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Article

Optimistic Evolutionists: The Progressive Science and Religion of Joseph LeConte, Henry Ward Beecher, and Lyman Abbott

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LeConte, Beecher, and Abbott offer together a lens through which to view the way speculative theology, when harnessed to ideological enthusiasm for scientific novelty, can spawn religious ideologies that bear little resemblance to orthodoxy ...

Historians of science have carefully studied the post-Darwinian Protestant accommodations of evolutionary theory. This paper extends a small portion of their efforts by focusing upon three prominent nineteenth-century “optimistic evolutionists”: Joseph LeConte (1823–1901), Henry Ward Beecher (1813–1887), and Lyman Abbott (1835–1922). Although each has been the subject of individual biographical studies, there is little scholarship looking at the three together, despite their personal relationships and mutual influences.

Thoroughgoing reformulation of traditional Christian doctrines stood among the nineteenth-century theological responses to evolution. The cases of LeConte, Beecher, and Abbott exemplify this mode. Importantly, their theological accommodations of evolution include treatments of two fundamental issues: the problem of evil and the concept of design. Matters of theodicy still vex theologians, while philosophers and scientists continue to acknowledge the implications of evolution for the doctrine of original sin. The emergence of “intelligent design” theories in recent years establishes the chronic vitality of the design hypothesis. Hence century-old deliberations upon these topics provide useful perspectives, even if only as cautionary voices calling attention to the theological difficulties awaiting Christians who recast traditional doctrines in service of new and fashionable scientific orthodoxies.

Hundreds of disappointed attendees were denied admission to the great hall of New York’s Cooper Union on Saturday evening, January 6, 1883. The hall’s brimming capacity of 2,500 had been reached well before the appointed eight-o’clock hour, the time scheduled for delivery of a lecture on “Evolution and Revolution.” By half past seven, the police had judged the situation

unsafe and closed the doors to additional guests. While a discouraged mass remained outside barred from the event, thousands crammed inside Cooper’s great hall were treated to the oratory of Henry Ward Beecher (1813–1887), “the most famous man in America.” Eighteen years earlier Beecher had been President Lincoln’s selection as principal speaker at the official ceremonial raising of the American flag at Ft. Sumter. The 1865 event had formally reunited the war-torn United States. Beecher was the fitting choice, for in so many ways he spoke to and spoke for middle-class Protestant America. He certainly spoke a lot, and was well paid for it too. As minister of Brooklyn’s Plymouth Church since 1847, he had become the highest-paid American clergyman, drawing an annual salary of \$20,000. In addition to his weekly sermons, he delivered more than 125 popular lectures per year at the

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height of his career, regularly collecting honoraria of \$1,000 per talk. Further, he influenced popular opinion on myriad topics through his written words that appeared in over thirty books and countless essays and articles published in his two widely read journals, the *Independent* and the *Christian Union*.¹

Now, on this January evening less than one year after the death of Charles Darwin, Beecher was set to pronounce his views on one of the day's hottest topics, the relation of evolution to the Christian religion. He opened his Cooper Union address with the assertion that "a greater change has taken place within the last thirty years, probably, than ever took place in any former period of five hundred consecutive years." This revolution was nothing other than a shift in humankind's understanding of God's mode of creation, a shift from the "instantaneous obedience of matter to the divine command" to a "method of creation as gradual, and as the result of steadily acting natural laws through long periods of time." Simply put, Beecher embraced evolution as *God's way of doing things*. Beecher did not rest merely with asserting that "a man may be an evolutionist and believe in God with all his heart and strength and soul," he gloried in evolutionary theory as a new revelation that was transforming humanity's relation to the Divine. As he concluded, voicing triumphalism fitting only for an age committed to the idea of progress, he gave thanks to God "for the growing light and power of the great doctrine of Christian Evolution."² As one student of Beecher's thought has put it, this most famous clergyman possessed the "ability to convince the American evangelical public that progress was more than scientific achievement, it was the redemption of the race through 'the law of development and growth.'"³

The last quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed what historian of science James Moore has called the "Protestant struggle to come to terms with Darwin." Jon Roberts and other historians have weighed in too, subjecting the topic to careful study and thoughtful discussion.⁴ What work remains for the historian? Perhaps only shining light on a few specifics. Such an endeavor, however, remains worthy for it easily leads to consideration of significant primary sources and focused prosopographical study, a small sampling of which this paper offers through selective consideration of three prominent "optimistic evolutionists" who spoke and published on evolution and Christianity during the 1880s and 1890s: Henry Ward Beecher, Joseph LeConte (1823–1901), and Lyman Abbott (1835–1922). Of the three, only the ecumenically oriented Presbyterian LeConte, a member of the National Academy of Sciences who taught geology and natural history at the University of California, Berkeley, was a prominent scientist. Beecher and Abbott were, arguably, the two most famous and influential clergymen of the second half of the nineteenth century. All three men wrote books and lectured on the relation of evolution to Christianity. They

knew, admired, and influenced one another. Considered together, their ideas offer a lens through which to view the way speculative theology, when harnessed to ideological enthusiasm for scientific novelty, can spawn religious ideologies that bear little resemblance to orthodoxy, regardless of the names by which they go.

The Trio

Henry Ward Beecher's Cooper Union address was but an opening salvo. Two years later, in 1885, Beecher published a grand 440-page volume of sermons on the topic titled *Evolution and Religion*. The book purported to discuss the "bearings of the evolutionary philosophy on the fundamental doctrines of evangelical Christianity" and "the application of the evolutionary principles and theories to the practical aspects of religious life."⁵ The same year that his *Evolution and Religion* was published, Beecher traveled to California, lecturing on the subject. Aware that the Harvard-trained scientist, Joseph LeConte, had authored a number of papers on evolution, in addition to a well-received book titled *Religion and Science*, Beecher contacted LeConte urging him to write another book devoted entirely to reconciling religion with evolution.



Figure 1. Henry Ward Beecher at Seventy-three (1887)

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Beecher insisted that LeConte “owed it to the world” to publish a volume of his thoughts regarding evolution and Christianity. Earlier, LeConte had reluctantly entertained and dismissed the idea. But Beecher’s plea finally persuaded him to write the book. Beginning work in earnest within months, LeConte devoted much of the next two years to writing. The book, *Evolution and Its Relation to Religious Thought*, appeared in early 1888 and immediately enjoyed “huge success” as it became “a leading work on the subject.” Within three years, LeConte had revised and expanded the volume, the second edition of which appeared in 1891 under the new title, *Evolution: Its Nature, Its Evidences, and Its Relation to Religious Thought*.⁶

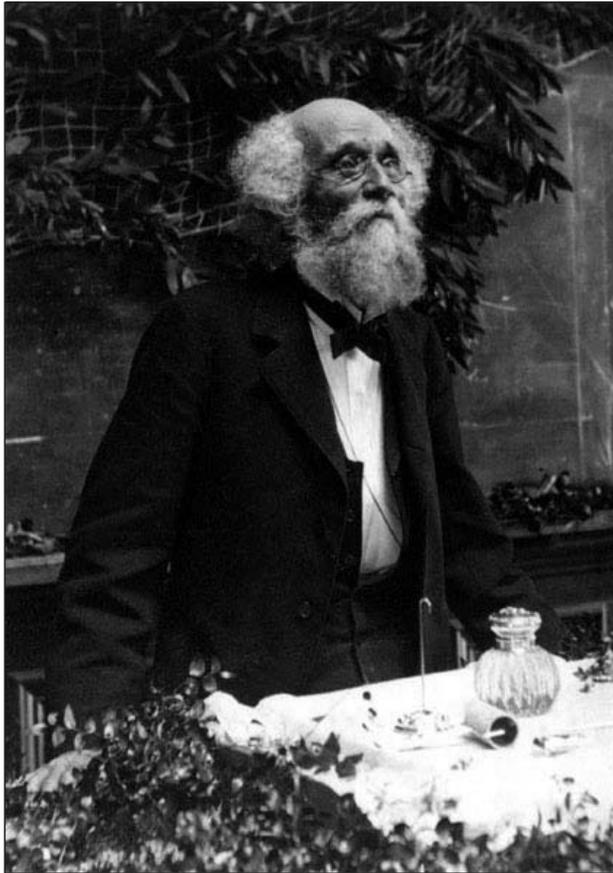


Figure 2. Joseph LeConte at Seventy-five (1898)

Among the readers deeply impressed by the evolutionary theology of both Beecher and LeConte, Congregationalist minister Lyman Abbott stood prominently. In 1876, Abbott had assumed an editorial position at Beecher’s *Christian Union*, the journal that became *Outlook* in 1893 and that would occupy Abbott for the rest of his life. Following Beecher’s death in 1887, Abbott inherited Beecher’s ministerial position in the pulpit of Brooklyn’s Plymouth Church. The late Henry Sloane Coffin once commented, “Lyman Abbott was unquestionably the foremost doctor of the church in America in his time, and one of the half-dozen most potent teachers of Christianity in our national history.” Historians of American religion have

further remarked that Abbott “exercised a more abiding influence” than any other modern religious leader.⁷

Among Abbott’s many published volumes was a very thick book of over six hundred pages bearing the equally weighty title, *Henry Ward Beecher. A Sketch of His Career: With Analyses of His Power as a Preacher, Lecturer, Orator, and Journalist, and Incidents and Reminiscences of His Life*.⁸ The massive tome paid tribute to Abbott’s close friend on the occasion of Beecher’s seventieth birthday. The year was 1883. Hence the book appeared just a few months after Beecher’s Cooper Union address, the text of which Abbott dutifully included in the volume. Abbott did not limit his praise to Beecher. His own 1892 book, *The Evolution of Christianity*, the first of three volumes on evolution, Christianity, and its social application, opened with affirmation and adoption of evolution as “defined by Professor LeConte.” His goal in the book was “to show that the historic faith of Christendom, when stated in the terms of an evolutionary philosophy, is not only preserved, but is so cleansed of pagan thought and feeling, as to be presented in a purer and more powerful form.”⁹

Considered together, then, Beecher, LeConte, and Abbott—three friendly associates of great national prominence—were co-laborers in the effort to unite evolutionary theory with the Christian faith. How did they do it? What did they produce? Were they successful? What can be gleaned, if anything, from their efforts? In particular, what did they have to say about such vital and related topics as the problem of evil, the question of design, and divine action and providence?

On these matters, Paul’s epistle to the Romans has spoken clearly:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise they became fools ...

Since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness ...¹⁰

Traditional Christian understanding of this text affirms at least some minimal version of natural theology, namely, that God’s existence and attributes can be rightly inferred from the design evident in the created world. Further, this text clearly suggests, especially when read in light of

Genesis 3, that the dark consequences of sin entered the world only *after* the innocent who first knew God *fell* into sin, that *evil and death* entered the world as a consequence of humanity's fall, and that evil, death, and scarcity are neither God's handiwork nor his tools of providential action.

Consequently, traditional Christian teachings regarding design and evil have stood in tension with evolutionary theories as long as thinkers have sought reconciliation between orthodox confessions and developmental hypotheses. Theologian George Murphy, for example, in contemplating a scenario of creation by evolution, has written, "The traditional problem of theodicy, how an all-good and all-powerful God can allow evil, is sharpened by evolution, for God apparently does not just allow evil but uses it in order to create."¹¹ Darwin agreed and found in this claim a telling case against the Christian deity. "I had no intention to write atheistically," Darwin wrote famously to his friend Asa Gray.

But I own that I cannot see as plainly as others do ... evidence of design & beneficence on all sides of us. There seems to me too much misery in the world. I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent & omnipotent God would have designedly created the *Ichneumonidae* with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of Caterpillars, or that a cat should play with mice.¹²

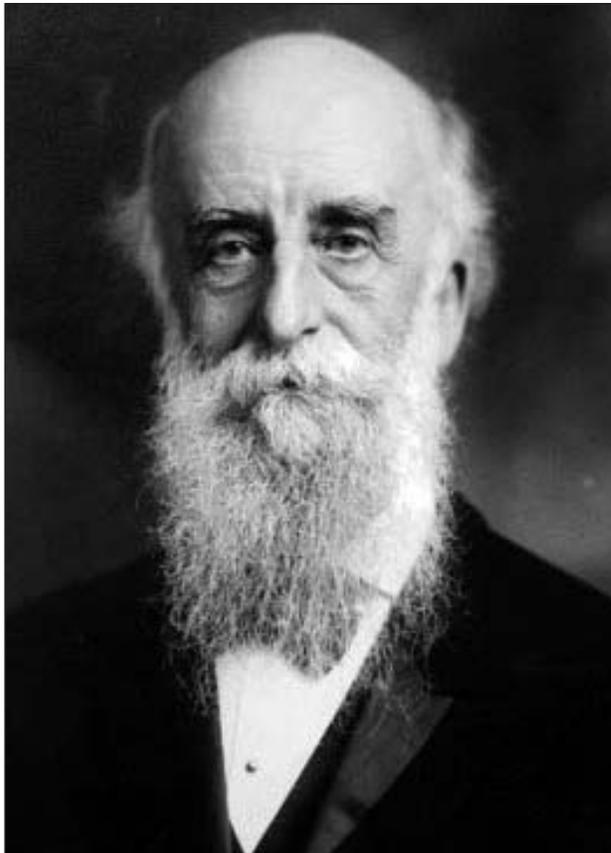


Figure 3. Lyman Abbott at Eighty (1915)

If evil constituted a barrier to Christian belief for Darwin, his theory of evolution by natural selection had rendered the design hypothesis simply superfluous. Darwin had shown Paley's disciples how design could be produced without a designer. Thus for Darwin, as historian Edward Larson has explained, "If nature reflected the character of its Creator, then the God of a Darwinian world acted randomly and cruelly."¹³ It seemed, therefore, that the price for accepting the evolutionary theory would be the abandonment of the traditional Christian accounts of design, of evil, and, perhaps, of God himself.

From whence, then, did the optimistic evolutionists of this study secure their confidence that the tensions between evolution, on the one hand, and Christian accounts of design, of evil, and of God, on the other, could be resolved? And if such a resolution could be found, would the compromise preserve a Christian faith worthy of the name? Consideration of how Beecher, LeConte, and Abbott answered these questions requires, first, a review of their assessment and understanding of evolution as a process of divine action and revelation.

Protestant Liberalism and Evolution as Revelation

If Darwinian evolution challenged the feasibility of traditional Christian theism, perhaps the sharp Darwinian edges of evolutionary theory could be softened and time-worn Christian doctrines modified in tactical ways to preserve the viability of both. This was the chosen path of American Protestant Liberalism. Historians have identified a host of sources from which Protestant Liberalism ostensibly drew: romantic philosophy, Hegelian teleology, the English Broad church movement, American Unitarianism, and transcendentalism.¹⁴ No doubt there were others. Regardless of the sources, the accommodation between evolution and religion engineered by Beecher, LeConte, and Abbott was underwritten, first and foremost, by two initial steps: first, by a softening of evolutionary theory and, second, by the placing of Christian theology into the subservient position of evolution's handmaiden. For these liberal Protestants, evolution was a settled fact, even if Darwinian natural selection by itself was insufficient and too harsh.

Henry Ward Beecher welcomed the "universal physical fact of evolution" as "the Divine method of creation" and confidently asserted in *Evolution and Religion* that "Evolution is accepted as *the method* of creation by the whole scientific world and that the period of controversy is passed and closed ... [for] Evolution is the *working* theory of every department of physical science all over the world."¹⁵ With a self-assurance matched only by its naivety, Abbott's journal, the *Christian Union*, proclaimed in 1882, "the time when ministers scoffed and derided Darwin and his disciples has forever passed."¹⁶ Thus

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Abbott opened his 1892 book, *The Evolution of Christianity*, with the settled affirmation, "All scientific men to-day are evolutionists."¹⁷ LeConte, of course, agreed, calling the law of evolution "the grandest idea of modern science" that is "thoroughly established, [indeed] far more certain than—the law of gravitation, for it is not a contingent, but a necessary truth."¹⁸

Whatever else it might have meant during these years to accept evolution as "grand" and "established," Beecher and his fellow optimists insisted that being a Christian "evolutionist" mandated that Christianity be recast into an evolutionary mold and that its old doctrines be tested according to new standards derived from evolutionary theories. "Evolution is God's way of doing things," wrote Abbott echoing Beecher.¹⁹ The task then, he insisted, was "to restate the principles of the Christian faith in terms of an evolutionary philosophy."²⁰ Beecher agreed. "Evolution is certain to oblige theology to reconstruct its system," he wrote.²¹ LeConte, also convinced that evolution required "a fundamental reconstruction of religious thought," warned that failure to do so meant "the church will die."²² He later wrote, "There can be no doubt that evolution ... must profoundly modify our traditional views of Nature, of God, and of man."²³

The transmutation hypothesis had demanded that thoughtful Christians reconstruct and restate their theology. Doing so was no onerous burden, however. Rather, it marked a welcome opportunity for ushering in the kingdom of God on earth. Accordingly, these optimists welcomed the evolutionary theory as new revelation. "The age of inspiration has not perished. Its sun has not set," announced Beecher. "A day has come when all dogmas, doctrines, formulas, laws and governments of the church, must be judged." Echoing Francis Bacon, Beecher believed that all theological opinions and convictions had been developed through the interpretation of God's two books. "We have two revelations," he explained, "God's thought in the evolution of matter, and God's thought in the evolution of mind." The former is the book of God's works, the latter, the book of God's words. So, asked Beecher rhetorically, "If to reject God's revelation of the Book [of God's words] is infidelity, what is it to reject God's revelation of himself in the structure of the whole globe?"²⁴

But evolution was not merely a scientific description of God's book of works. Rather, it was an ideological lens through which *all* revelation was to be read. Beecher called "the Evolutionary philosophy ... a new interpreter of God's two revelations" that "throws light upon many obscure points of doctrine and of theology that have most sadly needed light and solution."²⁵ Lyman Abbott voiced a similar theme:

The belief that the Bible is a revelation from God is not inconsistent with the belief that the Christian religion is an evolution; for revelation is not a final

statement of truth, crystallized into dogma, but a gradual and progressive unveiling of the mind that it may see truth clearly and receive it vitally. The Bible is not fossilized truth in an amber Book; it is a seed which vitalizes the soil into which it is cast; a window through which the light of dawning day enters the quickened mind; a voice commanding humanity to look forward and to go forward; a prophet who bids men seek their golden age in the future, not in the past.²⁶

As Beecher told his audiences that he "hailed the Evolutionary philosophy with joy," he conversely poured contempt, prescient of H. L. Mencken's anti-Fundamentalism, upon Bible-thumping Christians who voiced reservations about human evolution:

As it is now, vaguely bigoted theologians, ignorant pietists, jealous churchmen, unintelligent men, whose very existence seems like a sarcasm upon creative wisdom, with leaden wit and stinging irony swarm about the adventurous surveyors who are searching God's handiwork and who have added to the realm of the knowledge of God the grandest treasures. Men pretending to be ministers of God, with all manner of grimace and shallow ridicule and witless criticism and unproductive wisdom, enact the very feats of the monkey in the attempt to prove that the monkey was not their ancestor.²⁷

This contempt for Christian anti-evolutionism sprung from a confident faith that the wedding of evolution with religion would be the first stage in establishing the kingdom of God on earth. "Evolution will multiply the motives and facilities of righteousness," proclaimed Beecher. Resistance to his progressive evolutionary theology was, therefore, reactionary opposition to the very hand of God.²⁸

Beyond Darwin and Ancient Dogmas

Just what sort of "evolution" was it that promised such grand things on behalf of righteousness and pure religion? For Beecher, the specifics were still negotiable. Evolution, he explained, was that philosophy held by such a divergent lot as James Dwight Dana, Joseph LeConte, James McCosh, Asa Gray, George Mivart, and Herbert Spencer (just a few of the prominent figures Beecher explicitly mentioned as "men of profound Christian faith" who "substantially" hold to the theory of evolution).²⁹ That such men held to varied understandings of biological evolution and Christianity seemed either lost on Beecher or a matter of no consequence. After all, that evolution was a settled fact mattered more than the details of its mechanisms. Indeed, evolution was itself evolving. For Beecher, evolution was less a strictly scientific notion than a grand metaphysical vision of progress. "The vast universe," he wrote, "is moving onward and upward in determinate lines and directions, while on the way the weak are

perishing. Yet there is an unfolding process that is carrying creation up to higher planes and upon higher lines ... so that the whole physical creation is organizing itself for a sublime march toward perfectness."³⁰ The important factors for Beecher were that evolution meant progress, and it meant that the Genesis account was of no relevance for understanding the origins of life and the world.

With these convictions of Beecher, Lyman Abbott and Joseph LeConte each agreed. Further, none wanted evolution to be limited to the ideas of Charles Darwin merely. "Evolution is not to be identified with Darwinism," explained Abbott. "Evolution is, broadly speaking, the doctrine of growth applied to life ... the doctrine that all life proceeds by natural and normal processes from lower to higher stages ..." LeConte and Abbott went on to develop a more focused definition of evolution than had Beecher (who had contented himself with quoting James Dwight Dana).³¹ LeConte provided the definition. Abbott borrowed it verbatim. "Evolution is," explained LeConte, "(1) continuous *progressive change*, (2) *according to certain laws*, (3) and by means of *resident forces*."³² Of course LeConte expanded considerably upon this bare-bones definition as he went on to identify and explain "six factors of evolution," each "graded" according to a "scale of energy" and historical "order of introduction." Specifically, he identified five "graded planes" through which life forms ascended according to "the law of the transmutation and successive elevation of matter and force." The upshot was a complicated amalgam of Lamarckian theory, Darwinian selection, and vitalism all woven together by threads of speculative imagination and determined rejection of divine transcendence.³³

For LeConte, if God was anywhere, God was "resident in Nature." He explained that "forces of Nature are different forms of his energy [and] the laws of Nature are the modes of operation of the omnipresent Divine energy." At the heart of LeConte's evolutionism was a settled view of God as "immanent, indwelling, resident in nature ... in every molecule and atom, and *directly* determining every phenomena [sic] and every event."³⁴ Two things followed from this. First, the particulars of evolution's mechanism were shrouded in mushy mystery, even if they were called laws. Accordingly, LeConte was content to affirm that "the most important factors of evolution are unknown." This permitted him freely to depart from or to borrow from other scientific thinkers of his day almost indiscriminately. Thus, his own theory emerged as a grand philosophical edifice, its pantheistic foundations resting firmly in mid air, with "natural forces" equated to "different forms of the omnipresent Divine Energy" and "natural objects" simply the "objectification of the Divine thought." Second, and of greater present concern, is the fact that LeConte's doctrine of divine immanence constituted the chief weapon in his defense of evolutionism against the charge that evolution fostered atheist materialism. "Either

God operates in nature in a more direct way than we have been accustomed recently to think," he wrote in an 1887 pamphlet, "or else nature operates itself and wants no God at all. There is no middle ground tenable."³⁵ LeConte believed that his view of evolution had fully vanquished materialism. Perhaps it had, but at the price of removing miracles from Christianity:

Once [one] clearly conceive[s] the idea of God permeating Nature and determining directly all its phenomena according to law, [then] the distinction between the natural and the supernatural disappears from view, and with it disappears also the necessity of miracles ... In fact, the word [miracle] as we usually understand it has no longer any meaning.³⁶

According to this view, then, "all is natural and all is supernatural ... but none more than another."³⁷

LeConte's immanentist theology and its corollary demise of the distinction between the natural and supernatural carried important implications. Chief among them emerged the conclusion that *everything* evolved: God did, nature did, Christianity did, as did the human understanding of these grand things. "Religious thought," explained LeConte, "like all else, is subject to a law of evolution."³⁸ Lyman Abbott's book, *The Evolution of Christianity*, could not have been more aptly titled. In it he wrote, "The institutions of Christianity must be elastic, because Christianity itself is a growing religion." He continued, "[B]oth the Old Testament and the New Testament were constructed by a process of natural selection. As collections of literature both can be described ... as the result of a practical process of selection and elimination."³⁹

Particularly important to this affirmation of universal evolutionism stood the distinction that these men drew between "religion" and "theology." Consider Beecher's complaint: "Men are continually confounding the two terms, religion and theology. They are not alike." Abbott provided quite simple definitions. "Religion is the life of God in the soul of man," he asserted. "Theology is the science of religion."⁴⁰ Clearly then, religion was *divine*, while theology—human thought about religion—was but a *human* science, changeable and subject to gross error. Human formulations were inadequate because they were finite and limited. On this point Abbott explained, "The fundamental difficulty about all attempts to define truth in a creed is that truth is infinite, and therefore transcends all definitions."⁴¹ For Beecher, LeConte, and Abbott, religion needed to be emancipated from the "outrageous complexity" and "unbearable systems of theology." The tool for this emancipation was the evolutionary perspective, which, explained Beecher, "will obliterate the distinction between natural and revealed religion."⁴² Accordingly, the remaining pure religion would be "definite, absolute and unchangeable" as it would breed "love," "justice," and "harmonies of intimacy and inter-

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communication.” Thickets of theological underbrush would be swept away as would, Beecher promised, “ancient dogmas which are either renounced or are falling into oblivion.”⁴³ As this happened, the ancient Augustinian distinction between the “city of man” and the “city of God” would collapse and the kingdom of God would become progressively manifest on earth.⁴⁴ Fueled by such millennial intentions, these optimistic evolutionists had few qualms about recasting old doctrines of Christendom. Consider, as a significant case, the doctrine of sin.

The Fact of Sin

The great English literary genius G. K. Chesterton once called “the fact of sin—a fact as practical as potatoes.” Aware that “certain new theologians dispute[d] original sin,” Chesterton retorted that original sin “is the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved.”⁴⁵ Perhaps so. Bad things happen and people do them. But squaring the traditional Christian account of sin—its origin and effects—with optimistic evolutionism still presented a hurdle to Beecher, LeConte, and Abbott. While they could hardly deny what Beecher called “the fact of sinfulness,” their new evolutionary theology served to undermine and transform the historic doctrine of original sin and its effects.

Beecher dedicated an entire chapter of *Evolution and Religion* to “The Sinfulness of Man.” Therein, he devoted considerable attention to what he called, “the whole theory of sin and its origin, that lie at the base of the great evangelical systems of Christianity.” His judgment was unequivocal. “I hate it,” he wrote repeatedly, as he denounced “the old theory of sin” for being “mischievous.” Further, it was “repulsive, unreasonable, immoral, and demoralizing.” He condemned the doctrine of inherited original sin with an autobiographical proclamation: “I inherited from my father and mother as pure a nature as ever descended to a child. There has [sic] no drop of Adam’s bad blood come through to me.” The narrative of Genesis 3 had value, he conceded. “If treated as a poem ... it is both harmless and pleasing.” Lyman Abbott called it “a beautiful fable.” If, however, it is treated as a “fact” or “as theology has for a thousand years treated it,” Beecher explained, “it is an awful morass, out of which have flowed down streams of mischief ... and poisonous influences.” Further, Beecher maintained a theological vision in which

no place is found for Adam, and no place for any allusion, even to the malformed and monstrous doctrine of the fall of the race in Adam, and its alleged terrific consequences, which have become the bed-rock on which theology has been built ... The fall of Adam and the imputation of his guilt to all his posterity was a bastard belief of the Jews, grown up, with other glosses and absurdities of Pharisaic theology ...⁴⁶

Not surprisingly, Beecher’s rejection of original sin had other theological implications. Maintaining the premise that “Adam’s sin was his own, and no one else’s,” Beecher concluded, “It never descended. There is none of it in all the world.” Clearly then, any doctrine of baptismal regeneration—the notion that the guilt of Adam’s sin could be washed away in the waters of baptism—was absurd. “As well one might say that education relieves men of the effects of Aesop’s Fables,” mocked Beecher.⁴⁷ Abbott, while less sarcastic, reached the same conclusion. “Now the [traditional Christian] doctrine of the Fall and of redemption,” he wrote, “is inconsistent with the doctrine of evolution. It is impossible to reconcile the two.”⁴⁸ But, this was not a great problem for him. In his chapter on “The Genesis of Sin” in *The Theology of an Evolutionist*, Abbott shrugged with these words: “Did Adam fall, six thousand years ago? It is immaterial.”⁴⁹ LeConte displayed even less concern for the Genesis narrative.

With traditional notions of original sin and the fall set aside, Beecher and his fellow optimists were free from traditional concerns about death being a consequence of the fall. After all, such real things as death and destruction, evil and struggle, could hardly be the consequences of a fable or misty legend. The fifth chapter of Romans may have taught that “sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin,” but whatever St. Paul may have intended by those words, Beecher and his colleagues considered themselves free to interpret the realities of death and evil according to their upbeat ideology of progressive evolutionism. So Beecher admitted that “the theory of Evolution is as much a theory of destruction and degradation as of development and building up ... [D]eath seems to be the instrument by which life itself is supplied with improvement and advancement.” But in the long run, it was all for the good because “death prepares the way for life,” he wrote.⁵⁰

Joseph LeConte was even more optimistic about the good to be found in evils of all sorts. His final chapter of *Evolution: Its Nature, Its Evidences, and Its Relation to Religious Thought* bore the title, “The Relation of Evolution to the Problem of Evil.”⁵¹ Was the traditional problem of theodicy in fact “sharpened by evolution” as many Christian scholars have asserted? Not for LeConte. Rather, in his law of evolution he claimed to have found the “philosophic alchemy which can transmute evil into good.”⁵² LeConte considered, in order, physical evil in the animal kingdom, physical evil in relation to humans, organic evil and disease, and moral evil. In each case his conclusion was the same. That which seemed evil at first, was “only seeming evil” and “rather a good in disguise.”⁵³ Evil of every sort—be it suffered by the individual struggling animal, by the hurting or diseased human, or be it “the most dreadful” moral evil—he explained, had “its roots in the necessary law of evolution. It [was] a necessary condition of all progress, and pre-eminently so of moral progress.”⁵⁴

With a grand display of question-begging and circular reasoning, LeConte justified evil after evil. For example, the only way to overcome natural evils such as “heat and cold, tempest and flood, volcanoes and earthquakes” and “the dread evil of disease” was knowledge of the laws of Nature.⁵⁵ Such knowledge could not be attained unless, first, natural evils existed and, second, unless the presence of those evils required humans to seek knowledge by which to avoid them. Since evil was the necessary prerequisite to the search for a means to overcome evil, evil, LeConte insisted, was actually good. “May we not, then, confidently generalize?” he asked. “May we not say that all physical evil is good in its general effect—that every law of Nature is beneficent in its general operation, and, if sometimes evil in its specific operation, it is so only through our ignorance?”⁵⁶ Ultimately then, proclaimed LeConte, “All that we call evil both in the material and the spiritual world is good.”⁵⁷

Of course, even such fantastic rhetorical maneuvering could not erase from plain view sin’s ubiquity. So Beecher, LeConte, and Abbott conceded that it was real. “[Since] all evolution, all progress, is from [a] lower to higher plane,” explained LeConte, “all evil consists in the dominance of the lower over the higher; all good in the rational use of the lower by the higher.”⁵⁸ He was echoing Henry Ward Beecher who had written years earlier “that sin springs from the struggle for the relative ascendancy of animal and spiritual in man’s double nature, and that the conflicts of life are simply the conflicts between the lower and the upper man.”⁵⁹ Abbott voiced the same theme: “Every man is two men; every man is a battle-ground in which the higher and the lower man are contending one against the other.” Hence he explained, “every sin is falling back into the animal condition.”⁶⁰ This was the seventh chapter of Romans read through the lens of progressive evolutionism. Sin was real. But man could save himself from it by following Christ’s example and overcoming his lower self. As men did this fine spiritual thing, the progressive evolution of society would hasten the arrival of heaven on earth.⁶¹

By Design

Was such a sublime prospect part of a grand divine plan? Even if LeConte, Beecher, and Abbott had satisfied themselves, as Darwin himself could not, that evil posed no barrier to theistic belief, had not Darwin at the very least vanquished Paley and rendered the argument from design the fossil of an extinct doctrine? Even if Abbott and his colleagues rejected the Bible as an infallible guide, the historic Christian faith had not repudiated St. Paul’s contention that God’s “invisible attributes have been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.” How, then, did these optimistic evolutionists respond? They did so in the predictable fashion, by recasting Paley in an evolutionary mold and embracing design as the handiwork of an immanent God.

Beecher admitted, “The doctrine of Evolution, at first sight, seems to destroy the *theory of intelligent design* in creation ... [The design theory] which has been a stable argument for the proof of the existence of God and his attributes, seems to have been shaken from its former basis.”⁶² But, just as evil “seemed” at first a problem for these men, so now evolution only “seemed” a challenge to the theory of “intelligent design.” Like Paley, Beecher argued by analogy, but on a grander scale. After rehearsing Paley’s argument for a watchmaker from the instance of finding a single watch, Beecher proposed that a watch factory “where watches are created in hundreds of thousands by machinery” was far more robust evidence of design:

If it be an argument of design that a man could make one watch, is it not a sublimer argument of design that there is a man existing who could create a manufactory turning out millions of watches, and by machinery too, so that the human hand has little to do but to adjust the parts already created by machines? If it be evidence of design in creation that God adapted one single flower to its place and functions, is it not greater evidence if there is a system of such adaptations going on from eternity to eternity? Is not the Creator of the system a more sublime designer than the creator of any single act?⁶³

Beecher was so fond of the argument that he multiplied it. He imagined the design of an oriental rug and then proposed “a higher design” in the human who constructed a loom that could continue the work of rug making “a thousand-fold more magnificently than human fingers did.” His conclusion was obvious: “Evolution, instead of obliterating the evidence of divine Design, has lifted it to a higher plane and made it more sublime.” He confidently gushed, “Design by wholesale is grander than design by retail.”⁶⁴

LeConte and Abbott echoed their elder optimist with similar affirmations of design. LeConte grounded his avowal of design in his conception of “an infinite immanent Deity behind phenomena.” He conceded that the old view of separate creative acts by a designing transcendent deity was no longer tenable. But this did not undercut all notions of intelligent design. “The removal of ... manlike directness of separate action can not destroy the idea of design, but only modify our conception of the Designer,” he explained. “What science, and especially evolution, destroys, therefore, is not the idea of design, but only our low anthropomorphic notions of the mode of working of the designer.”⁶⁵ Lyman Abbott revisited and revived Paley’s watch argument, but with a Beecheresque twist of fantasy in the form of an organic metaphor.

Suppose this watch which [the man] picks up and puts into his pocket, after he has carried it for a year, produces another watch that will keep time; does this show less intelligence, or more? Suppose this watch which he picks up and carries in his pocket drops

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from itself in a year's time a little egg, and out of that egg there comes a perfect watch a year later; does that show less intelligence or more? ... The processes of growth are infinitely more wonderful than the processes of manufacture.⁶⁶

Similarly, Abbott contrasted the intelligence required to make a wooden cuckoo bird for a cuckoo clock with the intelligence required to produce a living bird that hatches from an egg. In every instance, he proclaimed, "growth is more wonderful than manufacture." Hence design by evolution was more wonderful to the optimistic evolutionists than was design by fiat.

Christian Evolutionism as Utopian Ideology

Their grand project had been to recast the Christian faith in terms of a progressive evolutionary philosophy. Did their efforts issue in a Christian religion worthy of the name? Or had they crafted something, however ambitious, that substantively departed from both orthodox Christianity and received scientific opinion? Regardless, what do their efforts reveal about the nature of progressive ideology as it shaped the encounter between science and Christianity in late nineteenth-century America?

A generation ago there appeared a little book by Hungarian scholar Thomas Molnar (b. 1921) entitled *Utopia: The Perennial Heresy* in which he observed:

from time to time the belief spreads among men that it is possible to construct an ideal society. Then the call is sounded for all to gather and build it—the city of God on earth ... The dream—utopia—leads to the denial of God and self-divinization—the heresy.⁶⁷

A similar theme was voiced over half a century ago by Austrian philosopher Eric Voegelin (1901–1985) in his book, *The New Science of Politics*. Voegelin offered an analysis of the nature of ideology and described as its chief error, "the fallacious immanentization of the Christian eschaton," the attempt to make heaven on earth.⁶⁸ These twentieth-century European scholars understood some fundamentals that had escaped the view of the late-nineteenth-century's American optimistic evolutionists. These fundamentals included the grim truth that attempts to make heaven on earth invariably fail, that implementation of ideological schemes are more likely to create hellish consequences, that humans are not evolving into God, that Christianity has always insisted on the distinction between the creature and the Creator, and that Christianity is the religion of hope for a *kingdom* of God "not of this world."⁶⁹

Lodged in the optimistic hearts of theological evolutionism's proponents was an abiding commitment to a "superficial and dubious" ideology alluringly dressed in the language of the Christian religion. It was an ideology

of progress, the aim of which was no less than establishing what Joseph LeConte called "A Divine Kingdom on Earth."⁷⁰ The motives were noble enough. The successes of modern science carried the perceived threat of atheist materialism—a threat that needed to be answered and quashed without diminishing the grandeur of modern science in the process. Further, if the modern evolutionary perspective taught anything fixed, it seemed to teach that there were no fixed ideas, especially religious ideas. Thus "in order to reconcile religion and science, [these men] had to romanticize Christian experience" and to set aside "stale and rigid creeds" as fixed and fossilized remnants of bygone days. The only way to save Christianity, according to the optimistic evolutionists, was to alter it fundamentally by shedding historic doctrines, notably those associated with original sin, evil, sacramental theology, the divinity of Christ, divine transcendence and providence. The result, of course, was not genuine Christianity but pantheism. As one of Beecher's biographers has observed, "It appeared to be a brilliant maneuver which completely outflanked the menace of materialism."⁷¹ For the pantheist, either "everything is God" or "nothing is God."⁷² Recall that this was LeConte's analysis. Since materialism was intolerable, God must be fully immanent, so much so that his kingdom could be realized in humans and upon the earth. A tempting dream that is: collapsing the distinctions between heaven and earth, between the creature and the Creator, between the natural and the supernatural, all toward the ends of immanentizing the eschaton and humanity becoming like God. But was not the promise with which the serpent had tempted Eve, "you will be like God"?

Much of the optimistic evolutionists' project was animated by what one historian has called "a quest for cosmic comfort amid a fear that human beings confronted only an indifferent universe."⁷³ Since they accepted as a given the hegemony of evolutionary science, their self-appointed task was to recast Christianity in terms of evolutionism. Perhaps the richest irony of the entire project was the result: an ideology that was faithful neither to the Christianity they claimed to preserve nor to the science of evolutionary biology that would emerge in the twentieth century. While they transformed Christianity into pantheism, they advanced a squishy evolutionism barely recognizable to modern biology.

A Moral to the Story?

Perhaps this story suggests a moral that could be conveyed through a historical analogy. Imagine the science and religion of a fashionable and orthodox cosmologist in the fourteenth century. He would, of course, have embraced, with the blessing of both the church and established astronomical opinion, a Ptolemaic geocentric cosmology. But as the course of Western Civilization has shown, his doing so was, in fact, a mistake both theological

and scientific. Had a longer prudential vision been available to him, what would have been the “correct” thing to have done at the time? It would have been to take the remarkably humble approach of embracing a provisional agnosticism regarding the cosmological question while awaiting a fuller human understanding of the heavens.

If such a humble perspective was missing at the dawn of the Renaissance, is it any surprise that the upbeat, confident, progressive Americans of the late-Victorian era lacked it as well, flush as they were with enthusiasms for modern science, industrial capitalism, imperialism, and the rush of change?⁷⁴ Although the optimistic evolutionism of Beecher, LeConte, and Abbott was pretty thin gruel upon which to nourish a soul or a society, the enthusiasm for wedding the latest science with new-fangled Christianity proved irresistible.

Has the time now finally come at the dawn of the third millennium to set aside the humble approach that would have saved thinkers of past eras from their confident mistakes? Is now the time to forge a solid integration of evolution with Christianity? If recent publications are any indication, many scientists and Christians seem to think so as they go about developing and defending new species of theistic evolutionism.⁷⁵ Should this generation consider, instead, a less ambitious, but more difficult approach? It would require these actions. In science: Develop, extend, and investigate empirically biological evolution. Build energetically upon the strengths of evolutionary theory. Contend honestly with its weaknesses. In faith: Maintain fidelity to traditional Christian orthodoxy. Uphold historic confessions. Resist trendy ephemeral theological innovation. But in efforts to integrate evolution with Christianity, proceed with utmost caution. That is, before baptizing evolutionary perspectives with a “kenotic understanding of divine action”;⁷⁶ before wrangling about the challenges of “intelligent design” theorists or squabbling about contrary theistic claims for the full-sufficiency of Darwinian mechanisms;⁷⁷ before crafting a trendy Christian evolutionism expressly congenial to culturally fashionable sentiments regarding homosexuality, lesbianism, and transgenderism;⁷⁸ before claiming to have discovered evolutionary biology hidden in the doctrine of the incarnation; and especially before setting aside—in deference to the demands of evolutionary science—traditional creeds, confessions, and doctrinal formulations;⁷⁹ in short, before hurriedly pressing either Christian theology into the service of evolutionary theory or evolutionary theory into the service of Christian theology, might there be wisdom in patient and continued study? Might there be prudence in considering the option of a “provisional agnosticism” on the grand questions of exactly *how* and, perhaps even, *whether* to detail the ways evolutionary theory and the Christian faith are to be integrated? It is the option that would have saved both our pre-Copernican brothers and the Victorian optimistic evolutionists from errors,

both theological and scientific. Could it be the option that just might do the same for Christians contending with evolution today? ♦

Notes

- ¹“Beecher on Evolution,” *New York Times*, 7 January 1883, p. 2; J. David Hoeveler, *The Evolutionists: American Thinkers Confront Charles Darwin, 1860–1920* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 112 (salary); Debby Applegate, *The Most Famous Man in America: The Biography of Henry Ward Beecher* (New York: Doubleday, 2006).
- ²Henry Ward Beecher, “Evolution and Religion,” in *Henry Ward Beecher. A Sketch of His Career: With Analyses of His Power as a Preacher, Lecturer, Orator, and Journalist, and Incidents and Reminiscences of His Life*, ed. Lyman Abbott (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1883), 566, 573.
- ³William G. McLoughlin, *The Meaning of Henry Ward Beecher: An Essay on the Shifting Values of Mid-Victorian America, 1840–1870* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 5–6.
- ⁴James R. Moore, *The Post-Darwinian Controversies: A Study of the Protestant Struggle to Come to Terms with Darwin in Great Britain and America, 1870–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Jon H. Roberts, *Darwinism and the Divine in America: Protestant Intellectuals and Organic Evolution, 1859–1900* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988); Frederick Gregory, “The Impact of Darwinian Evolution on Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century,” in *God & Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science*, ed. David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 369–90; David N. Livingstone, *Darwin’s Forgotten Defenders: The Encounter Between Evangelical Theology and Evolutionary Thought* (Grand Rapids and Edinburgh: Eerdmans and Scottish Academic Press, 1987); and J. David Hoeveler, *The Evolutionists: American Thinkers Confront Charles Darwin, 1860–1920* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).
- ⁵Henry Ward Beecher, *Evolution and Religion* (New York: Fords, Howard & Hulbert, 1885), 1, 147.
- ⁶Joseph LeConte, *The Autobiography of Joseph LeConte*, ed. William Dallam Armes (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1903), 288–9; Lester D. Stephens, *Joseph LeConte: Gentle Prophet of Evolution* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 173–4; Timothy Odom Brown, “Joseph LeConte: Prophet of Nature and Child of Religion” (M.A. thesis, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1977), 108–18; 134–49.
- ⁷Ira V. Brown, *Lyman Abbott: Christian Evolutionist—A Study in Religious Liberalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953); and Henry Sloane Coffin, quoted in *ibid.*, vii.
- ⁸Lyman Abbott, ed., *Henry Ward Beecher. A Sketch of His Career: With Analyses of His Power as a Preacher, Lecturer, Orator, and Journalist, and Incidents and Reminiscences of His Life* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1883).
- ⁹Lyman Abbott, *The Evolution of Christianity* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1892), iv. Abbott’s other two books were *Christianity and Social Problems* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1897) and *The Theology of an Evolutionist* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1897).
- ¹⁰Rom. 1:18–22, 28–29a; English Standard Version.
- ¹¹George L. Murphy, “Christology, Evolution, and the Cross,” in *Perspectives on an Evolving Creation*, ed. Keith B. Miller (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 374–5.
- ¹²Charles Darwin to Asa Gray, 22 May 1860 in *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin*, vol. 8, ed. Frederick Burkhardt et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 224.
- ¹³Edward J. Larson, *Evolution: The Remarkable History of a Scientific Theory* (New York: The Modern Library, 2004), 92.
- ¹⁴Hoeveler, *The Evolutionists*, 104.
- ¹⁵Beecher, *Evolution and Religion*, 3, 50.
- ¹⁶*Christian Union* 26 (1882), quoted in Brown, *Lyman Abbott*, 141.
- ¹⁷Abbott, *The Evolution of Christianity*, 1.

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- ¹⁸Joseph LeConte, "Man's Place in Nature," *The Princeton Review* (1878), quoted in Stephens, *Gentle Prophet*, 161; and Joseph LeConte, *Evolution: Its Nature, Its Evidences, and Its Relation to Religious Thought*, 2d ed., rev. (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1901), 275.
- ¹⁹Abbott, *The Theology of an Evolutionist*, 76.
- ²⁰Quoted in Hoeveler, *The Evolutionists*, 105.
- ²¹Beecher, *Evolution and Religion*, 52.
- ²²Joseph LeConte to Sallie LeConte Davis, June 17, 1886, quoted in Stephens, *Gentle Prophet*, 180.
- ²³LeConte, *Evolution*, 280.
- ²⁴Beecher, *Evolution and Religion*, 41, 44, 46.
- ²⁵*Ibid.*, 48–9.
- ²⁶Abbott, *The Evolution of Christianity*, 25.
- ²⁷Beecher, *Evolution and Religion*, 46.
- ²⁸*Ibid.*, 52.
- ²⁹*Ibid.*, 51–2.
- ³⁰*Ibid.*, 115.
- ³¹*Ibid.*, 49–50. Regarding Dana, Beecher wrote, "No man is more trusted, more careful, more cautious than he."
- ³²LeConte, *Evolution*, 8; and Abbott, *The Evolution of Christianity*, 1.
- ³³LeConte's "six factors of evolution" were "1. Pressure of the environment. 2. Use and disuse of parts. 3. Natural selection. 4. Sexual selection. 5. Physiological selection. 6. Reason." His "five graded planes" were those of "chemical elements," "chemical compounds," "plant life," "sentient life," and "moral life." See Stow Persons, "Evolution and Theology in America," in *Evolutionary Thought in America*, ed. Stow Persons (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1956), 441–4; LeConte, *Evolution*, 73–88; and Stephens, *Gentle Prophet*, 167 ff.
- ³⁴LeConte, *Evolution*, 353; and LeConte, "Evolu[t]ion, An Element in Fundamental Religious Thought," quoted in Stephens, *Gentle Prophet*, 184. See especially chapter seven of LeConte, *Evolution*, "Some Logical Consequences of the Doctrine of The Divine Immanency" in which LeConte asserts that "Divine immanency carries with it the solution of many vexed questions."
- ³⁵Quoted in Stephens, *Gentle Prophet*, 187 and 179. See also, LeConte, *Evolution*, 353.
- ³⁶LeConte, *Evolution*, 356.
- ³⁷*Ibid.*, 355.
- ³⁸*Ibid.*, 351.
- ³⁹Abbott, *The Evolution of Christianity*, 18, 40. In *The Theology of an Evolutionist*, Abbott added, "There is no infallible authority. Infallible authority is undesirable" (p. 61).
- ⁴⁰Abbott, *The Theology of an Evolutionist*, 1–2.
- ⁴¹Abbott, *The Evolution of Christianity*, 23.
- ⁴²Beecher, *Evolution and Religion*, 52–3.
- ⁴³Beecher, *Evolution and Religion*, 52, 11; and Beecher, "Evolution and Religion," in Abbott, *Henry Ward Beecher*, 572.
- ⁴⁴As Abbott's biographer, Ira Brown, stated it, the goal of evolution "was the Kingdom of God on earth, a cooperative society based on self-sacrifice." See Brown, 148.
- ⁴⁵G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (1908; reprint, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 19.
- ⁴⁶Beecher, *Evolution and Religion*, 90–2; Abbott, *The Theology of an Evolutionist*, 43.
- ⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 97.
- ⁴⁸Abbott, *The Evolution of Christianity*, 206.
- ⁴⁹Abbott, *The Theology of an Evolutionist*, 43. For a more recent serious attempt to grapple with the "perceived conflict between the theory of evolution and Christian theology" regarding the doctrine of original sin, see Robin Collins, "Evolution and Original Sin," in *Perspectives on an Evolving Creation*, ed. Keith B. Miller (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 469–501. Here Collins introduces what he calls the "Historical/Ideal View" as a tool for exegesis of relevant passages in Romans 1, Romans 5, and Genesis 1–4.
- ⁵⁰Beecher, *Evolution and Religion*, 114–5.
- ⁵¹LeConte, "The Relation of Evolution to the Problem of Evil," in *Evolution*, 365–75.
- ⁵²*Ibid.*, 370.
- ⁵³*Ibid.*, 366–7.
- ⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 369, 373.
- ⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 366, 368.
- ⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 369.
- ⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 374.
- ⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 374–5.
- ⁵⁹Beecher, *Evolution and Religion*, 86.
- ⁶⁰Abbott, *The Evolution of Christianity*, 123; and Abbott, *The Theology of an Evolutionist*, 49.
- ⁶¹For further discussion of the evolutionary development of civilization in LeConte's thinking, see Lester D. Stephens, "Joseph LeConte's Evolutionary Idealism: A Lamarckian View of Cultural History," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 39 (July–Sept. 1978): 465–80. For LeConte's comments on Christ as the ideal for emulation, see "The Relation of Evolution to the Idea of the Christ," chap. 8 in *Evolution*.
- ⁶²Beecher, *Evolution and Religion*, 112–3. Emphasis added—this may be the first time the phrase "intelligent design" appears in the science-religion literature, well over a century before the emergence of the "intelligent design" movement of the 1990s.
- ⁶³*Ibid.*, 116.
- ⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 117, 115.
- ⁶⁵LeConte, *Evolution*, 346, 349.
- ⁶⁶Abbott, *The Theology of an Evolutionist*, 27.
- ⁶⁷Thomas Molnar, *Utopia: The Perennial Heresy* (London: Tom Stacey Ltd., 1972), v.
- ⁶⁸Eric Voeglin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952), 121.
- ⁶⁹For fuller treatment of the errors and evils of ideology, see Mark A. Kalthoff, "Contra Ideology," *Faith & Reason* 30 (autumn & winter 2005): 221–41; and Russell Kirk, "The Errors of Ideology" in *The Politics of Prudence* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 1993), 1–14.
- ⁷⁰Ira V. Brown, "Lyman Abbott: Christian Evolutionist," *The New England Quarterly* 23 (June 1950): 231; and LeConte, quoted in Lester D. Stephens, "Joseph LeConte's Evolutionary Idealism: A Lamarckian View of Cultural History," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 39 (July–September 1978): 476. See also, Joseph LeConte, "The Theory of Evolution and Social Progress," *The Monist* (July 1895): 481–500.
- ⁷¹William G. McLoughlin, *The Meaning of Henry Ward Beecher*, 54; and Hoeveler, *The Evolutionists*, 105.
- ⁷²Molnar, *Utopia*, 60.
- ⁷³Hoeveler, *The Evolutionists*, 107.
- ⁷⁴This is not to suggest that the optimistic evolutionists were without contemporary critics. For example, Francis M. Bruner (1833–1899), a theologian trained at Halle and l'Ecole de Paris before his American academic career at Abingdon and Eureka Colleges, came out with a polemical refutation at the turn of the century. See Francis M. Bruner, *The Evolution Theory—As Stated by M. LeConte and Applied by Dr. Lyman Abbott, Unsupported by the Phenomena of the World as Far as We Are Able To Know It: A Historical and Scientific Examination of the Claims of Evolutionists, as they are set forth in THE EVOLUTION OF CHRISTIANITY* (Des Moines: The Kenyon Printing and Mfg. Co., 1900).
- ⁷⁵Joan Roughgarden, *Evolution and Christian Faith: Reflections of an Evolutionary Biologist* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2006); Karl E. Peters, "Toward an Evolutionary Christian Theology," *Zygon* 42 (March 2007): 49–63; Keith B. Miller, ed. *Perspectives on an Evolving Creation*; Francis Collins, *The Language of God* (New York: The Free Press, 2006), 197–211, wherein Collins proposes "to rename theistic evolution as Bios through Logos, or simply BioLogos"; Denis Lamoureux, *Evolutionary Creation: A Christian Approach to Evolution* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008).
- ⁷⁶Murphy, "Christology, Evolution, and the Cross," 372 ff.
- ⁷⁷Collins, 181–95; and Roughgarden, 80–101.
- ⁷⁸See Roughgarden, 102–24; and Joan Roughgarden, *Evolution's Rainbow: Diversity, Gender, and Sexuality in Nature and People* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
- ⁷⁹Murphy, "Christology, Evolution, and the Cross," 378 ff. and 386 ff.