

REVIEW ARTICLE

The Post-Darwinian Controversies

JOHN C. WHITCOMB

The Post-Darwinian Controversies: A Study of the Protestant Struggle to Come to Terms with Darwin in Great Britain and America, 1870-1900, by James R. Moore. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979. Pp. 502. \$37.50.

With 350 pages of closely reasoned historical analysis and an impeccable style, bolstered by 986 bibliographically illuminating endnotes and a 58-page bibliography, James R. Moore of England seeks to demonstrate the "theological orthodoxy" of Darwinism and to explain all significant Protestant responses to Darwin in both Great Britain and America during the last three decades of the nineteenth century in the light of this thesis.

It is indeed a major undertaking, and the result is a masterpiece of historical erudition. It appears that no non-Catholic writer on either side of the Atlantic who interacted with Darwin's theory of organic evolution escapes Moore's attention (p. 11 and n. 18). All previous writers on the history of these controversies are criticized for their shallow or provincial approach in neglecting "the thousands of books and articles on evolution and religion that were published in the wake of *The Origin of Species*" (p. 7).

The author, who serves as Lecturer in the History of Science and Technology in The Open University (England), wrote a doctoral thesis on this subject at the University of Manchester in 1975 (pp. x, 355 n. 23), and, with the aid of a generous grant, expanded his work into the present form early in 1978, using the large library collection at Princeton Theological Seminary as well as bibliographic resources available in England.

The basic thesis of the book is that a paradoxical harmony existed between true Darwinian evolutionism and Calvinistic/trinitarian orthodoxy (pp. 15-16, 280, 289-95, 297-98, 308, 327, 334-36, 341, 345, 349, 398 n. 110), even though Darwin himself never saw this and finally abandoned Christian theism by sinking into deism and finally agnosticism (pp. ix, 15-16, 109, 276, 315, 326-40, 346-51).

In order to accomplish this incredible *tour de force*, Moore not only leaves no stone unturned in eliminating the idea of "warfare" and "militant conflict" between science and Christianity but, inevitably, redefines Christian "orthodoxy" to the total exclusion of all forms of "Biblical fundamentalism" with its "literalistic" hermeneutics. If Christianity could somehow be "transformed" and "rightly viewed" (pp. 1, 16), there could be no conflict with Darwinism!

For "Fundamentalism" Moore has nothing but contempt. Because of their "deeply biased interpretations of the post-Darwinian controversies" (p. 69), "the movement of aggressive advocates of 'fundamental' Christianity which appeared in the United States about the year 1920" (p. 70) "could not remember the evangelical evolutionists among their ancestors" (p. 73) such as A. H. Strong, B. B. Warfield, James Orr, and G. F. Wright (pp. 71-72), and, thus, "bereft of intellectual leadership . . . panicked" (p. 74). Devoid of "Galilean charity . . . their indictments of modernism and evolution closely resembled Allied propaganda" which taught Americans "to hate Germany, that barbaric nation which, to the Fundamentalist way of thinking, had uniquely fostered critical and evolutionary thought." Now it became the duty of fundamentalists to avenge the "theological atrocities" committed by German critics against the Bible (p. 74).

With rather obvious relish, Moore, the historical pacifist, militantly attacks all "zealous defenders of biblical literalism" who indulged in "monkey business" in their "campaign against evolution in education" (p. 75). Our author is not at all reticent in his description of how "the agnostic lawyer, Clarence Darrow . . . swung with the spirit of the moment" during the famous Scopes Trial of 1925, "taking advantage of the popular impression that the Bible and evolution were on trial to land a crushing blow on the premier representative of the Fundamentalist opposition [William Jennings Bryan], "making him talk nonsense" and "confess ignorance." Thus, "the Fundamentalists were reversed" and "the world could not stop laughing at their ignorance" (p. 76).

Professor Moore presumably finds it inexcusable for the "defenders of biblical literalism" to have taken seriously the biblical commands to "fight the good fight of faith" (1 Tim 6:12; cf. 2 Tim 4:7) or to have utilized "the divinely powerful" "weapons of our warfare . . . for the destruction of fortresses" (2 Cor 10:4). On the other hand, the evolutionary scientist Maynard Shipley "is perhaps to be excused for not always writing dispassionately and for omitting sufficient documentation in his 'short history of the Fundamentalist attacks on evolution and modernism'" (p. 75). Thus, while "the symbol of war . . . was an appealing one to the fundamentalist" (p. 74, quoting Norman Furniss), "the military metaphor must be abandoned by those who wish to achieve historical understanding" (p. 76).

Does James R. Moore, then, approach the history of science and Christianity without any bias whatsoever? No, he honestly believes that "Darwinism was the legitimate offspring of an orthodox theology of nature and . . . that, 'rightly viewed,' orthodox theological bottles proved to have been made expressly for holding the new Darwinian wine," even though "to reason thus may well invite the accusation that one is doing scarcely veiled apologetics" (p. 16).

Our author's respect for Darwin—a respect that borders on reverence—is indeed "scarcely veiled." Darwin's "epoch-making discovery . . . made biological evolution for the first time scientifically cogent and theologically challenging" (p. 214). "Theory and prejudice were tempered with that caution

which caused Darwin's scientific reputation to endure and with those noble virtues, comprised in the Golden Rule, which endeared his character to every race and class and nation" (p. 161; cf. p. 138).

"Face to face with a mountain or a coral reef, the biblical chronology seemed nonsense" to Darwin. For him, "gratuitous explanatory concepts, from catastrophes to archetypes" were simply "weak and beggarly elements" (p. 152). In fact, there was no ultimate *certainty* in the natural world, except for the certainty that there is no *fixity* of biological species (pp. 87, 115, 214-16). All is vague and in a state of flux. Moore is convinced that "it was these beliefs about certainty and fixity which were primarily overthrown" by Darwin (p. 15). As for the fundamentalists who held to the chronologies and concepts of Genesis out of a sense of loyalty to the Christ who endorsed Genesis, "never again" after the Scopes Trial of 1925 would they "make front-page news across the nation" (p. 76). Thus, the only controversy that remains is "whether evolutionary theory demonstrates the need for a new religion to include the new idea of an evolving Universe or whether nothing more is needed than a transformed—or for the first time clearly understood—Christianity" (p. 16, quoting John Passmore).

Moore does admit, however, that Darwin's theory faced some very serious problems. "Above all, Darwin's theory of natural selection demanded a vast amount of time" (p. 133), but "time, as we shall see, was precisely what Darwin was denied" (p. 129). William Thomson (later Lord Kelvin), a brilliant English physicist and mathematician, showed that the earth could not be as old as evolution demanded (p. 134—though Moore does not seem to realize that even radioactivity has not invalidated Kelvin's arguments). Darwin commented to a friend: "I am greatly troubled at the short duration of the world according to Sir W. Thomson, for I require for my theoretical views a very long period *before* the Cambrian formation" (p. 135).

Another problem was "missing links" in the fossil record. Speaking for Darwin, George Frederick Wright insisted, naively, that the geological record was "even in its best preserved sections, . . . poor and beggarly beyond description" (p. 288). Again, our author gives no evidence of comprehending the futility of such evolutionary rationalizations in the light of the obvious non-existence of whole chains of links—a fact increasingly recognized by leading paleontologists today.

Darwin finally convinced himself that to believe in "miraculous creations" would make "my deity Natural Selection superfluous" (pp. 322, 344). But to say that "nature selects the fittest" is far from explaining where "the fittest" comes from. An obvious example of this is the fantastically complex human eye. Moore unforgivably dismisses the whole problem by saying that Darwin took this famous argument from design "as the *pièce de résistance* for an omnivorous natural selection" (p. 309; cf. p. 255).

A supreme tragedy—and absurdity—was Darwin's conviction that his own brain derived ultimately "from unreasoning lower animals by fixed biological laws," though this concept did give him, at least on one occasion, a "horrid doubt" concerning the validity of his own evolutionary reasonings

(p. 321). Moore, of course, offers no solution to Darwin's dilemma. Alfred Russel Wallace, who independently "discovered" the theory of organic evolution, profoundly disagreed with Darwin's view that man differs from the animals only in degree, not in kind (pp. 184-90). Darwin's answer, which Moore apparently shares, was that the evolution of humanity is analogous to the mystery of the development of the individual human soul (pp. 157, 280, 337, 347). Darwin, of course, could not have known even the outlines of the veritable mountain of scientific evidence against such a concept which is available today. But Professor Moore should know better.

The major portion of the volume provides a brilliant though biased analysis of the astounding variety of responses to Darwin on both sides of the Atlantic. Moore's heroes, of course, turn out to be the "Christian Darwinists" (i.e. theistic evolutionists), such as James Iverach and Aubrey Lackington Moore in Great Britain (pp. 252-69) and Asa Gray and George Frederick Wright in America (pp. 269-98). The villains, somewhat surprisingly, include not only the "Christian anti-Darwinians" such as F. O. Morris, E. F. Burr, L. T. Townsend, C. R. Bree, T. R. Birks, G. T. Curtis, and especially Charles Hodge and J. W. Dawson (pp. 196-205), but also a wide spectrum of "liberal Darwinists" and "Neo-Lamarckians" including St. George Mivart, Frederick Temple, John Bascom, Joseph LeConte, Thomas MacQueary, Lyman Abbott, Francis Howe Johnson, George Matheson, Henry Ward Beecher, Minot Judson Savage, John Fiske, Henry Drummond, and especially the popular Herbert Spencer (pp. 153-73, 217-51, 304-7).

Somewhat beyond the comprehension of the present reviewer was Moore's theological classification system. Christian anti-Darwinians such as Charles Hodge and John William Dawson are labeled as "semi-deists" (p. 339) because "they believed that God may 'intervene' in the course of nature" (p. 328). "'A theory of occasional intervention [namely, special creation] implies as its correlative a theory of ordinary absence'—a doctrine which 'fitted in well with the Deism of the last century. . . Cataclysmal geology and special creation are the scientific analogue of Deism'" (p. 264, quoting with approval A. L. Moore [1843-90]).

Our author creates even greater theological confusion when he asserts that Christian Anti-Darwinism, which involved an endorsement of the fixity of biological species (= "after its kind" in Genesis 1 and Leviticus 11), was "largely an amalgam of biblical literalism and Neo-Platonism" and "may thus in fact have had little to do with Christian doctrines" because it was conditioned by "philosophical assumptions with which the Christian faith has been allied" (p. 215; cf. p. 15). The biblical literalism of anti-Darwinism, contrary to Moore's opinion, came from a consistent application of historical/grammatical hermeneutics to the text of Genesis as confirmed by the Lord Jesus Christ, who referred to each of the first seven chapters of Genesis in a literal fashion, and by the NT writers, every one of whom referred to Genesis 1-11 in a literal fashion. Neo-Platonism has had no influence whatsoever in the consistently biblical interpretation of Genesis with regard to supernatural creation or other doctrines.

In complete contrast to the Christian Anti-Darwinians, "Christian Darwinism" is set forth as Christian, theistic, trinitarian, and Calvinistic! While acknowledging that Calvin himself was a strict creationist (p. 337), Moore nevertheless insists that it was "orthodox Calvinistic theology" which reconciled "providence and natural selection" and which demonstrated an ability "to reconcile 'chance' and providence, 'second causes' and a *prima causa omnium*," making provision for "even those events which seemed independent of or irreconcilable with divine purposes" (p. 334). Thus, in total contradiction to biblical revelation concerning creation, sin, and the curse, to say nothing of the scientific impossibility of natural selection as a mechanism for macroevolutionism, Moore makes divine sovereignty do service for Darwinism. Though Darwin finally disowned theism, our author assures us that his great discovery was the ultimate fruit of "the 'biblical' or classical Christian conception of God as Creator," which provided for "a free and perpetual Providence, the contingency of nature, and empirical methods in science," mediated through such thinkers as Bacon, Boyle, and Newton, and, at the dawn of the nineteenth century, William Paley and Thomas Robert Malthus (pp. 327-28, 308-26). Our author never explains, however, why "strict creationists" (such as Calvin himself!) could not hold such theistic views, nor why they necessarily led to a concept of evolutionism through natural selection.

Nowhere, perhaps, is Moore's theological incompetence more clearly displayed than in his effort to wed Christian trinitarianism to Darwinian evolutionism. Determined somehow to canonize Darwin as an unwitting apostle of the Church (who, "under the guise of a foe, did the work of a friend," quoting A. L. Moore, p. 268), our author uses Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance ("perhaps the most influential general theory of attitude change"—p. 14) to show how beautifully "Anglo-Catholic theology and its doctrine of divine immanence . . . made its contribution to the reduction of dissonance between Darwinism and Christian beliefs" (p. 337). Somehow equating "God's triune nature" with "divine immanence"—a colossal theological blunder—Moore suggests that the reconciliation of Christianity and Darwinism "comes in a fresh appreciation of God's triune nature and a 'fearless reassertion' of 'the old almost forgotten truth of the immanence of the Word, the belief in God as 'creation's secret force.'" No less a doctrine will accommodate both Darwinism and theistic belief" (p. 337, again quoting A. L. Moore). Those who are knowledgeable in the history of science and theology will surely be astounded to learn that Darwinism "has helped the Church to recover an understanding of God's triune nature that was obfuscated by the deism of the Enlightenment" (p. 268).

"The great and learned Charles Hodge (1797-1878)," for over fifty years professor of exegetical, didactic, and polemical theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, whose "three thousand former students carried forth his 'Princeton Theology,' the Calvinism of the Westminster divines . . . and the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of Holy Scripture" (p. 203), certainly did not view Darwinism in that light! Toward the end of his life, in a

carefully written analysis entitled, *What is Darwinism?*, Hodge concluded that it was another form of atheism, because it replaced God's revelation in both Scripture and nature with human speculations (p. 204).

Although Moore politely dismisses Charles Hodge as "the last great representative of Calvinistic orthodoxy before the spread of the modern historical consciousness" (p. 204), he was far more than that. He was, in this reviewer's opinion, the most discerning thinker among all the participants in "the post-Darwinian controversies" of the nineteenth century. He was anti-Darwinian simply because he saw, far more clearly than others in the vast spectrum of theological interaction with Darwin's theories, that the deification of natural selection involved a destruction of both true science and true biblical Christianity. He would, perhaps, be even more horrified to read Moore's conclusion that "Christian Darwinians were notably orthodox in their beliefs" and that "it was their orthodox theology, in fact, which determined [!] that some Christians could become Darwinians" (p. 341).

Princeton University (then known as the College of New Jersey), the reviewer's alma mater, mainly through the influence of Charles Hodge (who served as president of its board) remained "a thoroughly orthodox Presbyterian institution" in spite of the fact that James McCosh (1811-94) assumed the presidency in 1868 (pp. 245, 385 n. 81). McCosh was a strong Darwinian except on the question of human origins and "did not occupy his new post for a week before expressing to the upper classes of the College that he was fully in favour of evolution, provided that it was 'properly limited and explained'" (p. 246).

Ten years later, an even greater tragedy (in the reviewer's opinion) befell American Christianity: "After Hodge's death in 1878 his students and colleagues could safely entertain an evolutionary account of creation" (p. 241). One of his students, who had previously graduated from the College, was Joseph S. Van Dyke, author of a mild endorsement of Darwinism entitled, *Theism and Evolution* (1886). Sadly, Hodge's own son and successor as professor of theology at the Seminary, Archibald Alexander Hodge (1823-86), "must be credited for placing his *imprimatur*, the honoured name of Hodge" upon this volume by writing its introduction. "Surely this, coming in the last year of his life, was a turning point for the acceptance of evolution among American Protestants" (pp. 242, 307).

Although many lesser voices continued to be raised against Darwinism (pp. 11, 93), including those of the greatly despised "Fundamentalists" of the 1920s (pp. 68-76), it is a solemn fact that by the time of the Darwin centennial of 1959, significant opposition to evolutionism had all but ended in the western world. If it had been written in the early 1960s and if its bizarre form of theistic evolutionism had not been included, Moore's book might have convinced many that Darwinism was here to stay.

But all this has changed. During the 1970's a veritable army of highly trained scientists, analogous to those who first opposed Darwin's theory (pp. 80-88), arose in Great Britain as well as in America to take a strong stand against the theological distortions of Genesis and the philosophic distortions of the fossil record, genetic and thermodynamic laws and astro-nomic evidence which have been perpetrated for over a hundred years in the

name of evolutionism (see, e.g., Henry M. Morris, ed., *Scientific Creationism* [San Diego: Creation Life Publishers, 1974], and a partial listing of the writings of forty of the more prominent creation scientists of this generation in John C. Whitcomb and Donald B. DeYoung, *The Moon: Its Creation, Form, and Significance* [Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 1978], pp. 166-69).

In conclusion, James R. Moore has devoted years of skillful efforts to create an ephemeral mirage: a non-biblical form of theism wedded to an unscientific concept of life history on planet earth. He could therefore be the last great representative of theistic evolutionism before the rise of late twentieth century scientific creationism. The true Church of Jesus Christ still awaits a definitive work on the history of science and theology, utilizing valid historiographic methodology and style and saturated with the theological presuppositions of Christ and the apostles. May that day soon come!