

# Book Reviews

## **DARWIN ON TRIAL Phillip E Johnson**

Downers Grove: IVP 1991 and Crowborough: Monarch 1994 195pp  
£7.99 pb

ISBN 1-85424-265-2

Some years ago, in fact in 1971, there was published in the USA a book entitled *Darwin Retried: An Appeal to Reason*. It was by a Harvard-trained lawyer named Norman Macbeth, and was highly reviewed (so the rear cover states) by no less personages than Sir Karl Popper (the doyen of philosophers of science, who called it 'most meritorious and a really important contribution to the debate... a truly valuable book'), and Arthur Koestler (who wrote 'a brilliant treatise which highlights the shortcomings and inconsistencies of the neo-Darwinian theory' and with which he could go 'at least half way'). I mention this because neither of these outstanding men was a believer in the Christian sense. The present book is in the same tradition as Macbeth's, but I think it fair to say outshines it. Of course it ought to, as it can build on its foundation. The author is a professor of law at Berkeley, California, where for over twenty years he has specialized in the logic of arguments. Unlike matters such as Quantum Theory or Big Bang Cosmology, Darwinism is a subject whose main concepts are well within the grasp of an intelligent and patient layman prepared to study the leading facts. Someone better qualified than Professor Johnson to examine its present standing would be hard to find. Of course, he must also be open and fair-minded, not given to special pleading on his own behalf, and with that rare quality, temperance; for Darwinism is a matter in which passions (on all sides) are very easily and frequently aroused. On all these counts I feel I must take my hat off to him.

Professor Johnson is concerned at the outset to clarify his own position. This is very necessary. Many Church Society members would be somewhat nonplussed if such questions as 'Are you a fundamentalist?' or even 'Are you an evangelical?' were suddenly thrust upon them, for the popular media have given these words quite new public meanings, and before a reply is given the wise man wants to know in what sense they are being understood. The subject of evolution is similarly bedevilled with uncertainties and it is one of the virtues of this book that the author recognizes this. So he carefully defines his understanding of the matter he is about to tackle. He is eminently honest in the way he discloses himself to his intended readership (secular, I imagine). 'I am a philosophical theist and a Christian' he writes. 'I believe that a God exists Who could create out of nothing if He wanted to do so, but Who might have chosen to work

through a natural evolutionary process instead. I am not a defender of creation-science, and in fact I am not concerned in this book with addressing any conflicts between the Biblical accounts and the scientific evidence.' He goes on, 'The question I want to investigate is whether Darwinism is based upon a fair assessment of the scientific evidence, or whether it is another kind of fundamentalism'. (Your reviewer likes that last suggestion!) Accordingly the reader will find here no reference to what the Bible teaches, but only to the scientific evidence and to whether Darwinism does fair justice to it. His considered verdict is that it does not.

Professor Johnson argues his case very impressively, and it is impossible in a short review to do anything like justice to it. He allows that *micro*-evolution, (like the oft-quoted industrial melanism in certain moths) is an observable fact which no one would deny. But to argue from this (which does not even produce a new moth species) to *macro*-evolution on the grand scale required to produce new phyla (like the vertebrates or molluscs) is quite inadmissible. Yet when pressed to present experimental evidence for evolution (that is, evolution on the grand scale) its secular proponents still have to fall back on such relative trivialities. To your reviewer it seems like invoking the acknowledged power of the wind to pile up sand dunes to account for the rise of the Himalayas. This analogy may seem a little extravagant, but I guess it is not altogether misjudged.

The fossil evidence next comes up for review. This was a big problem already for Darwin, but in his time it was possible to fall back on the argument from the paucity of the known fossil record. If 'descent with modification', to use Darwin's phrase, is a gradual and continuous process (as the accepted theory holds), where is the 'gradual and continuous' record in the rocks? Extensive research since Darwin's time has failed to find anything suggesting it. The record is characterized rather by *stasis*, constancy of fossil forms with sudden large abrupt changes. The recent proposal of 'punctuated equilibria' is a testimony to this. The fossil record remains an embarrassing problem still, though one which does not thrust itself forcefully on the merely casual enquirer. For such the difficulties can be satisfactorily met by presenting such rare cases of intermediates as *Archaeopteryx*, the fossilized half-reptile, half-bird. But to the trained palaeontologist (like the proponents of the 'punctuated equilibria' mentioned, both confirmed Darwinists) the problem is still an acute one.

The molecular evidence for evolution, based largely on the so-called 'molecular clock', and the question of prebiological evolution or the origin of life itself, are given careful consideration. In his last four chapters the author turns his attention to rather more general aspects of the subject: *The Rules of Science, Darwinist Religion, Darwinist Education and Science and Pseudoscience*. I was very impressed with what he has written under

all these chapter headings, but I must content myself with commenting on two selected points only. In the first he draws attention to the celebrated model of scientific advance proposed by the philosopher Thomas Kuhn (*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* 1962). What periodically happens in science, Kuhn says, is that a notably successful piece of work (such as the Copernican theory, or Newton's theory of gravitation) establishes a *paradigm*, a new way of looking at the world which conditions from then on how investigators actually *see* nature, and the sort of questions they ask about her ways. Henceforth, questions which lie out of the field of the paradigm simply do not get a look-in; no one thinks to ask them. However, the reign of the paradigm does not last for ever; phenomena appear with which it is clearly inadequate to cope. The bed is too short for them to lie on! Scientists struggle at first to accommodate them, but eventually the accepted paradigm has to give way. For a time there is confusion; and then some genius arises whose insight suggests a new paradigm. Such was the case when Einstein's relativity supplanted the world-view of Isaac Newton. Absolute space and time and the idea of simultaneity became no longer viable concepts. After that *the world was seen differently*, and the whole horizon of science enlarged unpredictably. This happens repeatedly, as every physicist knows. Like physics (but even more so), Darwinism deals with ultimates; is it not therefore likely that confronted by phenomena it cannot cope with it is due for a paradigm shift? For how can natural selection (and the Selfish Gene!) ever account for the development of man's amazing powers of abstract thought (witness Einstein or Heisenberg) or even more for his capacity for God-consciousness? If this understanding of the situation is correct, those under the sway of the old paradigm (Darwinism) will of course put up a determined fight, but eventually they will have to admit defeat.

The second point relates to the work of Karl Popper. One of Popper's great contributions to thought was to point out that scientific truth is not established by a progressive process of induction, that is, by finding more and more cases which confirm or *verify* the view we prefer. Rather, it is established by the opposite procedure, by looking for cases which *falsify* it. This runs against the common grain of human nature. 'The wrong view of science betrays itself in the craving to be right' is an aphorism of Popper's. A false science, like Marxism or Psychoanalysis, can look at any fact and find in it a confirmation of its own thesis; it can explain anything without batting an eyelid. Popper gives numerous examples. But a theory that explains everything actually explains nothing, he points out. Now Darwinism looks suspiciously like a theory that explains everything; one gets that feeling strongly when reading such a writer as Richard Dawkins (*The Blind Watchmaker*). In fact, Darwinism seems to function in the minds of its supporters not so much as a theory but rather as a presupposition. This does not prove it wrong, but it is potentially a very

dangerous state of affairs. It recalls the presupposition that underlay the Ptolemaic astronomical system, that everything in the heavens must move in circles; how could heavenly bodies move in any less perfect fashion? It took the paradigm shift inaugurated by Copernicus and Kepler to unseat that firmly established idea, but it was not a quick victory. We need to remember too that the predictions of the Ptolemaic system were in fact more accurate for some time than those following the new paradigm. But the Ptolemaic theory was ultimately *falsified* (Popper's point) by the undoubted evidence (as it eventually came to be judged) that the planets move not in circles but in ellipses. That was a phenomenon the old paradigm could not accommodate. Darwinism may well face a similar nemesis.

There are 54 pages of Research Notes which contain a good deal of interesting information, followed by a General Index of 7 pages.

This is a splendid book. Get it and read it. It is not an exposition of the biblical revelation, but it may shake the complacency of agnostic friends open-minded enough to give the matter thoughtful consideration.

DOUGLAS SPANNER

**UNASHAMED ANGLICANISM** Stephen Sykes

London: Darton Longman & Todd 1995 233pp £9.95 pb

ISBN 0 232 52103 4

Twelve essays on various aspects of Anglicanism, most of which have been published before, have been brought together into this one volume. Written by the consultant theologian to the Turnbull Report and a working diocesan bishop (though most of the essays were written in the late eighties when Stephen Sykes was Regius Professor of Divinity before becoming Bishop of Ely) the essays give an interesting insight into how this Bishop thinks and perhaps what helped inform the thinking of the Turnbull Commission.

Most of these essays I should have been glad to come across in a periodical, but I found them more difficult to read as a book. It is a collection of chapters, ranging from historical studies to quadrilaterals and evangelism.

Several questions resurface throughout the book are there distinctively *Anglican* doctrines? should there be? is there a distinctively Anglican doctrine of the church, and if so, what is it? and why are Anglicans so diffident about presenting it?

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Two attractive essays on Cranmer begin the book one on baptism, and the other on 'the Open Heart' in the Holy Communion. The only previously unpublished essay in the book is an exposition of George Herbert's poem 'Love bade me welcome', an exposition that examines Herbert's understanding of the Bible, of liturgy and of doctrine. George Herbert also appears as an Anglican *par excellence* in three other of the essays. A quizzical look at Richard Hooker examines whether he might not have countenanced the ordination of women in our day.

Part II of the book is entitled *The Anglican Doctrine of the Church*. Here the chapters look at some possible foundations of an Anglican ecclesiology, authority in the Anglican Communion (described in 1948 as 'dispersed authority', a description, says Sykes, that has never been bettered), authority in the Church of England, and *episcopate* and power in the church. There is much here that evangelicals would want to applaud: eg the recognition of non-episcopal trinitarian churches being part of the one holy catholic church, the necessity of laity playing a full part in the governing of their church, the church being required to reform itself (and therefore being able to criticise itself), and a call for 'much more careful scrutiny' of the use of the concept of collegiality among bishops.

A short chapter entitled 'An Anglican Doctrine of Evangelism' concludes that evangelism is not inappropriate for a people of liturgical praise.

A full index completes the 233 pages of fairly close print: this would be a useful book for someone who wanted a companion to Bishop Sykes' *Integrity of Anglicanism* (1977) and his *A Study of Anglicanism* (co-edited with John Booty 1989).

ROGER COMBES

### **CRUSADES: A History Robert Payne**

London: Robert Hale 1994 421pp £12.99 pb ISBN 0-7090-5467-X  
(Originally published 1986 in UK as *The Dream and the Tomb*)

This history of the Crusades is well researched and well written. Drawing extensively on original as well as secondary sources, it constitutes gripping reading - until the sensitive reader becomes nauseated by the cruelty, duplicity, treachery and lust blood lust even more than sexual lust<sup>3</sup> of this extraordinary story. Original sources are quoted generously, giving authenticity and 'flavour' to the narrative. The story is told in full, from start to finish, with plenty of local colour, geographical as well as historical.

The Crusades of which this is a detailed study are not, of course, evangelistic crusades like those associated with names like Billy Graham, though, incredibly, evangelism was spoken of by those who promoted them. Rather, they were the eight attempts, occurring during the period 1095 to 1303, made by 'Christian' Europe to gain possession of the Holy Places in Jerusalem from the Arabs who had gained possession of them, making them safe for Christian pilgrims, and, at the same time (!) converting the Muslim Arabs to Christianity. Europe had not long been brought to acknowledge the Christian faith (sometimes by brute force) and the Crusades were the product of mixed motives. These ranged from greed and aggression (disguised as zeal for Christianity) through the desire of Roman bishops for status and influence (by sponsoring and sustaining Crusades) to naive, pious devotion to the cause of Christ.

To this day nothing has done more to poison relationships between Christianity and Islam than the Crusades. There was plenty of carnage, pillage and lust on both sides; there were 'goodies' as well as 'baddies' on both; but the behaviour of representatives of mediaeval Christian Europe gave the lie, by their general behaviour, to any credible claim to be followers of the Prince of Peace and the lover of humankind.

This story, so powerfully told here, raises huge questions. For your unrepentant nonconformist reviewer it raises the issue of 'established' forms of Christianity. On a wider front, it raises the whole problem of the extent to which Christians should become involved in their cultural milieu. Involved they certainly are, and involved they must be if they are to serve as 'salt and light'. But how far can they go? Where should they draw the line? At what point are they called to oppose the *mores* of the society in which they live?

The book under review is not only a comprehensive and reliable guide to a historical phenomenon, written by a prolific and gifted writer and, incidentally published posthumously) but it provides stimulus to thought about issues of immense contemporary interest and importance.

HAROLD ROWDON

**THE SEVENTH-DAY MEN: Sabbatarians and Sabbatarianism in England and Wales, 1600-1800** Bryan W Ball  
Oxford: Clarendon Press 1994 402pp £40 hb ISBN 0-19-826752-5

This is a work of very detailed research, designed to show that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was a Sabbatarian movement in England and Wales which was widespread and included able men among

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its leaders.

Dr Ball clearly has an axe to grind, for he is President of the South Pacific division of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, and was once head of religious studies at Newbold College. Nevertheless, his scholarship appears to be impeccable, and he has produced a most impressive study of the available evidence. This clearly demonstrates that there were congregations of evangelical believers who felt it incumbent upon them to observe Saturday as the Sabbath, and that their leaders included some men of ability and integrity. The writer explains helpfully why this movement petered out during the eighteenth century, but does not suggest reasons why this point of view did not surface again in the revival of evangelical faith that followed, but, instead, appeared in another guise (the Seventh Day Adventist movement).

Of particular interest is the fact that numerous Sabbatarian congregations existed in areas, such as the Thames Valley and the Welsh orders where the Lollards had flourished. Wisely, the suggestion that Lollard influence 'may well have contributed to the later appearance of seventh day views' is not pressed too hard. The remoteness of such areas from episcopal control may go a long way towards explaining the existence there of religious heterodoxy.

For mainstream evangelicals, this painstaking study raises a sobering question? Are we justified in regarding the 'Sabbatarian' question as closed? The New Testament evidence is meagre and not altogether unequivocal. At a time when Sunday observance is a live issue, is there not a need for us to look again at a complex and perplexing issue?

HAROLD ROWDON

**NO PLACE FOR TRUTH; or, WHATEVER HAPPENED TO  
EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY? David F Wells**

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Leicester: IVP 1993 324p £10.99pb  
ISBN 085111 637

Professor Wells has written a timely book for the American scene and one which has much to say to us in the UK. His theme is the progress of modernity with its beginnings in the Enlightenment and its outward expression in industrialism and the culture of big cities. He is concerned with its effect upon the Church and, in particular, its effect upon evangelicalism. There is a comparison between the confessional theology of the past, which was the study of what the Church believes, and the present 'doing' of theology as an academic exercise or the publicising of a

set of private and fallible opinions. We remember how, some years ago, Dr E L Mascall regretted the substitution of Religious Studies for theology in the universities. One characteristic of the modern outlook is the virtual abandonment of the concept of truth, and here we recall the warnings of Francis Schaeffer, especially in *The God who is There*.

Professor Wells reminds us that the apostles delivered the facts about Jesus Christ and formalized them in the Gospel. The earliest preaching took place in an essentially pluralistic world. (Professor Latourette once said there were at least two hundred and fifty religions in the Eastern Mediterranean region alone.) The apostles were not afraid to preach Christ as the one way of salvation in a world of religious diversity. Today we see the collapse of theology in a world which is hostile to absolute principles and transcendent meaning. There is an emphasis on self-fulfilment and the authority of experience. Professor Wells shows how this was epitomised in, for instance, Harnack's 'What is Christianity?', though he fails to do justice to the massive counter-attack by Karl Barth in the Church Dogmatics. He is hard on the 'televangelists', who presumably include Billy Graham, though there can be no doubt that their evangelistic methods have been very fruitful among people who are not easily reached by the Church.

We should be grateful for the clear summary of the characteristics of the pagan mind and the modern mind, and the contrast of both with the biblical mind. The Bible story of redemption is set firmly in history and the result is a grasp of truth as manifested in divine revelation. But, as Wells says, 'the bottom line for the modern world is that there is no truth'. So when the Church allows itself to borrow the thought-forms of the world the ministry becomes simply a profession concerned with self-fulfilment. One interesting fact revealed in this book is that 1976 was known in America as 'The Year of the Evangelical' and that around that time 34% of adults questioned claimed to have been born again. At this point we may ask what is an evangelical? In general terms an evangelical is a Christian concerned primarily with the preaching of the Gospel. By the Gospel is meant God's permanent message for all persons without exception and this message, given once for all in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the climax of God's revelation in the Bible. An evangelical is conscious of being bound by the authority of the Word of God.

The book reminds us that 'a culture for whom God is no longer present believes everything', so that 'when we believe in nothing we open the doors to believing anything'. The result is a proliferation of outlandish cults. The working-out of this secularised attitude leads to a nihilism: 'Our drug-infested, crime-ridden inner cities have become miniature workshops in which we can see how the instability of our social order can easily lead

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to complete disorder.'

The first part of this book contains some interesting information about the development of American religion from its Puritan roots, with some reflections on the American character. There is, however, a vast field for further study and research and Professor Wells is to be congratulated on his pioneer work. There are two possible lines of investigation which might be followed up, namely, the nature of modern religiosity as a substitute for Christianity and the increasing influence of evangelicals both in the Church and the world. I would suggest two recent books as suitable follow-up reading: *Religion in Britain since 1945* by Grace Davie (Blackwell 1994) and *Evangelical Anglicans*, edited by R T France and A E McGrath (SPCK 1993).

EDGAR DOWSE

**SIMPLY PREACHING** Lewis G Higdon

Norwich: Canterbury Press 1995

160pp £7.95pb

ISBN 0 185311 1066

Although preaching is at a low ebb at present, there seem to be a number of books coming on the market both of sermons and how to preach them.

It is to be hoped that this influence will encourage a higher standard of preaching and restore a greater appreciation of this biblical form of gospel proclamation.

Here is one with a foreword by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Its subheading of 'a programme for clergy and readers' is substantiated by the first section which suggests stages in preparation in terms of the days of the week; while time is limited, work should be spread and the sermon not merely concocted late on Saturday night. The less time there is the more important to apportion it wisely. The author deals with types of sermon, special occasions and different ways of preparation. The latter tend to be a personal matter; some may value the methods suggested, while others may find them less helpful.