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**Evolution, Eschatology and the
 Privatization of Providence**

The relationship between evangelical Christianity and evolutionary theory has been conceptualized in a number of ways. By reviewing several major historiographical models the real complexity of evangelical encounters with evolution is revealed. This paper argues that ideas about providence and eschatology had important influences on the attitude to evolution adopted by evangelical Christians.

Key Words: design, eschatology, evangelicals, evolutionary theory, historiography, natural theology, providence.

How are we to think about the relationship between science and Christianity? Are we to conceive of them as two unrelated domains with different vocabularies and distinctive modes of discourse? Should we perhaps think of them as mutually hostile spheres of human understanding? Or should we perhaps give up the idea that there is any clear line of demarcation between science and religion and consider other ways of conceptualizing the issue? Whether any normative answer can or should be given to this question there is no doubt that the history of the relationship has been thought of in varying ways—in terms of isolation, integration and conflict!¹ And not surprisingly a wide range of metaphors has been deployed to speak of it—marriage and divorce, harmony and discord, war and peace, books and authorship, kingdoms and domains—and this in itself is indicative of just how difficult it is to get a handle on the topic.

As contemporary philosophers of science have pondered this question more and more have come to the conclusion that none of the candidates so far advanced for drawing a clear-cut boundary line between the frontiers of science and other spheres of human endeavour—candidates like verification, falsification, theory development, quantification, prediction and so on—have proved successful. Indeed some contemporary philosophers argue that various religious traditions are entirely within their cognitive rights to use their theological convictions as ‘controls’ in theory adjudication.² I do not intend to enter this particular debate. But in this context of changing philosophical assessments of the scientific enterprise

1 See the excellent survey in John Hedley Brooke, ‘Science and Religion’, in Olby (et al.), R. C., *Companion to the History of Modern Science*, London and New York: Routledge (1990), pp. 763–782.

2 Thus, for example, Wolterstorff, Nicholas, *Reason within the bounds of religion*; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (1984); Plantinga, Alvin and Wolterstorff, Nicholas (eds), *Faith and Rationality. Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press).

and scientific rationality, historical scrutiny of the issue is likely to be valuable. For the fact is that religious (and other 'non-scientific') factors just always have insinuated their way into the very heart of scientific discourse.

In this essay I thus propose to look at some of the 'control beliefs' that evangelical Christians brought to their encounter with evolutionary theory. But before we turn to the specifics of that engagement, it will be profitable to pause and consider briefly some of the ways in which the more general encounter between science and Christianity has been conceived.

Contexts

Conventionally, and no doubt still popularly, the relationship between Christianity and science has been seen in terms *conflict*.³ Metaphors of 'warfare' and 'struggle' have been common currency at least since the mid-nineteenth century writings of Andrew Dixon White, and the supposed fracas between Samuel Wilberforce and Thomas Henry Huxley at the 1860 Oxford meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science—a symbolic encounter which occupies a strategic place in the iconography of the conflict interpretation. This legend, however, has been demythologized as historians have raked over the ashes, and the conflict model more generally has crumbled as it has come under the searchlight of historical scrutiny. *God and Nature*, the collection of essays gathered together by David Lindberg and Ronald Numbers, constitutes perhaps the best exposé of the inadequacies of the warfare thesis.⁴ Indeed we might well ask why it was that the conflict model flourished as it did for so long, and wonder whether there were not social interests being served by its adoption. A fuller understanding of which individuals and groups constructed the warfare model, and why, would certainly be enlightening.⁵ Of course the disintegration of the conflict interpretation does not mean that there have never been conflicts between Christians and scientists; the latter-day antagonism between creationists and evolutionists should put paid to that suggestion. No; the point is, rather, that the warfare metaphor does not give us a fine enough tool for doing good historiographical work; indeed it actually delivers a distorted view of the relationship.

The inadequacies of the conflict model notwithstanding, there have

3 See the recent assessment in Lindberg, David C. and Numbers, Ronald L. 'Beyond War and Peace: a Reappraisal of the Encounter between Christianity and Science', *Church History* (1986) 55: 338–354.

4 Lindberg, David C. and Numbers, Ronald L. (eds), *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science*, Berkeley: University of California Press (1986). Recent reassessments of the Huxley–Wilberforce encounter are available in Lucas, J. R. 'Wilberforce and Huxley: A Legendary Encounter', *The Historical Journal* (1979) 22: 313–330; Jensen, J. Vernon, 'Return to the Wilberforce–Huxley Debate', *British Journal for the History of Science* (1988) 21: 143–160.

5 See the valuable discussion in Russele, Colin A. 'The Conflict Metaphor and Its Social Origins', *Science and Christian Belief* (1989) 1: 3–26.

been those who remain loath to abandon the language of antagonism altogether. Neal Gillespie, for instance, suggests that the history of nineteenth century science must be interpreted in the context of a conflict between two philosophical systems or *epistemes*, as he calls them, namely between positivism and creationism. At the heart of the issue, he argues, was a philosophical engagement between those advocating a naturalistic scientific methodology and those retaining ideas of supernatural interventionism.⁶ Again, Frank Miller Turner has urged that we must retain the notion of *social competition* if we are to understand the nineteenth century debates.⁷ His argument is that there was a struggle for cultural power in society between the old-fashioned clerical sage and the new thrusting scientific professional; in other words a conflict not between science and theology, but between scientists and theologians. The idea is that during the Victorian era cultural power progressively passed out of the hands of one elite—the clergy, and into the hands of a newer elite—the professional scientist. So scientific discourse became just one more arena in which cultural, rather than cognitive, interests were fought out. What this exegesis does for us then, is to focus our attention on the social dimensions of the encounter and if it perhaps treats ‘knowledge claims’ as rather too much an epiphenomenon of society it does nonetheless provide a helpful corrective to analyses that are over intellectualist in emphasis.

While the social struggles of scientists and clergymen have thus attracted historical attention, there have been those calling attention to the cooperation science received from theology. Those sharing this version of the story look to such commentators as Hooykaas, Dillenberger, Hill, Merton, Foster, and Russell, to name but a few, as laying out the basic historical and philosophical groundwork. For the nineteenth century, Jim Moore’s monumental treatise, *The Post-Darwinian Controversies*, drew attention to the ease with which those of a Calvinist disposition absorbed the Darwinian shock waves.⁸ Indeed Moore went so far as to claim that the theologically orthodox imbibed more pure Darwin than did those of liberal doctrinal persuasion because, among other things, the latter’s benign social philosophies supposedly lacked the harsher tones of Calvinism. Whether evangelical benediction on evolution was quite so exclusively restricted to those of Calvinist outlook is, I think, perhaps less certain; but for the moment I merely want to observe that the language of cooperation has been engaged as providing another route into the territorial zone between science and Christianity.

6 Gillespie, Neal, *Charles Darwin and the Problem of Creation*; Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1979).

7 Turner, Frank Miller, ‘Rainfall, Plagues and the Prince of Wales: A Chapter in the Conflict of Religion and Science’, *Journal of British Studies* (1974) 13: 46–65; Turner, Frank Miller, ‘The Victorian Conflict between Science and Religion: A Professional Dimension’, *Isis* (1978) 69: 356–376.

8 Moore, James R. *The Post-Darwinian Controversies: A Study of the Protestant Struggle to Come to Terms with Darwin in Great Britain and America, 1870–1900*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1979).

Despite the different emphases that each of these perspectives has brought they are united in speaking of an 'encounter' or a 'relationship' between two different spheres of thought and practice, namely the religious and the scientific. It is precisely the questioning of this sort of conventional bifurcation that lies at the heart of the final strategy that I want to itemize. This is the idea of continuity between scientific and religious belief-systems that has been the subject of numerous articles from the pen of Robert M. Young.⁹ Young's thoroughly Marxist conviction is simply that both science and religion are socially sanctioned ideologies. In his reading, the nineteenth century debate about 'man's place in nature' is fundamentally the story of the substitution of a religious theodicy by a scientific one; in both, the status quo is legitimated, first by talk of divine law or natural theology, and then by the language of natural law or natural selection. Science, like religion, merely acts to support principles of social conformity. Indeed when one looks at the rhetoric on the lips of leading scientific publicists like Huxley with talk of 'lay sermons', 'scientific priesthood', 'the church scientific, and 'molecular teleology', Young's arguments seem to have much to commend them. Science here seems to occupy the role of a naturalized natural theology. Values are no longer derived from the supernatural realm but rather are earthed in the all too mundane world of nature. And this naturalization of values is achieved through the sacralization of science. Certainly Young's thesis is open to criticism on several grounds: natural theology, for example, was far from a coherent, unified concept and its advocates used it for a diverse range of social prescriptions.¹⁰ But his portrait does, nevertheless, direct our attention to the socio-political uses to which both science and religion can be put. Readers of the contemporary debates between creationists and evolutionists cannot fail to notice how frequently social, moral and political agendas feature in the rhetoric.

It is plain, then, that a variety of interpretations has been advanced in the attempt to conceptualize the historical relations between science and Christianity. In my view no one of them has finally sewn up the case. Rather it seems to me that each of them has something to tell us. Accordingly, in seeking some clues to understanding evangelical engagements with evolutionary theory it would be wise for us to keep an eye open for those theological 'control beliefs' that have social as well as cognitive ramifications. For it would be just as foolish to interpret the relations between science and Christianity as solely antagonistic as it would be to deny that there have been skirmishes, or to proceed with the assumption

9 Young's major pronouncements on the theme are now drawn together in Young, Robert M. *Darwin's Metaphor. Nature's Place in Victorian Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1985).

10 Thus, for example, Brooke, John Hedley, 'The Natural Theology of the Geologists: Some Theological Strata', in L. J. Jordanova and Porter, Roy (eds), *Images of the Earth: Essays in the History of the Environmental Sciences*; Chalfont St. Giles: British Society for the History of Science (1979), pp. 39-64.

that cognitive claims are entirely reducible to society as to ignore the social dimension altogether.¹¹

Encounters

Evaluations of the more specific relationship between evangelicals and evolution theory are many and diverse. Some see opposition to the Darwinian formula as the typical evangelical response. Indeed Jon Roberts significantly entitles the relevant chapter of his recent excellent survey, *Darwinism and the Divine in America*, 'Get thee hence, Satan'.¹² By contrast some have found what they consider to be vibrant traditions of evangelical evolutionism on both sides of the Atlantic. In all probability these differing judgments reflect the samples each has chosen to illustrate the case. Still, we can surely settle for the verdict that evolution theory found both supporters and detractors within the evangelical community. What value there would be in embarking on a head count to quantify these diversities I leave for others to judge. Of course most of the writing on this topic has focussed attention on evangelical intellectuals, and I shall say something about this in due course. But for the present it might be helpful to illustrate something of the range of reaction by looking briefly at some examples and asking what were the underlying beliefs that predisposed individuals towards or against evolution theory.

The Idea of Design and the Privatization of Providence

Undoubtedly the best-known evangelical opponent of the Darwinian formula when it first appeared was Charles Hodge who roundly condemned Darwinism as atheism.¹³ Hodge, however, came to this judgement on the basis of a specific definition of Darwinism. For him it was neither evolutionary change, nor species transformation, nor a long earth history; rather it was an anti-teleological account of organic history. So it was because Darwin had had no recourse to design, not because evolution contravened a literal reading of the early Genesis narratives, that Hodge condemned his theory as tantamount to atheism. Accordingly, Hodge could—quite consistently in his own terms—describe the Harvard botanist Asa Gray as an evolutionist, but deny that he was a Darwinian because of his Christian commitment to a designed universe. On this basis, to reject Darwinism certainly did not necessitate an opposition to evolution. Hodge's repudiation of the Darwinian theory was thus on broadly philosophical-theological grounds rather than on detailed exegesis of the early chapters of Genesis. Indeed it may well be that Hodge's anti-Darwinian stance was

11 I readily admit that each of these claims would have to be argued through in detail. My aim here, however, is just to declare my own historiographical stance.

12 Roberts, Jon H. *Darwinism and the Divine in America: Protestant Intellectuals and Organic Evolution, 1859–1900*; Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press (1988).

13 See the discussion in Livingstone, David N. *Darwin's Forgotten Defenders. The Encounter between Evangelical Theology and Evolutionary Thought*; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press (1987).

actually much closer cognitively to the pro-evolutionary teleology of figures like James McCosh and B. B. Warfield than might at first be imagined. Either way, because the design argument was part of the very fabric of evangelical theology in the period any perceived assault on this doctrine would call forth condemnation. Thus in the writings of Robert Dabney from the Southern Presbyterians the same Hodge-like arguments were clearly to be heard. So even if, as Roberts argues, there was a good number for whom the inerrancy of scripture was the key issue, it is equally true that among both opponents and defenders of evolutionary theory, the question of design was of crucial importance.¹⁴

When we turn to those conservative Protestants who felt that they could marry their evangelical faith with some version of evolution, we find that it was their capacity to reconceptualize the idea of design in more holistic, idealist terms that was of crucial significance. For if indeed Darwin had dealt the death-blow to natural theology in the Paley mould, that certainly did not mean that other less utilitarian versions were unable to withstand the challenge. Accordingly we find a broader conception of teleology in the writings of figures like James McCosh, B. B. Warfield, A. A. Hodge, and others in the Princeton succession who declared, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, their support for evolution. Warfield himself proves to be a crucial case, particularly in view of his architectonic defence of biblical inerrancy. For Warfield, there just was no inconsistency between defending the propriety of evolution, with minimal divine intervention, and adhering to an inerrantist biblical theology. Too often the historical documents are approached by commentators with the assumption that such an alignment is just impossible, and thereby *a priori* judgments are issued that have little historical warrant.

These conceptual drifts it should be said, were not restricted either to Princeton theology or to America. Beyond the confines of New Jersey, George Frederick Wright, at least in his early days,¹⁵ and Asa Gray both sought for ways of preserving teleology in the wake of the Darwinian assault, as did James Dana at Yale. Certainly the strategies they followed were diverse; but their statements reveal nonetheless how crucial the design argument was within evangelical ranks. In Britain support for the renovation of the design argument was to be found among such Scottish theologians as James Orr, James Iverach, Henry Drummond and George Matheson, all of whom looked for an evolutionary teleology. In some ways the title of A. B. Bruce's book, *The Providential Order*, exemplified this intellectual trajectory within Scottish theology.

From my comments thus far it might well seem that my examples, drawn as they are largely from the Reformed tradition, support the

14 Livingstone, David N. 'The Idea of Design: The Vicissitudes of a Key Concept in the Princeton Response to Darwin', *Scottish Journal of Theology* (1984) 37: 329-357.

15 Numbers, Ronald L. 'George Frederick Wright: From Christian Darwinist to Fundamentalist', *Isis* (1988) 79: 624-645.

contention that Calvinists found it easier than other evangelical groups to make their peace with Darwin. And indeed this view has of late achieved something of the status of conventional wisdom. But this judgment ignores the not insubstantial body of Wesleyan support for evolution. Of crucial importance here are the writings of the Michigan geologist Alexander Winchell who assumed the role of purveyor of science to the Methodist fraternity in the northern United States through his contributions to the *Methodist Quarterly Review*. Here, and elsewhere, Winchell made it plain that he espoused the theory of evolution albeit in its Neo-Lamarckian guise, and that he was convinced that it strengthened the teleological argument in its homological form. Nor was Winchell a lone voice among Wesleyans. The distinguished editor of the journal, Daniel Whedon, did much to keep the Wesleyan fraternity abreast of the latest findings of science and philosophy and kept an open mind on the evolution question.¹⁶

Some Interpretations

Now that we have seen something of the range of responses to Darwin's theory in the immediate decades after it first appeared, this is perhaps an appropriate moment to pause and make some additional interpretative comments. Mention of Winchell's views provides a useful point of departure. For a while Winchell enjoyed a distinguished career in American science and religion, his curriculum vitae was not without its black spots. In 1876 he had accepted a position at Vanderbilt that enabled him to teach there for three months of the year while retaining his links with Syracuse University. But there he ruffled the feathers of Bishop Holland McTyeire chairman of the board of trustees, and was summarily dismissed from his post. Whether his departure was because of his advocacy of evolution or because of his espousal of the Pre-adamite theory in which he suggested that Adam was descended from black forebears, it is clear that some scientific-religious issue was at the heart of it. And this episode serves to remind us of the regional geography of American Christianity. For while Winchell could not be tolerated in Southern Wesleyanism (nor indeed could James Woodrow whose evolutionary views were outlawed by the Southern Presbyterian General Assembly), he was allowed much greater freedom of expression among his Northern co-religionists. So in our endeavour to understand 'the' evangelical encounter with evolution theory the regional factor should clearly be remembered. No doubt a biblical literalism with respect to the holding of slaves among Southern evangelicals had a part to play in the story.

The centrality of design arguments in these late nineteenth century debates also needs further elaboration. Because the language of 'providence', 'teleology', and 'design' so regularly features in evangelical assess-

¹⁶ In Britain precisely the same conceptual manoeuvres are to be found in the work of another Wesleyan, William Henry Dallinger, a distinguished microscopist. Several contributors to the Methodist serial the *Northwestern Christian Advocate* deployed similar tactics. See *Darwin's Forgotten Defenders*, pp. 135-137.

ments of evolution, it has been widely assumed that the preservation of natural theology, perhaps for its potential social agenda, was the chief concern of those evangelicals keen to offer the hand of friendship to evolution. A more careful scrutiny of the data, however, reveals that the design argument manifested itself in two distinctive modes. Natural theology, as conventionally deployed, was essentially the argument from design, namely a foundationalist attempt to base knowledge of the existence of God on rational, empirical foundations. From observed design in the world, apologists would argue to divine existence. By contrast there were those who advanced an argument to design, namely that belief in a designed world was a consequence of a prior belief in God. In this case the idea of design was rather more a *confessional* claim than a *philosophical* argument, and this urges on us a greater awareness of the different theological uses to which the vocabulary of design could be put.¹⁷

A greater sensitivity to the fine structure of teleological discourse may prove valuable in understanding evangelical reactions to evolution theory for two different sets of reasons, one cognitive, the other social. First, the contrasting philosophical positions that undergirded design arguments reveal just how crucial teleological thinking was to doctrinally diverse evangelicals. If they disagreed on apologetic strategy and on the soteriological potential of natural theology, they could all the while agree on the necessity of retaining the notion of a designed world. Moreover we can now see how those unsympathetic to the traditional natural theology task could yet remain committed to the argument to design, and thereby hold that assaulting design was tantamount to assaulting scripture. Too many commentators have assumed that when evangelical opponents of Darwin described the theory as unscriptural they were motivated by exegetical rather than philosophical considerations. In fact there were those who described it as unscriptural just because it opposed design.¹⁸ Whichever, I have the suspicion that how evangelicals thought about design was far more important in conditioning their responses to Darwin than whether their theology was Calvinist or not.

The changing fortunes of the idea of design needs to be interrogated for a second set of reasons, namely, changing social conditions. So, when the irrepressible optimism of the nineteenth century—fired, as it was at least in part, by Herbert Spencer—evaporated before the chilly winds of early twentieth century pessimism, the doctrine of Providence could scarcely survive unimpaired. To be sure the vocabulary of Providence survived in the more intimate world of the individual's spiritual life; Christians still

17 This distinction is crucial to the recent analysis by Wells, Jonathan, *Charles Hodge's Critique of Darwinism. An Historical-Critical Analysis of Concepts Crucial to the 19th Century Debate*, Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press (1988).

18 This was certainly so in the case of Charles Hodge, who, in his *Systematic Theology* discussed the anti-teleological character of Darwin's theory under the heading 'Anti-Scriptural Theories'. Jon Roberts takes this as indicative of Hodge's objection to Darwinism on biblical grounds; but this is misleading for Hodge's concerns were far more philosophical-theological than exegetical. See Roberts, *op. cit.*

felt that their personal biographies were controlled by God's providential care. But it was far harder to detect the public hand of Providence in the increasingly godless and chaotic world of post-war America. So might it not be that with the privatization of Providence the idea of the divine superintendence of evolutionary history receded before a more supernaturalist emphasis on miraculous intervention? At the very least it would seem worthwhile asking whether the vicissitudes of providential theology had any influence on the changing evangelical response to evolutionary biology.

By focusing on the significance of the doctrine of Providence I certainly do not mean to imply that this was the only theological factor in the debate. And yet because ideas about Providence are implicated in both the cognitive and the social domains, they provide an especially useful arena in which to apply the insights of the different historiographical models we earlier examined. How individuals thought of *design* determined whether their encounter with evolution would be hostile or cooperative; the kinds of social policy that different theological groups distilled from *the doctrine of Providence* conditioned whether they were in cultural competition with, or enjoyed ideological continuity with, the prevailing scientific culture.

Eschatology

How evangelicals conceived of the doctrine of providence and the sorts of social philosophy they espoused were also bound up with a closely related set of doctrines going under the rubric of 'eschatology'. The suggestion here is that responses to evolution theory were substantially conditioned by the eschatological stance adopted by commentators. There is, of course, an initial plausibility to this idea given the association between liberal theologies of hope, ideologies of progress, process philosophy and (at least certain versions of) evolutionary thought. Some two decades ago Ernst Benz published a work entitled *Evolution and Christian Hope*, part of which was devoted to an assessment of the relationship between Darwinism and such future-orientated ideologies as Marxist and materialist histories of salvation, Nietzsche's futuristic doctrine of the superman, speculations on evolution and the future of humanity in the writings of the Hindu Sri Aurobindo, and Teilhard de Chardin's evolutionized eschatology. The details of Benz's arguments are beyond my purposes here, but it is significant that in his analysis he accords a formative role to the eschatological thinking of such nineteenth century evangelical scholars as James McCosh, Henry Drummond and George Frederick Wright.¹⁹

All this suggest that there were significant resonances between attitudes to eschatology and attitudes to evolution theory. Thus postmillennialists,

19 Benz, Ernst, *Evolution and Christian Hope. Man's Concept of the Future from the Early Fathers to Teilhard de Chardin*, translated from the Germany by Heinz G. Frank, New York: Doubleday (1966). The relationship between eschatological vocabulary and quantum cosmologies is discussed in Drees, Willem B. 'Beyond the Big Bang: Quantum Cosmologies and God' (Doctoral Dissertation, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 1989). I am grateful to Dr. Howard Van Till for drawing this latter work to my attention.

like Warfield, with their exuberant confidence in social progress, were sympathetic to the idea of a gradual transformation of society, and so it is not surprising that they would find the transformism of evolution theory congenial. By contrast, the resurgence of premillennialism, particularly in its dispensationalist form, introduced a much narrower literalism into biblical hermeneutic and a more sombre note of social pessimism into evangelical rhetoric; the outcome was a theology with a far more robust emphasis on intervention than on providential superintendence of the world order. Accordingly premillennialists—like George McCready Price, Seventh-day Adventist father of the modern creationist movement—found the idea of evolutionary transformism repugnant on almost every front: social, scriptural, and scientific. Thus his pamphlet on *Poisoning Democracy: A Study of Present-Day Socialism* was described by one partisan as showing ‘that the conditions prevailing today are due largely to the acceptance of various socialistic and evolutionary theories termed “New Theology”.’²⁰ And if here we find displayed Price’s twin political and scientific phobias, it is not surprising that they were all-of-a-piece with his eschatological emphases:

The most timely truth for our day is a reform which will point this generation of evolutionists back to Creation, and to the worship of Him who made the heaven and the earth. Other reforms in other days have been based upon various parts of the Bible here and there. The reform most needed in our day is one based on the first part of the Bible—and upon the last part also. For he who is looking for the return of his Lord, and for the imminent ushering in of the new heaven and the new earth, must necessarily believe in the record of the first part of the Bible which tells of the Creation of the earth. Surely it is useless to expect people to believe in the predictions given in the last chapters of the Bible, if they do not believe in the record of the events described in its first chapters.²¹

It seems, then, that attitudes about the end times had a greater impact on thinking about origins than beliefs about election or divine sovereignty or any of the doctrinal particulars generally associated with Calvinism. And this is surely further confirmed in the following words published by the dispensationalist theologian John F. Walvoord in 1975:

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Darwinian evolution began to penetrate the ranks of postmillenarians. Liberals hailed the theory of evolution, with its easygoing optimism, as the true divine method for bringing in the predicted golden age. Recognizing this as a departure from the faith, more conservative postmillenarians and amillenarians attempted to refute the new evolutionary concept. One of the means

²⁰ Cited in advertisement appended to Bryan, William Jennings, *In His Image*; New York: Fleming H. Revell Company (1922).

²¹ Price, George McCready, *Science and Religion in a Nutshell*, Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald Publishing Association (1923), p. 13.

used was the calling of great prophetic conferences which were held in the last part of the nineteenth century and continued into the twentieth.

As amillennialism and postmillennialism have little to offer by way of refutation of the concept of evolutionary progress, these prophecy conferences soon became dominated by premillennial interpreters. Many of the doctrines which later became an essential part of premillennial theology were introduced into the discussion . . .²²

What lends further support to these suggestions, moreover, is what might be called the scientific dispensationalism that is built into the very fabric of creation science. For in these scenarios there is a major structural disjunction between the original created order and the post-fall, or perhaps better, post-flood world as we find it. The original structures of nature have, supposedly, been entirely dislocated by fall and flood. Thus it seems that the natural world itself has its own series of 'dispensations' to pass through.²³

The Popular Response

From what I have been saying so far, it seems that the evangelical encounter with evolution was bound up with such factors as geographical location, social philosophy, providential outlook and eschatological stance. At the same time, these assessments are based rather exclusively on the intellectual response to the theory. At most we know how perhaps a few dozen evangelical intellectuals felt about Darwinism. A thorough study of the popular literature, therefore, would certainly be enlightening. Still, my impression is that many churchgoers were unnerved by evolution talk as they imbibed with the rest of popular culture the notion that 'Darwinian man, though well behaved, At best is only a monkey shaved.' If this is so it raises fundamental questions about the relationship between evangelicalism's intellectual leadership and its popular base. Why was it that on this issue laymen and women failed to listen to their own theological

22 Walvoord, John F. 'Posttribulationism Today', *Bibliotheca Sacra* (1975): 16-24. The recent association between creationism and postmillennial theonomism requires further investigation. See McIver, Tom. 'Christian Reconstructionism, Post-Millennialism, and Creationism', *Creation/Evolution Newsletter*, (January-February, 1988): 10-16. Suffice to note that there are those who believe that the eschatological structure of theonomism (or Christian reconstructionism, as it is called) is significantly different from nineteenth century postmillennialism. As I read it—and these judgments are entirely preliminary—contemporary reconstructionist postmillennialism politicizes eschatology in a way that is totalitarian and theocratic; its strategies seem more interventionist than gradualist, revolutionary rather than evolutionary. Earlier postmillennialism seemed to rely more on God's providential supervision of the world order and its history.

So far as amillennialism is concerned, advocates could opt for different evolutionary positions, depending on the precise version of amillennialism adopted. Thus, for example, Floyd E. Hamilton, a staunch opponent of evolution in the 1940s turned from premillennialism to amillennialism. Yet he noted that 'the premillennial theory is . . . right in what it asserts of the condition of the world up to the time of the Rapture.' Hamilton, Floyd E. *The Basis of Millennial Faith*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (1942), p. 34.

23 I am indebted to Dr. Arie Leegwater for this suggestion.

spokesmen? Was it that the anti-religious rhetoric of certain scientific publicists was just too persuasive? After all, as often as not, when battle was engaged it was initiated by those who wanted to wield science in the service of secularism. Huxley and others were only too ready to tell Christians what they could and could not believe about evolution, and were on occasion the first to raise cries of heresy.²⁴ Or was there a more fundamental breach between the sophisticated theologizing of the 'experts' and the humble faith of ordinary churchgoers? Whichever, it is precisely this sort of dislocation that has led some to question the value of the label 'evangelical' not only to bridge the chasm between the popular and the scholarly, but also to describe such widely diverse Protestant groups as Reformed Calvinists and Premillennial pietists. Certainly the differences between Warfield and, say, Luther T. Townsend on the evolution question make facile talk about the evangelical angle on evolution theory more than a little problematic.

The relative importance of these diverse factors—geographical, sociological, theological—clearly cannot be adjudicated here. But it certainly is the case that in the wake of the demise of Providential theology, the spread of social pessimism, and the rise of a populist fundamentalism, a more militant anti-evolution crusade emerged among conservative Protestants during the early decades of the twentieth century. A full history of the creationist movement is, of course, a real *desideratum*, and to speculate about the early sources of the movement is only to invite censure.²⁵ Still, the anti-evolution crusade of the 1920s emerged from two rather different sources. Initially there was the role played by George McCready Price, whose creationist science was born principally of his strongly literalistic, premillennialist, and inerrantist biblical hermeneutic.²⁶ Not surprisingly the movement gained most ground among Missouri-Synod Lutherans, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses and various dispensationalist groups.²⁷

But there was another source of dissatisfaction with evolution. William Jennings Bryan, famous for his participation in the Scopes monkey trial and three-times Democratic candidate for the United States' presidency, basically objected to Darwinism because of its repugnant moral implications. Accordingly he urged that 'tax-payers should prevent the teaching

24 See, for example, Gilley, Sheridan and Loades, Anne, 'Thomas Henry Huxley: The War Between Science and Religion', *Journal of Religion* (1981) 61: 285-308; Barton, Ruth, 'Evolution: the Whitworth Gun in Huxley's War for the Liberation of Science from Theology', in Oldroyd, David and Langhem, Ian (eds), *The Wider Domain of Evolutionary Thought*, Dordrecht: Reidel (1983), pp. 261-287.

25 Professor Ronald Numbers of the University of Wisconsin-Madison is preparing a full study of the creationist movement.

26 By the mid 1920s Price had found his way into the pages of the *Princeton Theological Review* which had been under Warfield's editorial care until his death in 1921. Had Warfield still been alive in 1926 it is doubtful whether Price's truculently anti-Darwin piece would have appeared in that serial.

27 See the discussion in Numbers, Ronald L. 'Creationism in 20th Century America', *Science* (1982) 218: 538-544.

in the public schools of atheism, agnosticism, Darwinism, or any other hypothesis that links man in blood relationship with the brutes . . . If it is contended that an instructor has a right to teach anything he likes, I reply that the tax-payers must decide what shall be taught. The hand that writes the pay check rules the school.'²⁸ Darwinism, he maintained, removed any stimulus to righteous living. Moreover, he was revolted by the Social Darwinism that he believed he could detect among the German National Socialists. Disturbed by Germanic jingoism and militarism, and profoundly committed to Democratic politics Bryan was happy to throw his weight behind the fundamentalist cause célèbre, and so found himself reflecting grass roots opinion when he acted for the prosecution in Dayton, Tennessee.²⁹ In private, we now know, he confessed that he had no objection to evolution before the advent of the first human pair.³⁰

There is clearly insufficient space here to continue the story through the reaches of the twentieth century. All that needs to be said is that the anti-evolution sentiments aired in the 1920s, along with their diverse ideological motivations, were to come to full fruition with the emergence of the various creationist movements that have mushroomed in our own day. At the same time various evangelical groups have maintained the theological propriety of adopting some form of evolutionary theory.

Conclusion

When we speak of the evangelical encounter with evolution, then, it may well be that we are speaking of abstractions. In every case we need to ask what we mean by 'evangelical'. Do we mean the encounter between evangelical *theology* and evolution theory, and if so which brand? Again, do we mean evangelicals in the academy or in the pew, and is there a difference? And precisely the same sorts of questions apply to the idea of evolution. Do we mean species transformation, or naturalistic causal explanation in organic history, or natural selection, or a long earth history? Much ink has been spilt in the effort to identify the essential nature of Darwinism. But this has proven to be an especially stubborn problem. If we identify evolution by natural selection alone as the kernel of Darwinism we face difficulties immediately, not the least of which is the fact that Darwin himself also accepted evolution by family selection, use-inheritance, sexual selection, correlative variation and so on. If, by contrast, we turn to the idea of evolutionary gradualism that rules out not only T. H. Huxley, but also modern evolutionists like Stephen Jay Gould. As for metaphysical naturalism as a candidate—that rules out such key players

28 Bryan, William Jennings, *In His Image* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1922), p. 122.

29 Szasz, Ferenc Morton, *The Divided Mind of Protestant America*; University: University of Alabama Press (1982), pp. 106–135; Durant, John, 'Darwinism and Divinity: A Century of Debate', in Durant, John (ed.), *Darwinism and Divinity*; Oxford: Basil Blackwell (1985), pp. 24, 26.

30 See Numbers, 'Creationism' (note 27).

in the Darwinian drama as Wallace, Romanes, Lyell, Baldwin, Gray and many others. In truth it looks as though finding an essential definition of Darwinism may not prove to be a useful undertaking. It would be better to consider Darwinism as a system of ideas, or even a conceptual 'species',³¹ which changes over time and whose components are more related by family resemblance than by genetic identity; Darwinians, like other families, have more first and second cousins, than identical twins.

In sum there has always been a variety of evangelical responses to a variety of evolutionisms. And yet, if the suggestions made in this paper are well founded, ideas about design, providence, and eschatology, implicated as each of them is in both the theological and social arenas, were among the crucial control beliefs that evangelical Christians brought to their encounter with the evolutionary paradigm.

³¹ David Hull makes extended use of the species metaphor as historiography in his most recent book, *Science as a Process: An Evolutionary Account of the Social and Conceptual Development of Science*; Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press (1988). He emphasizes that natural selection historiography is not to be construed as evolutionary epistemology.

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