sense of God’s world-transforming involvement through incarnation, cross and resurrection. Three streams of Christian thought struggle with evolution, however. Two are products of modernity, namely Protestant biblical literalism and reasonable Anglicanism’s fixation on the argument from design. The third contrary stream does not deny that evolution takes place, though it does question God’s responsibility for a dark and violent process so alien to God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, who is light of the world and prince of peace. Some theologians, including activists for animal welfare, condemn the undoubtedly harsh and wasteful process that Darwin revealed, against eco-theologians whose delight in the holistic complexity of evolving natural systems is not matched by a concern for natural selection’s myriad victims.¹ There are necessary insights on both sides of this argument. Can they be held together across a significant divide in theological and scientific imagination?

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I

Spiritual squeamishness about material existence has a long history. Gnosticism posited a demiurge as creator of the flawed, material world, from which human souls had to be rescued. Some see evolution itself in similar terms, excusing God from responsibility for a world of violent predation. Others blame ‘the fall’, but look beyond Adam and Eve’s misguided choice – since we now know that 3.5 billion years of natural selection preceded humanity’s appearance – to the fallen angels, who were thought to have rejected their appointed role in running God’s world, hence corrupting a hitherto non-violent creation. In this way, everything from earthquakes and tsunamis to disease, predation and death can be seen as emerging contrary to God’s will.

Both scientific and theological training reinforce my conviction that this is not the right answer. As Richard Kingston put it,

> if God entrusted to fallible … angelic beings such absolute control over creation that it was within their power to “brutalize” the animal kingdom for all time, then he cannot be exonerated from all culpability for what actually happened. Must we not go further and say that such action would indicate either incompetence or the fact that the sufferings of the lower creatures are unimportant in the eyes of the Creator! The fall of the angels, in brief, provides neither a sound theodicy nor a stimulus to animal welfare.

Those who blame the fall for ruining a kinder, gentler version of life as we know it cannot appreciate how inconceivable that life is apart from long aeons of natural selection in unyielding environments – as if there could have been recognizable species in a world with the same physics, chemistry, geology and biology as our world but without animal suffering and death. Apart from the fundamental physics which produces order at the expense of entropy, disorder and decay; or stellar evolution forming (and supernovae releasing) the heavy elements that eventually coalesce in planets and living bodies; or the geological churning producing habitable landmasses and fertile soil (along with earthquakes and tsunamis); and apart from global catastrophes and mass extinctions in pre-history clearing the way for mammalian life, we would not have ‘all things bright and beautiful’.
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No Eden-like state of finely-wrought, pain free herbivores without predation or natural selection did or could ever exist. The big beautiful eyes, acute senses and agility of deer, for instance, emerged over millions of years under pressure of predation, just as the breathtaking speed of cheetahs only arose through the slower and less alert starving and failing to breed. Likewise, resistance to disease was won at the expense of much collateral damage among weaker specimens, while adaptation to the biosphere’s many liveable niches means that today’s exquisitely adapted rock-climbing goats, soaring eagles and darting fish evolved at the cost of countless others who succumbed to death-traps of gravity, adverse temperature, wind and water. Complex creatures cannot be imagined as finished products without acknowledging their ‘palimpsest quality’, with layers of earlier life forms revealed within the structures of their being. As for predation, without which a world of alert, fleet, gorgeous and intelligent creatures would never have emerged from somnolent protoplasm, it is also likely to be the case that human brains could not have achieved the necessary complexity without assimilating sufficient proteins available only from meat.

The tendency to resist nature’s brute facts may reveal a wish-fulfilling motive, resisting the inevitability of creaturely finitude, imperfection and hence suffering, as if unwaveringly positive outcomes for all creatures in all circumstances represent the only scenario compatible with a loving God. This reflects the typical expectations of modern Western individuals for their own lives, given the premium we place on control and personal satisfaction. Such thinking recalls the *theologia gloriae* which Luther condemned, looking instead to a *theologia crucis* – a theology of the cross – for understanding the costly, counterintuitive nature of God’s investment in the world. Further, it precludes any satisfying account of divine action in a world open to creaturely freedom, which entails the possibility of outcomes that God will not control. Such an account follows the Catholic imagination of Aquinas into a sacramental understanding of God at work in, with and under the creaturely processes of nature and history. Rather than isolating God from the bitter facts of life, I want to assert that this whole tragic, savage but also wonderful world is the world God is still creating, and that the necessity of death and decay entailed by fundamental physics and revealed by life’s evolution is a process in which God is working-out the Christ event.
II

Admitting that God’s will embraces 3.5 million years of animal suffering does not necessarily entail that Christus Redemptor has given way to a harsh, unfeeling Christus Selector – as Jürgen Moltmann fears. Rather, a God who works through evolution can still be the God of natural selection’s victims. It is not only the blood of Abel that cries out to God from the ground (Genesis 4:10), but that of every unlucky wildebeest snatched by a crocodile, every injured foal circled by wolves, every pelican chick tossed from its nest by efficient parents favouring its healthier sibling. How can God’s love for creatures be squared with the tragedy of ‘nature red in tooth and claw’ – including 97 per cent of all animal species which ever lived now extinct, apart from individual creaturely suffering? This requires a compound theodicy.

A first step is to reinterpret divine providence as God ‘letting creatures be’, according to their own natures. Recall William Blake’s reminder that God is not only the creator of lambs:

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry? ...

What the hammer? what the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

Process theologian Jay McDaniel concludes that God was on the side both of the orcas he once saw attacking a grey whale and of the whale trying to escape them. A loving providence can be understood as fitting creatures to thrive in their respective niches, not least by allowing pain mechanisms their necessary protective place in any complex creaturely existence. God’s care over animals is not in the personal form appropriate to humans, therefore, nor can every circumstance be bent to a kind purpose, as Austin Farrer pointed out.

The God of nature gives his animal creatures pains out of love for them, to save their lives; he makes the way of destruction
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distasteful to them, as a parent makes the path of danger distasteful to a child, by little punishments. Again, out of love for them, God moves his creatures to shun their pains and mend their harms, so far as their sense and capacity allows. And at last, when they must acknowledge defeat, as every perishable creature must, he relieves them of the power and will to struggle, of the pain on stimulus of which they can no longer usefully act, and of the being they can no longer hopefully defend.12

The second element of a compound theodicy reappraises suffering. Holmes Rolston views predation not in terms of ‘value loss’ but of ‘value capture’, with a redemptive element built into life’s ongoing creation. ‘The secret of life’, he concludes, ‘is that it is a passion play’.13 His connection of natural selection with the cross is echoed by today’s leading theorist of human sacrifice underpinning cultural creation, René Girard, who sees Darwinian nature as ‘a super-sacrificial machine’.14 Yet Girard is no supporter of human sacrifice as cultural glue, seeing the cross as God’s definitive outing of the sacrificial mechanisms holding nature and humanity in bondage. While responsibility for natural selection and its attendant suffering must be sheeted home to God, it is not the whole story, nor will it be God’s final word about creation. Christ’s cross begins undoing nature’s iron law whereby the fittest alone survive, in the meantime testifying to God’s acceptance of responsibility for natural and human worlds that appear to have required these means for their emergence.

It is this new creation, emerging from and promising finally to overtake the old, that provides a necessary third element in the compound theodicy animal suffering demands. As John Wesley preached, ‘the Father of All has a tender regard for even his lowest creatures, and ... in consequence of this, he will make them large amends for all they suffer while under their present bondage’.15 The suffering and loss of so many species and individual creatures looks very different if they are not gone forever, but somehow preserved in God’s love and life.

Some have argued that it only makes sense for sentient life with a memory of its suffering to be redeemed, but all resurrection is a gift from God rather than a right entailed by strictly earthbound creaturely natures. The Book of Revelation (5: 13) pictures all creatures gathered together around God’s
throne in the new heavens and the new earth, but what could this mean if God respects the particularities of animal nature? Isaiah’s lions eating straw like oxen (65: 25) are surely at best suggestive. Likewise, to limit animal redemption to their remembrance by God, as process theology suggests, is too much like today’s popular eschatology, which sees immortality in terms of memory only. Further, it risks over-spiritualizing the new creation while under-emphasizing God’s regard for creaturely otherness and integrity.¹⁶

A more concrete outcome is surely entailed by God’s care for all life on its own terms, as James A Dickey imagines in his 1961 poem, ‘The Heaven of Animals’:

Here they are. The soft eyes open.
If they have lived in a wood
It is a wood.
If they have lived on plains
It is grass rolling
Under their feet forever.

Having no souls, they have come,
Anyway, beyond their knowing.
Their instincts wholly bloom
And they rise.
The soft eyes open.

To match them, the landscape flowers,
Outdoing, desperately
Outdoing what is required:
The richest wood,
The deepest field.

For some of these,
It could not be the place
It is, without blood.
These hunt, as they have done,
But with claws and teeth grown perfect,

More deadly than they can believe.
They stalk more silently,
And crouch on the limbs of trees,
And their descent
Upon the bright backs of their prey

May take years
In a sovereign floating of joy.
And those that are hunted
Know this as their life,
Their reward: to walk

Under such trees in full knowledge
Of what is in glory above them,
And to feel no fear,
But acceptance, compliance.
Fulfilling themselves without pain

At the cycle’s centre,
They tremble, they walk
Under the tree,
They fall, they are torn,
They rise, they walk again.17

A theodicy adequate to the terrible extent of animal suffering requires something like this heaven for animals, while in the meantime God’s providential care extends appropriately to each creature, with Christ sharing creation’s groaning in travail (Romans 8: 22). His physical resurrection heralds a day when the traumas of animal life are soothed and forgotten at last, in a mysticism of love which is God’s first and last word about every beloved creature.

Notes


5. See, for example, Neil Shubin, Your Inner Fish: A Journey into the 3.5 Billion Year History of the Human Body, Pantheon Books, New York, 2008.


Reaction and response

The church and Charles Darwin

John Beer

Preamble

This article is an examination of the Church’s response to Darwin in the context of the climate of ideas that existed in the nineteenth century in the period leading up to Darwin and beyond, and then to make some comparisons with the Honest to God debate that erupted a century later. Owen Chadwick has noted that at the same time as Darwin’s theories were causing upheaval among churchmen, there were arguments raging over the historical evidence for the truth of the Bible. Biblical criticism emanating from Germany was becoming a liberal force with which conservative orthodoxy had to reckon. New scientific methods and discoveries were presenting a challenge to the literalist view of the Scriptures.

The Mood of Victorian Christianity

Following the Wesleyan revival and the Great Awakening in America in the late eighteenth century, the Established Church had settled down to
a ‘high and dry’ existence. But the election of Whig Government bent on reform sounded alarm bells when the church saw the need, not only to defend itself, but to guard its privileges. At the same time it is ironic that while the climate of scepticism was challenging the church’s authority, at the same time the church was reaping the benefits of the Industrial Revolution. Science and technology had helped improve navigation and developed steamers able to take boatloads of missionaries to spread the Gospel in foreign parts. Here was evidence to confirm the popular cry that ‘God who made thee mighty’ was indeed ‘making thee mightier yet’. Tom Frame has observed that ‘there was no real sense of conflict between science and religion in Victorian England’. A clergyman with a country living had the time to pursue his interest in science and geology. The furore that followed Darwin was essentially an attack on the plea for a more liberal approach to all matters religious, and the ensuing debates set out to demonstrate how a liberal theology could be respected and compatible with intellectual integrity. Secondly, in considering the impact of Darwin’s theories it should be noted that the church’s doctrines, creeds and dogmas are the result of theologians interpreting the Scriptures from their own particular outlook and circumstances and on the basis of their own culture and traditions. Whichever way we look at it, creeds, doctrines and dogmas are the products of the minds and experiences of particular people in particular generations.

The battle between science and religion was not new to the nineteenth century. The theory of the universe developed by Copernicus and Galileo pushed the earth out of the centre of things and set it in motion, and this was bitterly contested by the theologians who believed that a geocentric universe was part of their revelation. Then the discovery of the geologists that the earth had been in existence for millions of years led to a new dispute. This stretching of the time-span completely upset the scheme of so-called ‘sacred history’ that claimed to trace the course of events down to our Christian era. The majority theological approach to evolutionary thinking arose after the publication of *The Origin of Species*. The mass of evidence, the rigour of its argument and the care Darwin took to avoid theological confrontation over the issue of human evolution were crucial facts in the rapid Victorian acceptance of evolutionary thinking. The disputes ended with the retreat of the theologians. The sci-
Scientific findings backed by evidence, were accepted, and most theologians adjusted themselves as well as they could to the new situation.

Nineteenth century Christian belief depended overwhelmingly on a fairly simplistic acceptance of the absolute reliability of the Bible. As Adrian Hastings has observed: ‘in the light of Darwin and, in subsequent decades, in the light also of biblical scholarship, that reliability was irremediably punctured.’ The result was a diminishing ‘loss of confidence in the intellectual reliability and moral authority of Christianity.’ In 1849, JA Froude published his autobiographical *Nemesis of Faith* which drew attention (as did Tennyson’s poem *In Memoriam*) to the crisis of religious faith in the nineteenth century. A more accurate title to Froude’s work would have been ‘The Nemesis of Doubt’. As a young Anglican deacon and Fellow of Exeter College at Oxford University, Froude’s book was a cathartic and painful autobiography written to purge his memory of a violent father, but its principal theme was the belief that doubt causes wickedness, or in other words, there was no morality without religion. Sutherland, the hero of the book, who is actually Froude himself, disbelieves the literal truth of many of the Biblical narratives, in particular the penal substitutionary doctrine of the atonement and the eternal torment of unbelievers in hell. At Oxford, Froude had been taught by Newman that reason always ends in doubt. Hence, an individual is forced to credit the incredible or end in moral ruin.

When it comes to the question of religious doubt, to Darwin’s name we need to add the names of Marx, Nietzsche, Freud and Durkheim. By the early twentieth century these five prophets of enlightenment had created an apparently irresistible consensus. Whichever form of adoptionism was preferred, whether religion was to be interpreted by Marx as ‘the opium of the people’, or with Freud as ‘the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity’ mattered little. God was dead and religion an allusion. How then, could a place be found for the spiritual in a modern scientific world? How could the widening gap between secular and sacred be bridged? The idea of inevitable progress that took root in the nineteenth century was linked with the onward development of the human spirit. If this was so, then it seemed impossible to claim finality ‘for a figure who lived and died nineteen hundred years earlier, particularly when historical criticism was eroding the old certainties of the Bible and tradition, and blurring the form of that figure more and more. There was a philosophical undermining of
Christianity as a faith centred in a singular historic person. ‘But remove it and you are left with something looking less and less like Christianity’.

**FD Maurice and Christian Socialism**

A notable churchman who figured prominently in the debate was Frederick Denison Maurice (1805–72) who has been described by Alec Vidler as ‘the greatest thinker of the English Church in the nineteenth century’. He had been nominated in 1836 for the Chair of Political Economy at Oxford but failed to gain election. He was subsequently appointed Professor of English Literature and History at King’s College, London. In 1846 he was given the Chair of Divinity at King’s College and later became involved in a controversy concerning the meaning of eternal life and eternal punishment. Maurice’s *Theological Essays*, published in 1853, denied ‘future punishments’ and were considered ‘of dangerous tendency’ by the King’s College Council and led to his dismissal.

Maurice believed that the province of the theologian embraced all great human questions. He is best remembered for his pioneering work in the Christian Socialist Movement which grew out of the Darwinian era and stressed the freedom of God to act apart from the church. God was believed to speak more directly from outside the church through those who were the enemies of religion and Christianity than from within through its official representatives. Christian Socialists in England were responding to the problems that arose from the Industrial Revolution as well signs of a developing revolutionary situation emanating from France. They were also responding to the Darwinian theory of ‘survival of the fittest’, the *sine qua non* of capitalism. Whereas European Socialist parties in most cases had an anti-church bias, this was not so in Britain. Initially the churches disliked the socialists because they denounced the churches as agents of capitalist oppression. But Maurice and those who thought like him believed that the world was evolving towards Socialism which looked to co-operation as opposed to competitive individualism. Christian Socialism sought the transformation of society and tended to play down the idea of the transcendent. The Christian Social Union was founded in 1889 with the Bishop of Durham, Brooke Foss Westcott, serving as President. He believed that it was not the Church’s responsibility to propose social programmes but to enforce eternal principles. The movement went through various phases and spawned a
number of organisations such as the Industrial Christian Fellowship which remained active throughout the economic turmoil of the 1930s.

Darwin’s theories thus had economic and social consequences which influenced Maurice and others at the time. They were also influenced by the liberal Protestant Biblical scholars on the European Continent. Maurice was concerned with the challenges resulting from the agrarian and industrial revolutions. He was attacked by the conservative Evangelicals on the grounds that he was presenting Christianity as co-terminus with humanity and that church and the world were simply alternative names for human society. The key question was whether the church’s only duty is to convert individuals and leave politics to the politicians, or whether, if society is unjust, the church’s duty to promote and superintend the transformation of society. This question was taken up by a number of Christian intellectuals in the late Victorian period even as they responded to criticisms of orthodox Christian belief emanating from advances in the natural sciences.

**Essays and Reviews (1860) and Lux Mundi (1889)**

The clash between scientific discoveries and biblical history produced a storm in the Church of England which reached crisis point in 1860 with the publication of *Essays and Reviews* in 1860 and of *Lux Mundi* in 1889. Both collections represented the views of leading Anglican churchmen whose endorsement of Darwin’s work was seen by opponents as undermining the foundations of traditional Christianity. *Essays and Reviews* was considered ‘an invitation to apostasy’ and created an outpouring of anti-liberal sentiment which led to two of the authors being tried in the Court of Arches and suspended from clerical duties for a year. *Lux Mundi* ran to fifteen editions and five reprints between 1889 and 1909.

Both publications inflamed anti-liberal sentiment. Their intention was to shake the Church out of complacency and to show that Christianity was ‘not hostile to Darwin’s book’. Within *Essays and Reviews*, Frederick Temple’s article argued that biblical scholarship must be adult and mature, using fully the gifts of the Spirit and human intelligence. Rowland Williams, a Professor at Lampeter, described some of the findings of the German critics, including the hypothesis that the Pentateuch was not a single literary whole written by Moses, but a collection from various sources. Robert Baden Powell, Professor of Geometry at Oxford in his ‘On the Study of the Evidences of Christianity’ was the only one of the authors to make specific reference to
Darwin. His was an attempt to reconcile Darwin’s evolutionary theory with Christianity, but at the cost of dispensing with the miraculous. He attacked the then much admired argument of Archdeacon William Paley that miracles provided evidential support for the truth of Christianity.

CW Goodwin was one of the two lay contributors. He possessed an impressive curriculum vitae: Egyptologist, lawyer, botanist, Hebrew and German scholar, geologist, and, later in life, he was a judge in Shanghai and then in Yokohama. His essay was entitled ‘The Mosaic Cosmogony’ in which he attempted to show that the picture of the universe presented in the Bible ought not to be regarded as significantly inerrant. The story of creation, he wrote, was simply a Hebrew myth which modern research shows to be physically untenable. It is a human utterance which Providence has used ‘in a special way for the education of mankind’. Because Goodwin was not a cleric his essay did not make him liable to prosecution.

Benjamin Jowett’s essay ‘On the Interpretation of Scripture’ concluded the volume. It was a plea ‘for the use of reason as more important than even profound or exact scholarship in the interpretation of Scripture. The Historian Geoffrey Faber notes that Jowett’s essay ‘has a lasting quality of a classic statement’ and that it ‘was on a plane above all other six contributions.’ He goes on to say that few today ‘would dream of contesting the argument’, that ‘practically everything that Jowett said long ago has been conceded’ and that ‘it remains one of those few topical masterpieces as easy and profitable to read after a hundred years’. In offering some advice to theologians, Jowett observed that ‘unlike philosophy, the Gospel has an ideal life to offer, not to a few only, but to all. There is one word of caution, however, to be given to those who reverence inquiry; it is that they cannot retain the right to condemn enquirers.’

Addresses, memorials and remonstrance against the mischievous tendencies of the essays were addressed to bishops and archbishops who were ‘entreated to take against traitors to their sacred calling’ who were guilty of ‘moral dishonesty’. The view expressed by Frederic Harrison in the Westminster Review was probably the most virulent. It had the effect of destroying any hope the essayists may have had of defending Christianity against attack by the rationalists. It appeared precisely at the moment ‘it could do the greatest harm – just after the meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science at which Bishop Samuel Wilberforce and Huxley had debated Darwin’s evolutionary hypothesis’. At the Convocation
of Canterbury, Archdeacon Denison said ‘of all the books in any language which I have ever laid my hands on (it is) incomparably the worst. It contains all the poison of Tom Paine’s *Age of Reason*, while it has the additional disadvantage of having been written by a clergyman’.

Two of the contributors, Henry Bristow Wilson and Rowland Williams, were charged with denying the divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures and denying the doctrine of eternal punishment. After a ten-day hearing before the Dean of Arches, Dr Stephen Lushington, the charges of heresy were proved and the defendants were sentenced to a year’s suspension from their clerical employment. They appealed to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in June 1863 and, after an eight-day hearing, the judgement was overturned on 8 February 1864. The controversy continued. In April 1864 the matter came before both Houses of the Convocation of Canterbury which condemned the book as a whole. It was only once in the previous three centuries (1717) that such a sentence upon a book had been made. Out of sheer frustration, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Archibald Tait, declared: ‘the great evil is that the liberals are deficient in religion and the religious are deficient in liberality.’

*Lux Mundi*, although highly controversial, did not arouse as much discussion and argument as *Essays and Reviews*. The collection’s editor, Charles Gore (later successively Bishop of Worcester, Birmingham and Oxford) described *Lux Mundi* as an attempt to ‘put the Catholic Faith into its right relation to modern intellectual and moral problems’. Gore’s own chapter entitled ‘the Holy Spirit and Inspiration’ received much of the criticism. In a Preface to the tenth edition which appeared in 1890, Gore stated that the authors were ‘writing for Christians perplexed by new knowledge which they are required to assimilate’. It was, he noted, not a question of compromise, but readjustment or fresh correlation of the things of faith and the things of knowledge. What he looked for was a reconciliation which would set the scientific and critical movement free from the imputation of hostility. Referring to the history of relations of the Church to Aristotelian philosophy Gore stated that there was a precedent – such a reconciliation has ‘more than once been effected in the past.’

Gore went on to say that ‘the best minds of the future are to be neither religious minds defying scientific advance, not scientific minds denying religion, but minds which religion interprets and is interpreted by science, in which faith and enquiry subsist together and reinforce
one another’. He wanted to make it clear that he and his fellow essayists ‘were amenable to the bar of authority and were bound to feel sure that nothing (they) were saying was transgressing the laws which the Catholic Church has laid down’. He saw recent criticism of the Old Testament as representing a real advance to analytical method as applied to literature, and thus a most serious method of thought. We can see the influence of Darwin here when Gore stated that ‘for all the reality of its inspiration the Old Testament is on a lower level than the New’. Gore commented that it is, ‘almost universally recognised that God in the Old Testament is seen as appealing to the human condition at a low stage of its development, tolerating what was not according to His original will or His ultimate purpose’. He gives the examples of divorce and of Abraham’s sacrifice. In the case of Abraham’s sacrifice, ‘appealing to men to do things which in a more fully developed state of the conscience could not even be conceived of as commanded by God, in order that through their very obedience to the appeal they might be led higher into the knowledge of what God could, and could not, enjoin’.

Referring to the story of Noah and the Flood (Genesis 6–8) and to the story told by Jesus of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16), Gore says that these are ‘representative narratives’:

The traditions of the flood in all races, must run back to a real occurrence, but the actual occurrence cannot be exactly estimated. What we have in Genesis is a tradition used for spiritual teaching. As the story is told, it becomes, like Dives and Lazars, a typical narrative of what is again and again happening. Again and again, as in the destruction of Jerusalem or in the French Revolution, God’s judgements come on men for their sin.

Gore’s approach is allegorical, although he does not use that word and concludes that ‘the narrative of the flood is a representative narrative, and our Lord, who used the story of Dives and Lazarus, can use this too’.

Aubrey Moore’s essay ‘The Christian Doctrine of God’ posed the question: ‘what fuller realisation of God’s revelation of Himself is He giving us through the contradictions and struggles of to-day?’ While affirming that the revelation of God in Christ is both true and complete, Moore went on to say that ‘every new truth which flows in from the side of science or metaphysics, or
the experience of social and political life, is designed by God’s providence to make that revelation real, by bringing out its hidden truths.’

**The Colenso Controversy**

John William Colenso (1814–83) was a missionary bishop in Natal in South Africa and an associate of FD Maurice and a friend of Sir Charles Lyell, whose geological work had greatly influenced Darwin. Colenso came to notice in 1862 when he challenged the authorship and narrative of the first five books of the Bible in his *The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua Critically Examined*. He also published a commentary on St Paul’s Epistle to the Romans: newly translated and explained from a missionary point of view. Romans has always been a favourite source for those who advance the doctrines of justification by faith alone and predestination. Of all the New Testament books Romans is the least likely to serve as a basis for liberal and universalist doctrines. Colenso was strongly denounced by Bishop Lee of Manchester who said: ‘the very foundations of our faith, the very basis of our hopes, the very nearest and dearest of our consolations are taken from us when one line of that Sacred Volume on which we base everything is declared to be unfaithful or untrustworthy.’ In his reply to Bishop Lee, Colenso diverted attention from theological principles by labouring the point and quoting Leviticus 11: 6 that the rabbit does not chew the cud as the text claimed.

Colenso believed that Africa possessed its own important history and culture, which distinguished him from most other missionaries. Soon after his arrival in South Africa in 1854 he had contended that polygamists should be allowed to become Christians, maintaining that polygamy was not a symptom of gross and pagan sexuality, but an integral part of the soil structure. He was at odds with conventional Christian orthodoxy, seeing his mission in Africa less in terms of the conversion of the individual and more in terms of Christianising the whole culture and people. But it was his thoughts on the Bible and his theological opinions that projected him into the public domain and marked him out as a controversial and even divisive figure.

**The 1960s: *Honest to God* and Secularisation**

The argument that erupted between science and religion in the nineteenth century continued well into the twentieth. After Darwin, the gap between sacred and secular had steadily increased. But by 1960 the debate was a
more internal one between various theological interpretations. The rise of Christian literalism led to the famous Scopes Trial in Tennessee concerning the legislated prohibition on teaching evolutionary theory in schools. The Christian constituency had generally dwindled further in Western countries. Two world wars brought only a temporary increase in church attendance. Even so, as John Macquarie has noted, ‘the question of God dominated religious and theological discussion in England and the United States’.

An American scholar and observer of religion, Gabriel Vahanian (1927– ) published *The Death of God* in 1961 and added momentum to a movement that took its name from the book’s title. The book was not itself an atheist manifesto but a cultural analysis. Vahanian argued that as Western society has entered a post-Christian era, God is no longer a meaningful factor in human life. He blamed Christian religiosity for having brought this about. God, to whom he refers as ‘the wholly other’, has been reduced by Christianity to a mere idol and our culture has rid itself of this idol. Vahanian was not an atheist but he detested idolatry and sentimental religiosity and he argued that the cult of Jesus without God is simply another form of idolatry. His book was the first to open up a vigorous debate on the continuing viability of theism.

Macquarie also notes that in America there was a more far-reaching revolt against traditional theism, when a group of theologians rejected all firms of theism and attempted to reconstruct theology without God. Two significant books were Paul van Buren’s *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* and Harvey Cox’s *The Secular City*. Harvey Cox argued that so far as being regarded as an enemy, secularisation should be counted as implied in the Bible itself. The doctrine of creation by its repudiation of all forms of pantheism makes the world profane and a fitting object for human investigation and even exploitation, and human beings are meant to be co-creators with God. Cox hailed city life and technological advance as liberating factors which gave men and women a new sophistication and added responsibility. He believed that the business of Christianity is not to be a ‘religion’ (which means the cultivation of the inner life) but to participate fully in the life of the secular city. Cox’s extreme form of secular Christianity was, however, short-lived.

Across the Atlantic, Bishop John Robinson’s small book, *Honest to God*, which first appeared in March 1963, took up the questions considered by Vahanian concerning God and God’s action that had already been raised
by the German theologians Paul Tillich, Rudolf Bultmann and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The latter was the most influential exponent of the tension between belief in God and religious systems. In the midst of human suffering and his own imprisonment as an enemy of the National Socialist State, Bonhoeffer discovered a growing awareness of God’s presence and drew attention to the neglected prophetic theme of Christianity. He contended that humanity’s essential fellowship with God in Christ would remain but that religion will pass away. ‘Religion, pious practice, belongs to man’s immaturity. When he comes of age and finds himself no longer bewildered, childish and dependent upon God in childish ways, the practice of what has hitherto been known as religion will disappear.’ Bonhoeffer’s experience led him to the belief that religious acts do not make a person a Christian but participation in the suffering of God in the life of the world. In his own way, Robinson called for a drastic revision of our understanding of God in the light of both contemporary theology and secular learning. Just as Maurice and Gore in the nineteenth century claimed that they were not eschewing orthodox Christianity, Robinson explained in a later book entitled *Exploration into God* that he was not, despite the allegations of some critics, an atheist.

While the intellectual ‘playing field’ may differ from what it was in Darwin’s generation or even from the 1960s, the conflict between sacred and secular continues and presents the church with the perennial problem of making its message relevant and intelligible to each new generation.

*A footnoted copy of this article is available from the Editor on request.*
The Australian religious reaction to *Origin of Species*

Tom Frame

Introduction

An uninformed reader of recent anti-theistic works would be excused for thinking that Christians have always and everywhere been hostile to Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* allegedly because the Church had no answer to his purely naturalistic account of life. While the strongest objections to evolutionary theory and the most strident campaigns to undermine its credibility have come from Christians, Australian religious leaders in the second half of the 19th century gave Darwin’s work a cautious but generally positive response. This article provides a brief overview of Australian religious reactions to Darwin’s work in the period 1860–1900. I have focused on a succession of Anglicans because they had most to say publicly about Darwin’s work and were the most consistent interpreters of its influence on religious and secular thinking.

William Clarke’s Cautious Acceptance

The tone of early religious responses to *Origin* was set by the pre-eminent colonial cleric-scientist, the Reverend William Branwhite Clarke. Clarke was the first Rector of St Thomas’ Church in North Sydney and a pioneering
geologist who would become the Vice President of the Royal Society of New South Wales when it was founded in 1866. He obtained a copy of *Origin* in May 1860 and was immediately attracted to the ideas and conclusions he encountered in its pages. Widely known as the ‘Father of Australian Geology’ and esteemed for his piety and Anglican orthodoxy, Clarke exemplified intellectual open-mindedness. He said after reading *Origin*: ‘We ought not to be accused of nervousness as to the fate of the Scriptures, and if we would wait for further evidence, for a wider range of experiment, Australia’s continent offered so much to excite the curiosity and intelligence of man.’ Clarke’s personal approach to Darwin’s work was reflected in his explanation of the methods that he believed ought to guide all of the ‘philosophical societies’ that had been established around Australia.

We must strive to discern clearly, understand fully and report faithfully ... to abjure hasty theories and unsupported conjectures; where we are in doubt not to be positive; to give our brother the same measure of credit we take to ourselves; not striving for mastery, but leaving time for the formation of judgment which will inevitably be given, whether for or against us, by those who come after us.

Although Clarke was a cautious supporter of Darwin’s theories, the same caution led the Anglican Bishop of Melbourne, Charles Perry, to a different conclusion.

**Charles Perry’s Cautious Rejection**

Charles Perry (1807–91), a vigorous opponent of the triumvirate of liberalism, ritualism and modernism, also obtained a copy of *Origin* shortly after its release. Although much of his time at Cambridge had been devoted to studying law, Perry had worked closely with the celebrity-scientist Reverend William Whewell. Perry also read the geological work of Sir Charles Lyell and tried to remain conversant with recent advances in scientific thinking. He studied *Origin* closely becoming coming to the conclusion that Darwin was mistaken.

As a leading colonial churchman, it was expected that Perry would comment publicly on Darwin’s work and to reflect on its consequences for religious belief. As a convinced evangelical who was predisposed to uphold the authority of Scripture from any real or potential threat to its veracity
and as a Christian who claimed to believe in the accuracy of ‘every statement’ in the Scriptures, Perry delivered a lecture entitled ‘The Inspiration of the Book of Genesis as proved by the Science of Geology’ on 27 September 1860. Three hundred people were present. Contemporary reports noted that many were unable to gain admission and were turned away. Four years later, Perry was still criticising ‘natural selection’ on the grounds that ‘it attributed to nature a foresight in providing for future contingencies which belongs only to mind.’ In an address entitled ‘Science and the Bible’, delivered at Melbourne in September 1869, Perry said that none of Darwin’s illustrations of natural selection ‘nor the whole of them together, in the slightest degree corroborates his theory.’ This was a bold retort.

He alleged that the case for natural selection suffered from ‘the absence of evidence for transitional forms either among living or fossil animals’ and pointed to ‘the difficulty of crossing either species of the same genus and the absolute impossibility of crossing between different genera.’ These were, in Perry’s view, unanswerable objections.

The rationalist Henry Gyles Turner later mocked Perry because ‘he had so little conception of the trend of scientific investigation as to be satisfied that he had demolished Darwin and all his theories in the course of an hour’s lecture.’ But Perry’s biographer explains that ‘it had not been Perry’s purpose to ‘demolish Darwin’, nor did he make this claim for himself. Perry started his lecture by making it clear that he had not come forward as a champion of the Bible against science. His sole aim was to demonstrate that the hypotheses which were being generally accepted as overthrowing belief in the Bible were still very fluid.’ Perry stressed that he was certainly not opposed to scientific insights or conclusions.

I have not examined, and in many cases I should not be able to judge of the evidence ... historical, archaeological, geological, ethnological and grammatical ... from which these results have been deduced; but I accept them, as I accept the phenomena of natural history described by Darwin, upon the authority of the various scientific men who have made these several branches their peculiar study, and whose characters justly entitle their statements to credit. They certainly present to us a problem ... of very great difficulty. I do not pretend to be able to solve it; but I trust ...
that if it ever be solved, it will be in a manner consistent with the truth of the Bible.\textsuperscript{7}

Perry would suspend judgement on Darwinism while maintaining the hope that any apparent contradictions between science and Scripture were ‘generally grounded upon incorrect premises or false deductions’. Dr Barry Butcher of Deakin University suggests that

\begin{quote}
Perry’s address set the high-water mark of the debate over human antiquity. An impressive array of Melbourne’s social elite turned out to hear his message, indicating the extent to which he was responding to establishment fears about growing liberalism in science and religion … Perry had upheld the uneasy alliance between true science and revealed religion … and with it the authority of those invested with the task of maintaining social order in the face of ‘the brutality of the mob’\textsuperscript{8}.
\end{quote}

To his credit, Perry acknowledged that Christians of sound learning and good conscience had taken other positions towards Darwin’s work. He refused to denounce these positions as heterodoxy or heresy.

\textbf{Origin and Orthodoxy}

Perry’s successor, the more liberal-minded James Moorhouse, had a less rigorous view of Biblical inerrancy. Following his lead, Anglicans were steadily less troubled by evolutionary theory. The Reverend Robert Potter told the Anglican Church Congress held at Melbourne in 1882 that he had ‘always liked the doctrine of evolution’ because it offered ‘an approximately true account of the way in which things have grown from their origin to their present condition.’\textsuperscript{9} The warden of St Paul’s College at Sydney University, Canon William Hey Sharp (1845–1928), explained that evolution had ‘no hostile bearing upon the essence of religious belief. It is evidently powerless to deny the existence of a Creator. Nor can it undermine the force of the argument from design.’ He did, however, concede that Archdeacon William Paley’s ideas needed to be reworked. Notably, the inclusion of human beings within evolutionary theory did not concern Canon Sharp. He thought the divine image in human beings was spiritual rather than physical. The Anglican
mood influenced other non-Roman Catholic denominations. Walter Phillips concludes that by 1890

Protestant ministers in the principal pulpits of the major denominations had accepted the theory of evolution and adjusted their theology accordingly. The main denominational periodicals also encouraged acceptance of evolution and discussions at Anglican church congresses in the 1890s and early in the twentieth century clearly indicate that many Anglicans, including most bishops, took the theory of evolution for granted. The attitude of people in the pews is more difficult to discover. What little evidence there is suggests that educated laymen took much the same position.10

Phillips notes that in some instances evolutionary theory was applied positively to theology and that Darwinian ideas became part of popular religious discourse.

There was certainly increasing talk within the non-Roman Catholic Churches of theological ideas developing, of divine revelation being progressive and of the Scriptures showing signs of an evolving sense of God. Canon AE David of Brisbane believed that evolutionary theory saved the Church from needing to locate ‘direct evidence of design in creation’. The task was now ‘to find the impress of the mind of the Creator not so much in these isolated instances as stamped upon the face of Nature as a whole ... a far higher and grander concept of the Universe and its Maker’. Bishop Alfred Barry (1826–1910) of Sydney went as far as saying the Apostles’ Creed became the great statement of Christian belief ‘by natural selection’.

Other than in a few isolated religious communities, Darwinian ideas were absorbed into the Australian religious mindset by the time of Federation in 1901. It was no longer considered deviant to embrace evolutionary theory or heretical to question the historicity of the creation narratives in Genesis. By the 1890s, The Bulletin’s editor felt able to declare:

The development of the theory of evolution, that grand conception which unites all phenomena in one splendid synthesis under uniform law, remains the most attractive feature of contemporary science. From year to year the hypothesis is altered, but its general truth becomes always
clearer, and those who now reject it do so only by impugning the quality of their intellect. It is not as if there are rival theories of defensible validity. All the facts point one way. For creation and emanation there are assumptions and presumptions innumerable, but not a vestige of ponderable proof. For evolution there is all the proof that is. Its chain of evidence may not be complete; the links that are wanting have probably been lost forever; but sufficient remain to amply justify the general judgement of scientists.11

The wider embrace of Origin’s ideas

With the goodwill of the major Churches, Darwin’s ideas had been absorbed into popular perceptions of the origin and forms of modern life within forty years. Most Australians had relied on a few trusted intellectuals to explain Darwin’s work, outline its broader significance and make sense of disputed evidence and contested theories. It was not surprising, given what was at stake and the continuing debate in Britain, that Darwinian theory took some time to gain currency.

In the first instance, Darwin’s theories and postulations were considered unconventional, even radical, and wise heads counselled the need for caution. Darwin’s methods and the way he dealt with the absence of evidence was the subject of continuing academic discussion. Darwin’s conclusions and their potentially alarming consequences needed to be interpreted by a range of academic disciplines. But research and reason prevailed and evolutionary theory became scientific orthodoxy.

Darwin’s work prompted considerable convergence in long-standing academic disciplines and generated interest in biochemistry, biophysics, palaeontology, morphology, ecology, population genetics and behavioural traits. The theoretical concepts of evolution were subjected to empirical testing when and where possible. Where theory could not be tested, such as the hypothesis that evolutionary processes observable today were solely responsible for the transmutation of species seen in the fossil record, there was a willingness to concede that practical verification was not possible. But evolutionary theory was acknowledged to be a more plausible explanation of the known fossil record. There was debate among evolutionary theorists about rates and degrees of evolutionary change
but not the fact of evolution. By 1901, Darwinian ideas were at the centre of academic thinking in Australia and had become part of most school curricula as well.

Darwin’s ‘one long argument’ was more readily embraced in Australia than in Britain or the United States. The colonial churches had not set themselves implacably against evolutionary theory and most refused to set the authority of Biblical revelation against the insights of biological science. There would be no local version of the 1925 Scopes Trial or widespread embrace of young earth creationism. Although anti-theists have made evolutionary theory a ‘wedge issue’, it has not been very effective in Australia where the mainline churches have embraced evolutionary theory although harmonising its tenets with theistic belief has not received the attention it deserves. I believe the early responses of Anglicans in particular to Origin set the tone and for that we ought to be grateful 150 years on.

Notes

2. Quoted in Anne Moyal, A Bright and Savage Land, p. 86.
7. Perry, Science and the Bible, Melbourne, 1869, p. 17.
Creator God, evolving world

Providence or process?

Neil Ormerod

In his book *The God of Evolution* my friend and colleague Denis Edwards asks the question: ‘What difference does acceptance of the theory of evolution make to a Christian theology of God? ... theology of God for today must attempt to be faithful to the insights of the ‘good news of God’ from the context of an evolutionary view of the world.’ He goes on to cite Ian Barbour’s call for a ‘reformulation’ of Christian theology in the light of contemporary scientific insight. Edwards’ book is an attempt to provide such a reformulation, deemed necessary because of the insights of modern science.

Edwards is not the first, nor the last, to make such a call. The first major attempt to do so was perhaps that of Alfred North Whitehead with his vision of a ‘process philosophy’ which attempted to reformulate the whole of metaphysics, including the being of God, around the concept of process or change. For Whitehead ‘nature is a structure of evolving processes. The reality is the process.’ Even God is in process. In his Aquinas Lecture of 1976, one of Whitehead’s followers, Charles Hartshorne argued as follows:

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The entire history of philosophical theology, from Plato to Whitehead, can be focused on the relations between three propositions:

1. The world is mutable and contingent;
2. the ground of its possibility is a being unconditionally and in all respects necessary and immutable; and
3. the necessary being, God, has ideally complete knowledge of the world.

Aristotle, Spinoza, Socinus, and process philosophers agree that the three propositions, taken without qualification, form an inconsistent triad, for they imply the contradiction: a wholly non-contingent being has contingent knowledge.

And so our whole concept of God needs to be rewritten to accommodate the contingency of creation that science manifests in the theory of evolution. God too must be contingent, must change, and indeed must evolve.

It would be easy to document a range of theologians who have taken up this call for a renewed theology of God in light of modern science, particularly evolution. It is indeed close to a new orthodoxy on the matter. However, as a theological position, it is far from unassailable. I would like to suggest it falls over on two fronts. First, it fails to grasp what can be done within the framework of so-called ‘classical theism’ to accommodate evolutionary perspectives. Second, it misunderstands, or at least fails to accommodate, the implications of some of the findings of modern science, particularly in relation to scientific notions of time.

**Classical theism**

The term ‘classical theism’ has become a bit of a whipping boy in theological discussion since Whitehead’s use of the term and critique of its supposed position. Nonetheless it remains a slippery term to use. Many associate its classical exposition with the writings of Thomas Aquinas, but Whitehead’s own exposition owed more to decadent scholasticism and Deism than Aquinas. Others often present caricatures or popular misrepresentations in their critique of the prior theology of God they are seeking to replace. For the present purposes I will use the term to refer to the writings of Aquinas, and not to distortions or popular misunderstandings of the classical position.

The key question for us is whether classical theism allows for a necessary God to know and create genuine contingency in the world. In the *Summa contra Gentiles* Aquinas deals with questions concerning divine
providence and its relation to contingency and necessity. The objections raised by modern authors are already in evidence.

   If all things that are done here below, even contingent events, are subject to divine providence, then, seemingly, either providence cannot be certain [for which we can read: God does not know/create contingency and so is not omnipotent etc], or else all things happen by necessity [for which we can read: there is no genuine contingency/chance].

Again we find the contrast of divine necessity and the contingency of the created order, as highlighted by process thought. But Aquinas does not accept the conclusions drawn by process thinkers. Among his long and detailed response we find the illuminating comment:

   If God foresees that this event will be, it will happen, just as the second argument suggested. But it will occur in the way that God foresaw that it would be. Now, He foresaw that it would occur contingently. So, it follows that, without fail, it will occur contingently and not necessarily.

Or as Bernard Lonergan pithily summarises, ‘what providence intends to be contingent will inevitably be contingent.

This very classical position has recently been taken up in the document ‘Communion and Stewardship’ published in 2004 by the International Theological Commission (ITC). Following upon the same lines as Aquinas, it argues:

   But it is important to note that, according to the Catholic understanding of divine causality, true contingency in the created order is not incompatible with a purposeful divine providence. Divine causality and created causality radically differ in kind and not only in degree. Thus, even the outcome of a truly contingent natural process can nonetheless fall within God’s providential plan for creation ... Divine causality can be active in a process that is both contingent and guided. Any evolutionary mechanism that is contingent can only be contingent because God made it so.
It is not possible in this brief article to provide a full analysis and justification of Aquinas’ position, or that of the ITC. I would note however that it is based on a number of very traditional positions, such divine transcendence from creation, creation *ex nihilo* and a strong understanding of divine providence, each of which are interrelated. The God of classical theism is the transcendent cause of being itself. As Royal Astronomer and atheist, Martin Rees notes, ‘Theorists may, some day, be able to write down fundamental equations governing physical reality. But physics can never explain what ‘breathes fire’ into the equations, and actualizes them in a real cosmos.’ Divine causality actualises the very being of things, that is, ‘breathes fire into the equations’ actualising the reality of the cosmos. Thus it differs ‘in kind and not only in degree’ to the forms of scientific causation (read: ‘equations’), both necessary and contingent, that we encounter in the cosmos. Such a causation does not intervene in the created order, but in a single divine act of creation actualises the totality of all that is, past, present and future.

Of course, this classical position raises a host of question about the genuine contingency of future events, and in relation to the problem of evil. All this needs to be addressed and can effectively be done, I would contend, within the framework of classical theism. But what I would like to suggest is that far from being opposed to contemporary scientific insights, such a classical position is fully congruent with important insights on the nature of time as understood in modern physics.

**God, time and relativity**

Although we are celebrating the sesquicentenary of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* and the bicentenary of his birth, there may be more significance in recalling that we are in the decade of the centenary of Einstein’s discovery of both special and general relativity. While theologians have sought to accommodate the theory of evolution into their speculations for some time now, it seems to me that few are yet to come to grips with the implications of Einstein’s theories on space and time. Let me illustrate with an example.

In his efforts to draw out the implications of a process view of God, Joseph Bracken notes,

> The world order within this scheme is still unfolding even for God. That is, even God cannot know with certitude what the creature will choose until after the creature chooses it.
God, in other words, must adjust to what creatures decide and thus inevitably take risks in dealing with creatures. Does this imply that God is in some sense temporal and subject to change? It would seem that this is the price to be paid for claiming that God is a genuine subject of experience in interaction with creatures rather than an abstract object of thought, the term of a logical inference from contingent effect to transcendent first cause.\(^{14}\)

Behind this attempt to place God within the flow of time lies the assumption that there is a single time, or at least a privileged time (God’s time), against which all events in the universe can be measured. In such a universe there is a universal ‘now’, so that God knows what is happening ‘now’ and what happened in the past, but not what will happen in a future time to ‘now’.

This is precisely the type of scenario ruled out by Einstein’s theories of relativity in both its forms. For according to Einstein there is simply no such thing as a universal ‘now’. To illustrate this point physicist and popular author Brian Greene asks us to consider the following thought experiment. Imagine two locations, one with us here on earth and another some 10 billion light years away with some alien creature. Assume no relative motion between them and that we both agree on a mutual ‘now’. Suppose that our distant friend decides to move slightly, walking away from us at about 10 miles per hour. Then its ‘now’ will consist of events 150 years in our past. On the other hand, if it were to move towards us at the same speed, its ‘now’ would include events 150 years in our future. This type of thought experiment, whose conclusions arise as a simple consequence of Einstein’s theories, imply that there is simply no such thing as ‘now’, no universally acceptable definition of simultaneity. As Greene concludes:

Past, present and future certainly appear to be distinct entities. But as Einstein once said, ‘For we convinced physicists, the distinction between past, present and future is only an illusion, however persistent.’ The only thing that’s real is the whole of spacetime … In this way of thinking, events, regardless of when they happen from any particular perspective, just are. They all exist. They eternally occupy their particular point in spacetime.\(^{15}\)
To emphasise this conclusion he later states, ‘Under closer scrutiny, the flowing river of time more closely resembles a giant block of ice with every moment forever frozen into place.’ Such a position, I would contend, is entirely congruent with the understanding of creation and divine transcendence found in classical theism, and in contradiction to positions adopted which seek to implicate God in the flow of time, as illustrated by the quote from Bracken. As I commented above, for classical theism a single divine act of creation actualises the totality of all that is, past, present and future. 

Conclusion

I began by noting the calls to reformulate our understanding of God in light of the theory of evolution and other scientific advances. I have countered this by arguing that a more traditional theology of God, referred to at times as ‘classical theism’ is robust enough to encompass notions of evolution, and in fact is more congruent with scientific accounts of time than what is often proposed as an alternative. This is not to say, however, that the theory of evolution is without theological significance. It has burst the boundaries of being a merely biological account of diversity from common origins and has changed the way we view our universe and our societies. It has moved us out of a perspective where change had to be justified, to one where we accept change as the natural order of things. It has become a metaphor, not only for the biological but the cosmic, the social and the cultural. Theologically it raises particularly interesting questions about traditional understandings of original sin, and how we view the early history of the Church. As Karl Rahner has shown, it places Christology in a new light. All these are positive gains. But what it does not require is a different understanding of God from that espoused by Thomas Aquinas so long ago.

Notes

Creator God, evolving world: providence or process?


8. *Summa contra Gentiles*, 3, c.94.


12. To do so requires the recognition that what we often refer to as ‘random’ is always randomness around some statistically given frequency. So rather than speak of lawfulness and chance, we should speak of two different types of lawfulness, one which accounts for the type of classical laws of Newtonian mechanics and others which account for statistical phenomena. Both types of lawfulness allow for the expression of divine purpose. See Ormerod, ‘Chance and Necessity.’


17. See also Paul Davies, The Goldilocks Enigma: Why Is the Universe Just Right for Life?, Allen Lane, London, 2006. Davies notes: 'Time is part of the physical universe, inseparable from space and matter. Any designer/creator of the universe must therefore transcend time, as well as space and matter. That is, God must lie outside time if God is to be the designer and creator of time' (p.227). As he goes on to note, Augustine was well aware of this.

Review article

The elephant in the room

Three new books on animal ethics and animal theology

Scott Cowdell


Andrew Linzey is the world’s first ‘animal theologian.’ Introducing *Creatures of the Same God*, he charts his own vocational commitment to animal welfare and the reform of Western theological imagination—as a conscientiously vegetarian theological student, then through decades of writing and activism as an academic clergyman, most recently as founder of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics. This little book is a helpful *entée* to Linzey’s *oeuvre*. Early chapters emphasise the moral claim of sentient creatures, with their proven sensitivity to pain and capacity to suffer, suggesting that God calls humans beyond ‘gastrocentricity’ to an appreciation of our ‘multi-eyed universe’ that God experiences from within. Next, animal welfare is identified as central to the history of British and American humanitarianism, which also included commitment to child welfare from early industrial times. This answers allegations that concern for animals accompanies a lack of concern for people.

The book’s spiritual heart is in two chapters engaging alternative theological positions. Linzey advocates ‘theos rights’ as well as animal rights (that God’s incarnational love affair with all flesh necessarily precludes the commodifying instrumentalism that abuses sentient beings), also his ‘eschatological vegetarianism’ anticipating the peaceable kingdom where lamb lies down with lion. For me the most significant and challenging part of the book is the chapter pitting animal theology against ecotheology, with its typically global perspective overlooking the suffering of individual creatures. Linzey criticises the ‘predator gospel’ of environmental theologians (Fox, McFague, Ruether) whose characteristic holism justifies nature’s cruelty as simply the way of things in God’s world and essentially benign. Linzey sides with Paul Tillich against his interpreter John A.T. Robinson. Tillich shared the Romantic philosopher Schelling’s conclusion that ‘a veil of sadness is spread over all nature, a deep unappeasable melancholy over all life’ (p. 36), while the dying Robinson famously discerned ‘my God in my cancer’ in a way that Linzey absolutely condemns. Linzey’s critique of ecotheology presupposes a high doctrine of the Fall, which resists accommodation to violence and suffering. They are not simply ‘meant to be’ and should be resisted in the name of Christ’s new creation—fighting cancer along with fighting animal abuse. Hence Linzey’s argument that, rather than
offering an adjunct to mainstream theology, his animal theology tests the adequacy of all theology.

We meet a number of key voices in Christian tradition—from texts in the Bible and the Fathers, to St Francis of Assisi, to Cardinal Newman’s linking of innocent animal suffering to that of Christ, to John Wesley’s condemnation of blood sports and his insistence that animals participate in the resurrection, to the Anglican priest Arthur Broome who in 1824 founded the RSPCA and the Protestant minister who in 1870 mandated vegetarianism in his church and initiated a modern movement. Linzey also mentions references in the apocryphal gospels to Jesus’ care for animals, at least one of which (healing a donkey collapsed under its load) may be as ‘reliable’ as healing miracles in the canonical gospels. We also read about Linzey’s controversial foray into animal liturgy, providing pastoral resources with his book Animal Rites: Liturgies of Animal Care. In conclusion, Linzey calls us to become ‘a prophetic Church for animals’.

Next I come to Linzey’s more programmatic Why Animal Suffering Matters. Two preliminary chapters address the ethics of animal suffering and the practical challenge of finding solutions. Widespread acceptance of animal suffering is based chiefly on an understanding of human distinctiveness and the priority of human over animal claims. Linzey addresses six putative differences in his attempt to build a moral case. First there is the ‘animals are slaves of humanity’ view, traced via Aquinas to Aristotle’s teleology and its natural hierarchy of beings. Linzey cites the Bible’s witness to God’s covenant with ‘all living creatures’ and many other texts, repositioning God-given authority as Christological, with power redefined in terms of service. Next is the priority of rationality in defining humanness, again from Aristotle via Augustine and Aquinas, with the accompanying assertion that suffering of animals is less serious because of their rational incomprehension. Linzey questions this premise arguing that, while rationality makes humans more wounding by words than animals, nevertheless we weave our suffering into a narrative of meaning while animals are left with the raw terror of incomprehension. ‘Irrational’ animals are by definition more identified with their bodily state than humans and hence may suffer more than we do through cruelty and the deprivation of movement. A related argument, that linguistic capacity unlocks the richness of life such that those lacking it are less likely to suffer, is quickly dispatched: the special care we devote to powerless humans who cannot give consent carries over to animal suffering,
which is no less real for being non-verbal. Likewise the argument that animals are not moral agents and hence exist necessarily in a state of conflict with humans—so that animals have no rights—is countered by Linzey asserting the moral claim that innocent suffering typically entails in the human situation. There is an interesting discussion about the traditional denial of souls to animals—‘rational’ (human) souls, that is, beyond the ‘vegetative’ soul of plants and the ‘sensitive’ (animate) soul of animals, neither of which are immortal. This has been taken to mean that animals deserve less consideration, with vivisection justified by denying animals any link to God. Linzey counters that the divine image in us is properly that of Christ the servant of all, deconstructing yet another claim for human superiority.

Linzey’s second chapter is a wide-ranging discussion of how to institute reform. Here he engages with contemporary misperception and misdirection that overlooks animal suffering – ‘we can’t really know what they’re feeling’, ‘we must have verifiable scientific proof’, ‘we mustn’t be anthropomorphic’, ‘why not plants too?’, ‘animals may feel pain, but not as we do’ – going on (in a Chomskian manner) to counter institutional reinforcement of present attitudes with proposed new institutional expressions of animal welfare. He emphasises so much nerve anatomy and physiology in common between humans and animals, also our common ancestry, arguing that it is nonsensical to ascribe suffering to a beaten child but not to a fox harried and torn apart by hounds. ‘The reason that it is often so difficult to get a serious hearing for animals,’ he perceptively concludes, ‘is because, unlike many other ethical issues, humans not unnaturally suspect that granting animals moral solici- tude will involve major changes to their lifestyles’ (p. 57).

Part II of the book makes for especially harrowing reading. It is based on three case studies: hunting with dogs (now banned in England—thank you, Tony Blair), fur farming and the annual Canadian seal hunt. In each case there is a close engagement with standard justifying arguments (Lord Burns’s report on fox hunting, Canadian bishops supporting the seal hunt) and the ineffectual measures required in mitigation of cruelty. The acknowledgement of animal suffering as intrinsically objectionable is rarely encountered, though human interests are given unquestioned weight—the right of ‘country sportspeople’ to their traditional recreations, of Canadian fishermen to a livelihood and a traditional diet and of commercial and fashion interests to torment tens of millions of wild animals for a lifetime of close-caged immobility, ended by (fur-preserving) electrocution, with probes in
the mouth and anus. In conclusion, Linzey engages with the pro-animal case of radical utilitarian philosopher Peter Singer, though rejecting his refusal to grant rights in the moral community to infants under one month (a consequence of Singer’s case for abortion based on foetal non-sentience). Linzey emphasises instead the special regard both sentient animals and defenceless infants deserve and which they have been granted together throughout the modern history of humanitarianism. Here, utilitarianism’s tendency to allow evil in the name of a greater good is countered by a more theological account of meaning and value, grounded in God’s ‘theos rights’ to have vulnerable creatures treated with respect.

The association between human and animal suffering underpins the last of these books, comprising proceedings of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics’ first international conference, held at Keble College in 2007. Philosophers, ethicists, legal scholars, law enforcement officers, scientists and theologians all contribute. Many abusers of women, children and the elderly, also most serial killers and violent serial rapists, typically demonstrate a history of animal abuse, with the worst offenders beginning with childhood abuse of animals. Abused children witnessing animal abuse often grow up to emulate it. Animal abuse also accompanies human abuse, when pets are hurt or killed to terrorise and punish children, or threatened to extort money from vulnerable elders. I was saddened to learn that many women delay escaping an abusive partner for the safety of a shelter for fear of leaving a threatened pet behind.

Statistics are amassed, with case studies from law enforcement’s chamber of horrors, leaving little doubt that there is a common pathology at work. The book canvasses options for legal reform, mandatory reporting of animal abuse by veterinarians, and law enforcement more intentionally pursuing animal abusers because it is likely in so doing to uncover and prevent human violence. A number of contributors, Linzey included, consider the pathology of violence towards wild animals, including the desensitisation to suffering typically fostered among aficionados of English fox hunting and American deer hunting. They discuss the infamous dolphin drive hunts of Japan, with highly sentient creatures hounded, terrorised, gaffed and speared in a bloody maelstrom, all for the traditional right to eat cetacean meat (though it is increasingly unpopular, being mercury-laden), and English hunt advocates scorning reports of foxes (also unlucky domestic dogs and cats) torn apart by dog packs in the countryside—even in people’s yards, in front of children.
It was a harrowing few days as I read these books. My grief and outrage was stirred up over so much animal suffering, but also over the terrible fact of intentional cruelty deemed necessary by so many people as the only way of coping with their own deeply-wounded natures—murderers and abusers, certainly, but also normal people in the grip of a blood-lust that craves hurting and killing. This is not God's wish for God's creatures. Even if he is wrong about the Fall, so that God is not alien to the whole death-and-life drama of predation and natural selection, nevertheless Linzey is surely right that humans should not make things worse. Anything we can do to reduce the amount of animal suffering, also unnecessary killing, is worthwhile. As for hunting, where clean kills are far from the norm, also bizarrely brutal medical experiments, fur farming, whale harpooning and every other anxious human response to nature's threatening otherness, I invoke Christ crucified, whose stance is surely with the victims. As for 'eschatological vegetarianism', I welcome the growing availability in Europe and America of non-meat protein, with tasty mainstream meat-free products placing vegetarianism within the reach of normal busy families in the West.

As for nature's cruelty, maybe God creating by evolutionary means allows animal pain, yet God feels every bit of it personally and redeems it through the suffering of Christ, with God's new creation revealing the healing and restoration of every traumatised creature. But even if nature's created 'goodness' accommodates the natural suffering of animals, Linzey's insistence on minimising animal suffering and death is hard to discount, as is his 'eschatological vegetarianism'. Here is a challenge at once theological, political and personal.
Review article

Reality and hopefulness

Challenges and possibilities for rural churches

Don Saines


In the Boyer Lectures of 2001 Geoffrey Blainey made the following observation:

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Smaller towns fear for their future. Many have recently lost their bank, their only hairdressing shop and clothes store, and even their football team – once the pride of the district and the focus of all loyalties. One doctor, living in a farming town which holds 900 people, tells me he will almost certainly be that town’s last doctor. Nobody will be found to replace him.¹

There is no doubt that many rural and remote communities in Australia are facing social and economic challenges. To this we must also add environmental issues and the certainty of climate change. This is a trend mirrored in rural areas around the world with our ever-increasing movement toward urbanisation and efficiencies of scale.

This is also the context and the challenge for the church in rural Australia. The challenges are, however, not only economic, social and ecological. Rural Australia is also facing ‘the abandonment of Christian faith’ and diminishing church attendance. On average, the proportion of Australians identifying as Christian declined by 7 percent between 1996 and 2006 and the number of Anglicans in rural Australia fell by 1.6 percent, though the variation in the percentage of people who identified with a Christian denomination during this same period varies across rural Australia. The highest identification was +6.8% in Queensland and the lowest was -11.3% and -10.3% in the Northern Territory and Tasmania respectively.²

These are some of the realities that are reported in the recent publications from the Christian Research Association (CRA) entitled Models of Leadership and Organisation in Anglican Churches in Rural Australia and Sowing and Nurturing: Challenges and Possibilities for Rural Churches. The reports offer a summary of research findings from across the church in rural Australia. As well as presenting us with sobering realities, the reports also found hopefulness for the church in its faithful service and innovative ministry.

Sowing and Nurturing: Challenges and Possibilities for Rural Churches is written as a ‘primer’ for rural community and rural church life more generally. Models of Leadership and Organization in Anglican Churches in Rural Australia is written as an overview of Anglican rural churches with a focus on particular Anglican parishes across Australia as examples of varied approaches to leadership and organization.³ It is important to note that, as
the writers suggest, the purpose of the reports is to offer ‘a brief summary’. They are not to be read prescriptively but as options ‘presented to stimulate discussion, generate ideas and encourage reflection on the nature and life of the rural churches in relation to their mission’ (SN, p. 3). And it is to this end that this present review is written.

While some aspects are duplicated within both reports they complement each other well and it is helpful to read both as there are details particular to each. *Sowing and Nurturing* is the more comprehensive of these two reports and offers helpful commentary arising out of wider research and reflection. It also briefly situates the rural church within its social and economic context and within the wider cultural context that is reflected across much of the Western world including urban Australia. Rural Australians are not isolated from the experience of secularisation and postmodernity. Helpfully, and in the face of these realities, *Sowing and Nurturing* begins with a brief reminder of our *raison d’être*, our reason for being church and having a missionary faith in these changing and challenging times in rural Australia.

The valuable heart of *Sowing and Nurturing* is the discussion of findings about leadership and the developing models of ministry. Highlighting the key role of leadership (SN pp.11, 22–23), the reported variations and developments in models of ministry are hopeful signs of vitality in the rural churches. Lest we lose heart, these are models that have already helped revitalise rural churches in small but real ways, as people of faith have responded to local need and the call of God to ministry. Strengths and ‘challenges’ are helpfully listed under each model (SN, pp. 12–18).

Most of the ministry models listed have parallels with the experience of rural Anglican churches. However, in the second report, *Models of Leadership and Organization in Anglican Churches in Rural Australia*, the ministry models are enfleshed, as it were, as they speak of actual parish case studies where women and men have gathered together to collaborate toward creative and sustainable ministry. The models are taken from around the Anglican Church of Australia and range through stipended full-time ministry, ecumenical cooperation, enabler-supported ministry, large-area team ministry with multiple parishes and ministry leadership teams. (MLO, pp. 4–8). Strengths and challenges are also outlined and given more helpful content (MLO, pp. 9–12).

These trends toward collaborative ministry are mirrored in the wider Anglican Communion. These developing ministry models have arisen
across the Communion due in part to a cultural postmodern and postco-
lonial hierarchical suspicion that has gone hand-in-glove with a desire for
relationality and community. These collaborative ministry models also
come from a reading of scripture. They parallel the experience of the early
d church and the cultural pluralism that is also our common experience today.
It is a model known in Roman Catholic, Anglican and Protestant churches.
But there is also something in this approach that sits well with the rural
ethos where communal existence necessitates shared living, in spite of
the tradition of rugged individualism. Rural people are very aware of their
interdependence (SN, p. 25).

Here we must also recognise that the rural church has often led the
way in its implementation of the models spoken about in these reports. The
need to be innovative in ministry has perhaps arisen sooner in rural and
remote regions than in more populous and prosperous urban centres – or
perhaps the innovations are different. In this regard the rural church has many
parallels with the church in the two-thirds world and with the faithful but
under-resourced churches of Africa and Latin America. It is not surprising
therefore to see that one of the models suggested by Sowing and Nurturing
is the ‘Base Ecclesial Communities’ model (SN, p. 18). These CRA findings
speak of the importance and value of small churches and of small group
life. It is possible that small groups meeting as house churches may be the
way ahead for many. It will be helpful for rural church congregations to
read about these models in both reports, not for the sake of copying but to
expand ideas and feed the imagination.

At this point I must also express some dissatisfaction. The examples of
‘fresh expressions of rural church life’ in Sowing and Nurturing are drawn
from the UK. And yet the Anglican examples (and there will be similar
examples from other denominations) could have been highlighted as in
part ‘fresh expressions.’ The Anglican example of the ‘Company of the Good
Shepherd’ in the Diocese of Bathurst is an excellent example of a tradition
turned around and made relevant and ‘fresh’ to the time and place. But
importantly, this was a model that worked with what was at hand. This is a
common trait, a necessity, of rural life.

The complex nature of rural community means that there is no simple
solution to the restoration of faith and church membership. Here I want
to underscore the social and cultural reality briefly outlined by these CRA
reports. Perhaps more than any faith communities in Australia, rural churches
live in a complexity of social and environmental change and face, in some situations, the ongoing diminishment of population and agricultural or forestry output. Those who are members of the church in places such as the coal-mining communities of the NSW Hunter Valley or the forestry towns of south-eastern NSW live in the invidious position of having to advocate for local industry and employment while learning about the need for reducing carbon emissions in order to reduce global warming. What kind of Christian spirituality and leadership is required here?

Theological reflection and the spiritual formation of the men and women who live in the face of these realities is therefore a key task for our churches. The CRA reports rightly impress upon us the need for training, and while pragmatic and practical faith is often the tenor of a rural spirituality, the complexities of rural experience will often require capacities to think and dream beyond our usual local experience. For Anglicans there are also some ominous predictions made under the heading ‘Signs of Hope’: ‘In none of the churches we visited was there strong evidence the church would still be there in another 20 years, or even five to ten years in some case ... there is need for radical thinking’ (MLO, p. 14).

In my view Christian formation is the ongoing need in the face of such huge issues. Reference in Sowing and Nurturing to the Base Ecclesial Communities as one important model of ministry is very appropriate given their focus on small groups gathered to read the scriptures in their context. This activity will be increasingly vital for rural churches to implement. But so too is the process of social analysis, which is also a key aspect of this model. Social analysis is important for it helps us understand the broader context, how we fit in and why we are where we are, so as to prevent us having too narrow a perspective about our rural community and the God whose love invites us toward a costly discipleship.

This is especially the case when, for many churches, decline will continue to be their experience. Sustainability is not a new question for rural Australians or for the rural church. The myth of agricultural abundance is in many areas of rural Australia challenged by a more common experience of drought and death, even in the heart of Australian agriculture, the wheat lands of NSW, Victoria and Western Australia. In her chapter in Anglicanism in Australia, Ruth Frappell writes of the influence of the rural myth upon the development of rural dioceses: ‘The rural myth declared that the country rode on the sheep’s back’ and as a result few acknowledged the depopulation of rural
Australia in the early twentieth century. Within the Anglican Church we have as a result inherited ‘under-resourced inland dioceses.’

In matters of church decline it is too easy for us to blame our leaders or our rural traditions for declining membership and to make easy suggestions. While now several decades old, Kenneth Dempsey’s findings from his study of a local Methodist church in the 1950s and 1960s remain an important reminder when we start to get too critical. Dempsey found that comments made by clergy, their wives and church members often suggested that the blame for the decline in the church was due to one or other group within the church, for one reason or another – a clergyman was a poor preacher, or did not visit, or could not relate or held ideas that did not sit with country folk; the laity were not committed, were too dependent on the expert or better-educated clergyman and so on. But Dempsey does not find that these issues or attitudes in and of themselves provided the overall answer for the decline. Rather, Dempsey points out that the experience of conflict and decline in that period was not unique to that congregation or indeed to rural congregations generally. Decline was not due to ‘the shortcomings of ministers, local laymen or the [organisational structure]’ but was more the product of external changes – geographical and social mobility, social recognition and leisure activity beyond the church and the church’s inability to give convincing answers to questions raised by the widespread and profound human suffering of the twentieth century. The expansion of the communications industry has only added to these external influences.

Both *Sowing and Nurturing* and *Models of Leadership and Organization in Anglican Churches in Rural Australia* give us valuable insight into the rural church and into some of the ways faithful men and women are participating together in ministry. Faith and life will continue though changes and developments and some closures will occur. We now need to take these invaluable reports further and deeper theologically and ecclesially while not for one moment forgetting that we have a mission before us. In this regard and in the face of our present rural context we will always need a reminder of our *raison d’être*, our reason for being church and having a missionary faith. As the recent water crisis across eastern Australia has made us aware, these are also faith and life matters that affect all Australians. Reality and hope are the two sides of the coin that is the church in rural and regional Australia and represent the value of these two recent CRA publications.
Review article: Reality and hopefulness:

Notes

The twilight of faith?


In 1824 the colony of New South Wales was just thirty-six years old. From a religious perspective, the early signs were troubling. Congregations were small and, in large part, apathetic. To James Denney, a Scottish Presbyterian minister, New South Wales seemed ‘the most godless place under heaven’.

Tom Frame’s thesis in *Losing My Religion* is that little has changed in nearly 200 years. In 2009 unbelief is widespread, if not endemic, and there are few signs of genuine religious revival. To the contrary, according to Frame, ‘Australia’s Christian meta-narrative has already been challenged [and] it will eventually be discarded’ (p. 300).

Frame admits that he is fascinated by secularism and atheism. *Losing My Religion* is his way of ruminating publicly about the causes and effects of our nation’s spiritual malaise. His sources include census data going back to the early nineteenth century and modern-day opinion polls. He has gleaned fascinating historical information from the records of major churches, sceptics’ organisations and government agencies, both state and federal.

Frame is conversant with ecclesiastical history and ‘secularisation theory’. He nominates two world experts as having influenced him a great deal: British sociologist and theologian David Martin, and the contemporary Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor.

Marshalling this material with impressive skill, Frame concludes that most Australians have never been much interested in religion. While church attendance figures remained quite high until the late 1950s, much of the worship conducted in Australia has, he suggests, always been of a superficial kind.

In 1971, Donald Horne (author of *The Lucky Country*) penned these provocative words: ‘Australia has not been so much a Christian country as
a respectable country ... [and] the Churches have been most significant, not for their religious nature, but for their taking the side of respectability’ (p. 67).

(I do not agree fully. But to the extent the charge is or was ever justified, it is a grave one. Jesus of Nazareth was quite disinterested in attaining social ‘respectability’ – for himself or his followers. There is scarcely a clearer theme in the gospels.)

According to Frame, even ‘respectable’ religion is now on the wane in Australia. By all relevant measures, there has been a steep drop in levels of religious affiliation and practice over the last generation. Moreover, Frame contends, ‘[t]he residue of belief found among Australians is theologically deficient and philosophically unsophisticated’ (p. 295).

He identifies seven contributing factors, none of which are unique to Australia. Their impact has been felt across the West for over fifty years. Paraphrased, the seven factors are: (1) the proliferation of secular community organisations and clubs as social alternatives to the churches, (2) plummeting standards of religious education of the young, epitomised by ‘the collapse of the Sunday School movement,’ (3) the end of nominal religious customs (such as treating Sunday as a day of rest), (4) increased (but badly inadequate) public awareness of the natural sciences, (5) widespread disapproval of sectarianism and religious extremism, and greater world-weariness overall, (6) perceived failure by the churches to adjust to cultural and political change and (7) discord within the churches themselves.

It is an interesting list. Personally I would nominate vastly increased material affluence as another key factor.

In any case, it is hard to deny that Australia has become one of the most unreligious – and irreligious – nations on Earth. However, as Frame recognises, the majority of Australians are not positive disbelievers in God. Most are indifferent and ill-informed unbelievers. They ‘have either no idea what the Christian religion is offering or they have rejected what they mistakenly think it is offering’ (p. 294).

There also exists in this country a small but influential class of people who regard religion with hostility and contempt and work actively to denigrate it.

Richard Dawkins’s atheist tract The God Delusion was first published in Australia in 2006. It is, as Frame says, ‘a poor book’ – sloppily and shallowly argued, hopelessly one-sided and maddeningly supercilious in tone.
Yet it was lauded in the mainstream media here, and fast became a best-seller.

*The God Delusion* spawned several other commercially-successful books by atheists from Britain, Europe and the US. Frame dissects their writings, as well as those of three notable Australians – broadcasters Phillip Adams and Terry Lane and philosopher Tamas Pataki.

All Frame’s criticisms are cogent and effective. He refers to fierce secular critiques of the New Atheists by learned commentators overseas, such as Terry Eagleton in Britain and Thomas Nagel in the US. Importantly, Frame does not dumb down or otherwise misrepresent his opponents’ positions, as Dawkins and others do routinely. He concedes that some unbelievers’ arguments have force, and deserve detailed rebuttal.

Nor does Frame overstate the empirical case for God. He is disarmingly candid about his own wavering and comfortable with the existence of doubt generally. He opposes blasphemy laws. He welcomes open, rigorous and *frequent* public debate about religious matters.

I liked Frame’s criticisms of negative rule-based morality, his thorough grasp of science and his rejection of biblical literalism. I admire his preparedness to condemn religious office-holders for their ineffectiveness, incivility and other vices. On these issues Frame’s views are liberal.

On the other hand, he is staunchly orthodox about such things as the objective nature of the Moral Law, the all-religions-are-equal mentality (‘intellectually idle’ [p. 189]) and the dangerous myth of ‘the utter self-sufficiency of human beings and the perfectability of human reason’ (p. 285).

Frame insists that his book is not an apologetic (p. 8). Nevertheless, he includes a pithy discussion of the classic ‘proofs’ of God’s existence (the so-called ontological, cosmological, teleological and moral arguments, as well as the under-rated argument *e consensus gentium*). While properly acknowledging that none is without difficulties, Frame reminds his readers of the pedigree and persuasiveness of each. Collectively, ‘they provide a philosophical demonstration of the *reasonableness* of theism’ (p. 122; my emphasis).

But theoretical arguments are of secondary importance when it comes to the Christian faith. As Frame rightly says, it stands or falls on the divinity (or otherwise) of Jesus of Nazareth.

In my opinion, anyone aspiring to be a serious commentator about religion – theist, agnostic or atheist – is duty-bound to study the evidence...
pertaining to the Incarnation and the Resurrection. Frame has done so, conscientiously, but few of the New Atheists exhibit more than token knowledge of the subject.

Some, including Dawkins, take pride in their ignorance. As Frame suggests, this means that they have simply not engaged in a hard-headed ‘quest for truth’. Rather, they have confirmed a lot of people (including themselves) in pre-existing prejudices.

On a few matters I part company with Frame.

First, a point of detail: Jesus’s preferred title for himself was not the ‘Son of God’ (he used it only rarely) but the ‘Son of Man’. Exactly what Jesus meant by that term is an important question. All unbelieving Australians could usefully wrestle with it.

Frame justifiably accuses the ‘liberal Protestant churches’ of lacking doctrinal rigour. But he also scoffs at their ‘preoccupation with the promotion of social justice and cultural inclusion’ (p. 299). Would that were really so! Jesus and the Old Testament prophets would be delighted.

Finally, Frame suggests that ‘most agnostics if pushed would lean more towards atheism than theism’ (p. 32). I believe the opposite is true, in Australia and overseas. Many undecided people can yet be guided towards faith if people like Tom Frame keep fighting the good fight.

Roy Williams
Author of God, Actually (ABC Books, 2008; Monarch Books, 2009)

Scripture in postcolonial perspective


The historical record is replete with the experience of conquest and colonial expansion. Most often recorded by winners, such exploits are usually valorised. But the reality is that conquest and colonisation are murderous and rapacious. Much of the biblical record has as its historical and imaginative matrix the sociocultural experience of imperial expansion and domination.
Within the Bible the people of God, whether Israel or the church, are often at the mercy of imperial forces. Not always, however. Even in the Bible the people of God can take on the role of conquistador and coloniser, most notably in certain parts of Deuteronomy (for example 7:1–6) and the book of Joshua, whose opening verses are so often deemed fit for memorisation in Sunday school classes. Even if one accepts the likelihood that the conquest account in Joshua is unhistorical, as argued by archaeologists Israel Finkelstein and William Dever, the problem remains that Joshua has been received as canonical scripture and has therefore been appealed to in support of imperial conquest, colonial expansion, ethnic chauvinism and territorial theft. When the Bible, understood as ‘God’s Word’, has been used to authorise the subjugating sword for the purposes of imperial domination and colonial exploitation, God has been ‘colonised’, so to speak, reduced to the status of an ideological instrument that functions to serve the interests of the powerful and aggressive. Enter Mark Brett who, in his latest book, not only shows (yet again) how the Bible has been implicated in Australia’s colonial history but also undertakes to ‘decolonise God’ by means of careful re-readings of scriptural texts that have served or been made to serve colonial interests.

Aware that both the production and the reception of biblical traditions have resulted in ‘mixed blessings’, Brett addresses a series of scriptural texts or traditions to show either that they are susceptible to a responsibly different interpretation or that they can legitimately be read to undermine or at least challenge their reception in support of colonial expansion and imperial domination. Certain texts he seems prepared to consign to the interpretive too-hard basket, for example New Testament anticipations of eschatological vengeance, which sit in uneasy tension with the nonviolent tenor of Jesus’ mission and message. But in the main he offers helpful postcolonial soundings of biblical traditions to show both that colonising texts can be subverted inner-biblically and that readings of texts that serve colonising interests are but colonising (mis)readings. An instance of the latter is Brett’s discussion of Genesis 1:28 within the broader context of the ‘primeval history’ of Genesis 1–11. (See chapter 2, ‘Alienating Earth and the Curse of Enemies’.) The language of ‘subduing’ the earth and ‘ruling over’ other life forms in Genesis 1:28 has been used to authorise colonial expansion and territorial takeover, but Brett’s contextual reading of this divine summons shows the colonial reading of this text to be of a piece with colonialism per se, that is,
an illegitimate interpretive power-play. Simultaneously, and perhaps unintentionally, Brett shows how ham-fisted so many interpretations of Genesis 1–11 are relative to the creative originality of the (admittedly composite) text as we have it.

In chapter 5, ‘Deuteronomy, Genocide and the Desires of Nations,’ Brett follows up his discussion of Israel’s indigenous origins on archaeological and anthropological grounds by showing that the conquest texts in Deuteronomy and Joshua (as well as Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers) contain subverting inconsistencies. By contextualising the core of Deuteronomy to seventh-century Judah following the Assyrian conquest of Israel to the north, Brett argues that its conquest texts are not so much about annihilating or evicting indigenous peoples of the land as about inculcating exclusive loyalty to Yahweh by ‘borrowing’ from Assyrian imperialism. Such ‘appropriation’ of Assyrian imperialism in the interests of internal religious and social reform was, according to Brett, an effort on the part of Jerusalem theologians to resist Assyrian hegemony by means of ‘colonial mimicry,’ that is, imitation for the sake of resistance. While I concur that ‘the theology of Deuteronomy is in many ways open to deconstruction’ (p. 91), I would have appreciated a more detailed discussion of the alleged parallels between the seventh-century vassal treaties of Esarhaddon and Deuteronomy 13, the principal basis for Brett’s reading of Deuteronomy 13 and other similar texts as ‘colonial mimicry’ of Assyrian imperialism. Moreover, even if Brett is correct to interpret Deuteronomy 13 as ‘colonial mimicry,’ one wonders whether such mimicry really resists the means of empire no less than the imposing empire itself.

With respect to the ethnic exclusivism of Ezra-Nehemiah, Brett claims for these texts what he claims for Deuteronomy 13, namely that Ezra-Nehemiah is more a text of cultural resistance by a minority group in exile than one that serves the interests of social control, as appears to be the case from a surface reading of these texts. He also shows that the ethno-exclusivist perspective in Ezra-Nehemiah is contested in other canonical writings from the same period, for example the book of Ruth, Isaianic traditions and the books of Chronicles. Furthermore, he argues that the final editors of Genesis preserved minority traditions within the broader narrative so as to call into question the dominant ethnocentric voice. Brett’s discussion of Genesis 17 and 21–22 is illuminating, but whether his interpretation will
convince those who do not share either his theological convictions or his assessment of the provenance of the texts discussed is unlikely.

Brett also covers other topics ranging from biblical data relating to ancestral religion and prophetic critique to the nonviolent mission of Jesus and cultural hybridity in Pauline theology. The book concludes with a chapter on ‘Postcolonial Theology and Ethics’, which, if I understand Brett correctly, calls for a kenotic stance and a re-appropriation by the church of ancient Israelite understandings of redemption.

The hardcover version of this monograph published by Sheffield Phoenix Press is prohibitively priced, putting it beyond the reach of most readers. Yet because of its perspective, scope and perceptiveness, this book deserves a wide audience. ATF Press is to be congratulated for making it accessible to many in Australia and New Zealand who might otherwise have bypassed its wealth of exegetical, interpretive and theological insights. I recommend it to all, but it will probably garner the bulk of its readership from among those whose sense of identity is somehow shaped by the Bible yet who recognise that biblical interpretation involves wrestling with problematic as well as edifying texts.

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A prism for the history of a nation


To complete a centennial history of any institution is a major achievement. One hundred years is a large span to encompass, especially when it is the tumultuous twentieth century. Renate Howe draws on an impressive amount of source material – written, oral and pictorial – to tell this story. Those who, like me, knew the Australian Student Christian Movement (ASCM) when it was a respected and vibrant presence in Australian universities might be surprised to find how tenuous were its beginnings. Starting her story with
the 1896 meeting to found a national student Christian movement, held at Ormond College in Melbourne, and dominated by the towering figure of the American evangelist John R. Mott, the author points to the early difficulties in raising funds, the resistance of the secular universities to having Christian groups meeting on campus and the struggles of the miniscule staff to build on the momentum generated by Mott’s visit. From these tentative beginnings, she charts lucidly and comprehensively the growth of the movement through the twentieth century.

A hazard for any institutional history is that it runs the risk of being dominated by facts, acronyms and statistics. In this book they are there, but they do not overwhelm the narrative. The ASCM has always been primarily about people. The personalities and even dynasties that have contributed so much to the movement over the century are brought to life for the reader, giving added richness to the history. For instance, to SCMers of my generation, John R. Mott was accorded almost mythic status. It is refreshing to encounter in the book a more human person with limitations as well as the great strengths that we knew about. Howe points out, for example, that he never quite came to terms with the differences between his own country, the United States of America, and the secular nation of Australia. Moreover his assertive Protestant evangelicalism sat uneasily with the outlook of some of his Australian counterparts.

It is a particular pleasure to see – in this account of a movement that from the beginning gave exceptional recognition to its female staff and members – that the work of outstanding women in the SCM features prominently. Among them, the one who dominates the narrative of much of the century is the redoubtable Margaret Holmes who, as a 29-year-old Melbourne graduate, ran the movement single-handedly during World War I and the years immediately after. Then, in 1924, at a time of crisis in the ASCM’s history, she was appointed to the new post of headquarters secretary and became, at the age of 38, ‘in effect, CEO of a national student organisation that was to be a prominent and influential movement in the 1920 and the 1930s’ (p.170). The personal contribution of this strong but modest woman, including her pioneering work for internees and refugees, receives overdue recognition in the book.

Howe provides a thorough examination of the beliefs and ideas that animated the movement. The question of the aims and membership of the SCM runs like a leitmotif through the century, causing sometimes acrimonious
debate at critical moments of its existence. Evolving attitudes to Bible study and worship are also charted. Other religious issues examined include the relationship of the SCM to the missionary movement – from a sometimes uneasy acceptance of Mott’s slogan, ‘the evangelisation of the world in this generation’, to its rejection, the sterling service of ASCM families in the pre-World War II mission field and the postwar evolution of the missionary impulse into the overseas volunteer movements in which SCMers also participated fully. The theological clash between modernism and fundamentalism and the fraught relationship between the ASCM and the Evangelical Union are also explored. Other themes are the relationships of the SCM with local churches and its active role in the national and international ecumenical movement – one of the jewels in the crown of the ASCM.

Because of its commitment to working in the world, the SCM as a movement, and many of its individual members, were intimately engaged in the great debates and events that shook the twentieth century. Howe charts the movement’s involvement, showing it both responding to, and sometimes helping to shape, the events and ideas of the era. They include:

- the struggles for social justice, leading early in the century to involvement in settlements and in the Workers’ Educational Association
- the idealistic search for a new world order following the suffering of World War I
- the confrontation with fascism and communism in the 1930s
- its participation in the peace movement, often in uneasy partnership with communist activists, which, incidentally, led to scrutiny of the movement by the Commonwealth Investigations Branch, precursor of ASIO with prominent individuals such as Camilla Wedgwood, Margaret Holmes and Frank Coald rake earning the distinction of personal CIB files
- the reconstruction of society following World War II, with SCMers in key roles in the bureaucracy
- the building of awareness of the Asia-Pacific region by various means, including the student volunteer scheme
- opposition to the White Australia Policy and lobbying for Asian immigration
• the formation of an enlightened Aboriginal policy that influenced debate surrounding the 1967 referendum on Aboriginal citizenship
• and active involvement in the Vietnam War protests, in particular opposition to the draft.

It is fitting that a centenary history should be celebratory and Professor Howe duly celebrates the many fine achievements of the ASCM. But her commitment as a professional historian has ensured that the book is not hagiography. She has scrutinised the evidence with rigour and detachment and has chronicled the movement’s failures as well as its achievements, its weaknesses as well as its strengths, its doubts as well as its convictions. In her final chapters she identifies and explores with candour the social, political and theological factors in a rapidly changing Australia that contributed to its decline from the 1960s. She ends with a balanced and restrained reflection on the contribution of the ASCM to Australia’s social, political and religious life.

A Century of Influence is an impressively authoritative, judicious and immensely readable study of a century of ASCM history. But it is more than that. The analysis of the movement’s engagement with the major issues of the twentieth century can be seen as a prism through which the intellectual, religious, social and political history of the nation is refracted. It is a significant contribution to Australian historiography.

Diane Langmore
Former General Editor of the Australian Dictionary of Biography

Stresses faced by English clergy families


Public People, Private Lives is a book about the stress being experienced by clergy families in the Church of England. Its content ‘is shocking and at the same time inspiring,’ writes commentator Ann Atkins in her foreword (p. xiii). As someone who has spent over twenty years in full-time parish
ministry I was neither shocked nor overly inspired. While the contexts and conditions in which English clergy minister are somewhat different to the situation in Australia, many of the stresses highlighted in this research are familiar. In Australia, as in England, a role that was once high-status and low-stress has decreased in status and increased in stress. Consequently, clergy and their families are people at risk. The extent of their vulnerability is reflected in numerous accounts of depression, disillusionment, burnout, marriage difficulty and family breakdown.

Jean Burton is a clergy spouse and a qualified family systems therapist with experience in counselling clergy and their families. Chris Burton is an Anglican priest with training in family therapy and considerable parish experience. The investigations undergirding this book were conducted in connection with doctoral research. The Burtons were concerned about ‘a long term undermining of clergy and their families’ (p. 3). Despite their background and experience they confess to being surprised at the extent of the difficulties revealed in their investigations. Their research, focusing exclusively on the experience of families of male clergy, was converted into a book in the hope of providing ‘new insights for all ordained church leaders, as well as lay members such as church wardens, church council members and others in key positions’ (p. xxii). They framed the overall thrust of the book with the question: ‘Why does the church, one of whose tasks is to care for others, seem to find it so hard to care for its carers?’ (p. 5). The fact that the discussion focuses solely on male clergy with families still at home is understandable from the perspective of academic research but it curtails its value in the Australian context where most bishops are currently ordaining more women than men.

The Burtons’s methodology emphasised in-depth personal discussion over broader statistical analysis. They wanted to gain the perspective of the whole family ‘by talking to children and parents together’ (p. 5) and by following up annually on their initial consultation with two further discussions ‘to see how their perspectives and responses might change over a period of time (p. 5). Conversation focused on the causes, development and accumulation of stress in these families, and on the mechanisms they adopted for coping with emerging threats to family stability and functioning. Twenty families were recruited from across England for the study. They were selected on the basis of the willingness of the whole family to be involved in the process and not because they were already stressed or seeking help in
dealing with stress. Two six-member reference groups were also convened (one of pastoral carers and one of church leaders) in order to comment on the family conversations and supply further information about the church as a social organisation.

The book is divided into six sections. The introductory section outlines the broad context of ministry within the Church of England along with a description of its formal support systems, such as there are! Part 2 looks at the wider scene citing previous research into family stress, highlighting common issues and detailing ‘stress models’. Part 3 covers the first round of interviews dealing with the curacy stage, where ordinands make the transition from theological training to their first parish appointment under the tutelage of a senior incumbent. In Australia, particularly in the rural dioceses, limited parish finance and pressure to fill a surge in vacancies mean that few new ordinands are now offered a curacy position. The effect of this new approach to appointments on clergy families is yet to be appreciated. In my view it will almost certainly exacerbate stress.

Part 4 examines ideas and theories that help shed light on the experience of clergy families and the ways in which they can become complicit in their worsening plight as they respond to numerous double binds and the pressure to accommodate unreasonable expectations. Part 5 describes issues arising from the second and third round of interviews. In Part 6 the authors reflect more critically on some of the dilemmas faced by the families and reference groups before outlining recommendations for addressing the most acute needs.

The strength of the book lies in the detail with which recurring stressors are described. The deliberate family focus and the use of numerous personal examples highlight the causes and effects of stress on clergy, their spouses and their children as well as its impact on the family system. There were common themes that recurred with almost monotonous regularity. Discussions around issues to do with relocation, accommodation, support (diocesan and congregational), education, role definition, expectations, boundaries, priorities, conflict, finances and time management were uppermost, although different family members experienced these as stressful in dissimilar ways. Overlaying this commentary, the authors note that ‘the financial, sociological and spiritual situation of society at this stage in the early twenty-first century is changing rapidly, raising new issues as well as intensifying existing ones’ (p. 217).
In response to their findings and numerous ‘solutions’ suggested in interviews, the authors propose twelve recommendations for reducing stress in clergy families. Given their emphasis on whole families it is disappointing that most of their recommendations are directed towards individual clergy. There will be a flow-on effect. Nonetheless, it seems strange that none of the recommendations address the specific needs of spouses or children.

Many of the recommendations refer to aspects of continuing clergy formation including training to address the specific dilemmas raised in the research, training for different stages and roles within the church (curate, incumbent, team leader), training in conflict management and assistance with financial management. The authors note that ‘clergy who took part in training during the research indicated that it brought stimulation, a great reduction in isolation, a fresh focus to the job and a new sense of competence.’ They also note that ‘all clergy need training to manage their individual task in such a diffuse job’ (p. 219).

A further recommendation highlighted the role and resource of senior members of the laity, noting that these people have much experience and insight that, ‘framed within an overall training plan, could greatly enhance clergy performance without incurring high costs’ (p. 220). Regular consultation and supervision for clergy was recommended together with a greater emphasis on clear job descriptions, job applications and references so that the right person is placed in the right appointment. In this respect, the negotiation of clearly articulated covenants that address common areas of clergy stress could be particularly helpful. For a covenant to be effective, it is essential to facilitate open conversation between all parties. Covenants need to be regularly and formally reviewed, with revisions presented to stakeholders to help align expectations with needs and aptitudes.

A final group of recommendations concerned monitoring clergy conditions of service, including housing and working hours, and monitoring clergy discipline and pastoral care.

The recommendations touch on significant issues and each are worthy of extensive consideration. In the Australian context it would be important to consider recommendations that relate to the circumstances of female clergy and their families. An overall weakness of the book is the imbalance between its repetitive descriptions of the problems facing clergy families and the paucity of discussion on ways ahead. Its structure is of course restricted by the format of the inquiry. Although the authors seek to influence a wider
church readership in the hope of addressing the debilitating impact of stress on clergy families, a more concise summary of key findings followed by a wider-ranging exploration of solutions would have resulted in a more accessible and useful book.

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The Homeless Heart


The Chinese maxim, ‘may you live in interesting times’, takes us only so far. Scott Cowdell sharpens the matter in his book on faith in times of uncertainty, anxiety and violence. It would be hard to dispute these three fundamental features of life in the world of the twenty-first century. However what is particularly interesting is the form and content of these elements of our present context. It raises an even more fundamental question: what does living faithfully with God look like in such a world?

Cowdell uncovers the contours of a way in faith that is both trusting and indwelling in God, in short a faith that abides in God the Trinity. Scott Cowdell is an accomplished Australian theologian and author. This is his sixth book and in my view it breathes a maturity and power that makes it both a challenge and delight to engage with.

His own introduction captures the flavour and intent of the book well: ‘This is a book about the nature of Christian faith. In our anxious age of violent certainties, it offers a holistic understanding of faith that I intend to be timely and liberating, orthodox, and critical’. In doing so Cowdell argues that the Christian faith answers the contemporary ‘spiritual yearning for inclusion and deep re-connection with others and the world’. He points us to ‘an abiding faith in Jesus Christ, of mystical flavor, worked out through the Eucharistic community’.
The argument unfolds in two parts with three chapters in each. Part 1, aptly titled ‘faith in the crucible of modernity’, offers a map and analysis of the context in which an abiding faith in God has to be lived. Part 2, ‘belonging, believing and behaving’ constructs a vision of an abiding faith for our time.

The starting point for Cowdell’s inquiry (chapter 1) is his depiction of the ‘homeless heart’ of modernity. This is the restless, unsatisfied yearning of the modern self. This is the self that is ‘ill at ease before the horizon of mystery’ (p. 9). This is the self that finds the move (and movie of that name) ‘Into Great Silence’ either irrelevant, discomforting or a sign of ‘wasted lives’. Indeed the homeless heart of the West seems unclear what ‘home’ would look like if it appeared. Tracing the-break up of the ‘integrated religious civilization’ and the ‘emergence of religion as a discrete category’, a ‘life style option’, Cowdell discusses the withering impact of secularization on religious faith in the modern era. It is a move from tribal faith to individualised faith. The price is high – the modern individual has forfeited ‘belonging to community and place’. It is no wonder that the modern self is an anxious self: ‘we have all become bricoleurs, charged with crafting our own selves by the choices we make’ (p. 22). This self-actualisation pulse feeds off a consumer society; indeed we are caught in its grip. Everything is commodified, particularly work and relationships. The religious/belief offerings are diverse in this new framework: conservative Christianity, consumer spirituality and atheism. They all make a bid for the homeless heart and Cowdell’s discussion of ‘atheist chic’ (champion Richard Dawkins) and ‘atheism lite’ typified for Cowdell by the ‘atheist priest’ Don Cupitt is both witty and sharp. Dawkins’s version comes in for a solid critique later in the book and is well worth the read in itself. The homeless heart of the brave new world of the modern individual nurses many fears and anxieties. But the agenda has been set.

What happens to God and the sacred in this crucible is taken up in chapter 2. Here it is a question of the ‘system’ and the loss of the sense of the divine. Cowdell traces this disintegration of the sacred from late medieval nominalism (Peter Abelard 1079-1142) and the Franciscan Bonaventure (1217-1274). God became ‘a thing like other things’. The stuff of creation was conceived of as an independent realm dislocated from the divine; faith and philosophy were ruptured. The interwovenness of God with the world was seriously weakened and a ‘new version of transcendence for God’ arose (p. 55). The result from the side of faith was new forms of fideism and ‘Bible-
only Protestant fundamentalism. Religion was privatised and hermetically sealed from the public space. We have here the origins of a God of absolute power and the ‘roots of modern scepticism and the homeless heart’ (p. 61). The matter was compounded under the stress of the violence of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. What emerges is a desire for certainty and rationality shorn of faith in the brave new world of cosmopolis. This is the new system and its collapse in the twentieth century in the wake of world wars, nihilism and violence breed a deeper anxiety and search for meaning. Cowdell’s discussion of the fate of theology and faith in this chapter is succinct and insightful.

Chapter 3 uncovers the victims of the failed system of the cosmopolis. This is an important chapter as Cowdell deconstructs the dynamic of the modern obsession with power deploying the insights of the philosopher-anthropologist-cultural theorist, Rene Girard. Girard’s identification of the way desire and mimesis operate to create scapegoats and victims takes the usual analysis of religion and its fate in modernity to a fresh level. Scapegoating is the Girardian safety valve for dealing with violence. This mechanism is located at the very origins of culture in its attempt to mask human predilection for violence by relocating it in ritualised forms. This leads Cowdell into an analysis of deviance and foreignness in modern society in relation to the scapegoat mechanism. Girard enables Cowdell to unmask the violence of the system, identify the victims and expose the false sacred at its heart.

The crucible of modernity is captured well by Cowdell, ‘constructed on anxiety, committed to certainty, and maintained by violence’ (p. 99). Tribal faith has given way to a highly individualised faith in the modern world. Is there a third way that does not revert to earlier tribalism and does not get caught in the trap of private faith and the false sacred realities of the market and consumer culture? Can there be a truly abiding faith that enables people to ‘live quietly in their own skins’ and a ‘tolerable peace’ amid the anxieties and violence of our time? Such questions occupy Cowdell’s constructive theological task in Part 2.

Chapter 4, ‘At Home in Jesus Christ’ offers a fresh interpretation of the Christian mystical tradition. Cowdell recognises that the word mysticism ‘conjures up images of religious esoterica and spiritual athleticism’ (p. 103). The author wishes to reclaim mysticism ‘as a way of talking about what everyday Christian faith was classically understood to be … and can be again in our post-modern world.’ His intent is to commend a ‘kinder, gentler
but also more robust version of faith’ conformed to the gospel rather than contemporary culture. Cowdell identifies abiding faith as ‘referring to the baptised, Eucharistic life of abiding in the encompassing, liberating, vivifying and transforming reality that is Jesus Christ, his Spirit, and his Church’ (p. 104). The chapter takes the reader through the faith of the gospel and the mysticism of St Paul – a dying and rising with Christ. It tracks the emergence of abiding faith in the classical tradition and shows how this faith went into ‘exile’ from late medieval Europe and identifies signs of its recovery in the twentieth century in the theology of Karl Barth. I think Cowdell is absolutely right about Barth’s place in this longer and richer tradition of faith. It is a shame so many students of theology have not been exposed to precisely this feature of Barth’s legacy.

How then does this positive account of the nature of abiding faith stack up against modern western notions of meaningfulness? Chapter 5 explores faith’s knowledge and modern doubt. Cowdell rightly, I believe, sees a strange connectedness between rationalistic believers and the ‘unbelieving hardheads who oppose them’ (p. 137). In this chapter Cowdell draws upon biographical snippets from key figures: English theologian and retired bishop David Jenkins, a harrowing story of abuse and conversion from a short story, ‘The Turning,’ by Tim Winton and a critique of Richard Dawkins’s rational scepticism. Cowdell is quite accurate when he notes that ‘Dawkins has reacted in kind to the way Christianity has regularly presented itself since Descartes and the Enlightenment, in rational terms based on universally-acknowledged truths and general wisdom’ (p. 149). We should heed the lesson; if we play that game we shall surely lose but, more importantly, we falsify the nature of abiding faith, which is at heart a participatory knowing.

The danger for faith is that it succumbs to what George Lindbeck has called a ‘cognitive propositional’ approach to faith’s knowledge. The other alternative is an ‘experiential-expressive’ faith that reacts against the rationalist impulse and retreats into an inner world of feeling. Cowdell is clear, ‘faith and belief are not superstructures built on the bare hull of experience’ (p. 157). This is the location for the nineteenth-century Protestant Friedrich Schleiermacher and the twentieth century Catholic Karl Rahner’s transcendental anthropology. I believe Rahner is more complicated with a heavy dose of the cognitive propositionalist approach as well.

More positively Cowdell proposes abiding faith as a ‘form of life’ and ‘paradigmatic imagination.’ Such faith belongs to an imaginative web
constituted by ‘observation, theory, tacit assumption, its own innate logic’ and capable of converting people to a new form of life. In this web, faith can have the character of certitude but in a ‘non-dogmatic and non-violent’ manner. This kind of abiding faith is ‘calm, large-souled, and life-giving’ (p. 177). It can hold its own in today’s intellectual climate. This is a dense chapter covering a variety of important themes. Its strength – variety of approaches and stories – also created a sense of disconnectedness for this reader at times. It struck me that the red thread woven through the story of faith’s knowledge was the notion of participation.

Cowdell rounds out his discussion of the nature of faith in a final chapter on vision, self and spirituality. This is a delightful chapter articulating a move from system to gift, a modest metaphysics as an overture to reconnecting faith with philosophy and the world and a move from the self as anxious individual to ecclesial person. This last move is critical and Cowdell, drawing upon an important thinker for his own work, James Alison, highlights the importance of ‘saintly influence’ and the role of others in making the self. In this vision of self and spirituality a mature compassion can arise even as a deeper honesty is revealed of what it means to be an ecclesial person. The accent is on conversion – being remade and converted at multiple levels of personhood.

In this context the autobiographical ‘parson’s tale’ represented a remarkable recapitulation of the whole book. Cowdell reflects upon his own journey into an abiding faith and in doing so shows brilliantly how a Girardian reading of desire, mimesis and conversion sheds light on our human predicament and the power of God’s grace through faith to transform lives. For me the tale gave an authenticity to everything the book was about. How refreshing to find a theologian whose soul and mind become so transparent at critical moments.

Scott Cowdell offers us an intriguing and nuanced theological account of the fortunes of Christian faith – its rise, fall and new possibilities. Cowdell’s command of the theological tradition is impressive He moves with ease through the labyrinth of history, culture and theology. The book is well conceived and its inner logic unfolds and gathers momentum. It is a satisfying, informative and mature piece of theology. His commendation of an abiding faith that is at once mystical and practical is both attractive and compelling. As a fan of all things Girard I found the author’s deployment
of Giradian theory illuminating. I hope he can expand on this in the future for the sake of a wider theological public.

This is a scholarly work on a subject that touches a raw nerve for the ‘homeless heart’. In this sense it is a fine example of a mediating theology in the best tradition of Anglican apologetics. A must read for any serious student of modern theology who wants to understand why we are where we are and how we might find our way faithfully into the future.

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A prophet for our times


Many Christians around the world name Dietrich Bonhoeffer a modern Protestant saint. Together with other martyrs for the faith and next to Martin Luther King and Oscar Romero, his statue graces the west entrance of Westminster Abbey in London. His writings, especially Discipleship and Letters and Papers from Prison, have inspired Christians to follow Jesus more intentionally and have challenged theologians not to bypass the centrality of the cross of Christ for the issues of the day.

And indeed, thanks to scholars like John Moses, the inspiring and challenging legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer has been kept alive to the present day. The sixteen-volume (plus a register volume) Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke, which is being made available in English, provides a rich resource for Bonhoeffer studies. John Moses knows Bonhoeffer’s writings well. But he goes further. He places Bonhoeffer in the context of his time, culture, church and history, and appropriately names him a ‘reluctant revolutionary’.

‘Reluctant’ because neither his cultural and upper-middle-class, well-educated family background nor his church affiliation as a Lutheran Christian predisposed Bonhoeffer to revolutionary thought or action. Moses shows
convincingly that the Bildungsbürgertum to which Dietrich Bonhoeffer belonged had a strong tradition of granting ‘divine right’ and therefore gave unquestioned authority to the state; its ideology included using war as an instrument of politics; and it furthered an unhealthy sense of German national identity and with it fostered a latent anti-Semitism.

This was reinforced by the Lutheran theological tradition in which Bonhoeffer found himself. Romans 13 was used (or as many would say, misused) to accept unquestioningly the authority of the state. The negative attitude toward the Jews in parts of the Christian Bible and by Martin Luther had blinded the vision of large sections of German culture and the Christian churches to their anti-Semitism. And an unsophisticated understanding of the Lutheran ‘two kingdom’ theory left the political realm with its economy, militarism and cultural institutions (Nährstand, Wehrstand and Lehrstand) virtually outside the influence of the church and its pastors and theologians. Given his family, cultural and theological background, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was not destined to become a revolutionary (see chs 1 and 2).

Nevertheless, due to theological encounters, personal experiences and cultural influences, Bonhoeffer came into collision with his own cultural and theological tradition and slowly but surely became a ‘reluctant revolutionary’. Moses succeeds in placing the development of Bonhoeffer’s life within the wider context of German history. Here is a summary statement:

... by early 1934, at the latest, Bonhoeffer had identified the Führer as a menace – indeed, as the agent of the anti-Christ – lost confidence in his own class for submitting so spinelessly to the seducer (the Verführer, ‘misleader’), identified the Nazi Jewish policy as the key issue for the future of the church – indeed, as a status confessionis – and come to the conclusion that sooner or later ‘a spoke will have to be jammed into the wheel’ of the Nazi movement. The fact that the ‘German Christians’ had declared unequivocal support for the Führer issued a challenge to traditional Lutherans to declare where they stood, and the result was the formation of the Confessing Church of which Bonhoeffer was a major personality. (p. 173)

John Moses portrays the development of Bonhoeffer’s theological, social and political consciousness. The personality and theology of Karl Barth
focused his theology on Jesus Christ (p. 78), but Bonhoeffer goes beyond Barth by interlocking Christology with the Jewish question (chs 3, 5 and 7). Since Jesus was a Jew (p. 161), the very centre of Christian faith is related to the Jewish question and therefore the anti-Semitism in the church can only be seen as a heresy and the anti-Semitism of Hitler makes him an agent of the anti-Christ. For Bonhoeffer, ‘the church is Christ’s presence in the world and is therefore automatically at enmity with the forces of the Antichrist’ (p. 77 and chs 5 and 7). This the Lutheran churches and most of their theologians, under the guise of their ‘two kingdom’ theory, failed to understand. Even Karl Barth and ‘Barmen’ failed at that point (see index under ‘Barmen Confession’).

In America, Bonhoeffer learnt that the Sermon on the Mount was not a ‘law’ from which Christ needs to liberate us or a series of sayings with no relevance for politics, as his Lutheran tradition suggested, but an invitation to take faith seriously and consider pacifism and conscientious objection a possibility for the Christian (ch. 4). Indeed, in a letter to his brother Karl-Friedrich in January 1935 he confessed that a rediscovery of the Sermon on the Mount had for the first time in his life convinced him that he was ‘on the right track’ (alluded to on p. 134).

His repeated use of Proverbs 31:8–9, ‘speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy’, demonstrates Bonhoeffer’s heightening solidarity with the fate of his Jewish fellow-citizens (ch. 7).

All of this – his theology, his personal faith and his social conscience – brought him into collision with his church and culture. He felt alone, but there was no way back. Moses shows in an interesting and readable way how Bonhoeffer used his international and ecumenical contacts to ease the burden of Jewish refugees and pave a possible way forward for the future of Germany.

John Moses’ portrait of Bonhoeffer in the context of his times is more a woodcut than a detailed painting. It highlights the main issues and keeps to history rather than theology. He shows that Bonhoeffer stands out. There were of course many intellectuals in Germany’s history who counselled peace and justice; there were many others who left Germany when the Nazis rose to power. But the fact remains that the dominant mood in the 1930s was nationalism, anti-Semitism, expansionism and a willingness to use war to achieve the aims of Nazi ideology. Moses helps us to understand the sheer
greatness of Bonhoeffer’s protest and that he did so, at least in a major part, for religious convictions and commitments. Moses counsels wisely that neither German history nor history in general can be properly understood if the religious dimension, good and bad, is ignored (pp. xi, 3–5).

In the final chapter and in the epilogue of his book, Moses traces the post-World War II reception of Bonhoeffer’s legacy. While in Britain that legacy was welcomed and received with open arms and, indeed, it was through British publications that that legacy was made universally accessible and famous, German churches and other social institutions struggled with the Bonhoeffer story. The post-war bishop of the Lutheran church in Bonhoeffer’s diocese, Otto Dibelius, did not show much interest in Bonhoeffer’s legacy, and the German legal system did not exonerate Bonhoeffer for decades after his judicial murder by the Nazi state.

This new book includes helpful appendices with the texts of the Barmen Theological Declaration (1934), the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt (1945), the Darmstadt Statement (1947), and the German Democratic Republic ‘More Justice in the GDR’ Declaration (1989). The latter three are little known in the English-speaking world. An index concludes the book. Some persons (for example Thielicke) and topics (for example Freiburger Kreis) treated in the book are missing in the index, and for some index entries (for example Bonhoeffer, anti-Semitism, Germany) more details would have been helpful.

Like with any good book, this book not only informs and inspires but also raises questions inviting further thought.

While agreeing with Moses on the terrible consequences of the Lutheran ‘two kingdom’ theory, we should also acknowledge that a sophisticated understanding of that theory, as for instance provided by one of Bonhoeffer’s Finkenwalde students, Gerhard Ebeling, can retrieve its theological value.

John Moses shows convincingly how an educated culture can be derailed to commit terrible atrocities and how theology is always tempted to provide legitimacy for those in power. At the same time it must not be overlooked (as John Moses knows) that economic and social factors mixed with a low self-esteem were decisive for the rise of Hitler. And it must also be repeated ever again that the main opposition to Hitler did not come from the churches but from the Bildungsbürgertum.

From the denominational point of view Germany was and is a divided country. Since Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran, Moses naturally focuses on the
failure of the Lutheran churches to discern the signs of the times and to meet its challenges. But wide parts of Germany where the Hitler movement was strong were dominated by the Roman Catholic church, and the so-called free churches fared no better.

Of major importance is the challenge of understanding and interpreting the presence of Jewish citizens in the German culture and of Jewish Christians in the church. The discussion is carried on throughout Moses’ book. It reaches a high point in chapter 7. Moses uses the term *theologia gloriae* to describe the ecclesiastical and theological tendency to treat the Jews as objects of Christian mission. He says: ‘The *theologia gloriae* is unequivocally anti-Jewish, and is the precursor of anti-Semitism in all its grotesque manifestations throughout history’ (p. 194). His historical analysis is eloquently argued and convincing. And yet, a problem remains. The Hebrew Bible calls God’s people to repentance. In the Christian Bible all people are invited to believe in Jesus Christ on the basis that God raised the crucified Jesus from the dead. Given the barbarism of Germany toward the Jews and given the terrible failure of the churches in Germany to show solidarity with the oppressed, it is perfectly understandable when German Christians cease to engage in a specific mission to the Jews. But that should not eliminate the missionary structure that is inherent to Christian faith. Bonhoeffer named Jesus the man ‘for others’, and he called the church to follow Jesus by being the community ‘for others’. The gospel must be addressed as an invitation to life to all people, including Christians and Jews. Tolerance, non-violence and peace are not served by denying the universality and absoluteness of Christ but by developing a culture of freedom in which people of different faiths learn to talk and live together. And yet, as Moses reminds us, we too easily forget in our theology that Jesus was a Jew.

I found Moses’ evaluation of the Freiburg Circle in general (p. 190ff.) and the theologian Helmut Thielicke in particular a little harsh (‘ultra-conservative’, ‘reactionary’, ‘men of yesterday’). Some of the members of that Circle suffered terrible torture at the hands of the Nazis and Thielicke himself, according to his autobiography, only narrowly escaped the torture chambers. In post war Germany he was one of the few theologians who kept the prophetic and liberating relevance of the gospel alive in a defeated and demoralised culture.

John Moses has provided us a valuable service by introducing us again to a great Christian and has reminded us of our own responsibility in the
culture in which we find ourselves. Bonhoeffer’s unmasking of anti-Semitism as a Christian heresy and a human tragedy (chs 1 and 3), his commitment to non-violence and peace (chs 4 and 5) and his enduring testimony that a witness must accept responsibility for what he or she believes (p. 143 and the whole of ch. 6) is as relevant today as it was seventy years ago. Moses has given us an eloquent account of one of the modern credible Christians who was willing to question traditional values and was willing to swim against the stream and thus became ‘a prophet for our times’ (p. 250).

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SMR Booknotes


This set of essays edited by feminist writer and founder of Womens Forum Australia, Melinda Tankard Reist, deals with the very disturbing subject of the sexualisation of girls through advertisements for clothing and merchandise, the portrayal of women in the print media and the proliferation of Internet pornography. The foreword by the Australian actress Noni Hazlehurst sets the tone for much of what follows. Noting the increasing exploitation of children through media manipulation and rampant consumerism, Hazlehurst takes aim at young feminists who, ‘acting as apologists for the agents of inequality’, argue that ‘there’s no need to worry, everything’s acceptable and anyone who has concerns about the way things are going is just an old-fashioned wowser. There are some academics who claim that young children are media savvy and therefore cannot possibly be exploited’. And yet, there are widespread reports of sexually active twelve-year old girls demanding removal of their public hair and looking forward to having breast implants. Their highly sexualised behaviour encourages boys to believe that women are willing to provide the sexual services they have observed on the Internet. This book is not for those easily offended. The contributors – who include clinical
psychiatrists and health experts, philosophers and ethicists, advocates and campaigners – avoid any euphemisms in making plain the very real threats being posed to childhood innocence. This book is makes for disturbing reading but the issues raised demand action and not indifference. [Copies can be obtained at www.spinifexpress.com.au or (03) 9329 6088.]
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