

Book Reviews

As an attempt to fill a gap in the history of science and religion by considering mid-twentieth-century evangelical scientists, the book meets with real success, if not unqualified success. The very brevity of the book—only 175 pages of text following the introduction—demands that important material be omitted. For example, Rios's treatment of the ASA's consideration, in the late 1960s and 1970s, of social issues "beyond evolution" could have at least mentioned, if not considered in depth, the 1970 book prepared under the auspices of the ASA, *Our Society in Turmoil*. And following the success of Carl Sagan's book and television series, *Cosmos*, ASA leaders began in 1984 to plan a five-program response that they hoped would rebut Sagan's naturalism before a nationwide audience. Neither this effort nor the publication of the contemporary ASA booklet, *Teaching Science in a Climate of Controversy*, which was distributed to 60,000 teachers in 1986, was even mentioned in Rios's book. And while exploring the RSCF's association with Inter-Varsity Fellowship, he neglects to treat comparably the ASA's association with such entities as the Moody Institute of Science or with the Evangelical Theological Society, an organization with whom the ASA held numerous joint conferences during the 1950s and 1960s. Examples of such omissions are many.

Nevertheless, *After the Monkey Trial* deserves careful attention, especially by readers of this journal. Even if the book does not provide the last word treating the history of twentieth-century evangelical engagement with science, what it does provide is important and very interesting. Rios shows how these devoted evangelical men, and a few women, engaged with science, accommodated their faith to its claims, and wrestled with their young-earth Christian brethren who strove to deny them any right to identify as creationists while they embraced evolution with their evangelical hearts.

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THE SLAIN GOD: Anthropologists and the Christian Faith by Timothy Larsen. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. 256 pages. Hardcover; \$45.00. ISBN: 9780199657872.

Throughout its history, anthropology has had an uneasy at best, hostile at worst, relationship with Christian faith. Most anthropologists have been atheists, and the discipline has forbade theological speculation in its discourse. Anthropology sees itself as the rational, secular, and natural science of people. The exclusion of religious thought from critical analysis has been far from a benign division of

labor. Anthropologists have a reputation for being openly hostile to Christianity. Their antagonism is especially strong for missionaries, who are deemed agents of the West, destroying traditional cultures. But, more than this, anthropologists find it difficult to relate to and understand religion as a whole, even the religions of the cultures they are investigating. As a result they have developed theories of religion that reduce it to functions of cultural arenas they understand better: cognitive uncertainty, psychological need, social unity, political legitimacy, symbolic meaning, and so forth.

Timothy Larsen is a historian at Wheaton College who studies nineteenth- and twentieth-century British Christian faith and thought. In this book, he examines six well-known British anthropologists, intertwining biography with anthropological theory. The six anthropologists studied are ordered historically, but also form a "ring composition" with regard to their individual relations to Christian faith, from atheists to believers to animist.

First is Edward Tylor, the founding "father" of anthropology in England. Tylor was raised as a Quaker, but gave up his faith and became openly antagonistic especially to Catholicism. He denied the existence of the spiritual world entirely in his attempt to create a positive science of people that would be legitimate in the secular academy. Larsen says that Tylor had locked religion and science into a "zero-sum struggle" (p. 25), and that once he had allowed reason in, "there was no apparent way to stop scepticism from undermining religion as a whole thereafter" (p. 35).

Next is James Frazer, the author of the popular classic in comparative religions, *The Golden Bough*. Frazer too had come from a Christian home, but embraced skepticism, "rationalism," and science as the replacement for religion. Larsen suggests,

While Frazer was ostensibly ... [making] savage practices more familiar and understandable, his covert intention was in all likelihood the reverse: to make familiar religious practices that his readers had always accepted as understandable come to appear strange and savage. (p. 48)

E. E. Evans-Pritchard, whom Larsen identifies as the center of the ring (p. 221), was a believing Christian throughout his adult life. He is a complex figure: the son of an Anglican clergyman who encountered real personal difficulties in adulthood (a drinking habit, a wife who committed suicide, and psychological war wounds), but who converted sincerely to Catholicism. His church attendance was not regular, but his faith included a strong personal devotional

life and an intellectual defense of religious belief and practice. This defense was conducted, first, by a demonstration of the rationality of so-called “primitive” religions; next, by a challenge to anthropology to reject positive science in favor of a humanist approach to social history (p. 110); and then, by a rejection of the notion that religion can be reduced to other arenas of life. “He who accepts the reality of spiritual beings,” stated Evans-Pritchard, “does not feel the same need for such explanations” (p. 99).

Mary Douglas, Larsen’s next anthropologist, was raised and remained a practicing and devout Catholic for her entire life. She especially defended the church and wove her commitment to it into her theorizing about the nature of hierarchy and its necessity for social life. Douglas is followed by Victor and Edith Turner, who began their adult married life as atheists, but converted to Catholicism as a result of their anthropological work on ritual in Africa. Victor Turner openly defended Christianity when describing his conversion:

It seemed more reasonable to hypothecate a purposive somebody behind the structure of the universe than a purposeless something ... if materialism be right, our thoughts are determined by irrational processes and therefore the thoughts which lead to the conclusion that materialism is right have no relation to reason. (p. 185)

Edith, however, wandered into quasi-animist thinking after Victor’s death, and now defends the existence of the “supernatural” in ways that would have helped Tylor make his point that it is all nonsense. The ring is complete.

Larsen’s book is helpful in providing background information for the history of the discipline and for demonstrating the complexity of its relation to Christian faith. The anthropologist La Fontaine had said, “Once you stop religious thought, you start thinking anthropologically” (p. 167). Yet, as Larsen points out, theology has been there all along as a conversation partner (p. 225). All of these anthropologists, whether hostile or friendly to faith, used biblical words, concepts, and analogies in their theorizing. Larsen concludes that “Christian thought continues to invite and repel anthropologists, to intrigue and to haunt them, even in the second half of the twentieth century and into the new millennium” (p. 226). Though a bit inclined to “purple prose,” the book will be valuable to Christian students and scholars of anthropology who would like to find ways to incorporate faith into the discipline.

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THE TERRITORIES OF SCIENCE AND RELIGION by Peter Harrison. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015. 300 pages, including 100 pages of notes, bibliography, and index. Hardcover; \$30.00. ISBN: 9780226184487.

A revised version of Peter Harrison’s 2011 Gifford Lectures was recently published as a monograph under the title *The Territories of Science and Religion*. The book lays out an in-depth study of how the modern concepts of religion and science emerged in European history and grew to take on the prominent roles that they have today. Harrison identifies the medieval virtues of *religio* and *scientia* as important progenitor concepts, and by following the story of their evolution, he expands a historical narrative developed in his previous work. The lecture format makes for a bit of redundancy from chapter to chapter, but the interleaving themes are complex and merit repetition. In any case, the writing is crisp, the documentation is extensive, and the arguments are clear. One of the book’s most original and important contributions is the recovery of a close historical connection between the world of value and moral normativity on the one hand and the world of factual knowledge and belief on the other. In the words of the author, the focus on virtues offers “an entirely new perspective on these issues” and allows us “to more closely relate the history of moral philosophy to the history of science” (p. xi).

As Harrison reminds us straightaway, our modern concepts of religion and science are not permanent categories that map neatly onto distinct territories or natural kinds of human activity. To use his geopolitical example from chapter 1, our concepts of religion and science are historically contingent in the same way that our concepts of Israel and Egypt are. It is meaningless to talk about the relationship between the nations of Israel and Egypt in the year 1600, because those nations did not exist at that time. Similarly, it does not make much sense to discuss the relationship between religion and science in 1600, because people then did not organize their thinking in this way. Of course, there were ideas, beliefs, and practices through which people served God and conceptualized physical reality, just as there were lands and territories in the region where the states of Israel and Egypt lie now. However, prior to the modern era, people’s activities were not aggregated in ways that correspond to our current categories of religion and science. The use of our categories to explain those activities can only obscure our understanding of historical reality. The historian’s job is to reverse the order of explanation, so as to show us where our modern concepts came from, and thereby to explain how we got from there to here.