

6-1-1959

Brief Studies

Paul A. Zimmermann
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Zimmermann, Paul A. (1959) "Brief Studies," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 30, Article 43.
Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol30/iss1/43>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

BRIEF STUDIES

THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES

This year marks the centennial of the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*. The anniversary has already been observed by the publication of several books and of numerous magazine articles. The Everyman's Library edition of *The Origin of Species* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1956. 487 pages. Cloth. \$1.85) provides a well-bound and economical edition for those desiring to read Darwin's epic of evolution in this its centennial year. However, this reprint of *The Origin* is deserving of particular attention because of the introduction by W. R. Thompson.

W. R. Thompson is director of the Commonwealth Institute of Biological Control, Ottawa, Canada. His introduction to the reprint of Darwin's classic is unique inasmuch as Thompson did not content himself "with mere variations on the hymn to Darwin and Darwinism that introduces so many textbooks on biology and evolution, and might well be expected to precede a reprinting of the *Origin*" (p. vii). In fact, Thompson has produced a scholarly and penetrating analysis of the failings not only of Darwin's theory but of modern neo-Darwinism as well.

It is seldom that one finds a modern scientist so willing to expound his misgivings concerning the dogma of evolution. Thompson states: "I happen to believe that in science heresy is a virtue and reaction often a necessity, and that in no field of science are heresy and reaction more desirable than in evolutionary theory." (P. vii)

Thompson's introduction presents Darwin's fundamental theory in lucid fashion. He then demonstrates that Darwin did not prove that species had originated by "natural selection." Moreover, modern studies on heredity have undermined the Darwinian position. Neo-Darwinians have turned to modern mutation theory as a mechanism of evolution. But Thompson rejects mutations as a means of explaining how all living species might have evolved. He condemns them as being in general "useless, detrimental, or lethal." (P. xii)

Thompson also criticizes arguments for evolution based on rudimentary organs, homology of structure, and biogenetic law.

According to Darwin's theory, one would not expect to find a persistence of common fundamental structural plans in living things, yet this is just what we do find. Thompson states, "Taking the taxonomic system as a whole, it appears as an orderly arrangement

of clear-cut entities which are clear-cut because they are separated by gaps" (p. xvi). Thus the phyla, classes, orders, and families have definite and fixed characteristics. It is in the small groupings of the genera and species only that classification is sometimes uncertain. (This is precisely what we would expect on the basis of Scripture's statement that living things reproduce after their "kind.")

Darwin was conscious of the lack of historical vindication for his theory. Chapter X of the *Origin* bears the title, "On the Imperfection of the Geological Record." Thompson observes that a century of paleontological research has not materially altered the picture. "The modern Darwinian paleontologists are obliged, just like their predecessors and like Darwin, to water down the facts with subsidiary hypotheses which, however plausible, are in the nature of things unverifiable." (P. xix)

Thompson's evaluation of Darwin's influence on science is not the propagandistic hymn of praise so often heard. He admits that the *Origin* stimulated biological study, but charges that its false concepts produced much time-wasting research devoted to the "production of unverifiable family trees" (p. xx). Mendel's work on heredity, first published in 1865 and rediscovered in 1900, was much more significant.

A further criticism of Darwinism is that it produced "the addiction of biologists to unverifiable speculation" (p. xxi). Thompson also laments the reluctance of many evolutionists to enlighten the non-scientific public concerning the widespread disagreements that exist among workers in the field. "This situation, where scientific men rally to the defense of a doctrine they are unable to define scientifically, much less demonstrate with scientific rigour, attempting to maintain its credit with the public by the suppression of criticism and the elimination of difficulties, is abnormal and undesirable in science." (P. xxii)

This excellent critique of Darwinism and modern neo-Darwinism ends with the observation that the "doctrine of evolution" has a strong anti-religious flavor. Chance supplants God in the direction of life and living things. "It is clear that in the *Origin* evolution is presented as an essentially undirected process. For the majority of its readers therefore the *Origin* effectively dissipated the evidence of providential control." (P. xxiii)

Both theologian and scientist will understand Darwin's doctrine of evolution better because of W. R. Thompson's penetrating and courageous introduction to this reprint of *The Origin of Species*.

PAUL A. ZIMMERMAN