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THE 'BATTLE' BETWEEN SCIENCE AND RELIGION
OVER EVOLUTION IN NINETEENTH CENTURY
NEW ZEALAND

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History at Massey
University

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1985

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Abstract

This thesis describes and analyses the New Zealand response to the Darwinian theory of evolution in the second half of the nineteenth century. Traditional accounts, using a distorted version of the Huxley-Wilberforce debate as their model, have been triumphalist, positivistic, and militaristic. The bloody 'battle' between science and religion, according to these received views, resulted in the overwhelming victory of science, truth, and progress over religion, ignorance, and superstition. This model is inapplicable in the New Zealand context. Generations of reconciling Genesis with geology had prepared the Christian mind well for coming to terms with scientific discoveries, and adjusting interpretations of Scripture accordingly. After an initial period of caution and deliberation, churchmen within the major denominations came to terms with biological evolution as readily as they had earlier accepted the findings of geology and palaeontology. By the 1880's evolution became acceptable to most educated Christians. Scientists too, quickly accepted biological evolution but remained religious believers, and in many cases devout, practising Christians. Their religious view of nature was reinforced rather than destroyed by Darwin. The handful of freethinkers who proclaimed that Science had supplanted Christianity also belie the positivist model, for evolution became for them a surrogate religious faith. Science did effectively become secularized by the beginning of the twentieth century, but this was the work of devout scientists who wanted to prevent religious controversy from constantly holding back the progress of biology. The 'battle' between science and religion over evolution culminating in the final and decisive triumph of science was a myth.

Preface

I would like to record my thanks to all those who have been so helpful over the last three years. Dr Peter Lineham has been all that I could ask of a chief supervisor, and more. His never-failing enthusiasm, constant help with sources, insightful criticism and sympathetic counsel have put me permanently in his debt. I am grateful to all the members of the Massey University Department of History who have provided such a stimulating and congenial atmosphere to work in. Dr Kerry Howe has been a very friendly and approachable assistant supervisor. He has constantly helped me to keep the 'magnum opus' in a healthy perspective! Thanks to Professor W.H. Oliver for helping to supervise the initial stages of the thesis. Professor J.C. Davis and Dr David Thomson have provided valuable comments and criticisms. I would like also to acknowledge ideas and references from Professor Ian Breward, Professor G.S. Parsonson, Professor M.P.K. Sorrenson, Professor George Marsden, Sir Charles Fleming, Roger Chapman, Philip Fleming, and my father, Dr David Stenhouse, who has proved adept at clarifying complex zoological and philosophical issues over the phone. Special thanks to my brother David who was a great help in the final stages.

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Auckland Public Library, the New Zealand Baptist College Library, and the Cambridge University Library. A number of librarians and archivists deserve special mention: David MacDonald of the Hocken Library, Marcia Baker (Methodist Church Archivist), Kathleen Coleridge of the Victoria University Library, Ian Thwaites of the Auckland Institute and Museum Library, Judith Bright of the St. Johns College Library and Peter Gautrey of the Cambridge University Library.

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Abbreviations

<u>CG</u>	<u>Church Gazette</u>
<u>DNZB</u>	<u>Dictionary of New Zealand Biography</u>
<u>FR</u>	<u>Freethought Review</u>
<u>JHB</u>	<u>Journal of the History of Biology</u>
<u>JRH</u>	<u>Journal of Religious History</u>
<u>LT</u>	<u>Lyttelton Times</u>
<u>NZE</u>	<u>New Zealand Evangelist</u>
<u>NZH</u>	<u>New Zealand Herald</u>
<u>NZJH</u>	<u>New Zealand Journal of History</u>
<u>NZJS</u>	<u>New Zealand Journal of Science</u>
<u>NZ Mag</u>	<u>New Zealand Magazine</u>
<u>NZ Meth</u>	<u>New Zealand Methodist</u>
<u>NZP</u>	<u>New Zealand Presbyterian</u>
<u>NZW</u>	<u>New Zealand Wesleyan</u>
<u>ODT</u>	<u>Otago Daily Times</u>
<u>TPNZI</u>	<u>Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute</u>

Library Symbols

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