
JAMES C. UNGUREANU

Historians of science and religion usually trace the origins of the “conflict thesis,” the notion that science and religion have been in perennial “conflict” or “warfare,” to the historical narratives of John William Draper (1811–1882) and Andrew Dickson White (1832–1918). While Draper and White have been designated cofounders of the conflict thesis, there has been little research on how contemporaries responded to their narratives. This paper examines the early reception of these narratives by considering the extensive commentary they received in British and American periodicals from 1856 to 1900. Sampling a selection of this material suggests that while many rejected Draper and White’s interpretation of the past, many others agreed with them in affirming that theological dogmatism came into conflict with the advance of human knowledge. This essay also suggests that Draper and White may have had a more nuanced position about the history of science and religion than has been contended by modern scholars. Whatever their intentions, however, their historical narratives had the unintended consequence of creating in the minds of their contemporaries and later generations the belief that science and religion have been and are at war.

Most historians of science and religion agree that stories about the “conflict” or “warfare” between science and religion were first fully articulated in the late nineteenth century, specifically among Anglo-American writers. They usually trace the origins of the “conflict thesis,” the notion that science and religion are irrevocably at war, to two nineteenth-century works—John William Draper’s History of the Conflict between Religion and Science (1874) and Andrew Dickson White’s A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom (1896).

Acknowledgements: I am grateful to Peter Harrison, Ian Hesketh, Ron Numbers, Bernie Lightman, and Ted Davis for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay. I would also like to express my thanks to the anonymous referee for Church History, who provided encouraging and helpful comments.

James C. Ungureanu is an honorary research fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, University of Queensland.

1See, for example, early claims in Colin A. Russell, R. Hooykaas, and David C. Goodman, The ‘Conflict Thesis’ and Cosmology (Milton Keynes: The Open University Press, 1974); Owen
As David Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers argued in the mid-1980s in the pages of this very journal, it was mainly the writings of Draper and White that instilled in the “public mind a sense of the adversarial relationship between science and religion.”

But as is widely recognized today, scholars from various disciplines have systematically dismantled almost every facet of these narratives, many now labeling them “myths about science and religion.” Yet for all this work in “demythologizing” the relationship between science and religion, there is still much to be done in charting the production, diffusion, and reception of such narratives. As David N. Livingstone has observed, historians have been so concerned with debunking myths about science and religion that they have perhaps ignored the important task of uncovering and scrutinizing the cultural functions such narratives performed.

This essay seeks to address part of this problem by examining a sample of the extensive commentary Draper and White received in British and American periodicals from 1856 to 1900. It needs to be noted at the outset that Christianity faced dramatic challenges during the period. Advances in the natural and historical sciences, whether intentional or not, seemed to many a direct assault on the Christian faith. Debates about the character of Christian faith raged both inside and outside the church, and out of these debates emerged new ways of thinking about nature, man, and God. As church historian Linda Woodhead has argued, the nineteenth century witnessed the “reinvention” of Christianity. Those who rejected traditional doctrines of orthodoxy—yet claimed to remain theists—often adhered to some form of liberal Christianity. Indeed, this new or “reinvented” Christianity was one of the defining features of nineteenth-century liberal Protestantism.


3The literature is extensive—accessible overviews may be found in Ronald L. Numbers (ed.), Galileo Goes to Jail and Other Myths about Science and Religion (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); and Ronald L. Numbers and Kostas Kampourakis, eds., Newton’s Apple and Other Myths about Science (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).


Nineteenth-century liberal Protestantism generally responded to higher criticism and scientific naturalism by transforming rather than abandoning the faith. For the religious liberal, there was an “acute sense of the need for a reformation of Christianity,” an attempt to accommodate Christianity to the modern era. Recognizing that advances in the natural and historical sciences had supposedly contradicted established religious ideas, liberal Protestants attempted to ameliorate the emerging malaise by readjusting or reconstructing the meaning of “religion” itself. By the last decades of the century, “New Theology” or “free religion” movements had found adherents on both sides of the Atlantic.

What this new, or freer religion, looked like was deeply contested. But regardless of how it was conceived, many men and women in the nineteenth century believed that the reconciliation of science and religion depended on it. Perhaps the single most important strategy used by liberal Protestants and religionists at the end of the century was turning “theology” into a pejorative. By contrasting the ideal of free, progressive scientific inquiry against the authoritative, reactionary methods of theology, religious liberals imagined dogma as the true obstacle to modern thought. Thus, conflict occurred not between scientific truth and religious truth but between contesting religious ideas. If religion would only rid itself of dogmatism and ecclesiastical authority, science and religion would be in harmony. Many liberal Protestants believed that the separation of religion from theology was the best approach to bridging the growing divide between modern thought and ancient faith, and therefore for bringing about reconciliation between science and religion.

The controversy surrounding discussions over “free religion” or the “New Theology” is reflected in the public response to Draper and White. In fact, I contend that Draper and White must be placed within this wider religious context. While the majority of scholarly historical opinion has pitted Draper and White as antagonists rather than harmonizers, it seems to me that a closer reading of their respective works demonstrates a more nuanced position. It is often mentioned, but left unanalyzed, that Draper’s History of the Conflict was largely a compilation and condensation of previously published works. Most importantly, Draper had published his History of the

---

6Ibid., 7.
Intellectual Development of Europe in 1863, and here he made a crucial distinction that most historians of science have forgotten or ignored. In discussing the so-called “paganization” of Christianity under Emperor Constantine, for example, Draper emphatically distinguished between Christianity and “ecclesiastical organizations.” “The former,” he wrote, “is a gift of God; the latter are the product of human exigencies and human invention, and therefore open to criticism, or, if need be, to condemnation.” He also argued that the paganization of Christianity had resulted in the “tyranny of theology over thought” and declared that those “who had known what religion was in the apostolic days, might look with boundless surprise on what was no ingrafted upon it, and was passing under its name.” Even his notorious History of the Conflict, under closer inspection, continues to make such distinctions, such as when he argued that he would only consider the “orthodox” or “extremist” position and not the moderate one. He expressed concern that “traditionary faith” was leading the “intelligent classes” to give up on religious faith entirely. His narrative was thus intended to show that the decline of religious faith was a direct consequence of a politicized or “materialized” Christianity, not science.8

White shared much of the same sentiments in his historical narratives. History showed, according to White, that “interference with Science in the supposed interest of religion, no matter how conscientious such interference may have been—has resulted in the direst evils both to Religion and Science, and invariably.” But by separating religion from theology, White could denounce that the “most mistaken of all mistaken ideas” was the “conviction that religion and science are enemies.” While science has conquered “dogmatic theology,” he argued, it will “go hand in hand with Religion.” For White, science was an aid to religion, encouraging its “steady evolution” into more purified forms.9

When we examine the reviews, we find that, on the one hand, many liberal Protestants implicitly accepted such historical narratives because they had already independently fostered such narratives. They thus agreed with Draper and White that traditional theology or orthodoxy had proved wholly unable to engage science in fruitful conversation and, therefore, that theology needed to be thoroughly modernized. The more religiously liberal

press thus welcomed these narratives as genuine attempts at reconciling science and religion. On the other hand, the more religiously conservative or orthodox, while recognizing their attempts at reconciling religion and science, nevertheless vilified Draper and White as instigating conflict. This turned out to be a prescient warning. As we shall see, the liberal Protestant reformulation of religion was a risky strategy that ultimately backfired. Draper and White had lost control of their narratives to a new generation of religious skeptics and unbelievers who saw such liberal attempts at reformulating the ideas of God and religion as gratuitous and unnecessary. Science, and particularly evolution, could be invoked to explain all phenomena, from the history of the formation of the universe to the origin and development of the human body, including religion itself. Thus, in a remarkable twist of irony, both orthodox believers and radical unbelievers found themselves in concord: if theology was found unbelievable or unnecessary, so must be religion. What, then, was the point of holding onto it? If science can answer all questions, religion was superfluous remnant of primeval mankind. If religion choked free inquiry, it must die. Draper and White, then, were attacked by orthodox and unbelievers alike. As we shall see, whereas the orthodox confronted Draper and White about their vague formulations of religion, unbelievers accused them of losing their nerve.

I. RESPONDING TO CONFLICT

John William Draper’s (1811–1882) scientific work was overwhelmingly well received. As a professor of chemistry and medicine at New York University, his early studies in chemistry and physiology earned him such accolades as “original,” “ingenious,” “masterly,” “profound,” and even “reverent.” When he turned from science to historical writing, he received numerous flattering letters from well-known figures. Scottish publisher Robert Chambers (1802–1871), for example, thought his *Intellectual Development* was a “brilliant work.” Irish physicist John Tyndall (1820–1893) believed it

---

had “courage as well as ability.” American historian George Bancroft (1800–1891) “immediately read every word of it,” adding that “it is my hope that you will lead and encourage men to the better experience of reflective judgment and clearer perception of the universality of law.” American “cosmic philosopher” John Fiske (1842–1901) told his fiancée that while he thought Draper was “lame” as a classical scholar, he completely agreed with his assessment that medieval Christianity had been a “gigantic swindle” and a manifold of “iniquities.”

More importantly, a number of American religiously liberal magazines viewed Draper’s *Intellectual Development* as an entirely “Protestant” project. *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* gushed that no argument “so magnificent has been essayed since Milton undertook to ‘assert eternal Providence, and justify the ways of God to man.’” The *North American Review* interpreted Draper’s theory of history as the “outgoing of the will of the immutable Creator; and Christianity is not the growth of the human intellect, but the gift of God.” The Unitarian *Christian Examiner* found the work clear, earnest, and reverent in tone and put Draper in “favorable comparison with the pedantic dogmatism of Buckle, or the frequent harsh austerity of Comte.”

Across the Atlantic, the *Athenaeum* celebrated Draper’s *Intellectual Development* as “the most instructive and complete of all which have yet been written with a similar ambition.” Unsurprisingly, the leading Broad Church Anglican and driving force behind the *Essays and Review* (1860), Henry B. Wilson, writing for the *Westminster Review*, called it a “great work” and a “valuable contribution to the study of the philosophy of history.” Draper demonstrated, wrote Wilson, “how human life in society, as well as in the individual, is subject to the dominion of law.” In a later issue, English jurist Sheldon Amos praised it as “encyclopædic,” “graceful,” “eloquent,” and “indisputably true.” He agreed with Draper that the influence of Constantine upon the course of Christian history changed it forever, ultimately leading to its “paganisation.” Amos also noted that “we are apt to overlook what Christianity was once, and what in its own essence

---

11 All in the Draper Family Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C. (hereafter “Draper Family Papers”): Robert Chambers to John W. Draper, 23 June 1864, container 2; John Tyndall to John W. Draper, July 15, 1863, container 7; and George Bancroft to John W. Draper, 1 October 1865, container 1.


it is still.” Constantine thus “prostituted” the simple and pristine message of Christ “in order to reinvigorate the putrid mass of the Roman Empire.”

When *History of the Conflict* first appeared in 1874, Draper continued to receive numerous letters of support. Bancroft, for example, had informed him that he “sent a copy of your wonderful book to Prince [Otto von] Bismarck, with a letter touching on all the points, which you could have wished me to notice.” “No man in America,” he wrote, “could have come near which you have accomplished. You bring to your work a knowledge of the natural sciences and of the history of man in all his relation.” When Tyndall caught wind of Draper’s new book, he also wrote to him to tell him that “no intelligence that I have lately received is more agreeable to me than that which informed me of your intention to give us a ‘History of the Conflict between Religion and Science.’” Later, in his “Apology for the Belfast Address,” Tyndall recommended to his readers “Dr. Draper’s important work entitled ‘History of the Conflict between Religion and Science.’”

As with his earlier work, Draper’s *History of the Conflict* received many favorable reviews from the liberal press. For example, a reviewer for *Appleton’s Journal*, incidentally an organ of the same publisher that published the writings of both Draper and White, praised it for its “peculiar force,” and “lasting influence,” observing that the conflict between religion and science had become the topic of discussion “of every thoughtful man.” The heart of the matter, he explained, was the “religious question”—namely, its changes, survival, and future. Even a local newspaper like the *New Orleans Bulletin* understood that Draper was not just tracing the history of science but also the “rise and progress of religion.” A reviewer for the *New York Evangelist* aptly summarized the view of many liberal Protestant readers, describing it as the “most powerful argument within my knowledge in defense of Protestantism and modern civilization.”

Still, if the religiously liberal press were quick to praise Draper for his progressive views, many also attempted to moderate or correct his
terminology, particularly his imprecise use of the term “religion” in his title. A reviewer for the *New Orleans Monthly*, for example, recognized that Draper was “not opposed to Christianity,” but he did question his choice of terms. Strictly speaking, the conflict is between “the church and science—the church being regarded as an organization, local or more general, embodying a system of religious belief.” The *Universalist Quarterly and General Review* agreed that Draper needed to amend the title of his book from “Religion” to “Church”—or more precisely still, the “Roman Church.” Nevertheless, the reviewer believed that the question of the relationship between religion and science was “the question which is now agitating the world of thought.” Similarly, Unitarian clergyman Thomas Hill maintained that the “title of Dr. Draper’s book is a mistake.” He thought the book did demonstrate, however, that conflict between science and Christianity first arose “when the church had been corrupted into a political engine, and a money-grasping corporation.” This corrupted church persecuted science and religion. “For every martyr of science,” Hill wrote, “history can show a thousand martyrs of religion, slain by the ecclesiastical powers of Rome.” The *Westminster Review* also thought Draper’s latest work should have been titled “History of the Conflict between Dogma and Science” and not religion and science. It is in “every case those formulas which have been invented for ecclesiastical purposes, rather than the religious sentiment, pure and simple, with which science is in antagonism.” Thus, despite their critique of his phraseology, they all agreed with Draper that the conflict began when the Christian Church attained political power.18

Other reviews reflect the incongruity and often strong disagreements between contending liberal sects. For example, the increasingly radical *Index* of the Free Religious Association, an American organization that called for the emancipation of religion from all “dogmatic traditions,” heavily advertised Draper’s *History of the Conflict* in its “Popular Books” column, placing his work alongside others by J. S. Mill, Charles Darwin, John Fiske, Thomas H. Huxley, John Tyndall, Herbert Spencer, George H. Lewes, John Lubbock, Edward Clodd, Friedrich A. Lange, William E. H. Lecky, and Friedrich Max Müller. Its editors responded to those who wished to amend Draper’s title by observing that the “church” was the only “religion” Christendom had known for eighteen centuries.19

19Dr. Hill on the Struggle of Science,” *Index* 6, no. 280 (May 6, 1875): 208–209. See also E. L. Youmans, “Draper and his Critics,” *Index* 6 no. 285 (June 10, 1875): 269; and Amasa M. Eaton,
Reviewers in the *Christian Union*, however, reveal more carefully measured praise. Judging by its title alone, one reviewer remarked that it was a total failure. Its central weakness was its “inability to distinguish between actual religious feeling and the dogmas which are superimposed upon that feeling rather than resulting from its development.” Another commentator argued that Draper was no atheist, “as some over-candid religionists are fond of asserting.” Draper’s God, however, was nevertheless an “impersonal God.” Such theism, the reviewer remarked, “can have no influence upon the life; it can inspire no fear, no hope; it makes no action different from what it would have been to the avowed atheist.” Yet another commentator faulted Draper for not distinguishing between “the Latin Church and Christianity.” But he agreed with Draper that the early church committed a “gigantic blunder” when “she allied herself with the civil powers.” One final commentator lamented Draper’s biases, averring that they have needlessly offended “his Christian readers” and, more importantly, destroyed “his influence as a historian.” In truth, science and religion are “by nature complementary, not antagonistic.” It is only the “dogmatists in either camp that seek for quarrels or impugn each other’s motives.”

While many of the more conservative periodicals agreed that Draper was attempting to reconcile religion and science, they insisted he ultimately failed. Despite his irenic intentions, they argued, his work could only lead to further antagonism and even unbelief. Presbyterian theologian Henry B. Smith (1815–1877), for instance, sharply criticized Draper’s *Intellectual Development*. While Draper was clearly not among the skeptical materialists, the drift of his argument, Smith warned, will “encourage those speculations” and ultimately enthrone “physical laws as supreme.” What is more, he marveled at “how a believer in God and a divine government, and in man’s immortal destiny, can advocate such a view.” The work was, therefore, a “mistake and a failure.” Similarly, a reviewer for the *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* recognized that while Draper proclaimed a “personal God” and “Sovereign Constructor of the Universe,” these proclamations were vague and undefined. In fact, Draper had undermined these pious remarks when he argued that divine intervention was “derogatory to the thorough and absolute sovereignty of God.” A universe wholly independent of the sustentation, guidance, and control of God made religious belief superfluous.

---


Draper’s philosophy, then, could only lead to a “dogma of infidelity and atheism.” Moreover, by reciting the “exaggerations, corruptions, and superstitions that have obtained credence, through the misleading and perversion of man’s moral and religious nature,” Draper’s work could only bring about contempt for “all belief in religion and supernatural agencies.”

Other critical reviews were often very conflicted. This is partly the result of Draper’s apparent anti-Catholic rhetoric, which most Protestants viewed by default if not by admission as “pro-Protestant,” irrespective of where they leaned theologically. The Nonconformist, for instance, recognized that Draper’s sympathies lay with Protestant Christianity and that he sought the “reconciliation of religion and science.” But Draper ultimately disappointed, and thus the reviewer bemoaned that his work could have been an “Eirenikon by all who believe, both that the Bible gives a true and authoritative revelation from God, and that the book of nature cannot lie.”

The Methodist Quarterly Review, which had once praised Draper’s scientific work, believed his History of the Conflict was “overdrawn.” Other conservative periodicals blasted Draper’s attempted reconciliation as a charade. A reviewer for Scribner’s Monthly, for example, accused Draper’s irenic intentions as “a thinly disguised attack, not only upon Christian revelation, but all religion outside of the creed.” The Presbyterian Quarterly and Princeton Review could not find any clear definitions of either “science” or “religion” in Draper’s book. Indeed, the reviewer found it difficult to discern whether Draper believed in God or the immortality of the soul at all.

But the most critical reviews came, perhaps unsurprisingly, from Catholic periodicals. Orestes A. Brownson (1803–1876), a New England Transcendentalist convert to Roman Catholicism, believed that the positive reception of Draper’s work was a sign that society had become profoundly naïve. While Draper acknowledged a belief in a personal God, the admission, Brownson argued, “seems to be only a verbal concession, made to the prejudices of those who have some lingering belief in Christianity.” Cast in a “purely materialistic mould” and written to show that “all philosophy, all religion, all morality, and all history are to be physiologically explained, that is, by fixed,
inflexible, and irreversible natural laws,” Draper only offered a pretended reconciliation. Thus, despite his profession of a “Supreme Being,” the “living and ever-present God, Creator, and upholder of the universe, finds no recognition in his physiological system.” His philosophy, in the final analysis, was nothing but “pure materialism and atheism.”

An interesting feature of Brownson’s review is that he accused Protestantism of creating men like Draper. He explained that Protestantism has always been “the religion of the intellect.” But this has come at a cost: “Philosophy, science, Biblical criticism, and exegesis, the growth of liberal ideas, and the development of the sentiments and affections of the heart, have made an end of Protestantism.” From its inception, Protestantism had gradually moved away from its intellectual roots and developed into a “vague philanthropy, a watery sentimentality, or a blind fanaticism, sometimes called Methodism, sometimes Evangelicalism.” The Catholic Church is the “only living religion that does, or can, command the homage of science, reason, free thought, and the uncorrupted affections of the heart.”

Brownson returned to Draper in another intensely critical review for his own magazine, Brownson’s Quarterly Review. Like many other conservative readers, Brownson could not find a clear definition of either religion or science in Draper’s book. He argued that a conflict between “religion and science” was impossible, for they were “two parts of one dialectic whole.” He claimed that Draper had conflated all religions, from gross fetishism to debased polytheism to absurd fable and obscene rite and made Christianity responsible for it all. This was and still is, he argued, the rhetorical strategy of “Protestant Christianity.” Indeed, according to Brownson, Draper and was firmly rooted in the Protestant heritage.

The Catholic World also roundly condemned Draper’s narrative. It was a “farrago of falsehoods, with an occasional ray of truth, all held together by the slender thread of a spurious philosophy.” Draper willfully misrepresented Catholic doctrines and confounded Catholicism with a number of vague and incongruous beliefs. His history was an unbroken tissue of “fatuous drivel.” According to the reviewer, Draper, whatever his good intentions, is the true instigator of conflict, not the Catholic Church. He may claim the reality of divine governance and the immortality of the soul, but “his whole book,” the reviewer explained, “is a cumbersome and disjointed argument in favor of necessity, as opposed to free agency; of law, as opposed to Providence.”

---

Like Brownson, the reviewer believed Draper was repeating and multiplying the “old, time-worn, oft-refuted, and ridiculous stories which stain the pages of long-forgotten Protestant controversialists.” The real concern over Draper’s book was the “unhealthy condition of the public mind which can hail its appearance with welcome.” Its positive reception thus exemplified the “diseased mind” of the age.²⁶

Other readers reveal just how easily Draper’s narrative could be appropriated for anti-religious purposes. A certain Joseph Treat had sent him a meandering and incoherent letter, describing the need for a revolution in science. He argued that he could “demonstrate” that all science was based upon an incredible falsehood—namely, Christianity. Great men of science, from Copernicus to Spencer, according to Treat, were tainted by a “Christian character” that prevented them from truly understanding nature. The first step in liberating science from Christian bondage was the study of history. This is the reason why he admired Draper’s “grand work” of history. Treat believed that the history of science demonstrated the gradual emancipation of science from religion. He asserted that the Bible was the “sole cause of conflict between science and religion” and that Draper’s history served well his cause to correct science and eradicate Christianity.²⁷

Another good example of this kind of response was T. D. Hall, a member of the National Liberal League (later renamed the American Secular Union), which was a group of radicals who broke away from the Free Religious Association.²⁸ Hall published a pamphlet entitled “Can Christianity be made to Harmonize with Science?” Here, Hall declared that the historical “facts” in Draper’s book were not new. They had been reported since the Protestant Reformation. But Draper has gathered these facts with such skill, and stated them so clearly, that he has “brought them to bear with such overwhelming force.” Draper’s only failure, according to Hall, was that he “seemed to lack the courage and candor to state the whole truth, regardless of consequences.” Namely, that science and Christianity are ultimately irreconcilable. One cannot abandon core Christian principles and expect it to survive. They are the “very life blood of Christianity,” and to abandon them is to “cause it shortly to cease to exist as an organized system of religious belief.” Declaring essentially that Draper had lost his nerve, Hall maintained that “nothing is ever gained by stopping short halfway, and endeavoring to thrust out of sight a part of the necessary effects of causes which we know to be

²⁷Joseph Treat to John W. Draper, Jan 5, 1875; Joseph Treat to John W. Draper, Jan 30, 1875, in container 7, Draper Family Papers.
operating.” One thing was clear: before the onward march of science, Christianity will and must disappear.29

Treat and Hall were both subscribers to the Truth Seeker, an American freethought magazine edited by D. M. Bennett (1818–1882) and published by the National Liberal League. The second half of the nineteenth century was a golden age of radical, freethinking movements. Movement leaders tended to reside in urban centers, but thousands of adherents were scattered throughout the rural countryside, linked by a number of circulated freethought tracts, pamphlets, and magazines. Some of its most prominent voices at the end of the century were personalities such as George Jacob Holyoake (1817–1906), Charles Bradlaugh (1833–1891), Robert G. Ingersoll (1833–1899), Samuel P. Putnam (1838–1896), Alfred W. Benn (1843–1915), J. M. Wheeler (1850–1898), John M. Robertson (1856–1933), and, perhaps most important of all, Joseph McCabe (1867–1955).30

The point that needs to be emphasized here is that these movements had appropriated Draper’s historical narrative in their calls for the secularization of society. In 1885, Charles Albert Watts (1858–1946), son of famous secularist publisher Charles Watts (1836–1906), began publishing a short monthly guide devoted to advertising the latest “liberal and advanced publications” titled, the Watts’s Literary Guide. The journal became one of the most successful publishing ventures of the secularist movement and was later renamed the New Humanist, which is still in print today. Charles Albert filled the Guide with summaries of the works of Buckle, Lecky, Spencer, Huxley, Darwin, and others—including Draper.31

Soon after launching the Guide, Charles Albert organized the Propagandist Press Committee “to assist in the production and circulation of Rationalist publications.” These efforts attracted a larger number of subscribers than previously thought possible for a secular organization. Near the end of the century, Charles Albert and his new committee had founded the Rationalist Press Association and the publishing house, Watts & Co. The Rational Press Association sought to “stimulate freedom of thought and inquiry in reference to ethics, theology, philosophy, and kindred subjects,” to “promote a secular system of education,” and to “maintain and assert the same right of propaganda for opinions and ideas which conflict with existing or traditional

29T. D. Hall, “Can Christianity be made to Harmonize with Science,” An Essay Read before the Liberal League, at Minneapolis, Sunday, March 7th, 1875; container 14, Draper Family Papers.
creeds and beliefs as is now legally exercisable in favor of such creeds and beliefs.” To this end, the association published and reprinted books and pamphlets on science, history of religion, biblical criticism, and biographies of rationalists. The Rational Press Association, in short, aggressively and deliberately sought to give the perception that modern life was inherently inhospitable to religion.32

Writers for the Rationalist Press Association and other secular publishing firms consistently turned to Draper and his historical narrative in support of their own agenda. In his short essay on the Dynamics of Religion (1897), for example, prolific secular journalist John M. Robertson listed Draper as an “infidel.”33 Robertson continued to cite Draper’s historical narrative as a general history of freethought, but later explained in his A Short History of Freethought: Ancient and Modern (1906) that the “survival of theism” in Draper was part of psychological and social pressure, and that this demonstrated the “elements of essentially emotional and traditionary supernaturalism.” Draper is an example of how “men engaged in rationalistic and even in anti-theological argument” could continue to cling to religion.34 Moreover, in his massive two-volume History of Freethought in the Nineteenth Century (1929), Robertson argued that Draper’s narrative was a “powerful contribution to popular rationalist culture.” This work, he explained, was a substantially “evolutionary view of social and mental progress.” While he admitted that Draper wrote as a “theist,” Robertson argued that Draper was “insistently naturalistic in his whole survey,” and therefore acted as a partial solvent to his own theological position. His book became a “freethinker’s book, for freethinkers, and it is a curious circumstance that this very aggressive treatise has gone in the ordinary way of bookselling during sixty odd years, without any noticeable polemical notoriety.”35

Other secularists had reached similar conclusions. Joseph M. Wheeler (1850–1898), whose Frauds and Follies of the Fathers (1882) appropriated the work of Protestant historians to demonstrate the irrationality and credulity of the Church Fathers, recorded Draper as a “freethinker” in his monumental Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers (1889). Samuel P. Putnam (1838–1896), who had notoriously described religion as a curse, disease, and lie, adopted Draper as an authority throughout his 400 Years of

Freethought (1894). George E. MacDonald (1857–1937), in his Fifty Years of Freethought: Being the Story of the Truth Seeker (1929), mentioned how the writings of Draper played a central role in D. M. Bennett’s rationalistic campaign.36

But perhaps the most important secularist to have arrogated Draper’s historical narrative was Joseph McCabe. A Roman Catholic monk who abandoned his religious beliefs around 1895, McCabe was a prolific author, writing over two hundred books on science, history, and religion. A vehement advocate of atheism, McCabe frequently forecast the doom of Christianity in light of modern science. He mostly published with Watts & Co. in London, and his massive Biographical Dictionary of Modern Rationalists (1920) was particularly noteworthy. Like other secularists, McCabe included Draper in his tribute. While he was careful to note that Draper was “a Theist, and believed in personal immortality,” his work nevertheless became one of the “classics of Rationalist literature.”37

McCabe also found a home in Girard, Kansas, with the “Henry Ford of Literature,” Emanuel Haldeman-Julius (1889–1951). An atheist, socialist, and newspaper publisher, Haldeman-Julius began publishing the five-cent, paper-covered “Little Blue Books” series in 1919. He sold over 100 million copies of these pocket-sized books to working-class and middle-class Americans. The Little Blue Books were intended to be a “University in Print” and included a great mixture of classical literature, novels, how-to manuals, and essays on sexuality, politics, philosophy, history, religion, and science. Haldeman-Julius had also debuted writers like Will Durant (1885–1981), Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), and Clarence Darrow (1857–1938) to the American public.38

McCabe was by far the most prolific writer for the Little Blue Books series. Significantly, one of the most successful books in the series was his *The Conflict Between Science and Religion* (1927).\(^{39}\) In this work, McCabe essentially repeated Draper’s narrative. But unlike Draper, McCabe gleefully cheered on the decay of religion all over the earth. Historians of the twenty-first century, he argued, will look back with amusement at those men of science and theologians of his own century who protested that there was no conflict between religion and science. “He will read the priests protesting,” he wrote, “that there is no conflict between true science and religion, and the professors plaintively chanting that there is no conflict between science and true religion.” But according to McCabe, future historians will recognize that “science has, ever since its birth, been in conflict with religion.” The Christian religion, McCabe contended, was the “most deadly opponent” of scientific progress.

More importantly, most of McCabe’s Little Blue Book was a diatribe against “progressive religion.” Ironically, he repeated the same arguments of conservative and orthodox opponents of Draper. McCabe called liberal Protestantism the “veriest piece of bunk that Modernism ever invented.” According to McCabe, those liberal theologians who reinterpreted traditional religious belief, wittingly or unwittingly, attacked the very foundations of Christianity. The modernists, McCabe wrote, “are Christians who believe that Paul and the Christian Church have been wrong in nearly everything until science began to enlighten the world.” But to reject its central doctrines, he argued, is to reject the whole of Christianity. Even those “extreme modernists,” such as E. Ray Lankester (1847–1929), Oliver Lodge (1851–1940), Henry F. Osborne (1857–1935), Mihajlo I. Pupin (1858–1935), Robert A. Millikan (1868–1953), and others, who have taken a conciliatory approach, are wrong.\(^{40}\) These men were members of the scientific community, who wrote during the anti-evolution controversy of the 1920s. Some of them contributed to the pamphlet campaign of the American Institute of Sacred Literature, which published a series of leaflets asserting the harmony of science and religion. But as Edward B. Davis argues, these pamphlets “represented a variety of modernist theological positions reconciling scientific knowledge with religious faith.” Indeed, theologian Shailer Mathews (1863–1941), editor of the series, rejected traditional Christianity. “Mathews wanted,” Davis writes, “a new Christian faith to replace the old, the religion of Jesus without the Jesus of religion.”\(^{41}\)

---


\(^{40}\)Ibid., 15–25, 26–38.

But for McCabe, any conciliatory approach demonstrated a misunderstanding of the true nature of religion. Science is a unified endeavor, whereas religion has never been unified. If one seeks the reconciliation of science and religion, “we shall have to take three hundred different collections of religious beliefs and apply science to them.” But this was impossible, McCabe argued. “The land which lies between straight Fundamentalism and straight Modernism,” he quipped, “is the Land of Bunk.” In the final analysis, the Christian rationalist, whether he realizes it or not, is still in conflict with science. Those who have succumbed to scientific ways of thought have divested God of all personality, reducing traditional conceptions to abstractions of Power, World-Energy, Cosmic Force, Soul of the Universe, Vital Principle, Urge, Creative Principle, Absolute, and so on. However this deracinated religion was formulated, it is nothing more but mere wish fulfillment, and, therefore, resided in the “land of bunk.”

III. REACTING TO WARFARE

When we turn to the various responses to the historical narrative of cofounder and first president of Cornell University, Andrew Dickson White (1832–1918), we must remind ourselves that his narrative differed little from Draper, despite his distinction between religion and theology. Indeed, he documented, in painstaking detail, the supposed religious interference with science, Protestant and Catholic alike. Although White seemingly took a more measured position in his book titles, this distinction between theology and religion was little more than an afterthought. His readers did not fail to notice and accuse him of such duplicitous rhetorical tactics.

Unsurprisingly, liberal readers quickly embraced White’s narrative as an effort at reconciling modern life and religion. The London *Popular Science Review* hoped it would “help allay some of the fears which religious people feel in regard to science, which can never come into conflict with genuine religion.” Similarly, the *Dublin University Magazine*, usually a more conservative voice among periodicals, nevertheless commended it as an “admirable work,” written in a “most tolerant, conciliatory, and rational spirit.” White was an example of a true “Christian philosopher.” The *Athenaeum*, while criticizing White’s understanding of medieval thought, still called on “free men to repeat again and again in the ears of their children the tales of this book.” The *Westminster Review* was perhaps the most generous. Its review agreed that the “history of science is not a tranquil narrative of happy revelations, but a troubled history of battle and murder.” Although White at times carries the metaphor too far, in the main his work is
a “remarkably full and perspicuous history of some very terrible events—events which has an intense interest in relation to the history of progress.”

When White published his two-volume *magnum opus* in 1896, American religious liberals continued to highly praise his thesis. The *Outlook*, a liberal religious weekly, commended White for differentiating between “religion and dogma” and compared it favorably against Draper’s earlier treatment. White’s book “should stand beside the ‘History of Doctrine’ in every theological seminary,” the reviewer declared. Science, having freed religion from dogmatism, will now “go hand in hand with her.” The *Independent* explained that the book was “an elaborate argument under many heads on the repressive influence theology is said to have exerted on the intellectual progress of Christendom.” Its central aim was to “convict theology as a vicious tendency to interfere with scientific freedom to the injury of both science and religion.” In attempting to clarify White’s argument, the reviewer maintained that the “warfare” was “not between theology and science, but between opposite tendencies in the human mind itself.” White demonstrated that it is not theology that comes into conflict with science but rather an “obstructive and conservative phase of intellectual progress.”

The Founding president of Stanford University, David Starr Jordan (1851–1931), likewise perceived the enemy of scientific progress as man’s innate conservatism. In his presidential address of 1895, Jordan argued that religion was a “condition of the mind and heart—an attitude, not a formula.” A pure and undefiled religion does not consist of “creeds” or claims of “orthodoxy.” Elsewhere he explained that the conflict begins in the human mind, then develops into organized bodies, and in turn becomes a struggle between freedom and democracy. “The whole conflict is a struggle in the mind of man. It exists in human psychology before it is wrought out in human history. It is the struggle of realities against tradition and suggestion. The progress of civilization would still have been just such a struggle, had religion or theology or churches or worship never existed.” When he reviewed White’s book for the transcendentalist *Dial*, Jordan recapitulated these arguments. He praised White’s book as “one of the great works of our century,” and acknowledged his emphasis on the “struggle of dogmatism.”

---


But again, Jordan felt that dogma was nothing more than the “desire of organized conservatism to limit action.”

Adherents of the “New Theology” applauded White’s supposedly conciliatory efforts. Theologian Theodore T. Munger (1830–1910), for instance, was an admiring correspondent, often inviting him to his New Haven home and the Unitarian Club. 47 American industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie (1835–1919) wrote that he had followed White’s work closely, and declared that that the world was rapidly evolving a new and better religion. 48 One Elbridge D. Jackson praised his view of sacred literature, particularly the Bible, as “eminently precious, not as a record of outward fact, but as a mirror of the evolving heart, mind, and soul of man.” Jackson also told him that he now had a “better opinion of the Bible,” seeing it as “the expression of the very highest flights the human mind and heart have reached in seeking after God.” 49 Significantly, James Gorton, a pastor of a Universalist church, hoped to use White’s book in his Sunday classes, “a class for this very purpose among young and older people.”

White’s own colleagues from Cornell University, however, noted the fine line he walked. White’s successor at Cornell, Charles Kendall Adams (1835–1902), for example, published a review in the popular American magazine Forum, proclaiming the book as exceptional and important. At the same time, Adams observed, White’s reverent spirit towards “religion” will be lost to many readers. Indeed, Jacob Gould Schurman (1854–1942), third president of Cornell, could not understand White’s desire to preserve some remnant of Christianity. Schurman explained that White’s book was neither a history of science, nor a history of dogma, but a history of collisions between the sciences and the “dogma laid down in the creeds of Christendom.” He praised it as a “self-attesting encyclopædia” and believed it should be consulted by scientist, historian, and theologian alike. But according to Schurman, “Knowledge is a continuous becoming; it has never attained—it is always on the way.” Consequently, religion evolves as society evolves, and “the most assured dogmas of to-day may need modification and adaption to the larger vision and deeper insight of to-morrow.” Religion, he contended, “would still exist were theology and theologians annihilated.”

47 T. T. Munger to Andrew D. White, June 27, 1895; Oct 13, 1895; Oct 21, 1895; Jan 3, 1896; Jan 15, 1896; Jan 23, 1896; Feb 27, 1896; Mar 13, 1896; Mar 25, 1896; Mar 30, 1896; Nov 10, 1896; Dec 8, 1896—all in Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, reels 63, 64, 65, and 68 (hereafter, “White Collection”).
48 Andrew Carnegie to Andrew D. White, May 6, 1896, White Collection, reel 66.
49 E. D. Jackson to Andrew D. White, Mar 9, 1894, White Collection, reel 61.
50 James Gorton to Andrew D. White, Mar 30, 1894; James Gorton to Andrew D. White, May 4, 1894, White Collection, reel 61.
Schurman thus he could not understand White’s desire to save some outmoded, now largely obsolete version of Christianity.51

While many of the religiously liberal emphasized White’s “profoundly religious nature,” others were unconvinced. American Catholic priest Augustine F. Hewit (1820–1897), for example, in a series of articles contended that “all science is from God, and is a rethinking of his thoughts.” He maintained that “the book of nature and the book of revelation are both alike from God,” and thus science and religion were “intrinsically in harmony.” Where there is discord or struggle, it arises from mistakes and misunderstandings on one side or the other. As far as White’s narrative was concerned, Hewit anticipated the modern revisionist historiographer’s emphasis on complexity, making distinctions between conservatism and innovation, personal basis, and political circumstance. Hewit went on to call Protestants “inconsistent supernaturalists, who undertake the vain labor of uniting a defense of Christianity with a rejection of Catholicism.” The rising “agnostic tribe” drew heavily from these “inconsistent supernaturalists,” attacking religion in general as “the product of a long, dark age, on which the light of science is just beginning to dawn.” Such was the testimony, he concluded, of Protestantism.52

Indeed, more conservative estimates, while recognizing White’s perceived irenic attitude, nevertheless warned that the book would ultimately undermine religion—and Christianity in particular. The politically whiggish but not radical Manchester Guardian, for instance, thought White was an opportunist and that his work demonstrated “little insight into the greatness of the Middle Ages.” Rather than dealing with the complexities of history and theological thought, the book was merely a “storehouse of curiosities of superstition” and thus “not a great contribution to the history of thought.” The Tory Speaker was both disappointed and discouraged, blasting it as “a most unscientific work.” If “religion and science” was a misnomer, so was science and theology. “Science has from the moment of its birth been at war with ignorance, or prejudice, or folly, but surely not with theology, which must be said, in any tolerable sense of the term, to belong to the great army of the sciences.” The Quarterly Review recognized White’s approach as “religious and reverent,” but argued that the same objections raised against Draper could also be raised against him.53

Back at the home front, many readers did not take White’s supposed conciliatory approach seriously. Indeed, they believed it was a ruse. The *Chicago Tribune* published several articles condemning White’s understanding of the miracles in the Bible, including ones by clergyman Alexander Patterson and oriental scholar Elizabeth A. Reed (1842–1915). A reviewer for the *American Historical Review* recognized that White designed the work to “prevent unnecessary damage to Christianity” but noted that his understanding of Christianity was entirely ambiguous. In some of his more conciliatory phrases, White seemed to practice the “very sancta simplicitas” he ridiculed. When White seemed to concede that the theologian and the man of science both shared a sincere love of truth, the verdict of his account always seemed to show otherwise. Similarly, a reviewer for the *Nation* could not understand White’s desire to preserve religion. “Mr. White seems to us to make a mistake in thinking that he is called upon to offer any suggestions as to the reconciliation to be effected now between science and religion.” Others attempted to offer such reconciliations, only to be persecuted. That day has come and gone, however. According to the reviewer, “it is science which is established now, and if there is to be a reconciliation, it is religious truth which must justify itself.” A writer for the *Boston Arena* concurred, arguing that if White had demonstrated that the Bible had been “the greatest block in the way of progress,” why continue forcing children to read it in public schools?

White also received numerous letters from perceptive readers, and these are perhaps more instructive for our purposes. For instance, Albert Britt, managing editor of the New York weekly *Public Opinion*, pointedly asked White, “are the masses of men yet sufficiently developed to determine and follow out a course of right conduct without the impelling power of a belief in, or a fear of, a personal God who rewards and punishes?” Physician John Shackelford believed White’s narrative completely undermined the Bible. He recognized that his “warfare” was ultimately “between the Old and the New Theology” and went on to caution White that if he rejected the Fall and the Atonement, “Christ’s religion goes by the boards. A religion without the authority of God back of it is a religion without power.” He concluded that if Christ was

---


not “God manifest in the flesh,” he either made a “tremendous mistake” or was an “imposter of the worst type.”

Other readers more explicitly noted the contradictions in White’s religious views. Nevada Baptist minister William Phillips, for instance, wondered what he really believed about Jesus Christ. “What think you of Christ? You write of him as ‘the Lord Jesus Christ.’ How? Intellectually? By virtue of His spiritual influence?” Phillips then reveals the core dilemma:

If He was not miraculously conceived; if He did not come in the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost; if He is not to come in judgment; if all the claims that the Gospels represent Him as making, for Himself, and all the claims that the epistles make for Him are accretions, additions to his teaching, superstitions, shall we then speak of Him as the Lord Jesus Christ?

Harry A. Miller, a “Truth Seeker” and tobacco leaf dealer, also questioned White’s use of the phrase “Our Lord Jesus Christ” when it appeared he only saw Jesus as a man. He too asked White, if the story of the birth and life of Christ is myth and legend, then why does he refer to him as “our Lord Jesus Christ.” “I want to know,” Miller asked, “if by calling Him (Lord) you mean to express or refer to Him as being any thing besides a man or only as I believe a ‘Great man.’”

Perhaps White’s most penetrating critic was an old family friend, Mary K. S. Eaton. After reading White’s work, Eaton wrote that it left her feeling a “profound regret.” Apparently not one to mince her words, she bluntly told White that his work was a wasted effort. “If I am not mistaken,” she wrote, “the object is to prove the Christian religion a ‘cunningly devised fable’; the Bible which Christians accept a tissue of falsehoods; its Divine author a myth; his son, that this same Bible pronounces ‘God manifest in the flesh,’ the greatest imposter the world has ever known; and then you inform us that it is true but in some high and mysterious sense!” She did not want to debate the finer details, but to simply ask—cui bono? “What if you succeed in creating doubts in the minds of men, in taking from them all trust in the Revelation they have accepted as coming from God. What then? What will you give them in its stead? Your poor starving theories? [...] A religion evolved from human brains stripped of all that is Divine? An image without a soul?”

White attempted to answer these challenging questions. He told Eaton that he believed he was doing his best to “save the Bible,” to strengthen Christianity by

---

56 Albert Britt to Andrew D. White, Jan 9, 1905, White Collection, reel 93; John Shackelford to Andrew D. White, May 23, 1909, White Collection, reel 105.
57 William Phillips to Andrew D. White, Nov 6, 1895, White Collection, reel 64; Harry A. Miller to Andrew D. White, Jan 16, 1917, White Collection, reel 123.
58 Mary K. S. Eaton to Andrew D. White, Mar 6, 1894, White Collection, reel 61.
giving it a “new basis.” But Eaton was astounded by such hubris. She responded mordantly, asking him, “what do you supposed has saved it all these centuries without your helping hand? What means have you added in this great work?” Indeed, it seemed to Eaton that White’s efforts had been to “prove it false, a human work subject to the accidents and full of imperfections that belong to all human works.” From her perspective, “there was no God” in White’s Bible. “You may not be an atheist in the sense that there is no God in the Universe, but when you declare that the Revelation he has made to man is fast crumbling away on account of what you call the ‘human theological foundations’—that Rock which he says the gates of hell shall not prevail against—I take the liberty by repeating: there is no God in your Bible.” Furthermore, Eaton believed Christianity required no new basis at all. “What in the name of poor, feeble, ignorant Christians, I ask, is this new basis?” According to Eaton, “the Rock on which Christianity is founded is in no danger from the ceaseless labors of its enemies.” Since Christianity was not in danger, it did not need someone like White to protect it. Indeed, she noted that the attitude of the “truth destroyer is that of the ‘Warfare of Science’ man.”

They continued this awkward exchange for the next two years, with Eaton repeatedly charging him with naiveté, and in one letter even called him “Sancta Simplicitas.” White responded that she had misunderstood his “motives and statements” and called her critique “savage.” She replied that one could respond in no other way to his claims of saving the Bible and strengthening Christianity with a new basis. For those who accept “Jesus as God manifest in the flesh,” she wrote, “we need no other foundation than this secure one.” White eventually lost patience with Eaton. In 1896, he terminated the correspondence. He wrote that he had refused to read her latest letters and would no longer read any others she sent. He had endured enough “torrents of misconception and objurgation” and would no longer read her “vitriolic criticism.” He maintained that his work is the result of “long years of study and thought.” In his “desire to speak the truth” he had “sacrificed much—very much.” He told her, moreover, that he was not alone in his views. They are entertained by “those of a very large number of the foremost divines in the English Church, a considerable number in the American Episcopal Church, a very large number indeed in the Orthodox Congregational and other Churches, many even in the Roman Catholic Church, and their numbers are constantly increasing.” Because these were “reverend, devoted, Christian men,” he thus felt justified in holding his views. His sole motive, he continued, “has been to prevent rash, hotheaded,

59 Mary K. S. Eaton to Andrew D. White, Apr 16, 1894, White Collection, reel 61.
60 Mary K. S. Eaton to Andrew D. White, Jan 21, 1896, White Collection, reel 65.
men from throwing away Christianity altogether, and taking refuge in out and out atheism and materialism.” Eaton’s ridicule and mockery, he howled, “shows that you know nothing whatever of the problem involved.” A mind so charged with ignorance and prejudice, he concluded, could and should never sit in judgment. He closed that he “will not quarrel” with her any longer, for he was someone “not to be quarreled with.”

The protests of Eaton and other religiously conservative readers were prescient, however, for soon the same secularists that appropriated Draper’s narrative would take up White’s writings in their campaign to secularize society. The American *Free Thought Magazine*, for example, declared that White had “done immense service to the seeker after truth.” His account revealed the “struggle which the liberal minded and honest churchmen have had in their efforts to give to Christianity the benefits of a reasonable, instead of an unbelievable, theology.” White’s narrative was not a mere history of “folly, cruelty, and crime,” but a history of the “successive triumphs of science.” It is a work which every free thinker “should have in his library.”

Across the Atlantic, the same secularists who included Draper in the pages of their histories of rationalism and freethought also included White. English secularist Alfred W. Benn (1843–1915), for instance, reflected after reading White’s book that “either there is greater freedom of thought in the United States, or the majority are more enlightened than with us.” He argued that White’s work was “continuing the labours of Buckle, Draper, and Mr. Lecky.” But White, according to Benn, “disclaims any hostility to Christianity.” Indeed, according Benn, White seemed to indicate that such “revolutions in thought” have only served to advance it Christianity. Benn, however, thought the sentiment confusing. He called White a “Feuillant,” after the constitutional monarchs of the Legislative Assembly of 1792. Whatever the ambiguity of White’s religious views, Benn argued that “their general acceptance would involve the abandonment of what we now call Christianity.”

White had to contend with atheists who were confused why he remained religious at all. In a revealing series of letters from husband and wife Edward Payson Evans (1831–1917) and Elizabeth Edson Gibson Evans (1832–1911), both expressed dismay over White’s inconsistencies and contradictions. White first met the couple in Ann Arbor, where Edward was Professor of Modern Languages at the University of Michigan. Edward

---

61 Andrew D. White to Mary K. S. Eaton, Jan 30, 1896, White Collection, reel 65.
resigned in 1870 to become a freelance journalist and relocated to Munich. Elizabeth herself was also a frequent contributor to journals and magazines, in addition to authoring several radical books published by the Truth Seeker Company, including *A History of Religions* (1892), and *The Christ Myth* (1900), the latter denying the historical existence of Jesus.

After the appearance of his earlier *Warfare of Science* (1876), White had asked the Evanses for their opinion. In an 1877 letter, Elizabeth criticized White’s vagueness and loss of nerve but hoped he would find the courage, joy, and peace of “disbelieving” one day. She wrote, “considering your position, both public and private, it is a brave thing that you have done; but I cannot see, I cannot see how, having gone so far, you are able to stop where you do!” Indeed, she believed White had thoroughly “alienated the strictest sect of the Pharisees,” and yet she could not fathom why he believed “there is no necessary antagonism between Science and Religion—that Science in its own victories has been fighting also for Religion—and that these two great Powers ought to defend and help each other?” Religion and science, she added, have “no point of contact or agreement.” Moreover, “conceptions of supernatural Beings and conditions date from the infancy of the human intellect, when the imagination had full play and before experience and experiment had taught men to reason correctly. Such conceptions have in the progress of civilization become refined; but they are no nearer the truth now than they ever were—at least we do not know that they are.” Every variety of science had destroyed religion, so “what is there left of the Bible as a record of inspired wisdom now that its geography and geology and astronomy and physiology and history have been proved to us false—its philosophy and theology traced to their primitive sources? And what is Christianity without the Fall and the Atonement, the Trinity, and the incarnated Savior?”

Edward was even more critical. He argued that White was “too generous to the discomfited foe in permitting him to retire from the field with the greater part of his weapons and war-material.” He confessed that he belonged “to that class of persons who entertain what you characterize as ‘that most mistaken of all mistaken ideas—the conviction that religion and science are enemies’; and the perusal of your book has strengthened me in this conviction.” Indeed, reading his book convinced him that the “conflict between these two forces is fundamental and irrepressible and that the warfare will cease to be waged only when one of them shall be put hors de combat and cease to be a force in the world.” He acknowledged that White was not “defending dogmatic Christianity, but are standing up ‘for the living kernel of religion.’” But Edward pressed him for this “kernel.” Significantly,

---

64E. E. Evans to Andrew D. White, Feb 22, 1877, White Collection, reel 22.
he declared that whatever definition White gave, “there is no body or community of Christians on the face of the earth that would accept your definition of the Christian religion as full and adequate.” Whatever the definition, in short, will only lead to a “lamentable confusion of ideas.” We must call “things by their right names,” Edward forcefully demanded.65

White rather pitifully responded to their stringent critique several days later. He simply said that “I think still that I could make a good defense of my use of the word ‘religion.’” But in the numerous letters he wrote to the Evanses over the next fifty years, he never again returned to defend his definition of religion. This did not prevent the Evanses, however, from insisting (perhaps even gloating) that White’s work was having an effect counter to his intentions. As late as 1901, for example, Elizabeth reported to White that the Truth Seeker Company had listed his book in their Catalogue of Free Thought Works. “By the way,” she added, “I hope you appreciate my self-sacrifice in omitting your book in my bibliography at the end of my ‘The Christ Myth.’ I wanted to put it in, for though I did not consult it in writing my book, still many of the subjects coincide with your statements and for the sake of readers it would have been well to draw attention to your larger work.” White nevertheless remained on congenial terms with the Evanses all his life.66

But while the Evanses criticized White for his lingering religious sentiments, other skeptics praised his work as a useful and powerful weapon against religion. His eldest son, Frederick White, had told him in 1889 that “several copies of the Freethinker’s Magazine came last week for you with a note from Mr. H. L. Green the editor saying that he has read with great pleasure the later New Chapters in the Warfare of Science and hopes to see them all published complete some time.”67 Green himself wrote White later about Patterson’s critique of his book in the Chicago Tribune, calling on him to “reply to what the doctor here says.”68

The “great agnostic,” Robert G. Ingersoll, also wrote White to tell him that he was reading with pleasure his “New Chapters.” However, he opined that Christianity was not worth saving. “The Church pretended to have the word of God—pretended to have all truth worth having—and as a consequence it was obliged to say ‘Obey! Believe!’ It could not say: Investigate—think!” In his opinion, he could “not see how man can be free, or worthy of freedom, until he ceases to imagine that a Master exists.” Turning White’s argument on its head, Ingersoll claimed that “the only ‘power in the universe strong enough to make truth-seeking safe’ is man.” Finding a perceptive

65E. P. Evans to Andrew D. White, Feb 22, 1877, White Collection, reel 22.
66E. E. Evans to Andrew D. White, Jan 4, 1901, White Collection, reel 82.
67Frederick White to Andrew D. White, Feb 2, 1889, White Collection, reel 51.
68H. L. Green to Andrew D. White, Mar 28, 1897, White Collection, reel 70.
contradiction in White’s thinking, Ingersoll pointedly asked “if God makes truth-seeking safe now, why did he allow it for thousands of years to be dangerous? Was not truth as valuable then as now?” All orthodox churches then and now continue to deter investigation, according to Ingersoll, and the “power that makes for righteousness is exceedingly weak, where bigots are in the majority.” Despite this criticism, Ingersoll maintained his work “will do good” to “increase intellectual hospitality,” banish “provincialism of creeds,” and to reveal the “egotism of ignorance.” White has, according to Ingersoll, demonstrated that all supernatural religion is superstitious, and that the superstitious is untrue.69

Charles Albert even sent him a copy of the latest Watts’s Literary Guide, which gave a lengthy review of White’s book. He informed White that the publication of his book “has brought me dozens of letters urging me to endeavor to induce you to write for the Annual.” White, however, declined, characteristically citing heavy pressure of work. This did not deter Charles Albert from writing him again the following year, telling him he could write on whatever subject he chose, and mentioned that T. H. Huxley, Walter R. Cassels, and others have contributed to the Agnostic Annual.70

No doubt, some of these letters must have deeply disturbed White, for he had always intended his work to silence the “scoffers.”71 He told his friend George Lincoln Burr (1857–1938) that he wanted to “give a fair and judicial yet hearty presentation of the truth—the truth as it is in Jesus one might very justly say. I think the world needs it, to take place of such gush as [John Henry] Newman on one side and such scoffing as [Robert G.] Ingersoll on the other.”72 Perhaps most disturbing for White, however, was his own son’s growing irreligious attitude. Frail at birth and sickly throughout his adult life, Frederick White (1859–1900) was always burdened by the heavy weight of his father’s ambitions for him. In seeking his father’s approval, Fred seemed to take his father’s nonsectarian beliefs to extremes. While Fred’s letters were mostly concerned with business matters, there are occasional glimpses into his growing irreligious opinions. Early in 1886, for example, he told his father that he had heard Ingersoll argue a case “in a superb manner.”73 On another occasion, he told him that the religious revivals in New York were perfect examples of the “hypocrisy and salacity which are as inseparable from orthodox Christianity as from Mohammedism.” Ministers and the priesthood

69 R. G. Ingersoll to Andrew D. White, Dec 27, 1888, White Collection, reel 50.
70 Charles A. Watts to Andrew D. White, Jul 1, 1896, White Collection, reel 67; Charles A. Watts to Andrew D. White, Mar 29, 1897, White Collection, reel 70.
72 Andrew D. White to George Lincoln Burr, Aug 26, 1885, White Collection, reel 44.
73 Frederick White to Andrew D. White, Jan 5, 1886, White Collection, reel 45.
are “organized satyrs,” Fred declared.\textsuperscript{74} White replied that he did not want him
talking and living like a “heathen,” and instructed him to attend one of the more
liberal services at home in Syracuse.\textsuperscript{75} Fred responded that he occasionally
attended a Presbyterian service, but, at other times, he went to hear Unitarian
“Dr. Calthrop” speak, who, although a “good and pure man,” must “go to
hell and burn eternally” according to the other ministers. He refused to
attend the revival meetings at St. Paul’s church in New York, where
“absolution and confession” were held and the priest gave “nasty lectures”
that scared ladies “half out of their wits.” He told his father he “will go to
church as often as you wish me to, but I cannot force myself to take any
stock in clergy, dogma or creed.” Even Calthrop’s church, he said, was “a
milder form of the same disease.” Fred then unleashed a torrent of invectives
toward the whole of Christianity:

I am morally certain that the great majority of thinking practical men of the
present time regard the present degeneration of religion as unworthy of any
attention and the officers of the Church, Pope, Bishop, Priest and Minister,
one and all as insincere hypocrites if not worse. What they want is money
and power and—too lazy or stupid to gain either by work—they
hoodwink females and children of both sexes with such phrases as
immaculate lamb, incarnation, eucharist, aural confession, salvation,
regeneration, try to repress all truth and progress—and so frighten the
cowardly portion of mankind with their pictures of hell-fire, that they
prefer to pay cash and believe impossible lies, to taking the risk of
damnation. I hate to encourage these men in any way, they have a well
organized conspiracy against truth and virtue now and I doubt if they can
be exterminated in less than a century—and every man they can scare a
little or get some cash out of adds just so much to the garbage-heap which
future generations will have to clear away. I would not write this did I not
know that among the intelligent men which I have talked with the
sentiments which I have expressed on the subject are nearly universal.\textsuperscript{76}

Fred attempted to reassure his father that “we all, I think, believe in an old-
fashioned religion, a deity, and in the wonderful teachings of Christ.” Fred
had taken his father’s critique of Christian theology to its logical
conclusions. The response to his work must have been a constant source of
frustration and chagrin for White—a persistent indication that his most
integral purpose, the reconciliation of science and religion, was almost
unanimously ignored.

\textsuperscript{74}Frederick White to Andrew D. White, Apr 13, 1886, White Collection, reel 45.
\textsuperscript{75}Andrew D. White to Frederick White, Apr 29, 1886, White Collection, reel 45.
\textsuperscript{76}Frederick White to Andrew D. White, May 13, 1886, White Collection, reel 45.
IV. CONCLUSION

The new challenges of the nineteenth century intensified the belief among many liberal Protestants that Christianity required another reformation. Responding to the advances of natural and historical sciences, they sought to combine progressivist conceptions of science with progressivist conceptions of religion. Some liberal theologians went as far as saying that rising “secular movements” were necessarily beneficial to theology as “the pruning-knife are to the tree.”\textsuperscript{77} These new conceptions came to influence late nineteenth-century discussions about the relationship between science and religion. The conflict occurred, liberals argued, not between scientific truth and religious truth but between contesting theological ideas. As American theologian George P. Fisher (1827–1909) perceptively wrote in the \textit{Princeton Review} near the end of the century, “It has not been a war of disbelievers and sceptics on the one side, who have been obliged to suffer at the hands of believers in Christianity for teaching scientific truth. It has commonly been a contest of Christian against Christian. Where there has been a combat of this sort it has been an intestine struggle.” If religion would only rid itself of dogmatism, science and religion would be in harmony. Many liberal Protestants thus believed the separation of religion from theology was the best approach to bridging the perceived schism between modern thought and religious faith, and ultimately for bringing about reconciliation between science and religion.\textsuperscript{78}

The public response to Draper and White varied greatly. While there was much overlap, inconsistency, and even contradiction in these responses, three general patterns emerge. The more liberal press praised their historical narratives as clearing the way for the reformation of religion. They embraced the rhetoric of “conflict” or “warfare” as effectively demonstrating the need to separate religion from theological traditions. Because liberal theologians had already independently fostered the distinction between the two, these reviewers interpreted Draper and White as providing the basis for a consensus that had eluded other attempts to reconcile modern thought with religious faith. Many were thus sympathetic to their narratives, arguing that the progress of scientific knowledge revealed the need for Christians to make significant revisions to their faith. Failure to harmonize Christianity with modern thought, they warned, would convince the public to abandon Christianity altogether.

The more religiously orthodox, however, were unwilling to concede that religion could survive without theology. Rather than saving Christianity, orthodox believers warned that the approach of Draper and White and others

\textsuperscript{77}See, for example, J. Llewelyn Davies, “The Debts of Theology to Secular Movements,” \textit{Contemporary Review} 16 (Dec 1870): 189–206.

would ultimately destroy it. The religiously conservative press thus criticized their narratives as unhistorical, misleading, and deceptive.

Finally, and in fulfillment of these forewarnings, in the last decades of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, freethinkers, secularists, and atheists appropriated their narratives of “conflict” and “warfare” in their campaigns to secularize society. They interpreted these narratives as an assault against all religion. They employed the language of conflict and warfare to destroy religious belief rather than reform it. Indeed, many of these unbelievers credited Draper and White for their conversion to unbelief. At the same time, unbelievers “outed” men of science and liberal clergymen alike, arguing that they chose a half measure when they should have gone all the way. Unbelievers were baffled that theists like Draper and White accepted such radical criticism of orthodoxy and yet continued to believe that religious men and women remained somehow justified in their belief.

Thus, in one of those remarkable ironies of history, both orthodox and unbeliever found themselves in concord: if theology was found unbelievable, so must be religion. Draper and White, then, were attacked by the orthodox and unbelievers alike. Liberal Protestants had gambled on a risky strategy and lost. Unbelievers attacked the integrity of liberal theologians, censured their attempt to reconceive old doctrines, and castigated their refusal to make a clean break with the ancient religion. The unbeliever regarded such attempts at reconstructing religion as superfluous, that religion was indeed at war with science, and, therefore, needed to be eliminated entirely from society. By appropriating their historical narratives, they left Draper and White with deeply troubled legacies.

Historians of science have much to gain by considering the early reception of the narratives of Draper and White. Such an approach sheds further light on how contemporaries reacted to those narratives that later scholars have so strongly condemned. But while Draper and White are regarded the principal casus belli of the “conflict thesis,” this early reception seems to indicate that they were understood quite differently by many of their contemporaries. Liberal Protestants at the end of the century viewed themselves as protectors of “true Christianity” or “true religion” rather than its enemies. Indeed, they portrayed the orthodox theologian as a threat to science and religion. Many readers recognized that Draper and White were not secular critics of religion. Like other liberal Protestants, Draper and White offered their historical narratives as demonstrating the threat of theological dogmatism to both scientific and religious progress. In short, practitioners, promoters, and popularizers of such historical narratives played an important role in advancing the cause of liberal Protestantism. At the same time, these narratives had the unintended consequence of creating in the minds of contemporaries and later generations the belief that science and religion have been and are at war.