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Religion/Religions in the United States: Changing Perspectives and Prospects

STEPHEN J. STEIN*

The opening lines of a recent anthology edited by Yale historians Jon Butler and Harry S. Stout read as follows:

One of the more interesting commentaries on the age in which we live is that no field of American history has enjoyed a greater renaissance over the past three decades than religion. From a cottage industry that was once limited to seminaries and denominational colleges, the field has grown exponentially, and now major books and articles are emerging from history departments and religious studies departments located in major research universities.¹

It is out of the context of that dramatic historiographical expansion that I approach my task.² I intend to draw on that literature to examine the profound changes occurring in the religious makeup of our nation today by setting those changes into historical perspective and to explore the implications of those changes for understanding the contemporary challenge facing the principle and the practice of religious liberty.

One reason that the field of American religious history has enjoyed this three-decade burst of scholarly energy and investment is the accelerating growth of religious diversity. We have always been a religiously diverse people, but never to the degree as at the present moment. To illustrate that point, I will begin by constructing a collage composed of contemporary religious persons, individuals who define their being and reality by religious practices.³ Each of these persons lays claim to constitutional protections. These religious people must be the center of any discussion of contemporary religious life in America and the subjects on whom we focus if we are to deal adequately with issues of religious liberty. The free exercise of religion is more than an abstract principle; it involves concrete practice. It requires someone, some person, to do the practicing. I begin therefore by looking at the manifold ways your neighbors and mine, fellow citizens of the republic, practice religion in contemporary America.

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1. *RELIGION IN AMERICAN HISTORY 1* (Jon Butler & Harry S. Stout eds., 1998).

2. One striking measure of the vitality of American religious history as a field today is the cluster of revisionist literature recently published in anthologies edited by leading scholars. See, e.g., *LIVED RELIGION IN AMERICA: TOWARD A HISTORY OF PRACTICE* (David D. Hall ed., 1997); *NEW DIRECTIONS IN AMERICAN RELIGIOUS HISTORY* (Harry S. Stout & D.G. Hart eds., 1997); *PERSPECTIVES ON AMERICAN RELIGION AND CULTURE* (Peter W. Williams ed., 1999); *RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY AND AMERICAN RELIGIOUS HISTORY: STUDIES IN TRADITIONS AND CULTURES* (Walter H. Conser, Jr. & Sumner B. Twiss eds., 1997) [hereinafter *RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY*]; *RETELLING U.S. RELIGIOUS HISTORY* (Thomas A. Tweed ed., 1997).

3. For an alternative approach to the measurement and assessment of religious diversity in contemporary America, see *HANDBOOK OF DENOMINATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES* (Frank S. Mead ed., 9th ed. 1990); *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF AMERICAN RELIGIONS* (J. Gordon Melton ed., 5th ed. 1996).

A collage, as you know, is by definition "an art form in which bits of objects . . . are pasted together on a surface in incongruous relationship for their symbolic or suggestive effect."⁴ To that end I juxtapose a devout Episcopalian whose week does not begin properly unless opened with the fixed liturgical responses of *The Book of Common Prayer* and the traditional celebration of the Eucharist,⁵ side by side with a New Age representative who channels dolphins for a fee-paying audience who joins him in the conviction that all mammals are kindred spirits and are able to learn from one another.⁶ The next two religious persons include a Jehovah's Witness "publisher" who spends nearly every free hour going door to door in obedience to the command of Jehovah God,⁷ and a devout conservative Roman Catholic who has visited every site in the United States where the Virgin Mary allegedly has appeared and has a set of Polaroid pictures taken at those sites, several of which contain cloud formations thought to be evidence of the Virgin's presence.⁸ Then three more, including a Christian Scientist whose understanding of God provides the metaphysical basis for the practice of spiritual healing,⁹ a born-again Christian whose evangelical convictions have led to three arrests at abortion clinics for violations of safe corridors,¹⁰ and a member of the Nation of Islam who is serving a life sentence in a federal penitentiary for first-degree murder.¹¹ Now let's paste near

4. See WEBSTER'S NEW WORLD DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN ENGLISH 273 (3d college ed. 1988).

5. On the struggle within the Episcopal tradition over worship forms, see Don S. Aimentrout, *Episcopal Splinter Groups: Schisms in the Episcopal Church, 1963-1985*, HIST. MAG. PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH 295-320 (1986); see also MICHAEL MORIARTY, *THE LITURGICAL REVOLUTION: PRAYER BOOK REVISION AND ASSOCIATED PARISHES: A GENERATION OF CHANGE IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH* (1996).

6. For an example of dolphin channeling, see THE NEW BELIEVERS (Monticello Prods. 1990). For information on the New Age movement, see CATHERINE L. ALBANESE, *NATURE RELIGION IN AMERICA: FROM THE ALGONKIAN INDIANS TO THE NEW AGE* (1990); MICHAEL F. BROWN, *THE CHANNELING ZONE: AMERICAN SPIRITUALITY IN AN ANXIOUS AGE* (1997); *PERSPECTIVES ON THE NEW AGE* (James R. Lewis & J. Gordon Melton eds., 1992).

7. See M. JAMES PENTON, *APOCALYPSE DELAYED: THE STORY OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES* (1985). The most instructive look into the religious culture of the Witnesses is obtained by examining their leading publications, *The Watchtower* and *Awake*.

8. For discussions of recent Marian apparitions in the United States, see MICHAEL W. CUNEO, *THE SMOKE OF SATAN: CONSERVATIVE AND TRADITIONALIST DISSENT IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN CATHOLICISM* 5-6, 44-47 (1997); DANIEL WOJCIK, *THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT: FAITH, FATALISM, AND APOCALYPSE IN AMERICA* 60-96 (1997); see also Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz, *The Marian Revival in American Catholicism*, in *BEING RIGHT: CONSERVATIVE CATHOLICS IN AMERICA* 214-15, 218, 227-33 (Mary Jo Weaver & R. Scott Appleby eds., 1995).

9. See ROBERT PEEL, *HEALTH AND MEDICINE IN THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE TRADITION: PRINCIPLE, PRACTICE, AND CHALLENGE* (1989). The most striking testimonial evidence regarding spiritual healing is found in the church's publications, *The Christian Science Journal* and *Christian Science Sentinel*.

10. See JOHN JEFFERSON DAVIS, *ABORTION AND THE CHRISTIAN: WHAT EVERY BELIEVER SHOULD KNOW* (1984); JAMES RISEN & JUDY L. THOMAS, *WRATH OF ANGELS: THE AMERICAN ABORTION WAR* (1998); JOSEPH M. SCHEIDLER, *CLOSED: 99 WAYS TO STOP ABORTION* (1985).

11. See CLAUDE ANDREW CLEGG, *AN ORIGINAL MAN: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ELIJAH*

the edges a member of a Presbyterian cell church that meets in a neighbor's living room;¹² a "Baby Boomer" seeker who attends the contemporary worship service at the Willow Creek megachurch in suburban Chicago;¹³ an African-American preacher in a New Orleans Spiritual church;¹⁴ a devotee in the Krishna Consciousness movement resident at New Vrindaban, West Virginia;¹⁵ one of the seven remaining Shakers living in community at Sabbathday Lake, Maine;¹⁶ a Scientologist in California who measures her spiritual progress toward "clear" by the use of an e-meter;¹⁷ a midwestern housewife who has not entered a church building for years but whose refrigerator is covered with a multitude of magnetic religious images and who watches Robert Schuller's *Hour of Power* religiously;¹⁸ and a Hasidic Jew who believes that Rebbe Menahem Mendel Schneersohn will return from the dead.¹⁹ Scattered on top of all these let's place one of the members of

MUHAMMAD (1997); MATTIAS GARDELL, *IN THE NAME OF ELIJAH MUHAMMAD: LOUIS FARRAKHAN AND THE NATION OF ISLAM* (1996); C. ERIC LINCOLN, *THE BLACK MUSLIMS IN AMERICA* (1994).

12. The term "cell church" is a name newly given to a grassroots house church movement emerging among some Christian denominations. These small groups center their activities in the home instead of the institutional churches. They look to the pattern of early Christians as a model for their cells. See *Cell Church Page* (visited Nov. 7, 1999) <<http://www.cell-church.org>>.

13. Randall Balmer's three-part video series on American evangelicalism, entitled *MINE EYES HAVE SEEN THE GLORY: AMERICAN FOLK RELIGION* (Gateway Films/Vision Video 1992), includes an instructive segment on Willow Creek; see also Paul Braudodakis, *Why They Struggle to Believe: Inside the Minds of Today's Spiritual Seekers*, LEADERSHIP, Winter 1997, at 40 (containing interviews with Willow Creek participants); Lester Ruth, Lex Agendi, Lex Orandi: *Toward an Understanding of Seeker Services as a New Kind of Liturgy*, 70 *WORSHIP* 386-405 (1996).

14. See CLAUDE F. JACOBS & ANDREW J. KASLOW, *THE SPIRITUAL CHURCHES OF NEW ORLEANS: ORIGINS, BELIEFS, AND RITUALS OF AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN RELIGION* (1991).

15. On life among the devotees at New Vrindaban, see A *KRISHNA FAMILY* (Kurt P. Dudt & Joel Mlecko eds., 1989); see also FRANCINE JEANNE DANER, *THE AMERICAN CHILDREN OF KRISHNA: A STUDY OF THE HARE KRISHNA MOVEMENT* (1976); E. BURKE ROCHFORD, JR., *HARE KRISHNA IN AMERICA* (1985).

16. See STEPHEN J. STEIN, *THE SHAKER EXPERIENCE IN AMERICA: A HISTORY OF THE UNITED SOCIETY OF BELIEVERS* (1992). For a sense of the resilience of this small community, see their publication, *The Shaker Quarterly*.

17. See *CHURCH OF SCIENTOLOGY, SCIENTOLOGY: THEOLOGY & PRACTICE OF A CONTEMPORARY RELIGION* (1998); L. RON HUBBARD, *DIANETICS: THE MODERN SCIENCE OF MENTAL HEALTH: A HANDBOOK OF DIANETIC PROCEDURE* (1975).

18. See JAMES PENNER, *GOLIATH: THE LIFE OF ROBERT SCHULLER* (1992); DENNIS VOSKUIL, *MOUNTAINS INTO GOLDMINES: ROBERT SCHULLER AND THE GOSPEL OF SUCCESS* (1983). For two perspectives on religious kitsch, see COLLEEN MCDANNELL, *MATERIAL CHRISTIANITY: RELIGION AND POPULAR CULTURE IN AMERICA* (1995); Leigh E. Schmidt, *Everyday Blessings*, 115 *CHRISTIAN CENTURY* 752-54 (1998).

19. See generally *NEW WORLD HASIDIM: ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDIES OF HASIDIC JEWS IN AMERICA* (Janet S. Belcove-Shalin ed., 1995) (discussing the "complexity of contemporary Hasidim," a conservative minority group within the Jewish community); MENAHEM MENDEL SCHNEERSOHN, *ANTICIPATING THE REDEMPTION: MAAMARIM OF THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE MENACHEM M. SCHNEERSOHN CONCERNING THE ERA OF REDEMPTION* (Rabbi Eliyahu Touger

Heaven's Gate that did not make the trip with the thirty-nine;²⁰ a Native American of the Lakota tribe who uses traditional therapies to deal with an alcohol problem;²¹ a corporate lawyer on Wall Street who meditates twice a day to relieve stress;²² a Mormon fundamentalist in Idaho whose "family" includes three wives and eight children;²³ a seventy-eight-year-old widower in Florida who falls asleep each night to the words of "Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep";²⁴ and a fan of Hal Lindsey who is convinced that the Second Coming is about to take place.²⁵ As a border for this collage I would write in bold letters the words of the First Amendment: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of

& Rabbi Sholem Ber Wineberg trans., 1994) (addressing the concepts of the Messiah and Redemption through translations of seven Rebbe discourses called maamarim); Jim Yardley, *Messiah Fervor for Late Rabbi Divides Many Lubavitchers*, N.Y. TIMES, June 29, 1998, at B1.

20. The most instructive sources available at this time concerning Marshall Herff Applewhite and the Heaven's Gate community are several video tapes made by the members of the group. See, e.g., Videotape: Do's Final Exit (Right to Know Enterprises 1997) (on file with the Indiana Univ. Undergraduate Library); Videotape: Last Chance to Evacuate Earth Before It's Recycled (Right to Know Enterprises 1996) (on file with the Indiana Univ. Undergraduate Library); Videotape: Students of Heaven's Gate Expressing Their Thoughts Before Exit (Right to Know Enterprises 1997) (on file with the Indiana Univ. Undergraduate Library); see also Martin E. Marty, *Playing with Fire: Looking at Heaven's Gate*, 114 CHRISTIAN CENTURY 379 (1997); Evan Thomas, *Web of Death: Inside the Heaven's Gate Suicide*, NEWSWEEK, April 7, 1997, at 28.

21. On Lakota religion and spirituality, see ARCHIE FIRE LAME DEER & RICHARD ERDOES, *GIFT OF POWER: THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF A LAKOTA MEDICINE MAN* (1992); JULIAN RICE, *BEFORE THE GREAT SPIRIT: THE MANY FACES OF SIOUX SPIRITUALITY* (1998); MICHAEL F. STELTENKAMP, *THE SACRED VISION: NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGION AND ITS PRACTICE TODAY* (1982).

22. On the relationship between meditation and well being, see PATRICIA DRAKE HEMINGWAY, *THE TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION PRIMER: HOW TO STOP TENSION & START LIVING* (1975); MICHAEL MURPHY, *THE PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF MEDITATION: A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDITATION RESEARCH WITH A COMPREHENSIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY, 1931-1988* (1988).

23. See IRWIN ALTMAN & JOSEPH GINAT, *POLYGAMOUS FAMILIES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY* 191, 207, 273 (1996); Patricia Lynn Scott, *Mormon Polygamy: A Bibliography, 1977-1992*, 19 J. MORMON HIST. 133-155 (1993). It is important not to confuse Mormon fundamentalism with evangelical fundamentalism.

24. There is no established historical literature documenting the religious patterns of the elderly in contemporary America. There are, however, publications in the area of pastoral care. See HAROLD G. KOENIG, *AGING AND GOD: SPIRITUAL PATHWAYS TO MENTAL HEALTH IN MIDLIFE AND LATER YEARS* (1994); Jeffrey S. Levin, *Religious Research in Gerontology, 1980-1994: A Systematic Review*, 10 J. RELIGIOUS GERONTOLOGY 3-31 (1997).

25. It has been suggested that Hal Lindsey's *THE LATE GREAT PLANET EARTH*, in its many editions and translations has sold in excess of twenty million copies. For the most helpful volume for understanding the place of apocalyptic within contemporary American religion, see PAUL BOYER, *WHEN TIME SHALL BE NO MORE: PROPHECY BELIEF IN MODERN AMERICAN CULTURE* (1992). For a useful analysis of the rhetorical appeal of Lindsey's publications, see STEPHEN D. O'LEARY, *ARGUING THE APOCALYPSE: A THEORY OF MILLENNIAL RHETORIC* 134-71 (1994).

religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof”²⁶

Many other religious Americans belong on this collage, but there is no need to add more. The point is clear. The religious diversity that exists in America today is genuinely bewildering.²⁷ The religious pluralism in our nation becomes more complex with each passing day. The challenge we face at the turn of the new century and the beginning of the new millennium is to construct some conceptual model or to write some collective narrative that will do justice to this contemporary situation and will assist us in understanding its implications for the future of our nation.

I. THE EVOLUTION OF AMERICAN RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Let me repeat one point: religious diversity in America is not something new. But the scope of religious diversity in contemporary America is greater than ever before. Observers of American religion—sometimes participants, sometimes scholars—from early on have struggled to find ways to describe and explain religious pluralism as it has evolved historically in America. They have used a variety of models and narratives to make sense of the nation’s religious life in different time periods.²⁸ We can follow the evolution of that diversity through American history by examining the reflections of some of these observers.

In the earliest years of the American experience, during the Colonial Era, the dominant religious parties framed their descriptions of religious diversity in terms of heresy and dissent. In colonial New England, for instance, the clergy of the established Congregational churches labeled dissenters, such as Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson, as well as lesser known parties including the Gortonists, as antinomians and schismatics.²⁹ They branded Quakers with the epithet “Fanatics” and sought to drive them from the region through a series of physical penalties, from cropping an ear to boring the tongue, and finally to hanging.³⁰ In New England, religious outsiders appeared in the public narratives as theological or social deviants.

26. U.S. CONST. amend. I.

27. The denominations, communities, and groups in this collage are all easily categorized as “religious” based on an ostensive definition of religion. It is more difficult to agree about the “religious” nature of some other groups that are less obvious in their claims and activities. For example, the World Church of the Creator, an organization preaching white supremacist views and linked to possible acts of terrorism, pushes even the limits of a functional definition of religion. See Jared Sandberg, *Spinning A Web of Hate*, NEWSWEEK, July 19, 1999, at 28. The definition of religion is critical for First Amendment issues.

28. See SYDNEY E. AHLSTROM, *A RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE* 1-13 (1972).

29. See *THE ANTINOMIAN CONTROVERSY, 1636-1638: A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY* 4-10 (David D. Hall ed., 1968); John Cotton, *The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared, in THE ANTINOMIAN CONTROVERSY, 1636-1638: A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY*, *supra*, at 396, 414-37.

30. PHILIP F. GURA, *A GLIMPSE OF SION’S GLORY: PURITAN RADICALISM IN NEW ENGLAND 1620-1660*, at 145-50 (1984).

Rarely do we learn directly about such groups apart from the views expressed by the religious parties in power.³¹

Still less evident in the formal accounts of religious life in the first century of European colonization on the Atlantic seaboard were the diverse religious traditions of the natives who were being displaced by the colonizers. The diversity of tribal religions was obscured by the almost universal application of the categories of "savage" and "heathen" to all natives.³² In the world of first contact, only destruction and/or conversion were acceptable modes of interaction with the natives in the eyes of European Christians.³³ Even in the writings of those whom we regard as most sensitive to the rights of the Native Americans, there was little understanding of the religious diversity within the tribal groupings, much less of the particular traditions central to their experience. William Penn's Christian Eurocentrism was evident in the opening lines of a letter in 1681 he addressed to the Indians in the Pennsylvania region. He wrote "There is a great God and power that hath made the world, and all things therein, to whom you and I, and all people owe their being and well-being, and to whom you and I must one day give an account for all that we do in the world."³⁴

In the eighteenth century in the southern colonies where the Anglican Church enjoyed favored status, the religious activities of backwoods evangelicals were dismissed with contempt by many observers. For example, in 1766 Charles Woodmason, an Anglican itinerant, penned a condescending account ridiculing the manners of the "New Lights" in South Carolina, their "religious Assemblies" where he saw confusion and anarchy reigning, and their "Love Feasts" celebrated at night where the "Kiss of Charity" was exchanged and where he alleged promiscuity prevailed.³⁵ "To see, I say," wrote Woodmason, "a Sett of Mongrels under Pretext of Religion, Sit, and hear for Hours together a String of Vile, cook'd up, Silly and Senseless Lyes . . . must give great Offence to ev'ry one that has the Honour of Christianity at Heart."³⁶ His dismissal of these dissenting Christians reflected both an aesthetic and a class bias.

In 1789 and 1790, shortly after George Washington was elected the first president of the new United States, he recognized the importance of assuring religious

31. On religious dissent in early New England, see *id.*; DAVID S. LOVEJOY, RELIGIOUS ENTHUSIASM IN THE NEW WORLD: HERESY TO REVOLUTION (1985).

32. JAMES AXTELL, THE INVASION WITHIN: THE CONTEST OF CULTURES IN COLONIAL NORTH AMERICA 131-38 (1985).

33. See *id.* at 137.

34. A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF RELIGION IN AMERICA TO THE CIVIL WAR 123 (Edwin S. Gaustad ed., 1982) [hereinafter CIVIL WAR] (quoting EDWARD MARSH, SOME ACCOUNT OF THE CONDUCT OF THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS TOWARD THE INDIAN TRIBES 29-30 (1844)); see also AXTELL, *supra* note 32; FRANCIS JENNINGS, THE INVASION OF AMERICA: INDIANS, COLONIALISM, AND THE CANT OF CONQUEST (1975).

35. THE CAROLINA BACKCOUNTRY ON THE EVE OF THE REVOLUTION: THE JOURNAL AND OTHER WRITINGS OF CHARLES WOODMASON, ANGLICAN ITINERANT 97-103 (Richard J. Hooker ed., 1953) [hereinafter BACKCOUNTRY]. For a fuller account of the southern religious context in this period, see RHYS ISAAC, THE TRANSFORMATION OF VIRGINIA 1740-1790 (1982).

36. BACKCOUNTRY, *supra* note 35, at 102-03.

minorities that all groups—even those that had experienced hostility and disadvantage under the colonial governments—would enjoy “liberty of conscience”³⁷ and the right to worship the deity “according to the dictates of their consciences,” free of bigotry and persecution.³⁸ These assurances he communicated in a series of letters to Baptists in Virginia, Quakers in Pennsylvania, Roman Catholics in Maryland, and Jews in Rhode Island as part of his attempt to win support for the newly formed central government.³⁹ Washington recognized the substantial religious diversity that already existed in America. Earlier he had written about the ways in which harmony among different denominations would contribute to the stability of the new nation.⁴⁰ In the 1790s that harmony was an ideal yet to be realized.

One of the first published attempts in the new nation to describe in more systematic fashion the variety of organized denominations was made in 1789 by Jedidiah Morse, a Congregational clergyman whose ministerial career took him to Connecticut, Georgia, and New Jersey, and then finally to Massachusetts. Morse’s publication, entitled *The American Geography*,⁴¹ later earned him the accolade “the father of American geography.”⁴² In his publication he took note of the different denominations active in the three sections of the former English colonies—New England; the Middle Colonies, and the South.⁴³ He listed, for example, eleven different denominations active in New York: English Presbyterians, Dutch Reformed, Baptists, Episcopalians, Quakers, German Lutherans, Moravians, Methodists, Roman Catholics, Jews, and Shakers.⁴⁴ Some of these had only one congregation;⁴⁵ by contrast, the English Presbyterians had eighty-seven.⁴⁶ From Morse’s account it is evident that Americans had not yet learned how to live in the harmonious manner Washington envisioned. Critics labeled New England’s Congregationalists a bigoted people.⁴⁷ Theological controversy between supporters and opponents of the doctrines of predestination and of perfection raged in several regions.⁴⁸ Evangelicals in the South were stamped as poor, “very ignorant,” “generally a moral, well-meaning set,” but “enthusiastic” and superstitious.⁴⁹ Morse’s account distinguished among denominations on the basis of geography, theological beliefs, and social class.

37. “IN GOD WE TRUST”: THE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND IDEAS OF THE AMERICAN FOUNDING FATHERS 58 (Norman Cousins ed., 1958).

38. *Id.* at 59.

39. *See id.* at 44-73.

40. *See id.* at 58-61, 63.

41. JEDIDIAH MORSE, *THE AMERICAN GEOGRAPHY: OR, A VIEW OF THE PRESENT SITUATION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA* (1789).

42. D.G. Reid, *Jedidiah Morse*, in *DICTIONARY OF CHRISTIANITY IN AMERICA* 779 (Daniel G. Reid et al. eds., 1990).

43. *See MORSE*, *supra* note 41.

44. *See id.* at 268.

45. *See id.*

46. *See id.*

47. *See id.* at 387.

48. *See id.*

49. *Id.*

Nearly fifty years later in 1843, Robert Baird, a Presbyterian minister whose primary commitments were to evangelicalism and the missionary cause, and who spent some twenty-eight years traveling throughout Europe on behalf of those causes, published what is considered the first general assessment of American religion.⁵⁰ His volume was designed to explain the religious situation in the United States to those outside its boundaries.⁵¹ Baird, too, took note of the "diversity of religious doctrines," sometimes even within the same denomination.⁵² His attempt to explain the differences underscored the disparate origins and nationalities of Americans, the divergent traditions that immigrants brought with them to the New World,⁵³ and the freedom allowed to all kinds of religious views in the United States.⁵⁴ But for Baird the fundamental distinction was between evangelicals and what he called "non-evangelicals" or "unevangelicals."⁵⁵ In the latter category he listed Roman Catholics, Unitarians, "Christians" (of the Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell varieties), Universalists, Hicksite Quakers, Swedenborgians, Jews, Shakers, and Mormons.⁵⁶ In Baird's analysis we see in nascent form the "mainstream" model of American religious history. His account focused on the primacy, dominance, and what he saw as the moral superiority of the evangelical denominations; he left no doubt about the respect they deserved. The "unevangelical" denominations, by contrast, he linked with "the sect that has buried the truth amid a heap of corruptions of heathenish origin"⁵⁷ as well as with "the grossest of all the delusions that Satanic malignity or human ambition ever sought to propagate."⁵⁸

Another instructive nineteenth century attempt to describe the religious diversity in America was published only a few years later. It was authored by Philip Schaff, an immigrant from Switzerland who came to America in 1844 and taught church history at a German Reformed seminary in Mercersburg, Pennsylvania.⁵⁹ Ten years later he returned to Europe and lectured about America, including the nation's religious situation.⁶⁰ He tried to make sense of religious pluralism for his European audience. Schaff wrote:

Favored by the general freedom of faith, all Christian denominations and sects, except the Oriental [by which he meant Eastern Orthodoxy], have settled in the United States, on equal footing in the eye of the law; here attracting each other, there repelling; rivalling in both the good and the bad sense; and mutually

50. See ROBERT BAIRD, *RELIGION IN AMERICA, OR, AN ACCOUNT OF THE ORIGIN, RELATION TO THE STATE, AND PRESENT CONDITION OF THE EVANGELICAL CHURCHES IN THE UNITED STATES, WITH NOTICES OF THE UNEVANGELICAL DENOMINATIONS* (2d ed. 1856).

51. See *CIVIL WAR*, *supra* note 34, at 401.

52. *Id.* at 418.

53. See *id.* at 418-19.

54. See *id.* at 419-20.

55. BAIRD, *supra* note 50, at 579.

56. *Id.*

57. *Id.*

58. *Id.*

59. See PHILIP SCHAFF, *AMERICA: A SKETCH OF ITS POLITICAL, SOCIAL, AND RELIGIOUS CHARACTER* (Perry Miller ed., 1961).

60. See GEORGE H. SHRIVER, *PHILIP SCHAFF: CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR AND ECUMENICAL PROPHET* 40-42 (1987).

contending through innumerable religious publications. They thus present a motley sampler of all church history.⁶¹

One might conclude from the image of “a motley sampler” that Schaff was pessimistic about religion in America. But, in fact, the opposite was true. In the published version of his views he described America as “the Phenix grave” for all the churches imported from Europe to the New World; none of them, he thought, neither Protestantism nor “Romanism,” would dominate this new situation.⁶² But out of the conflict and “chaos,” he asserted, “something wholly new” would arise, a “beautiful creation.”⁶³ Though he did not spell out the particulars of that future arrangement, Schaff was optimistic about the ultimate outcome of the “kingdom of Jesus Christ” in America.⁶⁴

The new immigrants that flooded into America after the Civil War in the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century added complexity to the religious pluralism in the United States. Hundreds of thousands of Jews from eastern Europe brought to these shores deep commitments to Orthodox Judaism as well as versions of politically active secularism.⁶⁵ They overwhelmed the modest numbers of Orthodox and Reform Jews who were part of the religious diversity inherited from the colonial period and the antebellum years.⁶⁶ In the decades after the 1880s, American Jews planted the organizational seeds for the discreet “branches” of Judaism that were in place by the end of the 1920s—Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Judaism.⁶⁷

Similarly, during these same years the makeup of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States was transformed from its heavy Irish and German cast by the arrival of multiple new ethnic groups from Southern and Eastern Europe, especially Italians and Poles.⁶⁸ Religious diversity within Roman Catholicism is sometimes harder to discern because of the presumed unity of the ecclesiastical structure and hierarchy. Tensions, however, were deep within the ranks of the clergy as well as among the laity, and often most severe in manifestation when the clergy and the laity in one parish were of different ethnic backgrounds.⁶⁹ Differences in language, cultural mores, and devotional practices complicated efforts to build a strong unified American church.⁷⁰ These fault lines, for example, emerged clearly in the tepid response of the Irish hierarchy to the popular devotions of Italian immigrants, as was

61. SCHAFF, *supra* note 59, at 80.

62. *Id.* at 80-81.

63. *Id.* at 81.

64. *Id.* at 80-81.

65. See R. LAURENCE MOORE, *RELIGIOUS OUTSIDERS AND THE MAKING OF AMERICANS* 72-101 (1986).

66. See *id.*

67. See ARTHUR HERTZBERG, *THE JEWS IN AMERICA: FOUR CENTURIES OF AN UNEASY ENCOUNTER* 152-282 (1989).

68. See *IMMIGRANTS AND RELIGION IN URBAN AMERICA* at xi-xvii (Randall M. Miller & Thomas D. Marzik eds., 1977).

69. See AHLSTROM, *supra* note 28, at 531-32.

70. See JAY P. DOLAN, *THE IMMIGRANT CHURCH: NEW YORK'S IRISH AND GERMAN CATHOLICS 1815-1865*, at 119, 160-61 (1975).

evident in the festival honoring the Madonna in Italian Harlem.⁷¹ In the United States the notion of “one holy Catholic church” has always been a theological ideal in the process of being fulfilled.

Other immigrants also added to the religious diversity in America. Orthodox Christians of Greek and Russian background, as well as Serbian, Syrian, Ukrainian, Albanian, Bulgarian, and Rumanian groups, founded religious organizations defined by ethnic and national identities.⁷² Chinese immigration followed a different path. After the discovery of gold in California in 1848, hundreds of thousands of Chinese laborers had come to America, bringing to the West Coast the traditions of Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and other popular pieties; and they founded temples.⁷³ But by 1882 the wave of Sinophobia was strong enough in the nation for Congress to pass the Chinese Exclusion Act.⁷⁴ Subsequently many of these “pagan temples,” as they were called by critics, were forced to close.⁷⁵

The government had a hand in documenting the expanding religious diversity in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The Federal Census of 1890 for the first time attempted a thorough and comprehensive survey of religious organizations.⁷⁶ Although the accuracy of the data gathered has been questioned,⁷⁷ the trends are clear. The census revealed the Roman Catholic Church as the largest single denomination in the United States.⁷⁸ Similarly, Methodism had become the largest Protestant denomination in the nineteenth century.⁷⁹ The continuing importance of other Protestant denominations, especially those with roots in the Colonial Era, was also evident.⁸⁰ And the astonishing growth of the Latter-day Saints in a short sixty years of existence was confirmed.⁸¹ In these statistics only the Jews broke significantly into this solid Christian front.⁸²

Henry K. Carroll’s commentary on the religious scene in the United States strikes a highly appropriate note. He wrote:

The first impression one gets in studying the results of the census is that there is an infinite variety of religions in the United States. There are churches small

71. See ROBERT A. ORSI, *THE MADONNA OF 115TH STREET: FAITH AND COMMUNITY IN ITALIAN HARLEM 1880-1950*, at 55-57 (1985).

72. See Paul D. Garrett, *Eastern Christianity*, in 1 *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE* 325-44 (Charles H. Lippy & Peter W. Williams eds., 1988).

73. See *ASIAN RELIGIONS IN AMERICA: A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY* 73 (Thomas A. Tweed & Stephen Prothero eds., 1999).

74. See *id.* at 73-74.

75. *Id.* at 73-75 (quoting parts of the Chinese Exclusion Act, Act of May 6, 1882, ch. 126, 22 Stat. 58 (repealed 1943)); see also Thomas A. Tweed, *Asian Religions in the United States: Reflections on an Emerging Subfield*, in *RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY*, *supra* note 2, at 189-217.

76. See HENRY K. CARROLL, *THE RELIGIOUS FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES* at ix-xiv (1893).

77. See *id.*

78. See *id.* at 457.

79. See *id.*

80. See *id.*

81. See *id.*

82. See *id.*

and churches great, churches white and churches black, churches high and low, orthodox and heterodox, Christian and pagan, Catholic and Protestant, Liberal and Conservative, Calvinist and Arminian, native and foreign, Trinitarian and Unitarian. All phases of thought are represented by them, all possible theologies, all varieties of polity, ritual, usage, forms of worship. In our economical policy as a nation we have emphasized the importance of variety in industry. We like the idea of manufacturing or producing just as many articles of merchandise as possible. We have invented more curious and useful things than any other nation. In matters of religion we have not been less liberal and enterprising.⁸³

The last decade of the century brought new attention of a different sort to the changing religious situation in America. In 1893 the World's Parliament of Religions opened in Chicago in conjunction with the Columbian Exposition celebrating the 400th anniversary of Columbus's arrival in the New World.⁸⁴ At that assembly arranged by liberal Protestant leaders, Americans had an opportunity to hear and see representatives of religions of the East as well as spokespersons for many of the organized denominations in America.⁸⁵ Among the most celebrated Asian participants were the Hindu Swami Vivekananda and the Buddhist Anagarika Dharmapala.⁸⁶ Their presence aroused new public interest in the religions of the East.⁸⁷ The parade of speakers at the parliament in Chicago documented the changing character of America's religious pluralism and anticipated developments in the twentieth century.

Among the groups not represented on the platform at the parliament were several new American religions including the Latter-day Saints, who by this time were themselves split into several competing groups; the Russellites, the followers of Charles Taze Russell, or members of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, later in the twentieth century renamed the Jehovah's Witnesses,⁸⁸ and the Seventh-day Adventists led by Ellen Harmon White.⁸⁹ A representative of Mary Baker Eddy's Christian Science movement did address the parliament.⁹⁰ No individuals associated with the rapidly expanding Holiness movement lectured at the assembly.⁹¹ Only two delegates from African-American religious communities were on the program at the

83. *Id.* at xiv-xv.

84. *See generally* RICHARD H. SEAGER, *THE WORLD'S PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS: THE EAST/WEST ENCOUNTER, CHICAGO, 1893* (1995); *THE WORLD'S PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS* (John H. Barrows ed., 1893).

85. *See* SEAGER, *supra* note 84, at 43-62.

86. *See generally* CARL T. JACKSON, *VEDANTA FOR THE WEST: THE RAMAKRISHNA MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES* (1994); THOMAS A. TWEED, *THE AMERICAN ENCOUNTER WITH BUDDHISM 1844-1912: VICTORIAN CULTURE AND THE LIMITS OF DISSENT* (1992).

87. *See* JACKSON, *supra* note 86, at 16-36; TWEED, *supra* note 86, at 31-34.

88. *See* Stephen J. Stein, *Apocalypticism Outside the Mainstream in the United States*, in 3 *THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF APOCALYPTICISM* 108, 129 (Bernard McGinn et al. eds., 1998).

89. *See* THOMAS G. ALEXANDER, *MORMONISM IN TRANSITION: A HISTORY OF THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS 1890-1930* (1986).

90. *See* STEPHEN GOTTSCHALK, *THE EMERGENCE OF CHRISTIAN SCIENCE IN AMERICAN RELIGIOUS LIFE* 193 (1973).

91. *See* MELVINE. DIETER, *THE HOLINESS REVIVAL OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY 271-73* (1980) (discussing possible reasons why members of the Holiness movement were absent).

parliament.⁹² This near exclusion was consistent with the deeply racist character of the entire Columbian Exposition.⁹³

By the middle of the twentieth century religious pluralism in the United States was infinitely more complex than the situation Jedidiah Morse or Robert Baird had described.⁹⁴ Yet the dominant model for making sense of it remained the image of a mainstream—a Protestant “establishment”—in which certain culturally prominent and powerful denominations exercised religious hegemony.⁹⁵ In this model these Protestants were viewed as the consummate religious insiders, and all other groups were situated in some manner or other on the outside.⁹⁶ Numbers alone did not determine insiderhood and outsiderhood, for the Roman Catholic Church had been the largest single denomination since the time of the Civil War, and remained so.⁹⁷ Political power, cultural authority, social influence—these were the apparent measures that set Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, the white divisions of the Methodist and Baptist families but not the Southern Baptists, the Disciples of Christ, and the United Lutherans into an informal coalition, a liberal alliance evident in their support for both the Federal Council of Churches (formed in 1908)⁹⁸ and the National Council of Churches (formed in 1950).⁹⁹ Now the “mainstream” and the “margins” replaced Baird’s “evangelicals” and “non-evangelicals.”¹⁰⁰ The “margins” included an astonishing range of religious persons outside this “establishment”—from Roman Catholics and Jews to Southern Baptists and Missouri-Synod Lutherans, from African Americans located in traditional black churches such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church to their racial brothers and sisters who joined Father Divine’s Peace Mission Movement or Elijah Muhammad’s Nation of Islam, from Pentecostals—black and white—taking part in a host of regional associations to upper and lower class members of the Unitarian-Universalist family.¹⁰¹

The 1950s witnessed a few alternative suggestions for conceptual models, but none ultimately rivaled the mainstream metaphor. Some observers spoke of American society and culture as Judeo-Christian, a concession to the presence of Jews in America from early on in the seventeenth century and an acknowledgment of their

92. See SEAGER, *supra* note 84, at 45.

93. See generally PENTON, *supra* note 7.

94. See PETER W. WILLIAMS, *AMERICA’S RELIGIONS: TRADITIONS AND CULTURES* 321-436 (2d ed. 1998).

95. William R. Hutchison, *Protestantism as Establishment*, in *BETWEEN THE TIMES: THE TRAVAIL OF THE PROTESTANT ESTABLISHMENT IN AMERICA 1900-1960*, at 3-6 (William R. Hutchison ed., 1989) [hereinafter *BETWEEN THE TIMES*].

96. See *id.*

97. See AHLSTROM, *supra* note 28, at 555.

98. See WILLIAMS, *supra* note 94, at 331.

99. See Robert A. Schneider, *Voice of Many Waters: Church Federation in the Twentieth Century*, in *BETWEEN THE TIMES*, *supra* note 95, at 95, 97.

100. See *id.* at 111-15.

101. See generally *AMERICA’S ALTERNATIVE RELIGIONS* (Timothy Miller ed. 1995); see generally MOORE, *supra* note 65, at 140-49 (discussing the history of Pentecostalism in America).

significant numbers in the twentieth century.¹⁰² The language of “Judeo-Christian,” however, has rarely implied parity between the two religious traditions in America.¹⁰³ Many Christians employing that construction have reflected a not-so-subtle implicit triumphalism.¹⁰⁴ For them the “Old Testament” is often viewed as a proto-Christian, sometimes even as an explicitly Christian, document.¹⁰⁵

In 1955 the sociologist Will Herberg crafted a widely heralded variation on the earlier models.¹⁰⁶ In *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* he argued that there were three publicly acceptable ways to be religious in America, all of which served equally well to establish one’s identity in an increasingly faceless modern society.¹⁰⁷ Herberg’s historical sketches featured the rise to power and influence of immigrant Catholicism and Judaism, and pointed to the functional role of religion in sanctioning the American way of life.¹⁰⁸ He spoke of a “triple melting pot.”¹⁰⁹ Herberg’s judgments created the notion of a tripartite mainstream.¹¹⁰ Left out of this picture still were all the “marginal” groups previously excluded, except the Catholics and the Jews.¹¹¹

The continuing attraction of the mainstream model and of the corresponding historical narratives featuring powerful Protestant denominations was evident in a series of major studies of American religious history during the 1960s and early 1970s published by some of the most prominent historians of religion in America, including Winthrop S. Hudson in 1965,¹¹² Edwin Scott Gaustad in 1966,¹¹³ Martin E. Marty in 1970,¹¹⁴ and Sydney E. Ahlstrom in 1972.¹¹⁵ The last of these, the Ahlstrom volume, was a magisterial expression of the mainstream model that also contained substantial attention to the factors creating a new religious pluralism in the second half of the twentieth century.¹¹⁶ Collectively, these works exerted an enormous influence and contributed directly to the renaissance of interest in religious history described by Butler and Stout.

102. See, e.g., *THE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN HERITAGE* (William J. Courtney ed., 1970); *THE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN VISION AND THE MODERN CORPORATION* (Oliver F. Williams & John W. Houck eds., 1982).

103. See ARTHUR A. COHEN, *THE MYTH OF THE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN TRADITION* (1969).

104. See Mark Silk, *Judeo-Christian Tradition*, in *DICTIONARY OF CHRISTIANITY IN AMERICA*, *supra* note 42, at 602-03.

105. See Alan Richardson, *The Rise of Modern Biblical Scholarship and Recent Discussion of the Authority of the Bible*, in 3 *THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF THE BIBLE: THE WEST FROM THE REFORMATION TO THE PRESENT DAY* 294, 332-37 (S.L. Greenslade ed., 1963).

106. See WILL HERBERG, *PROTESTANT-CATHOLIC-JEW: AN ESSAY IN AMERICAN RELIGIOUS SOCIOLOGY* (1955).

107. *Id.* at 52-53.

108. See generally *id.*

109. *Id.* at 46.

110. See *id.* at 51-52.

111. See *id.* at 53.

112. See WINTHROP S. HUDSON, *RELIGION IN AMERICA* (1965).

113. See EDWIN SCOTT GAUSTAD, *A RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF AMERICA* (1966).

114. See MARTIN E. MARTY, *RIGHTEOUS EMPIRE: THE PROTESTANT EXPERIENCE IN AMERICA* (1970).

115. See AHLSTROM, *supra* note 28.

116. See *id.* at 965-1096.

Since 1970, religious change has accelerated in America, producing a situation in which existing conceptual models have seemed increasingly inadequate. In this situation one of the most instructive attempts to deal with the changes came from Catherine L. Albanese who in 1981 published the first edition of *America: Religions and Religion*,¹¹⁷ a volume employing a new approach to organizing the story of America's religious history. Her two primary controlling themes were "The Manyness of Religions in America"¹¹⁸ and "The Oneness of Religion in America."¹¹⁹ Under the first theme she introduced in the following order the persons and groups constituting America's astonishing religious pluralism: Native Americans,¹²⁰ Jews,¹²¹ Roman Catholics,¹²² Protestants,¹²³ and African Americans¹²⁴—all of whom came from somewhere; the members of distinctive new religions, such as the Mormons¹²⁵ and Seventh-day Adventists,¹²⁶ as well as participants in the occult and metaphysical movements;¹²⁷ the adherents of Eastern religions;¹²⁸ and the representatives of distinctive regional religious patterns in the United States.¹²⁹ With each of these she featured the ways in which religion functions. She defined religion as "a system of symbols (creed, code, cultus) by means of which people (a community) orient themselves in the world with reference to both ordinary and extraordinary meanings and values."¹³⁰ Under the second theme Albanese acknowledged the ways in which Protestants have exercised public dominance in the civic and cultural spheres in American history.¹³¹ In this volume for a first time there was a conscious attempt to create a comprehensive narrative for American religious history in which Protestants are simply one among the many.¹³² Albanese brought to her task a broad-based respect for diversity and a sensitivity to the particularities of different traditions.

In 1986 R. Laurence Moore launched an even more frontal attack on the dominant Protestant historiography. In *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans*¹³³ he argued that the prevailing historiographical consensus rested on the ecumenical hopes of Protestants for Christian unity and on their deep fears of sectarianism, religious dissent, and pluralism.¹³⁴ Moore cited a leading Protestant periodical as

117. CATHERINE L. ALBANESE, *AMERICA: RELIGIONS AND RELIGION* (1981). Albanese's texts has gone through two major new editions, one in 1992, the other in 1999.

118. *Id.* at 13.

119. *Id.* at 9.

120. *See id.* at 19-38.

121. *See id.* at 39-58.

122. *See id.* at 61-82.

123. *See id.* at 85-110.

124. *See id.* at 113-35.

125. *See id.* at 141-45.

126. *See id.* at 145-49.

127. *See id.* at 163-87.

128. *See id.* at 189-219.

129. *See id.* at 221-43.

130. *Id.* at 9.

131. *See id.* at 247-81.

132. *See generally id.*

133. MOORE, *supra* note 65.

134. *See id.* at 1-2.

evidence of the problem. In 1951 *The Christian Century* editorialized that “the United States is faced with the menace of a plural society based on religious differences.”¹³⁵ Moore, by contrast, celebrated the ways in which religious outsiders—Mormons, Catholics, Jews, Christian Scientists, millennial sects, twentieth-century fundamentalists, and African-American churches—have played a positive role in shaping American culture.¹³⁶ In his judgment, these groups comprising the alleged “margins,” rather than the Protestant “mainstream” churches, have been the most creative segment of American religious life.¹³⁷ The categories—mainstream and margin—he branded as strategic fictions.¹³⁸ Moore’s volume along with multiple publications by scholars such as J. Gordon Melton,¹³⁹ James R. Lewis,¹⁴⁰ Timothy Miller,¹⁴¹ and others has served as a positive catalyst for the expanding field of historical studies dealing with religious outsiders and new religious movements, groups often labeled pejoratively in the media as “cults.” A burst of such scholarship, for example, followed the tragic conclusion to the standoff between the Branch Davidians and agents of the federal government in 1993.¹⁴²

But the mainstream model has not passed from the scene. In 1989 William Hutchison published one of the most sophisticated attempts to keep the concept alive. In a volume of essays entitled *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America 1900-1960*, he and his fellow essayists examined the persistence of Protestant religious and cultural authority between 1900 and 1960 in what was clearly an increasingly pluralistic America.¹⁴³ Hutchison’s collection probed the ways in which Protestant influence continued during that era of transition.¹⁴⁴ Some of the essayists seemed unwilling to concede that a seismic shift in American religion had occurred.¹⁴⁵ By 1989 denial of change was either a product of nostalgia or an exercise in wishful thinking. By that time the decentering of American religion was clearly underway. These same years witnessed the rise of multiculturalism in American society.¹⁴⁶

135. *Id.* at 3 (quoting *Christian Century*, June 13, 1951).

136. *See id.*

137. *Id.* at 21.

138. *See id.* at 46.

139. *See* ENCYCLOPEDIA OF AMERICAN RELIGIONS, *supra* note 3.

140. *See* JAMES R. LEWIS, THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF CULTS, SECTS, AND NEW RELIGIONS (1998).

141. *See* AMERICA’S ALTERNATIVE RELIGIONS (Timothy Miller ed., 1995).

142. *See, e.g.*, ARMAGEDDON IN WACO: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE BRANCH DAVIDIAN CONFLICT (Stuart A. Wright ed., 1995); FROM THE ASHES: MAKING SENSE OF WACO (James R. Lewis ed., 1994); MILLENNIUM, MESSIAHS, AND MAYHEM: CONTEMPORARY APOCALYPTIC MOVEMENTS (Thomas Robbins & Susan J. Palmer eds., 1997) [hereinafter MAYHEM]; JAMES T. TABOR & EUGENE V. GALLAGHER, WHY WACO?: CULTS AND THE BATTLE FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN AMERICA (1995).

143. BETWEEN THE TIMES, *supra* note 95.

144. *See id.*

145. *See, e.g.*, Dennis N. Voskuil, *Reaching Out: Mainline Protestantism and the Media*, in BETWEEN THE TIMES, *supra* note 95, at 72, 90.

146. *See generally* RONALD TAKAKI, A DIFFERENT MIRROR: A HISTORY OF MULTICULTURAL AMERICA (1993) (discussing the experiences of immigrants from England, Africa, Ireland, Mexico, Asia, and Russia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries).

In this context some historians have given up on constructing a comprehensive inclusive narrative for American religion.¹⁴⁷ In part they have done so because in the past such narratives “have focused disproportionately on male, northeastern, Anglo-Saxon, mainline Protestants and their beliefs, institutions, and power.”¹⁴⁸ These historians also desire to tell the stories of the religious persons and groups who have been ignored previously—an admirable and important goal.¹⁴⁹ On the other hand, abandoning the effort to create an integrated comprehensive narrative, in my judgment, is not the answer, for it is through these larger narratives that isolated religious persons and groups come to see themselves in relation to other religious individuals and communities. For that reason the search for inclusive models and comprehensive narratives should not be abandoned even in the face of bewildering pluralism. Today there is greater need than ever before for such stories.¹⁵⁰

II. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS AS A MEASURE OF MODERN RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

One asset available to those who wish to make sense of America’s exploding religious pluralism is the body of instructive statistics on contemporary religions. Membership figures confirm that most mainstream Protestant denominations are in serious trouble because year after year they are experiencing membership losses.¹⁵¹ Not only are they not maintaining a growth rate consistent with the rising population, but they are actually losing net members. For example, the United Methodist Church, the third largest church body in the United States, has lost slightly over one-half of one percent of its total membership in each of the last two years.¹⁵² The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has a similar pattern, with losses of 1.22% and 0.88% in 1997 and 1998, respectively.¹⁵³ The United Church of Christ followed the same pattern, but with still higher percentages, 1.94% and 1.33%.¹⁵⁴ Losses in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, while smaller, have followed the same downward curve.¹⁵⁵ The American Baptist Churches saw an increase in its decline during these two years, from 0.63% to 0.93%.¹⁵⁶ All of these denominations are part of the presumed Protestant mainstream.

147. See RETELLING U.S. RELIGIOUS HISTORY, *supra* note 2, at 3. A similar attitude about grand narratives in American history in general is evident in Lawrence W. Levine, *Clio, Canons, and Culture*, 849 J. AM. HIST. 80 (1993).

148. RETELLING U.S. RELIGIOUS HISTORY, *supra* note 2, at 3.

149. See, e.g., Ann Braude, *Women’s History is American Religious History*, in RETELLING U.S. RELIGIOUS HISTORY, *supra* note 2, at 87, 87-107.

150. See Stephen J. Stein, *Our Stories/Their Stories: Insider and Outsider Narratives in American Religious History*, 37 CRITERION 2-15 (1998).

151. See WADE C. ROOF & WILLIAM MCKINNEY, AMERICAN MAINLINE RELIGION: ITS CHANGING SHAPE AND FUTURE 148-50 (1987); YEARBOOK OF AMERICAN & CANADIAN CHURCHES 1998, at 8-10 (Eileen W. Lindner ed., 1998) [hereinafter YEARBOOK].

152. See YEARBOOK, *supra* note 151, at 12.

153. See *id.*

154. See *id.*

155. See *id.*

156. See *id.*

But statistics show that this pattern of loss is not shared by all religious groups. Roman Catholicism, for example, already far and away the largest denomination, is enjoying statistical gains in the United States. Between 1997 and 1998 the church enjoyed a net increase of 927,460 new members, according to reported data; that represents a 1.54% increase in membership.¹⁵⁷ The Southern Baptist Convention and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod—both confessionally and politically conservative denominations—enjoyed modest increases between 1997 and 1998, 0.18% and 0.25%, respectively.¹⁵⁸ Far more impressive gains were made by two denominations often listed on the sectarian edge of the religious scene. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints experienced growth rates of 2.39% and 1.88% in the last two years.¹⁵⁹ The Assemblies of God recorded positive growth rates of 1.70% and 3.33% in these same two years.¹⁶⁰ In a word, R. Laurence Moore's religious "outsiders"¹⁶¹ continue to experience positive growth while the denominations that have been part of the Protestant mainstream are losing members steadily.

There is another way to use statistics to demonstrate the changing character of religious pluralism in the United States today. In 1998 the thirty-one largest denominations in America accounted for more than 95% of all church membership.¹⁶² In that year the ten largest denominations had these numbers, followed by the percentage of all church members in the U.S.: The Roman Catholic Church, 61,207,914 or 38.38%; Southern Baptist Convention, 15,691,964 or 9.84%; The United Methodist Church, 8,495,378 or 5.33%; National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., 8,200,000 or 5.14%; Church of God in Christ, 5,499,875 or 3.45%; Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 5,180,910 or 3.25%; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 4,800,000 or 3.01%; Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 3,637,375 or 2.28%; African Methodist Episcopal Church, 3,500,000 or 2.19%; and National Baptist Convention of America, Inc., 3,500,000 or 2.19%.¹⁶³ Together these ten account for 75.06% of the reported church membership. The remaining quarter is divided among perhaps some 1700 or more organized religious groups, not counting independent congregations.¹⁶⁴ (It is worth special comment that three of these top ten denominations are exclusively African-American communions.¹⁶⁵)

Even more revealing statistics can be cited to show the dramatic increase in the number of religious persons other than Christians and Jews in North America. The following figures for 1998 are inclusive for both the United States and Canada.¹⁶⁶ In North America the second largest religious group behind the Christians is the Jews with some 3,850,000 listed as members.¹⁶⁷ Next in order are the Muslims with

157. *See id.*

158. *See id.*

159. *See id.*

160. *See id.*

161. MOORE, *supra* note 65.

162. *See id.* at 6.

163. *See id.* at 7.

164. *See id.*

165. *See id.*

166. *See id.* at 5.

167. *See id.*

3,332,000; Islam is experiencing dramatic increases in numbers in America.¹⁶⁸ There is every reason to expect the number of Muslims to exceed the number of Jews in a very short time.¹⁶⁹ These same statistical tables list 1,285,000 Hindus and 565,000 Buddhists.¹⁷⁰ In addition, there are also significant numbers of Chinese folk religionists, Sikhs, Confucians, Bahaists, Jains, and Shintoists.¹⁷¹ Collectively these groups document the extensive presence of the religions of Asia in North America. What is not apparent from these numbers, but is apparent from other sources, is that these Asian religions are now experiencing substantial conversions from among the non-Asian portion of the American population.¹⁷² In other words, this growth is not due simply to growing numbers of Asian immigrants in the United States and Canada. This same statistical source lists 1,439,000 "New-Religionists," that is, persons active in the variety of small new religious movements scattered across America.¹⁷³ In the aggregate, these figures confirm that America's religious pluralism increasingly reflects the full range of the religions of the world.

III. A LOOK AT FOUR PIECES OF THE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS COLLAGE

Another aspect of the challenge facing those who wish to make sense of America's exploding religious pluralism involves confronting the astonishing variety of religious practice in contemporary America. Earlier I alluded to that diversity in the religious collage that I pieced together. To that collage I will now add, with a bit more detail, four select examples of contemporary vernacular spirituality.¹⁷⁴

In his tour of America's evangelical subculture, historian Randall Balmer gives his readers an inside view of a Friday afternoon healing service at Camp Freedom, the site of a Holiness camp meeting in St. Petersburg, Florida.¹⁷⁵ A plain cinder-block "tabernacle" was the site of the service. Homemade wooden benches, fluorescent lights, a large platform in front—these features dominated the modest accommodations.¹⁷⁶ The preacher for the day was Bedsaul Agee whose confidence in God's healing power was evident in his testimony. "Our God is able to meet our needs," he testified.¹⁷⁷ "I had a hand with three withered fingers, and the flesh was

168. *See id.*

169. *See id.*

170. *See id.*

171. *See id.*

172. *See id.*

173. *Id.*; *see also* WORLD RELIGIONS IN AMERICA: AN INTRODUCTION (Jacob Neusner ed., 1994).

174. For an instructive exploration of religious pluralism in one urban area, *see* RELIGIONS OF ATLANTA: RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN THE CENTENNIAL OLYMPIC CITY (Gary Laderman ed., 1996); *see also* ROBERT WUTHNOW, AFTER HEAVEN: SPIRITUALITY IN AMERICA SINCE THE 1950s (1998); Wade C. Roof, *Modernity, the Religious, and the Spiritual*, 558 ANNALS AM. ACAD. POL. & SOC. SCI. 211-24 (1998).

175. *See* RANDALL BALMER, MINE EYES HAVE SEEN THE GLORY: A JOURNEY INTO THE EVANGELICAL SUBCULTURE IN AMERICA 195-207 (1989).

176. *See id.* at 195.

177. *Id.* at 196.

restored on those in two days, and the doctor said he never saw anything like it in all his days. Of course he didn't. It was a supernatural miracle of God."¹⁷⁸ This particular afternoon, when the congregation was invited to come to the front for healing, no one came.¹⁷⁹ Then the ushers passed out white cocktail napkins on which those in attendance were urged to write prayer requests for friends or relatives.¹⁸⁰ Eventually some in the congregation came forward on second invitation.¹⁸¹ The clergy at the front prayed with them, laid hands on them, and anointed them with oil; these actions were greeted with "shouts of deliverance."¹⁸² The clergy then did the same with the napkin requests.¹⁸³ Before the service concluded, the minister asked for testimonies of healing.¹⁸⁴ When none were forthcoming, he concluded the service with the words, "Go by the Word of God. Go by faith that you are healed in the name of Jesus."¹⁸⁵ This service and the camp meeting stand in a long line of such gatherings and represent one deep vein of spirituality still present in evangelical America today.

In her firsthand account of Alourdes, or Mama Lola, a Vodou priestess in Brooklyn, New York, ethnographer Karen McCarthy Brown takes us inside a spiritual world where family members, dead relatives, and ancestral spirits interact on a daily basis.¹⁸⁶ Vodou is a blend of African religions and French colonial Catholicism that emerged from the eighteenth century slave world in Haiti.¹⁸⁷ Alourdes has a core of steady disciples who turn to her for healing work, which in this tradition embraces health concerns as well as issues bearing on family, love, and work.¹⁸⁸ One of Mama Lola's continuing responsibilities is to care for the wants and needs of the spirits whom she contacts for assistance.¹⁸⁹ For example, on one occasion Alourdes presides over the birthday celebration for Azaka, the spirit of a peasant farmer who reminds her of her roots in Haiti.¹⁹⁰ Brown describes in great detail the care taken to prepare an altar for the celebration in Alourdes's home.¹⁹¹ On the table and cabinet converted to "altars" were placed leafy branches, paper decorations, cloth scarves, bottles of Haitian liquor, pastries, candies, fruit, peanuts, traditional bread, and a birthday cake.¹⁹² The labor required to assemble and prepare all these items was part of the devotional work in this spiritual discipline.¹⁹³ The

178. *Id.*

179. *See id.*

180. *See id.*

181. *See id.*

182. *Id.*

183. *See id.* at 197.

184. *See id.*

185. *Id.*

186. *See* KAREN MCCARTHY BROWN, *MAMA LOLA: A VODOU PRIESTESS IN BROOKLYN* 38-68 (1991).

187. *See id.* at 3-4.

188. *See id.* at 4-5.

189. *See id.* at 5-6, 44.

190. *See id.* at 38.

191. *See id.* at 40-43.

192. *Id.* at 41.

193. *See id.* at 45.

actual ritual took place late at night and involved the use of songs and chants to call the spirits.¹⁹⁴ Ultimately, the aim of these devotional practices was to establish proper relationships with family members living and dead.¹⁹⁵ In the case of Mama Lola, we gain insight into the special leadership role of women in this tradition.

The political scientist Michael Barkun has written about the movement known as Christian Identity.¹⁹⁶ It is not a denomination or a religious sect, but a composite movement that includes "independent churches, Bible study groups, political organizations, and communal settlements."¹⁹⁷ Uniting these disparate elements is a set of distinctive beliefs linking "Aryans" with ancient Israel, the Jews with Satan, and the present with an impending apocalypse.¹⁹⁸ A measure of secrecy surrounds membership in the group, the size of which has been variously estimated.¹⁹⁹ Several communal organizations linked to Christian Identity have used force and violence to achieve their ends with the result that they have been the object of federal law enforcement investigation and surveillance.²⁰⁰ Members in the movement believe that they will have to experience a severe tribulation, including a possible race war, before the Second Coming of Christ.²⁰¹ For that reason their activities are parallel in certain ways to the larger survivalist movement.²⁰² They call for economic self-sufficiency and the stockpiling of weapons and food.²⁰³ Often they have clustered in rural areas, and they strategize about military operations.²⁰⁴ Christian Identity groups have verbally attacked Jews and nonwhites; they divide the world sharply between the forces of good and evil.²⁰⁵ Some cells of the movement believe they have the responsibility to be instrumental in bringing about the endtime events.²⁰⁶ This is literally a militant apocalyptic form of spirituality.

The School of Spiritual Integrity is another example of the changing nature of religious pluralism in America. The Internet website for this organization, which is attractive and well designed, banners "the harmony of life" as its goal.²⁰⁷ This site is part of the "ministry" of the Rev. Kythera Ann, who is a native Californian, the owner and operator of a graphics and design firm, and a New Age prophet.²⁰⁸ By her

194. *See id.* at 52.

195. *See id.* at 48-49.

196. *See* Michael Barkun, *Millenarians and Violence: The Case of the Christian Identity Movement*, in MAYHEM, *supra* note 142, at 247 [hereinafter Barkun, *Millenarians and Violence*]; *see also* MICHAEL BARKUN, *RELIGION AND THE RACIST RIGHT: THE ORIGINS OF THE CHRISTIAN IDENTITY MOVEMENT* (1994).

197. Barkun, *Millenarians and Violence*, *supra* note 196.

198. *Id.* at 248.

199. *See id.* at 248-49.

200. *See id.*

201. *See id.* at 249-50.

202. *See id.* at 251.

203. *See id.*

204. *See id.*

205. *See id.* at 248.

206. *See id.*

207. Kythera Ann, *School of Spiritual Integrity* (visited Nov. 1, 1999) <<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/2427/>>.

208. Kythera Ann, *Reverend Kythera Ann* (visited Nov. 1, 1999) <<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/2427/Founder.html>>.

own description, she has been a channeler and clairvoyant since childhood; she also claims to have studied with masters.²⁰⁹ She speaks of having offered classes and workshops for more than twenty years.²¹⁰ Now she offers courses both locally at her headquarters in California and through the mail.²¹¹ The stated goal of her school is to “facilitate . . . discernment and connection to Spirit.”²¹² To that end, persons who link with her through the Internet can choose among a variety of courses of study.²¹³ The School of Spiritual Integrity offers instruction in “metaphysical disciplines” and New Age topics, including angels, chakras, crystals, dreams, kabbalah, mandalas, sacred geometry, and tarot.²¹⁴ Book and video recommendations are also available for those who desire to explore these areas of spirituality.²¹⁵

IV. RELIGIOUS PLURALISM: CHALLENGING THE ASSUMPTIONS

The dramatic changes evident in the religious makeup of the nation and the exploding variety of alternative and innovative forms of spirituality require careful reassessment of certain longstanding assumptions about religion in America. In the search for better ways to understand the contemporary religious situation, we must acknowledge that some of the assumptions on which earlier models and narratives rested are no longer valid. I will identify five such assumptions in need of reappraisal.

A. Living in a Post-Denominational Age

Denominational categories are no longer sufficient or primary religious identifiers for many contemporary Americans. I do not mean thereby that denominational language has no usefulness. Obviously it continues to function in particular ways. Rather I intend to suggest the necessity of recognizing the alternative markers preferred by many religious persons. Robert Wuthnow has shown how the categories of “religious liberals” and “religious conservatives” have become more important than denominational labels for many because of the division over such controversial issues as abortion, homosexuality, and family values.²¹⁶ That has led some commentators to talk about this as a post-denominational age.²¹⁷ Likewise, large

209. *See id.*

210. *See id.*

211. *See id.*

212. *Id.*

213. *See Course Descriptions* (visited Nov. 1, 1999) <<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/2427/course.html>>.

214. *Id.*

215. *See School of Spiritual Integrity, Recommended Reading, Cassettes, and Videos* (visited Nov. 1, 1999) <<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/2427/books.html>>.

216. ROBERT WUTHNOW, *THE RESTRUCTURING OF AMERICAN RELIGION: SOCIETY AND FAITH SINCE WORLD WAR II* (1988).

217. *See* Donald E. Miller, *Postdenominational Christianity in the Twenty-First Century*, 558 ANNALS AM. ACAD. POL. & SOC. SCI. 196, 197-98 (1998); *see also* REIMAGINING DENOMINATIONALISM: INTERPRETIVE ESSAYS (Robert Bruce Mullin & Russell E. Richey eds.,

numbers of religious persons prefer to identify themselves as “evangelicals,” “born-again Christians,” or even “fundamentalists” rather than as members of specific denominations.²¹⁸ In our day these terms often carry clearer meanings than denominational categories; they also draw sharper boundaries than most denominational terminology. One other factor weakening the value of traditional designations stems from the greater loyalty many religious persons feel for local institutions over national organizations.²¹⁹ Support—both financial and personal—has risen for one and declined for the other.²²⁰ One of the advantages, for example, enjoyed by megachurches is that they usually operate as independent local entities without high profile denominational affiliations.²²¹

B. Religion Versus Spirituality

The common definition of “religion” as belief in a divine or superhuman power to be obeyed and worshiped, or the expression of such a belief, is not expansive enough to deal with the breadth of religious experiences and spiritual endeavors in contemporary America. Today religion is increasingly likely to be defined as any system of belief or practices resembling, suggestive of, or likened to a religious system; or perhaps even simply “any object of conscientious regard.”²²² Religion has become whatever a person declares to be the object of regard or pursuit. Some commentators on American religion are offering a slightly different formulation of this same phenomenon. The last twenty-five years, they suggest, have witnessed a growing number of Americans who completely reject the word “religious” and in its place use the word “spiritual.”²²³ Often they choose to live apart from established religious institutions, “indifferent to organized religion or even hostile to it.”²²⁴ These individuals see the cosmos as pulsing with spiritual energies which can be tapped through various spiritual disciplines.²²⁵ These newer expressions of individual and vernacular forms of spirituality are part of the story behind Harold Bloom’s judgment that “[n]o Western nation is as religion-soaked as ours.”²²⁶ Only a very fluid definition of religion can do justice to the multitude of different “religions” and forms of spirituality that exist in contemporary America.

1994).

218. Mark A. Shibley, *Contemporary Evangelicals: Born-Again and World Affirming*, 558 ANNALS AM. ACAD. POL. & SOC. SCI. 67, 74-75 (1998).

219. See William McKinney, *Mainline Protestantism 2000*, 558 ANNALS AM. ACAD. POL. & SOC. SCI. 57, 61-62 (1998).

220. See *id.* at 59; Shibley, *supra* note 218, at 68.

221. See DONALD E. MILLER, *REINVENTING AMERICAN PROTESTANTISM: CHRISTIANITY IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM* (1997). Megachurches are also called “new paradigm churches.”

222. WEBSTER’S NEW WORLD DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN ENGLISH, *supra* note 4, at 1134.

223. Martin E. Marty, *Revising the Map of American Religion*, 558 ANNALS AM. ACAD. POL. & SOC. SCI. 13, 21 (1998).

224. *Id.*

225. See *id.*

226. HAROLD BLOOM, *THE AMERICAN RELIGION: THE EMERGENCE OF THE POST-CHRISTIAN NATION* 30 (1992).

*C. The End of Monotheism and
Judeo-Christian Value Dominance*

Several common assumptions regarding the place of religion in Western public culture are no longer shared by many Americans. Monotheism—the notion that there is one divine power or God responsible for the world—is not a given for all religious groups in the United States today, much less for those who explicitly espouse a secular worldview. Some imported and/or new religious movements, for example, are explicitly polytheistic or nontheistic. The cultural authority once almost universally conceded to the Bible in the West (the Hebrew Scriptures, or Old Testament, and the New Testament) no longer is a given. One factor contributing to that development may be the widespread scriptural illiteracy in our society, even among persons active in the Christian and the Jewish communities.²²⁷ Additionally, other scriptures—the Quran, the Bagavad Gita, the Book of Mormon—now compete for favored status. And the related notion that there is a universal set of fixed, self-evident moral values binding on everyone derived from Judaism and Christianity—the “Decalogue” or Ten Commandments—is also rejected explicitly by some and hotly contested by others.

*D. The Unifying Power of Religion:
The Myth*

The idea that religion can be, or should be, or is a cohesive unifying force in American society has little relationship to either historical or contemporary reality. The nation has never possessed a common religion—not even a common “civil religion,” and it certainly does not at the present. In the past religion has been a major point of division among Americans, even during those times when observers and historians alike have focused attention on the dominance of the mainline Protestant churches. We need only remind ourselves of the sustained campaigns against Native Americans, Catholics, Jews, Mormons, Muslims, “cults,” “New Agers,” and other groups to make that point.²²⁸ At present, the undeniable reality of astonishing religious diversity undermines even the notion or the ideal of a religious unity. Perhaps the last-gasp effort to attain a Christian America was the Moral Majority of Jerry Falwell.²²⁹ Finally even its leaders recognized the disjunction

227. See Roof, *supra* note 174, at 219-21.

228. See generally ROBERT F. BERKHOFFER, JR., *SALVATION AND THE SAVAGE: AN ANALYSIS OF PROTESTANT MISSIONS AND AMERICAN INDIAN RESPONSE 1787-1862* (1965); RAY ALLEN BILLINGTON, *THE PROTESTANT CRUSADE 1800-1860: A STUDY OF THE ORIGINS OF AMERICAN NATIVISM* (1938); KLAUS J. HANSEN, *MORMONISM AND THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE* (1981); JOHN P. NEWPORT, *THE NEW AGE MOVEMENT AND THE BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW: CONFLICT AND DIALOGUE* (1998); LEO P. RIBUFFO, *THE OLD CHRISTIAN RIGHT: THE PROTESTANT FAR RIGHT FROM THE GREAT DEPRESSION TO THE COLD WAR* (1983); *THE EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN ANTI-CULT MOVEMENT: CHRISTIAN COUNTER-CULT LITERATURE* (Aidan A. Kelly ed., 1990); John L. Esposito, *Islam in the World and in America*, in *WORLD RELIGIONS IN AMERICA: AN INTRODUCTION*, *supra* note 173, at 243, 255-57.

229. See GABRIEL J. FACKRE, *THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT AND CHRISTIAN FAITH* (1982); *NEW CHRISTIAN POLITICS* (David G. Bromley & Anson Shupe eds., 1984).

between their idea of Christianity as a cohesive force in our society and the fact of radical religious pluralism in contemporary America; they disbanded that organization.²³⁰ Political observers tell us today that even the Christian Right is reevaluating the overall strategy of involvement in politics.²³¹ In my judgment, most Americans now recognize the practical impossibility of ever achieving a religious consensus. In America, religion will most likely remain a divisive issue rather than a unifying force among our population.

E. Outgrowing the Founders' Intent

The "intentions of the founders" with respect to religion, as expressed in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, may not be a sufficient philosophical or theoretical basis for dealing with the new challenges that will face the principle and practice of religious liberty in our nation in the years ahead. The constitutional clauses providing for disestablishment and free exercise, of course, deserve continuing preeminence and respect, but the possible matters of contestation regarding religion in the future are likely to become more and more complex and less and less related to the historical concerns that informed those clauses. How, for example, should the legal and constitutional concessions granted to organized denominations, including tax benefits, zoning variances, and medical exclusions, apply to a self-declared shaman who operates a website for his virtual congregation out of his home, collects free-will offerings from his followers, prescribes a variety of remedies for everything from a toothache to cancer, uses "recreational drugs" for spiritual ends, and is far more "religious" than nine out of ten Americans? Our best hope in the future may be wise legislators who will craft new tolerant legislation, and even wiser judges who will apply democratic principles to issues involved with the free exercise of religion. I suspect that our collective experience to date has not equipped us particularly well for the host of issues concerning religious liberty likely to arise in the coming century.

AFTERWORD

I often tell my students that the Founders of our nation created a religious system in which they agreed to disagree about matters of religion. I am confident the Founders would be dumbfounded if they could return today and see the religious world—the teeming marketplace of religious options—in America at the end of the twentieth century. "Free exercise" is a glorious principle; it is a wild thing in practice! We and our children have the responsibility of rising to the challenge of working out the full implications of that principle in practice.

230. See Shibley, *supra* note 218, at 78-80.

231. See, for example, the editorial *Limits of Politics*, 116 CHRISTIAN CENTURY 299 (1999).