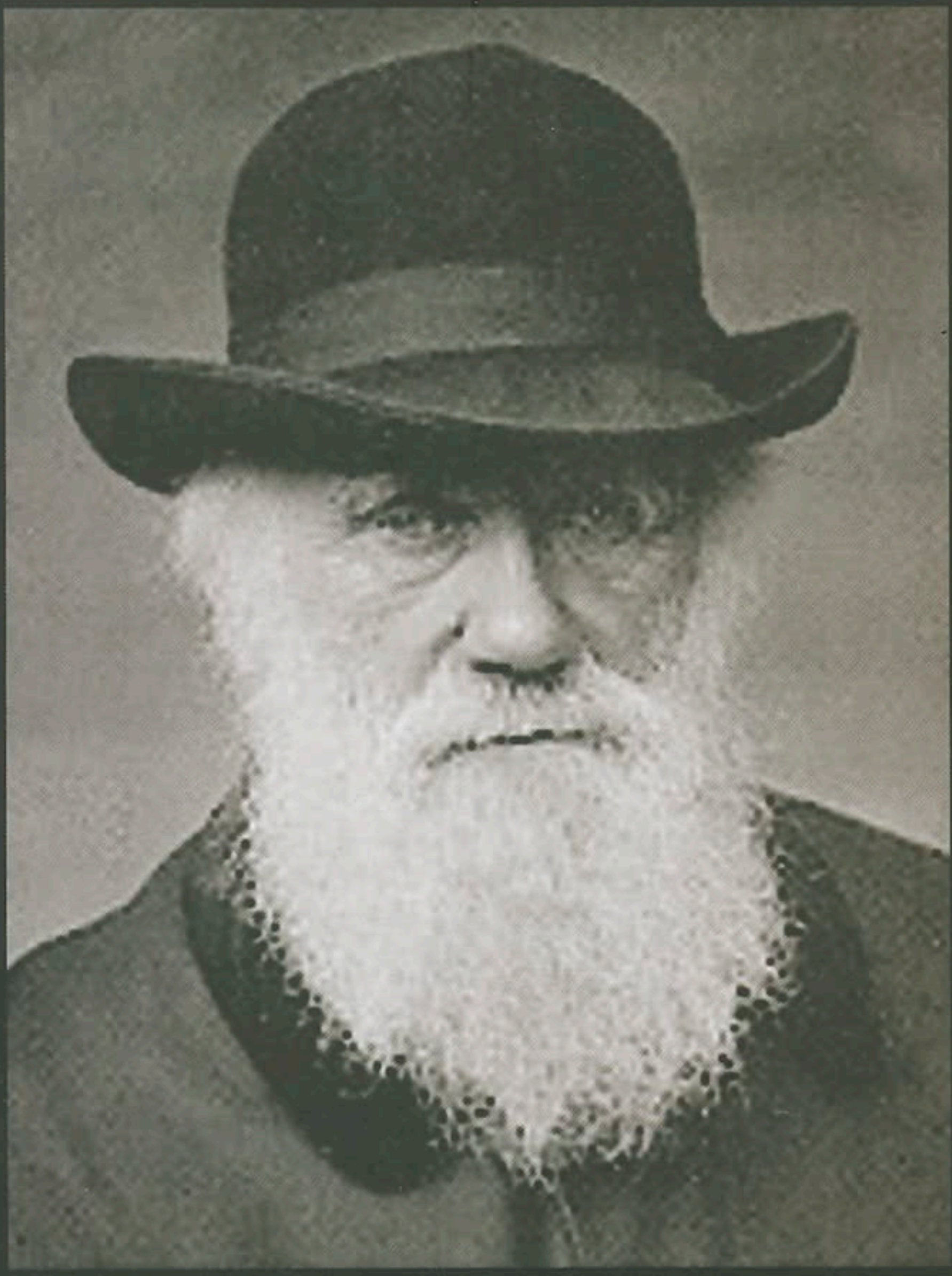
Darwin and Evolution Interfaith Perspectives



edited by Jacques Arnould OP

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Introduction

The Kingdom and Darkness

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Choosing between God and Darwin? The double anniversary in 2009 which celebrates the birth of Charles Darwin in February 1809 and the publication of his magnum opus *The Origin of Species* in November 1859, is the occasion for many of our contemporary believers to ask the question which has been haunting religious circles for a hundred and fifty years: what should be done with Charles Darwin's work and ideas? Are they acceptable and are they compatible with faith? Should they be condemned and opposed? A reading of the numerous publications which have appeared for this anniversary suggests that these questions exist beyond denominational circles, and go so far as to take on different and even opposite forms. Nowadays why do God and his followers appear to be the principal obstacles to the study of Darwin's ideas, to the development of his theories and to the dissemination of the most modern ideas found in these theories? Which strategy should be adopted towards the most virulent adversaries, those who are nowadays commonly referred to as creationists? Expressions are many depending on the mood, the opinion or creed of their authors: God against Darwin, Darwin against God, God *versus* Darwin (a reference to the American and Australian law suits and later to the legal settlement of the question), God or Darwin and finally, but more rarely, God and Darwin . . .

Choosing between God and Darwin. Reading and listening to those who express their opinions and their convictions as to how to interpret the God/Darwin question, it seems that a good many of

them take these two realities to be contradictory, incompatible and irreconcilable and that it is therefore necessary to choose one and to reject, to forget and even to fight against the other. The ignorance which reigns within religious, as within scientific circles, seems to be the consequence of such duality and conflict is its most serious result. The vitality and diversity of the creationists on the one hand and the arrival on the scene of the atheists, encouraged by a semi-scientific background on the other, are not without interest or legitimacy. But in themselves, these trends do not necessarily promote the dialogue which would guarantee a real progress worthy of human intelligence.

Choosing between God and Darwin? Asking this question seems to be as inevitable as it is essential. There is no doubt that it is not easy for scientists to ask this question given that God is not part of their data nor of their hypotheses or theories. When Napoleon Bonaparte asked Laplace where he placed God in his *Système du monde—System of the universe,* 'Sire,' he replied, 'I have no need of this hypothesis'. That was the answer of the scientist that he was and not that of the believer he might otherwise have been. We need to respect even now those who follow the example of Charles Darwin himself, those who, as scientists, follow the prudent path of not confusing competencies. The position of questioning may be more easily adopted by those who are part of the religious sphere, be they lay believers or theologians. Being more easily adopted does not mean that it requires no effort, but merely that it is not excluded for want of logic. The lack of interest in science as expressed by Karl Barth supposes that he actually and reasonably asked himself the question and did not merely dismiss it outright from his thoughts.

Giving back to God and to Darwin what belongs to each one. This question was taken seriously by theologians even in Darwin's time. We tend to forget that in 1860 seven liberal Anglican theologians published a work called *Essays and Reviews* which provoked a greater enthusiasm than *The Origin of Species* and unleashed on themselves the anger of Anglican authorities. Those who were immediately called 'The Seven Against Christ' sided with Darwin. According to them *The Origin of Species* constituted a real revolution in favour of the principle of the auto- evolutive powers of nature. They explained why it was time to put a critical reading of the Bible at the disposal of believers in order to ensure the supremacy of rational discourse, of *logos,* of reason over myth, so as no longer to turn the sacred text into 'a bogy-

man for Christian fundamentalists'. As a matter of interest, let us point out that *Essays and Reviews* sold 22,000 copies in two years; that is more than *The Origin of Species* did in twenty years. At that time the theological battle was no less savage than was that of evolution and several protagonists took part in it with a foot in each camp. The position of the French Dominican Dalmace Leroy seems to have been more conciliatory, for in the introduction to his book *L'évolution des espèces organique—The evolution of organic species,* he writes:

> I believe that the evolutionist idea will undergo the same fate as Galileo's. Having initially sown panic within the orthodox milieu, truth will emanate cleared of all exaggeration once emotions have calmed down. Then, one might be grateful to one religious man for not fearing to foresee his future positively. Let us render unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar in order to invite Caesar to render unto God what belongs to God.[1]

This prudent questioning position was still too bold for the Roman authorities, who forced him to retract, just as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was forced into exile in the mid-nineteen twenties.

What belongs to God? The task of the theologians is far from being easy nor is the method they use easy to explain. To what facts and data, to what experience, tools and method, to what discourse and language can they have recourse in order to 'say God'? How can they conciliate the work of reason and the affirmation of faith without mixing them and avoid any form of confusion, of dogmatism and of fundamentalism? There can be no question of instilling a little piety in science in order to salvage reason or to theologise, nor can there be a question of transforming the immense territories still unexplored by scientists into various religious reserves and anti-scientific shelters for God. How can anyone speak about a God when this God cannot be proven and yet is severely tested? The theologians' task is as difficult as it is fascinating. Some of them undertake that task using, as basis, the scientific background they have acquired or in collaboration with researchers, while others seek a clearer understanding of the elements of their religious tradition, elements which are stumbling blocks, be they imaginary, ephemeral or real. All of them are convinced that their work, as difficult and imperfect as it might be, can be accomplished for the greater glory of God . . . and of humanity.

1. Dalmace Leroy, *L'évolution des espèces organique* (Paris: Perrin et Cie, 1887), 10–11.

Choosing between God and Darwin? Finally, what if one did not have to seek to choose because that would mean having to choose between God and Man, while we must believe in one as we do in the other? The faith, the trust we put in one as in the other, although it is expressed in many varied ways and common channels, that faith, that trust cannot become indistinct and, consequently, cannot be in opposition with itself. Human existence has too many challenges, too many obstacles to overcome and cannot afford to waste its energy on conflicts of nebulous benefit. At the end of his publication *Le hasard et la nécessité—Fate and necessity,* Jacques Monod resumes thus: 'The old alliance is broken; at last Man knows that he is alone in the indifferent immensity of the universe whence he emerged by chance. His duty is written nowhere anymore than is his destiny. It is up to him to choose between the Kingdom and darkness.'[2]

Choosing between the Kingdom and darkness. Let us forget the debate and polemic raised by Monod's book, his ideas and his excessive criticism of religions in the name of acquired and accumulated modern scientific knowledge. Rather, let us join Monod and recall in the words of René Dubos, another French biologist, that 'To be human is to choose'.[3] There is no doubt that biology cautions us in the face of the danger of reducing the existence of life in general and that of humanity in particular to a succession of junctions to grapple with, of crossroads to negotiate and to see in it merely a gigantic multiple-choice questionnaire in which only one box can and must be ticked. On closer inspection, life and death, fate and necessity, immutability and evolution appear to be less in opposition with each other as in collusion. The same may be said of God and Darwin and of religion and science. However, Monod places choice elsewhere, that is at the level of human thought and action and therefore at the level of ethics. If the human odyssey appears most often as a long and perilous trek which attempts to take apparently contradictory elements in consideration, it could not have overcome so many perils, it could not have survived so many dramas and have emerged as it has, had it not been thrust, borne and inspired by the need, by the dream and the nostalgia for a Realm of Realms. It behoves our dignity and our duty, indeed our survival as human beings depends on it, to be ready to speak, to listen,

2. Jacques Monod, *Le hasard et la nécessité. Essai sur la philosophie naturelle de la biologie moderne* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), 194–95.
3. See René Dubos, *Choisir d'être humain* (Paris: Denoel, 1974).

to share and to debate what these Kingdoms and darknesses mean for us, for our diverse communities of ideas and convictions.

Choosing between God and Darwin? The debate in the which theologians and scientists, authors of the following pages, have accepted to take part, is merely one way of answering this question.

The authors of the following articles all come from monotheistic traditions: Christian, Islamic and Jewish. The articles are written by biblical scholars, ethicists, historians, philosophers, scientists and theologians. They represent a variety of views within their respective traditions and within their academic disciplines. None are held as the definitive statements of either their faith tradition nor their profession.

Lacking in this volume are any papers from the other world religions and in particular from the Buddhist or Hindu traditions. Attempts were made to seek contributions from scholars of both but proved too difficult. In part this was due to the fact that for both traditions evolution and Darwinism are neither controversial nor a cause of religious based debate as within the monotheistic traditions; there is no question of choosing between a creator and evolutionary theory.

In Buddhist thought there is nothing which contradicts or calls into question evolution. In Buddhism it is not necessary to know the origins of life and there are no controversies over the relationship between 'creationism' and evolutionary theory as there is no belief in a creator; everything is ultimately created by mind. Buddhists are generally accepting of scientific theories about the formation of the universe and Darwin therefore poses no threat.

Hinduism believes in a form of evolutionary theory but one which is different to the thought of many contemporary scientists. While scientists would refer to physical evolution, starting with simple life forms leading to more complex forms of life, Hindus refer to mental and spiritual evolution of life, starting from a state of ignorance to a state of illumination. Evolution is a mechanism of nature and a product of self effort which is accomplished through inner transformation and purification of the mind and body.

The anniversaries held in honour of Charles Darwin and his work have created the occasion and have been the cause of this debate. Obviously this is not the only gift the English naturalist offered to science and religion. It is a gift it would be as well not to forget at a time when humanity fears for its future and that, not without reason. Thank you, Mr Darwin!

Translated by Etiennette Fennell