

BOOK REVIEWS

MILITANT CHRISTIANITY: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL HISTORY By Alice Beck Kehoe, Lanham, NY: Palgrave, Macmillan Publishers, 2012, 194 pp. \$25.65.

We have been presented with an interesting history called an anthropological history that purports to trace the roots of the Christian Right's endorsement of militarism to the eras long before the emergence of Christianity. Alice Beck Kehoe's major thesis is that Indo-European values, especially the propensity toward military action developed by Germanic tribes, are the antecedent attitudes following an unbroken line down to proponents of the religious Christian Right today. This is an interesting enough short history of Western Civilization with special consideration to the militant set of values espoused by various groups through the ages. The thesis is novel, but in no stretch of the imagination does it prove its point from a truly scholarly viewpoint. The critical assumptions are merely suppositions worthy of consideration, but certainly not proved. Basically Kehoe asserts that since Far Right Fundamentalist Christians have a military bent and since throughout history various facets of Christianity had a propensity toward military action much like Indo-European ancestry stretching back some 4000 years, they must be connected! However, the author offers few meager arguments to prove the accusation. Major considerations like the fact that the U.S. was purportedly built on Christian principles and the resulting Patriotism stemming from that position can easily explain the tendency of conservative Christians to desire to maintain our prominence using military action if necessary. Such alternate explanation is not even considered in her book. She claims their militaristic bent is the force that leads such Christians to use the Christian roots of the U.S. as a guise to excuse military action. However it could just as easily be said that preserving the Christian roots of our country pushes this group to excuse military action. This might be another viable view. A sociologist should know causation cannot be assumed by coincident beliefs. The author never bothers to give any reasons to accept her interpretation of the direction of causation when an opposite interpretation is just as plausible.

The author gives us interesting facts. For example, the recognition that Constantine, the first Christian Emperor, was born in Rumania and may have possibly inherited the Germanic tribal mentality is worthy of consideration. However to assert that the sign Constantine conquered under which is verified by historians living at that time (early 4th Century C.E.) were the Greek letters Chi(X) and Rho (P), the first 2 letters of the title "Christ," look strangely similar to the crossed spears and battle ax used by the ancient Indo-European ancestors. This is why Constantine used the letters. Here are Kehoe's words, "Plausible as is the Christian clerics' interpretation of a chi and rho in monogram form, the sign does look like crossed spears with a battle ax, battle axes and spears are pagan icons." That's interesting speculation but certainly not proof and simply not written with the care and discipline of a sociologist in my estimation. The author makes very clear her disgust of Fundamentalists and has very little patience with the

political Right. Therefore anything, and I mean anything as you'll note later, they believe is treated with suspect. I've found through the years that any ideology must have some value or make some contribution to society or the movement could not sustain itself. What is it that sustains the Political Right? The author's position is that militarism is a main tenet of their belief system. Since the vast majority of Conservative Right Christians are women, militarism is a thought least on their minds. The driving impetus is something far more expansive than this one aspect, but this is not the place to debate positions here.

Now, the history of militant religious politics and the rise of Capitalism after the Reformation recounted in the volume are worthy of note. It's definitely true that often victory in war is attributed to the supernatural forces of nature, gods or a god. This is true of all religious societies and far antedates Christianity. That discovery seems, in itself, to emphasize the importance of human nature in explaining militant behavior rather than some social ideology passed on through generations that the author contends. All cultures (not just the Indo-European), the Incas and Aztecs in the Americas and the Genghis Khans of the East displayed a tendency toward militarism. It was better for the author to simply show that this tendency toward militarism is an ideology that can lead to extreme detriments in society rather than claim something that isn't proved.

I particularly enjoyed the treatise on the 20th century split that formed Fundamentalism into a clear separate branch of Christianity. However our writer relates that the development of the two camps can be traced to the divergent paths of two very influential and equally devout Christians. The book claims the one camp was influenced by John D. Rockefeller. He was the more conservative of the two but felt science and our God-given mentality would lead us forward to a better world. Somehow the more conservative but scientific thrust has evolved into the more liberal branch of Christianity, the opposite of what the author contends. The author never mentions that idiosyncrasy but persists in claiming Rockefeller is a primary promoter of Fundamentalist Militarism. It seems the author's aversion to the term "conservative" moves her to equate conservative Rockefeller to conservative Fundamentalists though his spending on science education and scientific research belie the fact that this simply isn't true. Her "hero" is Andrew Carnegie who spent his fortune on libraries, museums and the like and hoped that liberal education would lead us to a better world. Sociologists of Religion have proposed a much more efficient explanation for the divergent paths of 20th century Christianity.

We are treated to one more rant in this tome on all things conservative and I just have to include it. For her personal complete catharsis, she insists on assailing Capitalism, which is claimed to be an ideology created by Conservative Fundamentalists. Evidently Adam Smith must have been one of them. That accusation leads to distrust for entrepreneurialism since it is a corollary to Capitalism. Here I'm quoting her words: "Right-wing American evangelists, like Starbucks, want every street to be full of warmed, energized people 'filled with the Spirit,' as with a grande latte." Nothing is mentioned of the liberal, secular, non-Christians who have abused free speech much more flagrantly than any mega church which are also despised by Kehoe for

their entrepreneurial advertising (not realizing evangelical churches are not necessarily the Far Right Christian faction she has so much hatred for).

This book is recommended to any reader with the same mind set as Kehoe's and anyone who likes to read a writer's rants and raves. If you're what I would call a sociologist with an aversion to religion, this book will be therapeutic. The book does show convincingly that all religions can condone a militant attitude but to assert that an unbroken line stretching some 4000 years of militant, religious leaders culminating in the Christian Far Right of our present day, is simply not proved. I consider myself rather liberal in religion and politics but frankly I am quite embarrassed to put myself in the same category of liberalism as the unprofessional and narcissistic liberalism published here.

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