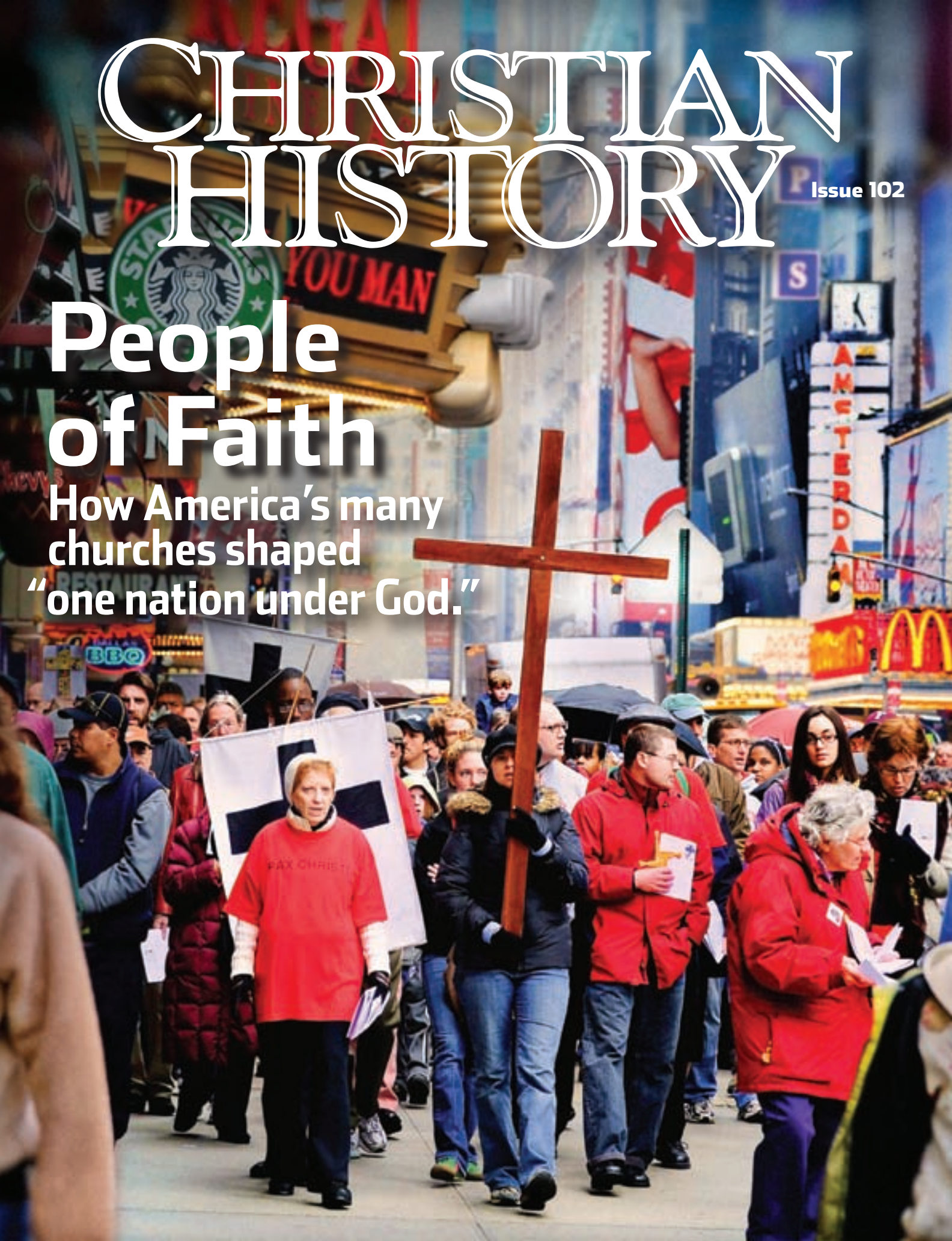


# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 102

## People of Faith

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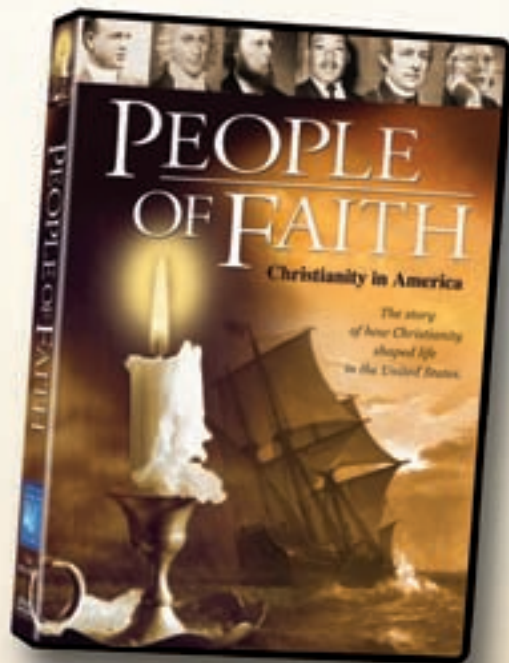
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# Editor's note

AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY IS, at the very least, odd. How odd is not always apparent to those of us who live inside it, for whom the story of denominational competition, freedom from an established church linked with governmental power, and a marketplace of religious choices is the norm.

Yet for some two centuries now, outside observers have been remarking on its oddity, ever since St. John de Crevecoeur wrote in 1782: "When any considerable number of a particular sect happen to dwell contiguous to each other, they immediately erect a temple, and there worship the Divinity agreeably to their own peculiar ideas. Nobody disturbs them. If any new sect springs up in Europe, it may happen that many of its professors will come and settle in America. As they bring their zeal with them, they are at liberty to make proselytes if they can, and to build a meeting and to follow the dictates of their consciences; for neither the government nor any other power interferes. If they are peaceable subjects, and are industrious, what is it to their neighbors how and in what manner they think fit to address their prayers to the Supreme Being?"

G. K. Chesterton once said that the United States is "the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed." In many ways, that creed is a religious one. The United States itself is seen as something to have religious faith in. Over the years, many Americans have

defined themselves as people who came here seeking religious freedom and who are still, despite everything, a religious people.

While this story is true, it is true in more complicated ways than we imagine. *Christian History* has devoted many issues to exploring those complicated and diverse stories—from Spanish missions in California, to conversions on the western frontier, to businessmen kneeling to pray in unexpected revivals, to the faith of American presidents. (Some links to those specific stories can be found in the "Recommended resources" on pages 21 and 41).

In this issue of *Christian History*, we step back and take a look at two main themes running through all these narratives. American Christianity is, and has been from its inception, diverse. It has thrived in unexpected ways and places. It has also been an active faith which has felt itself entitled to change society and has tried very hard to roll up its sleeves and do just that. But precisely because of our diversity, we have had different visions of what it means to thrive and how best to reform society. Those visions have often clashed, in ways described specifically by this issue's writers. And the religious and political situation in 2012 presents no evidence that we have come to any consensus about these matters.

While this issue alone will not bring us to consensus, it is the editors' hope that it will help us to





understand how we got where we are today and to think about productive ways to move forward. What did the founding fathers really think about the separation of church and state, and how has that separation been seen differently throughout the years? What did early settlers think about religious freedom—what were they being freed from, and what were they being freed for? How did the vision of America as a “Christian nation” translate in practice into its being a Protestant nation, and how did Protestants react when they realized that immigration and religious diversity threatened that vision? What social issues have Christians fought for over the years, and why do we so often find ourselves fighting on opposite sides? What is God’s vision for the future of Christianity in America? Will it continue to grow, thrive, and try to change the world, or is the future not so clear?

This issue is published as a companion to the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals’ *People of Faith* DVD set (available from Vision Video), which also considers these issues and takes the viewer deeper into the ways in which religious history has been central to American history. We recommend the DVDs and the ISAE website at <http://isae.wheaton.edu> as additional resources for continued exploration of these questions. Meanwhile, listen in on the conversation here, and see what it has to tell us about how Christianity has changed America—and how America has changed Christianity.

Jennifer Woodruff Tait  
Project Editor, Issue 102

*Christian History* magazine is back in print bringing you something old and something new!

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Now for “something new.” Each of our publications is also available as a free online flipbook with special “live” features at [www.christianhistorymagazine.org](http://www.christianhistorymagazine.org). Here you will discover links to video clips, audio interviews, and related articles from back issues.

We are currently working on an issue devoted to early African Christianity. Though we don’t often think of such church fathers as Tertullian, Origen, and Augustine as African, they were, and the African “landscape” they worked in was formative for all of world Christianity. We are also considering a keepsake Christmas issue this fall to explore the historical story behind many facets of our familiar, beloved Christian holiday.

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# From Pueblos to Pentecostals

AMERICA HAS ALWAYS HAD A DIVERSE  
RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE

Angela Tarángo

**BEFORE THE UNITED STATES** was even a glimmer of an idea, it was already multinational, multilingual, and multiracial; European, African, native, mestizo, and mulatto; Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and more. It already hinted at the religious diversity and marketplace of religious ideas yet to come.

## DIVERSITY IN THE EARLY WEST

In what came to be the desert Southwest, the first intermingling of New and Old World religions came through Spanish exploration and conquest. The Spanish military, accompanied by Franciscan missionaries, crossed into the grueling terrain of the deserts of northern New

Spain. In modern-day New Mexico, they encountered sophisticated indigenous people groups, whom they called “Pueblos.”

Almost immediately, the Spanish met resistance—sparked by the soldiers’ own bad behavior—and brutally put it down, instigating an uneasy truce. Barely suppressed hostilities simmered for the next hundred years. While the Franciscan missionaries aimed to stamp out all forms of native religion, many Pueblos resisted Spanish authority and continued to practice their traditional religions in secret. In 1680 the Pueblos revolted and drove the Spanish out of the region for 12 years. Ultimately, however, the conquerors prevailed.

Intermarriage, rape, and concubinage between Pueblos and Spaniards created on the frontier of New Spain a *mestizo* (“mixed”) society—in terms of both race and religion. It is often said that the counter-Reformation missed New Spain, and aspects of medieval Spanish Catholicism blended with native cultures in both the American Southwest and Latin America. The result of this was a long-enduring legacy of racial and religious *mestizaje* (“mixing”) in the Southwest, still visible today through the devotion of the region’s people to *La Virgen*

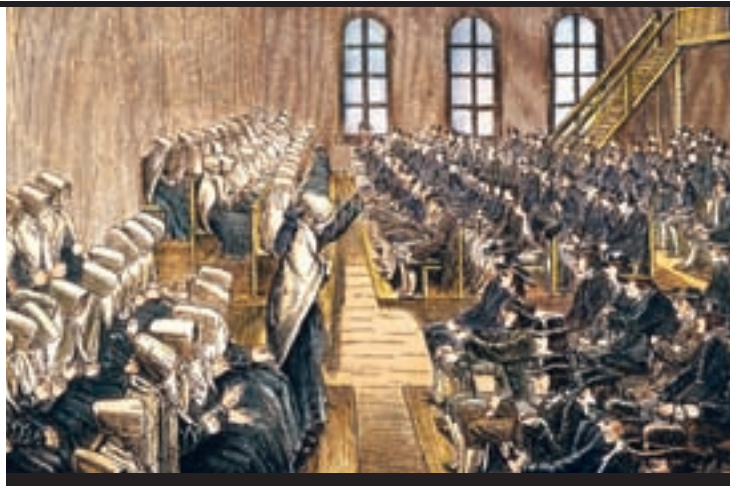
**PEACEABLE KINGDOM** *Left:* The painter of the 1843 *Peaceable Kingdom*, Quaker minister Edward Hicks, rejoiced in the haven of religious liberty founded by William Penn (pictured making treaty with Native Americans), linking it with the “lion and lamb” prophecy of Isa. 11:6. *Right:* Philadelphia Quaker meeting. *Below:* The *Matachines* dance (“Dance of the Moors and Christians”), performed from Peru to Northern New Mexico.

*de Guadalupe*, the presence of the *Matachines* dances (see photo and text on this page), and the pervasive blending of folk religions, healing traditions, Roman Catholicism, and ethnic forms of Protestantism and Pentecostalism.

## EAST COAST DISSENT

Meanwhile, strict, highly educated Reformed Puritans set the tone for East Coast religion. In 1630 John Winthrop led a group of Puritans to the shores of present-day Massachusetts with a vision to build a “City on the Hill” and set an example for the Church of England. Their errand into the wilderness, however, proved to be far more terrifying and lonely than they could have ever imagined—beset by inner and outer personal turmoil and theological battles. The powerful Congregationalist Church establishment worked hand-in-hand with a civic order assumed to be biblically mandated down to the details of its law code.

But dissenter Roger Williams would have none of it. Preaching against the right of any church to dictate the religious practice of all in its territory, Williams made himself so unwelcome that he was forced to flee south. There he founded Rhode Island on the principle of freedom of religion. Sniffed at as “the latrine of the colonies” by Massachusetts Puritan leader Cotton Mather, Rhode Island was New England’s first experiment in religious freedom.



Much to the chagrin of Rhode Island’s Congregationalist neighbors to the north, Williams’s vision for his colony emerged as the winning one. Just south of Williams, in the middle colonies of New York, New Jersey, and Delaware, a motley influx of settlers brought a variety of faiths with them, also distressing to the Dutch Reformed Church and later the English authorities. “Religious diversity by immigration” set the tone, and the middle colonies remained among the most pluralistic areas of the New World.

Pennsylvania made this pluralism a matter of principle as Quaker William Penn opened his “Penn’s Woods” for settlement to all religious dissenters fleeing Europe, giving a home to a variety of Quakers, Anabaptist groups, Moravians, Jews, Catholics, Presbyterians, and early Baptists. Penn wrote, “That there is such a Thing as Conscience, and the Liberty of it, in Reference to Faith and Worship towards God, must not be denied . . .”

Still further south, wealthy and aristocratic landowners kept colonies Anglican—though in the vast territories outside of Virginia, this was mainly in name only. Anglican ministers, stretched to the limit keeping even a few parishes going, wrote back to the mother church to plead for help.

Maryland enjoyed a brief dalliance with Catholicism before folding into the Anglican order, and in the Carolinas and Georgia, Anglican planters did little to convert their African slaves, for fear that baptism would lead their “property” to argue that one Christian should not own another.

Yet, in what would become North Carolina, a variety of Protestant dissenters began to settle in the Piedmont, giving the area a rich taste of the evangelicism that would soon take root and flower.

## SEEKING SALVATION

The strict Calvinism of New England Congregationalists meant that many believers struggled with the doctrine of predestination; were they among the elect







## REVIVAL: LOVE IT OR HATE IT

Left: Invited to America by the Congregationalist preacher-theologian Jonathan Edwards in the 1740s, Anglican George Whitefield stirred up the Great Awakening in New England. Below left: Boston Congregationalist Charles Chauncy, known as "Old Brick," critiqued the Awakening as "irrational." He would later become a Unitarian.

## FIRST STAR PREACHER

The ideas of gifted Anglican preacher George Whitefield complemented those of Edwards. He believed in predestination but also preached that an emotional salvation experience could reveal that one was among the elect. He was the first superstar preacher to emerge in the New World, rising to celebrity status across the colonies and touring the colonial countryside preaching at whatever church would have him, on side lawns, or in nearby fields.

Whitefield was known for his extemporaneous speaking skills, emotionally powerful theatrical phrasing, and the power to project his voice to huge crowds before the age of electronic amplification (Ben Franklin once calculated the size of a Whitefield audience to the nearest thousand). Connecticut farmer Nathan Cole described the scene at one of Whitefield's revivals: "When I saw Mr. Whitefield come upon the Scaffold he Lookt [*sic*] almost angelical."

Whitefield's preaching transformed many, and his emotional style forever changed Christianity in America. He also codified the three-step conversion experience, which later came to be known as being "born again." Whitefield preached "conviction," the realization of one's sinfulness; "evangelical humiliation," praying and waiting for salvation and prostrating oneself before God; and finally "regeneration," beginning in the moment when the Holy Spirit enters one's soul and cleanses it of sin, thus assuring salvation.

Whitefield's preaching tours left chaos in their wake, since he publicly criticized preachers who had not experienced conversion. Critics such as New Englander Charles Chauncy worried that people's emotions were taking control of them and leading them far from the path of "rational religion." In the aftermath, New England Presbyterians and Congregationalists split into prorevival and "old-style" factions.

## AND THEY KEPT ON COMING

Baptists began to spread across the colonies, especially in the South, where the Anglicans tried to put a stop to their growth, but failed. The Baptist cause found an

or not? Their only assurance of their eternal destiny was to reach back into Scripture and history to affirm God's care for his covenant people.



But Methodism and its emphasis on salvation for all had come to the New World. So did the mystical and intensely personal practices of German Pietism, and the Enlightenment with its emphasis on rational thought, freedom of conscience, and the freedom to choose one's own religious destiny. By the 1740s, all of these influences flowed together into a potent

fuel feeding the flames of religious revival.

Scholars continue to debate whether an actual "First Great Awakening" ever occurred. We do know that a series of local revivals throughout the colonies in the mid-eighteenth century changed the landscape of American Protestantism.

Jonathan Edwards in Northampton, Massachusetts, unexpectedly set off revival among the young people of his parish by asking his congregants to actively seek an experience of conversion as a sign of their salvation. In place of the ambiguity that accompanied the doctrine of predestination, Edwards preached that the believer could have an emotional salvation experience—and know it. Edwards's work combined Puritan theology with Pietist experience, while mounting a defense against the Enlightenment's challenge to traditional religion.





**BURNING OUT AND CAMPING OUT** Left: Throughout the early 1800s, Methodist “circuit riders” criss-crossed the young nation, preaching the gospel and nurturing tiny congregations. Paid a pittance, traveling through all seasons, staying with whoever was willing to house them, rarely able to marry, these heroes of the rapidly growing Methodist denomination were often praised in their obituaries for having worked themselves into an early grave in God’s service. Below: Emotional camp meetings, too, fed the burgeoning Methodist movement.

The camp meeting—an open-air revival where people stayed for days on end—proved a powerful tool in the hands of the Methodists, who used it to evangelize large groups of people on the expanding frontier. Under the leadership of the constantly traveling Bishop Francis Asbury, Methodists also perfected the “church growth” technique of the circuit rider.

## THE METHODIST EXPLOSION

Inspired by the traveling preachers who had spread British Methodism, circuit riders ministered along a far-flung network of small rural preaching points. Week by week and month by month, through rain, sleet, snow, and hail, circuit riders spread Methodism’s message of the saving power of God’s love for all and challenged (at least in Methodism’s early years) southerners’ growing dependence on slavery. Along with Baptists, Methodists also helped foster the birth of both white and black hymnody. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Methodists were the largest Protestant denomination in America.

Fires of revival spread through the Northeast and Midwest, where they swept up a young lawyer named Charles Grandison Finney. After a powerful conversion experience, Finney left his law practice and struck out to evangelize America. Known for his plain-spoken and direct manner of preaching, the tall, ice-blue-eyed young evangelist introduced three major changes in revivalism—changes that made him the object of suspicion and animosity among older-style evangelists in the mold of Jonathan Edwards, even as Finney’s name became synonymous with American revivalism.

unlikely ally in Thomas Jefferson, who secured a separated church and state in Virginia on their behalf, freeing them from restrictive regulation and taxation in support of the established Anglican Church. All the while Methodists, who would become the big story of the following century, continued to trickle in.

Collectively, these eighteenth-century revivals resulted in a growing diversity of Protestant groups and a new way of understanding one’s relationship with God that began to spread at a slow burn. The flame would become a wildfire in the early nineteenth century.

If the revivals of the eighteenth century gave American evangelicals their conversionist theology of salvation, the revivals of the early to mid-nineteenth century gave American evangelicalism its religious practice. The democratic flavor of camp meetings, popular music, and Bible study marked this period as one of the most influential in the history of American Protestantism.

The birth of the Second Great Awakening, as it is often called, is usually dated to the Cane Ridge revival in 1801. This series of camp meetings in Cane Ridge, Kentucky, a few miles northeast of Lexington, was notable for its length and size (an estimated 10,000 to 25,000 people attended). It was ecumenical, with Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Congregationalist preachers sharing the platforms.

Their preaching urged sinners to give their hearts over to Christ, and many experienced emotional conversions, often heralded by weeping, shaking, laughter, dancing, and falling in ecstatic trances (akin to the modern charismatic experience of being “slain in the Spirit”). Cane Ridge set off revival all across America’s western frontier, the South, New England, and the “burned-over” district of upstate New York (so called because of its repeated waves of revival).





### SINNERS' BENCH AND ALTAR CALL

Finney allowed women to testify publicly, he urged mid-week nightly meetings for praise and preaching, and he introduced the "sinner's bench"—a pew set aside in the front of the church where sinners could pray and give their lives to Christ. This last innovation eventually evolved into the modern-day "altar call."

Methodists and Baptists appealed to enslaved African Americans and emphasized outreach work to slaves. They helped to train African American preachers (both enslaved and free), while simultaneously battling with them over issues of control. Black Methodist preacher Richard Allen, a former slave in Philadelphia, repeatedly challenged white Methodist authorities and eventually broke away to form the African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.).

Allen set a trend—systematic racism in the young nation made most African American Christians more comfortable in black denominations, and black Christians created and used these denominations as seats of political and spiritual power.

In the ferment of the nineteenth century, even more new groups sprang forth from the revivalist tradition begun in the Great Awakening. This included not only African Americans but also the Restorationist movements—those seeking to restore the first-century church—including the Campbellites (Disciples of Christ, Christian Churches) and Joseph Smith's Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

Staid "mainline" denominations such as Episcopalians and Lutherans also received new energy from the Awakening. And as revivalism ebbed in the 1840s, waves of Catholic immigrants began to appear in

**OUR GOD TOO** Black revivalism also exploded in the 19th c., using many of the same techniques as its white counterpart.

America in enormous numbers. After them came many Jews from Germany and later Russia. Americans found themselves in this period with a smorgasbord of religious affiliations to choose from.

### NEW AGE, NEW ISSUES

The start of the twentieth century ushered in new religious ideas and social issues. In this new America, believers had to decide how they were going to react.

Especially after the Civil War, a progressive, socially engaged form of Protestantism emerged that tried to deal head-on with the social issues of modernity. Protestant reformers often founded societies or groups to take on particular causes: temperance, women's rights, prison reform, educational reform, and abolition.

Many of the most prominent reformers were women. Their works included Unitarian Dorothea Dix's reforming crusade on behalf of the mentally ill and Presbyterian reformer Jane Addams's Hull-House in Chicago. Other women, not finding the answers they needed within orthodox denominations, formed their own groups—Mary Baker Eddy's interest in divine healing, for instance, resulted in the founding of the Church of Christ, Scientist.

Evolutionary theory and the "higher" biblical criticism that emerged in this era also led to both schism and growth among Protestants. Darwin's theory of evolution questioned the creation story in the Bible, and Christians quickly split over whether to accept





**DIVERSE AGENDAS** While progressive Protestantism led Congregationalist preacher Henry Ward Beecher to try to “bridge the chasm between the old orthodoxy and science” (right) and Presbyterian Jane Addams to pioneer in serving immigrants at her Hull-House (above), Pentecostals such as Aimee Semple McPherson’s Four Square Gospel Church (below) poured their efforts into evangelism.



Darwin or not. Leading the charge for acceptance was progressive Congregationalist clergyman Henry Ward Beecher, one of the most popular preachers of his day. More conservative colleagues often pilloried Beecher for embracing evolution and the idea that Christianity should adapt to the changing times.

## FIGHTING EVOLUTION

Conservatives openly fought the theory of evolution by natural selection and began to splinter over issues surrounding the Second Coming, how the Bible should be read, and premillennial dispensationalism. Dispensationalists believed that Jesus’ Second Coming would usher in the end times and that leading up to those end times, a series of events contained within certain dispensations (time periods) was unfolding, as laid out in the Bible (chiefly in Daniel and Revelation).

This stream of teaching fed the rising tide of fundamentalism among a variety of Protestant groups. As historian George Marsden says, “Fundamentalists were evangelical Christians, closest to the dominant American revivalist establishment of the nineteenth century, who in the twentieth century militantly opposed modernism in theology and the cultural changes that modernism endorsed.” Fundamentalists believed in a literal interpretation of the Bible, premillennialism, and cultural and social conservatism. By the start of the twentieth century, they could be found in a variety of evangelical Protestant denominations.

## PENTECOSTAL FIRE

At about the same time, a new form of Christianity in America was catching fire. Although similar small revivals broke out in a variety of places across the country, it was the one in the old livery stable on Azusa Street in Los Angeles that caught America’s attention. There a revival in 1906, led by African American preacher William Seymour, began to blaze among Los Angelinos.

In its infancy, this was a cross-racial revival. It encompassed whites, African Americans, and Latinos, and incorporated supernatural elements beyond those of the old revivalism, including speaking in tongues, prophecy, and visions, along with the familiar weeping and falling. Thus, Pentecostalism was born.

With its emphasis on bodily expressions and supernatural interventions, and its appeal to working-class men and women, Pentecostalism blossomed in the earliest years of the twentieth century. Although it later divided along racial lines,



**ONCE A GREAT SENDING NATION** Right: For American Protestants, the 19th c. was the “Great Century of Missions,” and much missionary activity was led by intrepid women. Below: Founded in 1911, the New York-based Maryknoll Fathers, Brothers, Sisters, and lay missionaries planted U.S. Catholic missions in East Asia, China, Japan (pictured), Korea, Latin America, and Africa.



it grew rapidly among all races in both cities and rural areas. Spurred by superstar evangelists like Aimee Semple McPherson, Pentecostals tended to be freer than established modes of Protestantism to allow women and minorities the chance to serve as leaders.

The movement also expanded almost instantly onto the world stage. Believing in the imminent end times, some adherents sold all they had (often not much) and fanned out in an unprecedented explosion of worldwide missions, especially in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, that stamped countless indigenous church movements with American Pentecostal traits.

Meanwhile, in response to the millions of Catholic immigrants continuing to pour into the United States, some Protestants contracted a virulent strain of anti-Catholicism. This became a part of public discourse. Anti-Catholic crusader Josiah Strong warned: “In republican and Protestant America it is believed that church and state exist for the people ... our fundamental ideas of society, therefore, are as radically opposed to Vaticanism as to imperialism, and it is inconsistent with our liberties for Americans to yield allegiance to the Pope as to the Czar.”

Not all Americans, however, were as intolerant. The World Parliament of Religions in 1893 allowed Americans to meet people of non-Christian faiths such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. American Christians began actively engaging the “other” to understand themselves better.

## THE SHAPE OF THE 20TH CENTURY

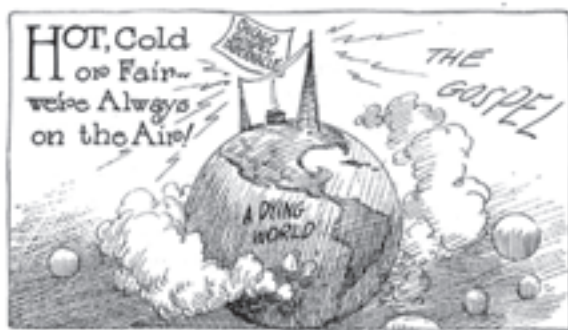
Nondenominationalism continued to grow with the development of many groups designed to help Christians retain their religion in an increasingly secular world: YMCA and YWCA, Bible conference networks, Sunday school networks, Christian periodicals, Christian radio programs, and eventually televangelism.

Protestants used the powerful tools of modern media (the radio, newspapers, TV) to get their messages out and help their flocks retain their beliefs in the face of modern culture, with fundamentalists and Pentecostals proving especially adept.

Meanwhile, the missionary work pioneered in the late eighteenth century by European Pietists, Moravians, and Baptists hit its stride. In the nineteenth century (known as missions’ “Great Century”), a flood of adventurous missionaries rushed into the world looking for souls to save and bringing modern civilization to unbelievers. Back home the missionaries enjoyed celebrity status: lionized in the church, promoted in the press, and lauded by presidents.

Although the “civilizing” flavor of evangelical missions continued in the twentieth century, American missionary work in some corners became self-critical and more sensitive to native cultures. Missionaries started to actively build hospitals, children’s homes, and schools to care for unmet needs. In fact, some emphasized social improvement more than actual conversion. This sea change emerged in part from the tireless work of John R. Mott, a Methodist, who created the World’s Student Christian Federation to improve the world by harnessing the energy of young Christians.





Catholic missionaries also took this approach. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Vatican stressed that Catholics needed to missionize America itself, and even after that call was lifted in the twentieth century, American Catholics joined the great missionary crush, most notably in the work of the Maryknoll Fathers in Latin America and Asia.

### LET'S ALL GET TOGETHER . . .

In the new "Christian century," Americans were sometimes led in surprising ways into ecumenical and interfaith cooperation. The Second Vatican Council blew the doors of the Catholic Church open and encouraged better Catholic-Protestant dialogue. Trappist monk Thomas Merton started his own East-West dialogue to find common ground between


**COVERING THE HOME FRONT** As American missionaries spanned the globe, back home the 20th c. became the age of mass evangelism, through media (left) and large events such as Billy Graham's "crusades" (below).

Catholic and Buddhist monks. Building on the "Social Gospel" movement of the previous century, German theologian-ethicist Reinhold Niebuhr taught Protestants their responsibility in the realm of politics. This spurred black Baptist pastor Martin Luther King, Jr., who drew on white Protestant progressivism in leading the civil rights movement. King also derived inspiration on nonviolence from Mahatma Gandhi (a Hindu) and Henry David Thoreau (an agnostic Transcendentalist).

Gandhi and King influenced labor leader César Chavez, who imbued his advocacy for farmworkers with his own Catholic mysticism. Some ecumenical handholding surprised even those who performed it, such as many in mainline denominations who financially supported the American Indian Movement.

### BUT CAN WE GET ALONG?

American Christians were increasingly aware of other religions and the diversity within their own country—but this did not mean that they all got along or even liked each other. The early twentieth century was a breeding ground for rampant anti-Catholicism, anti-Semitism, and anti-Mormonism. Within Christianity, fundamentalist, mainline, and Pentecostal Christians did not agree on many key issues, but had to learn to grapple with each other and co-exist, even if somewhat begrudgingly. America was now a spiritual marketplace, a giant buffet where believers could choose what religion they wanted to try on for the day.

Without a state-sanctioned church, America has become one of the most religiously diverse and observant countries in the world. In recognizing and exploring our pluralistic, innovative, and at times troubling religious history, Americans re-affirm the words of Harlem Renaissance writer James Baldwin, "American history is longer, larger, more beautiful and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said about it." 

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# Catholics in America

## THE TEST OF "FREEDOM OF RELIGION"

*Catherine A. Brekus*

**NUNS HELD AGAINST THEIR WILL** in dungeons. Ordinary people forbidden to read the Bible. Priests plotting to destroy the nation's public school system. An army of illiterate immigrants scheming to bring the United States under the pope's control.

Such were the rumors that led to discrimination and violence against the Catholic Church in early America. Most Americans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were Protestant, and they treated Protestantism as the unofficial religion of the republic.

Some were so hostile to the growing numbers of Catholic immigrants in their midst that they resorted to violence. In 1834 an angry mob burned down a convent in Charlestown, Massachusetts, because of a false rumor that a nun was imprisoned there, and in 1844 a riot broke out in Philadelphia because of fears that Catholics wanted to prevent Bible reading in the public schools.

The Philadelphia riots lasted for three days, with two Catholic churches burned to the ground, more than 100 people injured, and 20 people killed. It was one of the worst episodes of religious violence in the nation's history.

Since anti-Catholic sentiment has declined dramatically in recent decades, many Americans have forgotten that Catholics once struggled to practice their faith freely. But their history reminds us of the fragility of religious freedom in the United States. Even

though the Constitution guarantees the "free exercise" of religion, the nation has often failed to live up to its pluralistic ideals.

## LONG MEMORIES

The first Protestant colonists to settle in America brought with them a long history of animosity toward Catholics, stemming from the Protestant Reformation. Both Catholics and Protestants had suffered terribly during the European religious wars that occurred in the wake of the Reformation, with countless numbers imprisoned, tortured, and killed.

But the British Protestants who settled in America particularly remembered the violence inflicted by "Bloody Mary" (Queen Mary I, 1516–1558), who burned hundreds of Protestants at the stake. One of the most popular books in colonial America was John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* (popularly called *The Book of Martyrs*), which featured graphic accounts of Protestant martyrs being hanged, burned, or broken on the rack.

Most of the original 13 colonies passed laws limiting the rights of Catholics. Ironically, even Maryland (literally "Mary's Land"), founded by Lord Baltimore as a haven for Catholics, ended up persecuting them. Protestants outnumbered Catholics, and as they gained control over the government, they passed laws forbidding Catholics to vote, hold public office, and worship publicly.

Catholics gained greater acceptance during the Revolutionary War because most fervently supported



**XENOPHOBIA** In the 1800s, Catholic immigrants flooded into America's urban neighborhoods (left). They were met by Protestant suspicion of their unfamiliar spirituality such as in the Sacred Heart devotion (below) and by ethnic hatred, as depicted in this caricature of "savage" Irishmen (right).

the patriot cause. Charles Carroll, a wealthy Catholic planter from Maryland, signed the Declaration of Independence in 1776. His cousin John Carroll, the first Catholic bishop in America, wanted "to preserve inviolate forever, in our new empire, the great principle of religious freedom."

### A NEW KIND OF IMMIGRANT

Catholics in revolutionary America tended to be wealthy, English speaking, and more focused on private devotions than on public displays of their faith. Thus the Protestant majority mostly tolerated them. But when, in the nineteenth century, Catholic immigrants began pouring in from Ireland, Germany, Italy, Poland, Mexico, and Lithuania, Americans became increasingly anxious about their influence on the republic.

In 1789 U.S. Catholics numbered only around 30,000; but by 1826, 250,000 had arrived, and by 1850, Catholic ranks had swelled to more than a million. These new immigrants tended to be poor and uneducated. With the exception of German Catholics, who settled on farms in the Midwest, they clustered by nationality in northeastern cities. Living in squalid tenements and employed in low-paying jobs, they were often caricatured as "infidels" and drunks responsible for the nation's growing crime rate.

Irish Catholics were especially reviled. Influenced by centuries of British hostility toward the Irish, cartoonists often depicted them as dark-skinned savages, racially inferior to whites.

These Catholic immigrants were also more militant about defending their faith than earlier generations of American Catholics had been. Influenced by the Catholic revival in Europe, they held large parish mission meetings in urban neighborhoods, publicized reports of Marian apparitions around the world (especially at Lourdes in 1858), and claimed publicly that "sacramentals" like medals, statues, pictures, and holy water could be means of God's grace. They also insisted that miraculous healings were



possible, a claim that many Protestants at the time found superstitious.

### "AWFUL DISCLOSURES"

As the Catholic population in America increased during the nineteenth century, so did hostility against them. One of the bestselling books before the Civil War (surpassed only by the Bible and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) was a scathing attack on the Catholic Church, *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk* (1836).

Monk claimed to have been a nun in Canada, where she had supposedly been forced into sexual slavery by the mother superior, who instructed her that the pope himself had ordered sisters to prostitute themselves to the priests. Monk's narrative included lurid scenes of nuns being brutally beaten or imprisoned in an underground dungeon, priests scurrying through underground tunnels on their way to sexual assignations, and infants being strangled at birth. Monk claimed that hundreds of dead infants had been thrown into a pit of lime in the convent's basement.

Reporters soon discovered that Monk's tale was fictitious, fabricated by several Protestant ministers who later quarreled over the profits in court. But the book sold widely because it echoed Protestant stereotypes about Catholics.

Monk claimed that she was not allowed to read the Bible for herself or to trust her own conscience. Taught to believe that she had "no judgment of my own," she was determined "to obey the priests in all things," even if that meant tolerating rape and murder. She seemed to be living proof that Catholicism threatened American democracy. If Catholics were more loyal to the pope than to the American republic, how would they ever become good citizens? During the early 1850s,





**CHARITY** The New York Foundling Hospital (*left*) was established in 1869. Today, Catholic hospitals care for one in six patients in the United States.

#### COMMUNICATIONS

Religious media has been a Catholic as well as a Protestant domain. *Time* called Catholic TV preacher Bishop Fulton Sheen (*right*) “the first ‘televangelist.’” He earned an Emmy in 1952.



nativists organized the American Party, better known as the “Know Nothing” Party because of its codes of secrecy, which lobbied to delay citizenship rights for immigrants and prevent them from voting. In 1854 it succeeded in electing five senators and forty-three representatives to Congress, and only the Civil War halted its ascent to political prominence.

### CHURCH AND STATE AND POPE

If the Vatican had taken a more conciliatory tone in the nineteenth century, Americans might have been less fearful of the Catholics in their midst. But as European revolutions diminished the political power of the Catholic Church, Pope Pius IX responded by expanding and strengthening its spiritual authority.

In 1854, six years after the government of the Papal States was overthrown, Pius proclaimed the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception (the teaching that the Virgin Mary was conceived without sin). And in 1864 he issued the *Syllabus of Errors*, which condemned liberal ideas about the sovereignty of the individual and the free exercise of religion.

It was an “error,” argued the pope, to believe that “every man is free to embrace and profess that religion which, guided by the light of reason, he shall consider true.” A group of “Americanists” within the Church strongly supported the separation of church and state but were reprimanded for their views. Pius IX also convened the First Vatican Council (1869–1870), which declared that the pope was infallible when promulgating dogma.

### A CATHOLIC SUBCULTURE

Alarmed by all this, Protestants hoped that the public school system would inculcate Catholic children with American values. But because they defined “American” as Protestant, they supported curricula that most Catholics found offensive. Catholic children were required to read not only the King James Version of the Bible (instead of their own Douay-Rheims version, based on the Latin Vulgate), but anti-Catholic

stories in textbooks as well. In response, Catholic leaders strongly discouraged parents from sending their children to public schools. In 1884 the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore urged every church to build its own parochial school. Catholics argued that they should be able to direct their tax money to these schools (an issue still hotly debated today) but were met with strident opposition.

By building their own schools, orphanages, and hospitals, Catholics tried to nurture a distinctively Catholic worldview. Suspicious of liberalism and individualism, the Church argued that individual freedom always had to be subordinate to God’s commandments. According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia* of 1910, “liberalism” was a dangerous ideology that led to “the abolition of the Divine right and of every kind of authority derived from God; the relegation of religion from the public life into the private domain of one’s individual conscience; [and] the absolute ignoring of Christianity and the Church as public, legal, and social institutions.”

Catholics also denounced free-market capitalism for elevating individual profit over the common good. They argued that employers had a moral responsibility to pay wages high enough to support an entire family, not simply an individual worker.

### “THE ANTI-CHRIST HAS WON”

Despite the similarity of these opinions to some Protestant critiques, Protestants in this era continued to accuse Catholics of being subversive and “un-American.” The Ku Klux Klan, reorganized in 1915, gained 2,000,000 members by 1924 by attacking Catholics and Jews, as well as African Americans, as enemies of the nation.

When Al Smith, a Catholic, became the Democratic presidential candidate in 1928, the Klan sent out a flyer warning people that the “anti-Christ” had won. According to widespread rumors, the pope planned to move into the White House if Smith was elected. (Not surprisingly, Herbert Hoover easily defeated him.) In 1949 Paul Blanshard published a virulent attack on the



**OUR COUNTRY** The story of Roman Catholics in 19th- and 20th-c. America is one of gradual "Americanization," as immigrants assimilated to the culture of their new home. This 1957 image of parochial school children in a New York patriotic parade demonstrates the growing Catholic patriotism that paved the way for John F. Kennedy's election as America's first Catholic president just three years later.

some Catholics objected to Kennedy's claim that his beliefs would have no impact on his role as president, they shared his conviction that Catholicism and democracy are compatible. They were immensely proud to see the nation's first Catholic president swearing to "preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States."

### ON THE SAME SIDE

Only a few years after Kennedy's election, Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), a meeting of the world's Catholic bishops that proclaimed a new spirit of openness to modern culture. In a remarkable set of documents addressing liturgy, scripture, ecumenism, and the role of the Church in the modern world, the council emphasized that Church teachings could develop over time. One, *Dignitatis Humanae* (1965), reversed centuries of Catholic opposition to religious freedom by insisting that all individuals had the right to practice their faith without coercion.

But the American Catholic experience reminds us that religious minorities have struggled to practice their faiths freely in the United States. Other religious groups, especially Muslims, have taken Catholics' place as the targets of suspicion. We can only hope that we eventually achieve John F. Kennedy's vision of a more perfect nation—a nation where people of faith "will refrain from those attitudes of disdain and division which have so often marred their works in the past, and promote instead the American ideal of brotherhood." ☐

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**FREE AT LAST:** Roman Catholics experienced something of the prejudice that for so long barred African Americans from full participation in their nation's public life. Here Holy Cross Father Theodore Hesburgh, second from left, joins the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. at a 1964 rally at Chicago's Soldier Field.



Catholic Church, *American Freedom and Catholic Power*, which sold more than 100,000 copies and warned that the Roman hierarchy was plotting to impose "its social policies upon our schools, hospitals, government and family organization."

### INTO THE AMERICAN MAINSTREAM

Yet Blanshard's book was already out of date by the 1950s. As growing numbers of Catholics attended college and moved into the middle class, they seemed more interested in assimilating into the culture than criticizing it and no longer seemed as foreign or threatening. As the Cold War era dawned, Catholics also took a strongly anti-Communist stance. During the 1950s, Archbishop Fulton Sheen hosted a popular television program, *Life Is Worth Living*, which mixed spiritual advice with dire warnings of the Soviet threat. As many as 10,000,000 Americans watched his show each week.

John F. Kennedy's election to the presidency in 1960 was the most visible sign of assimilation. Although





# American religion 2.0

WHAT WILL SURVIVE? WHAT WILL DIE? WHAT WILL BE TRANSFORMED?

**CHRISTIAN HISTORY'S CHRIS ARMSTRONG** sat down recently with three scholars of the American religious scene to discuss whether it is still as diverse and thriving as it once was: **R. Scott Appleby** (Professor of History, College of Arts and Letters, University of Notre Dame); **Martin Marty** (Fairfax M. Cone Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus of the History of Modern Christianity, University of Chicago Divinity School); and **Molly Worthen** (Trinity College, University of Toronto).

**CA:** *How has the combination of religious freedom and innovation contributed to the diversity of American Christianity?*

**MW:** I think that the religious free market has been crucial to religious diversity. It feeds the instinct for innovation that characterizes all corners of American religion. I particularly see this in conservative Protestantism.

Evangelizing in a free market means you have to convince believers and spread your message in an effective way that is attractive and meaningful to people and answers questions that your audience is asking. Religious movements that emphasize evangelism—ranging from the Jesuits to “Jews for Jesus”—naturally encourage innovation.

Here's one example. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Church Growth Movement had its roots in the mission

field, where evangelicals used insights from the world of social science to make the Gospel culturally relevant. They brought those lessons back home, which contributed to the rise of the megachurch movement and seeker-sensitive Christianity.

Evangelicals and fundamentalists throughout American history have also been early adopters of media, despite charges that they are “antimodern.” They were quintessentially modern in their embrace of radio when it came around, and all forms of print media. Nowadays, we see this in their embrace of the Internet, though it is doing interesting things to traditional forms of authority, and I think we're seeing a culture in flux.

**CA:** *How does technology affect traditional forms of authority?*

**MW:** Take C. J. Mahaney and Sovereign Grace Ministries. Individuals in that church who are dissenting from the top leadership have used the Internet to get around the leadership. They've started a Wikileaks-type website where anonymous members of this church or disgruntled former pastors have posted stories and challenges to the top leadership, and that has nearly toppled Mahaney's ministry. I don't want to exaggerate this, but new media have the potential to really change the internal culture of churches that embrace them.

I'm not sure that this happened to the same degree



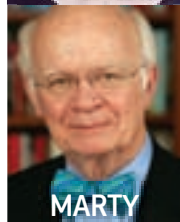


in other media revolutions. Control of the radio empire, control of the print empire, remained in the hands of top church leadership. But the Internet is so naturally democratic that it's a whole new animal.

**MM:** Scott [Appleby] and I have found in studies that fundamentalism's reputation, often self-cultivated and advertised, of being "the old-time religion" is inaccurate. Conservatives were conservatives, and some still are. But many have aggressively adapted. I remember a line that if you want a white fence post, you are very busy repainting it all the time. Conservatives let things lie. Fundamentalists and others like them are constantly improvising.



WORTHEN



MARTY



APPLEBY

Modern "inventors" have not been Reform Jews or mainstream Catholics or mainline Protestants, but Pentecostals and certain kinds of evangelical and African American churches with allegedly "conservative" biblical theology.

Why? They react strongly because they feel they have the most to lose. They fear being "blended in" if they don't paint themselves in bright colors and with rigid boundary lines.

I recall that when Christian rock came on the scene, conservatives—Pentecostals, fundamentalists, etc.—opposed the sounds and the costumes and the pelvic movements. A few years later, Christian rock topped the charts.

What we have to ask about the next generation is, What will

**WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?** *Left and above:* Thriving happens in many different ways in American Christianity, from the seeker-sensitive megachurch model of Willow Creek Community Church in the Chicago suburbs to Latin American Catholic rituals like this Phoenix, Arizona, parade in honor of the Virgin of Guadalupe (a 16th-c. Mexican apparition of Mary).

happen to theology when drastic stylistic changes, using and adapting so many symbols and signals from challengers to faith in the culture, come to shape all aspects of the faith and its communities? Give the changers credit. They are good students of culture. Their antennae are alert.

**SA:** On the one hand, communications technology has been a vehicle for being different, competing, finding a niche in the market. On the other hand, media makes things more similar. There's a certain way communicating happens in modern media, whether it's Wicca or orthodox Christianity. The ways we present ourselves and think through media, the ways images are used, have a homogenizing, Americanizing effect.

And one way that people of diverse backgrounds can feel comfortable in one American nation is that most religious groups that have been here for a while have at least one toe in what we would call civil religion.

**CA:** *What is "civil religion"?*

**SA:** When national symbols and rituals like the flag or the funeral of John Kennedy incorporate religious rituals and symbols and associate them with the nation itself. The symbols and practices of the nation become the sacred canopy shared by all Americans because they are American.

So we salute the flag, every president says "God bless America," and when we have state funerals they



**FROM WAVES TO BYTES** When radio evangelist Charles Fuller, (left; 1887–1968), later the founder of Fuller Seminary, started his hugely successful *Old Fashioned Revival Hour* in 1937, he could not have imagined the media revolution that is the Internet. But he probably *would* have guessed that this medium, too, would become an evangelical “loudspeaker” for the Gospel.



are full of ritual, symbol, and invocations of a kind of deist god. It's the notion that this is an “almost chosen nation,” as Lincoln put it. We are a nation that is under God, with whatever ironies that may contain, but we are nonetheless celebrating ourselves as the beacon, the shining city on the hill.

**CA:** At one point in the mid-twentieth century, formal ecumenism was all the rage. Has it been replaced by a more informal “grassroots” brand of ecumenism today?

**SA:** That hoped-for moment passed in the mid-twentieth century—a moment of, if not theological unity, then theological convergence. It passed because of a greater comfort with diversity itself and also because of an “enclave” or “retreating” movement within some groups.

Chris Smith has written a book called *American Evangelicals: Embattled and Thriving*. That's what many people feel as they perceive Christianity in an increasingly indifferent, if not hostile, society. Let's be embattled, that's a way to thrive. And that means reinforcing and underscoring our distinctives, and why we have advantages over the next group down the valley.

Mainline and liberal Christians have recognized a more universal sense of diversity as good in and of itself. Then on the conservative side of the spectrum, which was never very enthusiastic about the ecumenical movement in the first place, they are circling the wagons—precisely to survive and thrive.

**CA:** But isn't there something pulling the other way? Pragmatic cooperation on certain issues, or to gain certain political ends?

**SA:** Yes, “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” I'm not so sure it's led beyond tactical alliance building and then retreating, so I'm not so sure it's a trend that has real depth to it.

**CA:** I recall the experience of my wife and myself as young conservative Christians. We got involved in the crisis pregnancy center movement and experienced people from all kinds of backgrounds, both Protestants and Catholics, joining in common cause.

**SA:** I don't want to suggest there's no room for transformation. I simply mean that it hasn't led us to drop the denominational or doctrinal fences very far.

**MM:** I want to go back for a minute to what we've been calling “formal ecumenism.” Without doubt, it does not make news the way it did 50 years ago. Here's one incident that helped reveal the changes to me.

In 1960 I attended the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches [WCC]. At the time the Faith and Order people were working on a fresh definition of the goal of ecumenism. They had a beautiful phrase: “that all in each place” who accept Jesus Christ should come to a “fully committed fellowship.” We in the press got a release in which the typist had reproduced it as “a full committee fellowship.” Full committee fellowship is what most Christians, if they heard about ecumenism at all, pictured.

Vatican II, WCC, National Council of Churches in the United States of America [NCCUSA], and the rest were mainly seen as committees speaking with each other. The people went elsewhere to find fully committed fellowship. It followed few formal rules.

**MW:** I think there is contradictory evidence. Take, for



example, the reaction to Mitt Romney. I've come to the conclusion that there is a gap between the reaction of evangelical leadership to the idea of collaboration with Mormons for common social causes and the reaction of the evangelical grassroots.

But the gap works the other way too. Robert Putnam and David Campbell argue in *American Grace* that we are seeing increasing theological muddiness along with political polarization. They were giving a lecture about their research to some Lutheran Church Missouri Synod theologians and revealed that 86 percent of Missouri Synod Lutherans believe that their non-Christian neighbors might go to heaven. Putnam said, "Upon hearing this news, these theologians were stunned into silence."

Over the course of twenty-first-century life, most people have had increasing contact with neighbors who have different beliefs, with gay people, with people who disregard all sorts of traditional beliefs. That does break down intellectual assumptions and categories. If you have friends who are Muslim or gay or what have you, it becomes harder to accept the intellectual claims that perhaps you're hearing from the pulpit on Sundays.

**CA:** *Has the trend toward acceptance and diversity played down differences between American religious groups in recent decades or brought attention to them?*

**MW:** We are seeing a sort of pragmatic adjustment, as people get used to living their lives in more diverse societies. But there's also been a backlash against multiculturalism.

We're seeing more mutual tolerance among Catholics and Mormons and Protestants, but that's not yet extending to Islam by any means. And I do think it's complicated by political polarization: American political culture as two completely incompatible worldviews based on different assumptions, rather than as problems we can negotiate together as a community.



**GOD AND COUNTRY** *Left and above:* The "civil religion" that has been part of countless presidential campaigns resurged after the 9/11 attacks. **ROCKING FOR JESUS** *Below:* Always culturally adept, in the 1980s American Christianity jumped into rock music with both feet (pictured: Stryper).

**SA:** The divisions are not necessarily between Christian denominations but within those denominations on political, theological, and cultural matters. Catholics are very divided, for example. The current contraception debate with the Obama administration exposes a real division and tension and lack of communication within Catholicism. While they may take on religious language, these are questions about diversity and about the definition of our nation.

How much diversity can we tolerate as a people? When that diversity becomes too threatening, we launch theological torpedoes at our fellow Presbyterians or Catholics or Jews. I think civic issues and political issues have become dividing points. People load up on theological bonafides when they get into debates that are partly, at least, political.

**MW:** I'm encouraged by the thought of liberal and conservative Baptists or Catholics sitting side by side in the same pew and arguing. But one pattern that some scholars have noted is a sorting, where people tend to prefer congregations that affirm their pre-existing ideas. They are not very interested in dialogue.

As much as the Internet has opened us up to potentially talking to people all over the world, the blogs we tend to visit are those that reaffirm our own prejudices. And this is the downside of American religion, particularly in evangelicalism, where there is freedom to break away and start your own congregation as soon as there is any disagreement.





I think the Roman Catholic Church has a great advantage here. It has a structure that forces you to stay in the same intellectual, cultural, and worshipping community as the people who disagree with you. This is something that evangelicals to a greater degree can get away with not doing, and I think that it's intellectually crippling.

But I think that new immigrants are complicating that picture. Latino Pentecostals, for example, are for the most part coming out of a history and an environment that has given them deep antagonism toward Roman Catholicism. They harbor a serious anti-Catholicism in some cases that native-born Americans just don't recognize.

**SA:** The Catholic Church is being transformed in this country by the presence of Latino/as. By 2025 about 40 to 50 percent of American Catholics will be Spanish speaking or at least from Spanish-speaking homes. This also challenges the institutional Catholic Church because its leadership still remains white and largely Irish.

**MM:** Many of these changes relate not just to divisions of space and place but of time. Lausanne agreements and Vatican-and-others agreements get invoked, but few live by them. "The kids" today have a harder time going back to their parents' "Michael, Row Your Boat Ashore" or "Kumbaya" than they would to Gregorian chant. Ernest Gellner says that there is nothing more dated than the modernism of the previous generation. But that means that resolutions made today won't last long either.

**CA:** Thriving and vitality are words that are still relevant to American religion, but are they popping up in places nobody predicted 20 or 30 years ago?

**VISION OF UNITY** The 20th c. saw a concerted attempt, spearheaded by mainline Protestants, to reunify the diverse church in America and in the world. Methodist missionary statesman John R. Mott (left; 1865–1955) helped found the ecumenical World Council of Churches, and his work with international Christian student organizations earned him a Nobel Peace Prize in 1946.

**MW:** Yes, and I think Christians are being clever about redefining what it means to thrive. So evangelicals continue to be obsessed with baptismal rates. And you see liberal mainline Protestants talking about their success at bringing to secular society what they see as Christian values. For example, membership numbers may be down among liberal Episcopalians and Presbyterians, but look at the mass of social victories achieved by those groups.

**MM:** The letters of Paul speak of how "the forms of this world are passing away" and that is the case in the church too. The issue is, What will survive, what will die, what will be transformed?

For Protestantism at least four things that were invented between 1740 and 1840 are now being challenged. First, the denomination. They did not exist before the U.S. pattern of separated church and state and church competition. Second, the Sunday school. There are still Sunday schools, but they lack cultural clout. Third, the missionary movement. Fourth, the competitive parish system. There's still competition, but it's not just congregations that compete: media, parachurches, and go-it-aloners are in the mix.

**SA:** My little coda is the excitement of the continuing diversity of American religious experience. James Joyce was referring to Catholics when he said, "Here comes everybody." But you could say the same of American religion more broadly. It's one window on the really striking diversity and wonder of the human experience. **CE**



# Recommended resources

**MANY RESOURCES EXIST TO HELP** navigate the landscape of the diverse and thriving nature of American religion. Here are a few books, web resources, and articles from past issues of *Christian History* to get you started. (You can access these articles most easily by going to the online version of this issue at [www.christianhistorymagazine.org](http://www.christianhistorymagazine.org) and clicking on the titles of the articles that interest you. For a list of all of CH's back issues, see <http://www.christianhistorymagazine.org/index.php/back-issues/>.)

## GENERAL WORKS AND WEBSITES

- **Association of Religion Data Archives**, [www.thearda.com](http://www.thearda.com). Under the direction of sociologist Roger Finke, this website provides free data on most aspects of American religion with “features for educators, journalists, religious congregations, and researchers.”



- Randall Balmer, *The Making of Evangelicalism: From Revivalism to Politics and Beyond*. Focuses on “four great turning points” in the history of evangelicalism: the Great Awakenings, the nineteenth-century shift to premillennialism; the 1925 Scopes trial; and the rise of the religious right.

- Catherine Brekus and W. Clark Gilpin, eds., *American Christianities: A History of Dominance and Diversity*. Features essays about the diverse nature of Christianity in America—by race, gender, geographical location, theological approaches, and social concerns.

- Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776–2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*. Finke and Stark are perhaps the most famous modern popularizers of the thesis that diversity in the religious marketplace causes religion to thrive, and this book uses the last few centuries of American religious history to explain why they feel this is so.



- James Fisher, *Communion of Immigrants: A History of Catholics in America*. Surveys Catholicism's progress through, and impact on, American history, with attention to its cultural and ethnic diversity.

- Richard Hughes, ed., *The American Quest for the Primitive Church*. Explores how many different religious traditions in America—from Mormon to Baptist—have sought to restore primitive Christianity, and the wide diversity of the results.

- Martin Marty, *Pilgrims in Their Own Land: 500 Years of Religion in America*. This survey history of American Christianity highlights the personalities and the waves of migration that have shaped its story.



- Carolyn McCulley, “**Baptist Power**” (issue 62). “From this sprinkling of churches [in the early 1800s] came a thriving denomination that a mere century later produced the Revs. Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., Martin Luther King, Jr., and Jesse Jackson—products of the black Baptist tradition of activism.”

- Charles Morris, *American Catholic: The Saints and Sinners Who Built America's Most Powerful Church*. This comprehensive history of Catholicism in America includes its current challenges.

- National Humanities Center, “**Divining America: Religion in American History**,” [www.nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/divam.htm](http://www.nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/divam.htm). Over 30 brief essays explore how to teach (and learn about) various aspects of American religious history, each with copious links to further resources.

- Mark Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World: The History of North American Christianity*. This survey history of Christianity in America emphasizes what distinguished it, in Noll's view, from its European parents: “space, race and ethnicity, pluralism, and the absence of confessional conservatism.”

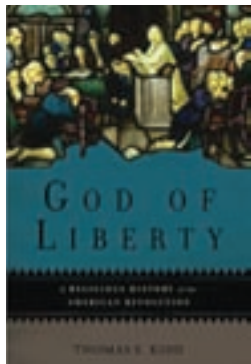


## EARLY SETTLEMENT, COLONIAL, AND REVOLUTIONARY PERIODS

- Donald Durnbaugh, “**The Flowering of Pietism in the Garden of America**” (issue 10). “Pietism clearly provided the foundations for much of American religious structure. Its emphasis on the Christian walk, on evident piety, and active and mutual support fit well with the American environment.”

- David Eller, **"The Germans Have Landed"** (issue 84). "It is October 1683. In a temporary cave-dwelling on the high banks of the Delaware, a German Mennonite family and several German Quaker families cast lots for parcels of land. The settlement they are founding—Germantown—will play a crucial role in the early history of the American Anabaptists."

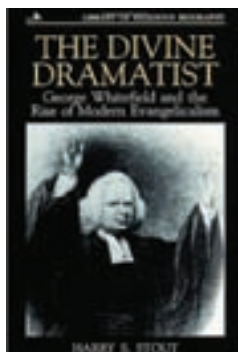
- Edwin Gaustad, **"Quest for Pure Christianity"** (issue 41). "Whether one thinks of Puritanism as bane or blessing, this is sure: no religious experiment in the New World has had a more enduring impact upon our nation's education, literature, sense of mission, church governance, ethical responsibility, or religious vision. This is the story of the Puritans' mission, what they termed an 'errand into the wilderness.'"



- Thomas Kidd, *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution*. Explores how evangelicals and deists cooperated in the revolutionary era in the service of a belief that religious freedom and diversity were important to the early republic.

- Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*. Argues that "the theme of democratization is central to . . . understanding the development of American Christianity and that the years of the early republic are the most crucial in revealing that process."

- James Smith, **"The Father of California"** (issue 35). "On the morning of July 16, 1769, on a windswept hillside overlooking the Pacific Ocean, Father Junipero Serra celebrated High Mass before a hewn wooden cross. The Mass signaled the sunset of Spain's mission colonization of the New World but the dawn of Father Serra's greatest work." See also **"Highlights of the California Missions"** (Mark Galli) and **"Christianity Comes to the Americas"** (William Taylor) in the same issue.



- Harry Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism*. This biography of George Whitefield highlights how much he contributed to the ethos of modern evangelicalism and how his theatrics prefigured the rise of modern televangelism.

- Harry Stout, **"Heavenly Comet"** (issue 38). "By 1750 virtually every American loved and admired Whitefield and saw him as their champion. . . . Whitefield's mode of revivalism—theatrical, passion-based, non-denominational, international, experience-centered, and self-consciously promoted through media—outlived him. Whether or

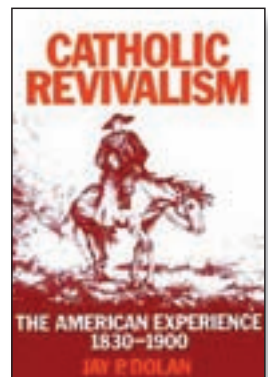
not they knew it, generations of evangelical revivalists, chaplains, youth and student parachurch leaders, and religious philanthropists followed a trail first blazed by George Whitefield." See also **"The Religious Odd Couple"** (Frank Lambert) in the same issue on Benjamin Franklin's friendship with Whitefield.

- Harry Stout, **"The Puritans and Edwards"** (issue 8). "The vision of a redeemer nation and a covenant people was dazzling and none, including Edwards, could escape its glare. As one voice among thousands, Edwards helped perpetuate that quintessentially Puritan notion of a righteous city set high upon a hill for all the world to see."

## NINETEENTH CENTURY

- Elesha Coffman, **"Alternative Religions"** (issue 66). "Many non- and semi-Christian groups also laid claim to the West, but none more successfully than the Mormons."

- Jay Dolan, *Catholic Revivalism: The American Experience 1830–1900*. Explores the history of how Catholics participated in revival through the use of the "parish mission."



- Carl Hallberg, **"A Church of Their Own"** (issue 66). "As immigration boomed between 1840 and 1920, the central plains attracted Europeans from agrarian backgrounds, while the West Coast and the Rockies lured Europeans and Asians seeking opportunity. By 1870, nearly three in ten westerners were foreign-born—and many of these newcomers had strong religious ties. Not unexpectedly, then, ethnic churches became the cornerstones of many immigrant communities."

- Bonnie Harvey, **"The West That Wasn't Won"** (issue 66). "In 1925, after three centuries of missions, the Native American Christian community stood at a meager 35,000. Mistreatment by the U.S. government and lack of understanding by white missionaries were simply too much to overcome."

- James Johnson, **"Charles Grandison Finney: Father of American Revivalism"** (issue 20). "The career of Charles Finney was nothing short of remarkable. From international fame as a revivalist, to professor at and president of a unique educational institution, to advocate and defender of a controversial doctrine of Christian perfection, Finney has left a major imprint on American religion."





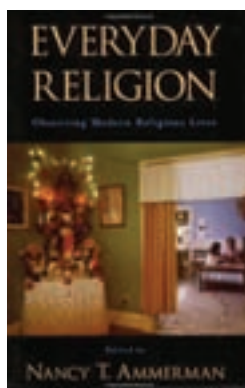
• R. Laurence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture*. Merchandising of religion is nothing new, and this book is a history of attempts at it since the beginning of the nineteenth century, from George Whitefield to Brigham Young to P. T. Barnum to Fulton Sheen.

• Edwin Woodruff Tait, “[The Cleansing Wave](#)” (issue 82). “The 19th-century holiness revival took many forms as it swept across denominational boundaries.”

• Charles Edward White, “[Holiness Fire-Starters](#)” (issue 82). “During her life (1807–1874) Phoebe Palmer spoke to over 100,000 people about Jesus and sparked a revival that brought nearly a million people into the church. Her influential theology paved the way for such modern holiness denominations as the Church of the Nazarene and the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana), and for Pentecostalism as well.”

## TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES

• Nancy Ammerman, ed., *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives*. This collection of essays describes modern American religious diversity as it functions “on the ground.”



• Jackson Carroll, *Mainline to the Future*. Argues for the continued vitality of the mainline tradition, but also maintains that it needs to adapt to the changes surrounding it in modern society.

• Elizabeth Hill Flowers, *Into the Pulpit: Southern Baptist Women and Power Since World War II*. Reveals the complicated history of women in the Southern Baptist Convention during the growth of conservative power in the church.

• Donald Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism*. Though several decades old now (before the prominence of the emergent church), this book traces the rise of “postmodern traditionalist” and postdenominational megachurches and the way they have transformed the American religious landscape.

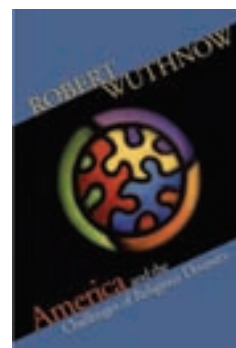
• Ted Olsen, “[American Pentecost](#)” (issue 58). “In a skeptical front-page story titled ‘Weird Babel of Tongues,’ a *Los Angeles Times* reporter attempted to describe what would soon be known as the Azusa Street Revival.”

• Robert Putnam and David Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. Based on extensive surveys of religious believers in America today, with in-depth profiles of a number of diverse congregations, the authors argue that “unique among nations, America is deeply religious, religiously diverse, and remarkably tolerant. But in recent decades the nation’s religious landscape has been reshaped.”

• Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving*. This detailed sociological study explores who modern evangelicals are and how they not only have survived, but continue to thrive, in modern, pluralistic America.


• Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture*. This is a comprehensive and sympathetic history of one of modern America’s major, and thriving, religious movements.

• Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity*. Argues that “responses to religious diversity are fundamentally deeper than polite discussions about civil liberties and tolerance would suggest. Rather . . . religious diversity strikes us at the very core of our personal and national theologies. Only by understanding this important dimension of our culture will we be able to move toward a more reflective approach to religious pluralism.”



• Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s*. Examines the diverse approaches to religious belief and practice in modern America, including the many people who define themselves as “not religious but spiritual.”

• From the “[Ten Most Influential Christians of the 20th Century](#)” feature (issue 65):

- William Martin, “[Evangelicalism: Billy Graham](#).” “As an evangelist he has preached to millions; as an evangelical he put a movement on the map.”
- Mark Galli, “[Missions and Ecumenism: John R. Mott](#).” “Evangelist and ecumenist.”
- Russel Moldovan, “[Martin Luther King, Jr.](#)” “No Christian played a more prominent role in the 20th century’s most significant social justice movement.”
- Vinson Synan, “[Pentecostalism: William Seymour](#).” “What scoffers viewed as a weird babble of tongues became a world phenomenon after his Los Angeles revival.” 



# A nation on a hill?

THE HISTORY OF CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS IN AMERICA HAS BEEN BOTH COMPLICATED AND CONTENTIOUS.

*Gary Scott Smith*

**MANY EARLY AMERICAN SETTLERS** sought, as Massachusetts Bay governor John Winthrop put it in his 1630 sermon, to create “a city upon a hill.” “The eyes of all people are upon us,” he added; if the Puritans followed “the counsel of Micah, to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God,” He will “delight to dwell among us, as His own people, and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways.” Moreover, Winthrop predicted, coming generations would ask the Lord to make their societies “like that of New England.”

## AMERICA, THE MODEL?

After Constantine made Christianity the favored religion of the Roman Empire in the early 300s, all Western societies established churches and used tax revenues to support them. Because Massachusetts and other colonies saw America as God’s “new Israel,” which could serve as a model of a godly, pious society and help spread Christianity to the world, they too established churches, mandating church attendance and Sabbath observance and banishing dissenters.

Most colonies used taxes to pay ministers, required citizens to affirm religious oaths to hold public office, and

restricted religious competition. Roger Williams felt the teeth of this restriction when, in 1636, his impassioned argument that “forced religion stinks in the nostrils of God” prompted Massachusetts to expel him.

When the colonies came together as the United States, the new nation broke with this 1,450-year practice of religious establishment. Not having a king was radical enough, but even more radical was the new nation’s decision *not* to establish a national church. The First Amendment to the Constitution, adopted in 1789 and ratified in 1791, prohibited Congress from establishing a church and from preventing citizens from worshiping as they pleased.

The decision frightened many. Western societies had long assumed that most residents would act morally only if they were compelled to participate regularly in the church; Thomas Jefferson disagreed, calling America’s arrangement “the fair experiment.” Prominent nineteenth-century jurist Dudley Field called America’s separation of church and state the world’s “greatest achievement . . . in the cause of human progress.”

The founding fathers adopted this arrangement for several reasons. For one thing, they knew that the experiment had already been tried for over a century, and it had not led to the moral collapse many feared. The exiled



Roger Williams had permitted freedom of worship in the colony of Rhode Island, which he founded in 1636. So did Quaker William Penn in Pennsylvania, which he established in 1681. And these colonies were thriving.

Moreover, the founders' Enlightenment convictions led them to make several arguments on behalf of religious liberty. First, they argued that history demonstrated that it was dangerous to give civil rulers authority over theological doctrines and ecclesiastical matters. Second, they insisted that people should be free to espouse the religious convictions that reason, conscience, and experience taught them were correct. And third, they sought to guarantee the same liberties and rights for all citizens, regardless of their ideological commitments—an ideal threatened by any form of religious establishment.

Their argument was religious as well as philosophical: Jefferson, James Madison, and other founders, as well as numerous Baptist and Presbyterian leaders, argued that the New Testament did not sanction religious establishments and that they in fact hindered evangelism and Christian nurture. Jefferson asserted in "A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom in Virginia" that the all-powerful God had chosen not to coerce people into believing in Christianity. Therefore, it was presumptuous, "sinful," and "tyrannical" for "fallible and uninspired" civil rulers to impose "their own . . . modes of thinking" as the "only true and infallible" religion. Moreover, attempts by the state to force citizens to espouse particular doctrines by "temporal punishments" or "civil incapacitations" tended to produce "hypocrisy and meanness."

### WHAT DID IT LOOK LIKE?

Madison argued similarly in his "Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments" (1785) that "the legal establishment of Christianity" had historically produced "pride and indolence in the clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, [and] in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution." Like Jefferson, he insisted that the "duty which we owe to our Creator and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence."

Many agreed with Madison that Christianity was much more likely to flourish if people voluntarily embraced it. Besides, because of the religious diversity in the new United States, no one denomination had enough adherents to be established as



### "IF MY PEOPLE, WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME, WILL HUMBLE THEMSELVES AND PRAY . . ."

In the popular imagination, the United States has long been considered a nation "on a mission from God." Whether led by an Episcopal priest (Jacob Duche) at the First Continental Congress (left) or mythically uttered by a heroic George Washington in a contemplative moment at Valley Forge (above), prayer has seemed an appropriate accompaniment to nation-building.

a national church. By the 1780s Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Baptists, Presbyterians, German Reformed, Dutch Reformed, Lutherans, Moravians, Mennonites, Quakers, Catholics, and Jews had all created thriving congregations.

The alliance that fashioned this "fair experiment" may seem an unlikely one. Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and James Wilson, among others, espoused theistic rationalism or deism. On the other hand, John Jay, Patrick Henry, Samuel Adams, Elias Boudinot, Roger Sherman, John Hancock, and others were devout Christians. However, both groups stressed God's providential direction of history and the value of prayer.

The arrangement they devised is often misunderstood. Far from creating a state that removed religion from the public square, the founders provided public support of Christianity through various means. Individual states could continue to establish churches, restrict public office holding to Christians, punish blasphemy, and issue proclamations of thanksgiving to God and calls for fasting. Federal funds could be used to finance missions to Indians, and government facilities could be used by Christian congregations for their worship services. In a 1797 proclamation as governor of Massachusetts (the colony that kept its established church the longest—until 1833), Samuel Adams beseeched God to "speedily" establish "the Kingdom of God and of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ . . . everywhere."



**A HOLY WAR** *Left:* Religion motivated many Civil War soldiers, like the members of the 69th New York State Militia, Fort Corcoran, Washington, D.C., pictured here attending Mass.

**LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL** *Below:* Enlightenment ideals joined New Testament egalitarianism in the 18th-c. Quaker-led birth of the movement to abolish slavery.



Meanwhile, another powerful force promoting religious pluralism came into play. Decades before the Revolutionary War, Massachusetts, a bastion of established religion, became both an unwitting seedbed of Christian diversity and the arena for a new force in American religion: voluntary participation in religion. The First Great Awakening of the 1730s and 1740s demonstrated that churches could best grow and expand their influence by the free participation of people who lived out their faith.

Led by Anglican evangelist George Whitefield and Congregationalist theologian and pastor Jonathan Edwards, the Awakening poured new life into hundreds of churches and created many congregations, schools, colleges, and missions—all through the efforts of those saved or renewed by the fiery preaching of itinerant ministers and local pastors.

One did not have to be a “born-again believer” to appreciate the social impact of these revivals. Benjamin Franklin did not share Whitefield’s beliefs, but he did attend some of Whitefield’s sermons in Philadelphia, and they became good friends.

Franklin was so impressed by the results these sermons produced that he published them. “It was wonderful to see the change soon made in the manners of our inhabitants,” Franklin declared. “It seem’d as if all the world were growing religious, so that one could not walk thro’ the town . . . without hearing psalms sung in different families of every street.”

### MARKETING FAITH

Many revivalists helped lead the campaign for religious liberty. In 1748 a group presented a petition to the Connecticut General Assembly arguing that their forefathers had come to this “howling Wilderness, full of savage Men and Beasts, that they might have Liberty of Conscience.” During the 1810s, revivalist Lyman

Beecher at first strongly opposed disestablishing the Congregational Church in Connecticut; but the positive fruit this change produced led Beecher to reverse course. He soon pronounced disestablishment “the best thing that ever happened to the State of Connecticut. It cut the churches loose from dependence on state support. It threw them wholly on their own resources and on God.”

Similarly, in 1819 Madison rejoiced that ministers of every denomination were zealously providing religious instruction in Virginia and winning people to Christian faith by “the purity of their lives.” Like Madison and Beecher, most Christians concluded that disestablishment created a religious “free market” that produced tremendous competition, variety, experimentation, and new methods of presenting the gospel, thereby furthering both evangelism and spiritual renewal.

Far from fading away after disestablishment, Protestant Christianity functioned as a de facto national religion until the 1920s. Frequent religious revivals, thousands of vital congregations, hundreds of religiously motivated reform movements, domination of education (all but a handful of the 500 colleges established before the Civil War were Protestant), influence in public schools and the media, and government support for Protestant Christianity all aided its prominence.

This influence was felt most in fervent social reform. In the first four decades of the nineteenth





century, proponents of the Second Great Awakening sought to remedy countless ills, most notably intemperance, slavery, biblical illiteracy, and poverty. Denominations and national and local voluntary organizations locked arms in a “benevolent empire,” distributing Bibles and tracts, evangelizing, reforming prisons, helping the poor, and seeking to raise the level of public morality.

These reforms reached into some of the darkest places of the young nation. Shocked by the mental breakdowns and suicides of scores of inmates locked in solitary confinement at the Auburn Prison in New York in 1821, reformers worked to improve prison life by teaching religion and literacy, furnishing libraries, and convincing authorities to reduce whipping, commute sentences, and separate inmates by age and condition (see image and caption on p. 38).

Temperance societies used a variety of means, including plays, to spread their “dry” message. William H. Smith’s *The Drunkard* (1844) was regularly performed at major theaters in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York. The play so moved P. T. Barnum that he featured it at his famous American Museum in New York and refused to serve alcoholic beverages there.

Protestants even tried to sanctify the Civil War. During the bloody, tragic conflict both the Union and the Confederacy claimed to have God’s approval, but leaders on each side insisted that God would bless their cause only if they faithfully obeyed him. The South emphasized its Christian heritage and convictions, while Northern ministers compared the death

**RALLYING TO THE CAUSE** By 1840, the year of this anti-slavery society convention, abolition had become a favorite cause of Protestant evangelicals in the North.

of Union troops with Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. Julia Ward Howe asserted in the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” (1864) that Union soldiers were engaged in a supernatural struggle against evil. Large numbers of Southern and Northern soldiers were converted in “camp revivals,” and their belief in heaven motivated many combatants to fight courageously.

## ONWARD, CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS

After the war, the social gospel movement resumed the Protestant crusade. From 1880 to 1925, ministers, social workers, college and seminary professors, businessmen, lawyers, and countless others—men and women; blacks and whites; conservative, moderate, and liberal Protestants—analyzed social problems and used a wide variety of tactics to remedy them. Led by pastors Walter Rauschenbusch and Washington Gladden, the movement motivated millions to improve American society.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, social gospel initiatives were not limited to modernist or “liberal” Christians (those who espoused higher biblical criticism and Darwinian evolution and emphasized Jesus’ example and teaching rather than his substitutionary sacrifice on the cross). Conservative, pietistic Christians (many of whom would become known by the 1940s as “evangelicals”) also operated soup kitchens, rescue missions, settlement houses,



**WHISKEY WARS** Above left: Although by this 1934 L.A. staging most people came to mock its antiboosze message, the 1844 drama *The Drunkard* had once been America's most popular play. Above: Some temperance crusaders blocked saloon doors with prayer-meetings, as outside this Ohio bar in 1874.

"institutional" churches that provided social services, and dozens of other ministries. Nor was reform an exclusively Protestant preserve: Catholics and Jews also forged a legacy of schools, hospitals, and charitable institutions still evident today.

But the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the 1920s led most conservative Protestants to abandon social reform because that was "what the modernists did."

### GET ON THE "RIGHT SIDE"

A half-century later, in the 1970s, many evangelicals, goaded by Carl Henry, Ronald Sider, Jim Wallis, and others, finally began to reassess their role in American public life. Henry challenged "Bible-believing Christian[s]" to get on the "right side" of "social problems such as war, race, class, labor, liquor, [and] imperialism" and to adopt "a progressive . . . social message."

Some on the "religious right," led by the Moral Majority, translated this call into more conservative terms and organized to protect the sanctity of marriage; strengthen families; combat the evils of communism, pornography, and big government; and oppose abortion and the right of homosexuals to marry and serve openly in the military (see "Taking back America," p. 32). Others (Evangelicals for Social Action, Sojourners, World Vision, Samaritan's Purse) focused instead on social justice: ending discrimination based on race and gender, uplifting the poor at home and abroad, reducing disease, and improving the environment.

### THE SECOND DISESTABLISHMENT

The informal Protestant dominance of American society declined significantly after the 1920s. Numerous forces contributed to this "second disestablishment." From the 1880s on, large numbers of Catholics, Jews, Orthodox

Christians, and unchurched individuals migrated to the United States—coincident with the fundamentalist-modernist feud that was dividing American Protestant denominations and reducing their public engagement. The rise of neo-orthodoxy in the 1930s, the emergence of Pentecostalism in the early twentieth century and the charismatic movement in the 1960s, the decline of mainstream Protestant denominations in the years after 1970, the growth of evangelicalism, and the "emerging church" movement further fractured Protestantism and reduced its cultural influence.

At the same time, many colleges and universities entirely abandoned their Protestant or Catholic heritage and adopted a secular, naturalistic approach in their governing philosophy, curriculum, and approach to student life. As George Marsden explains, by the 1930s the Christian worldview no longer directed the "heart of the university enterprise." Moreover, the explosion of media outlets—radio, television, movies, newspapers, magazines, and the Internet—spawned a cacophony of alternative voices.

But despite the significant increase of Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs and the concerted efforts of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, the American Civil Liberties Union, and proponents of the New Atheism to ensure that church and state are strictly separated, Christianity continues to function as the nation's founders envisioned it would: as a moral leaven in American political life. Fueled in part by contentious social issues, most notably abortion, school



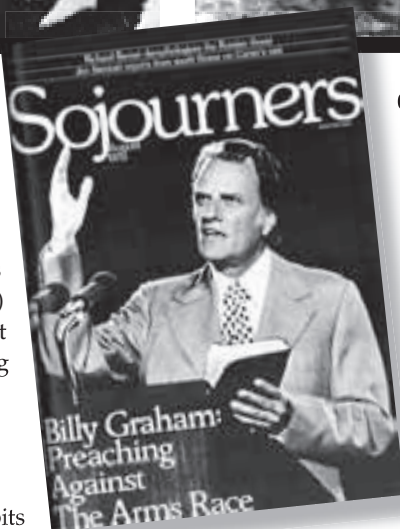


prayer, same-sex marriage, and embryonic stem cell research, religion has played a prominent role in many presidential campaigns. High percentages of Americans (72 percent in a 2008 Pew Poll) agree that "it is important that a president have strong religious beliefs."

### NO ATHEISTS IN THE WHITE HOUSE

While the Constitution prohibits religious tests for political office holders, in recent polls about half of all Americans claim that they would not vote for an atheist for president. As a result, most presidential candidates testify to their Christian faith and moral convictions, frequently quote Scripture, and compete for the votes of the large number of Americans for whom religion is important. Since 1974 every president has claimed to have a strong Christian faith, and in the 2012 battle for the Republican presidential nomination, two Mormons, two Catholics, and four evangelicals touted their religious convictions.

Because this nation has many denominations and three levels of government—federal, state, and local—the relationship between institutional religion and the state has always been a complicated one. The Constitution does not specify how organized religion and the government should interact with one another. Americans generally agree that the separation of church and state mandates that all religious groups have the same rights and opportunities under the law to worship, evangelize, and create organizations. People's free



### CHRISTIAN CONCERN FROM BABIES TO BOMBS

Above left: Renowned Baptist preacher Russell Conwell, here seen in 1924 at the Temple Maternity Hospital, inspired his Philadelphia congregation to start Temple University Hospital. Above right: When during the depression destitute Americans were unable to heat their homes for lack of coal, the Salvation Army operated a "free coal cart." Left: Billy Graham surprised many conservatives with this 1979 interview, in which he said that in light of human sinfulness, a nuclear holocaust would be inevitable if the arms race was not stopped.

exercise of their religious convictions can

be curtailed only if it infringes on the rights of others, violates civil laws, or threatens the public order.

Americans have long debated whether the United States was founded as a Christian nation and to what extent our laws and public affirmations should express Christian convictions. Unlike many state constitutions, the federal Constitution does not explicitly recognize God's authority over the nation or a divine basis for laws. Disagreements have erupted over Sunday blue laws, the use of Bible-quoting *McGuffey Readers* in public schools, and recently over whether the phrase "under God" should remain in the Pledge of Allegiance. Public schools have long been a source of contention. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Catholic protests about Protestant control of instruction and curriculum, coupled with Protestant fears that Catholics might gain control of tax monies in Catholic areas, led to removing or limiting religious courses and texts.

### "OUR LAWS ARE BASED ON JESUS"

Throughout the nineteenth century, the vast majority of Americans, whether Protestant or Catholic, saw



**COINING A PHRASE** Above: The familiar words became the official motto of the United States in 1956, though it had appeared on coins already for nearly a century.

**REVOKING INVOCATION** Right: Texas students at the time of the Supreme Court decision outlawing prayer in public schools (1963).



their nation as essentially Christian. Many religious communions sought the aid of the federal government to advance spiritual and social goals, worked to base the government's operations on Christian principles, and strove to shape its policies. In a unanimous 1892 decision, *Church of the Holy Trinity v. United States*, the Supreme Court justices declared, "Our laws and institutions necessarily are based upon and embody the teachings of the Redeemer of mankind. . . . [I]n this sense and to this extent our civilization and our institutions are empathically Christian. . . . [T]his is a Christian nation."

Before 1925 few challenged this contention. But while elite culture became increasingly secular after 1925, the Protestant establishment and its Catholic and Jewish allies continued to defend traditional religious standards. Since 1947 a series of Supreme Court decisions has significantly affected the place of organized religion in the public arena and contributed to heated debate about the relationship between church and state. *Engel v. Vitale* (1962) and *Abington School District v. Schempp* (1963) ruled prayer and Bible reading in the public schools unconstitutional, and more recent verdicts prohibit the display of religious symbols in public places.

Nevertheless, the concept of church-state separation has not prevented presidents from proclaiming days of prayer and thanksgiving, Congress from opening its sessions with prayer, the military from appointing chaplains, or the government from minting

coins that state "In God We Trust." In addition, some chief executives have held prayer breakfasts, worship services, or hymn sings at the White House. Almost all presidents have echoed George Washington's contention that religious faith is crucial to the well-being of the republic: "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports."

"Charitable Choice" and faith-based initiatives have recently created considerable controversy. Adopted by Congress in 1996, Charitable Choice increased the opportunity for congregations and parachurch organizations to receive government funds to help finance social services they provide. Five years later, President George W. Bush created the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives to provide greater opportunities for religiously motivated organizations to aid the needy; President Barack Obama continued this initiative. Supporters argue that it does not violate the First Amendment and that it eliminates unjust discrimination against religious groups. Others protest, however, that this policy sanctions discrimination in hiring on religious grounds and undermines religious liberty.

Some theological conservatives warn that religious agencies may be forced to compromise their mission and become dependent on governmental funds. "The brutal reality," declared Albert Mohler, Jr., president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, "is that when government money flows, government regulation inevitably follows." Secularists and civil libertarians complain that President Obama has yet to act on his promise to prohibit hiring based on religion and proselytizing in all organizations that receive federal funds to provide social assistance. Mohler counters by defending the right of religious organizations to hire workers who share their commitments and to evangelize while dispensing social aid.



**"RIGHT" TO VOTE** Below: Though Reagan disappointed the religious right, which hoped he would forward its agendas, he gained re-election in 1984. Right: Conservative activist Phyllis Schlafly demonstrates against the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970s.



## WALL OF SEPARATION

Massive confusion exists today about church-state separation. Does it require religion to be completely divorced from government, or does the First Amendment simply prohibit the establishment of a national church and guarantee religious liberty? The phrase "a wall of separation" between church and state, repeatedly used by the Supreme Court since *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947), is not in the Constitution. It comes from an 1802 letter in which Thomas Jefferson explained why he did not proclaim days for public prayer, fasting, and thanksgiving (unlike the first two presidents and almost all state governors).


Some argue that the First Amendment, in the words of Justice Hugo Black, erected a "high and impregnable" wall between church and state. But scholars contend that Black and later justices misunderstood Jefferson's use of the "wall" concept and that Jefferson supported "government hospitality to religious activity" as long as it was voluntary and offered equally to all citizens. Jefferson attended religious services held on government property, allowed Washington congregations to hold services in the Treasury and War Office buildings, and signed a federal law that provided tax exemption for churches in the District of Columbia. He also approved the use of federal funds to support missionaries who worked to evangelize Indians in the West.

## CHRISTIANS IN POLITICS?

How, then, should Christians operate in the public arena? Should individual Christians, denominations, and specialized ministries pressure members of Con-

gress to pass specific laws and dispense federal money in particular ways? Should Christians favor candidates who profess to be guided by biblical convictions? Some scholars lament that Jefferson's metaphor, as interpreted by the courts, has been improperly used to thwart citizens from participating in politics guided by their faith, and to prevent religious communities from speaking prophetically in public life.

The two polar positions on this issue are "exclusivism" and "inclusivism." Exclusivists claim that religious beliefs are divisive and inhibit political discussion. Inclusivists counter that all people, not only the religiously devout, bring presuppositions to political debates; therefore, it is unfair to ask individuals to suspend religious convictions when discussing public policy. However, many inclusivists also urge Christians to devise arguments from natural theology and practical considerations to buttress biblically based support for legislation.

The founding fathers spoke eloquently, passionately, and frequently about the importance of religiously grounded morality to the success of their new republic. They provided governmental aid for religion in a variety of ways. The current effort to exclude religious perspectives and ideals and ensure a naked, ideologically "neutral" public square is at odds with their views, the history of our country, and the well-being of our society—a society that still, in many ways, sees itself as a "nation on a hill." 

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# Taking back America

HOW FUNDAMENTALISM ENGAGED THE CULTURE OF THE LATE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURIES

Chris R. Armstrong

AS THE DECADE of the 1980s opened, supporters rejoiced—and opponents warned—that fundamentalism, born by the 1910s and gone from public radar screens in the 1950s, was now (in historian Martin Marty's words) "back with a vengeance." And an agenda.

At its core, fundamentalism had always been theological. Forged in the heat of battle against theological "modernists" who accommodated developments in science and biblical scholarship, fundamentalism built its house on biblical inerrancy. It fought Darwinian evolution for theological reasons. It viewed the mission field of the world through the lens of premillennialism—a bleak view of human culture assuming severe and irreversible decline, from which believers would be rescued only by the personal intervention of Jesus Christ.

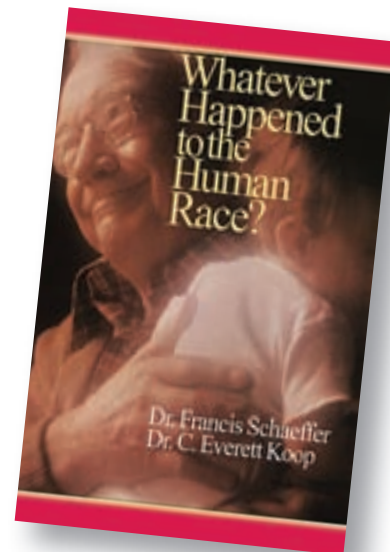
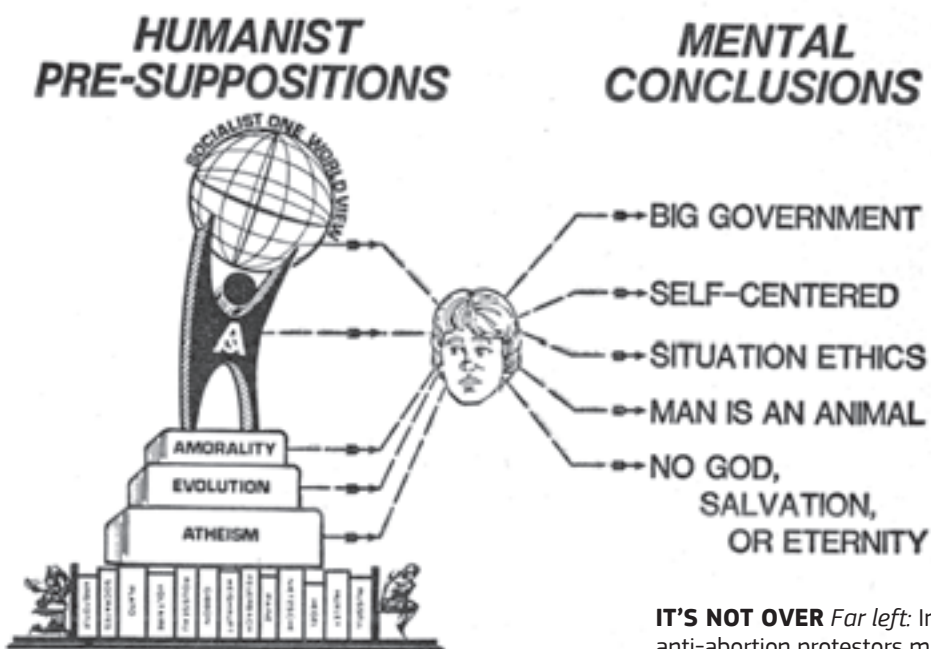
But fundamentalism also had a strong ethos of cultural concern. Its roots grew up in the nineteenth century, when evangelical Protestants comfortably behaved as custodians of a presumptively Christian American culture. And it reacted strongly whenever it saw this vision threatened. Higher biblical criticism and Darwinian evolution were not just theological threats, but threats to America's Christian civilization. At first fundamentalists saw such godless intellectual

trends behind the German barbarism of World War I. Then they perceived them in worldwide communism. By the 1970s, the forces of godlessness seemed to have rooted themselves within America itself—attacking American children in their schools, American families in their cohesion and sexual identity, and American institutions in their moral moorings. The old theological commitments were still present. Now, however, the crusade was primarily cultural and political: not about how to read the Bible or understand the end times, but how to vote and act on abortion, feminism, homosexuality, and school prayer.

These concerns arose from the counterculture's agitations of the 1960s and 1970s. The civil rights movement of the late 1950s and 1960s became the pattern and impetus for radical feminist and gay-rights activism, and the sexual revolution of the 1960s fostered sexual permissiveness. The *Engel v. Vitale* decision of 1962 declared government-imposed prayer in public schools a violation of the Establishment Clause of the Constitution, and the following year *Abington School District v. Schempp* declared against school-sponsored Bible reading. *Roe v. Wade*, 1973, protected a mother's right to terminate her pregnancy.

Each of these developments alone was troubling enough, but taken together, they amounted to a full-frontal secularizing attack. No longer could conservative Christians dictate public behavior from the high ground





of moral authority that came with being part of the Protestant establishment. By the 1970s, there no longer was a Protestant establishment. Simply shaming transgressors would not work anymore: rapidly losing status in the nation they had for decades thought of as their own preserve, fundamentalists now had to discover new modes of public persuasion and political action.

### ABORTION AND CREATION

On the issue of abortion, Roman Catholics led the charge. Abortion had long been treated as an excommunicable sin, but in 1968 Pope Paul VI (1897–1978) explicitly reaffirmed this stance in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. Then *Roe v. Wade* triggered a massive wave of Roman Catholic anti-abortion activism. To make progress in the cultural battle, fundamentalists swallowed centuries of confessional pride and joined with Catholics.

But one issue in the new culture war was distinctively Protestant: a quasi-scientific “creationism” arrayed against the Darwinian theory of evolution. By the early twenty-first century, although creationism was still solidly a fundamentalist preserve, linked as it was to a literal reading of the Genesis creation accounts, its camp had expanded to include many evangelicals and even some mainline Protestants through the “intelligent design” movement. Originating in the 1980s from the thought of scientist/historian Charles B. Thaxton (b. 1939), intelligent design (ID) argues that there are organisms in the natural world far too complex to have arisen by mere chance. Creation-science institutes, think-tanks, and museums developed multi-million-dollar budgets and sophisticated public relations campaigns focused on portraying Darwinian evolution as a “theory” that is shaky and unproven.

**IT'S NOT OVER** *Far left:* In 2008, 35 years after *Roe v. Wade*, anti-abortion protestors marched near the Supreme Court. **LIVING ORWELL'S NIGHTMARE** In 1979, fundamentalist thinker Francis Schaeffer and future surgeon general C. Everett Koop sounded the alarm over U.S. policies on abortion and euthanasia (*above right*). In 1984 Tim LaHaye warned in his *Battle for the Family* that government was becoming a godless, amoral “Big Brother” (*above left*).

Creationists also proved savvy political lobbyists, drawing support from such highly placed leaders as former House majority leader Tom DeLay (R-Tex.), former Senate majority leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.), and former president George W. Bush. Across 43 states, activists brought their movement to legislatures, school boards, and school districts. As a result, some districts adopted standards allowing for critiques of evolutionary theory within the science curriculum, and others either allow creationism to be taught alongside evolution or avoid teaching evolution altogether. Evolutionists have fought back, with battles seeing-sawing from year to year.

### “SECULAR HUMANISM”

In the 1970s one phrase came to encapsulate the fundamentalists’ sense of frustration: “secular humanism.” This was a concept from the writings of Francis Schaeffer (1912–1984), who drew from his Reformed tradition the insistence that Christianity should transform culture. His film series *How Shall We Then Live?* contrasts the Christian synthesis of the first 19 centuries of the church with a modern secular humanism, empty and destructive in confronting the fragmentation and moral relativism of the twentieth century. Schaeffer also helped raise *Roe v. Wade* to a position of preeminence as an example of secularist takeover of government. In 1979, working with soon-to-be surgeon



**CHOSEN NATION RISING . . . Left:** In the Reagan years, Jerry Falwell and his Moral Majority gained political clout. **. . . AND BABYLON FALLING Below:** From Hal Lindsey's 1970 end-times blockbuster through the 2007 wrap-up of the *Left Behind* series, fundamentalists thrilled to tales of imminent cultural collapse and divine rescue.

general Dr. C. Everett Koop (b. 1916), Schaeffer came out with a follow-up film series, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* It portrayed abortion as murder and the legalization of abortion as the natural result of secular humanists' emphasis on freedom of choice in the service of self-indulgence.

Under the rhetorical hand of fundamentalist author and family values activist Tim LaHaye (b. 1926), secular humanism soon morphed from syndrome to conspiracy. Many fundamentalist parents concluded that the public school systems had already succumbed. They continued a trend begun in the 1960s: founding alternative Christian schools with the explicit aim of arming young men and women against secular humanism both intellectually and politically.

### AMERICA: CHOSEN AND DOOMED?

Accompanying fundamentalism's campaign against secularization was its glorious narrative of "Christian America." From the late 1970s on, fundamentalist

leaders portrayed the promised land as a familiar place: the same land of virtue and piety created by the founding fathers and sustained by the Protestant dominance of the 1800s. The fundamentalists knew that this vision of America could not be regained by legislation alone, and so they prayed and organized for national religious revival and personal conversion, taking

2 Chronicles 7:14 as their founding vision.

But this rhetoric of cultural recovery mixed uneasily with that of end-times prophecy. Dispensational premillennialism, fundamentalism's favored end-times theory, had always insisted that the world—including America—would become increasingly evil and chaotic until Jesus returned, caught up his people in a global "rapture," and set up his thousand-year reign here on earth. This narrative was vividly portrayed in Harold Lee "Hal" Lindsey's (b. 1929) *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970), which, by 1990, had sold 28,000,000 copies. The *Left Behind* books by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins (b. 1949) took over where Lindsey's account left off.

Fundamentalists raised on this apocalyptic vision became adept at seeing it fulfilled in their nation's moral decline. But now such views existed, paradoxically, alongside efforts to work long-term change in the fabric of American society. In the words of historian George Marsden, "America might deserve the wrath of God for its sins, but let an American protester desecrate the flag or criticize the military and such outbursts would be treated as though they were blasphemy." America was now, oddly but compellingly, "simultaneously Babylon and God's chosen nation."

### FALWELL'S "TRUE FUNDAMENTALISM"

By 1980 a leader emerged to channel fundamentalism's newfound social activism: the Rev. Jerry Falwell (1933–2007). Falwell began his ministry in 1956 as the founding pastor of Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia. By the late 1970s, reading the signs of America's conservative religious landscape, Falwell turned the label "fundamentalist" to his own uses as a rallying flag in his crusade to bring the voice of a reputed silent-but-powerful "Moral Majority" to bear in American cultural politics. In 1979 Falwell cofounded the Moral Majority organization with *Left*





**GOD'S ENEMIES** Communism and evolution, while they may look like widely differing phenomena, were for late 20th-c. fundamentalists tentacles of the same monstrous problem: secularization. (Below: Carl McIntire, 1971.)



Behind author Tim LaHaye and Southern Baptist pastor Charles Stanley (b. 1932). It became the bulwark of the new, culture-warring fundamentalism and helped elect Ronald Reagan president in 1980.

For Falwell, the war of the 1980s to reclaim America for God was to be founded on Christian understandings; but it was not to be fought in the churches, the arena of the old fundamentalism. Instead, its battlegrounds would be the schools, the law courts, and the halls of political power. Its enemies included abortion, euthanasia, creeping “humanism” in the public schools, the threat to godly sexuality posed by pornography and homosexuality, new gender roles in the family, the continuing communist threat, and the forces arrayed against the state of Israel.

### FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT

As they fought these enemies, Falwell urged fundamentalists not to slacken in their efforts to evangelize, plant churches, and improve Christian education. And he continued to build a broad conservative political consensus beyond his fundamentalist base: not only evangelicals who were willing to stand militantly and faithfully for fundamentalist values, but also conservatives among Roman Catholics (at one point the largest single bloc within the Moral Majority), Mormons, Jews, and other concerned groups.


On the outside looking in were separatist fundamentalists in the mold of Bob Jones and Carl McIntire. In 1996 Falwell left the ranks of the independent (fundamentalist) conservative Baptists and brought his Thomas Road Baptist Church into the Southern Baptist Convention.

Today many self-described fundamentalists disavow their culturally engaged brethren. And the stricter fundamentalists do look very different from Falwell’s socially engaged sort. They preach separation from “apostate” religious liberals (all major



Protestant denominations); believe in an extreme version of inerrancy and frequently view the King James Version as the only inerrant text of Scripture; observe taboos against a long list of personal “sins” including smoking, drinking, and dancing; and support the anti-communist crusades of men such as Carl McIntire. In short, they seek separation from a world far gone in sin to present a distinctive Christian witness.

But in fact cultural engagement is nothing new for fundamentalists. The movement arose from a nineteenth-century evangelicalism that believed itself to be the custodian of American society—and indeed, like fundamentalism, often saw itself as embattled against corrosive cultural trends (think slavery and saloons). In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the dual sense of cultural custodianship and embattlement has only heightened, proving a potent motivator for today’s politically active fundamentalists (or as many now wish to call themselves, “conservative evangelicals”).

In response to disorienting cultural shifts, contemporary fundamentalists have taken organized action to affirm their own deepest values and spread them through persuasion and political pressure. And while their commitment to an inerrant Scripture leads them to affirm beliefs that place them outside the mainstream of American life, they spend more time and energy in the crusades of cultural politics than in the minutiae of theological debate. This pragmatic approach, which distinguishes them from fundamentalists of earlier decades, leads the “new fundamentalists” to publicize moral causes, sway elections, and worry liberal pundits, resulting in a torrent of public ink and bandwidth never given their forebears. 

*Chris R. Armstrong is professor of Church History at Bethel Seminary, St. Paul, MN, and managing editor of Christian History.*



# Crusades and reformers

## WHAT IS THE TASK OF THE CHURCH?

**CHRISTIAN HISTORY'S CHRIS ARMSTRONG** sat down for a discussion of how Christianity in America has been socially engaged; his conversation partners were **Randall Ballmer** (Professor of American Religious History, Barnard College, Columbia University); **Dana Dillon** (Assistant Professor of Theology, Providence College); and **Jennifer Graber** (Assistant Professor, Department of Religious Studies, The College of Wooster).

**CA:** *The rise of the "religious right" and the recent activities of religious "progressives" in politics are often perceived as representing a new development. Is that accurate?*

**JG:** I would say not. But it is much more partisan now. In the past, there was political involvement, but people didn't necessarily align themselves with a party and work for that party's success. Especially in the nineteenth century, reformers convinced people in political parties to take up similar platforms.

I think there have been watershed moments. Abolishing the slave trade was one. Court rulings have made certain religious groups feel particular parties have their best interests at heart. But these are always very complicated relationships. The political parties

may have some of the religious reformers' interests in mind, but not other interests.

**DD:** The issues rallying Catholics in the past, particularly in the early twentieth century, were workers' rights. That caused a lot of natural affiliation with what became the Democratic Party. But 1973 [*Roe v. Wade*] marks a very obvious divide for Catholics. Then those workers' rights, which included women's rights, became reproductive rights.

After that, I think that the Republican Party gave lip service toward restoring family values and moral issues in ways that touched chords for Catholics. The Democratic Party has done a great job with other issues that touch chords for Catholics. But that's more driven by how the partisan system works than by the beliefs of Catholics or of Christians in general.

**RB:** The religious right became a distinct political movement in the late 1970s, although you see hints as far back as the 1930s. The catalyst for evangelicals was not *Roe v. Wade*. The Southern Baptist Convention had passed a resolution calling for the legalization of abortion in 1971, reaffirmed in 1974 and 1976. Several evangelicals applauded *Roe* as marking an appropri-



ate distinction between personal morality and public policy. By the late 1970s, however, due to the Internal Revenue Service's issues with racial segregation at Bob Jones University, as well as Anita Bryant's crusade against gay equality in Miami Dade County, evangelicals began to mobilize.

The release of the *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* film series (1979) awakened evangelicals to the abortion issue, which they previously had regarded as a Catholic concern.

**CA:** What lessons can Christians learn from past attempts by believers to impact the political arena and implement social reforms? Are there particular mistakes and attitudes we should seek to avoid?

**JG:** Social reform movements in the early nineteenth century assumed there would be much more cooperation than conflict when religious folks and political leaders got together. This was because some of the issues and institutions that reformers cared most about, for example slavery, were transformed in this period.

Yet these were actually very controversial battles. Reformers constantly faced the ways the broader American public did not share their ideas. People involved in these movements wanted to change legislation and got themselves into very messy partnerships. They would go in with a sense they were fighting for the greater good, but it became morally complicated. For example, Christians who had great intentions of making prisons very humane institutions suddenly found themselves as partners, and workers, in places where people were essentially being tortured.

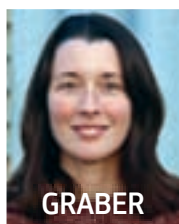
This paradox between wanting to be effective and also to be a witness has been hard to manage. Even having the insight to understand the paradox has sometimes been lacking.

**DD:** As a Catholic, it's very hard to let go of the idea that people are responsible to account for a universal morality. The purpose of government is to order all things in society to the common good. That means that Catholics want to help Catholic citizens, and all citizens, to advocate and take responsibility for that—and hold



**A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH** Left: The *Roe v. Wade* decision first galvanized Christian pro-life response in 1973. Almost 20 years later, at this 1991 protest, the abortion issue had lost none of its polarizing power.

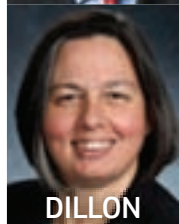
**"THE POOR WE WILL ALWAYS HAVE WITH US"** Above: In the 1930s, the devout and politically radical Catholic Dorothy Day worked with a French religious brother, Peter Maurin, to start the Catholic Worker Movement, whose "houses of hospitality" and farming communes still serve America's poor.



GRABER



BALMER



DILLON

the government accountable to doing that. I have sympathies with that, but if that aim ends up forming and shaping Catholic identity as a church, it undercuts our ability to speak about our more particular brand of Christianity, even to ourselves, and I think that's a mistake. Even in the recent government decision to require Catholic hospitals to provide contraception, Catholics don't know how to speak to themselves, to one another, and to the broader culture about these issues.

**RB:** What's often forgotten in the religious right's rush to remake the political arena in its image is the danger of collusion between church and state. Roger Williams recognized this almost four centuries ago. Williams wanted to protect the "garden of the church" from the "wilderness of the world" by means of a "wall of separation."

The Puritans did not share our post-Thoreau, Sierra Club romantic notions about wilderness. For them, the wilderness was a place of danger, where evil lurked. So Williams means he wants to guard the integrity of faith from too close an association with the state.

For admittedly different motives, Thomas Jefferson picked up on that language. Jefferson wanted to protect the government from religious division. The First Amendment's separation of church and state has ensured both political stability (Jefferson) and a vibrant, healthy religious marketplace (Williams) unmatched anywhere in the world.



## FROM PUNISHMENT TO REHABILITATION

High on the list of late 19th- and early 20th-c. progressive Christian causes was the reform of the American prison system (prisoners marching in lockstep at Auburn prison, N.Y., c. 1910).

But let me offer an example of Williams's concerns. I was one of the expert witnesses in the Alabama Ten Commandments case when Roy Moore plopped a two-and-a-half-ton granite monument emblazoned with the Ten Commandments into the lobby of the judicial building in Montgomery and refused to post any other religious sentiments or principles in that space. When Judge Myron Thompson ruled, correctly, that Moore's actions violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, one of the religious right protesters screamed, "Get your hands off my God!"

Now one of the commandments etched into that monument says something about graven images. And that was precisely Roger Williams's point about trivializing the faith by too close an association with the state.

**CA:** *On average, would you argue that the church has been a greater force for change or for preserving the American status quo?*

**JG:** Status quo, absolutely. Religious activists for social change are the exception rather than the rule.

**DD:** Status quo overall. But for Catholics, there is a bit of a pendulum swing. The Catholic Church in the United States has tended to see itself as an outsider who had to prove its loyalty to America. Only after the election of JFK did Catholics begin to think of themselves as part of the American establishment, and then, still somewhat distantly.

I think the U.S. bishops' encyclicals on war and the economy in the 1980s began a new engagement of Catholic leadership with U.S. political life. Issues with the Obama administration on health care and their opposition to the HHS policy mandating coverage of contraceptives is another such moment where we see a refusal to go along with the status quo. Whether it will be effective is another question.

**CA:** *Who is on your short list of the most important reformers in American Christianity?*

**JG:** Martin Luther King, Jr. But we shouldn't overlook other civil rights activists who made the movement work in local communities, people like Fred Shuttlesworth and Fannie Lou Hamer.

**DD:** For me, no one looms larger than Dorothy Day. These days, many people take it for granted that, if you are Christian, you should be committed to Christ in "the least of these," along the lines called for in Matthew 25.

But Dorothy Day not only lived that personally, she also cofounded the Catholic Worker Movement with Peter Maurin, making communities available for others who wanted to try that way of living. She and the Catholic Workers went on to challenge the structures that lead to poverty, and she served as a real prophetic voice, calling others, including leaders of the church, to give the poor their due.

**RB:** I'd include Charles Grandison Finney and Jonathan Blanchard, the abolitionist founder of Wheaton College. Louis Dwight, a member of the Boston Prison Discipline Society, helped to introduce the notion of prison as a place to be rehabilitated (prisons are called *penitentiaries*, from "penance"). Frances Willard, head of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, addressed the desperate social problem of alcohol. William Jennings Bryan, three-time Democratic nominee for president, is unfairly remembered for his less-than-stellar performance at the Scopes trial, but he would line up on the left of the political spectrum, especially in his support for women's rights and labor reform. In the twentieth century, I'd put names like Jim Wallis and Tony Campolo on that list, along with Nancy Hardesty, Mark Hatfield, and Jimmy Carter.

**CA:** *What do you think will be the most important cultural or political issue engaging American Christians in the coming decade?*

**JG:** It ought to be economics, but we'll continue to be consumed by sexuality. The sexuality conversation is important because it has to do with the well-being and civil rights of many Americans. Even so, as a person who studies the nineteenth century, I'm always shocked to see how concern and activism about poverty takes a back seat to other issues.

**DD:** Political forces are going to push conversations about same-sex marriage and contraception. The history of church control on these issues does not sit well with the modern sense of individual freedom. How-





**IN THE LION'S DEN** *Left:* The Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth (in hat) challenged segregated busing in Birmingham, Ala., by joining white passengers on a city bus, Dec. 26, 1956. Shuttlesworth boarded the bus hours after a bomb exploded inside his Collegeville, Ala., house.



ever, there is more at stake than making allowances for individuals who want to choose these things. There is a push for requiring everyone to acknowledge new definitions of marriage and to provide contraceptive coverage. Although these issues seem to be primarily about sex, they also touch on economic realities of marriage, children, and families in our society as well as on fundamental political issues such as the freedom of religion and the freedom of conscience.

**CA:** *What is the relationship of social engagement and politics?*

**RB:** People of faith have every right to bring their religious convictions into the arena of public discourse. The public sphere would be impoverished without those voices. At the same time, we must remember to observe the rules of civil discourse in a pluralistic society.

Too often, evangelicals have succumbed to the lure of "majoritarianism," which is the idea that if I can simply muster a majority I can impose my vision of morality on everyone else. That violates both the letter and the spirit of American democracy.

**DD:** I believe that (as Stanley Hauerwas would say) "the first task of the Church is to be the Church." In more Catholic terms, the church has received both a revelation and a mission from Christ. This puts it in service of the good of all and the good of each, but that

**HANDS-ON APPROACH** *Above right:* Committed to social justice and basic human rights during his presidency, the openly born-again Jimmy Carter began holding an annual Habitat for Humanity workday in 1984, giving a boost to the famous Christian housing ministry.

good is always understood in light of the truth revealed in Christ. Christ, not American political life, is the measure of the church's political engagements.

**CA:** *What are high-water and low-water marks of Christian social engagement in American history? Does the list change depending on where you are coming from?*

**JG:** I think low points are the silence about lynching in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as the lack of welcome of European Jews during the Holocaust by both the U.S. government and the church leaders who had politicians' ears.

It's interesting that you ask about where you are coming from. I think the issues should be determined by looking at Jesus' work with suffering and marginal people. I think that where you are coming from typically matters in an unhelpful way.

For middle-class folks to assist an impoverished family has historically meant a patronizing relationship between giver and receiver. So maybe the question



ought to be, How does the person in the “helper” or “advocate” position learn to listen to the person he or she is trying to help or advocate for? A little Gospel reading can help here.

**CA:** What are the top social issues that should concern the modern church?

**RB:** Jesus told his followers to care for “the least of these.” I find it difficult to evade our collective responsibility for those on the margins of society. This concern animated evangelical social reformers in the nineteenth century.

I also believe we’re once again seeing the damaging effects of unrestrained capitalism, just as during the “Gilded Age” late in the nineteenth century. There are vast disparities in wealth and a vicious cycle of poverty for the have-nots. What I find even more distressing is the assumption that capitalism is somehow divinely sanctioned. I get a kick out of evangelicals saying that Barack Obama can’t be a Christian; he’s a socialist. First of all, he’s not a socialist, but when was the last time these critics read the Acts of the Apostles?

During my recent research into the ideas of evangelicals before the Civil War, I found pervasive

**NOWHERE TO LAY THEIR HEADS** In 1890 Jacob Riis (1849–1914) published his photojournalistic exposé of New York’s immigrant slums, *How the Other Half Lives*. Images such as this one, *Street Arabs at Night*, stunned complacent Christians into benevolent action to help the nation’s poor.

suspensions of capitalism as hostile to Christianity. Finney, for example, rebuked capitalism because he said its fundamental self-interest was incompatible with the Gospel. He suggested that “business ethics” was an oxymoron.

**DD:** I think that the most fundamental moral truth is the dignity of the human person. Most of the truly horrible moments in history—genocides, mass enslavements—happened when the personhood of vulnerable populations was denied. I think that this means that we need to look to the most vulnerable populations—poor, marginalized, aged, disabled, unborn—and shore up the laws and the relationships that will offer them some protection, especially in a society that is increasingly driven by utilitarian values. **CA**



# Recommended resources

**MANY RESOURCES EXIST TO HELP** navigate the landscape of American Christian engagement with culture. Here are a few books, web resources, and articles from past issues of *Christian History*, to get you started. (You can access these articles most easily by going to the online version of this issue at [www.christianhistorymagazine.org](http://www.christianhistorymagazine.org) and clicking on the titles of the articles that interest you. For a list of all of CH's back issues, see <http://www.christianhistorymagazine.org/index.php/back-issues/>.)

## SURVEY HISTORIES



- William McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977*. Explores the relationship between revival awakenings and social reform movements in American history.

- John McGreevy, *Catholics and American Freedom: A History*. Studies the way Catholics have participated

in American intellectual life and how they have both cooperated and conflicted with Protestants over various social issues.

## EARLY SETTLEMENT, COLONIAL, AND REVOLUTIONARY PERIODS

- Mark Galli, *"Defeating the Conspiracy"* (issue 62). "For decades all manner of people and circumstances conspired against African Americans even hearing the gospel, let alone responding to it in freedom and joy."

- Justo González, *"Lights in the Darkness"* (issue 35). "It is true that the exploitation and immense cruelties of the [American] Conquest were done in the name of Christ, but it is also true that some in the same Name chose to live in solidarity with the exploited."

- Will Gravelly, *"You Must Not Kneel Here"* (issue 62). Recounts how Richard Allen, the first Christian bishop of African descent in North America, founded the African Methodist Episcopal Church, "one of America's first truly independent black denominations."

- The editors, *"In the Wake of the Great Awakening"* (issue 23). "The Awakening not only brought spiritual renewal to God's people, and new conversions, but salt and light to the society around."

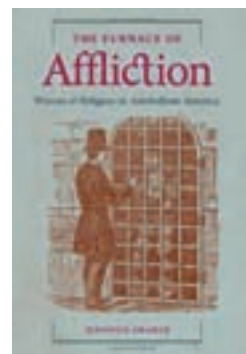
- Wesley Roberts, *"Rejecting the Negro Pew"* (issue 45). "Discrimination motivated blacks, where possible, to organize their own churches, though white leaders actively opposed that."

- Harry Stout, *"Preaching the Insurrection"* (issue 50). Explores the power of the sermon in colonial America: "Angry colonists were rallied to declare independence and take up arms because of what they heard from the pulpit."

## NINETEENTH CENTURY

- Daniel Dreisbach, *"The Wall of Separation"* (issue 99). "The rancorous presidential election of 1800 brought religion to the forefront of public debate and had lasting repercussions for the relationship between church and state."

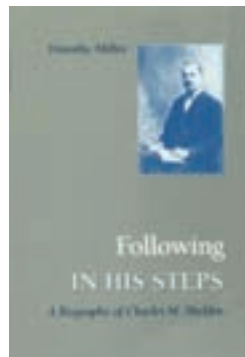
- Jennifer Graber, *The Furnace of Affliction: Prisons and Religion in Antebellum America*. This history of Protestant involvement with prison reform focuses on the many ways in which the reformers' ideals ultimately failed.



- Vincent Hardin, *"God's Avenging Scourge"* (issue 62). "Nat Turner's rebellion, the bloodiest in slave history, was driven by his prophetic visions."

- William Kostlevy, *"Saving Souls and Bodies"* (issue 82). "For some critics, the term 'holiness movement' has conjured images of navel-gazing holy rollers. This caricature is simply not accurate. The movement's most enduring legacy is a nationwide network of missions to the socially and economically disadvantaged . . ."

- Timothy Miller, *Following in His Steps: A Biography of Charles M. Sheldon*. The novel *In His Steps* (1897) famously urged social engagement on Protestant churchgoers. This biography of its author highlights his own social involvement.



- Ted Olsen, *"By Any Means Necessary"* (issue 62). "Black abolitionists were tired of waiting for a gradual peaceful end to slavery."

- Gari-Anne Patzwald and William Kostlevy, **"From Mutual Aid to Global Action"** (issue 84). Recounts the history of Anabaptist mutual aid and service ministries.

- Albert Raboteau, **"The Secret Religion of the Slaves"** (issue 33). "By the eve of the Civil War, Christianity had pervaded the slave community."

- Dana Robert, **"The Mother of Modern Missions"** (issue 90). "By bravely going where no American wife had gone before, Ann Hasseltine Judson inspired generations of women to become missionaries."

- Bruce Shelley, **"Counter-Culture Christianity"** (issue 45). Examines how Christians before the Civil War participated in social experiments where they "agreed to

hold their property in common, just as the apostles had apparently done in early Judea . . . [and] insisted that God called for a distinctive people reflecting the kingdom of God in all essentials of economic and family life."

- Timothy Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War*. This is one of the first modern scholarly books to systematically and sympathetically treat religious motivations for nineteenth-century social reform.

- Tim Stafford, **"The Abolitionists"** (issue 33). "After the Civil War, abolitionists were lionized. Then, soon, they were forgotten. They still are."

- Harry Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War*. Explores the dark side of

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## Faith and society: a timeline by Gary Scott Smith

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>1624</b> Virginia establishes the Anglican Church.</li> <li>• <b>1630</b> English Puritans found Massachusetts Bay Colony where church and state are closely linked.</li> <li>• <b>1636</b> Roger Williams is banished from Massachusetts Bay Colony and founds Rhode Island as a haven for religious dissenters; first colony to allow freedom of worship.</li> <li>• <b>1649</b> Maryland adopts Act of Toleration providing religious liberty.</li> <li>• <b>1681</b> Quaker William Penn founds Pennsylvania, which permits religious freedom and soon becomes the most religiously diverse colony.</li> <li>• <b>1702</b> Maryland establishes the Anglican Church.</li> <li>• <b>1737–1749</b> The First Great Awakening</li> <li>• <b>1785</b> James Madison pens "Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments."</li> <li>• <b>1786</b> Virginia enacts Thomas Jefferson's "Statute for Religious Freedom," disestablishing the Episcopal (formerly Anglican) Church.</li> <li>• <b>1789</b> U.S. Congress passes the Bill of Rights.</li> <li>• <b>1791</b> States ratify the Bill of Rights, including the First Amendment.</li> <li>• <b>1799–1840</b> The Second Great Awakening</li> <li>• <b>1818</b> Connecticut disestablishes the Congregationalist Church.</li> <li>• <b>1833</b> Massachusetts disestablishes Congregationalism, the last state establishment.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>1864</b> "In God We Trust" is added to currency.</li> <li>• <b>1880–1925</b> The Social Gospel movement</li> <li>• <b>1892</b> <i>Trinity v. the Supreme Court</i> declares that the United States is a Christian nation.</li> <li>• <b>1920</b> American Civil Liberties Union is founded to defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties guaranteed by the Constitution and laws of the United States.</li> <li>• <b>1947</b> Americans United for the Separation of Church and State (initially Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State) is formed to defend religious liberty and argue for government neutrality on religious matters.</li> <li>• <b>1954</b> "Under God" is added to the Pledge of Allegiance.</li> <li>• <b>1962</b> <i>Engel v. Vitale</i> rules school prayer unconstitutional.</li> <li>• <b>1963</b> <i>Abington School District v. Schempp</i> rules devotional Bible reading in public schools is unconstitutional.</li> <li>• <b>1971</b> <i>Lemon v. Kurtzman</i> establishes standards for legislation pertaining to religion.</li> <li>• <b>1996</b> Charitable Choice Act is passed, allowing government officials to purchase services from religious providers.</li> <li>• <b>2001</b> President George W. Bush creates the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.</li> </ul> |
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religious social engagement, describing how both North and South justified themselves through the idea that they were involved in a sacred cause.

- Ferenc Morton Szasz, **"Preparing a Way in the Wilderness"** (issue 66). "Though history has all but forgotten them, it was Christian preachers and teachers who really tamed the West."

- Jennifer Woodruff Tait, *The Poisoned Chalice: Eucharistic Grape Juice and Common-Sense Realism in Victorian Methodism*. Explores the theological motivations behind the efforts of evangelicals to reform many lifestyle issues in nineteenth-century America, especially temperance advocacy.

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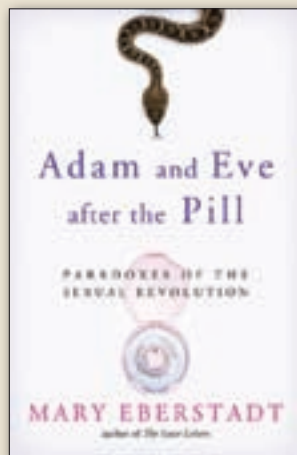
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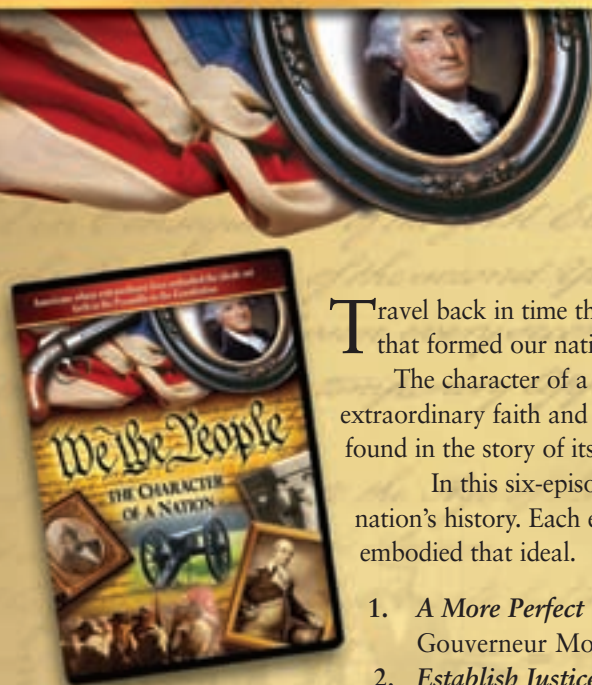


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