

**FEATURE: The War That Never Was
(First in SERIES of 2)**

VOICE: Walk up to a stranger on the street, and ask him how science and religion relate. Chances are he will answer with words like “conflict” or even “war.”

PROF.: An article in a scientific journal reveals some little-known facts. Let's talk about “The War That Never Was.”

FORMAT: THEME AND ANNOUNCEMENT

PROF.: Nineteenth-century Englishman Thomas H. Huxley promoted Darwin's ideas so enthusiastically that he was called “Darwin's bulldog.” But a recent journal article reveals, “Huxley was not *witnessing* a fight between faith and science; he was *trying to provoke one*.”

VOICE: Do you mean Huxley wasn't *seeing* a fight, but *trying to start one*?

PROF.: Yes. That statement appears in the September 2008 issue of the journal of the American Scientific Affiliation. Wheaton College professor Timothy Larsen entitles his article, “War Is Over, If You Want It: Beyond the Conflict between Faith and Science.” He has also written a book-length analysis, entitled *Crisis of Doubt: Honest Faith in Nineteenth-Century England*, published by the highly-respected Oxford University Press.

VOICE: Does Dr. Larsen mean Huxley wasn't looking for truth, but trying to advance some kind of personal agenda?

PROF.: Yes. Huxley didn't obey the principle of “following truth wherever it leads.” But many scholars during the lifetime of Huxley and Darwin did follow that principle. Many of them realized that there was never really a “war” between science and Christianity.

For example, George Sexton was the only nineteenth-century atheistic scientist in Britain who had an earned Ph.D. degree. He was a Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute, the Zoological Society, and the Royal Geographical Society. As Sexton studied more, he abandoned atheism and became a follower of Jesus Christ.

VOICE: Who else made that change?

PROF.: Dr. Larsen calculates that at least 20 per cent of the top leadership of organized atheism or secularism in nineteenth-century Britain eventually came to Christian faith and went on to defend Christian doctrine publicly. These were scholars who had read and understood all sides of the issue. After becoming Christians, these former leaders of atheism spent the rest of their lives lecturing, debating, and writing on how faith and learning harmonized.

With intellectual vigor, they tackled the issues they had raised as skeptics. They wrote numerous books and articles detailing why they were convinced that the latest scientific thought agreed with believing the Bible was truthful.

VOICE: That's very different from what I hear and read in many places.

PROF.: The idea that scientific progress disproved religious beliefs has been the majority opinion in many countries for at least fifty years. Dr. Larsen says, "Despite this being presented as the main story, it does not, however, measure up..."

VOICE: Then why do many scholars write about scientists supposedly having a "loss of faith"?

PROF.: Larsen responds, "A possible explanation is that the conversion narratives fit into another pattern: the war between faith and learning." The public in many countries has been told, "In the nineteenth century, the human race learned enough to realize that 'faith is not credible.' ...[In the twentieth century] this realization became widespread. People who were intelligent and brave and keeping up with their reading, therefore, inevitably lost their faith."

VOICE: What does Dr. Larsen answer?

PROF.: His research discovered that this is simply a false picture of the relation between faith and learning in nineteenth century. The intellectual claims of Christianity were very convincing to many of the smartest, best-read people – even to those who had begun with a deep bias against the Bible.

In Larsen's words, "The so-called 'war' between faith and learning, specifically between...Christian theology and science, was *manufactured* during the second half of the nineteenth century." It was created for propaganda purposes.

VOICE: To convince people of atheism?

PROF.: Yes.

VOICE: Who wrote these "manufactured" ideas?

- PROF.: After Huxley, the primary people involved were chemistry professor William Draper and Cornell University founder Andrew Dickson White. Dr. Larsen writes, “Draper and White were not simply describing an ongoing war between theology and science, but rather they were endeavoring to induce people into *imagining that there was one.*”
- VOICE: (SURPRISED) That's a strong accusation. How does Dr. Larsen support it?
- PROF.: He writes, “In order to do this, they repeatedly made false claims that the church had opposed various scientific breakthroughs and developments.” For example, they popularized the false idea that Christians had insisted that the earth was flat.
- VOICE: The “flat earth” issue supposedly came up when Christopher Columbus planned to “sail west to find the East.” The usual way of traveling from Spain to India was eastward over land. Columbus thought that if the earth was round, he could reach India by traveling westward over the ocean.
- PROF.: As far as he knew, there was only one ocean. No one knew the Western Hemisphere existed, and that later geographers would show that the oceans were divided into the Atlantic, the Pacific and other oceans and seas.
One version of this legend claims church leaders opposed Columbus's trip because Columbus thought the earth was round. That story has been told so widely that even most Christians assume that it's true.
- VOICE: Did the church leaders object to the idea that he could reach India by sailing west?
- PROF.: Only to one technical detail. Larsen explains, “Their objection was that the earth was much bigger than he was assuming and therefore Columbus's calculations regarding how long it would take to reach India were inaccurate.”
- VOICE: That would affect how much food and fresh water he would need to take along for the crew.
- PROF.: The church leaders were right about this – their size calculations were more accurate than those of Columbus.
Christian theologians have always declared that the earth is round. All of them who talked with Columbus, assumed that the earth was round.
- VOICE: Is Dr. Larsen the only scholar who believes this?
- PROF.: No, far from it. Even some atheists admit it. The late Dr. Stephen Jay Gould wrote, “The nineteenth-century invention of the flat earth...occurred to support another dubious and harmful separation... – the supposed warfare between science and religion.”

- VOICE: So one atheist admitted that other atheists “invented” the flat-earth lie, to convince more people to believe the lie that science was “at war” with religion.
- PROF.: Yes. Dr. Gould's words are worth repeating: “The nineteenth-century invention of the flat earth...occurred to support another dubious and harmful separation... – the supposed warfare between science and religion.”
- VOICE: If an idea is untrue, why would anyone want to promote a falsehood?
- PROF.: I mentioned that English biologist T. H. Huxley was a major figure in constructing the notion of a war between theology and science. He really considered himself an atheist, but nineteenth-century English society frowned on atheism. So he made his ideas more acceptable by inventing the word “agnostic” and defining it as someone who *doesn't know* whether God exists or not.
- Warfare was Huxley's favorite metaphor for the relationship between science and religion. Huxley even described himself as a “gladiator-general” in this alleged fight.
- VOICE: It sounds as if the “gladiator-general” used colorful figurative language.
- PROF.: Surprisingly, Larsen observes that Huxley's most savage attack was not against traditional Christians, who at the time were opposing evolution. It was against biologist St. George Jackson Mivart. Mivart infuriated Huxley by *accepting* scientific claims, not rejecting them. He claimed that Darwinism was perfectly compatible with historic Christian teaching.
- VOICE: So Huxley would be angry with him because Huxley was trying to convince the public that faith and scientific knowledge were at war.
- PROF.: Yes. He insisted that Mivart had to choose whether he wanted to be “a true son of the church” or “a loyal soldier of science”...
- VOICE: ...Another military metaphor!
- PROF.: It was in that context that Dr. Larsen wrote the sentence we quoted earlier in today's program, “In short, Huxley was *not witnessing* a fight between faith and science; he was *trying to provoke one*.”
- VOICE: Why did Huxley want a fight?

PROF.: Yale University history professor Dr. Frank Turner is convinced that the notion of a conflict between theology and science was generated as part of a campaign of professionalization by would-be scientists. In the mid-nineteenth century, there was no such profession. Charles Babbage, the brilliant mathematical thinker who first conceived the programmable computer, observed in 1851: “Science in England is not a profession: its cultivators are scarcely recognized even as a class. Our language itself contains no single term by which their occupation can be expressed.”

VOICE: Is he saying there wasn't even a word for “scientist”?

PROF.: Yes. Today the word “scientist” means a respected professional who is paid for doing important work. In nineteenth-century England there were only “men of science.” Larsen explains, “...like its counterpart, ‘men of letters,’ that referred more to the pursuits of gentleman of leisure than to what someone did for a living.”

VOICE: In other words, literature and science were both hobbies for people who could afford them, not vocations for serious professionals who were paid for their work.

PROF.: That strongly frustrated Huxley.

VOICE: But how did he think creating a “war between science and religion” would change his employment situation?

PROF.: We'll answer that question in our next episode – as we continue discussing “The War That Never Was.”

FORMAT: THEME AND ANNOUNCEMENT

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