



ST PAUL'S COLLEGE SYMPOSIUM
25th November 2009

Charles Darwin and the Church



This symposium, to mark the 200th anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth and the sesquicentenary of his great work, *The Origin of Species*, will include a day and evening of discussion on the positive impact of evolutionary ideas on religious thought.

PROGRAM

(All symposium sessions in the Junior Common Room, St Paul's College)

9.00-9.30: Arrival

9.30-10.15: **Key-note address**

Professor **John McDowell**, University of Newcastle,
"Dead Dogs, Darwin, and Divine Action: The Peace of the Creature
That is to Be"

10.15-10.45: Morning tea

10.45-12.15: three 20-minute papers plus discussion

Professor **John Gascoigne**, University of NSW,
"Darwin and the British Natural Theology Tradition"

The Revd Dr **John Beer**, senior clerical Fellow, St. Paul's College,
"Reaction and Response: Darwin and the Church"

Professor **Tom Frame**, St Mark's National Theological Centre,
Canberra,
"The Australian Religious Reaction to *The Origin of Species*"

12.45-1.45: Lunch in the College Hall

1.45-3.30: three 20-minute papers plus discussion

The Revd Dr **Stephen Ames**, Lecturer, Dept of the History and Philosophy of Science, University of Melbourne:

“Why would God use Darwinian evolution to bring life into existence? Is this a fair question? If so, is there a fair answer?”

The Revd Dr **Scott Cowdell**, Research Fellow in Public and Contextual Theology, St Mark's National Theological Centre, Canberra,

"God, Christ, and the World according to Evolutionary Theory"

Professor **Neil Ormerod**, Institute of Theology, Philosophy and Religious Education, Australian Catholic University,

“Creator God, Evolving World: Providence or Process”

3.45-4.45: Afternoon tea

4.15-4.45:

The Rt Revd **Brian Kyme**, Institute for Anglican Studies, Perth, remarks on the work of the Institute.

6.30-8.00: Dinner in the College Hall

8.00-9.00: **Cable Lecture (New Series)**

The Revd Dr **Ivan Head**, Warden of St Paul's College, “Darwin, Newman and a Shared Developmental Pattern”

You may register for the day, for the evening, or for both.

For abstracts of talks, see below.

REGISTRATION

The day only (including lunch):	\$30 (\$15 for students)
The evening only (including dinner):	\$65 (\$40 for students)
Both day and evening:	\$95 (\$55 for students)

Register via email to: stpaulsreception@usyd.edu.au

Payment can be made via credit card by calling the College office:
02 9550 7444

Registration will close on the 13th November 2009

Inquiries: Alan Atkinson, St Paul's College
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The image shows the Sagrada Familia Cathedral, Barcelona, designed by Antoni Gaudí (1852-1926), the building of which began in 1882 and still continues. "Those who look for the laws of Nature as a support for their new works", wrote Gaudí, "collaborate with the Creator."

Abstracts

John McDowell, "Dead Dogs, Darwin, and Divine Action: The Peace of the Creature That is to Be"¹

On the 150th anniversary of the publication of Charles Darwin's epoch-making *Origin of the Species* it is appropriate to return to critical questions concerning theological readings of this most celebrated and yet controversial of texts. 2009 is the anniversary of another significant text, and this will feature later in my paper by way of enabling a moment of critical conversation. On the 29th May, 75 years ago 138 people from 25 German state and provincial churches, largely ministers and academic theologians from the Reformed, Lutheran and Free denominations of the Protestant churches, met at the City Church at Barmen and accepted the 'Barmen Theological Declaration' penned by the Swiss theologian Karl Barth.

My paper will briefly highlight some of the most significant features of Darwin's work that may be fruitfully discussed in the context of this symposium. However, my interest largely lies in one matter in particular: the nature of divine agency and its ethical generativeness. Put otherwise, my concerns are bound up with work on the tragic mood that qualifies Christian hope, and the fragility of, to use the title of one of Paul Ricoeur's books, "fallible man". The contention is that Darwin's account offers significant resources for constraining the theological imagination in certain theologically appropriate ways, but yet in the end is bound up with an ideology of life because of death rather than life through or in spite of death.

John Gascoigne, "Darwin and the British Natural Theology Tradition"²

This paper will survey the close links between theology and science which were forged in the wake of the publication of Newton's *Principia* (1687) and the ways in which these continued to shape British intellectual life into Darwin's formative years -- being particularly influential at Darwin's alma mater of Cambridge. It will also offer some remarks on how they had become particularly influential in the scientific areas in which Darwin was most active. Darwin's work, it will be suggested, was in some ways one of the last great works in this tradition while also serving to undermine it.

¹ John C. McDowell is the recently appointed Morpeth Professor of Theology at the University of Newcastle, the author of *Hope in Barth's Eschatology* (Ashgate, 2000), and *The Gospel According to Star Wars* (Westminster John Knox, 2007), and the co-editor of *Conversing With Barth* (Ashgate, 2004). He was formerly the Meldrum Senior Lecturer in Systematic Theology at the University of Edinburgh, and a member of the Doctrine Commission of the Church of Scotland. His website is http://www.geocities.com/johnnymcdowell/johnmcdowells_page.

² John Gascoigne has degrees from Sydney, Princeton and Cambridge universities and is Professor of History at the University of NSW. He is author of *Joseph Banks and the English Enlightenment* (1994), *Science, politics and universities in Europe, 1600-1800* (1998), *The Enlightenment and the Origins of European Australia* (2002), and *Captain Cook. Voyager between Worlds* (2007).

John Beer, "Reaction and Response: Darwin and the Church"³

This paper will examine first, the changing face of the Church from 1830 to the advent of Darwin and beyond, including the widening of the gap between sacred and secular as a result of advancing scientific discoveries. It will include reference to the growth of liberalism with the publication of J.A. Froude's *Nemesis of Faith* (1849), *Essays and Reviews* (1861) and the *Lux Mundi. Essays* (1859). It will also analyse the response to Darwin in Australia from Bishop Moorhouse of Melbourne, and draw a parallel with the church's response to J.A.T. Robinson's *Honest to God* a century later.

Tom Frame, "The Australian Religious Reaction to *The Origin of Species*"⁴

In contrast to Britain, Europe and North America, Sydney's religious leaders gave Darwin's work a cautious but positive response. This paper will look at initial religious reactions to Darwin's theories, the gradual absorption of evolutionary theory into the religious outlook of both the clergy and the laity, and the enduring influence of science on the shape and substance of Australian belief.

Stephen Ames, "Why would God use Darwinian evolution to bring life into existence? Is this a fair question? If so, is there a fair answer?"⁵

Assume that God freely creates and sustains the universe in existence for some purpose. Asking why God used natural selection to bring life into existence seems to constrain divine freedom and so is not a fair question. Furthermore, even to consider the possibility of a 'fair' answer suggests we can do science from theology. The paper addresses these concerns as part of subverting the claim that Darwinism undermines Christian theology. The claim assumes that Darwinian evolution contradicts theology because evolution is a 'blind' process and therefore purposeless and because of the several aspects of the problem of natural evil. I assume that God creates and sustains the universe in existence for some purpose, and then refer to Aquinas' theological argument for the creation of secondary causes and his discussion of divine governance. I show how these entail a view of the universe, which is found to be partly instantiated by evolution. Among other things this respects the contingency of creation resulting from divine freedom, blocks the inference from 'blind' to 'purposeless', and responds to the problem of natural evil. I think this presents a fair answer to a fair question.

³ The Revd John Beer is the senior clerical Fellow of St. Paul's College. He has recently completed a thesis on the contribution to Anglicanism by Dr P.A. Micklem of St. James' Sydney (1917-37), the 1946 Oxford Bampton Lecturer.

⁴ Tom Frame is Director of St Mark's National Theological Centre in Canberra and the author of *Evolution in the Antipodes: Charles Darwin and Australia* (UNSW Press, 2009).

⁵ The Revd Dr Stephen Ames is a Lecturer in the Department of the History and Philosophy of Science, University of Melbourne.

Scott Cowdell, "God, Christ, and the World according to Evolutionary Theory"⁶
This paper affirms the compatibility of neo-Darwinian biology and orthodox Christian theology, considering ways of understanding God's action in Darwin's world. The so-called problem of evil is addressed--given the high cost of evolutionary outcomes in terms of individual animal suffering, also the enormous extinction of animal species, with 96% of those that have ever lived now gone forever. The paper will explore how the God of Jesus Christ both illuminates and is illuminated by evolution's unsentimental account of life on earth."

Neil Ormerod, "Creator God, Evolving World: Providence or Process?"⁷

It is commonly claimed that the shift to an evolutionary understanding of the world requires Christian theology to rethink their ideas about God, often resulting in some form of process theological position. The paper will examine whether in fact this shift is necessary or whether evolution is just as well accommodated in the more classical theistic stance of divine providence. Further it will argue that such a classical stance is far more congruent with contemporary scientific worldviews.

Ivan Head, "Darwin, Newman and a Shared Developmental Pattern?"⁸

Ivan hopes to explore Newman's religious concern to trace continuity through change from the earliest days of Christianity to its developed (Catholic) or even corrupted (heretical/schismatic) forms of later times, right up to the modernity of his 19th century. This will relate to the often made 'first move', which is to insist that divine truth can all be found in the first moment expressed in the scriptural source. He will explore the tension between that and what R.P.C. Hanson calls "the search for the Christian Doctrine of God", a search that embraces the succeeding centuries as of necessity. It is clear that there is a parallel between this pattern and Darwin's great insight that the world, if it was created, was not created complete all at once or in species entirety. Newman knew that the dynamic of change, continuity, flourishing and extinction of species was itself a challenging and profound dynamic, not for the faint-hearted. If Ivan can draw enough of that map, he may conclude with some observations of how theology and ethics will itself change further as a Darwinian perspective continues to reshape a continuing and developing quest for the truth of God.

⁶ Associate Professor Scott Cowdell (Charles Sturt University) is an Anglican priest and Honorary Academic Fellow of St Paul's College. He is based at St Mark's National Theological Centre, Canberra, as a Research Fellow in Public and Contextual Theology. He is also Canon Theologian of the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn and a Founding Fellow of the Oxford University Centre for Animal Ethics.

⁷ Neil Ormerod is Professor of Theology and Director of the Institute of Theology, Philosophy and Religious Education at Australian Catholic University. He is widely published in Australia and overseas. His latest books are *Creation, Grace and Redemption* (Orbis Press 2007) and *Academic Freedom in a Theological Context* (Australian College of Theology 2008).

⁸ Ivan Head is Warden of St Paul's College, and holds a PhD from Glasgow on the interpretation of miracle stories. He is Chairman of the Human Research Ethics Committee for Sydney IVF.