

Book Reviews

with history and primary sources, but very light on insight about the nature of science-religion tensions and how to resolve them; those looking for a new angle on these perennial problems may need to look elsewhere. But for those who desire to immerse themselves in all the intriguing commentary about the waters above the firmament throughout the first seventeen centuries of Christian history, this book will be a real treat.

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THE WAR THAT NEVER WAS: Evolution and Christian Theology by Kenneth W. Kemp. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020. 234 pages. Paperback; \$28.00. ISBN: 9781532694981.

In *The War That Never Was*, Kenneth W. Kemp roundly rejects commonplace belief among contemporary writers that a state of “warfare” exists between modern science and religion. On the scientific side, Kemp focuses narrowly on prevailing theory in the modern “paleoetiological sciences” of origins in geology and biology—especially Darwinian evolutionary science. On the religious side, his argument is confined mainly to Christian theology as it engages this kind of science. Contrary to very strong contemporary currents of opinion on both sides, Kemp contends that there never really has been a “war” between these sciences and Christian theology, and that there is no such conflict between them now.

In the introductory chapter, Kemp explains that his thesis does not stand on acceptance of Stephen Jay Gould’s well-known evasive proposal that science and religion are “non-overlapping *magisteria*,” so that they simply *cannot* be in conflict. For (so Kemp) it is untrue that religion trades only in *values* (so Gould). The Christian religion, at least, stands on purported *facts*, too, such as the alleged occurrence of miracles. In Kemp’s view, Christian theology can and does overlap at some points with the concerns and inquiries of scientists. This means that deep conflict, or “war,” between this religion and secure science is possible in theory. He specifies precisely that the potential conflict is not between ontological naturalism and supernaturalism, as often believed, but is rather a potential “epistemic conflict” on matters of both methodology and substance. He seeks to show, however, that apparently deep conflicts that have erupted and become definitive evidence for the thesis of “warfare” are, despite the prominence of certain bellicose figures on both sides, a byproduct of an urgent need to revise old ideas in the face of disruptive new ones. Kemp portrays the history of such

public clashes as, more deeply, an ongoing effort of thinkers to adapt traditional religious articulations to new religious-relevant discoveries in science, and thereby to preserve “peace” between the two great sources of truth.

Aside from the opening chapter, Kemp’s defense of this thesis is historical rather than merely theoretical in the abstract. The main body of the book is a succinct yet impressively detailed and well-documented tour of historical episodes that supposedly exemplify the alleged “warfare.” Whether Kemp achieves his aim or not (readers’ opinions are bound to be mixed), it is safe to say that the discussion brings a fresh and forcefully defended perspective to these old and (so we may think) worn instances of apparent “war” between science and theology. I believe that this book is worth reading just for the historical accounts themselves, apart from the controversial conclusions that Kemp draws from them.

The selected episodes are unsurprising: developments in nascent pre-Darwinian geology that ignited flare-ups between this new science and traditional readings of Genesis 1-11; the fiery debate between Thomas Huxley and Samuel Wilberforce over Darwinian theses at Oxford in 1860; the famous Scopes Trial of 1925 and the anti-evolution campaign that followed afterwards; and finally, the intense curriculum debates over inclusion of creation science (young-earth science) and intelligent design theory that were recently adjudicated by American courts. All these incidents appear to prove that the thesis of inherent “warfare” is obviously true. Kemp seeks rigorously to show that it is false.

As for conflicts between geology and traditional readings of Genesis over the age of the earth, the length of the “days” of creation in Genesis 1, the story of Noah’s Flood, and the story of Adam and Eve and the Fall, Kemp shows in carefully documented fashion that a great many Christian thinkers—probably a majority in America and the United Kingdom—had minimal difficulty in finding ways to adjust their readings of Genesis to accommodate the creation story plausibly enough to the emerging science. He discusses the eventual agreement of geologists that a worldwide flood did not happen, but not alternative readings. Further, I do not think he deals adequately with the problem that geology creates for doctrines connected with belief in a world-ruinous Fall. This problem persists now in geology and is magnified by challenges that Darwinian science poses to traditional lapsarian theodicy.

Notably, Kemp also omits the positive role that discoveries of creation stories in the Ancient Near East played in helping scholars to make nonconcordist critical adaptations to geology that are more plausible (so I believe) than the ones Kemp cites—Day-Age theories, Gap theories, and the like. Newly found ability to read Genesis in its own historical and literary-theological terms, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, has practically removed pressures that led to these somewhat strained solutions, and appeal to this approach, among all but a minority of conservative scholars, would have added considerable strength to Kemp's thesis.

Meanwhile, as for the famous debate between Huxley and Wilberforce, Kemp carefully and convincingly contends that neither Huxley nor Wilberforce can rightly be understood as generic representatives of their respective contemporary constituencies in science and religion. Numerous Darwinians were reticent to take the aggressively antireligious metaphysical stance that Huxley took. Likewise, numerous theologians found the anti-Darwinian posture of Wilberforce precipitous and premature at best. Despite difficulties (especially with the thesis of natural selection), many of them had begun to see promising ways of reconciling evolution with belief in divine purpose and design. Rather than "warfare," Kemp argues that this debate shows that new Darwinian ideas posed huge challenges to Christian thinkers in both religion and science. Anti-evolutionary bellicosity prevailed primarily among Protestant thinkers in decidedly conservative denominations, as it continues to do now. On the other side, anti-religious use of Darwinism came mainly from thinkers who were atheists for a variety of reasons. Kemp contends, however, that a quieter, larger grouping worked in service of "peace."

The same pattern (so Kemp) holds with the legendary Scopes Trial of 1925. Kemp provides a succinct yet factually detailed and insightful account (perhaps worth the price of the book for some readers), and in that context contends similarly that on William Jennings Bryan's side, the conflict was the product of mainly moral concerns born in part by theological mistakes on his part. Likewise, on Scopes's defense's side, hostility toward religion was the product of extreme overreach, most especially by the lead attorney, Clarence Darrow, whose atheistic dogmatism made his critique of religion "culpably imprecise." I recommend Kemp's incisive account of the trial for its own sake as riveting history, but I also encourage readers to carefully consider his conclusion that the

trial, monumentally famous as it is, "cannot provide any general insight into the relationship between science and Christian theology, or religion."

The final chapter will likely be of keen interest for its assessments of creation science and intelligent design theory offered as alternative sciences. As for the former, Kemp reiterates what other historians have documented: belief in a young earth had almost universally lost credibility among Christian thinkers in the West by around 1800 until its unexpected resurgence in America during the 1970s. Before then, its main advocates had been followers of Ellen White, the seminal prophetess of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, whose prophecies about science found print in the writings of a scientifically untrained high school teacher named George McCready Price (1924); its horizon widened mainly in American churches via the efforts of Henry Morris, a hydraulic engineer, after 1960. Kemp strongly agrees with the decision of the courts: creation science is a version of religion, not science. Moreover (so Kemp), this articulation of Christianity can by no means serve as representative of historic or mainstream Christian approaches to science.

As for intelligent design, as defended mainly by William Dembski and Michael Behe, Kemp offers a fairly detailed analytical summary and critique of each presentation. He concludes that the approach is methodologically precipitous and premature in its appeal to "irreducible complexity" at cellular levels for an inference of design. And, at any rate, formulations of intelligent design should not be invoked as generally representing the Christian religion vis-à-vis science. Further, Kemp judges that both versions of creationism do more harm to the credibility of Christianity than to Darwinian science. The "war" they wage against key aspects of Darwinism cannot rightly be construed as at all typical of Christian theology on this science.

In conclusion, Kemp expresses hope that "peace" between modern paleoetiological science and Christian theology may prevail, as theorists on both sides resist "war" and persist as they have generally been doing for more than a century now in "the necessity of rethinking and adjusting to the frontier between science and theology." I strongly recommend this book to readers of this journal for its many strengths, including defense of its main thesis, and I share in the hope that his optimistic prediction proves true.

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