

Answering Darwin's Challenge: Evolution and Evangelicalism in the Theology of Richard Roberts

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In his 1998 historical novel, *Mr. Darwin's Shooter*, Roger McDonald tells the fictionalized life story of the historical Syms Covington, the young English sailor who, while on the *Beagle* with Charles Darwin from 1831 to 1836, shot, snared and by other means collected many of the specimens which Darwin analysed and which featured in the development of his theory of evolution by natural selection. As portrayed by McDonald in the characters and relationships of Darwin, Covington and John Phipps, the evangelist-sailor who converted the young Covington and recruited him for service on the *Beagle*, part of the novel's story is the tension between traditional Christian belief and the implications of Darwin's theory. In his review of McDonald's book, Paul Quarrington noted this theme and commented: "It is my contention that what began aboard the *Beagle* has never really been resolved, that Darwin's challenge to religion has not been satisfactorily answered."¹ Quarrington may be right, particularly if one takes only popular, public accounts of the ongoing North American controversies about creationism as the main and perhaps only Christian answer to Darwin's challenge. Creationism, however, is but a small part of the broader account of religious attempts to answer Darwin's challenge, but the rest of the account is rarely told and little known, even among Christians who do not espouse creationism. Christianity may not yet be in a position to resolve what began aboard the *Beagle* but the task of doing so certainly requires a more complete public account than is presently available of its efforts to date.² Further, a more complete account may also

Historical Papers 2000: Canadian Society of Church History

suggest some of the reasons why public discourse continues to assume the opposition of evolution and religion and perhaps some fruitful directions for answering Darwin's challenge.

Since the publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species* in 1859, many Christians have endeavoured to reconcile Christianity and evolution, not only in terms of relating biblical truth and the origin and development of life on earth, but also in terms of the theological implications of evolution by natural selection for understandings of divine transcendence and immanence and divine sovereignty and providence. One lesser known exponent of such an approach was Richard Roberts (1874-1945), the Welsh-born evangelical pastor and theologian who, after immigrating to Canada in 1922, became moderator of the United Church of Canada from 1934 to 1936.³ Roberts was born in 1874 in the slate quarrying town of Blaenau Ffestiniog, northern Wales. His mother was the daughter of a shipping clerk and his father a quarry worker who became a minister in the Calvinistic Methodist Church. After concluding his own theological studies at Bala, Wales in 1896, Richard Roberts worked with the Calvinist Methodist Church's Forward Movement in towns in the coal fields and seaports in southern Wales. In 1900 he accepted a call to the Willesden Green Welsh Church in London; the following year he married Anne Catherine Thomas, another native of Wales whom he had met in London. In 1903 he transferred to the Presbyterian Church of England and became minister at St. Paul's Church, Westbourne Grove, London, where he made the acquaintance of Roman Catholic philosopher of religion Baron Friedrich von Hügel. In 1910 Roberts was called to the ministry of Crouch Hill Presbyterian Church, where one of the members of the congregation was the young John Macmurray, with whom Roberts was to become closely acquainted and whose later religious and philosophical writing would influence Roberts' own theology.

Just a few months after the outbreak of the "Great War" in August 1914, Roberts and others seeking a means to express Christian opposition to the war founded the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR). His pacifism and other congregational tensions compelled him to resign his position at Crouch Hill in 1915, whereupon he became Secretary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. This work led him in 1917 to ministry at the Church of the Pilgrims in Brooklyn, New York, where he worked part time while advancing the work of the FOR in the United States. He lectured at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley in the spring of 1920, and was

considered as a candidate for the school's presidency; his pacifism and socialism likely played a role in his not being offered the position. He hoped to return to England, but no employment options developed there. In 1921 he accepted a call to the American Presbyterian Church in Montreal, began work there in early 1922, and helped it to join the United Church of Canada at its founding in 1925. Two years after union he moved to Sherbourne United Church in Toronto, where he remained until 1938. During this time, from 1934 to 1936, he also served as the sixth moderator of the United Church. His years at Sherbourne roughly corresponded to the Great Depression and his work in this time was marked by attention to evangelism, social service, and economic justice. Although not a member of the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order, he was sympathetic to its work and wrote the preface to its influential 1936 book, *Towards the Christian Revolution*. In the seven years before his death in 1945, he lectured at theological colleges, preached in churches, and led retreats for students.⁴

Roberts had studied science in university before turning to the study of theology and the practice of ministry, and he retained a keen interest in and deep affection for the natural world all of his life. By the late 1920s, he began to articulate his sense of the inadequacy in coming to terms with evolution of both fundamentalist and liberal evangelical theologies. According to Roberts, fundamentalist evangelicals failed to address the proper implications of evolution for divine immanence while liberal evangelicals neglected due consideration of divine transcendence. He therefore attempted to clarify the issues at stake in a way that, while admittedly not yet offering a satisfactory synthesis, might at least on the basis of a "provisional dualism" point the way toward a more adequate understanding of divine immanence and transcendence and their relation to evolution.

Evolution and Evangelicalism

Four elements of the religious and scientific context in which Richard Roberts worked help to illuminate his reflections on evolution and Christianity: first, Darwin's relationship to the idea of evolution; second, the scientific response to Darwin's contribution to evolutionary thought; third, the religious response to evolutionary thought in general and to Darwin's account in particular; and fourth, the intellectual and religious

state of Canadian evangelical theology in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Despite common usage, Darwin did not discover evolution and is not the sole source of the challenge to religion that evolution presents. At the broadest level, evolution was one part of a complex of ideas that were reasonably common in European thought in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a complex that encompassed natural sciences and political thought and included concepts that correspond to the English words transmutation, transformation, development, and revolution. By the time that Darwin boarded the *Beagle*, such ideas were prevalent in both popular and scholarly writing. The work of the physician Erasmus Darwin (grandfather of Charles), the French naturalist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, the Scottish geologist Charles Lyell, and the English philosopher Herbert Spencer all contributed to the broad cultural discourse about evolution and development of the earth and life on it. By 1858, the naturalist Alfred Russell Wallace had independently developed a theory of the development of species that was virtually identical to the one that Darwin was by that time finally beginning to write for publication. Indeed, it was a letter from Wallace and the urging of two of Darwin's friends that motivated him to complete the "summary" of his theory that was published in 1859 as *On the Origin of Species by means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*.⁵ When considering how Christians have developed their theological responses to evolution, then, one must bear in mind, as Richard Roberts did, that "evolution" is a larger and more complex concept than that entailed in Darwin's particular understanding of evolution by natural selection. Darwin's work has certainly sharpened the challenge from evolution, but the challenge comes not only from Darwin.

If Darwin did not discover evolution, neither did contemporary European and North American scientists immediately and universally take his understanding of it to be definitive. Certainly, some were almost immediately convinced, including physician and naturalist Joseph Hooker, botanist Asa Gray, geologist Charles Lyell, and of course Thomas Henry Huxley, a comparative anatomist who as the chief public advocate of evolution by natural selection earned the title "Darwin's bulldog." Nevertheless, some scientific contemporaries criticized Darwin's method or reasoning, or continued to prefer Lamarck's account of evolution. Some also argued that the gaps in Darwin's theory of natural selection hindered

its persuasiveness. Foremost among the gaps, one which Darwin himself acknowledged, was the lack of a biological mechanism by which randomly generated and naturally selected traits would be transmitted from one generation to the next. Similarly, for evolution by natural selection to have had the time to work along the lines Darwin suggested, the earth had to be considerably older than had yet been demonstrated. By the late-nineteenth century many scientists were seriously entertaining the idea that the earth was much older than the five to six thousand years suggested by a literal reading of biblical chronology, but few thought it was as old as the billions of years required by Darwin's theory. Darwin died in 1882, well before supporting evidence for either matter was confirmed. Although published in 1866, Gregor Mendel's work on the transmission of biological traits was largely unnoticed until 1900. It was not until about 1930 that scientists of various disciplines began, based on the discovery of radioactivity and its application in radiometric dating of geological strata, to conclude that the earth was indeed old enough for evolution by natural selection to have had its necessary temporal scope. Until the 1920s, however, it was far from clear that Darwin's view of evolution would prevail.⁶ When Richard Roberts wrote and lectured on the implications of evolution for Christian theology in the late 1920s, then, the scientific consensus on evolution by natural selection, what came to be known as "the modern synthesis," was still being achieved, and the full terms of Darwin's challenge to Christianity were only then becoming firmly established. It is perhaps not surprising that Christianity should not yet have satisfactorily resolved what began aboard the *Beagle*.

And if European and North American scientists did not consistently rush to adopt evolution by natural selection, neither did contemporary ministers and theologians – some of whom were also scientists – consistently rush to reject it. Notwithstanding the debate between Thomas Huxley and Bishop Samuel Wilberforce in Oxford in 1860 and the Scopes trial in Tennessee in 1925, and the ways they have been used to portray the "warfare" between religion and science, by 1930 there had been no uniformly negative reaction among Christian responses to Darwin in Great Britain, Canada, and the United States. Certainly many Christian preachers and writers had criticized or rejected evolution, but many others had either cautiously or enthusiastically favoured it, or were simply unconcerned. And while it is true that there was a spectrum of responses among those now called traditionalists, liberals and modernists, even some traditional-

ists sought to accommodate Christianity and evolution. For example, while his understanding of God, Christ and humanity remained largely consistent with traditional Christianity, Princeton's James McCosh accepted evolution and argued that God both had designed the evolutionary process and continues to work through it. Similarly, some other traditionalist Protestants from Calvinist traditions tended to welcome Darwinian evolution with its emphasis on natural selection because they understood it to be consistent with their view of divine sovereignty, providence and predestination as acting through the laws of nature. In this they differed from the modernists, who tended to favour both Lamarck's emphasis on the role of internal forces in evolution and Spencer's confidence in the inevitability of progress. The fundamentalist response arose later and became focussed only with the publication of the pamphlet series, *The Fundamentals*, beginning in 1909. Nevertheless, while two of the early authors of *The Fundamentals* rejected evolution on the grounds of its "atheistic and materialistic influence," three other authors accepted evolution.⁷ Richard Roberts, then, was by no means unique in his attempt to reconcile Christian theology and evolutionary biology, but the fact that so many theologians of such different theological persuasions made such attempts does weaken claims for the opposition of religion and science in general and of Christianity and evolution in particular. Examining Roberts' approach not only helps to extend the case for rejecting any supposed necessary opposition, but also, as we shall see, reveals some features that warrant further consideration as Christianity continues to try to resolve what began aboard the *Beagle*.

The readiness of Christian thinkers of various theological schools to consider evolution positively points to the state of the Canadian evangelical theological project in the first decades of the twentieth century. In *The Evangelical Century*, Michael Gauvreau offers an account of Canadian Presbyterian and Methodist religious thought from 1820 to 1930 in the context of contemporary transatlantic evangelical thought. This account includes the stories of the theological colleges of these denominations and their role in preparing leadership for the churches and in developing the theological synthesis that harmonized the "evangelical creed" with the intellectual currents and social, economic, and cultural changes of the time. Both Presbyterians and Methodists sought a harmony of faith and learning, of the "culture of the revival" with the "culture of inquiry," of the "evangelical creed" with the new evolutionary thought and higher biblical

criticism, the purpose of which was the transformation of both individuals and society. Gauvreau argues that this project was reasonably successful in Canada from 1860 through 1905, but that from then until 1914 the historical relativism that had arisen in the 1890s began to erode the evangelical synthesis in ways that evolutionary thought and higher biblical criticism had not. Of course, by the time Richard Roberts arrived in Montreal in 1922 the breakdown of the evangelical synthesis was well underway. Nevertheless, Gauvreau's characterization of the late-nineteenth-century Canadian evangelical synthesis remains useful for understanding his work, for Roberts' reflections on theology and evolution can be understood as an example of the transatlantic evangelical project of achieving a harmony of faith and learning for the purpose of transforming both individuals and society.⁸

Roberts' Reflections on Evolution and Theology

Richard Roberts had been thinking about evolution a lot by the mid-1920s. From 1926 to 1928, he discussed evolution and theology in some detail in one article, two sets of published lectures (the 1926 Southworth Lectures at Harvard and the 1928 Merrick Lectures at Ohio Wesleyan), and an unpublished series of lectures delivered to the students of Emmanuel College, Toronto, in 1927. Another unpublished manuscript, undated but likely also from the late 1920s, also shows his interest in the relation of theology and science, including physics as well as biology.⁹ These essays and lectures show that Roberts was actively working out the multiple implications of evolution in a variety of ways, and testing these ideas with various audiences. Although he briefly mentioned William Jennings Bryan and the 1925 Scopes trial, the timing and content of Roberts' essays and lectures indicate that the trial itself was not the sole or even a major impetus for his attention to evolution. In fact, he had begun to consider the implications of evolution for Christianity no later than 1912 in addresses to the congregation at Crouch Hill Presbyterian Church, London. His later reflections about fundamentalism, liberalism and their responses to evolution, however, suggest that by the late 1920s Roberts was also concerned to address the widening rift between liberals and fundamentalists in North American evangelicalism. Further, a significant common theme in his theology is the need to synthesize or at least hold in tension various ideas and truths – the personal and the social, divine

immanence and transcendence, evangelism and social service, prayer and revelation, humanity seeking God and God seeking humanity, Barth's emphasis on revelation and Macmurray's emphasis on community. Roberts clearly hoped to articulate a theology that, if not providing a synthesis, at least held together the authentic points of the various dualities that, he maintained, persisted throughout Christian history and indeed all religious history.¹⁰

Roberts was not, however, motivated only by a desire to respond to the shortcomings of liberalism and fundamentalism and to provide an alternative to their polarization. He was also addressing for his time the relationship between religion and science, between the declining religious view of life and the ascendant materialist, mechanist, determinist, and behaviourist view of the world. On the one hand, Roberts did not accept the claim of science's authority over religion. "Mechanistic biology is evidently here to stay; but its jurisdiction over other fields, and particularly over religion, is not to be admitted."¹¹ On the other hand, neither did Roberts desire a Christianity that rejected or ignored science. He accepted a provisional dualism of science and religion, but only as "a bivouac on the march," a temporary phase in humanity's journey towards more complete understanding. Nevertheless, he wondered "whether, if the march had been pressed a little further before calling a halt, a more satisfactory inn might not have been found." Even though he regarded himself as only a "journeyman" in such matters, he endeavoured not only to raise the question but also to suggest a tentative answer by offering a biological account of religion. "Should we not decline any longer to regard religion as lying outside the world of 'nature' and treat it frankly as a biological phenomenon? If religion is not a manifestation of life, then it is nothing; and if it is a manifestation of life, then it must stand somehow in an organic relation to the rest of life; and the religious life becomes a part of the subject matter of biology." Roberts sought not to reduce religion to biology; rather, affirming that "religion involves revelation as much as evolution (to my mind) seems to involve religion," he maintained that "there are important ways in which Christianity may be regarded as continuing the development of life as evolutionary biology has revealed it to us." Roberts thereupon undertook "a modest and unpretentious essay in the theology of immanence."¹²

In this theology of immanence Roberts spent little time with three of the standard issues in the theological discussions of evolution to date,

namely, the truth of the Bible, evolution as inevitable progress, and the status of humanity in creation. His understanding of continuing revelation and its relationship with prayer included not only the Bible but also all of science, culture and history, but especially human personal relationships and the life and work of Jesus Christ. This view of revelation therefore precluded any unique, final authoritative status for the Bible over against that which is revealed by natural science.

Properly understood, everything that is, is a revelation of God. We may speak of the whole body of modern science as a revelation of God, so too we may speak of art . . . But in the specific theological sense, revelation is revelation of God in personal relationships; and of this man has acquired a volume of illuminating experience. Through his life of prayer, line upon line, here a little, there a little, he received information concerning the dweller in the innermost.

Now this information can come to any man who is looking for it; but most men even if they have it cannot report it; but there have been and still are men of unusual sensibility who have received communications out of the unseen and have reported them to their fellows in a speech which they can understand . . . And so little by little, the record of revelation is created. It is our way as Christians to say, and we shall have to return to this in greater detail at a later stage, that once in the fullness of time the unseen spoke in a man, not merely through man – in the man Jesus of Nazareth.¹³

On evolution and progress, Roberts believed that human and social progress was a *possibility* but he rejected its *inevitability*. He regarded the “myth of a fated Progress” as a clearly failed prediction, however confidently it had previously been proclaimed. And on the matter of humanity’s lowered status in creation as the descendants of apes rather than the special creation of God, Roberts argued that while this claim may have led some people to repudiate evolution and join the fundamentalist ranks, the issue was nevertheless “adventitious and not of the essence of the matter.”¹⁴

What was essential for Roberts were the implications of evolution for a Christian understanding of divine immanence and transcendence. He stated the terms of the problem starkly:

Creation implies a “transcendent” God; evolution an “immanent”

God. Creation requires a God standing outside the universe, having brought it into being by His own *fiat*, and operating upon it from without in perfect freedom according to His own will. It may be true that evolution does not logically imply immanence; but there is no doubt that the two ideas make good company in the mind. And to most minds evolution certainly does suggest a God *within* the universe, involved in and therefore limited by its processes, and somehow fulfilling Himself in its development.¹⁵

Roberts argued that human intelligence and religious experience, respectively, testify to God's immanence and transcendence, and he criticized both liberals and fundamentalists for emphasizing one element of this duality at the expense of the other. Nevertheless, he recognized the difficulty of reconciling these and other dualities, such as the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ or the eternal completeness of the divine and its relatedness to the world. Roberts also acknowledged the ways in which Christians from Paul to Pascal had struggled to come to terms with these dualities but had tended, with some exceptions, to almost exclusively emphasize transcendence. Evolution, however, had brought the struggle with these dualities to a crisis. Roberts observed:

But the antithesis has become acute in our time because we are persuaded that we live in a universe which is, so to speak, on the move . . . From our first slow recognition of biological evolution on this planet science has led us on to a conception of the entire cosmos in a process of development. Not only biology, but physics, seems to show that *process* is the law of all things in the heavens no less than on earth . . . No age has been confronted with a conception so vast and bewildering; and it is useless to pretend that theology can remain unaffected by it. It is no longer possible to treat the notion of divine immanence (as it has been commonly treated in the past) as a comforting postscript or as a compensation-balance to the traditional theology. It must be accepted as a principle of equal validity and coefficient with transcendence.¹⁶

Adopting what he regarded as Paul's strategy of using *both* transcendence and immanence theologies and their cognate concepts (e.g., justification for the former and the indwelling Christ for the latter), Roberts proposed no systematic synthesis. Arguing that the limits of human knowledge

prevented for the present a way of reconciling these dualities, Roberts proposed to do what he understood Paul to have done, namely, to rely on *both* ideas and their cognate conceptual complexes.

For the moment then, since it seems impossible to construct a single theology that shall do full justice to the implications both of immanence and transcendence, the only alternative open to those who desire to preserve the full value of both is to consent to a provisional dualism. This will require that we hold two theologies at the same time – the substance of the traditional theology of the Church and the nascent theology of Immanence. Obviously, neither can be held as final, but both as necessary to the final synthesis which is yet to be worked out. For my own part, I shall continue to affirm the main theses of a “transcendence” theology – Inspiration, Revelation, Incarnation, Redemption and Grace; but I propose also to hold the main theses of an “immanence” theology – the inborn and indwelling Christ, the “new man,” the Kingdom of God as the purpose and goal of the evolutionary process . . . I propose to be both a traditionalist and a modernist, in the belief that a frank dualism is a healthier state of mind than a premature and muddled synthesis.

Reiterating that “this dualism is provisional, a temporary lodging” and that a satisfactory synthesis could be our only permanent abode, Roberts suggested that, in light of the dominance of transcendence theology to date and the recent findings of biology and physics, the first step toward such a synthesis “would appear to be the working out of the philosophical and theological implications of immanence.”¹⁷

The immanence of God in the processes of nature and history implied for Roberts that these processes reveal God and that we can learn about God by studying these processes. According to Roberts, these processes reveal the striving of the universe for God, developing increasingly complex forms until the evolution of consciousness and spirit in humanity but possibly continuing beyond these forms. The striving for God manifest in humanity is different from non-human striving only by degree, not kind. And this striving is not the whole story, for it is only that which can be observed from the perspective of immanence. From the perspective of transcendence, one may also observe the divine striving toward the uni-verse. Taken together, the two perspectives would suggest or point toward the ultimate unity of the dualities.¹⁸

Is there any reason why, believing in the essential unity of all things, I may not provisionally conceive of two movements – from inert matter toward mind and from mind toward inert matter – abstractions from a reality which, if I could conceive it, I should find including both, and probably much beside, in one harmony?

If this much be conceded, it seems at least conceivable that these movements have met in man, in whom mind becomes self-conscious in matter. What is there then to hinder us seeing this double movement still at work on the human plane, God in search of man and man in search of God?

Then History will appear as the divinely-impelled but blundering search of the unseeing child for its Father, and Revelation as the search of the Father for His purblind child.

In Jesus, we shall say, nature achieved its goal in Deity, and Deity took upon it the flesh and form of man. The Word Incarnate both came up from the ranks and came down from the throne.

In the Cross, nature in man and man in Jesus bring to God the offering of a perfect obedience, and God in Christ is reconciling the world unto Himself.¹⁹

Roberts' Response to Darwin's Challenge

Despite the present and likely future state of cultural secularization, religious pluralism and disestablishment, and the post-modern deconstruction of truth claims, reclaiming the evangelical project of harmonizing faith and learning for the purpose of transforming both individuals and society seems a worthy if never more difficult task. As is suggested by recent public and scholarly attention to the relation between religion and science and to the relation of creation and evolution, the task of providing a compelling Christian response to Darwin's challenge has not yet been accomplished. Richard Roberts and others who have undertaken it may offer some assistance.

Roberts maintained for example that evolution has a purpose, a direction, a *telos* – an argument specifically repudiated since the late nineteenth century by many evolutionary biologists and other scientists, perhaps including Darwin himself.²⁰ The supposed purposelessness of evolution has also been a reason for some Christians' rejection of Darwinian evolution, but some other Christian thinkers – notably the controversial Catholic paleontologist and theologian, Pierre Tielhard de

Chardin, who died ten years after Roberts – have spoken of the *telos* of evolution in ways similar to Roberts. Those who reject evolutionary purpose sometimes argue that the proponents of purpose rely on non-scientific data, while the proponents point out that those who reject purpose do so based on their own faith in a materialistic and mechanistic understanding of science that is not necessarily warranted by science itself. Nevertheless, Roberts, like other preachers, theologians, and scientists since Darwin, could readily and without internal inconsistency adopt an approach to evolution that incorporates purposiveness. While many from Roberts' time until our own have debated the *telos* of evolution, both theologians and scientists continue to explore not only questions of how to account for complexity in the universe and the relationship of mind and matter, but also the extent to which issues considered to be “non-questions” by some scientists might be legitimately addressed by philosophy and theology. Some scientists and theologians are examining the possibility that complexity is not an accidental and aimless consequence of evolution but a tendency or direction that is somehow built into the very nature of the universe, into the very being of all matter and energy, or are considering that mind may not simply arise out of the evolution of matter but may have a role in the creation of reality. While we would certainly revise Roberts' particular account of the *telos* of the evolving world in light of continuing scientific and theological understanding – a task which Roberts himself would have encouraged – he may nevertheless serve not only as evidence that Christian theologians have in fact been trying to answer Darwin's challenge constructively for some time, but also as one model of how that task might be undertaken in a way that gives due attention to both science and theology.²¹

Perhaps more importantly, Roberts undertook to rework Christian theology in terms of a theology of immanence, not as a replacement of but as a complement to the theologies of transcendence that have been prevalent in Christian history. The dominance of theologies of transcendence since Roberts' day – indeed their reinvigoration in the neo-orthodox theologies of Barth, Brunner, the Niebuhrs and their disciples – has perhaps to some extent curtailed the further development of theologies of immanence along the lines that Roberts was beginning to explore. Combined with the prevalence of materialist and mechanist assumptions in twentieth-century western science, the transcendental emphasis of most twentieth-century theology has until recently prevented most liberal and

conservative Christians alike from even thinking there might be outstanding questions about the relationship between theology and science and between God and the universe. Indeed, most public discourse about religion and evolution seems to operate exclusively within a framework of a theology of divine transcendence that, precisely because such a theology makes it difficult to account for divine action in the world in a way that does not contravene physical and biological laws, reinforces the sense that religion and evolution are necessarily opposed. Of course, some theologians, especially process and eco-feminist theologians, have undertaken theologies of immanence that have, like Roberts, suggested ways of conceiving God, the universe, and their relationship that foster alternative ways of understanding the interaction of divine sovereignty and natural processes.²² Richard Roberts demonstrates that such work has deep roots in Christian thought and, more distinctly, reminds Christians to recognize the provisionality of their conceptual systems and the need for a theology that comprehends, in however incomplete a manner, both transcendence and immanence in our understanding of the relation of God and the universe.

Endnotes

1. Roger McDonald, *Mr. Darwin's Shooter* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1998); and Paul Quarrington, "Evolution's Hired Gun," *The Globe and Mail*, 13 March 1999, D16.
2. A notable recent exception is Robert Wright, "The Accidental Creationist," *The New Yorker*, 13 December 1999, 56-65, where Wright concludes his critique of Stephen Jay Gould's treatment of evolution and theism: "My point is that Darwinism needn't put theologians out of a job. Granted, it may force them to abandon beliefs. Scientific progress, as the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead wrote, has long spurred the amendment of religious doctrine – 'to the great advantage of religion' – while religion's essence remained intact. For many religious people, part of that essence is the belief that, above and beyond the vestigial cruelties and absurdities of the human experience, there is a point to it all, a point that, even if obscure, may yet become manifest. So far, biological science has provided no reason to conclude otherwise."
3. Catherine Gidney, "Richard Roberts: A Case Study in Liberal Protestantism in Canada During the Interwar Years," *Historical Papers: Canadian Society of Church History* (1995): 81-100; and Gidney, "Contextualizing Richard Roberts' Thought: Liberal Protestantism and the Dilemmas of the Modern

Age,” in Gwen R. P. Norman, *Grace Unfailing: The Radical Mind and the Beloved Community of Richard Roberts* (Etobicoke: The United Church Publishing House, 1998), 263-286.

4. Norman, *Grace Unfailing*.
5. Gillian Beer, “Introduction,” in Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), x-xii; Peter J. Bowler, *Evolution: The History of An Idea*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 1-150, 237-45; Timothy Ferris, *Coming of Age in the Milky Way* (London: Vintage, 1988), 221-36; Michael Ruse, *The Darwinian Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), ix-xiv, 1-159; and Stephen Jay Gould, “What Does the Dreaded ‘E’ Word Mean, Anyway?” *Natural History* Vol. 109, No. 1 (February 2000), 28-44.
6. Beer, “Introduction,” xvii-xxi; Bowler, *Evolution*, 187-217, 246-81, and *The Eclipse of Darwinism: Anti-Darwinian Evolution Theories in the Decades around 1900* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 3-19; Ferris, *Coming of Age*, 245-53; Ruse, *Darwinian Revolution*, 202-33; Julian Huxley, *Evolution: The Modern Synthesis*, 3rd ed. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1942, 1974), 13-28; and James R. Moore, *The Post Darwinian Controversies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 125-90.
7. Moore, *Post Darwinian Controversies*, 217-345; Phyllis Airhart, *Serving the Present Age: Revivalism, Progressivism, and the Methodist Tradition in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992), 54-57; Ian Barbour, *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 57-74; John Brooke and Geoffrey Cantor, *Reconstructing Nature: The Engagement of Science and Religion* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 247-81; John Dillenberger, *Protestant Thought and Natural Science* (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1960), 217-51; Michael Gauvreau, *The Evangelical Century: College and Creed in English Canada from the Great Revival to the Great Depression* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991), 125-80; and J.D. Rabb, ed., *Religion and Science in Early Canada* (Kingston: Ronald P. Frye, 1988), 297-348.
8. Gauvreau, *Evangelical Century*, 178-79, 218-12, 222, 290. Gauvreau is rightly and explicitly careful to avoid assuming that Canadian religious history simply reflects that of Great Britain or the United States. I too hope to observe similar caution and yet note how well Gauvreau’s account of the Canadian evangelical synthesis illuminates the theology of a transplanted Welsh evangelical. Transatlantic evangelical theology *may* have been sufficiently similar to render the consonance between Roberts’ theology and the Canadian synthesis more than a happy coincidence, but demonstrating such similarity

does not concern me in this context. And although by Gauvreau's reckoning, by the time Roberts arrived in Montreal the breakdown in the Canadian evangelical synthesis was already well underway, Roberts' late evidence of such an approach to theology may simply mean that he was an exception to the rule, or that he failed to take account of or even be bothered by the problems posed for Christian theology by historical relativism. Assessing Roberts' place in what Gauvreau calls "the passing of the evangelical creed" following the First World War could be useful, but must await another discussion.

9. Richard Roberts, "The Theological Dilemma in America," *The Hibbert Journal* 25 (October 1926-July 1927): 140-141; *The New Man and the Divine Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1926); *The Christian God* (New York: Macmillan, 1929); "The Scope of Theology," unpublished lectures, 1927, Box 4, File 112, United Church of Canada Archives (UCCA); and "Wheels and Systems: A Plea for Another Theology," unpublished manuscript, Box 3, File 17, UCCA. The various sources contain some duplication of material. His 1926-27 essay, "The Theological Dilemma in America," is almost identical to the introduction to his 1926 Southworth Lectures, published as *The New Man and the Divine Society*, and his unpublished 1927 lectures at Emmanuel College, "The Scope of Theology," were likely an early version of his 1928 Merrick Lectures, published in 1929 as *The Christian God*.
10. Roberts, *The High Road to Christ* (London: Cassell and Co., 1912), 93-97; "The Theological Dilemma in America," 141; *The New Man and the Divine Society*, 11; Norman, *Grace Unfailing*, 183; and Gidney, "Contextualizing Richard Roberts' Thought," 267-76.
11. Roberts, *The New Man and the Divine Society*, 5-6, in which Roberts was referring to Joseph Needham, ed., *Science, Religion and Reality* (London: Sheldon Press and Macmillan Co., 1925). Contributors to the symposium included Arthur James, B. Malinowski, C. Singer, A. Aliotta, A.S. Eddington, Joseph Needham, J.W. Oman, W. Brown, C.C.J. Webb, and W.R. Inge (see Roberts, "Wheels and Systems," 1: "One can hardly rise from the reading of [Alfred N.] Whitehead and [Arthur S.] Eddington without wondering why we allowed ourselves to be brow-beaten so sadly by 'Science' all these years. By we, I mean we preachers and teachers of religion. Materialism is as dead as Queen Anne. The discovery of a "principle of indeterminacy" in the physical world knocks the bottom out of all determinisms and behaviourisms whatsoever. And now that Science has, in honourable obedience to its own first principles, reached the point at which it is readily admitting that it is not "the only pebble on the beach," the admission is so obvious that it seems positively absurd that we should have been so incontinently scared into an apologetic posture").

12. Roberts, *The New Man and the Divine Society*, 6-9, 17.
13. Roberts, "The Scope of Theology," 12-14; cf. *The Christian God*, 25-33.
14. Roberts, "The Theological Dilemma in America," 140; and *The New Man and the Divine Society*, 9-10, 40.
15. Roberts, "The Theological Dilemma in America," 140-41; and *The New Man and the Divine Society*, 10.
16. Roberts, "The Theological Dilemma in America," 144; and *The New Man and the Divine Society*, 15.
17. Roberts, "The Theological Dilemma in America," 145; *The New Man and the Divine Society*, 16; and "The Scope of Theology," 15-18.
18. Roberts, "The Theological Dilemma in America," 147; and "The Scope of Theology," 14-15, 26-27.
19. Roberts, "The Theological Dilemma in America," 147.
20. Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 58-59, 237-47; Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker* (Essex: Longman Scientific & Technical, 1986), 169-93; Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meaning of Life* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 23-25, 61-84; Stephen Jay Gould, *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), 23-52, 277-323.
21. Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 165-94, 237-49; Pierre de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959); John F. Haught, *God After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 11-44, and *Science and Religion: From Conflict to Conversation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 63-69, 142-61; Paul Davies, *God and the New Physics* (London: Penguin Books, 1983), 72-87, 100-18, 164-76; and Nancey Murphy and George F.R. Ellis, *On the Moral Nature of the Universe: Theology, Cosmology, and Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).
22. On the history of the development of the emphasis on divine transcendence in Christian theology and the difficulty of balancing transcendence and immanence, see James W. Jones, *The Redemption of Matter: Towards the Rapprochement of Science and Religion* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984), 15-32, 115-18. For examples of theologies of immanence, see Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 281-332; John Cobb and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976); Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An*

Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992); and Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The End of Evil: Process Eschatology in Historical Perspective* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).