laws of genetics by Mendel in the late 1850's and by De Vries and others about 1900 posed problems for orthodox Darwinism and led to the idea of the sudden origin of varieties and species by large mutations (sudden random changes) of the genetic material.

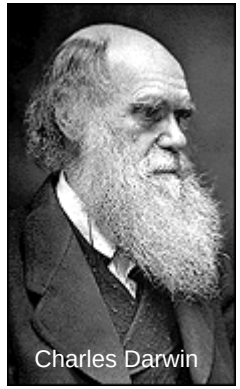
While almost universally accepted in some form or another, evolution has been seriously challenged on scientific grounds. It is noted that Darwin had no knowledge of the laws of thermodynamics (Clausius, Clapeyron and Kelvin were working on them at that time) and could be excused for assuming that order did arise spontaneously from chaos. Today, in the light of scientific discovery, we can no longer do this. Scientific observation over the past hundred years has confirmed without exception the principle that in a closed system, without outside interference (either accidental or intelligent), complicated molecules tend to break down to simpler, more stable, less energetic ones. Things just don't spontaneously become more highly organised. Yet it is not suggested that changes cannot and do not take place.

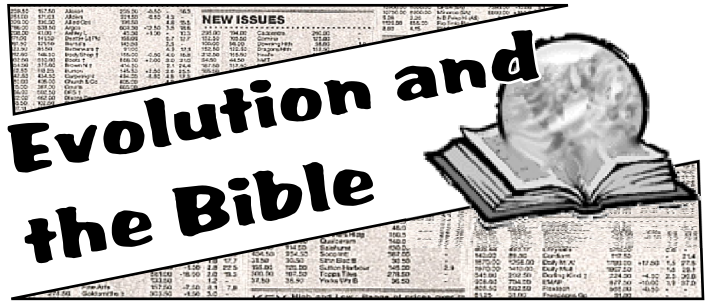
I have noted that evolution is a scientific theory. I am not a scientist myself. I have not had to study all the evidence the biologist has before him. I am not in a position to say the theory is right or wrong. But I do note that it is still only a theory.

As I think about some of the questions being raised by scientists, it seems to be a simple matter to talk about the changes we can observe and study, but science has a real problem pushing this idea back to the ultimate origins.

That's the problem for the scientist. But for me as a Christian, however he did it I am quite sure that God made this world. He is a Person, and means me, not just to guess about him, but to know him and live in relationship with him.

Peter J. Blackburn 1975
for students at the
Stanthorpe State High School


Charles Darwin



A prominent American scientist commented in a television symposium a few years ago, "The conflict is not between the Bible and science. The conflict is between what people say the Bible says and what people say science says." For himself he could say with complete honesty and integrity earlier in the same programme, "Christianity seems to me to be the most coherent understanding of the universe, in the light of all the facts I can see"'.

This man, together with many other of today's scientists, sees no conflict between his scientific studies and his Christian faith. In this he is like the originators of modern science who were nearly all men of profound Christian conviction whose faith in the rational Creator led them to look for law and order in the creation – men like Boyle, Faraday, Joule and Dalton, to name just a few.

Yet there are some who seem to think that you can't accept both science and faith. One or the other of them has to be rejected, so these people imply.

I am not suggesting here that there have never been conflicts, but that they have proved to be the sort of conflict mentioned above. On the one hand, the common-place ideas of people have been vested with a religious authority that they just don't have. For example, people thought the sun revolved around the earth – from our viewpoint, pictorially speaking, that's just what it does! And our highly scientific age still accepts the terms "sunrise" and "sunset" – these are accurate enough, though not strictly "scientific". But the view of the earth at the centre of the universe became a scientific religious dogma – based, please note, not on the Bible, but on the views of the second-century Alexandrian

astronomer, Ptolemy. Copernicus and Galileo, the men who clashed with their contemporaries on this issue, were themselves men of deep Christian conviction.

On the other hand, there can be conflict when scientific theory is taken beyond what is repeatable and demonstrable and speculations come to be preached with almost religious fervour!

Both of these elements come into the conflict that flares up from time to time concerning the theory of evolution and the Bible. Much of this conflict would be defused if people would see what the Bible does (and what it does not) say about origins – an increasing number of people are coming to see that what it does say on this subject is both important and relevant. It would also become more of a non-issue if the scientific observations and deductions could also be kept in their own true perspective – the process of thinking in science is still going on, the theory as such has been modified greatly since Darwin first proposed it in 1859, and a small, though increasing, number of scientists are questioning its validity altogether on scientific grounds.

The scientist has to be free to see what the evidence is, and where it leads him. And scientific prejudice can be just as much a barrier here as religious prejudice is supposed to have been in the past!

What the Bible Says

The Bible isn't a scientific book. And just as well – or people wouldn't have understood it until recent times! And if it had been written in modern scientific jargon, it would soon go out of date! The Bible is a book for all ages and for all stages of human progress.

The early chapters of Genesis teach that God is the Creator of everything. There is no mention of how he did this – he spoke and it came to be. While the record speaks of seven days, this does not necessarily mean twenty-four hour periods – note Gen. 2.4! If "with the Lord one day is as a thousand years" (2 Peter 3.8), we should hardly put limitations on the time involved. Others may look at the evidence and guess at the processes – but, whatever else is said, God is the Creator.

This doesn't mean he started things and left them running, either. He is in the whole process (note Col. 1.17). We have already noted that it was this conviction that started some Christian men on the whole scientific adventure in the first place.

It is important for us to know this because we are meant to worship the Creator, not created things – Paul talks about this in Romans 1.25. When we don't know about this, our sense of moral responsibility gets twisted.

What about Evolution?

The theory of evolution is an attempt to explain the origin and diversity of living things in terms of their common descent from one very simple type, or from very few such types. It is held that the more complex forms of life are derived from the more simple by a natural process of descent with modification; and it is generally held that the first very simple living things arose naturally by the modification of non-living matter.

The idea of the change of one kind of living thing into another is a very old one. It is found in various forms among primitive peoples, in several ancient religions, especially Hinduism, and among a number of early Greek philosophers.

Modern evolutionary theory owes its origin especially to Charles Darwin (1800-1882), and its widespread acceptance dates from his writings. The key to his theory is the means by which evolution is said to happen – natural selection in which chance changes are constantly taking place and only those organisms survive which are best fitted in the struggle for life.

Darwin's work caused a great stir in both Church and scientific circles, but in the course of the next few decades the majority of biologists came to accept the theory of evolution.

Since Darwin's time variations on his theory appeared. Against Darwin it was argued that his theory of natural selection was purely negative – it accounted for the elimination of the less fit, but failed to account for the appearance of better-adapted forms. The discovery of the