New directions in American religious history

edited by Harry S. Stout, D.G. Hart.

NEW DIRECTIONS IN AMERICAN RELIGIOUS HISTORY



Harry S. Stout
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PREFACE

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THIS BOOK OF ESSAYS proceeds from a conference on "New Directions in American Religious History," held at the Wingspread Conference Center in Racine, Wisconsin, October 21-23, 1993. In organization and format the conference was modeled on a similar one held at Wingspread in 1977 and the book which stemmed from it, entitled New Directions in American Intellectual History. In both conferences, leading scholars were invited to reflect on their specialties in, respectively, American intellectual and American religious history in ways that summarized both where the field is and where it ought to move in the decades to come. Like that work, this conference was intended to tap the energies at work in a new generation of religious historians alongside the old. Four members of the 1993 seminar were present in 1977, evidencing the close connection between intellectual and religious history. But seventeen members were new, reflecting both differences in the field that have become pronounced over the past two decades and the coming of age of new scholars whose work was just beginning or not even begun in 1977.

We would like to acknowledge the valuable contributions made by the other participants at the Wingspread Conference: Paul Carter, Nathan

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New Haven, Connecticut Philadelphia, Pennsylvania October 1996 H. S. S. D. G. H.

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NEW
DIRECTIONS
IN AMERICAN
RELIGIOUS HISTORY

INTRODUCTION

IN 1977, RELIGIOUS HISTORY was largely identified as a subfield of American intellectual history. When Henry May described the "recovery" of religious history, his subject matter was dominated by Perry Miller and the "Puritan synthesis" that ran from John Winthrop and Jonathan Edwards through Ralph Waldo Emerson and the American Renaissance up to Reinhold Niebuhr and neo-orthodoxy. Yet as substantial as the recovery was, it was under siege from almost the time May wrote his article. In fact, both intellectual history and religious history were already challenged in 1977, by the "New Social History," and the tone of the conference at Wingspread that year reflected this beleaguered status. The mood of intellectual (and religious) history in 1977 was defensive. The New Social History had begun its invasion of all fields in American history and threatened to turn the mainline of intellectual history as it had evolved since the 1950s into a sideline. In religion, the threat was doubly severe. Mainline Protestant denominations, which had inspired much of the canon until then, were themselves "declining" at a precipitous rate.

The wariness of the 1977 participants, confronting a field in eclipse, was reflected both in the essays themselves and in the book's introduc-

tion. Conference planner and volume coeditor John Higham announced a "loss of momentum" in intellectual history and went on to note: "It was now the social historians' turn to bask in the limelight, rallying throngs of students, mounting lavishly funded projects, and issuing brave pronouncements on their generalizing mission" (xiii).

Sixteen years later, in 1993, both fields had changed dramatically. Intellectual history has survived the challenge of the New Social History, though not without altering its focus from "elite" systems of formal thought to "popular culture" and "mentalité." And religious history has thrived as never before. If intellectual history has experienced a rise and decline and resurrection, religious history's rise is novel and still peaking. Never before have so many religious studies appeared on so many groups in so many books, journals, and dissertations as at the present.

With this unprecedented expansion in mind, the conference planners for the 1993 meeting invited twenty of the nation's most distinguished historians to address aspects of religion in American history. Not all of these historians (and one sociologist) were trained in religion; indeed, a majority were trained outside of religion and do not identify themselves as religious historians. But all are now confronting religion as a main theme in American history. In contrast to 1977, the mood at Wingspread was expansive. For better and for worse, religion is at center stage, and the question is where will it all lead.

One major theme in virtually all religious histories of the past two decades has been the discovery of religious "outsiders." Even as evangelicals, Roman Catholics, Mormons, and charismatics have displaced the mainline as the vital center of religious growth and enthusiasm in contemporary American society, so have they assumed primary interest in the field of history and the social sciences. Indeed the language of outsiders-become-insiders, and peripheries-become-centers, is now a commonplace in the literature on religion in America.

In this period of growth and transition, it is appropriate to ask what subjects, styles, and methodologies might prove the most useful for ongoing appreciations of religion's place in American history. The answers, as they unfolded in three days of conference discussions, grouped themselves into four discrete areas: regions, themes, events, and "outsiders." Among other things, religious history is the study of places and regions, of themes that permeate all times and places, of transformative "events" that reconfigure social and religious institutions, and of ethnocultural "outsiders" whose presence is so compelling that they obliterate their status as peripheral and dominate attention.

Given the decisive shifts in historiography from mainline to sideline in the past twenty years, the conference planners asked the participants to think of the new groups they are studying and the histories they yield in dialectical tension with the old Protestant mainline histories, thus bringing the old "Church History"-Protestant centered and intellectually based-into dialogue with the new, non-mainline-centered and socially based "religious history."

Though by no means exhaustive, the essays that follow provide strategic glimpses into all of these dimensions of religious history. They reveal as well a field in agitation and motion, with few common destinations. Collectively, they confirm a field exploding its confines and spilling out into all of American history.

In the opening essay by Harry S. Stout and Robert M. Taylor, Jr., the field of American religious history and the sociology of religion is traced over the past two decades. Based on careful surveys of the literature, together with two formal surveys sent to religious scholars in 1973 and 1993, they document the revolutions that have taken place in the field both in numbers and content. In 1973, American religious history was still written largely within divinity schools by scholars preoccupied with the Protestant mainline. The tools were largely the tools of intellectual history. Conversely, in 1993, American religious history has come to be written in university departments of history, religious studies, and American studies. The central preoccupations have been with the "marginal" groups from "Fundamentalists" to charismatics, to Mormons, to women, to African American Christians, and to Roman Catholics. And the methods have been the methods of social and cultural history. Like virtually all fields of American history, religious history is simultaneously rich in its diversity of interests and methods and rudderless in its overall direction or sense of professional priorities.

From the opening overview, we turn to essays dealing with three key regions: Puritan New England, the South, and Canada. Clearly, the coverage is not inclusive, but collectively, they do suggest themes and questions that can be applied to other regions in comparative contexts. We begin with Puritan New England. At the 1977 conference, David D. Hall suggested that Puritanism could be fruitfully studied in terms of the cultural and ideological connections binding "elites" and ordinary men and women. Yet those connections should not be construed as a complete identification of the Puritan rank and file with the official theology of the clergy. In his 1993 essay, he calls for a more "multilayered" understanding of Puritanism that recognizes ambiguities in the movement, particularly as they involve the mentalities of clergy and laity. In fact, he suggests, Puritanism contained considerably more ambiguities and crossed signals that transcended official theologies and platforms, and that were expressed outside of church settings. He singles out the family as a "religious" institution as persuasive and authoritative as the one defined by the clergy. And while overlapping in religious concerns, there were also clear differences in style and understanding.

Studies of religion in the antebellum South, black and white, have exploded since 1977, and no one has done more to stimulate their growth

If Puritans and antebellum Southerners are familiar to all students of American religious history, Canadian religious history is not. Too often, "American" is taken to mean the United States, with scant attention to nations north and south. In Phyllis Airhart's essay, Canadian religious historiography is examined in contrast to the United States. Lacking galvanic events like the American Revolution or ensuing imperialistic missions of "Manifest Destiny," where does Canadian religion derive its mythic stories, its sense of magnitude and relevance? Before the rise of the New Social History, Airhart suggests, these were difficult questions. But through the methodologies of the Annales school, introduced by "Francophone historians," religious history has been recast as the history of ordinary people, and in that recasting, found a narrative voice rendering it distinct. These differences, Airhart points out, are clearly manifest in popular religions. In particular, she looks at the contrasting styles of "radical evangelicalism" in the United States and Canada for clues to Canada's religious life. She also sketches out a program of research for previously neglected groups, including the numerically dominant, but largely invisible, United Church of Canada.

Events, no less than regions, have characterized much scholarship in American religious history. And no events have received more attention, both singly and in relationship to one another, than the "Great Awakening" of mid-eighteenth-century colonial America, and the American Revolution. Ever since Alan Heimert's seminal masterpiece on *Religion and the American Mind*, scholars of ideas and politics have had to confront the connections between religious awakenings and the social and political restructurings wrought by the American Revolution. In practice, this has led to imaginative reconstruction of social meanings in religious revivals and religious meanings in political revolutions.

For all of the attention paid to the eighteenth-century Great Awakening in American historiography, there has been no synthetic history since Joseph Tracy's nineteenth-century classic. But there are classic debates arguing diametrically opposed theses. On the one hand, scholars following Perry Miller's and Alan Heimert's lead have sought to examine the Great Awakening as the first stage of the American Revolution. Others, most notably Jon Butler, have argued that the "Great Awakening" is a nonevent, a historians' fiction. In his essay, Allen Guelzo carefully reviews the literature on the Great Awakening down to the present, and suggests an interpretive context in which a new synthesis might be written. Rather than examining the Awakening as primarily a social or political event, he suggests it be

viewed as a religious event. In the context of religious meanings, he suggests, the Great Awakening was not causally connected to the Revolution, as Perry Miller and Alan Heimert first suggested, but neither was it a historians' fiction. It was rather a movement offering a religious redefinition of faith that paved the way for modern evangelicalism.

Clearly, there was more to eighteenth-century religion than religious revivals. For the majority of ordinary men and women in colonial America, religion constituted the single most powerful cultural system of the era and supplied ultimate explanations for life that could not be found anywhere else. With this broader understanding of religion in mind, Gordon Wood probes the social world of the eighteenth-century American colonists/patriots for clues to the relation of religion to the Revolution. Few, if any, of these Founding Fathers were enthusiastic about religion, and fewer still understood their actions as religiously grounded; some were outright deists. Where then is the connection? The answer, Wood suggests, lies less in political treatises and constitutional debates than in the categories of social and cultural history. When the focus shifts from enlightened "elites" to "ordinary people," a fundamental question appears: "Was popular religion like a raging river that suddenly went underground [during Revolution] only to reemerge downstream with more force and vigor than ever?" This is certainly the conventional wisdom on the part of historians, but Wood argues, it is a flawed wisdom. Religious beliefs did not simply disappear during the Revolution; historians just do not know where to look. The place to look is not in mutually exclusive political dichotomies between "liberal" Loyalists and "evangelical" patriots but in more deeply rooted demographic and economic determinants that helped to prepare American society for revolution.

Running through all the regions and events that identify primary markers in American religious history are underlying themes that reappear in every place and every generation. In turning to the question of revivals and the definition of the self in antebellum America, Daniel Walker Howe covers the broad period from the Revolution to the Civil War, a subject that has enjoyed the most creative growth in the past decade. With all that research behind him, Howe suggests a new interpretation that would look at religion less on its own terms than for its interaction with politics, moral philosophy, and "polite culture." Where earlier portraits of antebellum religion tended to ignore individuals and instead referred to movements as aspects of social control, Howe urges new studies of individuals that will be sensitive to the ways in which they sought to reform or reshape themselves as much as their society. Alongside individual studies, Howe outlines a strategy for examining religious organizations that would focus as much on institutional forces and organizational theory as on revivals or episodic awakenings. These institutional forces, he suggests, grew nationwide by 1850, but then split over the "gigantic problem of slavery."

Race was not the only issue Americans faced in organizing religious institutions. Ethnicity was another. John Higham, who more than any other scholar has plumbed the depths of immigrant experiences, and whose presence at the conference served as a symbolic bridge between this and the earlier Wingspread conference, explores the issue of ethnicity and religion against two contrasting models of interaction. All too often, "ethnic history" or the "history of immigration" is identified with "new" Roman Catholic or Jewish immigrants whose identity derived from their status as immigrants. But what do ethnicity and immigration have to do with the construction of a "mainstream" Protestant identity? Quite a bit, Higham persuasively argues. As early as the disestablishment of religion in the early Republic, Protestants began pursuing a generalized Protestant communal identity, interdenominational in scope and at least implicitly cooperative. Beneath all the divisions and contentions, broader social and cultural boundaries were being drawn, creating a shared ethnic identity. Negatively, this broader ethnic and national identification was fueled by a common anti-Catholicism activated by the onset of mass immigration from Europe. More positively, it was promoted by the onset of romanticism in letters and religion. Together, they created a Protestant cultural identity and ongoing ethnocultural conflicts that would engage evangelical Protestants and nativists long after the Civil War.

Unlike race, ethnicity, and gender, which are relative newcomers to studies of religion, economics enjoys a long-standing relationship going back to the founding works of Max Weber and Karl Marx. In recent years, however, with the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, systematic attention to religion and economics has lacked a context. In an attempt to rekindle interest in the field and establish its importance both to studies of religious history and sociology, Robert Wuthnow and Tracy L. Scott engaged in a broad-gauge survey of literature treating economics and religion from community economic studies in the colonial era through the twentieth century. When all of this literature is pulled together, fundamental questions emerge which point the way to future research. The essay makes a powerful case for religion's central importance to economic life in American society and then goes on to chart some of the issues surrounding this topic in terms of the intersection of changing religious organizing and changing religious life, the parallel or contradictory religious motivations of working-class Americans and industrialists, and the impact of a religious "industrial work ethic" on such empirically measurable factors as frugality, diligence, and temperance. Wuthnow's and Scott's dual grounding in history and sociology is important both for their substantive findings and as a model of interdisciplinary research bringing together the fields of history and sociology.

Urban religion and community studies are beginning to attract renewed attention. In contrast to earlier scholarship that examined Protestantism's encounter with the city largely in tragic terms of failed missions

and rampant secularism, several contributors to this volume present revisionist models with more balanced conclusions. Based on his ongoing study of religion in New York City, Jon Butler challenges historiographical stereotypes about a failed Protestant encounter with the city. In contrast to European cities in the period between 1870 and 1920, when a pervasive and measurable secularism prevailed at the institutional level, American cities were more notable for their ongoing religious vitality. From a set of complete and previously neglected religious surveys undertaken in 1896 by the Federation of Churches and Christian Workers of New York City, Butler traces "a remarkable urban Protestant resilience" that suggests new models for understanding how Protestant churches expanded in urban America even as they declined in Europe.

Of all the cross-fertilizations of religious history with other fields, none have been more productive in the recent literature than studies of religion and gender. Wherever historians look in religion, they find women playing a disproportionate role both in membership and in voluntary leadership. In her essay, Susan Juster recognizes this phenomenon, and then goes on to ask how it affected rhetorical discourse. From a diverse sampling of religious records, including Puritans, Quakers, spiritualists, and mystics, and diverse periods stretching from the colonial era where oral discourse dominated to the nineteenth century where print culture increasingly held sway, Juster traces shifting conceptions of gender and discourse reflecting the shift from oral culture to print culture, and from agriculture to commerce. Central to this shift, she argues, is an altered conception of gender itself, from a discrete role that men and women could both take up, to a psychosexual identity forever segmenting and defining male and female "spheres" and states of being. By looking at religion and gender in the context of language and rhetoric, she provides a compelling explanatory context for the transformation of "woman's role" in nineteenth-century America.

One field largely neglected in the new religious history has been missions. As Dana Robert's essay makes clear, this omission is unfortunate because much creative work has appeared in the period since World War II. By borrowing models from cultural anthropology and linguistics, contemporary missiologists are producing a new generation of scholarship that walks the line between praising missionaries uncritically as disinterested servants of God, or condemning them in equally uncritical prose as the witting or unwitting tools of western imperialism. By transcending political categories and examining missions anthropologically, it is possible to reconceive the field in ways that fit well with much of the newest work in American religious history.

"Culture" has become the favorite catchword in recent literature on religion, yet until recently it has not informed much scholarship in twentieth-century religion. Richard Fox recognizes this void and proposes a new, "cultural" context for explaining twentieth-century Ameri-

can religious history. Recognizing that all church history in the Protestant liberal tradition is at least implicitly apologetic and sectarian, Fox proposes an alternative methodology anchored in a new "essentialist" cultural history, which would render religion meaningful to "secularists" who feel no personal or spiritual affinity to the religious groups they study. By way of illustration, he analyzes Robert Orsi's Madonna of 115th Street, showing how that approach can be expropriated by scholars whose primary interest in religion is more secularly grounded in the pursuit of American culture rather than the understanding of American religion qua religion. He then goes on to suggest a similar framework for his own study of liberal Protestant culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the rise of evangelicalism. The approach promises a new understanding not only of the "decline" of Protestant liberalism, but also of the rise of evangelicalism as a "mass faith."

A fourth group of essays deals with religious "outsiders" in mainline "Protestant America." To the familiar themes of Puritans and evangelicals, this section also explores the history and historiography of groups that were both outside of, yet constantly interacting with, white Protestants. African American religion has existed from the start in such an ambiguous position. Judith Weisenfeld explores the complexities of African American religious experience in a comprehensive framework embracing male and female, North and South, rich and poor. She contextualizes the complexity around two distinct but paradoxically interlocking themes: marginality and centrality. As never before, scholars are aware that African American religious history is central to American religious history. Free black and slave religion has stood throughout American history as the "shadow" of white Christianity. Yet at the same time, African Americans have been so distanced from equality and empowerment that their marginality conjures the image more of an American Egypt than of an American Israel. In their own margin, African Americans found a space and a voice to create their own meaning. And in interdenominational agencies like the YWCA, they found bridges to white American Protestants. The goal, Weisenfeld argues, is to project both these poles in methodological tension.

American Catholics, since the 1840s America's largest denomination, have been largely ignored in historical scholarship outside of Catholic institutions. Even when American intellectual historians "recovered" religion in the 1960s, they recovered white Protestant religion. Consequently, American Catholic thought has never been explored within the academic categories of American intellectual history. Non-Catholic historians are pursuing Catholicism now, to be sure, but it is within the terms and context of social history. Unlike Protestant history, there is no prior tradition of intellectual history that "new" historians need to revise. The need, Patrick Carey urges, is therefore to open up Catholicism to intellectual history, both for the sake of American intellectual history generally, where a substantial gap in coverage appears, and for Catholic historians

in particular, who need to reconnect with the normative centers of their tradition, largely ignored in the pursuits of social history.

A major theme in recent historiography has been the secularization of the university. In a provocative reexamination of this issue, David A. Hollinger challenges the secularization model, and instead proposes the term "de-Christianization" to describe what happened to the modern university and, more generally, to "public culture" in the twentieth century. Central to this cultural transformation, Hollinger shows, was the massive infusion of Jewish intellectuals (many of them nonobservant or "free-thinking") into American universities and public life. Working in the European tradition of Marx, Freud, and Durkheim, these intellectuals sought a "universal language" of culture that inevitably transcended religious particularities, and replaced an implicit Christian consensus with a vibrant cultural pluralism. One part of this pluralistic mosaic—and a large part at that—is Christianity, which, Hollinger argues, has hardly disappeared from American public life. Like Butler, Hollinger reverses earlier jeremiads positing a decline of "true Christianity," and asks instead: "Why is there so much Christianity in the United States in the twentieth century?" In fact, Christianity is still shaping society to a surprising degree, and models of secularization may be simply one more variant on the old Protestant myth of declension.

Fueling much of the growth of American religious history is the contemporary "Religious Right," and new global upsurges of "fundamentalism" in all faith traditions. In a concluding essay that confronts the American present, Anne Loveland brings the story full-circle by exploring recent literature on religion and modern American politics and society. By focusing on the "public realm," Loveland shows how religious history has moved in new directions that promote the history of African American religious history and women's religious history. Alongside these recent interests, Loveland traces the emergence of a public evangelical Christianity in the 1970s and its impact on contemporary American politics.

Collectively, these essays show how scholarship in regions, themes, events, and ethnocultural outsiders is being transformed by a "new religious history." If the destination is not always clear, the energy is at hand and the questions posed. Less a summation of work in progress than an agenda of uncompleted research, these essays show the promise and the pitfalls awaiting those who till the rich and variegated fields of American religion.

AMERICAN RELIGION AND SOCIETY

XIX

STUDIES OF RELIGION IN AMERICAN SOCIETY

The State of the Art

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Harry S. Stout Robert M. Taylor, Jr.

A MINIHISTORIOGRAPHICAL REVOLUTION has occurred in studies of American religion over the past 20 years as they have proliferated at the epicenter of the historical and sociological enterprises. Religious history has entered the mainstream of historical research, no longer confined to the American Society of Church History and its sponsoring divinity schools. Likewise, the sociology of religion, once marginalized in its discipline, has become a leading edge in sociological research through its base in the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. Spurred by the creation of new departments of religion, by increasing numbers of faculty and graduate students, by the addition of American religious history to history and American studies programs, and, not least, by unprecedented levels of funding by private foundations, the field has exhibited more growth than any other save women's studies. Yet while historians and sociologists bask in the glow of energized disciplines, their common institutional goals remain unexplored. What would the future hold if the two fields resumed the short-lived conversations of the late 1970s? This question we try to answer in the context of our commenting on the character of contemporary American religion research.

To an extent, our assessment of religious studies today is subjectively grounded in our two decades of work in the field. Apart from the impressions, however, our analysis relies on two questionnaires mailed in the summers of 1974 and 1993. In scope and compass, the questionnaires differed. The 1974 questionnaire focused on the "stars" of American religious history, while in 1993 we spread a broader net and included scholars from religion and sociology departments. Where the earlier questionnaire invited qualitative and discursive answers, the more recent one's format allowed for quantitative inquiry. The differences in scale and format make systematic comparisons of the two instruments impossible. Yet, as discrete "soundings," the questionnaires represent an experimental merging of "narrative" and "quantitative" information which, we hope, can model the integrative scholarship we advocate for the larger field.

The 1974 questionnaire went to 75 elite historians (and a handful of sociologists of religion) at a time when the American history profession was never livelier or more focused around its professional and national responsibilities.² Debates on the profession's and the nation's identity and direction occurred against a backdrop of profound social unrest that directed a rethinking of the "uses of history" alongside standards of objectivity and detachment.³ Social scientific approaches to history, assisted by new technological possibilities, gave rise to challenges in articulating theory and practicing quantitative methods. Traditional fields of study vied for status with popular specialties on women, blacks, labor, religion, business, culture, immigration, family, and demography.⁴ It seemed, at the time, that debates mattered, that the profession mattered, that the "facts" mattered. The serious young scholars with the weight of the world and of their profession on their shoulders appear to some 1990s standards as naive "moderns" unaware of the postmodern freeze to come and its indictment of all science and theory. But then the future was theirs to mold in reasonable and responsible ways. That they failed to accurately predict the future reminds us that historians are better chronicling the past than forecasting what is to come, even of their own fields.

As a group, the 1974 shapers of the church history field represented a generation reared in the triumph of World War II: drawn heavily from, and engrossed in the study of, the Protestant mainline; based in divinity school programs at elite universities; members of the American Society of Church History (ASCH); contributors and readers of the ASCH journal, Church History. 5 They did not figure prominently in major historical organizations nor in university faculties of arts and sciences. Their relative isolation worked well as long as intellectual and doctrinal history prevailed in the larger historical community, because historians would still rely on them to cover religious ideas. However, the introduction of a "New Social History" directed to "ordinary people" would require a "New Religious History"—one central to our 1974 questionnaire.

Perry Miller guided that 1970s generation of American religious scholars as well as intellectual history generally. He rehabilitated the Puritans, put colonial New England on the historiographical map, and offered a model of research that placed religious history within American intellectual history. 6 As a result, church history expanded from divinity schools into history and English departments. To Henry F. May, in 1964, Miller's achievement meant nothing less than "The Recovery of American Religious History." 7 But Miller posited a model of secularization "from Puritan to Yankee" that also circumscribed religion's importance to the larger historical enterprise within a colonial and early national setting. Ironically, then, as religious scholarship widened, its study became identified solely with Puritanism and New England.8

Meanwhile in the divinity schools religious history thrived. New intellectual and cultural histories transcended the old "denominational synthesis" and carried the weight of post-Revolutionary religious history in the divinity schools. Membership in the ASCH increased, as did subscriptions to Church History. The future looked bright.9 Two giants of the discipline, Sydney Ahlstrom and Sidney Mead, wrote religious history as intellectual history, but, while representing the culmination of a tradition inspired by Perry Miller, they also signaled newly emerging intellectual and cultural themes: post-Puritan religion, secularization, civil religion, and pluralism. 10

The drawback for many divinity-based scholars in dealing with new realities was their own institutional commitments. These scholars could be critical of, but could not ignore, the traditions that fed them. Reflecting the conservatism of the profession, the 1974 questionnaire respondents did not perceive any discontinuous or institutional changes on the horizon; the essential institutional setting and culture of religious history would remain continuous with its past. 11

The major threat to the continuation of established patterns of thought came from the New Social History beginning in 1970. 12 The application of theory and method from the social sciences to bodies of historical data dealing with ordinary people created a seismic shaking of historical and sociological studies. Suddenly (if briefly) historians began consulting sociology for theory and methods, and sociologists began reading historians for social context. From this fruitful interplay emerged the vision of a new synthesis or paradigm in American history where historians and sociologists working with common theoretical contexts and methodologies could outline the structural and functional dynamics of social change from "traditional" to "early modern" to "modern." 13

From today's vantage, it is clear how the New Social History heralded (or threatened) discontinuous change—an entirely new agenda for religious research and an entirely new place for religion in the larger historical enterprise. Once social and cultural history recovered religion and displaced intellectual history as the subject of choice for aspiring young graduate students, religion would be at the heart of the American history enterprise. Religious history as social and cultural history, with no spatial or chronological bounds, represented a route for religious history's escape from the iron cage of Puritanism. More ominously, it represented a methodological route for religious history's institutional escape from divinity-based programs into the university and mainstream historical research.¹⁴

In 1974, the implications of a new social scientific orientation including quantitative methods went largely unforeseen by historians of American religion. No one except for William McLoughlin, from his footing in American studies, predicted sweeping changes for religious studies. Although most looked upon the New Social History merely as another tool rather than a transformer of disciplines and institutions, reservations were not lacking. Ahlstrom thought the biggest barrier to the emergence of a "New Religious History" would be "the low quality and truistic 'findings' of many social and sociological studies. . . . Subtract human intentionality and institutions are mute." William Clebsch feared quantitative methods for their tendency "to yield results that are questionable because the phenomenon being delineated and described consists entirely of [numerical] variables." Timothy Smith saw in social science methodology a "narrowness of perspective which preoccupation with statistics seems to inflict upon scholars." The reductionist tendencies inherent in new scientific approaches bothered many respondents. George Marsden noted that when social scientific approaches are viewed as a New Religious History "the implication seems to be that most things should be reduced to their social scientific dimensions. Such reductionism would throw many questions about religion out of balance." Some divinitybased historians feared theological problems and a marginalization of the theologian's task. Clarence Goen thought the primary barrier to a New Religious History to be "the inescapable necessity for adequate theological interpretation, which social scientists often ignore." Likewise, Nelson Burr exclaimed his belief "in the Biblical philosophy of history, the theological approach; for otherwise I feel that history doesn't make sense to most people." 15

All university-based social and religious historians agreed that a New Religious History would find its way into history departments. Cedric Cowling observed that the New Religious History "should bring religious history more fully into the mainstream, increasing respect for it among social scientists and all specialists in the study of America." Similarly, Robert Berkhofer advocated the application of social theory and history to the religious record in a pattern whereby "American religious history incorporates some of the more advanced trends occurring in social history and in intellectual history."

The ethnocultural political historian Richard Jensen saw a New Religious History creating a "much broader based social history" with less emphasis on class and more on ethnoreligious groupings. John M. Mur-

rin commented that one consequence of the behavioral approach "will be to generate a compelling need to reexamine what people thought and wrote about their religious experience, if only because it will force us to place old ideas in a strikingly new context." Ideally, thought Michael Zuckerman, "a new Religious History would force a reintegration of American History generally. A new wholism of temporal and regional and ethnic cultures that would acknowledge wider unities and deeper diversities than are now admitted."

Among the handful of sociologists who responded, Benton Johnson cautioned against using quantitative methods with no grounding in social theory. And Sister Marie Augusta Neal believed a New Religious History would lead to "the discovery of the historical dynamic of religious experience as variables more independent than recently assumed." Significantly, virtually every historian polled in 1974 was reading some sociology alongside their primary research interests, and all recognized the need to embed their research in broader theoretical contexts. The three most cited theorists were Max Weber, Erik Erickson, and Peter Berger, with mention also given to Durkheim, Freud, and the anthropologist Anthony F. C. Wallace.

1

While the bulk of our historians willingly made concessions to social scientific theory and "other" religious traditions, none really envisioned a different discipline. It would remain, in their view, predominantly a divinity-based enterprise. In retrospect, the historians could not have been more wrong. We have witnessed in 20 years as sharp a break with the continuity of church history as the field has experienced since becoming "professionalized" in the early twentieth century. It is nothing short of a revolution contributed to by a nation moving simultaneously in conservative, fundamentalist, and multicultural directions. In the same way that religious revivals in the 1950s and theological "neo-orthodoxy" promoted a recovery of scholarly interest in "mainline" religion in the 1960s, so new religious revivals in the 1970s together with a revitalized Roman Catholicism and an evangelical "moral majority" sparked a recovery of scholarly interest in religion in the 1980s. Such is the power of the "religious factor," particularly the "evangelical" factor in current historiography that historian Jon Butler recently described an "evangelical paradigm" as "the single most powerful explanatory device adopted by academic historians to account for the distinctive features of American society, culture, and identity." 16

Other unforeseen trends evolved on an institutional plane, all to the detriment of divinity-based church history. The creation of religion departments in faculties of arts and sciences opened up new vistas of research and writing not bound by confessional boundaries or denominational ties.¹⁷ The decline in numbers within mainline Protestantism has

been paralleled by a movement within the academy to study those groups leading the 1980s "revival"—Roman Catholics, Mormons, evangelicals, and Pentecostalists (black and white, North and South), and turn attention from the colonial era to the early republic and beyond when many of the evangelical denominations began. 18 All the while in divinity-based domains, history faculties continue to decline, and Ph.D. programs increasingly compete with university history and religion departments. Reformation studies, the divinity-based compliment to Puritan and mainline studies, has also fallen on hard times. The ASCH now competes with fragmentary subfields, each with its own newsletters and programs. Church History experiences fewer submissions annually, and its relevance to American history has clearly diminished.19

Meanwhile, sociologists no less than historians have benefited from the 1970s revivals. Suddenly, it is no longer anachronistic to explore the "religion variable" in sociological analysis. 20 The secularization paradigm has come in for sustained scrutiny, and the jury is still out.21 Students of the nonprofit sector are coming to grips with the dominant place religious organizations occupy in the American philanthropic picture. And organizational theorists are beginning to see the roots of modern organizations in religious agencies.22

With these developments in mind, we returned to "the state of the art" in another questionnaire in the summer of 1993, one much more extensive and one that required a more quantifiable format to assist in the interpretation.²³

The academic respondents—the 495 respondents earmarked for analysis in this essay-turned out to be remarkably white, male, and middleaged, having been born in the baby boom period between 1946 and 1964. When asked "from where did you receive your highest degree," a bewildering number of public and private universities were named. Obviously, some time has passed when a cadre of "key" institutions, such as Yale, Harvard, and Chicago, turned out most of the students.

Most striking, since 1974, is the number of historians who have migrated out of divinity schools and into newly formed departments of religious studies in colleges and universities. In all, 82% of our respondents are college- or university-based, compared to only 5.3% in divinity schools.

Less than 10% of the historians surveyed indicated membership in professional organizations outside of history. This insularity extended to subspecialty organizations in the field. In fact, only three organizations held anything remotely like a quorum of religious historians: the ASCH, still respectable at 42%, the Organization of American Historians at 53%, and the American Historical Association at 61%. Less than 2% of sociologists surveyed belonged to any of these three organizations. Even the Social Science History Organization attracts only slightly more than 5%. Conversely, the sociologists tend to a larger degree than historians

to hold memberships in their own organizations, such as the American Academy of Religion, to which 66% of sociologists belong.

The 1993 respondents moved sharply from the mainline Protestant orientation of the 1960s and 1970s to one more evangelical and Roman Catholic. Thirty-two percent of the respondents identified themselves as "evangelical Protestant," 18% as "liberal Protestant," and 9% as "other Protestant" (for a total of 59% Protestant). Roman Catholics numbered 26%, and Jews 4%—a rough microcosm of the American population.²⁴ Those claiming no religious community numbered 6.5%. Islamic, Eastern Orthodox, Native American, African American Christian denominational, Buddhist, and Hindu scholars collectively numbered less than 1%. When broken down by discipline, the proportions vary in some significant ways. Sociologists by a 28% to 17% margin prefer liberal Protestantism, while historians prefer evangelicalism by a striking 37% to 13% margin.

In contrast to academics generally, the religion scholars registered a strong religious faith. For example, 78% classified themselves as either "very religious" (47%) or "quite religious" (31%). Only 6% (n=9) classified themselves as "not very religious." In addition, the largest number (41%) chose the field because of a "lifelong interest in religion," thus reinforcing the pattern of religiosity. In sum, this community of scholars is primarily Protestants, Catholics, and Jews "preaching to the converted" in their own constituencies.

Within the large umbrella of religious faiths, the most studied topics are in Catholicism and Protestant evangelicalism. We found nearly 200 of our respondents studying topics in Roman Catholicism (n=88) or "evangelicalism"—including fundamentalism, revivalism, and missions (n = 100). The signs of growth in these two areas are everywhere from journals and books to institutes, such as the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals, the Cushwa Center, or the Overseas Ministries Study Center, to new academic appointments in "Roman Catholic History" at non-Catholic institutions. Once the "religious outsiders," taking a back seat to mainline Protestant studies, the 1990s generation is now on the inside.

Studies responsible for feeding the new "evangelical paradigm" are often produced by secular university historians who tend to treat evangelicalism as an aspect of what to them are the "broader" demographic, ideological, or cultural themes. If not quite epiphenomenal, religion is often used in these studies as a tool to understand something othersomething presumably more "basic" and intrinsic to the discipline.25 While not prominent in our survey (because they tend not to join religious organizations), they exert a powerful influence on the field. For our purposes, we wanted to see how the scholars singled out in our survey perceived religion's explanatory value vis-á-vis race, class, and ethnicity.26 Not surprisingly, our respondents differed from scholars-at-large in according religion a coequal status. Historians generally allotted religion more importance than ethnicity and social class, but hedged on race.

The weighing of religion as a causal force in historical change rests on continued blossoming of scholarship. In the wake of church history's displacement from the divinity schools has come new research into formerly "marginalized" movements along with researchers from diverse religious backgrounds. Related to this is an apparent decrease in academics who profess a "liberal Protestant" faith. Contemporary scholars pursue subjects that speak to their own beliefs, interests, and preoccupations. Thus, by the fact of rising numbers of Roman Catholic and evangelical scholars, we should expect a corresponding increase in research devoted to those faith traditions. There are other reasons for the rise in religious studies. Our Roman Catholic and evangelical respondents emphasized a greater interest in religion among the public at large, while liberal Protestants stressed a burgeoning awareness of religious pluralism in societyas-a-whole. Interestingly, the "emergence of a religious right" and "increased availability of funding" were considered much less important.

The importance of funding, we think, may be underestimated. Fiftytwo percent of our respondents received significant financial support from outside agencies or from their home institutions. Leading in external funding research were the Lilly Endowment, The Pew Charitable Trusts, and Henry Luce Foundations (in that order), foundations virtually unheard of in historical research in 1974 (funding from home institutions remained constant). In 1974, prominent scholars of American religion, like American history scholars generally, largely depended on public support through the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Science Foundation, American Council of Learned Societies, or Guggenheim, agencies whose support for religion was (and remains) disproportionately small.²⁷ Federal scholarship programs have shied away from religious topics in both history and sociology. Against this backdrop, the investments of, first, Lilly under Robert Lynn, and then Pew, Luce, and programs established by particular faith communities such as the Billy Graham Center, the Cushwa Center, or the Southern Baptist Archives, are of undeniable importance. The appearance of massive funds for conferences, research projects, and fellowships has opened opportunities for scholars who otherwise might be left out or channeled into other research areas.

The increase in foundation support has also affected the type of research projects undertaken, particularly in sociology, where large surveys conducted by teams of scholars have become more the norm. With no funds for travel, data collection, research assistants, and computer analysis, research tends to turn inward on its own assumptions and preexistent paradigms. Studies tend to be more "clever" than the pioneering that comes with amassing large bodies of data.²⁸ History, too, has been profoundly influenced by foundations. Although a more individually based discipline, historians in the 1980s began assembling "teams" and conferences tackling large projects.²⁹ In our estimation, foundations have in some measure stepped into the void of the older divinity-engaged history to promote history with "mission" applications in the mainline, evangelical, and Roman Catholic communities. The gains are obvious, as are the losses. Traditions outside these major faiths are often ignored in scholarship. The overwhelming preponderance of scholars from Christian (and secondarily Jewish) communities is in part the product of these institutional forces.

Besides discovering the institutional forces behind the efflorescence of religious scholarship and what topics are being explored, we wanted to know which scholars—old and new—are read for content and methodology? What do our respondents identify as the highest achievements in their field? To what extent do historians read sociologists and vice versa? In 1974, American historians generally and religious historians in particular read sociologists. What about 1993?

American religious historians mostly appear to read deeply within their own recent historiography, a striking reversal of 1974 trends. When asked to identify scholars "very important" to their work, no one name emerged. No individual scholar was cited by more than half of our historian respondents. Martin Marty led with 42%, followed closely by Sydney Ahlstrom (40%), Perry Miller (39%), and Edmund Morgan (38%). Interestingly, two of these four persons never identified themselves as religious historians, a third wrote a Puritan synthesis, and the fourth is still very much alive and more current than "classic." Significantly, 34% of historian respondents listed William Warren Sweet as "not important." No early divinity-based historians received a nod, which suggests that today's religious history is lacking in enduring authoritative sources actively read by the profession. The discipline has no "founding fathers." With the exception of H. Richard Niebuhr, no other figure in the social sciences attracted more than 20%. Ironically, American religious history is among the most history-less disciplines.

In contrast, sociologists are more apt to read the old sociology classics alongside the new. Max Weber ranked "very important" with virtually every sociologist of religion—a figure without parallel among historians. Robert Bellah and Peter Berger followed close behind. Also, sociologists apparently read (and find very important) H. Richard Niebuhr and Martin Marty. While far from agreement on what the work of these sociological classics mean, they are read by the field as a whole. American religious history has no comparable classics.30

Classics aside, religious historians do read each other along with some current sociologists. When asked whether each increasingly consulted the other, almost three-fourths (72%) answered yes, an affirmation also indicated in the tally for the "three most important recent books or articles." Scholars whose work received more than 10 votes include: Robert Bellah, Jon Butler, Jay Dolan, Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, Nathan Hatch, James Hunter, George Marsden, Martin Marty, Mark Noll, Clark Roof,

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