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## Table of Contents

### Introduction

Philip Goff, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis.....	4
<b>Part I: How did we get here?.....</b>	<b>5</b>
Jon Butler, Yale University.....	6
Jay Demerath, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.....	7
Paula Kane, University of Pittsburgh.....	9
<b>Part II: Competing and complementary approaches in American religious history.....</b>	<b>11</b>
John Corrigan, Florida State University .....	12
Dennis Dickerson, Vanderbilt University .....	14
Robert Orsi, Northwestern University .....	16
<b>Part III: Competing and complementary approaches in social scientific studies of religion in America.....</b>	<b>18</b>
Penny Edgell, University of Minnesota .....	19
Rhys Williams, Loyola University Chicago .....	22
Jerry Park, Baylor University .....	24
<b>Part IV: Explaining religion in America: What can we learn from each other?.....</b>	<b>26</b>
Courtney Bender, Columbia University .....	27
Carol B. Duncan, Wilfrid Laurier University .....	29
David Hall, Harvard Divinity School .....	31
<b>Part V: Politics, Secularization, and the Public Square .....</b>	<b>33</b>
Daniel Walker Howe, University of California Los Angeles, Oxford University .....	34
Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, University of Buffalo Law School .....	36
Mark Silk, Trinity College .....	38
<b>Part VI: Race, Ethnicity, and Religious Pluralism .....</b>	<b>40</b>
Rudy V. Busto, University of California Santa Barbara .....	41
Helen Rose Ebaugh, University of Houston .....	43
David Wills, Amherst College .....	46
<b>Part VII: Where do we go from here?.....</b>	<b>49</b>
James Lewis, Louisville Institute, Louisville Theological Seminary .....	50
Amanda Porterfield, Florida State University .....	51

## Introduction

**Philip Goff**

**Director, Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture**

Despite the growth of the study of religion in North America over the past two decades, the need to understand religion's role in American society is greater now than ever before. Part of that is due to religion's increasing role in public life. But a contributing factor to this dearth of understanding is the restraint placed on scholars by their disciplines and teaching environments. Divided into camps of humanities, social sciences, seminaries, and professional schools, scholars working in American religious studies speak different languages, publish in different journals, and ask different—although often overlapping—questions.

This is an unfortunate situation because scholars are talking past, around, and over one another when there is much they can learn from each other. Many historians are surprised to find sociologists applying their theories to the American religious past, with varying levels of success. Similarly, many cultural anthropologists are shocked to discover scholars trained in history publishing ethnographic studies of religious traditions, also with various degrees of success. The result of this talking past one another is that scholars who could truly learn from each other are often unaware of those outside their discipline working on aspects of their topics or employing methods that could prove helpful. At a time when more understanding of the subject is paramount, and more work than ever is being done on religion in North America, we are left without the mechanisms to put these people in the same room at the same time.

The purpose of the first Conference on Religion and American Culture was to bring together scholars in the humanities, social sciences, seminaries, and professional schools who study religion in America in order to begin bridging this gap. Of course, various attempts to do this have been made at professional societies. But while the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion has welcomed humanities scholars, they stand out as foils because there are so few of them and their work is strikingly different. Similarly, while such humanities-dominated groups as the American Academy of Religion, the American Society of Church History, and the American Studies Association have at times reached out to social scientists for particular panels, most have nonetheless remained committed to their core disciplinary principles and failed to incorporate the social sciences into their work. Because of this, a disciplinary division has deepened significantly over the past two decades.

We believe that a biennial conference dedicated to a new perspective that is informed by the traditional humanities, social sciences, seminaries, and professional schools will reinvigorate the broader field of American religious studies. We can and should learn from one another. It will also lay the groundwork for future conversations about how to break down the disciplinary walls that have been erected when interdisciplinary work is clearly needed as well as to identify when the discrete disciplines offer better understanding of the topic. It is our hope that this initial conference will begin a serious and sustained conversation among the perspectives that will go a long way toward recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of disciplinary boundaries. Indeed, we expect the annual meetings of the national disciplinary-based societies will be enriched by beginning this conversation.

The first Conference on Religion and American Culture was held in Indianapolis in June 2009 as something of a summit, consisting of a series of roundtable discussions of the fault lines through presentations by top scholars from a variety of perspectives. Nationally known scholars from different backgrounds participated in each session. The panelists sat, quite literally, at a round table in the center of the room, surrounded by over one hundred scholars on risers so everyone could not only learn from the conversation but also participate in it.

The first day of the conference centered on the theoretical and practical issues that perplex those working in American religious studies from various perspectives. Session one focused on how we arrived at our current

disciplinary divides and what they mean for us. Historians then discussed such issues as the rise of American religious history and its relation to denomination studies, ethnography, and the slow demise of monographs, as well as the future of grand narratives. In the day's final session, social scientists conferred on the various divides within their disciplines, how these differences have influenced the study of religion in North America, as well as the potential and questionable efficacy of "interdisciplinarity."

Sessions on day two tightened the focus of the conference. The opening session considered how the various disciplines rely on each other's work, as well as what we consider the strengths and weaknesses of the various disciplines. The afternoon sessions concentrated on two nexus points where considerable time is being spent by scholars from various disciplines: politics, secularization, and the public square; and race, ethnicity, and religious pluralism. The final hour was spent considering how the larger field should move forward as well as discussing ideas for the second Conference on Religion and American Culture in 2011.

These *Proceedings* include all of the papers that were read at the conference. What is missing, however, are the lively and spirited conversations that marked each session. Indeed, the discussions continued over coffee breaks, lunches, and dinners. New friends were made and fresh ideas were discovered. While there is room for growth and improvement, the conference began a new conversation that will only gain strength as more disciplines and backgrounds are brought to the table. We look forward to that in 2011.

A word of thanks is due to several people and institutions. First, I am grateful to the panelists who wrote such thoughtful pieces. I asked them to be direct and provocative, and they responded beautifully. I am also indebted to seven of the Center's Research Fellows. Stephen Stein, Peter Thuesen, Arthur Farnsley, Brian Steensland, Sheila Kennedy, Edward Curtis, and Sylvester Johnson moderated the sessions and engendered thoughtful discussions and debate. Becky Vasko, the Center's Program Coordinator, provided liberal support in the planning and execution of the entire conference. Without her, there would have been no meeting. There were three organizations that provided funds to underwrite the conference: Indiana University's New Frontiers Grant, IUPUI's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Fund, and Lilly Endowment Inc. all contributed generously toward the costs of the meeting. I am deeply grateful for their faith in this project.

### Part I: How did we get here?

A discussion of disciplinary lines, how we in American religious studies are divided into groups and subgroups, the forces that keep us separated or encourage interdisciplinarity, the role of funding in all of this

Host: Stephen Stein  
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**Jon Butler**  
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Just a bit ago, Kathryn Galchutt of Concordia College in New York City sent me a review of two books she had written for the newsletter of the Lutheran Historical Conference. In the review, she contrasted attention to Catholics in New York City, represented by the publication of *Catholics in New York: Society, Culture, and Politics, 1808-1946*—the catalog of the recent large exhibit at the Museum of the City of New York—and the relative paucity of reference to Lutherans in *Minnesota 150: The People, Places, and Things that Shape Our State*. And she wondered, is there a place for Lutheran Studies?

If we ask how we got here, the obvious answer is denominations and denominational history. Puritan descendants wrote about Puritan ancestors because they thought of them as a group, in modern terms, a denomination. Virginia Baptists were writing fascinating histories by 1810. Muslims are already documenting their own recent past. Jewish history is still mainly the province of Jews.

This is different than economic history or the history of foreign policy. Economic historians may become rich, or at least better off, if they are smart enough to seek appointments in departments of economics rather than in history departments. But American religious history remains amazingly true to its non-academic origins in denominational history, and most historians of particular groups continue to be members of the group they document. Several groups have their own historical societies, the Lutheran Historical Conference among them, while it's not clear to me that history fares well within the American Academy of Religion, although indeed, religion is faring better within the Organization of American Historians than was true thirty years ago.

True, a few historians have no ties or few ties to a religious tradition and this has always been true, in modern times symbolized by Perry Miller, who was indeed an atheist, although I have known more than a few beginning Ph.D. students who were surprised, after reading the first volume of *The New England Mind*, that he wasn't a clergyman.

Is there something wrong with the denominational blush? How could one say that? A worshipper's history may be just as bad, or good, as history written by, well, just a historian—though I admit that I like it that none of us has yet written as well as Miller.

But I think we must admit that there are some real fault lines in our profession. The American Society of Church History is indeed just that, for better or worse. Jewish history is pursued separately; so far as I can tell, I don't believe it is included in this conference. The religious history of African Americans fits in many places, yet sometimes in none. Mormon history enjoyed some popularity within American history generally but now may be moving back to its denominational sites. And so forth. In short, integration remains almost as elusive among historians of religion as it is in American schools.

And what do we mean by history? Is it implicitly and explicitly critical and analytical? I'd be concerned that too much history of religion in America is reverential and somewhat defensive, perhaps more so than other kinds of American history.

Part of this may be caused by the broader isolation of the field. Aside from the study of Puritanism and religion in antebellum America (whose stature originated in Miller's work), and more recently the history of women in American religion, historians of religion have had to fight for their place in the larger sweep of American history.

But I think part of it also comes from a sometimes defensive commitment TO religion that tends to encourage historians to back away from criticism of denominations and figures for fear that it is taken as criticism of religion itself. Sometimes, one has the impression that it's the historian's task not only to narrate the specific subject at hand but, as well, to say that religion is good.

This leads inevitably to the problem of personal commitment. I will say that I have never agreed that a historian of religion needs to say, or is obligated to reveal, his or her own particular religious convictions. I

understand why undergraduates ask. I don't understand why historians ask, and even sometimes demand. I think many people, actually increasing numbers in the past three decades, study American religious history simply because they think it's intellectually interesting and a critical part of American history generally, not different than the history of American politics, economics, ethnic groups, or regions. Granted that there are some exceptions, I find this effort at personal confession common only in the field of American religious history and, of course, I think it's out of place, a kind of false explanation of why the individual is interpreting something one way or another. I don't think it explains much of anything, even if it satisfies some kind of academic prurient interest.

Here, I will admit I couldn't find any smooth segue to the questions of interdisciplinarity and funding. On the one hand, interdisciplinarity is simultaneously the most interesting and tedious development in this and many other fields of the past 30 years. Historians have been interdisciplinary for a long, long time.

I think what this might really mean is, "are we theory-driven?" I have two answers to that desire: no and yes. Far too much theory-driven scholarship is simply unreadable and pushes adepts even farther from the broad public audience historians need to engage. Too much of it is just claptrap, or is written as though it were claptrap. Yet we can't operate, and don't operate, without theory. We ought to be conscious of the way we conceive things but find ways to make our theoretical assumptions and methods understandable and truly revealing of our larger subjects.

That leaves funding, and we can spend few words on it. Funding? It is harder to obtain funding for historical research on U.S. subjects than for research elsewhere other than in third-world countries—pathetically inadequate NEH funding, state historical societies and denominational societies operating on shoestring budgets, no national funding for graduate students studying any kind of U.S. history, including the history of American religion.

So, if Kathryn Galchutt is going to realize her dream of Lutheran Studies, sadly, she's largely on her own. Amidst the meltdown of our national economy and the resulting gutting of college and university budgets, the prospects for success will likely depend on individuals just plugging away because, in the end, they like to write history.

A virtue? Perhaps. But it says little good about the way we value our public cultural life.

**Jay Demerath**  
**Department of Sociology**  
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Scholars of any stripe are apt to be placed on a distant pedestal and rated on a continuum ranging from nerd to genius. But if your specialty is religion, the misunderstandings multiply. Over the years when asked what I do, I often say, "Amongst my many sins, I am a sociologist of religion." Some acquaintances beat a quick retreat lest they be subject to proselytizing. Others rise to the bait of my presumed personal commitment and begin to ply me with suggestions involving the latest inspirational literature or forthcoming theological lectures. Still others see me as just the opposite: namely, a steadfast opponent of religion, and they are eager to enlist me in that cause. To avoid these problems, I have recently begun to describe myself as a "sociologist of the sacred." And when students occasionally sidle up to me after a class and ask hopefully if I am a "believer," I am apt to respond, "No, but I am a respecer."

I suspect that much of the foregoing plagues all scholars of religion. But I wonder if sociologists of religion don't bear a special cross. In fact, it is hard to convey just what I am about. On the rare occasion that I am able to rebut all of the above and explain that I am not in the business of advancing or assaulting religion but rather in the business of explaining and understanding it, this itself poses problems. Those who are not quickly bored are apt to take quick offense. Who am I to penetrate their facades, remove their veils, and explain them? The threat is compounded when they are not sure how to explain themselves or have little coherent sense of their own religion—except that they most certainly have one.

Without seizing this opportunity to indulge a Roskolnokovian double alienation, it is true that I have often felt victimized by some of my closest colleagues. On the one hand, many of my fellow sociologists who have respectably secular specialties regard me with considerable suspicion as one who might not only be personally religious but one whose religious virus might be catching on contact. As one confirmed structuralist with little knowledge of cultural matters generally once explained his skepticism about religion, "How can anything so crazy be a truly powerful factor in social life?" (Welcome to the post 9/11 world!). On the other hand, I have always thought that some of my more religious scholarly compatriots—including some of my best friends—see me as a sort of minor anti-Christ whose very secularism—not to mention my writings on secularization—may be diabolically self-fulfilling.

From the vantage point of the more humanistically inclined, part of the problem may stem from my standing as a sociologist. After all, there is something off-putting about the very methods of a sociologist of religion, especially methods that are more quantitative and scientific such as surveys and experiments. Indeed, because experiments can be especially off-putting (see Festinger, Riecken and Schachter's *When Prophecy Fails* followed by Allison Lurie's *Imaginary Friends*), it can't help when, as some of you know, I have often defined a sociologist of religion as "someone who with four children, sends two to church and keeps two at home as a control group."

But note that there is a difference between a religious sociologist and a sociologist of religion. In fact, many of my colleagues begin as the former and wind up as the latter. There seems to be something relativizing about studying faith, and I suspect that sociologists are not alone in experiencing it. But even for other scholars of religion, being non-religious has its compensations. While there are those who say it is impossible to know a phenomenon without becoming deeply involved within it, there are also those who urge researchers to remain clear of the biases and entanglements that personal involvement entails. As virtually every sociologist of my generation knows, the two greatest sociologists of religion—Emile Durkheim and Max Weber—were both, in the latter's phrase, "religiously unmusical." They approached matters of the spirit sociologically rather than religiously.

With apologies to Emile and Max, I want to flesh out what this has come to mean to me. In what follows, I offer a baker's half-dozen tips that

I often give my students as they begin to think about forming, framing, and writing-up their own research projects:

1. Say Something Both New and True: This is by far the best advice for scholarly writing. Offering neither is the quickest way for us all to do what the boxer Mike Tyson called "fading into Bolivia (sic)." And while combining the two is the gold standard, it is surprising how often we encounter one without the other, especially material that is new but not true. As their name intimates, newspapers offer good examples, at least where religion is concerned. Because sociologists of religion are assumed to be *au courant*, we are often asked to comment on new developments on the religious scene. Sometimes talking to a reporter can involve a helpful exchange of their information for your interpretation. But often the question itself is flawed. I remember being interviewed by a young reporter concerning my work on religions of the world, and after confessing her ignorance, began by asking me how likely it was that Islam and Christianity would merge in the near future? After several stories flashed through my mind—"Sociologist thinks merger either likely or unlikely"—and I indicated that something had just come up and I had to regretfully cancel the interview, I'm sure she was as relieved as I was. On another issue, if every religious revival I had been asked to assess over the years had been genuine, we would all be up to our waist in Bibles. But, of course, on occasions when I offered more rebuttal than supporting evidence, I frequently discovered later that this was no problem for the reporter who quickly rounded up supporting anecdotes for the story as originally conceived by her editor. Meanwhile, another example of the new but not true comes from a project that Mark Silk and I were engaged in with the late, great Bill Hutchison. The research asked focus groups around the country for their perceptions of what is new in their own religious experiences. When Bill was present as an observer, he was often unable to resist the temptation to answer for the respondents, and when they were left to their own perceptions, he almost invariably claimed that anything they said was new had been common for three-hundred years.

2. Pick a Fight With a Worthy Opponent over a Worthy Issue: Work that goes with the flow may be valuable, but moving against the current is more noteworthy. Readers want to know not only what you are saying that others haven't, but how what you are saying differs with what important figures have said before. Earlier I mentioned Weber and Durkheim. Of course, Max rose to prominence in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* by differing—albeit cautiously—with Marx, who had earlier "stood Hegel on his head," and Emile helped to establish sociology in France and the world by throwing caution to the wind regarding his differences with the more psychological work of the then great Herbert Spencer. Of course, the "Stark" reality is that some sociologists have been all-too eager to adopt this principle. But there is a difference between finding an enemy and making an enemy. If any of you have been offended by my colleagues, I want to apologize profusely on their behalf.

3. Compare, compare, compare—across time, space, or even the gulf between ideal-types and more inductive realities. Of course, there is nothing really new here, except how few of us actually do it and how exhilarating it can be. No matter how distant or arcane the scholars' formal subject matter, comparisons always lurk with the implicit presence of their own here and now. Comparison was the essence of the social scientific method for both Durkheim and Weber. Until lately there has been much less of this in more recent sociology. However, I have recently tried to remedy the deficiency in one fell swoop by comparing no less than fourteen societies in a recent book on religion and politics around the world (*Crossing the Gods: World Religions and Worldly Politics*). The project taught me a lot about culture wars, civil society, civil religion, fundamentalism, secularization, and most especially the relations among religion, politics, and the state. It also taught me how elusive true comparative expertise is in moving from the local to the "loco."



## Demerath

4. Particularize the general and generalize the particulars. Another analytic cliché perhaps, but also a potential difference between us. Some time ago, I wrote (until I was persuaded to edit): “From a historian’s perspective, sociologists frequently use history as a tissue on which to sneeze their theories. By contrast, sociologists are apt to view historians as scholarly scolds standing by with tissues at the ready.” Apologies notwithstanding, just as sociologists often seem to have a passion for change, historians sometime appear to have an ironic prejudice against it. More specifically, whereas we are inclined to plot flux along the many variables that concern us, historians are more inclined to focus more directly on the empirical world in its own terms, and it is understandable that change accrues more to the former than the latter perspective. Humanistic scholars appear more confident that small truths impeccably established are their own virtue, but sociologists tend to be uneasy about that and grab for brass rings that sometimes turn out to be papier-mâché. Of course, it matters greatly how one chooses both the particular and the lines of generalizability. There is a sense in which historians and religionists work within more confined parameters in which the analytic and substantive foci are one and the same, but sociologists often have analytic, substantive, and sometimes methodological specialties that operate somewhat independently of one another. Thus, a sociologist may approach religion from myriad perspectives, and what is extracted from research on religion may be used for a study on a wide range of other subjects. Much of traditional American religious history was concerned with establishments and their institutions, but the sociology of American religion was disproportionately drawn to religious deviance and the exotic and erotic worlds of sect and cult. Our mutual choices of subject matter are both cause and consequence of our quite different meta-discourses.

5. Of course, good data are important, and we are all storytellers. But concepts are the coin of the sociological realm, and new concepts with compelling names can make whole careers. In some ways, it is here that we have most clearly parted company from other disciplines. While many sociologists bow to no one in their rigorous empiricism, for others of us, concepts are crucial mediating devices that both highlight and distill reality, while representing it within a series of variables that provide the crucial bridges across time and space. I suspect many of you may find this so much arrogant artifice. Indeed, many historians may regard sociologists with some of the same reservations we harbor for economists. Both of us use conceptual models, but whereas sociologists try to fit our models to the world, the economists discovered early on that it was far more efficient and less risky to fit the world to their models.

6. Any new variable is worthwhile, but the real pay-offs come from developing a new causal variable. Show me a scholar for posterity and I’ll show you a new axis around which to explain and interpret the world. While the rest of us may develop perfectly serviceable concepts that basically “elaborate the dependent variable,” it is the truly seminal figures in every field who give us new independent or causal variables. The list of examples is legion—from Marx’s economic determinism to Weber’s stress on the organizational rounds of life and from Durkheim’s emphasis on culture and the sacred to Freud’s libidinous unconscious. However, I can’t resist adding that, while any good independent variable is the basis for a full-scale theory, truly successful theories contain built-in rebuttals to their critics. Let me offer a few examples. You don’t think sexuality is fundamental to human behavior? You must remember what we learned about repression. You say you don’t believe all history is the history of class struggles? Alas, your false consciousness is showing. You find that there is no truth in post-modernism? Truth itself was the first master narrative to succumb to post-modernity. Finally, you reject secularization as a historical dynamic? Then on what other basis is this disagreement between us sustained?

7. Just as illness reveals more than apparent health in medicine so do problems reveal more than seeming stability and success in analyzing religion: As if to honor this dictum, sociologists may sometimes appear to

hit below the belt. Certainly it is true that we are more apt to attract attention when we highlight problems with religious organizations, religious authority, or patterns of religiosity. Of course, that was also true of Weber, who was anxious to point out that “ideal” types were merely ideational analytic models and not intended as a gloss on problematic reality. Even Durkheim was eager to note that functional analyses should not camouflage dysfunctional consequences. Recent examples of how attention to negatives and “deviant” cases may foster new and important scholarship include the studies of Hadaway, Marler and Chaves on inflated claims of church attendance, the work of Hout and Fisher plus Kosmin and Keysar on the rising number of religious “nones” over the last two decades, and the various accounts of secularization. However, after giving a series of lectures on problems of church organization at the Yale Divinity School a number of years ago, I treasure the remarks of a student who came up after the last class to say, “You know, it’s as if you told me that my wife had fat legs and I could only respond, ‘I know, but I love her anyway.’”

## Conclusion

For many of the reasons I have noted, it is perhaps not surprising that over the years we sociologists have suffered from both interdisciplinary paranoia and interdisciplinary pronoia—or the delusion that someone out there actually likes us. Perhaps in defense, we have learned to not entertain self-doubt lavishly. Nor is this just an idle hunch. Some twenty-five years ago, a sociologist at Indiana University developed material for a Presidential address to a regional sociological society by sending out a questionnaire to the society’s members. The questionnaire had two parts. The first comprised a series of questions on how his subjects thought they and their work would be remembered by posterity long after their careers were over, to which most responded quite positively, thank you. The second part asked how many of a long list of names the respondents were able to identify, on which they performed poorly at best even though all of the names were Past-Presidents of the American Sociological Association. Needless to say, the results prompted a good deal of embarrassment and crow was the main course at the banquet following.

Throughout all of the foregoing, I have been aware of the dangers of stoking old stereotypes that are best allowed to die out. Clearly, there are differences that remain among us—but note that I say among and not between us. What has impressed me in recent years is how these differences have begun to blur. We all know sociologists who have encroached upon other scholarly domains, and not always hat in hand. By the same token, we sociologists have benefitted enormously, if not always graciously, from work done by historians, religionists, economists, psychologists, anthropologists, political scientists, and a host of other disciplines.

I remain convinced that disciplines often make their greatest contributions by remaining true to themselves rather than emulating other approaches. However, it is also critical that we learn from each other and even work with each other. Indeed, perhaps you have predicted that I would end these remarks by citing the line of a poet from my backyard, namely Robert Frost’s “Good fences make good neighbors.” But actually in the poem “Mending Wall,” this was the grouchy neighbor’s sentiment, not Frost’s own. His view was captured more by his repeated line, “Something there is that doesn’t love a wall.”

No, I think a better spirit on which to close comes from my grandfather—an Indianapolis funeral director of many years ago. He used to toast couples he and my grandmother were entertaining this way: “If you two love we two like we two love you two, then here’s to all four. But if you two don’t love we two as we two love you two, then here’s to we two and no more.”



**Paula Kane**  
**Department of Religious Studies**  
**University of Pittsburgh**

[These remarks derive from the convergence of three things: Guitar Hero, Mark Taylor, and the cultural turn.]

This spring I tried something new. I played Guitar Hero for the first time with a bunch of teenagers, although it appears that I am the last person in America to join this trend. For those not already in the know, Guitar Hero is a computer game that simulates the reality of being a solo electric guitarist. Guitar Hero isn't cheap entertainment: you buy an X-Box (which is expensive), which comes with a plastic fake electric guitar, and use a TV screen to project the game. As you play, an animated rock band may accompany you on screen, while an animated guitar fret board rolls inexorably toward you like a moving sidewalk, telling you what colored notes to "hit" on the guitar strings and awarding points for accuracy and skill level as you match them correctly, at speeds ranging from "easy" to "expert." My turn ended when I was "booed" offstage by the onscreen meter because I only hit about 27% of the correct notes on my fake guitar. My experience was fun, loud, and mildly humiliating, but mostly I felt a sense of *estrangement*, a sudden perception that the gulf between two worldviews had grown enormous. This feeling, I think, expresses a broad qualitative shift in sensibility between our students and ourselves.

As I thought about the contest (since academics can never just experience things without processing them intellectually at the same time), Guitar Hero is a perfect example of the uses of new technologies to represent the self. But what kind of self? I begin my reflections upon "how we got here" in the study of American religion with the students that we teach, because it is here that faculty should acknowledge a "paradigm shift" between the study of a real world, which we do as historians and sociologists, and the invention of simulated realities. Unlike my teenage competitors in Guitar Hero, I couldn't overcome the absurd premise of a guitar keyboard that does not correspond to any real notes or musical scale, and a musical game that ignored musicianship. Although I assumed that education and experience would help me with Guitar Hero, they became drawbacks instead. Because I can read music and play the guitar, I foolishly imagined that playing an instrument should create music, but instead, the competition is about finger speed. The game is a simulation of reality for which no real exists because the external referent, music, is missing. So, if our consideration of the field of American religion begins with the raw materials of the students that we teach and the cultural environment we inhabit, how do we understand the social forces that are forming them into subjects whose mental universe is different from our own because of electronic technologies?

If Guitar Hero and its imitators imply something about American culture today, and about the formation of subjectivity, then perhaps there are some lessons here: first, that young persons seem to expect little from their culture except for the ability to consume what they are told they should want. In Guitar Hero it is easy to recognize Baudrillard's notion of a simulation of reality to satisfy a need created by media. The game fulfills a media-generated fantasy of being a rock star by producing the illusion of guitar competence. It is a postmodern salad of signifiers with no signified. In it we also find a major shift away from the text-based learning of the humanities, toward the screen-based pursuits of many of our students. We think reality exists and is worthy of study; they are happier in the world of simulation.

A second consequence of the lures of consumerism and simulated reality is that while the notion of the self as consumer has replaced the notion of being a producer for some decades now, the repercussions are still seen in the low esteem for intellectual labor in the United States. If the notion of being a producer, even an intellectual one, has been replaced by a model of being a consumer of goods and fantasies as extensions of the self, perhaps we should endeavor to put the category of the production of

knowledge back on the table to restore the notion of the value of studying even religion as producing something necessary for American society.

Shortly after my *début* with 'Guitar Hero' I read religion professor Mark Taylor's op-ed in the April 27 [2009] *New York Times*, "End the University as we know it," which declared ominously that "Graduate education is the Detroit of higher learning." Like American auto manufacturers, most graduate programs, he wrote, produce a product for which there is no market, develop skills that are barely needed, and all at rapidly rising costs. Ouch. As educators, do we indeed produce a product that lacks a market, wasting time and money on reproducing rarified skills among our gifted, but unemployable students? If consumers of Guitar Hero are participants in a marketplace of goods, can the marketplace for ideas in higher education be immune to the ubiquity of market values?

Professor Taylor goes on to recommend the radical re-structuring of graduate programs to create a more adaptive web-like structure within and across universities, making full use of Internet learning. While I suspect that most of us are not ready to abolish departments for what he called "problem-focused programs," nor would most of us endorse his call to abolish tenure for faculty in favor of seven-year contracts, I found his polemic useful in urging us to reconsider how we study religion and for what purposes we train students in the study of American religion. If each of us here produced one Ph.D. student every five years, for example, there would never be enough tenure-track academic jobs available. So how can we educate students to esteem themselves as producers of significant knowledge, as well as to provide them with skills that expand rather than limit their job options? If the marketplace and market competition are still the reigning metaphors for life in late capitalism, despite the recent collapse of the banking, finance and automotive industries, what futures should we imagine for the study of American religion? Given the competitive ethos that dominates our norms for individual achievement, for departmental competition for resources within the university, and for inter-university competition for national rankings, how can the study of religion survive in an age of corporate-funded research that emphasizes medical, technical, and business training? Humanities and many social sciences desperately need a stimulus package, but will funding increases redress these inequities within the research university? Should resources be deployed as Mark Taylor recommends, in dissolving departmental boundaries and creating more flexible structures? Should we seek to merge our home departments with others to focus upon common problem sets, such as the relationship between the nation-state and religion, or situating American religion in a critical internationalism? Or, is there some merit in preserving the disciplinary boundaries of the status quo?

This brings us to the third and central piece of the puzzle: the study of American religion itself. How can we acknowledge the forces shaping our students' lives to direct our educational strategies and research to produce meaningful knowledge? By this I mean identifying and focusing on the big questions governing our field, rather than splitting American religious history into ever smaller and smaller pieces. If current trends continue, each of us will soon be heading our own group within the North American Religions section of the AAR. In this regard, the study of North American religion faces a niche marketing dilemma similar to that of other interdisciplinary "studies" programs. Let me draw a parallel to my own graduate field of American Studies, which draws similarly from Anthropology, History, Sociology, and other disciplines.

In briefest outline, American Studies was a Cold War product, originally content with glorifying American hegemony and middle-class post-war culture. In the late 1960s the field turned against all that and became critical of American racism at home, imperialism in Vietnam, capitalism, consumerism, and complacency. By the 1970s, American Studies, which had been installed as a program at some universities and a department at others, had proliferated and produced several offspring, or at least recog-

## Kane

nized kindred spirits: African-American Studies, Film Studies, Native American Studies, Women's Studies. Religion surfaced from time to time in each of these areas, as one of the aspects of culture, most recently as the theme of a special issue of *American Quarterly*. These subfields have continued to proliferate under new titles, like Race and Ethnic Studies, Queer Studies, Subaltern Studies, Television and Media Studies, and whiteness studies. Since the 1990s a so-called 'New' American Studies has been pioneered, mostly among scholars of literature, leading us to note (with regret) that the bulk of the application of the 'cultural turn' is being done outside of the field of religion.

But the arrival of the 'New' American Studies is not the final chapter, either. Recently it seems that American Studies has been cannibalized by Cultural Studies, which proved to be savvier about locating and riding the crest of the latest academic wave, which at the moment seems to be globalization studies flavored by postcolonial theory or anything that doesn't involve the nation-state and the United States in particular. We should ask, in tandem with this direction in Cultural Studies, what would a transnational or postnational American religious history look like? To some degree historians of religion have already built bridges with Cultural Studies perhaps because the United States lends itself well to studying the global religions that are represented in America. On the other hand, in the rush to be contemporary, we should not forget the past, particularly the body of critical theory of the 1960s through 80s which enabled the cultural turn in the first place. Its focus upon how power is created and exerted in culture, including religious culture, and upon relations of domination and subordination, has seemingly been erased from our students' education as though it never existed. This avoidance of questions of power across all spheres of American life, from labor unions to racial politics to public education, began during the Reagan years with the rise of the New Right. The erasure of critical theory has had the effect of moving academic research away from structural causality, effects of capitalism, class and race relations, onto the local, the regional, and the personal, hence the popularity of ethnography.

I think it is worthwhile to preserve this body of critical theory because of its explanatory power, and the seriousness of the issues at stake. Nod along with me if your own graduate training included scholars from this list, our secular litany of saints: Louis Althusser, Perry Anderson, Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard, Simone de Beauvoir, Walter Benjamin, Pierre Bourdieu, Fernand Braudel, Jacques Derrida, Terry Eagleton, Michel Foucault, Franz Fanon, Antonio Gramsci, Stuart Hall, C.L.R. James, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Fred Jameson, Jacques Lacan, Ernest Mandel, Herbert Marcuse, Juliet Mitchell, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, E.P. Thompson, Raymond Williams. Among lists of critical theorists of this type, the only two persons cited with regularity who concern themselves with religion are Paulo Freire and Gustavo Guterrez, neither from North America. (Yes, I know that Alain Badiou & Slavoj Zizek publish about religion, but they aren't interested in belief *per se*.)

How to overcome the alienation of history of religion from other discourses of culture? Why is religion only a bit player in these discourses of culture? Why aren't historians of religion producing heavy-hitters in the arena of critical theory? And what about those of us whose focus is explicitly on North America? Most of the theorists on my list of influences were European; now, theory comes increasingly from the developing world, the voices of the subalterns as the empire strikes back. Does the void in American theorizers of religious history mimic the eclipse of an American empire, including an intellectual empire that was built upon the notion of American exceptionalism and hegemony, or are we preparing now to re-imagine American religious history in a more international frame? Does religious history face the same fate as American Studies, of being superseded by Cultural Studies?

For this conference, then, I would propose to converse with you about three areas of concern for scholars of American religion, each one relating to the three anecdotes I've sketched: Guitar Hero as signaling the shift in

notions of identity as privileging consumption over production and simulations of reality over the real, in light of the consequences for academic study of the real world; next, in response to Mark Taylor's suggestions, the recognition that university bureaucracies have reached a point of exhaustion and need overhauling, if not necessarily on the market model he proposes; finally, the crisis of disciplines as reflecting a kind of amnesia toward the critical theorists of the last forty years, leaving us poorly equipped to think about globalization and the position of religion generally.

Part II: Competing and complementary approaches in  
American religious history

How seriously do historians take religion, or religious  
studies scholars take history? Whence goeth monographs?  
The rise of ethnography. What about grand narratives?

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As we begin our conversation about competing and complementary approaches in American religious history, I should mention that as a department chair who has just signed off on a new graduate track called “history and ethnography of religion” I think it would be fair to say that I see some measure of complementarity between different approaches to what we do. In the broader view of things, I think that religious studies, and, specifically, history, can and do collaborate in an assortment of ways to advance the study of religion in America. “Historical ethnography,” for example, has been with us for decades. The question is, “what kinds of religious studies?” and to some extent as well, “what kinds of history?” make good bedfellows. There are areas within religious studies in which scholarship can be oriented toward judgment and choice, even prescription. Ethics can be such an area. So can philosophy of religion, with its arrangement of arguments for and against. And so can systematic theology, and some constructive/reflective projects, especially those associated with collective identities. Historical scholarship likewise can manifest as a determination to avoid repeating past mistakes—war, despoilation of the natural environment, racist institutions, failed political orders. Research on the ethics of war—such as my colleague John Kelsay conducts with regard to jihad—generally exploits a number of intersections between religious studies and history and probably succeeds more impressively for so doing. I don’t think I would call Kelsay’s research prescriptive, but it falls somewhere between prescriptive and descriptive. How we engage it has much to do with authorial voice.

Other kinds of religious studies are less interested in prescription and less inclined to challenge the ideas or practices of the groups or persons under investigation. There is no need to rehearse in detail the background of this here. Some scholarship in the humanities and social sciences, shaped by a medley of influences, from Ruth Benedict’s and Margaret Mead’s early 20<sup>th</sup> century invention of culture as *gestalt*, through post-modern theorizing of the 70s and 80s, has focused on putting “text” in “context.” In most cases that means situating an opaque written artifact, event, or behavior in “culture” so that its symbolic meaning can be understood. I stress “symbolic,” “meaning,” and “understood” here. All three go together and denote an investigation tilted at the outset toward addressing the seemingly incomprehensible and tilted at the end towards explanation. Somewhere along the way, opacity gives way to translucence if not transparency. Interpretive reductions are made, but rarely are they claimed.

In historical scholarship, the pattern is clearest for me in the writings of *annalistes* and their disciples (who also happen to be their critics). When Robert Darnton, who taught with Clifford Geertz a long-running seminar called “History and Anthropology,” writes, in *The Great Cat Massacre*—which is a study of just that in 18c Paris—that he is engaged in the “anthropological mode of history,” there is a certain seductiveness to that. We want to sense that we are glimpsing past the veil of radical otherness into foreign lives, by means of decryption of a symbology that ordered that strange world. But as much as we might be tempted to believe that the empathic embrace of “anthropologically”-derived context will liberate us from our own situatedness, our predicament is that it does not. We choose which contexts matter, bring our own judgments of value, and determine out of our own presuppositions what “understanding” is, where it is located, and when it is full. But again, the trick is in the voice. Darnton’s kind of historical writing deploys a robust rhetoric of interpretation that ambiguates our relationship to the massacre at the same time that it demands we see it as an awful thing.

When historians and religious studies scholars investigate the religious past of North America, whether we take decidedly empathetic ethnographic tacks or flat-footed empirical chart-and-graph historical approaches, or whatever is in between, we end up in a similar place; namely, expressing some uncertainty about what happened at the same time that

we proffer judgment about what it means. Historical writing that takes religion seriously is able, like Darnton’s analysis of the cat massacre, to offer a persuasive reading of culture through focus on discrete events—a vision, a miracle, a revival, an instance of collective weeping. I think of William Christian’s writing on Marian apparitions and on shrines and relics in early modern Spain as a model in this regard. Religious studies scholars who take history seriously, for their part, are willing to attempt objectivity, to generalize, and, especially, to narrate cause and effect. That agenda sometimes leads to making judgments about culpability for tragedy. In this vein I think of anthropologist James Mooney’s extraordinary *The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, a book that interweaves historical overviews with data gleaned from engaged observation so as to define the causal relationships between the Ghost Dance, the Sioux Outbreak, the War Department, the Wounded Knee massacre, and the individual personalities associated with all of those. The variations in voice in that book—sometimes modest sometimes magisterial—represent to me Mooney’s struggle to come to terms with his own need to understand what happened at Wounded Knee at the same time that he was infuriated by it. He set that tone in the very first sentence of what he called his “narrative”: “The wise men tell us that the world is growing happier—that we live longer than did our fathers, have more of comfort and less of toil, fewer wars and discords, higher hopes and aspirations. So say the wise men; but deep in our hearts we know they are wrong.”<sup>1</sup>

All of this is to say that I am less concerned about differences in research paradigms and methods of analysis that might be discovered in the work of historians and religious studies scholars. I am more concerned with how writing itself is involved in the production of knowledge about American religious history. Grand narrative, in my view, is less about chronological sweep and vertical comprehensiveness than it is about representation. Edward Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*—in which Christianity is judged the culprit in the decay of a rich and lively Roman religion—long served as a manual of style for historical writing, and above all for its voice, which suggested detachment and objectivity, and insisted on closure. That voice is the classic tone of grand narrative. I hear it in Drew Gilpin Faust’s new history of death in the Civil War, *The Suffering Republic*, a book with a very limited range, surveying only a few years of American history, but grand in voice, *a la* Gibbon, and beautifully written. And it shouts its historical judgment: “This was not good!”

I like grand narrative; that is, if I am permitted to massage the term a bit, in the following direction: writing about American religious history that is grand is writing that simmers with tension between boldness and caution, unassuming modesty and a willingness to judge historical actors. If there is one thing we have learned from the pandemic of postmodern theorizing in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, it might be that historical narration—like, perhaps, the best theology—is a question about itself. It is close to self-immolating. Or at least, in contemporary parlance, it “checks” itself. Voice—however we manage to construct it (and it is sometimes seemingly by alchemy that we succeed in getting the right tone)—is crucial to histories of religion.

So, is there a future for grand narrative in American religious history? Yes. But the degree to which new grand narratives succeed will depend on how our literary voices prove their capabilities. It also will depend on whether we can find a way to fashion grand narratives in a way that better incorporates people’s lives. Not long ago I wrote about people’s lives as they lived them in one city during one year, and the end product was almost as long as my textbook on American religious history. That suggests to me that, in the absence of publishers’ sudden rush to market 900-page books—the exception of Daniel Walker Howe’s newest being noted—we have to compromise.

I do not think that this is an issue that is limited to religious history. Arguably, gender histories, immigration histories, histories of reading,

## Corrigan

and other kinds of narration can reap substantial benefit from attention to individual lives. In the case of religious history, there is also the weight of a specifically “religious studies” scholarship concerned with “what is religion” to contend with; and that scholarship, still flashing credentials forged in a seminary curriculum that focused on spiritual formation, states of grace, signs of salvation, and “ontology,” can abstract lives and disembodied religion. What is needed is some willingness to take our leads from lives and then surround them with ideologies, institutions, political battles, commodity production, locations—piling on whatever else that can make historiography out of biography. This is easy to say and hard to do. And the trick here regarding people’s lives is not voice. It is a more difficult trick. Something like burying them alive, and then sustaining them.

I think here of the work of Natalie Davis, who is probably best known for her *The Return of Martin Guerre*, but whose subsequent works *Women on the Margins*—which told a far-reaching story of religion in Europe and the Americas in the lives of three women—and the recent *Trickster Travels*—which narrates the early modern history of Islam and Africa with respect to the life of Al-Wazzan—are pointers in the direction we need to go. My own preference is to examine individuals for their embeddedness in groups—not as much the independent agents that Davis favors. I also prefer to interpret the lives of actors less as representations of personal psychodynamics and more as manifestations of their complicity in collective agendas as their groups compete with others for power and position. Ethnography and history both have roles to play in that. So do other branches of the humanities and social sciences.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> James Mooney, “The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890,” *Fourteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1892-1893*, Part 2 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1896), 657.



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Scholars and students in the respective fields of religious history and religious studies needlessly neglect opportunities for cross-fertilization which can invigorate inquiries in both areas of study. Often they attend different conferences, publish in separate journals, and seldom critique book and essay manuscripts for peer-reviewed presses and periodicals in the opposite area. Distinct affiliations in the American Historical Association and the American Academy of Religion, for example, socialize and orient scholars into restricted intellectual interactions that deprive each "discipline" of insights and methodologies of colleagues frequently working on the same or similar subjects.

My own scholarly experiences convince me that normative approaches to researching and writing history can benefit from religious studies methodologies and perspectives. When I wrote *Out of the Crucible: Black Steelworkers in Western Pennsylvania, 1875-1890*, the evidence I uncovered through the regular routine of research demanded attention to the religious dimensions of black working class life. The unavoidable data pertaining to laborers doubling as preachers, church founders, and influential lay leaders raised questions on whether relationships existed between the sacred space of the sanctuary and the secular sphere of the workplace. Because mill owners and managers provided financial support for the establishment and maintenance of black congregations, how did African American workers assert their autonomy in their religious space and at the same time critique the deplorable conditions that their employers imposed on them. I documented the dominance of industrial hegemony and the weak response of religious institutions to the rampant racial inequities that pervaded the workplace. I discovered that independent unionism during the 1930s became the emancipatory force that energized black workers and encouraged black churches to publicly criticize racial discrimination in the steel mills.<sup>1</sup> Though I stand by this assessment over two decades later, I see ways that the analysis could have been deepened. What was the content of belief regarding matters of capital and labor? How was sacred space defined notwithstanding the intrusive presence of mill money in constructing churches and employing some preachers in the foundries? To what extent did gender and religion interact and establish black churches as areas where women enjoyed unusual autonomy in governing religious affairs? Rituals, hierarchy, folk belief anchored in southern black culture, hermeneutical practices in scriptural interpretation and the use of various religious symbols were intrinsic to the sources which shaped the study, but I missed opportunities to complicate the analysis through these religious studies explorations. I and other historians in labor history or in other fields more often than not neglect these methodologies which are grounded in religious studies. Moreover, no historians in African American and labor history have explored the relationship between these proletarian issues and religion nor have practitioners either in black religious history or in black religious studies weighed in on these matters in their scholarly literature. There are other general examples where scholars and students in religious history and religious studies operate apart from each other and fail to develop a broadened discourse about phenomena that they explore in common.

Some historians, especially in religious history, have heeded these admonitions. Let me cite two historians, namely Eamon Duffy and Clarence Taylor, who illustrate these points. Duffy in *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580*, probed deeply into the lived religion of English Catholics during the two centuries which included the Protestant Reformation. He uncovered widely practiced piety, various devotional habits, and rituals that demonstrated that Catholicism functioned as a religion that belonged to the people. Though far less literate than clergy and their social "betters," Duffy reconstructs the religiosity of grassroots Catholics by weaving together poetry, icons, art, superstitions, and other elements of folk culture that interacted with prescribed church practices. The convulsions of monarchical shifts between Catholic and Protestant allegiances showed the people's resilience in defining the

content and practice of their faith. Duffy's creative use of signs, symbols, superstitions, and rituals cast in dynamic historical developments illustrated a blending of religious history and religious studies approaches that should be paradigmatic for scholars in both fields.<sup>2</sup>

Clarence Taylor in *Black Churches of Brooklyn* examined black religion and its encounter with 20<sup>th</sup> century mass culture. He juxtaposed traditional Protestant doctrines in Baptist and Methodist churches and Holiness and Pentecostal beliefs and their surrender to popular tastes in amusement, banquets, fashion shows, boat rides, gospel music, and various examples of mass consumption in beauty and hair products. His interior examination of black belief and mass culture probed deeper into the lived religion of an important segment of the American population than most monographs and married the methodologies and perspectives of both religious history and religious studies.<sup>3</sup>

The works of Duffy, Clarence Taylor, and other historians like them transcend the dichotomies that some theorists in religious studies advance. They divide inquiries about religion says Mark C. Taylor, in such polarities as sacred/profane, cosmos/chaos, order/disorder, and other divisions. Instead, Duffy and Clarence Taylor seem to adhere to what Mark Taylor has called "a theology of culture" in which complex adaptive systems enclose complicated religious activities of peoples striving to make sense of their lives and their social, political, and economic surroundings. Scholars of religious history, at least, those who approach this subject like Duffy and Clarence Taylor, may have realized what Mark Taylor lately has recommended.<sup>4</sup>

Scholars in religious studies, however, sometimes overlook the chronological and narrative analysis framework that shapes the interpretive presentation to which historians adhere. Important works in religious studies, though rightfully grounded in theories about how meaning is derived from every facet of human existence and the surroundings that they inhabit, pursue this objective apart from narrative sources which should anchor these discussions. Sometimes theories are unevenly applied because they cannot be reconciled with the actual historical record. Because historians are committed to rigorous archival research, and where appropriate, field research, scholars in religious studies, who sometimes bypass these methodologies, overlook raw data that might refine or redefine their theoretical declarations. In my own field, African American religious history, from which I should generalize only in a limited way, suffers from a general lack of primary research. Frequently, time-worn debates that have been offered as the normative boundaries of discourse collapse whenever some scholar explores an unexploited archive which throws new light on black religious life. Religious studies, where relevant, would be invigorated through the adoption of the primary research methods that characterize their colleagues in religious history.

These two fields, perhaps, differ only in methodological preferences. For historians, archives are the required venues where research begins and narrative/analysis becomes the fruit of this approach. For religious studies scholars, theory matters more than narrative. Historians, because of their preferred methodologies, choose topics that focus on literate societies. Moreover, such sources, while undergirding their use of material culture, remain foundational to how history is fundamentally understood. There is, however, greater breadth in the choice of subjects that religious studies scholars select especially in their extensive writings about non-literate peoples located across time and geography. What the two fields have in common lie in their agreement that the subjects of their research are themselves the text both sets of scholars must understand and interpret. Historians have much to learn from their colleagues in religious studies especially in their greater receptivity to methodologies in anthropology, psychology, linguistics, and other disciplines. Scholars in the two fields surely can benefit from liberal borrowing of methodologies from each other.



## Dickerson

My present project, "William Stuart Nelson and the Religious Origins of the Civil Rights Movement," and other such works-in-progress require the theory and intercultural breadth that characterize religious studies and the core methodological approaches of religious history. Nelson, a student of Quaker pacifism and Gandhian satyagraha, also spent years in search of common testimonies about nonviolence in the scriptures of several world religions. He tried to describe and discuss the religiosity of African Americans and Hindus and Muslims in their respective liberation movements against white racist segregation in America and British colonialism in India. The signs, symbols, and scriptures which cross-fertilized the emancipationist ethos of blacks and Indians drew from modes of inquiry from the two fields. There may be convergence between religious history and religious studies, and if so, each will better document and analyze religious reality as experienced by countless peoples and how they make sense of their complicated lives in an ever shrinking world.

For these reasons there remains much need for monographs. In African American religious history, the most developed area among formerly subject populations, monographs are required because so much is still unexplored. Surely, other minority or migrant peoples either in the United States or elsewhere need monographic treatments as the crucial foundation for broader, theoretical works. Therefore, ethnographical studies set in a transforming global setting and shaped in the crucible of innumerable macro trends, would inform various monographs. These studies would examine the multiple facets of life for racial and ethnic groups whose religious selves were forged in complex global circumstances.

Although discrete monographic and ethnographical studies in both religious history and religious studies would seemingly drive these fields to focus on particularities, grand narratives remain relevant. Broad global forces and themes compel large surveys of religion in the postmodern world. The popularity and usefulness of various studies on the rise of Christianity in the southern hemisphere, for example, demonstrate the need and desire for such works. Monographs, ethnographies, and grand narratives, rooted in religious history and religious studies, have only started to explore globalism and post-modernity and how they will affect religion and how its practitioners will respond to these macro developments.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Dennis C. Dickerson, *Out of the Crucible: Black Steel Workers in Western Pennsylvania, 1875-1980* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986) and see Dennis C. Dickerson, "The Black Church in Industrializing Western Pennsylvania, 1870-1950," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, 64, no. 4 (October 1981), 329-344.

<sup>2</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Clarence Taylor, *Black Churches of Brooklyn* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> Mark C. Taylor, "Reconfiguring Religion", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 77, no. 1 (March 2009), 108; 111-118.

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As my contribution to our discussions I want to explore what the phrase “to take seriously” might mean when used in relation to the two immense entities, “religion” and “history.”

This is a huge topic for such a short time, but I hope I can at least mark the phrases “to take religion seriously” and “to take history seriously,” as needing careful critical parsing. Mostly these phrases are used tendentiously and resentfully by certain kinds of religious practitioners and certain kinds of secular historians to discredit each other, but there is nothing self-evident about either admonition. The question of taking religion/history seriously brings us to the heart of the modern project, moreover, and the stakes of this diptych, religion/history, are high. Historical research on religion and religions was fundamentally constitutive of the intellectual world we inhabit today, in particular historical inquiry into events and experiences once taken as miraculous, supernatural or supra-historical, and trans-historical by religious practitioners, and recorded in scriptures, chronicles, community memories, and traditions. Primary among these and most distressing for Christians were the wonderful things Yahweh did for Israel and the resurrection of Jesus Christ; they included all such divine interventions into human space and time, among them the conversion of the Emperor Constantine, the stigmata of Saint Francis, the incorruptibility of the bodies of the saints, and in modern times the revivals of colonial New England, the apparition of the Blessed Mother at Lourdes, and the descent of the Holy Spirit on Azusa Street. Religious people understand themselves at such moments to be standing on holy ground; modern historical consciousness begins in the work of digging up this ground. “The historians of the Enlightenment,” Peter Gay writes, “freed history from the parochialism of Christian scholars and from theological presuppositions, secularized the idea of causation and opened vast new territories for historical inquiry. They went beyond tedious chronology, endless research into sacred documents, and single-minded hagiography, and imposed rational, critical methods of study on social, political, and intellectual developments.”<sup>1</sup> This is only part of the story, but it identifies an important dimension of modern critical historiography, within whose terms we all inevitably work.<sup>2</sup>

This critical, even corrosive (depending on who was writing) historical spirit was seen as necessary by 18<sup>th</sup>-century thinkers not only for a truer vision of the past, but also for the flourishing of freedom and reason among the citizens of modern liberal democracies. Imagine a society in which the majority of voters believed that the Blessed Mother actually appears on earth! It is only a short step from this to electing Berlusconi. The discovery of historical causation within the limits of the human and the assault on historical credulity were key to human psychological, social, and religious liberation. As David Hume put it, “The frail memories of men, their love of exaggeration, their supine carelessness; these principles if not corrected by books and writing, soon pervert the account of historical events, where argument or reasoning has little or no place, nor can ever recal[ ] the truth, which has once escaped those narrations.” Ignorant of true historical causation, citizens submit to the authority of “invisible powers” and of their earthly representatives.<sup>3</sup> The practice of history contributed to this by identifying the real (meaning the social, economic, and political) causes of religious events; in this way, history played a key role in the modern task of remaking the really real, resetting its boundaries.

Something of this astringent spirit of historical inquiry in relation to religion persists in the practice of history today, and we should all be grateful for this and do what we can to perpetuate it (many of us share it, in any event). When I listened to efforts to “explain” the child sexual abuse crisis in American Catholicism with reference to homosexuality, which is to foreclose discussion about historical causes by relocating what happened in the realm of biological malfunction (as church authorities saw it), or by vague, tendentious, and historically uninformed allusions to “Vatican II,” I found my own Enlightenment gorge rising. Thus is full scope given

“for knavery to impose on credulity,” to quote Hume again.<sup>4</sup> The truth of the crisis is to be found in the history of modern Catholicism and in the lives made for and by children in the church in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; to see this requires disciplined historical research and reflection. Taking religion seriously means taking seriously the grave harm religious ideas, figures, and practices have done and continue to do. “Why assemble here all these abominable monuments to barbarism and fanaticism?” Voltaire asks the angel showing him the wreckage of religious history. The angel answers, “to instruct you.”<sup>5</sup>

One of the great ironies of the present moment is that religious studies scholars are more likely to remember this than secular historians (by which I mean historians not primarily concerned with the religious past), who tend to be generous on the subject of religion. Christianity makes its appearance in U.S. history surveys and textbooks in the evangelical crusade against slavery; in the Social Gospel movement; and in the Christian cadences of the Civil Rights movement. It is not all good: Father Coughlin regularly turns up in such surveys and texts, too often standing in for American Catholics generally, as does the resurgence of conservative evangelicalism in the 1970s. But I think it is clear that American historians who are not scholars of religion take religion seriously.

With this caveat: historians take religion seriously when it intersects with the history of the state and of civil society. Religion matters in the historical imagination to the extent that it either contributes to or impedes the forward development of democracy, social justice, and freedom, it matters in its relation to the movement from pre-modern to modern—what subaltern historian Dipesh Chakrabarty calls the “transition narrative”—with all that this entails in terms of evaluating different ways of being in the world and especially of participating in society.<sup>6</sup> The choices for *Homo religiosus*, that old guy, are to get with the historical program, on its terms, or be condemned to obscurity or (for the really out-of-step) to ignominy. Clearly at work here is a strong, mostly unacknowledged, position on what is good religion and what is bad religion, although the distinction is often framed non-theologically as what is historically relevant religion and what is historically irrelevant religion.

So historians take religion seriously in its social and public forms, but a deep anxiety about religious experience persists among them, as if merely discussing such experiences, including them in a survey course, thinking about them historically, somehow implicates the historian in them, as if by talking about Pentecostalism one becomes a Pentecostal, or becomes aligned with Pentecostals, finds oneself on their side. To talk historically about religious experiences appears to threaten the barrier between past/present so solidly constructed and fiercely authorized by modern historiography. Perhaps this is because the study of religious experience is never just about the past. People continue to have religious experiences all around us in the modern world—whatever the narrative claims, religion even in its most unsavory and uncomfortable forms (for moderns) is not dead—and so historians who read the daily papers cannot be as confident about the pastness of this phenomenon as about others. The contemporary historical imagination treats religious experience as contagious, as infectious in the past (as in all those “crowd” theories of religion), but there is fear of contagion in the present too, fear even of the infection of historians. The critical skeptical approach to religion is one of the great (and liberating) contributions of modern historiography, but the anxious aversion to religious experience is a problem.

Do scholars of religion take history seriously? When religious historians examine religion within the framework of politics, civil society, and social ethics, there is no question of their historical seriousness. But problems arise when religious historians are drawn instead to study religious experiences in the past, in particular human beings’ encounter with special others (gods, spirits, ancestors, the souls of the dead, and so on), which is what religion mostly is, who are taken as really present, and the practices that follow from these encounters, especially if these historians

## Orsi

not only refuse to subordinate such experiences to the explanatory frameworks of the social (including the discourses of modern psychological pathology), but actually treat them as primary, generative, and creative. What matters historically about an African American Pentecostal social activist in the South Bronx in the mid-1960s, for instance, is not his or her involvement with neighborhood improvement efforts but his relationship with Jesus, who is present to him in the circumstances of his everyday life, and how this bond leads him to neighborhood activism and gives his political activities their distinctive cast. This man's public career is not social work under another name; it is social work in Jesus' name and in Jesus' company.

Historians of such experiences of presence in space and time find themselves working at the outer edges of the limits of modern historiography (but not beyond them), at odds with the authority of the narrative of the transition from pre-modern to modern and with the social quarantine of real presence, where certain principles and boundaries taken for granted by modern historians are less stable (between the imaginary and the real, for instance, or between the present and the past, between the inner world of a person's needs, fears, and desires and the social world, or between the gods and the world) and moral judgments and political evaluations less sure.

To take religious experiences of real presences seriously means understanding imaginary beings as having historical life and agency of their own, which does not entail ignoring questions of social power but understanding how these figures are implicated within, but also cause trouble for, arrangements of power. *Imaginary* here does not equal unreal or delusional, but instead means the engagement of the imagination with the world as the world is given.<sup>7</sup> To take religion seriously in this way, as socially consequential relationships of real presence, real relationships with real beings, seems almost perforce not to take history seriously, which is the answer to the question, "do scholars of religion take history seriously?"

This brings me to a provisional conclusion. Instead of asking, do scholars of religion/historians take history/religion seriously (the simple answer is yes to both, in the ways I have described), we might ask, are there other ways of taking religion/history seriously so as to challenge the normative divisions of modern critical historiography and the anxious marginalization of religious experience, for a more robust engagement of history and religious studies?

We might begin by taking religion seriously in a way that from one perspective seems (although it is not) dangerously akin to how religion was taken seriously before the age of modern historiography, namely as the human encounter within particular spaces and times of real presences (gods, saints, demons, souls, ghosts). This invites us to think about how presences become socially and historically "real" in imagination and experience, then how presences-become-real act in history. The social in this view is understood heterogeneously, temporally and ontologically plural and porous. We will need to enrich our historical and phenomenological language about the "imagination," so that we are no longer trapped in a positivist real/unreal binary, instead asking new questions about individual and collective psychology; approaching the religious imaginary as an intersubjective social and cultural medium brings us close to the processes of religious creativity at work on the world in particular historical circumstances. We will come then inevitably in the modern era to relationships between children and adults in religious contexts, because it was in these charged bonds *among* children and adults—and children are ambivalent presences themselves in such contexts, as the pervasive violence against them by religious figures in the name of the gods suggests—that religious worlds are most fluidly and anxiously in play, and when the realness of religious worlds, the possibility of these worlds, first takes hold. As the novelist, Geoff Dyer, writes of India, "Maybe you had to absorb it all as a kid, and just get lost in the fabulousness of the

*Mahabharata* or the *Ramayana*, and then, as a result of that early exposure, your brain would be configured or formatted in such a way that it all made a kind of sense that was simultaneously allegorical and literal, fantastic and believable."<sup>8</sup> Taking religion/history seriously in this way means we become historians of those times and places when, in the company of their gods, people most directly and efficaciously engaged the world, for better and for worse, in their idioms of religion, as the world is acting most powerfully and intimately on them. This is to take religion/history seriously.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation. Volume I. The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 37.

<sup>2</sup> "Only part of the story" is meant to do a great deal of work in this paragraph. I understand that the terms "the Enlightenment" and "the modern" oversimplify vastly complicated historical realities; neither entity is stable or singular; both comprise multiple and varied local traditions and inheritances; both generated alternatives from within (pietism and romanticism belong to modernity too, Wesley and Newman are both moderns). There has been a wide range of personal attitudes towards religion among modern scholars, furthermore, ranging from deep contempt and radical corrosive skepticism to others—I am thinking here of the great Scandinavian Lutheran historians and phenomenologists of religion and anthropologists such as Robertson-Smith and R. R. Marett, as well as historians who worked critically within religious traditions—who were critical in their approach to religion, resolutely social and this-worldly in their search for causes, so skeptical and suspicious of religious institutions as regularly to run afoul of them, and yet who did not treat religious figures and practices as infantile, pre-modern, delusional, or contemptible. The Bollandist project is likewise a decidedly modern critical historical undertaking. Yet I think the impulse that I have identified in the text—which ranges from the soberly skeptical to the enthusiastically debunking and thoroughly contemptuous—is a central, even dominating, aspect of modern historiography broadly when it comes to religion. Western historiography was deeply committed to the narrative of the movement from pre-modern to modern and this invariably entailed judgments about what religious expressions and experiences belonged to the forward moving part of this narrative, to the adulthood of the West, and which belong to the culture's childhood. Finally, I hope I have made it abundantly clear in the text that I am not interested in joining the recently fashionable, but now I think rapidly passing, condemnation of "the Enlightenment" among Christian scholars in the academy, including Christian historians. Narrowly and broadly construed, the "Enlightenment" and "modernity" are what make our intellectual world and work possible. Maybe it is precisely as a Catholic that I so cherish the freedom of modern thought from religious imposition (including the imposition to "take religion seriously") because I know all too well what happens when religious authorities possess power over scholarship. I am very interested in real presences as real actors in history, but my interest is thoroughly, if restlessly and ambivalently, modern.

<sup>3</sup> David Hume, *The Natural History of Religion* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1956), 25, 28.

<sup>4</sup> Hume, *The Natural History of Religion*, 48.

<sup>5</sup> Francois-Marie Arouet de Voltaire, "Reflections on Religion," in Isaac Kramnick, ed., *The Portable Enlightenment Reader* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 120.

<sup>6</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 31.

<sup>7</sup> This notion of imagination is beholden to D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London and New York: Tavistock/Routledge, 1971). See also Arnold H. Modell, *Imagination and the Meaningful Brain* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003), and Ruth M.J. Byrne, *The Rational Imagination: How People Create Alternatives to Reality* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Geoff Dyer, *Jeff in Venice, Death in Varanasi* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2009).

Part III: Competing and complementary approaches in  
social scientific studies of religion in America

Are the important divisions less those between social  
scientists and humanists and instead those that divide  
social scientists into quantitative and qualitative?  
What role do non-sociological sciences play in the  
larger picture?

Host: Arthur E. Farnsley, II  
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First, I want to thank you for inviting me here to participate in this conference, which is an exciting opportunity for me to be a part of interdisciplinary conversations on the study of American religion. What I am going to talk about today is a small part of a paper I am developing, that works out these ideas more fully. This is work-in-progress, so I am especially glad to have the chance to receive feedback here on the motivating ideas, which I am developing for a new research project on the intersection of religion, science, and the law in everyday life, to be conducted with my colleague Kathy Hull at the University of Minnesota.

The dominant approach to religion by sociologists for over a century was one rooted in secularization and modernization paradigm that assumes that modernity is corrosive of religious authority and that secularization is an on-going process in modern societies (Berger 1969; Glock 1965; Weber 1998; Wilson 1966). Some scholars (Bruce 1996; Bruce 1999; Bruce 2006; Chaves 1994; Chaves 1989) still affirm some version of the secularization/modernization paradigm.

But the secularization thesis has become a ground of serious and sustained contention (Gorski and Altinordu 2008). "New paradigm" scholarship (Warner 1993) elaborates how modernity can lead to thriving religion in the private sphere, which can then lead to religious mobilization in the public arena (Casanova 1994; Regnerus and Smith 1998). "New paradigm" scholars are actually quite diverse; some argue that religious subcultures provide a source of meaning and moral order that is systematically undermined by other aspects of modern life (Smith 1998). Others emphasize the vitality and provision of an array of appealing religious "goods" in modern religious markets (Stark and Finke 2000). Others focus on American religion specifically and point to the general traits of voluntarism and pluralism that foster religious vitality in the American context (Warner 1993).

Both "classical" and "new paradigm" positions take modernity for granted as the starting point for meaningful theorizing about religion's place in contemporary society and agree on its core features. And both are dominated by a substantive, neo-Weberian approach to defining religion as an object of study, focusing on self-identified religious groups and institutions (Weber 1978; Weber 1998). Central debates between, and within, these two bodies of scholarship revolve around questions of religious authority: What is the nature and scope of religious authority in the modern world? Authority is understood either institutionally (the authority of religious elites and officials to compel respect) and culturally (the authority of orthodox doctrinal statements to compel assent and to shape behavior).

As a subfield, it is possible to see sociology of religion as pre-occupied with a narrow set of questions and debates upon which agreement is virtually impossible, since those who see secularization as an on-going process can always point to the need for a longer time frame or different cases, and those who understand modernity as having opened up the possibility for a thriving, and public, religious presence can find more than enough examples to suffice for their purposes (Evans and Evans 2008; Gorski and Altinordu 2008). And this leads, I believe, to a serious problem, in that our current theoretical apparatus does not help us to understand important and urgent empirical questions about religion in American society.

#### Examples of Problems with Current Approaches

To assume that secularization is a master process is to close down empirical inquiry into local processes of both religious decline and religious expansion (secularization and sacralization).

To focus on the decline of religious authority, or the conflict between religious and secular elites, conflates one historically specific form of re-

ligiosity with "religion" in general, closing down inter-disciplinary dialogue and comparative study. The conflict Evans and Evans (2008) write about between religion and science is most acute where religion is understood as a set of propositional truth claims, with doctrine being the key to religious identity and boundaries. This is a remarkably Protestant vision of what religion is and does, and is a bias that is so deeply rooted in our theoretical apparatus that the rational-choice religion scholars use the key features of Reformed Protestant religiosity as their measure of religious strength (Stark and Finke 2000).

Empirical analyses of mainstream religious communities in the U.S. shows that they are organized around grappling with two moral logics, expressed by engagement with two moral questions: "what is right" and "what is caring" (Becker 1999). In doing so, they unite two moral styles traditionally understood as masculine and feminine. But dominant approaches in our subfield set an undue priority on the "masculine" logic by focusing relentlessly on the authority of the official representatives of mainstream religious institutions and elites to compel assent and compliance (the "what is right" part). This leaves the moral logic of caring relatively un-explored as a key feature of religious life.

A focus on the authority of traditional religious elites means that expressions of religiosity that occur outside of mainstream institutions go unremarked or are actively dismissed as consumerist, flakey, or otherwise lacking in moral seriousness (Roof, Patrick, Grimes, and Leonard 1999). Sociologists of religion were surprised at the upsurge of Americans identifying as "spiritual" over the last two decades, and the recent release of the 2008 American Religious Identification Survey led to some surprise at the twelve-plus percent of Americans who identify with a "higher power" conception of god (instead of a personal god). But the revival of non-Christian spiritual practices associated with feminist, magical, Eastern, and other holistic, embodied traditions has been occurring for some time, and it is only theoretical blinders that have made us unaware of these changes. (For exceptions, see Berger, Leach, and Shaffer 2003; Hammond, Wacker, Williams, Roof, Johnson, Frankiel, and McGuire 1991; For exceptions, see Winchester 2008).

I argue that it is timely and important for sociologists who study religion to reconceptualize both the nature of religion and its place in contemporary society. This reconceptualization, in my view, should avoid defining religion in a way that is directly referential to modernity as an originating condition that is by definition universally hostile to religion. But it should also avoid defining modernity as a condition that is universally and by definition supportive of religious vitality and expansion. Rather, secularization and sacralization processes should be conceived of as local, historically contingent, and open-ended. Moreover, dynamics of secularization and sacralization should not be the exclusive focus, and perhaps not the dominant one. Others have argued the latter two points before (Warner 1993), but without a more fundamental reconceptualization of the nature of religion and its place in the contemporary world, such arguments tend not to make much headway in actually turning scholarly and empirical attention away from the (stale) secularization debate.

But where to begin? In this paper, I argue that we can fruitfully borrow insights from two other scholarly perspectives that can help us to begin the work of reconceptualizing both the nature of religion and its place in the modern world. From philosophy, we can borrow (with care) the term "post-secular"—not as a description of empirical reality but as a way to name and motivate a scholarly turning point. From religious studies, we can engage seriously with a current debate over whether the use of the term "religion" is itself useful, or whether it implies a uniformity of experience, social organization, and social impact that is more a creation of modernist categories of understanding than it is a good descriptor of people's lives in historical context.

## Edgell

### Cultural Approaches to the Study of Religion

Below, I outline the elements of a cultural approach to the sociological study of religion that does not take modernization as its starting or reference point. It is important to note that I am not the first to propose that we should study religion as a cultural phenomenon. Classical work in sociology spoke to religion as a source of both common culture (shared beliefs) and collective culture (shared codes and categories that are constitutive of identities, discourses, and specific beliefs) (Jepperson and Swidler 1994). Weber's essay on the Protestant ethic was a statement about the power of common religious culture, in the form of shared beliefs regarding salvation and an accompanying ethic, to shape our public life (Weber 1998). Scholarship in the Durkheimian tradition focuses on religion as collective culture. Durkheim argues that religion is best understood as a moral community united around a shared understanding of the sacred and the profane (Durkheim 2001; Eliade 1961).

Theoretically, however, Durkheim's understanding of religion was fundamentally different than Weber's substantive definition of religion as real-world self-identifying religious institutions and communities. In this work, the sacred is defined as a powerful realm apart from everyday life and experience; it must be approached with awe through rituals that mark the transition from profane to sacred and back again, and connection with this realm provides both a feeling of individual renewal and a renewal of the collective representations of the community that the sacred symbolizes. Durkheim writes that the believer who communes with his god is actually stronger for the experience.<sup>1</sup> Later work on the tradition of phenomenology provides a more elaborated way to think about the experience of everyday reality as contrasted to other modes of experiencing reality that seem "outside of" or "apart from" that mundane everyday world (Berger 1967). Not only individuals, but collectivities are strengthened through rituals which bring members in contact with the sacred. This theoretical approach has been reduced, in contemporary sociology, to a simplistic "God is society," but what Durkheim was really saying was that religion is a powerful and deep metaphor for society that leads to a form of knowing that is more than simply assenting to particular religious beliefs.

The main problem with the Durkheimian approach for studying religious groups and institutions is that in the modern world, there are few instances in which religion symbolizes the sacred order of an entire society. In the American case, scholars have looked instead to "civil religion" (Bellah 1967; Schwartz 2000) or the moral codes at the heart of civic discourse (Alexander 1992) as the loci of the sacred. When it comes to studying self-identified religious groups and movements, however, or analyzing why an individual's religious beliefs shape other aspects of belief and behavior, the Weberian approach has been dominant. One could apply Durkheim's understanding of "the church" as a moral community organized around the sacred to the study of specific religious groups and communities; but absent the link between the religious sacred and the social sacred, there is little theoretical power in this approach.

Anthropologists have also studied religion as a cultural phenomenon; this work has influenced some sociologists of religion as well. The most influential statement is Geertz's (Geertz 1973) famous essay on "Religion as a Cultural System." Geertz defined religion as a symbol system and argued that it provides both a shared ethos and world view. But Geertz believed that the power of religion was rooted in its ability to foster a long-lasting and deep religious "sensibility" (moods and motivations) so that religious answers to existential questions about the nature of existence and the problems of suffering, death, and chaos (the suspicion that there is

no meaning or order in the universe) are truly satisfying answers. Geertz's essay provided a way to think about religion as cultural but not as coterminous with "the sacred" or as providing the sacred canopy for an entire society. His examples of the efficacy of religious experience refer in some cases to small-scale communities in which there would be widespread religious consensus but also to the practices of religions like Catholicism in a context of modern religious pluralism. Moreover, both Durkheim and Geertz wrote about the power of religion to motivate human behavior as something that is rooted in doctrine and beliefs, but experienced through ritual and embodied practice; their approach paves the way for a more complete understanding of "the religious" than one focusing on doctrine, beliefs, and institutional authority (c.f. Nelson 2005).

But there are weaknesses in the Geertzian approach for sociological purposes. The assumption of a universal religious impulse seems problematic in a world in which religious dis-engagement can and does follow religious dis-establishment. (Some are fond of saying this is the case only in Western Europe, which is "the exception." But it is quite a large exception; it is joined by Canada and Australia and perhaps other cases, and any cases are sufficient to establish the point that a "universal" religious impulse is a problematic assumption.) Also, the "worldview" that Geertz describes may be a good fit for some—for example, for observant Jews in a place like the U.S., in which ethos and worldview are both linked and strengthened by their clearly demarcated boundary with the dominant culture. However, one can easily imagine others for whom the phrase "religious worldview" does not seem a good fit, for whom religion is one aspect of larger cultural "toolkit" or one repertoire upon which people draw to designate their own identity or grapple with social, political, and moral issues (Swidler 1986). More generally, the system part of the definition of religion as a cultural system seems problematic in a world in which people approach religion more like "tinkerers" and less like those deeply embedded in a primary categorical religious identity (Wuthnow 2007). Finally, Geertz does not elaborate very much on where religious cultural systems come from, how they might change over time, or how the spread of religion may have less to do with providing satisfying answers to existential questions and more to do with power, or even coercion (Edgell 2008).

I would argue that the weaknesses in these earlier approaches are not insurmountable, and that there is a great deal to be gained in the re-centering of culture in the study of religion. Understanding religion as a cultural repertoire and not a cultural system solves many of the problems with earlier cultural approaches as well as the problems associated with modernization/secularization approaches and contemporary rational choice accounts. I will define what I mean by a cultural repertoire, and then describe what is religious about religious cultural repertoires. I will then outline what I see to be the chief strengths of such an approach, and propose some ways forward as we make the turn to a post-secular sociology of religion.

### Religion as Cultural Repertoire—A New Approach

A cultural repertoire is an interconnected set of a) schema, b) discourses, and c) embodied practices. This definition is my own but it is based upon other work in cultural sociology and bears a resemblance to descriptions of cultural repertoires, or to statements about how we should study culture (Lichterman 2008; Steensland 2000; Swidler 2001). This definition encompasses the primary forms of social "work" that culture accomplishes (see Becker 1998b; see Becker 1999; Edgell 2005), as elaborated by theorists from a range of traditions. Culture categorizes the world and forms the bases of boundaries and distinctions (Lamont 1992a; Lamont 1992b; Lamont and Molnar 2002; Pachucki, Pendergrass, and Lamont 2007). Culture provides discourses that orient social action, providing beliefs and making moral claims on people (Swidler 2001; Wuthnow 1989). And culture provides what some have called habitus, an embod-

<sup>1</sup> *Elementary Forms*, p. 419 "The believer who has communed w/his god is not simply a man who sees new truths that the unbeliever knows not; he is a man who *is stronger*." Emphasis in original.



## Edgell

ied and practical sense of how to negotiate the world, as well as specific ritual competencies, scripts, and routines of activities (Bourdieu 1978; Bourdieu 1984; Winchester 2008).

Religious cultural repertoires (hereafter "religious repertoires") are primarily oriented to connecting with the sacred. The sacred realm may or may not be supernatural per se, and it may be immanent or transcendent; but it is both apart from and other than everyday reality, and it is understood to be a realm of fundamental reality, experience and power. This definition of the sacred is in some ways similar to Durkheim's (2001) or Eliade's (1961), but there is a crucial difference. The sacred realm, as defined here, contains collective representations of an imagined community.

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Like many of you, I work at a university that regularly touts the benefits of “interdisciplinarity.” For a while, this was only talk, and though our university president repeatedly called for us to “knock down the silos” that isolated us in our disciplines, there were significant structural arrangements that meant that no rational academic actor would invest too much in such efforts (e.g., interdisciplinary area studies programs continued to languish in terms of funding and status, their faculty were usually ‘secondary appointments’ of faculty whose budget line were in traditional departments, and the like). That has changed somewhat, with some internal grants going to interdisciplinary proposals, the advent of “cluster hires” attempting to bring in people working on similar substantive areas across three different departments, and a reorganization of a group of struggling departments into a “school” (sort of on the Arizona State, VCU model). But with the current president leaving, we will have to wait and see what new education revolution will be the pet project of the next one.

In all this, I noticed, no one bothered to define what “interdisciplinary” meant and how one does it in practice. Similarly, there was little explanation about what was lost with disciplinary or why that is a problem that interdisciplinarity will solve. Nor was there any discussion of what constitutes a “discipline” and how do we know one, except for the obvious structural organization of the standard university.

I occasionally asked these questions, and received little in the way of a developed answer. Sometimes people would allude to interdisciplinarity as “taking insights” from different disciplines. Others sometimes noted that it went beyond just being “multi-disciplinary” in that it involved a thorough “integration” of disciplinary perspectives. Well, okay. But how does one do that, and what does it look like when one does? How can I tell the interdisciplinarity from the “multi-disciplinary,” and how are they different from the diversity that emerges from a broadly defined discipline such as sociology? We are, by nature, history, and temperament a “loosely bounded” discipline—but what am I not getting that makes true interdisciplinarity seem so elusive?

The case for interdisciplinarity was not made any more persuasive, in my view, by Mark Taylor’s April column in the *New York Times*, which was primarily an attack on the structure of graduate school and the scholarly organization of the university as we now know it. In order to avoid what Professor Taylor sees as too narrow specialization and scholarship often irrelevant to contemporary life and its economic and social problems, he offered an image of what an interdisciplinary curriculum might look like. But several key questions were left not just unanswered but completely unacknowledged. Most important of these in my view concern who gets to decide what intellectual questions are worth pursuing and what (and whose) standards of evaluation and assessment are used to measure the resulting “knowledge.” It is well documented that sources of funding push certain intellectual questions and currents and that standards of assessment are getting increasingly standardized through quantitative measurement. Thus, while the educational fads, and some academic structures, are moving toward interdisciplinarity, I still find it an underdeveloped intellectual case.

Before you mistake me for a pure man of principle, however, I should hasten to note that in the 18 months I have been a member of a team of scholars working on an NIH grant studying religious congregations and their responses to HIV/AIDS, both within members of their congregations and within the larger community (Yes, I have been following the money myself). The team is made up of people from the departments of sociology and anthropology on the main campus, as well as faculty from the departments of public health and family medicine on the medical campus—including biostatisticians, a psychologist, a medical doctor, etc. As a result I have seen up close cross-disciplinary collaboration.

And one of the first things I noticed was that disciplinary differences among the group were not the major working—or thinking—divisions.

There were some disciplinary issues, often around terminology—e.g., what does it mean to call something “theoretical” or what set of assumptions go into an “institutionalist” perspective? But those types of things could get sorted out. The bigger difference, and the one that actually shaped the way the division of labor became organized in both gathering data and then producing papers and articles from that data, was epistemological and as a result methodological.

The other sociologist—my departmental colleague who teaches grad statistics—was comfortable with public health folks and biostatisticians. They worried about sample sizes, power statistics, scale constructions and the like. The quantitative psychologist also could talk with them, at least analytically. At the same time, I fell in with the cultural anthropologist, and we are currently working on two papers together and a third with a public health person who has social psychology training.

It wasn’t the substantive knowledge that was really at issue in our group of many disciplines. Nor was it a narrow method or analytic issue of being “quantitative” or “qualitative” (that is a manifestation, not a source, of the baseline differences). It was more epistemological—how one perceived the nature of social reality, what status one accords to actors’ descriptions of their worlds, how one goes about investigating those worlds, and what counts as useful knowledge.

Thus, I am not sure I think a “disciplinary gap” is widening in the social scientific study of religion. Because of journals such as *Religion & American Culture* and *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (a journal for which I just ended a 5 year editorial term) there is more general exposure to the work of more scholars from more disciplines than there once was. But it seems to me that there is more of a ‘within discipline’ gap that is consistent across several disciplines than a ‘between discipline’ gap—those of us who are more interpretive and constructionist in our work use ‘qualitative’ methods and have increasing exposure to history, literary studies, and theologically driven work. Those who are more realist and reference hypothetico-deductive models of inquiry, use quantitative methods and pull insights and techniques from demography, economics, and medicine/public health. I would put psychology in this latter group, but even it is experiencing a division between European psychologists of religion and those who dominate work in this country. This epistemological/methodological divide is cutting across all the social science disciplines, to one degree or another, but especially sociology.

I believe you can see some of this division, if you look at the journals that have emerged in recent years with a self-consciously cross-disciplinary focus. For example, along with *R&AC* which has become a premier journal, but largely drawing historians, religious studies scholars, and those social scientists who are more humanities oriented, is the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, a multi-disciplinary effort whose name speaks for itself.

On the other side is the *JSSR*, that while not at all founded to be quantitative, evolved into a journal that primarily published quantitative work doing what Thomas Kuhn might have called “normal science.” Indeed, as editor of *JSSR* I worked self-consciously to attract those doing ethnographic and historical work. But I remember on more than one occasion when trying to persuade an historian or religious studies scholar to submit, they wrinkled either their brow or their nose over the word “scientific” in the title.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The term “scientific” was originally intended in the late 1940s establishment of the Committee on the Scientific Study of Religion to announce that this wasn’t a theological gathering. By the 1961 founding of the journal the term also represented the era’s aspiration for a unified social science. Much like the similar hopes from that era that ecumenism would produce one unified mainline Protestant denominational structure, both aspirations founded on the shoals of local differences and boundary-marking identities.

## Williams

*Social Science History* is another example of a cross-disciplinary association and journal that is based fundamentally on an epistemological commitment to a “scientific” version of social science—and in practice publishes quantitative work almost exclusively.

I certainly found in my years editing *JSSR* that it was a multi-, not inter-, disciplinary journal if that distinction rests on the extent to which other disciplinary issues, questions and literatures are engaged. Most authors chose problems from within their disciplinary problematic, referenced literature only within their sub-discipline, and addressed scholarly audiences that were largely sub-discipline-bound. On occasion I tried to work against this tendency for the journal to be two or three mini-journals within the same cover by sending a paper to a reviewer from another discipline. It wasn’t just authors that resisted my efforts, as reviewers often did as well, declining many of these solicitations. On the other hand, to the extent that I was able to push the boundaries of disciplinary definition, I ran into the epistemological and methodological walls I mentioned above.

The question for today is, I believe, whether this is a problem. I have colleagues who make a case for disciplinarity, as they focus on the word “discipline” and believe that by establishing some boundaries for thinking and scholarship we enhance shared standards and build cumulative knowledge faster. Scholars are less likely to have to “re-invent the wheel” when moving into discussions with new partners or approaching new topics. Other critics will point to the fact that scholars often “cherry-pick” the findings and conclusions from work in other disciplines—so, for example, a sociologist will bolster his/her argument by saying “historians know that” when the question is still very much alive among historians. In any case, I do wonder whether the divisions described here are remediable at all, and what can be done about them beyond calling them to collective attention and on occasion celebrating this as a feature of our profession that testifies to its vibrancy.

I think a greater issue is that our epistemological divisions and tendency to talk past each other is hazardous for public understandings of our work and our findings. It is not news to any of us here that the knowledge of social scientists is not taken as seriously in the public sphere and by policy makers as is that of “natural scientists.” Economists are sometimes treated as though they offer “scientific knowledge” but given their prediction record that is a bit of a mystery. Nonetheless, we are often treated as offering “soft science” and “impressions” (even, gasp, “theories”) instead of facts.

Many of our colleagues want to respond to this situation by pushing sociology (or other social sciences) to be more like natural sciences. To accept their paradigmatic assumptions more fully, use their language and hypothetico-deductive methods, and tighten the boundaries of what can be considered “sociology.”

That, I believe, is a mistake. It may be an effective argument in trying to win battles within scholarly circles to argue that we must speak with a united voice to the public, but it does not actually increase public understanding. Instead, I believe we need to be emphasizing to the public that the content of *answers* depends largely on the *questions* being posed. We need to reveal publicly that the first part of every answer should be a consideration of “why do we want to know?” Our answers vary depending upon what we want to know and why. We often will offer nuance to a simplistic question such as “are Americans getting more religious?” by defining what “religious” means or discussing what measures mean “more” or “less.” But when getting a seemingly straightforward question such as “has weekly church attendance decreased?” we are often tempted to provide a simple answer. Instead we should counter by asking what the answer to the question is supposed to tell us and what assumptions prompted its asking. I believe we should deliberately problematize what we know, and try to communicate that to wider publics—in other words displaying our varied approaches, orienting questions, and methods of in-

quiry—rather than trying to ignore or deny them in order to keep it simple for outsiders or present ourselves as true “scientists.”

The response to Creationism from evolutionary biology is instructive. I believe that biologists should not be responding to challenges by denying there is any messiness in Darwinian theory—that leads to easily to what I have called a “scientific fundamentalism.” As Ian Hacking noted in a recent review in *The Nation* it is intellectually disingenuous and politically ineffective to present everything as “settled”—better for public understanding to air our methods, questions, and disagreements.

In sum, we, as scholars of religion, are enjoying a resurgence in interest in what we do. We field more media requests, public questioning, and opportunities to publish our research than has been true in the recent past. In that sense it is the ‘best of times’ and we all want this to continue. But we cannot close our intra- or inter-disciplinary divisions without losing something important, not the least of which are the grounds over which we can argue and debate each other. And we should not try to hide these from non-specialists and non-academics. Rather, we need to lay open our assumptions, our approaches and our differences, and explain how our answers depend on why we want to know in the first place.



**Jerry Z. Park**  
**Department of Sociology**  
**Baylor University**

Our discussion was formed around two comparisons: the divide between qualitative and quantitative research and the gap between religious studies and sociology of religion. Are methodological differences within the discipline a more difficult hurdle to overcome compared to the distinctions between these disciplines? My initial response is “no,” the gap created between types of methodological approaches in sociology is in some important ways less problematic compared to the problems occurring between religious studies and the sociological study of religion. Collaborative research seems quite feasible in terms of refining theory and concepts which in some ways avoids any problems that focus on method. However a larger barrier appears in the structure of our current reward system for research.

To illustrate my point, I will present two examples of the ways in which religious studies and sociological research in religion can inform one another, and I will conclude with a brief elaboration on the more practical problem that explains some of our current dilemmas in the limited amount of collaboration we see today. One of my areas of interest is in the Asian American religions of which the literature seems to have exploded since 2000. In this body of research, I have encountered a wide array of topics and approaches to studying and analyzing these topics that have convinced me that the difference between religious studies research and sociology of religion research is not between “words” versus “numbers” per se but in frame of argument. By that I mean none of us would dispute the difference between asking a quantitatively oriented research question on the adherence levels of Asian versus non-Asian Buddhists and a qualitatively-oriented question on the meaning of adherence for these same two groups. But aside from that distinction there is still another distinction I see in the literature. Here are two examples to illustrate my point. I was investigating the extant research on what exactly we mean by Asian American theology and I found different explanations between different disciplines.

Example from Religious Studies Research on Asian American Religion:

In the first example by Sang Hyun Lee who teaches at Princeton Seminary, the chapter examines the concept of marginality in Asian American experiences, and two other terms, “pilgrimage” and “home,” that are often associated with the former. Lee notes the experience of marginalization through his personal life experience and through broad unempirically-verified claims about Asian American Christian churches. Lee cites Richard Niebuhr to articulate that Asian American Christians, like other Christians, experience pilgrimage constantly. The unique Asian American Christian pilgrimage leads to awareness followed by sympathy followed by solidarity with other Asian Americans who experience marginalization (such as the L.A. riots of 1992). “Home” for Asian American Christians refers to a life within an ethnic church where their marginalized identity as a racial minority is now made mainstream for a brief moment—on a Sunday morning for example. Churches act as a creative site for affirming a new identity which Lee never specifies further beyond greater generational and gender inclusivity. He then concludes:

“In sum, the two historic symbols of the Christian faith—pilgrimage and home—manifest their original power in new ways when they are appropriated in the Asian American context of marginality. Pilgrimage for marginalized people means the willingness to face up to one’s marginality and to join with other strangers in the margins. But it is precisely their pilgrimage or their freedom from the idolatrous centers of the world that prepares them for an experience of the reality of the household of God that God is building for all humankind. Pilgrimage and home, then, necessarily go together. This can only be so because, in the final analysis, pilgrimage and home are connected by a story that is God’s own story.” (Lee 2001: 68)

Example from Sociology of Religion on Asian American Religion:

In the second example by Russell Jeung who teaches at San Francisco State University, this study looked at the diverging ways that race and ethnicity are articulated in the theology of mainline versus evangelical Asian Americans (Jeung 2002). Jeung argues that evangelical and mainline subcultures have unique institutional logics which affect the way the Bible is interpreted and applied to topics such as racial identity. After interviewing 44 ministers as well as observing worship services, Jeung found that mainline Protestant Asian Americans focus on “a moral code of faith and good works” (218). This is coupled with a more postmodern approach to theology that embraces diversity and effectively one’s identity as an Asian American. Thus, empowered by this affirming of one’s identity as a racial minority, Asian American mainline Protestant Christians are motivated to address social injustices, particularly those around racism.

Evangelical Protestant Asian Americans, on the other hand, take on a more therapeutic view of race. From this perspective, God is highly interested in the individual and helping the individual become more spiritually whole. Asian Americans then are similar to one another due to their shared experiences growing up with parallel cultural values, be they Japanese, Korean or Chinese, in the modern American context. This emphasis on spiritual solutions to emotional and identitarian dilemmas leads to a pro-active engagement of other similar Asian Americans to raise awareness of their need for healing, wholeness, and holiness in a kind of Asian American evangelical Matrix revolution. Jeung concludes:

“These two different understandings of Asian American identity stem from the division among Asian American Christians. Ministers derive their discourse and worldviews from separate organizational fields, where institutional logics become tenets of faith. With these logics, the pastors of Park Avenue United Methodist Church and Grace Faith Church are oriented to read and teach the Scriptures with different concerns and assumptions. These logics help establish the symbolic boundaries of Asian American identity, both as an emergent congregational form and as an understanding of selfhood.” (233)

What makes these two different from one another even though they are essentially getting at the same question: what is Asian American theology? It is partly a methodological issue as you can tell, but it is not one between a survey and an up-close ethnography. Instead, one is based on interpretation of key discursive texts, concepts, and ideas while the other focuses on consensus-based interpretation of multiple voices. As a sociologist, I see a divide between these types of methodologies, but they can nevertheless inform one another. Conceivably, one could draw up a follow-up study that looks at how “marginality,” “home,” and “pilgrimage” operate differently for mainline and evangelical Asian American Christians. Here semiotic analysis of concepts bears on the type of metaphors that a comparative ethnographer can investigate. And if this analysis proves fruitful, a larger survey question could be built on it. This in turn could serve to inform religious studies on other important hermeneutic and semiotic distinctions found in various Asian American religious communities.

Higher Education and the Implicit Reward Systems of Basic Research

I propose that despite the fact that the aforementioned studies could inform one another to form a high-quality interdisciplinary study, we will probably not see such an analysis in the foreseeable future. Rather there are larger structural factors at work that go beyond a discussion of methodological differences. While this may take us beyond the intended scope of this session, I would suggest that our current reward structure

## Park

enables tunnel vision for many faculty. Breadth of knowledge and collaboration are publicly lauded as values that the academy espouses, but frequency of publication is where we see greater emphasis in assessing tenure and promotion. Measuring productivity through quantity rather than characteristics such as collaboration discourages the kind of efforts needed to create interdisciplinary works. Semiotic analysis, for example, bears significantly in sociologists' interviewing and survey techniques and making use of such analysis ought to engender more collaboration. But I conclude that it is far easier to avoid such connections in a research environment that lends itself to rewards based on production and less on theoretical advances.

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Part IV: Explaining religion in America: What can we  
learn from each other?

What can those working in the humanities learn from  
social scientists, and vice-versa? How do we view one  
another? What do we consider the other to be doing  
right and wrong?

Host: Brian Steensland  
Department of Sociology  
Indiana University Bloomington



**Courtney Bender**  
**Department of Religion**  
**Columbia University**

On Thursday when I arrived in Indianapolis I took a shared car service in from the airport, and found myself traveling to the Omni hotel in a stretch limo with a middle aged man and his teenaged son. The father struck up a conversation with me as we left the airport. Where are you from, he asked, and what are you doing in Indianapolis? I said I was attending an academic conference. You're an academician? He asked. Yes, I said, I work on sociology and religion in America.

I could see a gleam in his eye, and he introduced himself as an organizational and financial consultant who helped people think about the spiritual side of their business. He had a business that helped financial organizations think through their business priorities, and his slant he said was to consider how becoming more spiritually secure would allow his clients to be more productive in all areas of business and of life. In this economic downturn he said, a lot of people are rethinking things – for example, is there more to life than turning a profit? He hastened to add that he helped businesses in the financial sector think about how they could be more profitable: the two went together.

Slipping into interviewing mode, I asked him what kind of spirituality he meant, as “spiritual” could mean a lot of things. Was he the spiritual of Deepak Chopra, or was he talking about spirituality in a more Christian sense, as part of a Christian faith. He said, “That’s a good question!” and offered that he saw it in a more Christian sense. He told me that in addition to being a trained psychologist, he was also an ordained minister, and a Christian mystic.

There was so much to think about in this list that I could not help but ask him a few more questions. What denomination were you ordained in, I asked. He paused briefly and said, “My life journey has taken me in many different directions,” he said. “I am ordained Southern Baptist. But —well I like to say that I’m a recovering Southern Baptist.” I chuckled and said, I imagine that there are a lot of those. He laughed, and his son said “oh yes, there are.”

So, I said, what about being a Christian mystic? What does that mean? He looked at me again, and I said, “that was your term, I think.” He nodded and said, “I talk to God. I have been talking to God since I was four years old. And God talks back to me.” He described to me in detail his morning meditation and prayer practice. He wakes up, he says, and goes into a deep meditation. God comes to him, and he talks with God about his plans for the day, for his business and life. Everyone can have that access, and have that kind of relationship. It’s so powerful.

He then added that just that morning he had come out of his meditation and written an article in twenty-two minutes that should have taken four hours. Being somewhat interested in automatic writing, having written on that recently, I couldn’t help but ask him. What happened that he could write so quickly: had he had inspiration while talking to God, or was God still present when he was writing? I am not sure that my new acquaintance understood this poorly phrased question, but he elaborated his process of reading, writing and synthesizing. The Holy Spirit had helped him narrow down the business principles he was writing about to a list of twelve.

We talked until we reached my hotel. We exchanged cards, and my seatmate told me he would look me up in New York: “everything happens for a reason,” he said as we shook hands, “and I am glad to meet you.” His son, whom I think had been taking notes while we were talking on a brand new MacAir, added “Bless you, Courtney. Bless you.”

While I’m not a big believer that things happen for reasons, I suppose we can say that the reason I met him was so I could raise a few questions today about American religion, and how we study it. The questions that I want to ask are two: First, what kind of American religion did I encounter in the car, and second, what kind of disciplinary approaches would best help us make sense of what he is or was doing?

I’ll address the second question first. I am a sociologist, and I can contextualize and interpret, or as John Corrigan says give “particular voice to” both this man and his interests from within the discipline of sociology. I can even do so in such a way that my friends and colleagues in religious studies and American religious history will recognize and be able to engage thoughtfully. I do not need interdisciplinarity to do this. But I do need a different conception and approach to sociology than what is usually represented or figured as ‘sociology of religion’ to, by and for religious studies scholars.

So, thinking about the anecdote above, I could draw on the research and theories of conversion, narrative, language and emotion in the work of Francesca Polletta, David Smilde, Roberto Franzosi, or even Harrison White. I could likewise think about the overlap, expansion or relation of “religion” within other institutional or cognitive fields by drawing on the work of Karen Cerulo, John Levi Martin, or Paul DiMaggio, to name just three. Many of these scholars have extended the theories of Bourdieu, Latour, Foucault and others on Paula Kane’s list of “critical theory,” but also extend in directions of cognitive sciences, literary theory and analysis, and so on. I might draw likewise on the ample and illustrious field of collective memory and its relation to social processes, identity, and politics, including the work of Jeffrey Olick or Andreas Glaeser, and taking this up to another level consider how all of these tendrils in my example require us to think differently, or not, about religion’s relation to late capitalism and its competing notions of subjectivity. Here, I would draw on the work of Margaret Somers, Nancy Fraser, Norbert Elias and others. Only a few of the sociologists I have just mentioned work on religion. Nonetheless, their considerations of how to analyze and consider issues of meaning, power, narrative, memory, and epistemology (and so on) can contribute to the ways we engage the topic of religion, both within sociology and in religious studies as well.

I mention all of these because although my *modus operandi* is and will continue to be highly interdisciplinary, at this juncture I believe it is worth making a case and thinking very hard about the value of disciplinarity. As the list I have just made suggests, and as we all know, each discipline has enormous internal heterogeneity. Any time any one of us attends an academic disciplinary meeting we are reminded that there are enough intellectual debates ongoing in our disciplines to keep even the most pugilistic among us happy for a long time.

So, we might say that sociologists of religion should and can continue to be more disciplinary, mining the riches of our own field in different ways than we have. For sociologists interested in religion, this means engaging in theoretical and epistemological questions with colleagues who are interested broadly in issues of memory, history, culture, authority, and meaning, but who have no apparent interest in religion. Likewise, sociologists working in religion can do a better job than we have done in alerting friends and colleagues in religious studies and American religious history to these sources and debates.

Another related but not so “intellectual” reason to pause before rushing into interdisciplinarity is that, unlike twenty-five or thirty years ago, we live in an academic world engulfed by interdisciplinarity, and not always for the better. In this period we have witnessed and been newly shaped by an unprecedented proliferation of interdisciplinary centers. To give just two examples, I recently had the opportunity to ask a Princeton dean how many interdisciplinary centers, programs and institutes his institution has, and he said that he did not know. There were “too many to count.” At Columbia where I teach, there are more interdisciplinary centers than there are departments in the traditional disciplines. I have heard from increasing number of quarters that interdisciplinary centers are frequently used by university administrators to weaken departmental culture, through joint appointments and other kinds of demands placed on faculty. Interdisci-

## Bender

plularity in this sense is not a goal to which we aspire, nor is it a consequence of our intellectual wanderings. Rather, it is a set of institutional structures that take on certain life of their own. We might celebrate the mess of interdisciplinary centers or we might worry about the effects that they have on other forms of institutional cultures in higher education. There is good reason, and many examples, to suggest that we can do both. Yet I would argue that we do not live in academic worlds where we need to continue to fight for interdisciplinarity or articulate its goals to administrators. It is *fait accompli*.

Few of us I imagine wake up in the morning thinking about whether interdisciplinarity is a good thing or not, or even if this is what we do. Rather, we wake up thinking about the questions or problems that a particular piece of text, archive, data set or interview pose. None of us could survive in our academic worlds without being obsessively preoccupied by such things, and part of becoming an academic is being disciplined into the specific practices that allow us to find the right questions and the right ways to answer them. And one of the things that our monastic guilds do is to teach us, through slow process, how to understand our pre-occupations and make sense of them. As it is difficult, time consuming, and ultimately empowering to be inhabited by a discipline, so interdisciplinarity holds out particular challenges of time and responsibility. Why wouldn't we imagine that interdisciplinarity practice at its best requires as much time and as much disciplinary formation as our initial training? Most of us recognize that this is the case, even though this particular point is sometimes lost in the rush to perform or present "interdisciplinary" scholarship at the institutional level.

With this in mind, I offer two things that I think that good interdisciplinary practice does. First, it slows us down. It is obvious that we—all academics—are currently in an enormous rush to publish, present, engage, teach, and discover. Good interdisciplinarity practice slows down this rush. It forces us to translate our interests to new colleagues, to explain to them why what we do is necessary, vital, or interesting, and to confront our own jargon's limitations. This is not always pleasant work. Dialogue does not always end with friendships found; the kind of interdisciplinary dialogue we encounter does not always end in the interfaith hope that underneath it all, we are the same. Sociologists and historians will probably continue to disagree, and they should indeed, on the role of generalization, the possibility and problems of making causal arguments, and so on. Yet at the same time, taking the next step, to learn another disciplinary language or inhabit and master its sensibilities presents opportunities that mere dialogue across boundaries will never allow. But such learning and training takes time.

With this in mind, I think that good interdisciplinary practice makes us modest scholars, more aware of the limits of our own discipline's capacity to speak about the world, and more aware of the investment that others have made in their own disciplines. This sense of humility goes against the grain of the more familiar interdisciplinary research "hero" who forges the streams or brings back insights from another land, presenting him or herself as one who has "mastered" or "conquered" the foreign. If we are honest with each other, and ourselves, we realize that the continued effect of interdisciplinary research is to remind us that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, and that expertise is hard won.

With this in mind it is time to return to the first question that I raised in this talk: how is my acquaintance in the limo-share interesting? What in fact prompted me to ask all of my questions to him? To answer this, I have to admit that while he was telling me about talking to God there were a range of other voices that I started to hear, a veritable chorus, in fact. I can name these voices, they are familiar to you, and include Leigh Schmidt, Ann Taves, Chris White, Cathy Albanese, John Modern, Jackson Lears, Jon Butler, Donald Meyer, Lawrence Moore, Louis Menand, and many others. These people are all historians, religious studies or American stud-

ies scholars. It is these scholars and others who have collectively established quite clearly that the man I met in that car from the airport is not unusual at all. He is the face of American religious futures and pasts, living out his religious aspirations in multiple sites, cross cutting the worlds of finance, psychology, Southern Baptists, and involving his own explorations in meditation and direct contact with the divine.

These colleagues are not sociologists and at this point in time sociologists of religion in the United States rarely include individuals like this in their stories of American religion, or trace out the various connections to varied institutions that his story suggests. Invoking these historians thus allows me to briefly note in closing what I have learned from historians about the current lacunae in my own sociological thinking, and what I believe other sociologists might also be encouraged to explore. First, sociologists of religion can take a stronger account of history into our equations. American sociologists interested in the spiritual lives of Americans, for example, often imagine that the landscape they are looking at changed radically in the 1960s, while historians suggest that there are important continuities that we overlook at our peril. Second, we can engage in a deeper conversation about the quality of "America" that operates often as a background concept in our studies. Historians' arguments about American exceptionalism is one thing to engage, as are the studies that situate "America" in transnational contexts, place "contact" at the center of thinking about America's formation. These studies can only further nuance our disciplinary interests in globalization, transnationalism, immigration and the ongoing export of American cultural and religious products. Third, I imagine that sociologists might have much to chew on as we consider our own disciplinary responses to John Corrigan's questions about representation and voice, and the literary aspects of our academic trade. Similarly, our thoughtful and engaged responses to Bob Orsi's emphasis on bringing attention to presence (divine, supernatural or otherwise) might transform and deepen our understandings of what sociologists of religion bring to the study of American religion.

There is much more to say about what sociology brings to religious studies, and I imagine that sociologists have more work to do to highlight the works that we find most useful in the subfields of cultural sociology, theory, and comparative-historical sociology, where many of the sociologists in this room have deep ties. On this, there is much more to say, but I am out of time, so I thank you again for this opportunity to speak, and look forward to the discussion.

**Carol B. Duncan**  
**Wilfrid Laurier University**  
**Department of Religion and Culture**

My responses to questions of this panel are shaped by my disciplinary training in sociology and cultural studies and my location in the Canadian academy. My responses are also contextualized in relationship to my areas of research interest which include Diaspora Studies, Caribbean Religions, religion and popular culture and Black Church Studies.

Let me start by saying that I understand “American” religion and culture to include not only continental US-based but also wider North American as well as hemispheric influences in the Americas and transnational contexts. As a Canadian, I am ever cognizant of the proximity of the United States, geographically and culturally; however, I am also acutely aware of important differences and distinctions as well. For example, an important critique raised in the field of African-Canadian Studies by George Elliott Clarke is the notion of “African-Americanism”—the ideological assumption of the normative centrality of particular experiences of African-American religious and cultural life as generalizable for all persons of African descent or the point of comparison against which all other peoples of African descent whether they are in the continental United States or not are either consciously or unconsciously compared.

For instance, in a Canadian context, there are some mainline Anglican Churches founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that are now *de facto* Black Churches as their congregations are made up almost exclusively of Caribbean and continental African migrants. The existence of these churches challenges taken-for-granted assumptions about Black Church formation in North America.

A second example is the existence of many cross-border stories that are often told in versions that end at the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel. The Underground Railroad is one such story which typically ends with stories of freedom in Canada without detailed discussion of the establishment of black communities in southwestern Ontario, the maritime province of Nova Scotia and the impact on indigenous African Canadian churches such as the African United Baptist Association.

I am a sociologist by training whose professional life over the last decade has been spent in a religious studies department. I was hired by the Department of Religion and Culture to bridge areas in social science and cultural studies approaches to the study of religion. What I have learned as a social scientist teaching and writing in a humanities setting is the importance of engagement with narrative structure and content. This concern includes narratives constructed by other scholars, subjects of research as well as myself in my scholarly writing and participation in other media such as photography, radio and television.

In researching my book, *This Spot of Ground: Spiritual Baptists in Toronto*, I conducted in-depth conversational interviews. When I asked questions in interviews with members of the Spiritual Baptist Church about their religious lives, the responses from many people were a mixture of citations of biblical quotations, testimony, preaching, singing and life history. They also included visual accounts as some members had compiled their own photographic record of their church participation and audio recordings of sermons. One scholarly response to the question of how to deal with this plethora of information which corroborated as much as it contradicted “facts” was to ignore all of that “stuff.” From this perspective, my central task was an enterprise of factual sifting for the nuggets of golden data which were presumably few and far in between the dross of details. Canadian sociologist Dorothy E. Smith’s concept of “the everyday world as problematic,” introduced in her book of the same name, was enormously influential in taking up ordinary circumstance as the basis of the sociological analysis.

I have been inclined since graduate studies to deal with the “stuff” which is the “orature”—a combination of oral traditions and written works either produced by, or referenced by, members of the community and frequently produced as a unique third entity existing somewhere between spoken work and written text. Orature resonates with Henry Louis

Gates Jr.’s notion of the “speakerly text” in his theorizing about African American literary production and its multivocality in his influential work, *The Signifying Monkey*.

From scholars of Caribbean literature such as Mervyn Morris and Olive Senior and actor and cultural critic, Honor Ford-Smith, I learned to contextualize Creole language and patterns of speech of Caribbean religious practitioners as an integral component of respondents’ comments. From literary studies scholar and poet, Edward Brathwaite, I learned to see these responses as part of the “nation language” of the community which was capable of expressing complex religious, theological and philosophical ideas. Like many people of Caribbean descent living in transnational contexts in North America or Western Europe, I was familiar with Creole but as a language of humour, dramatic performance and poetry, not as a language of critical engagement. Centuries of the denigration of Creole languages and cultures have left their mark in the stereotypic designation of such languages as grammatically incorrect versions of western European languages.

With my colleagues in humanities, I have engaged in long-standing dialogues about narrative structure, the self, the politics of identity and community formation. We have also tackled thorny questions concerning epistemology, ontology and their relation to research methodologies involving university researchers and community members.

Important, too, are the works of visual artists, photographers and writers. I am deeply inspired by the work of scholar/writers such as Raymond Williams, Orlando Patterson, Olive Senior, George Elliott Clarke, Afua Cooper, Edward Kamau Brathwaite and Himani Bannerji. In their scholarly as well as literary works, they explore the complex terrain of identity, culture, history and community.

I am particularly indebted to the works of W.E.B. Du Bois and Zora Neale Hurston. Luminaries of the Harlem Renaissance, both were social scientists who trained at leading American universities in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Du Bois, a Harvard trained sociologist, noted in his classic work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, posed the cautionary prediction that the problem of the twentieth century would be the problem of the color line. In a post-Civil Rights era United States whose current president is a black man who holds the most powerful political office on earth, the question of the color line and its shifting or erased presence is still relevant in discussions of power relations.

In many ways, Zora Neale Hurston is like an intellectual grandmother for my scholarship. I know from anecdotal conversations with colleagues and students that I am not alone in this assertion. As a graduate student, I read Hurston’s scholarly anthropological writing on the sanctified church, Haitian vodun and Jamaican and Bahamian folklore and oral traditions. I also read her novels and plays set in the U.S. South. I was deeply inspired by Hurston’s lived experience as a scholar and artist whose work engaged cultural anthropology with relevance for social scientific research and the arts.

Simply put, her existence and her writing in the voice that she did about topics specific to black religious and cultural experiences in the US south and in the Caribbean were in many ways pioneering. Hurston’s work demonstrated that it was possible to conduct research in ways that were integral to specific black cultural frameworks about oral traditions which arose out of those circumstances in ways that made intrinsic sense to the community. Thus, Hurston’s work engaged themes of insider research, relationships between researchers and the individuals and communities in which they conducted their research, the politics of language and expression in black communities and significantly, too, connections between aesthetic culture, religious expression and identity formation.

These are all methodological and theoretical questions that have occupied social science researchers in sociology and anthropology over the last three decades. Yet, I never learned about Zora Neale Hurston in my



## Duncan

formal academic training as an undergraduate or graduate student. She was not typically included on reading lists in ethnographic methodology which included Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner, Franz Boas and Melville Herskovits. I was lead, instead, to her work through reading Alice Walker as part of that informal curriculum of shared ideas, books, and photocopied texts that circulated in academic and arts circles in Toronto in the 1980s and 1990s. In shared anecdotal stories with scholars—many of us sociologists, anthropologists and literary critics—we have acknowledged the ways in which Zora Neale Hurston's work has influenced scholarship and in many instances actually made that scholarship conceivable and eventually possible.

As an anthropologist trained by Franz Boaz at Columbia University, Hurston adapted classical anthropological methods in her research practices. Hurston's anthropological research in the US South and in the Caribbean as well as in her writings as novelist, playwright, and anthropologist addressed experiential methodologies and frameworks that emerged from black cultural contexts as valid. In fact, I would say that many of the issues raised by Hurston are still current for religious and cultural studies research in diasporic contexts 80 years later. "Research," Hurston noted, in her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, "is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose. It is a seeking that he who wishes may know the cosmic secrets of the world and they that dwell therein." She noted that it was the "glamour of Barnard College" that blocked her initial research attempts. The Barnadese, as she terms it, of "Pardon me, but do you know any folk tales or folk songs?" was not the right language of communication with the folk in Polk County. In switching linguistic codes, in speaking authentically in the social context, Hurston was able to do research that was more meaningful.

My exploration of links of language, culture and religion in Caribbean diasporan contexts is rooted in perspectives and approaches pioneered by Zora Neale Hurston. I have long fostered an interest in pursuing the study of Hurston's research and writing trajectory and the ways in which her personal diasporan voyage connected the US South, the place of her birth, with New York City (the place of her Harlem Renaissance activities as student, scholar and playwright) and the Caribbean (one of the places of her field research) in her development as an anthropologist and artist. I suggest that in her research work on *voudou* in Haiti and New Orleans and on tale telling traditions in the US South and Jamaica and the Bahamas, Hurston, arguably, forged not only a southern African-American but also a diasporic African aesthetic sensibility that infused her research. These connections presaged, in important ways, contemporary perspectives on black religious and cultural studies. For example, her masterpiece, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, was written in a burst of creativity in Haiti during fieldwork.

I see myself taking up some of the questions of Hurston's research approach in my own work and my own diasporan connections between North America (where I live and work), the Caribbean (source of my ancestral heritage) and the UK (the place of my birth). This exploration is like a mythical search for Zora. I am intrigued, for instance, that Zora Neale Hurston visited Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, (it is one half of the twin city Kitchener-Waterloo in which I have lived and worked for about a decade) on a road trip to Michigan as detailed in her, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, autobiography. Where did she stay in what was then undoubtedly a segregated, by tradition, if not by law, community? My literal search for Zora in my local context is akin to my metaphorical search for her in relationship to my own work. She is right there, right at home, but not from there.

Countering the stereotypical views of humanities and social science scholars is important. The stereotype of the ahistorical, positivist oriented social scientist does not fully capture the range of methodological approaches and theoretical insights of social science researchers. As well,

the idea that humanities scholarship does not address "real social problems" in definable ways and is largely "irrelevant" is also just as misleading.

What both social science and humanities scholars are doing right is underscoring the significance of interrogating the ways in which we tell each other stories about culture and humanity including religious life. Clearly, an understanding of human culture and experiences is an important component of not only educational curricula but also the role of university as an intellectual community that is viable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

I live in Waterloo, a part of Canada's 'technology triangle' or 'Silicon Valley north'. It is home of the BlackBerry made by Research In Motion, a local company whose technology is used virtually throughout the world. (There are probably a few BlackBerries in this room right now!) I participate in dialogues, from time to time, with engineers and what they signal in these discussions is the need for more integrated research approaches that include the humanities. A new degree program has just been started at the University of Waterloo called the Bachelor of Knowledge Integration. Completed concurrently with another degree program, it is one of a few undergraduate degree programs aimed at integrating knowledge across humanities, social science and physical science disciplinary boundaries. Participation in the kinds of dialogue in which we have been engaged is key for the contemporary academy both in our research and teaching in the study of religion.

**David D. Hall**  
**Harvard Divinity School**

My remarks—and at the outset, I underscore the obvious, that these are the remarks of a historian—are divided into two parts. In the first, I reflect on the sociology of religion; in the second, I describe four aspects of American religious history I would like to understand better, the implied question being, where could I look for help in accomplishing that goal?

1. Me and My Shadow: The sociology of religion in the United States and its bearing on my work.

Throughout my graduate training and on into my teaching in the 1970s and 1980s, I did little reading in the sociology of religion; on the other hand, I once taught a seminar half of which was devoted to C. Wright Mills as an “intellectual” of his times. A decisive turning point in my evolution as a historian occurred in the latter half of the 1970s when, with many others, I came under the influence of cultural and social anthropology directly and as mediated through historians such as Natalie Davis and Peter Burke; less directly but of nearly equal importance, I began to read in *Annales*-style cultural history. Not until the early 1990s, and in the context of wanting to enrich the concept of lived religion, did I turn to sociologists and sociology. With the aid of a research assistant I scoured the *Journal of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion* for work I could use either in courses on lived religion or else conceptually. To say I found nothing useful is too sweeping, but that’s what it felt like. About the same time, I stumbled onto studies of social patterns of churches and religious life conducted in the 1920s and 1930s by H. Paul Douglass, Liston Pope, and St. Clair Drake, and although unable to put this work to immediate use, felt then and continue to feel that it was extremely valuable. Thanks to the intervention of a friend whose field was modern French history, I met Daniele Hervieu-Leger in the wake of a conference at Harvard; from that encounter followed her participation in a 1994 conference on “lived religion” that also included Nancy Ammerman; papers by each were included in *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (1997). As did many historians of religion in America, I found Finke and Stark’s *The Churching of America* unreliable in its representation of the colonial and early national periods. A chapter in which I updated Ahlstrom’s *Religious History of the American People* (1972; second ed., revised, 2004), owes a good deal to Robert Wuthnow’s work on post-1950s Christianity.

None of these moments of encounter or exchange loom in retrospect as intellectually robust. Nor do I essay to keep up with current work in sociology of any kind. Why not? One reason is my illiteracy when it comes to quantitative analysis, a double illiteracy in that I find it painful to read papers that pursue such methods. But the deeper reasons seem three-fold, and may pertain to others than myself. The first is that, in contrast to European scholarship on religion, no vigorous connections exist in the United States between the social history of religion and the sociology of religion. Indeed the social history of religion is rarely practiced on this side of the Atlantic, whereas in Britain and Germany (and no doubt in other countries) it is a major field, embodied and exemplified in the work, for example, of Hugh McLeod. When Europeanists convene a conference on secularization (in three of which I have participated), it makes visible the lively conversation among social historians and between them and sociologists such as Grace Davie, sociologists who would readily acknowledge the work of those historians. Why such conversations occur may have something to do with the willingness among the British to treat aspects of “Marxism” seriously (and without having to posture as “radicals”). The absence of such conversations on this side of the Atlantic means, in effect, that historians like myself aren’t challenged by a rich body of work.

A second reason is as simple as saying that what interests me is “meaning,” which is always plural, messy, ambiguous, and in social practice,

negotiated. A favorite example of what I have in mind is the chapter in Robert Orsi’s *The Madonna of 115th Street* on “The Meanings of the Devotion to the Madonna of 115th Street”; an example within my own scholarship would be the chapter on “wonders” in *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religion Belief in Early New England* (1989). Meanings cannot be quantified—or, to make the same point another way, there is little reason for doing so since the people we study were fully capable of entertaining forms of meaning that seem in tension if not contradictory. The history of baptismal practices in early New England are a wonderful case in point, as I have tried to demonstrate elsewhere. A third problem follows, a skepticism about the categories of analysis on which sociologists rely, be these institutions or rules. None seem especially fixed or specific, something as true of “churches” in the seventeenth century British Atlantic as it may also be of churches or denominations in the new millennium.

2. Questions I’d like to be able to answer more confidently.

Because time is precious, I limit myself to four of these.

(a) The place of religion in nation building. By nation building I refer to the “grand narrative” that encompasses the making and remaking of the American national state, the narrative that encompasses 1776, 1787, the election of 1800, the Mexican War, 1861, the ratifying of the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> amendments, the rise of social democracy as tentatively undertaken by the Progressives and undertaken more emphatically by the New Deal and the Great Society. I would like a clearer understanding of the part that Christianity has played in this long process (still, no doubt, unfolding) of nation-making, a question linked to a recognition that historians who did their work in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s made it their goal to connect religion, society, and politics: Ralph Henry Gabriel, Henry May, Sydney Ahlstrom, and the two Niebuhrs, H. Richard and Reinhold, to cite only a few of those who did so. Such a project is vulnerable to special pleading by religionists (an example being the attempts to connect the first “great awakening” to the coming of the Revolution). It is vulnerable as well to the misuse of analytical categories, as when a term as confusing as “democratization” is applied to theology, practice, and church order. Arguments for the singular congruity between evangelicalism and democratization ignore the crucial hesitation about “liberty” among churches and theologians to whom “liberty” meant disciplined submission to the moral law as much as it did free agency or individualism. It must be noted, too, that Catholicism has never found its way into the story, and the antebellum and post-bellum South are also misfits, as is everything associated with “Fundamentalism.” To be aware of these sins of commission and omission should make us wary of the story as told a half a century ago, although I am not sure this is the reason why the grand narrative seems so unappealing to many younger historians of religion.

What would give us as religionists greater critical purchase on this story? I limit myself to two obvious suggestions: an understanding of religion that is sufficiently flexible and open ended, and an understanding of politics that is of the same kind. In the historiography of the English Revolution of the seventeenth century, much attention is now being paid to the rhetoric of “anti popery,” a term that aligns the religious and the political, but *not* in some two-dimensional or mono-causal manner, for this rhetoric could be employed by virtually every version of Protestant, including the Laudians—which means that its place in state-making is no simple thing to determine.

(b) The truism that church and state are “separate” is just that, a truism—but as Philip Hamburger and others have recently demonstrated, a thoroughly political truism, put to use by self-interested parties as a means of isolating / criticizing others, especially Roman Catholics. Sidney Mead’s approach, though path-breaking for its times, seems astonish-

## Hall

ingly innocent of this politics. A critical reappraisal of “the separation of church and state” and of the much extolled “voluntary principle” along these lines would release some of the pressure to depict the American situation as exceptional (i.e., different from the European) and, as well, release some of the pressure to demonstrate the harmony between Protestant evangelicalism and the nation-state, for in point of fact many evangelicals (especially those associated with the Reformed tradition) relished the status of quasi establishment. Hence the post Civil War movement, led by that notable exponent of the voluntary principle Phillip Schaff, to add an amendment to the Constitution protecting the Sunday Sabbath. Uncovering the politics of de facto establishments and, simultaneously, the persisting disaffection of Protestant groups, is a project barely underway, but in my view badly needed.

(c) In a Boston-area faculty seminar on American religious history, a senior historian remarked recently that everyday religion (that is, what the laity are doing) is *never* connected to theology as articulated by the clergy. Even though the statement is patently wrong, it underscores a major challenge we face as historians. Theology matters, but how does it matter? Two ways it matters are reasonably easy to identify. Theology provides the basis for the stories that animate some versions of practice, a good example being stories of healing or stories about experiences deemed providential (itself a major theological category). Theology also provides the basis for rules that can guide our practice: who enters a church, who comes to the sacraments (and of course how the sacraments themselves are framed and administered), what is meant by “charity,” and the like. But we need a fuller grammar of how practice and theology fit together, recognizing as we take on this challenge that “fit together” can also entail slippage, inconsistencies, and outright defiance.

(d) the Americanness of Christianity in the U.S.A. On the one hand the generation of Miller, Trinterud, Mead, and others established a framework for understanding what made religion in America distinctively “American.” On the other hand, the specifics of their studies are wanting—inaccurate, incomplete, overstated. We need for religion something like the critical perspective on cultural geographies that has affected the understanding of “early American literature” and fore-grounded “the Atlantic world.” Some parts of exceptionalism may indeed be warranted. But it is cause for concern that two major recent studies of religion in America, Mark Noll’s *America’s God* and Catherine Albanese’s *A Republic of Mind and Spirit* are both driven by the concept of “an” American religion—and to juxtapose these two books is to appreciate how wildly different our appraisals of that religion can be. Surely we can do better, if only by declaring a truce and, as an act of will, bracketing the term American.

Which of us—what kinds of historians, what kinds of sociologists—would want to undertake any of these challenges is beyond my capacity to predict. But I do feel that historians of religion need the assistance of others in doing so.



## Part V: Politics, Secularization, and the Public Square

Host: Sheila Suess Kennedy  
School of Public and Environmental Affairs  
Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis

**Daniel Walker Howe**  
**Department of History**  
**UCLA and Oxford University**

In recent years the media have been full of reports of the connection between evangelical Christianity and the Republican party. This, however, is hardly news. Evangelical Protestants have constituted a Republican voting block ever since the birth of the Republican party in 1854. The Democratic party, in turn, counted on the loyalty of non-evangelical religious blocks like Catholics, Jews, freethinkers, and confessional (as distinct from evangelical) Protestants.

The political division between Republican and Democratic religious bodies arose out of their differing attitudes toward society. Nineteenth-century evangelical Protestants wanted to remake the world, to bring it into conformity with God's will. They supported a long agenda of social reforms, including temperance, public schools, state asylums for the insane, transforming prisons into penitentiaries designed to reform the inmates as well as punish them, cracking down on prostitution, getting the post office to observe the Sabbath, restricting the spread of slavery, and, in some cases, abolishing slavery altogether. Certain liberal and radical Christian groups, notably Unitarians and Quakers, endorsed this agenda too and added other causes to it, such as women's rights and opposition to capital punishment. Many evangelicals saw social reforms as preparing the world to receive the second coming of Christ, a belief that took the name "post-millennialism" and added a religious dimension to nineteenth-century American faith in progress.

Roman Catholics and confessional Protestants, on the other hand, had a more pessimistic view of the world and did not expect to be able to transform it drastically. They saw themselves as preserving, through authoritative creeds and sacraments, islands of holiness in an ocean of corruption. At least one religious group, the Lutherans, had both evangelical and confessional aspects in their tradition. During the second party system, Lutherans behaved like confessionals and generally supported the Democrats or opted out of party politics. But during the realignment of the 1850s, the Lutherans (mainly Germans at that time) behaved like evangelicals and went over to the Republicans, forming a critical element in the new northern Republican majority. The arrival of Scandinavian Lutherans later in the nineteenth century only strengthened the Republican affiliation of the Lutherans.

In the nineteenth century, the initiative and momentum lay with the evangelicals. They were already well organized in the antebellum era, a time when very little else in the United States was yet organized. Evangelical religion then represented the most powerful single cultural force in the country. That was why the disparate groups opposed to them felt it necessary to make common cause in the Democratic party to resist them.

The slavery issue did drive a wedge into nationwide evangelical Protestantism. On other issues antebellum southern evangelicals behaved much like their northern counterparts, supporting temperance, insane asylums, public schools, and other aspects of the "benevolent empire" including the Whig Party. But when it came to slavery, southern evangelicals endorsed not even gradual emancipation but moderate legal reforms to recognize slave marriages and, sometimes, the "colonization" of black people in Liberia (or elsewhere). Disagreements over slavery split the Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian denominations before the Civil War, and the divisions did not heal for generations afterwards. The Roman Catholic Church presented an even more implacable front against the abolition of slavery than did southern evangelicals, and did so in the North as well.

In the early years of the twentieth century, the reforming evangelicals stood at the zenith of their power and confidence. They successfully backed Prohibition and (outside the South) women's suffrage, both of which won addition to the Constitution. They saw themselves as the cutting edge of progress and Western Civilization. Their overseas missionaries allied with European and U.S. imperialism, spreading Christianity

along with the benefits of western medicine, technology, and education all over the world.

But even at this apparent pinnacle of evangelical Protestant success, forces were at work that undercut its cultural authority. Western civilization in general suffered both physically and psychologically from the catastrophic First World War, and the Protestant reformers paid a price for having endorsed Western Civilization so completely. More specifically religious in their effects were the Theory of Evolution in biology and the Higher Criticism of the Bible. Once the import of these European intellectual developments was appreciated (and this took time on the western side of the Atlantic) they split American Protestantism into those who accommodated them and those who rejected them. The unity and confidence of evangelical Christianity sustained serious damage.

The evangelical reformers, very early on, had chosen to enlist the state as an ally—notably in the public school systems that created both a literate laity to read the Bible and an informed citizenry. This explains their decision to affiliate with the Republican party rather than the Democrats. The Republicans supported strong government at both the state and federal level, to provide education, infrastructure like railroads, canals, and lighthouses, and tariff protection for American industries. And so the temperance movement evolved from its early emphasis on individual decision for abstinence from liquor, to state legislation making liquor difficult to obtain, and finally to constitutionally mandated nationwide Prohibition.

Up to this point the evangelical reform agenda had been highly successful. But Prohibition provoked a strong backlash. To many secular liberals it seemed a betrayal of evangelicalism's long-standing commitment to the autonomy of the individual. Repeal of Prohibition in 1933 signaled the turning of a historical tide against the evangelicals and the failure of their dream that a redeemed American society could lead the world into the establishment of Christ's Kingdom.

Meanwhile an ironic partisan role reversal was occurring. Beginning with the populist movement of the 1890s and decisively since the New Deal, the Democratic party has remade itself into the party of strong government, while the Republicans have become the party of laissez-faire. In the twentieth century, many evangelical Christians have found the remade Democratic party congenial—William Jennings Bryan, Woodrow Wilson, and Jimmy Carter constituting prominent examples. Black evangelicals switched massively from the party of Lincoln to the party of FDR. More often, however, white evangelical Protestants have stuck with their historic Republican affiliation. In doing so, they have signaled their transformation from an innovative to a culturally conservative force in American life. This transformation has not, on the whole, made for success.

Since the repeal of Prohibition, evangelicals have sustained a long series of social, cultural, and political reverses. Not only alcohol but addictive drugs have become readily available. Likewise readily available are contraceptive devices and pornography, once legally restricted. Censorship of films and television, once tight, has become loose. After all that Protestant Christianity did to foster public education, prayer and Bible-reading have been banned in the public schools. Divorce by mutual consent spread suddenly after years of resistance from state legislatures. Since the Second World War the U.S. Supreme Court has often, though not always, ruled against the evangelicals, most notably in the landmark decision, *Roe v. Wade* (1973). Meanwhile the liberalization of immigration laws, in combination with a tidal wave of illegal immigration, have produced a demographic transformation in the composition of the American population, largely in a direction away from Protestantism.

In some of these battles the evangelicals have given up. For example, they no longer oppose divorce. Other battles change their form through

## Howe

the years. Opposition to teaching the Theory of Evolution, far from being put to rest by the Scopes Trial of 1925, has resurfaced in a number of times and places. But the terms of the debate have shifted significantly since the 1920s. The issue at present is not so much whether the creation account in Genesis should be preferred over evolution in teaching school-children biology, as whether the universe (and perhaps evolution itself) might illustrate the intelligent design of a divine Creator.

The historian cannot but note the gigantic shift in opinion since the days of Thomas Jefferson. Then even the harshest critics of organized religion endorsed the intelligent design of the universe—indeed, the Deists argued that the universe provided so clear a revelation of its divine creation that no biblical revelation was needed.

Of course, one supremely important and successful twentieth-century reform movement reflected evangelical Christian passion: the civil rights movement, led by the Baptist minister, Martin Luther King, Jr. Tragically, however, many southern white evangelicals opposed the movement and continued to support racial segregation. Those white Christians who came to the support of the black churches over civil rights were mostly theological as well as political liberals. Within the mainline Protestant denominations, the clergy often supported civil rights more than their laity did, creating a political division within mainline Protestantism that has not since been resolved.

Having lost the “modernist” Protestants (those who accepted Evolution and Higher Criticism) the evangelicals began to look for other allies. To a considerable extent, they found them among Roman Catholics—unlikely allies from a historical point of view, but logical ones once the abortion issue became salient. American Catholics had voted overwhelmingly Democratic in the days when most of them were poor immigrants. By the late twentieth century, however, Catholic political partisanship became more uncertain. The hierarchy lent its moral authority to humanitarian social policies and nuclear disarmament, but opposed the Democratic party on abortion.

The Republican party in recent years has catered to its evangelical constituents by siding with them on abortion and various other issues like opposition to homosexual marriage. This support, however, has been largely symbolic. The evangelicals’ loyalty to the Republican party has actually delivered very little to them in substantive terms, as they increasingly realize. (Ronald Reagan promised them a constitutional amendment to legitimate school prayer; whatever became of it?)

To view this subject in historical perspective is to see that American evangelicals have been politically active for a long time, especially although not exclusively in the Republican party; that the direction and strength of their influence have varied; that they have often played constructive roles in the past; and, finally, to notice some of the limitations on their current cultural and political influence.

**Winnifred Fallers Sullivan**  
**University at Buffalo,**  
**The State University of New York**

We have been invited to reflect boldly on the future of the study of American religion in the context of our own special areas of study.

I am trained in law and in religion, and I will speak briefly this morning about the intersection of these two powerful and complex socio-cultural formations—rivals, one might say, for the privileged place in the defining of American self-understanding. We are a country that presents itself to the world as embodying—and purveying—a distinctive yoking of religious freedom and the rule of law—in service, we say, of the spread of democracy. Do we believe this? What is the rule of law? What is religious freedom? What is it we are pressing on the rest of the world? Do we understand it?

The great American legal scholar, Karl Llewellyn, wrote a small book for law students introducing them to legal education, entitled *The Bramble Bush*. It was prefaced by a nursery rhyme of the same name that formed a metaphor for his understanding of what law school is about:

The Bramble Bush

There was a man in our town  
 and he was wondrous wise:  
 he jumped into a bramble bush  
 and scratched out both his eyes—  
 and when he saw that he was blind,  
 with all his might and main  
 he jumped into another one  
 and scratched them in again.

I read *The Bramble Bush* before I went to law school. I was terrified.

The image has stayed with me. It is a powerful and violent image. It should give pause to anyone who would hope to rival the authority of modern law or to mess with lawyers. There is a short answer to the question of what religious freedom is under the rule of law. Religion that is legal is permitted. Religion that is not legal is not permitted. And politics determines what is legal.

But both law and politics in the U.S. are also, of course, constituted in part by religious cosmologies and anthropologies although they are largely blind to those dependencies. Mutual misreadings and misunderstandings between the two present real problems for scholars. Can law and religion recognize one another? Can the academic study of law and the academic study of religion be brought to see their overlapping jurisdiction?

This conference has largely divided religion scholars into two groups, historians and sociologists. Like some others here, I don't really fit into either. I myself was trained some twenty years ago at the Divinity School at the University of Chicago in History of Christianity (which was not always really history) and History of Religions (which was not really sociology or anthropology or religious studies). We thought we were somehow both subscribing to the *sui generis* nature of religion and its study, and deconstructing both at the same time. While now perhaps a bit anachronistic, this odd training has been useful to me in negotiating the boundaries between law and religion.

I am, as I mentioned, also a lawyer and have a law degree. I have practiced law and I now teach in a law school—after having taught in religious studies programs. I am interested in the phenomenology of modern religion as it has been formed in modern legal contexts.

My own “experimental” scholarly method owes something, perhaps, to the bramble bush. I have tried to take the critical ways of talking about religion that I learned at Chicago—and since, from other practitioners within the academic study of religion—back into law places. What happens in these law places when one talks about religion in these ways—when one, as we like to say, takes religion seriously? Can those formed in the bramble bush hear what we are saying? And then, I go back to the religion folks and try out self-critical law ways of talking and see if I can be heard.

One of the curious things about the American study of religion is that the study of law seems largely alien to its work—except with those particularly legalistic religious traditions, Judaism and Islam. For American Christians, who are largely antinomian in outlook, law is not part of religion. Law, modern law, begins in modernity with its secularization. So, for the most part, American religionists have not studied law—and legal scholars have not studied religion. They are taken to be different things. They deal with one another at arms' length. American scholars of religion largely accept law's account of itself as sovereign, universal, self-contained, neutral, acultural and quintessentially secular. They even tell their own origins as being authorized by the Supreme Court—in an astonishing display of deference to the law. And American lawyers, when they have to deal with religion, largely accept a churchy clerical account of religion.

When I went to law school in the mid seventies, there was no religion in law schools. No courses about religion and no talk of religious identity. Today there are many courses that purport to treat religious topics and every law school has a Christian law students association, a Jewish law students association, etc. Today there is lots of religion in law schools. Not the academic study of religion. But there is religion and talk of religion. What kind of religion is this?

One struggle for those of us who think that the study of religion demands academic credentials of some kind—whether historical, sociological, or ....—is to realize that it is deeply against the American ideology, an ideology that understands religion as something that anyone can talk about—and indeed that anyone has a constitutional right to talk about. We are all committed to the notion that whatever you say about religion has the same status as whatever anyone else says about religion.

This was brought home to me recently when I testified as an expert witness in a religion case. I gave what I thought was a fairly pedestrian account of the religious category within which scholars would place the defendants in the case. The defendants tried to have me and my testimony excluded from the trial but the trial judge said that he found my testimony helpful as background to his decision. On appeal, however, the court of appeals agreed with the other side that the judge should not have heard my testimony—not because I was not a qualified expert—but because, they said, it was not relevant. All expert testimony about religion is irrelevant, they said. Religion is simply a matter of individual sincerity. Expert testimony is establishmentarian.

I think one problem today with the study of religion is not that no one thinks religion is important. One problem is that no one thinks that studying religion requires any special training. Everyone is talking about religion. Everyone in higher education and everyone in the public... but most of them don't think that talking about religion requires special expertise. Inspired by Carl Schmitt, even secular liberal law professors are writing theologies.

But we can't do anything about that. Indeed maybe we wouldn't want to, if we were honest about our political commitments. So let me talk briefly about what I think is a time of exceptional opportunity for “church-state” studies. Church-state is of course a misnomer in the U.S. context. We arguably do not have a church or a state—we are a government and a religion of the people—but it is even more that case today...

We are at an interesting moment with respect to the legal regulation of religion and religious diversity. Both in the U.S. and in the world generally. Separation has failed as a legal doctrine for the management of religion. Or rather we can now see that separation has failed. We have to consider other models.

In the U.S. today, after a sixty plus year experiment, we are seeing the de-constitutionalization of religion. The Supreme Court is getting out of the business of regulating religion. From a free exercise perspective, *Smith* means that one does not have a constitutional right to be exempt from laws of general application. From an establishment clause perspec-

## Sullivan

tive, the school voucher cases and the *Hein* decision mean that government funding of religion is now permissible. The Court has turned over the management of religion to the legislatures. To be sure there will remain the difficult problem of implementing laws such as RFRA and RLUIPA, as well as a range of laws giving special privileges, or occasionally special disabilities, to religious folks. But those laws are understood to be a site of political negotiation, not of constitutional doctrine.

At the same time I think we are seeing a legal naturalization of religion—or spirituality—as a universal aspect of human life—one that is being increasingly institutionalized in hospitals, prisons, schools, workplaces etc. Whether these changes can be explained as a reaction against overly rationalist accounts of the human, or to the decline in anti-Catholicism, or as the result of globalization or ideologies of equality, I think that judges and lawmakers will increasingly see government support for religion as reasonable as long as it is broadly non-discriminatory. This is a big change for U.S. law. Separationism is dying.

To my mind there are several pressing needs in the study of religion and law in the U.S. in this new situation:

First, to second David Hall's point, is a need to firmly put aside the seductions of received readings of the opinions of the Supreme Court and the myth of American religious freedom and to do good historical research on the local stories of religion and law in the U.S., both at the state level, especially before 1940, and at the local government level. e.g. Nancy Buenger's fascinating work on the establishment of the municipal courts in Chicago and the religiously motivated people who were involved and who explicitly understood themselves to be working within a Roman Catholic natural law tradition coming through New Mexico.

Second, there is a need for comparative work. The general problem facing the U.S. in its management of religious diversity is one that is shared by virtually every country in the world. We cannot go on believing in American exceptionalism in this area such that all we need to do is to go on rehearsing the history of the colonial establishments, the drafting of the religion clauses, and the religion cases of the Supreme Court in support of the myth that Americans invented and have perfected the freedom of religion. We would do well to see how these problems have been and are being addressed elsewhere. As with all comparative work, such comparisons can help us see the intersection of law and religion in the U.S. better, the ways in which it is the same and the ways in which it is different. e.g. The EU is becoming a laboratory for such comparative work—with layers of religious and legal pluralism interacting and recombining. See, for example, Jim Beckford's work on religion in prisons. And many others, including Alessandro Ferrari.

Third, there is a need for the integration of the best new work in the academic study of law and religion. Critical religious studies and critical legal studies need to talk to one another. For religion scholars, this means that law has to be seen as just as problematic a category as religion and legal pluralism as real as religious pluralism . . . Religion scholars should not accept law's account of itself as uniquely universal, rational, transparent, acultural, ahistorical, secular etc. Religion scholars should not unwittingly participate in normative legal projects. e.g. Greg Johnson's work on NAGPRA.

And, as for the bramble bush, law schools should be recognized for what they mostly are: seminaries! For the production of professionals who will propagate a very particular idea of the rule of law. Not graduate programs in the study of law as a social phenomenon, except around the edges. Legal scholars need . . . Well. We all know what they need. To get religion.



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Even decades of participant-observation in the news media doesn't prepare you for being in the eye of a media storm yourself. And that's where I was, thanks to the 2008 American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS). The third large telephone survey conducted by Barry Kosmin and Ariela Keysar—my colleagues at the Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture—it sailed out into the world March 9 under the banner of the college's Program on Public Values (which I direct), and never looked back.

With the help of *USA Today's* bells and whistles, the Trinity ARIS (as we're calling it) turned into the biggest national story of the week, with the possible exception of President Obama's announcement of his new policy on embryonic stem cell research. There was news coverage galore—on network television and radio, in newspapers domestic and foreign, to say nothing of talk shows and the blogosphere.

Do a Google search and you get 100,000 or so references. As of this writing, the Trinity ARIS website (<http://www.americanreligionsurvey.aris.org>) has been visited nearly 70,000 times. That may not amount to much beside a YouTube sensation like Susan Boyle, but for an academic report, it's nothing short of amazing.

What actually caught the world's eye was the revelation that since the first of the surveys in 1990, the number of Americans adults who say they have no religion has grown two-and-a-half times, their proportion of the population nearly doubling from 8.2 percent to 15 percent. This amounts to two-thirds of the 10-point national decline in self-identified Christians (from 86 percent to 76 percent).

That finding was canonized in "The End of Christian America," *Newsweek's* April 4 cover story by editor John Meacham. Not since *Time's* April 8, 1966 "Is God Dead?" cover has so stark a religious message adorned an American newsweekly. It put the Trinity ARIS right up there with *Time's* notorious Death of God theologians.

But in fact, the increase in no-religion Americans—the "Nones"—was not really news. It was the 2001 ARIS, the second of the surveys, that registered the big bump (to 14.1 percent). Since 2001, the proportion of Nones has grown by less than one point—and Christian self-identification has declined by less than one (with the actual number of self-identified American Christians *increasing* by over 450 thousand).

So why wasn't the rise of the Nones and the decline of the Christians a big story back when it *was* a story?

The press release that announced the ARIS on October 25, 2001, highlighted the increase in Nones as "one of the most striking 1990-2001 comparisons." But Gustav Niebuhr's story in the *New York Times* the same day chose instead to focus on the survey's finding that the number of Muslims in America was smaller than had previously been estimated. For two months, the rest of the press followed Niebuhr's lead, and not just because he was writing for the Newspaper of Record. In the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attacks, Islam held center stage when it came to national religion coverage.

On the day before Christmas, *USA Today* did take note of the increase in Nones, but the headline was that America was still "one nation under God." "Nation of Faith: Religion Remains Central to Americans" cried the *Daily Oklahoman's* stop-the-presses editorial December 30. Not until March 2002 did the Nones receive a full-dress treatment, in a three-story package by *USA Today's* Cathy Lee Grossman focusing on the Pacific Northwest, the country's least religiously identified region.

Grossman's package attracted the attention of religion reporters as well as of the irreligious, such that when the occasion arose to do a story on the latter, the ARIS inevitably got a mention, supplying evidence to demonstrate that they were in fact a growing segment of American society. Yet in the post-9/11 world—the world of Osama bin Laden and George W. Bush—"the Rise of the Nones" was well outside the prevailing narra-

tive. Perhaps, some experts claimed, the finding was a statistical anomaly.

In the years since, other surveys have shown that the 2001 ARIS got it right. But Pew, Baylor, and the General Social Survey prefer to call the Nones "unaffiliated"—which permits the comforting thought that at least some of them just don't happen to belong to a particular church at this particular time. And reassures the public that these are not, God forbid, Americans who don't believe in God (though, not surprisingly, a disproportionate number of them don't). While the confirmatory findings did not grab the headlines, they made it clear to those who were paying attention that the Trinity ARIS' finding of 15 percent Nones wasn't much to write home about.

But for the country at large, for the world at large, it was big news because it fit into the current narrative of Democratic ascendancy, the election of Obama, the collapse of the religious right, and the New Atheism. A culture digests no statistic before its time.

So does the Trinity ARIS have only an old story to tell? By no means. It shows, startlingly, a shift in Catholicism's center of gravity from the Northeast to the Southwest. California is now more heavily Catholic than New England is—and New England has become almost as religiously unidentified as the Pacific Northwest. This is a measure of the latinization of the Catholic church, the result of Latino immigration and a falling away of non-Hispanic Catholics (especially those of Irish descent).

Then there is the changing face of non-Catholic Christianity.

On one side, Mainline Protestantism seems to have gone from a condition of losing market share to one of dying away. In 1990, those who identified with mainline denominations constituted 18.7 percent of the American population. During the 1990s, their share of the pie dropped to 17.2 percent even as their actual numbers increased, from 32 million to just under 35 million. But since 2001, they have shed 6.5 million adherents, and dropped proportionally to under 13 percent of the population.

Nor are the prospects for recovery good. Demographically, mainliners are significantly older than other segments of the Christian population. The future of non-Catholic Christianity does not lie with them.

Where does it lie?

One of the great virtues of the ARIS approach is that instead of offering an array of religious boxes for respondents to put themselves in, it simply asks, "What is your religion, if any?" If the respondent gives a generic answer like "Protestant" or "Christian," he or she is asked, "Which denomination?" Those who decline to name one are simply listed as "Protestant" or "Christian Unspecified" or "Evangelical/Born Again."

Or "Non-Denominational Christian."

In 1990, fewer than 200,000 adults identified themselves that way. In 2001, the number was two-and-one-half million. In 2008, it was eight million. By contrast, the "Protestants," who weighed in at over 17 million in 1990, now comprise just above 5 million, shrinking from 9.8 percent to just 2.3 percent of the population.

In 1990, these residual Protestants made up two-thirds of the Generic Christian category. Today, they're just one-sixth. Pretty clearly, the low-intensity "I'm just a Protestant" is being rapidly replaced by the "I'm a *non-denominational* Christian"—often a megachurch member—who resists further labeling as a matter of affirmative religious commitment.

Since 1990, these non-denominationals (including "Christians" and "evangelicals") have increased their share of the population from 5 percent to 8.5 percent to 11.8 percent. Soon they will outnumber the mainliners. Put them together with the rest of the evangelical flock—Baptists, Pentecostals, etc.—and they outnumber the mainliners by two to one. In another decade, the ratio will likely be three to one.

In short, what Martin Marty called the two-party system of American Protestantism is in collapse. A broad species of evangelicalism has become the norm for non-Catholic Christianity in America, while the main-

## Silk

line has turned into a large niche market. It is clear that this new reality has not been lost on the Obama administration, whose faith outreach has been notable for its focus on the evangelical community.

But what about those Nones? Even if their sizable increase is not news, it remains in need of explanation. Uniquely among all the ARIS findings, the rough doubling in the None population has occurred in every state, in every racial and ethnic group. This is a bona fide national religious phenomenon.

There's little indication, however, that the phenomenon has coincided with a change in American religious behavior. It's a change in labeling, a category shift.

Religion in America has become less of an ascriptive and more of a chosen identity. A nation of seekers is less inclined to identify with a childhood religion it no longer practices. A normative evangelicalism requires an active faith commitment. A liberalism of little faith wants no part of religion, if religious identity points to the GOP. All those people who now say they are "spiritual but not religious" are pretty likely to say, yes, we have no religion.

Whatever the exact explanatory mix, the category of having no religion—even unto unbelief—has now established itself in American culture. As President Obama said in his Inaugural Address, "We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and nonbelievers."

That is not to say that all Nones are the same—that they express their no-religion status in the same way. In the Pacific Northwest, the distinctive policy expression of None culture is physician-assisted suicide, which last November became the law of the land in Washington as well as Oregon. In New England, it is same-sex marriage, which as of this June had been adopted by every state in the region except Rhode Island.

The explanation, I'd venture, lies in the difference between a libertarian regional ethos and a communitarian one. But that is a subject for another survey.

## **Part VI: Race, Ethnicity, and Religious Pluralism**

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Whither Race, Ethnicity, and Religious Pluralism?

I want to begin by thanking Phil Goff and the Center, IUPUI, and the Lilly Endowment for giving us the opportunity to come together and work through some of the nuts and bolts issues—many of them quite rusty—in American religion that too often get temporized in the rush of our regular teaching and administrative duties. These are conversations I wish I had had decades ago.

As I tried to “make meaning”<sup>1</sup> out of the conference schedule and instructions, the theme for this panel, as with the other two at the end of the program, came with no accompanying leading questions to address, other than to give us keywords to suggest the session’s conversation. It is interesting to note that even though the first session began with a question/comment regarding “whither Lutheran Studies?”, raising issues about religious pluralism, particularity, and how one writes American religion (as history or sociology), the focused session on “Race, Ethnicity, and Religious Pluralism” comes at the *end* of the schedule. What might our conversations look like, for instance, if we had opened this conference with issues of pluralism, ethnicity and race as preparation for the issues of disciplinary turf wars, the writing of American religious history, the methods and targets of sociological inquiry, politics, and the public square? And although it may seem trivial to some or most, I had that frisson of disquiet, recognizing that, once again, race and ethnicity appear at the very end of the topical sessions. What might we learn in our conversations if we assume that race is in fact the master narrative of American religion? Now, if I was really paranoid, I would make something out of the error of the misspelling of my institution’s abbreviation, even as the other panelists’ institutions are fully named; alternatively I could interpret such an error to the happy notion that *everyone* knows, nevertheless, what UCSB means, even when it appears as “U-S-C-B” on the program. In all likelihood, of course, it was likely just a matter of trying to fit everything within the margins! You see, it is about making meaning.

This tiny error, however, is relevant to my presentation because the anxiety—real or imagined—about how to interpret these four letters, I want to transfer onto the anxiety—mostly real than imagined—about the three terms of the session’s title. So absent any leading questions to ponder, I turned the title into a “Keywords” teaching moment to tease out the meanings around: “Race,” “Ethnicity,” and “Religious Pluralism.” Now, it is the case that these diversity critters are assumed to be siblings often mistaken for one another. I want here, to argue that we must recognize the essential differences among them, and point out why it is never good to mistake one for the other.

*Bestiarum Americanus*: An American Religion Bestiary

I titled my presentation “An American Religion Bestiary” because I want to imagine the three keywords in the session as animals in a *bestiary vocabulum*, a medieval compendium of animals real and fantastic, bizarre and even loathsome, accompanied by illustrations and brief moral lessons for the reader.<sup>2</sup> The lessons of “race, ethnicity and religious pluralism” for us here today, however, are ideological ones, and as such imply ethical implications for our work in American religion. I have reversed the order of the keywords in the session title, moving from the most vague and general domesticated creature of “religious pluralism” to the more pointed and “problematic” wild beast of “race.” I give you then: 1) the elephant of religious pluralism; 2) the chameleon of ethnicity; and 3) the elephant of race.

1. The Elephant of Religious Pluralism

One of the most well-known and cliché images of American religious pluralism is found on the first page of Catherine Albanese’s ubiquitous

textbook *America: Religion and Religions* (now in its 4th edition). A million college freshmen have been introduced to our field through the allegory of the elephant in the dark: where a group of blind men who have never before encountered such a beast define it in various ways by which part of the body they first touch. Albanese tells her newbie scholar of American religion, “there will be so much elephant to feel, there will be so many American religions to explore...the task will be in some ways like trying to see an elephant in the dark.”

The elephant in the dark allegory is the perfect rhetorical device for introducing American religious pluralism precisely because not only is our view of the thing always only partial, it is subject to any and all interpretive trends, whims, training and proclivities by scholars of American religion. What I like about the way Albanese tells the story is her implied critique of scholars of American religion: the group is blind, they come to their conclusions in isolation from one another, there is simply too much to explore and know; and each is motivated to know “from a place of personal darkness.”<sup>3</sup>

This particular elephant happens to be an Asian elephant, because, as I noted during the discussion yesterday, the tendency among American religionists has been to focus almost exclusively on the “exotic”/“oriental” religions of Asia in Asian immigrant communities (even as I remind you, the great majority of Asian Americans are Christian).<sup>4</sup> One need only look at the table of contents in Diana Eck’s *A New Religious America: How a “Christian Country” Has Become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (2001) to note that the only three case studies she focuses upon to demonstrate religious pluralism are Hindus (Chapter 3), Buddhists (Chapter 4), and Muslims (Chapter 5). Similarly, Stephen Prothero’s recent, *A Nation of Religions: The Politics of Pluralism in Multireligious America* (2006) is true to the bias, but he inverts Eck’s order: Muslims (Part I), Buddhists (Part II), Hindus and Sikhs (Part III).<sup>5</sup>

The Asian elephant of American religious pluralism not only reveals the pervasive orientalism in our field, but from an Asian American Studies perspective this modeling of pluralism focused on traditions so often imputed to Asian Americans coincides rather nicely with the “model minority” image of Asian Americans as embracing the values of success, middle-class respectability, educational attainment and the rags-to-riches narrative. Linking religious others to “good” ethnic/racial others serves the purposes of allaying fears about weird, new religions in our neighborhoods through their association with successful if not “quiet” Asian Americans. However, one of the darker sides of the model minority stereotype is its use by policy makers and scholars to imply that other racial minorities would do very well to take a lesson from these successful, compliant communities.

Consider, for example, Raymond Brady Williams’ analysis of South Asians in his *Religions of Immigrants from India and Pakistan: New Threads in the American Tapestry* (1988), where he likens South Asian immigrant social and economic victories to the early successes of European immigrants, even though they (South Asians) share some characteristics with other racial minorities. Institutional religion for Brady “solves” the problem of racial otherness and provides the cocoon that allows them to negotiate their way into and beyond the middle class. Asian Indians and Pakistanis for Williams are thus more like earlier European immigrants than they are like other racial minorities—at least where religious institutions are concerned. As Williams assumed the dominant sociological literature to address the experiences of new Asian Indian immigrants, he ended up depicting Asian Indians as an ideal, paradigmatic minority who, despite sharing aspects of racial stigma with Blacks and Hispanics, nevertheless beautifully proved the processes and movements towards assimilation laid out by the standard sociological models. In this way, Williams manages to revive “classical” ethnicity paradigms by applying them to “new” Asian Indian immigrants who, not surprisingly, look and behave like western European immigrants in arrival and settlement.<sup>6</sup> The

## Busto

elephant of American religious pluralism is, indeed, a friendly beast with many surfaces to feel and interpret.

### 2. The Chameleon of Ethnicity

In my graduate seminar on race and religion in the U.S. at Santa Barbara, I begin with a set of readings that browse chronologically the ways American religion scholars have used and abused the concepts “race” and “ethnicity.” More precisely, I need students trained in American religion to see for themselves the imprecision with which otherwise venerable colleagues apply these ideas to affirm particular purposes and projects—usually to the point of divesting any substantive content from the term “ethnicity.”

The chameleon of ethnicity, so perfectly invisible as it perches squarely on top of other ideas or arguments, is such a gentle, small, and shy creature that even if you do see it, it doesn’t incite alarm, and you may be persuaded by its irresistible cuteness to adopt and take it home with you. The ethnicity chameleon is most frequently found clinging onto two surfaces. First, the surface of religion. In my seminar we track the ethnicity chameleon from Ruby Jo Reeves Kennedy, to Marcus Hansen, Will Herberg, Martin Marty, Harry Stout, Timothy Smith, and on through Nathan Glazer and Robert Bellah—to reach the place where ethnicity, as coextensive with religion, becomes a voluntary act of personal preference and symbolic performance in the U.S. Along the way, for example, Stout imagines that religion and ethnicity are “two identical expressions of the same phenomenon such that one’s ethnicity becomes, in fact, his religion” (labeled here “ethnoreligion”). Similarly, Herberg rewrites Hansen’s Law (“What the son chooses to forget the grandson chooses to remember”) to declare that it is religion that is most central to the third-generation’s return to the ethnic culture of the immigrant generation.<sup>7</sup> Religion and ethnic differences in this literature are so interpenetrated that by the time we reach Bellah’s formulation of American Civil Religion, the collective “American” expression of identity, in good Durkheimian fashion, completely eclipses any meaningful distinctions between “ethnicity” and “religion.”

The second surface we most often find the ethnicity chameleon is race. However, here our shy gentle creature is often called upon to help tame the muscle and potentially aggressive nature of race. On this surface, the ethnicity chameleon, contrary to its usual nature, does not mimic the shagginess and rough hide of the race beast, but instead employs its most soothing, calming patterns to draw the eye away from the unpleasant features of race. This strategy of substituting ethnicity (or at least its appearance) for race is one of the most strategic, useful and pervasive moves in American religion. The more enlightened, progressive and comfortable we become around the elephant of religious pluralism, the more likely we are to focus on the beauty and charms of the ethnicity chameleon rather than on the larger, uglier flank of race.

While everyone has race and ethnicity, the latter is much more inclusive and preferred for polite conversation. When everyone is “ethnic” all of our stories of immigration, family disaster, community struggle, and successes are valued, equal and interesting. Ethnicity is crucial to prove the truthfulness of democracy and meritocracy; but it hides the ugliness of power, racial strife, exclusionary immigration laws, racist housing covenants, and debates over affirmative action, etc. Ethnicity is the great social leveler. It will be interesting to see, for example, how, when, and whether a Puerto Rican nominee to the U.S. Supreme Court is really like an Italian.<sup>8</sup> The chameleon of ethnicity is small, usually invisible, but a mighty beast.

### 3. The Elephant of Race

While the ethnicity chameleon happily applies its skills to merge with

the friendly hide of the religious pluralism elephant; we have seen that it must, however, draw attention away from its elephant of race host. This elephant, the elephant of race, is an African elephant, known for its unpredictability and notorious inability to be trained. People fear the elephant of race, and it should be easy to completely avoid the elephant of race. Unfortunately, the elephant of race is fond of taking residence in, or at most, slowly ambling through government offices, polite social situations, classrooms, and academic gatherings.

Nalo Hopkinson, a Jamaican-born Canadian Science Fiction writer, tells the story of how a tiny 15th floor apartment was invaded one afternoon by an elephant. Hopkinson doesn’t tell us where the elephant came from, but it crashed through Jenny’s front, door, squeezed its way down the hallway and burst into the living room, smashing the TV and knocking over the bookshelves. It ate the potted plant, and deposited globules of dung on the carpet. The visitation was a full sensory invasion; Jenny was powerless against the behemoth. Aggravated by its casual destruction, her pathetic slap against its rough hide only goaded the elephant to clamber over the wall of the balcony, where it flung itself into space. Hopkinson writes, “The elephant hovered in the air, and paddled until it faced her. It looked at her for a moment, executed a slow backwards flip, then trundled off, wading comfortably through the ether as though it swam in water.”<sup>9</sup>

Like the enigmatic elephant in Hopkinson’s story, the elephant of race is not contained by common sense reality; we cannot deny its presence even when science tells us it shouldn’t exist, or when academic theories explain it away. We cannot predict when it will come crashing into our quotidian contentment, orderly structures, faculty meetings, and classrooms. We must, however, learn to anticipate the race elephant’s arrival, and when it knocks over our theoretical furniture, to give it room. Our attempts to shoo it away will remain futile; we cannot and should not ignore it, for to do so is at our peril. Some of us may want to inspect its hide to see if the ethnicity chameleon can divert our attention, because race is always an issue to be solved, a problem, an obstacle to overcome. The behemoth of race follows its own logic and will not be denied its presence.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> A reference to David Hall’s comment on the “Explaining Religion in America” session on the problem of interdisciplinarity.

<sup>2</sup> Willene B. Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts: The Second-Family Bestiary: Commentary, Art, Text and Translation* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2006), 1-2. The term Bestiarum Vocabulum (“The word beast”) which has come to refer to bestiaries in general comes from the introductory phrase, “Bestiarum vocabulum proprie convenit leonibus... (The name ‘beast’ applies, strictly speaking, to lions). I might have used the image of the zoo, but as that scourge of our profession, Wikipedia tells us, the beasts there are constrained by their captivity. “And in addition to their status as tourist attractions and recreation facilities...zoos may engage in captive breeding programs, conservation study, and educational research.” The indictment of scientific inquiry, and exoticizing here with regard to our beasts of race, ethnicity and religious pluralism, however, may be too harsh, and not necessarily the argument I want to make at the moment.

<sup>3</sup> See also John Hick’s use of the elephant in the dark for a philosophical take on religious pluralism, *Problems of Religious Pluralism* (NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), 37; and Peter N. Gregory, “Describing the Elephant: Buddhism in America,” *Religion and American Culture* (Summer 2001) Vol. 11, No. 2: 233–263. So common is the trope that Gregory need only suggest the story in the title, as he does not need to recount the tale in the article.

<sup>4</sup> According to the 2000-1 Pilot National Asian American Political Survey, Christians represent 46% of the Asian American population; Buddhists (15%); Hindu (6%) and Muslim (2%). Pei-te Lien and Tony Carnes, “The Religious Demography of Asian American Boundary Crossing,” *Asian American Religions: The Making and Remaking of Borders and Boundaries*, Tony Carnes and Fenggang Yang, eds., 40-41, (New York: NYU Press, 2004).



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<sup>5</sup> For a somewhat more nuanced but nevertheless limited treatment of religious pluralism see Barbara McGraw and Jo Renee Formicola, eds., *Taking Religious Pluralism Seriously: Spiritual Politics on America's Sacred Ground* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2005). At the other end of the spectrum see John R. Stone and Carlos R. Piar, eds. *Readings in American Religious Diversity* (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing, 2007) for a somewhat stereotypical presentation of the topic, especially in the choice of cover art.

<sup>6</sup> Raymond Brady Williams, *Religions of Immigrants from India and Pakistan: New Threads in the American Tapestry* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 22ff.

<sup>7</sup> Harry S. Stout, "Ethnicity: The Vital Center of Religion in America," *Ethnicity*, vol. 2 (1975): 207; Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (New York: Doubleday, 1955), 257.

<sup>8</sup> Since the conference, discomfort about race in the U.S. has been clearly revealed in the arrest of Henry Louis Gates at his home, and the "privilege loss anxiety" by whites in the health care reform debates under a black president. See Mike Swift and Josh Richman, "White Anger Fueling Health Care Debate," *San Jose Mercury News*, 22 August 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Nalo Hopkinson, "Herbal," *Afro-Future Females: Black Writers Chart Science Fiction's Newest New-Wave Trajectory*, Marleen S. Barr, ed. (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University, 2008), 175

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In the past decade sociologists of religion have been very cognizant and focused on issues of race, ethnicity and pluralism in American religion in large part because of the development of Religion and the New Immigrants as a subfield in our discipline. The field evolved, in part, because of generous funding to a number of projects on the topic. Since I have been very involved in that development, I will focus my remarks on that area of research, with emphasis on interdisciplinary issues. My comments are divided into three parts: 1) a short history of the origins of that field; 2) evolution of the field; and 3) questions and challenges on issues of interdisciplinary work.

#### History of the field

In the early 1990's Stephen Warner began writing a book on American Religion. He came to the chapter on race and ethnicity and wanted to include materials on the religions of the new immigrants who arrived in the U.S. since 1965. He was amazed on the dearth of attention to these groups of newcomers on the part of scholars of religion. He put aside the book, applied to the Lilly Endowments and the Pew Charitable Trusts for funding, and developed his NEICP project that involved the funding and supervision of twelve doctoral dissertations on religions of new immigrant groups. Most of the doctoral students were members of the religious/immigrant groups they were studying. The work of that project resulted in *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration* (1998).

As the fieldwork for the NEICP project was in progress, I applied to the Pew Charitable Trusts for funds to conduct a similar project, this time with all religious groups located in Houston, Texas, and to include several Buddhist communities since there were no Buddhist groups in the first project. With generous funding, I brought my colleague, Janet S. Chafetz, onto the project with me and together we supervised a team of researchers to conduct research in 13 religious congregations in Houston representing Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Zoroastrians and various Protestant and Catholic churches representing different denominations and ethnic groups. That research, known as RENIR I, resulted in our first book, *Religion and the New Immigrants: Continuities and Adaptations in Immigrant Congregations* (2000).

In the course of interviewing for the first RENIR project, we were very aware that new immigrants maintain close ties with their home communities even when living in a new society. We were curious how transnational ties impact religious beliefs, practices and institutions in the home countries from which the immigrants migrate and, ultimately, global religious systems in the Diaspora. Pew was generous to fund a second project in which we selected seven U.S. congregations, five of them in our original sample, and traced transnational religious ties between home and host communities. That research, known as RENIR II, eventuated in *Religion Across Borders: Transnational Immigrant Networks* (2002).

As RENIR I was nearing completion, the Pew Charitable Trusts, with two very supportive program officers, Luis Lugo and Kimon Sargeant, launched the Gateway Six Projects, each located in an immigrant gateway (Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, Chicago, Washington D.C. and Miami). Each of the Gateway Projects was to focus on some aspects of the role of religion and religious institutions in the lives of the new immigrants arriving in their cities. The research from those projects is just now being disseminated through articles and books.

#### Evolution of the field in terms of interdisciplinary work

The field that has become known as Religion and the New Immigrants has evolved in what I see as three stages in terms of major foci:

First, both Warner's *Gatherings in Diaspora* and then Chafetz and my work used concepts and, in our case, the same interview schedules to

study various congregations in order to arrive at some generalizations regarding the role that religion and religious groups play in the adaptation and settlement of new immigrants in the United States. Many of the ideas and working hypotheses that both Warner and ourselves used to focus the fieldwork came from case studies that had been done by religious studies folk (e.g. Orsi's two studies on Italian immigrants; Numrich's studies of Buddhists; Ana Maria Diaz-Stevens work on Puerto Rican Catholics; Jay Fenton on Hindus in Atlanta) as well as historical work from earlier waves of immigration (e.g. Jay Dolan; Will Herberg; Timothy Smith). I think, in this instance, there was close collaboration, at least in ideas, between the work of religious studies folk and those of us in Sociology.

However, the two arenas in which work in this area could have been enriched is by greater collaboration with both historians and religious studies scholars. My co-author, Chafetz, had an undergrad degree from Cornell and constantly bemoaned the fact that sociologists seem to ignore and know little about history. When the question was raised by Portes, Levitt, Alba and others about what is "new" about the new immigrants, she argued that very little was new except the **rate** at which events such as letters, visits, return migration, etc. happened. She constantly prodded me to read American history, especially regarding earlier waves of migration. I think if I had done so with more attention our work would have been enriched.

Likewise, we did not follow through on suggestions that Tony Stevens-Arroya and Nancy Ammerman gave at our planning meeting, namely, to include theological ideas that exist in each religious tradition to see how different theologies and religious meaning systems impact variations in how immigrants understand their new situation and adapt to it. It seems to me that social scientists are more comfortable with structural analyses of religious institutions than with meaning systems and theological understandings that might impact behaviors and social organization. This was certainly the case with our project and, overall, with all of the Gateway Six projects on religion and the new immigrants. There is relatively little focus on religious meaning systems or theological foci in any of the studies.

2) The second phase of research came with the work of Peggy Levitt, Nina Glick Schiller, Sarah Mahler, Chafetz and my second book on *Religion Across Borders* and a growing number of others who began to focus on transnational aspects of religion among the new immigrants. In this phase, emphasis shifted from adaptation in the U.S. to religious ties between immigrants in the U.S. and their families and friends in their home countries, as well as transnational ties between religious institutions, religious leaders in both countries, etc. It is in this arena that I think collaboration between social scientists and religious studies scholars could have enriched the work that ensued. For example, Cecilia Menjivar (1999) in her study of Catholic and evangelical Salvadoran immigrants and their links to their communities of origin emphasizes organizational and institutional structures of these religious groups in terms of enabling or constraining the creation of transnational spaces. However, a more deliberate and systematic inclusion of theological differences between Catholics and evangelicals could, I think, have yielded some interesting findings of ways in which theological emphases impact ways in which immigrants think about their migration journeys. Very little of the work on religion and immigration, in general, and especially comparative work in terms of transnational networks has included theological differences among religious systems. It would be interesting to see what such analysis yields.

I want to call your attention to Jackie Hagan's new book, *Migration Miracle* (2008), that focuses on the role of religion in the migration journey. She does focus on religion as a system of meaning that motivates and sustains migrants on their journeys, especially those who come via the southwestern desert.

3) The most recent work on religion and the new immigrants is taking yet a different focus and that is comparisons among diasporic communi-

## Ebaugh

ties in varying national locations. For example, Margarita Mooney's new book coming out this fall (2009) with UC press traces Haitian immigrants in Paris, Montreal and Miami. The focus of her book and several others coming out soon is an analysis of ways in which social context such as cooperation between religious and government leaders impacts successful assimilation. Her book also does a nice job of portraying how Catholic faith, including narratives about transformation and redemption, impacts immigrants in these three cities. Her current grant through the Engaged Scholars Studying Congregations Program is to disseminate her findings to faith communities who could find her work helpful in working with immigrants. She is co-authoring a summary of her book with a theologian who works in pastoral care to present her findings in a way that is more accessible to and relevant for religious leaders. Nancy Nason-Clark (2001) has taken a similar approach in her work on churches and abused women by co-authoring a book with Catherine Kroeger, a theologian, to translate her research into findings that are relevant and useful to church leaders. Here is one pragmatic way in which social scientists and either theologians or religious studies people are collaborating, that is, the dissemination of knowledge to particular audiences.

Now, while this emerging field has grown in terms of number of involved sociologists, numbers of books published and journal articles produced, it is very important to note that the "new immigrants" and the congregations which they either create or join remains small percentage-wise. I think both Gallup polls and the ARIS data document those involved in "immigrant religions" to be less than 6-8% of the total population. David Hall mentioned what he called the "critique of diversity," namely, that diversity arguments can mitigate awareness of the centers of power. I agree in so far as we need to keep perspective on the fact that immigrants constitute a small minority in the U.S.

However, as data clearly show, most immigrants are Christian and are either creating non-denominational congregations or are joining American congregations. As a result, they are shaping the current texture of American congregations as ministers and boards grapple with such issues as language of services, which Madonna to venerate and what national holidays to celebrate, not to mention the big issue of whose food to serve. Thus, we are definitely seeing the "de-Europeanization" of American congregations.

Finally, I would like to make a number of observations and comments regarding what I see as the state of interdisciplinary work on religion. First, where are the political scientists, anthropologists and economists at this meeting? We saw yesterday a show of hands how few social scientists are here especially compared with historians of American religion. Does this indicate a lack of interest on the part of social scientists or the unique history of the Center on American Religion and Culture?

Secondly, I do think that as scholars of religion from various disciplines we are like ships passing in the night with different paradigms, vocabularies and, especially, judgments of what constitutes evidence. Historians tend to focus on the unique historical story while sociologists are always asking for cross case comparisons and generalizations from particular cases to a broader universe.

Thirdly, we belong to different professional associations, publish in different journals and serve as reviewers for people in different disciplines. This results in different configurations of social, professional networks that are the lifeblood of our academic and professional lives.

Fourthly, I raise the question: In what ways can interdisciplinary work enrich outcomes? We assume that interdisciplinary is better; however, given the structure of academia and academic departments, perhaps being faithful to the questions, theories and methodologies of one's discipline is the best way to contribute to an understanding of religion in society. The assumption at least deserves challenge.

Finally, there are many ways to "do" interdisciplinary work, including: 1) reading each others work; 2) as consultants in developing research

projects; 3) being on the same research teams; 4) in interpreting data to churches/religious groups; and 5) joining interdisciplinary societies and publishing in interdisciplinary journals. I am sure this list is not exhaustive. The important questions, I think, include: what are the productive and useful junctures among scholars of religion in different disciplines? Where and under what circumstances is an interdisciplinary approach helpful? What are the most fruitful ways to engage in interdisciplinary interactions? These are the types of pragmatic questions that, I think, we need to address in order to make the best use of contributions across our varying fields.

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**David W. Wills**  
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Since this conference is focused on conversations across disciplinary lines, let me begin by placing myself on the disciplinary map. As you will see, I have moved around a bit—and that shapes the way I approach the issues we have been discussing.

On the publicity for this program, I am listed as being in the History Department at Amherst College, but that is a mistake. Throughout the thirty-seven years I have been at Amherst, I have been a member of the Religion Department. Initially, I was also for about fifteen years a member of the American Studies Department, but in the late 1980s I moved over to Black Studies. Once upon a time I did teach a course in Amherst's History Department—on the history of the American South—and I have on occasion advised History students on their senior theses, but I have never been a formal member of that department.

It is also the case that even though I was an undergraduate history major and did some graduate work in American religious history (with Lefferts Loetscher and Sydney Ahlstrom) along the way, my doctoral degree is also not from a History Department nor even from a program in American religious history. I am instead a product of the old Religion and Society track of the Study of Religion program at Harvard. I entered that program, which generally attracted people with an interest in either social scientific theories of religion or in social ethics (or both), planning to study with the sociologist Robert Bellah and hoping to pursue the historical sociology of American religion. Professor Bellah left for Berkeley before I was able to take a single course from him, and my graduate career was accordingly something of an improvisation, but work in the social sciences (along with history and ethics) remained a part of it. I took courses in the old Department of Social Relations on political sociology and race relations (from Seymour Martin Lipset and Thomas Pettigrew), as well as a course from Talcott Parsons on American Society. I also for two years was a teaching fellow for the Catholic sociologist Joseph Fichter, then at Harvard Divinity School as the occupant of the Stillman Chair in Roman Catholic Studies. My implausible official designation was Teaching Fellow in Roman Catholic Studies.

At the dissertation stage, my historical interests, which had by no means disappeared, reasserted themselves, and I plunged into the study of African American religious history. Even here, however, my approach was sociologically inflected. I was never a Parsonian—or a Bellah disciple. The sociological theorist who most impressed me was Max Weber and one of the things I had in mind was to undertake a Weberian study of African American religion. The study of African American religion had already been much influenced by sociology, but—to put the matter loosely—it was usually a sociological functionalism which I did not find especially helpful. I thought Weber might be of more use. As it turned out, the dissertation I wrote (the social ethicist Ralph Potter was my official adviser) was more Troeltschian than Weberian. I wrote on social thought in the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, beginning my work with some very general Troeltschian questions but ending up deeply immersed in highly specific historical research. It was increasingly clear to me that a willingness to generalize broadly about African American religious history had run far ahead of carefully researched studies on the particulars of that history, and that what most needed doing was the latter. A number of like-minded young scholars, nurtured and protected by Preston Williams at Harvard, himself an ethicist, not a historian, gathered in the 1970s around the Northeastern Seminar in Black Religion and the Afro-American Religious History group of the AAR. We were a biracial group and very ideology-averse (or at least we so imagined)—at a time when neither of these things was very fashionable. We welcomed all comers—but if you were smart you didn't show up at our meetings without some archival dust on your clothes.

Even so, I remained under the thrall of certain sociological generalizations, most especially the version of the secularization hypothesis that makes the Great Migration of the World War I era the great watershed in

the religious history of black America. E. Franklin Frazier's artful but in some ways perverse classic, *The Negro Church in America*, took a beating in those days for its neglect of African traditions and the way it characterized slave religion (as well as its more general assimilationism), but part of its narrative of the twentieth century often went curiously unchallenged. The structure of Frazier's book made emancipation and migration parallel "moments" in the disorganization and reorganization of black life—including black religious life. Just as the end of slavery fundamentally changed things, so too did the Great Migration from the rural South to the urban North. But there are surely asymmetries to be noted here. The end of legal slavery, however extended the process surrounding it, was an "event" in a way that the extended twentieth-century migration of African Americans was not. One of my late colleagues at Amherst, Theodore Greene, a historian, was fond of remarking that sociologists had two historical categories: then and now. It used to be like that, now it's like this: pre-modern to modern, *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, or something along those lines. And I do think the literature on the history of twentieth-century African American religion has had a very hard time getting past just such an exaggerated before-and after-narrative centered on the late nineteenth-teens and early nineteen twenties, the period of the so-called Great Migration. This has not only been a problem for our understanding of the twentieth century, moreover, it has also affected our understanding of the immediately preceding period, which has too often been collapsed into a static before, waiting in rural timelessness for the Great Migration to introduce change. We are still waiting for someone to write a book that does for the period 1875 to 1915 what Al Raboteau's *Slave Religion* did thirty years ago for the previous period. Maybe this is the reason why. (Parenthetically, I would note that John Giggie's *After Redemption: Jim Crow and the Transformation of African American Religion in the Delta, 1875–1915*, is an important recent attempt to treat this period on its own terms.) In any case, I confess that it took me awhile—and much persuading by my friend Randall Burkett—before I saw the large problem with the sociologically-formed, Great Migration-centered urbanization/secularization narrative of African American religious history. But some of us have been complaining about it for awhile now and I do think we are doing better.

I have also spent a good deal of time and energy over the years arguing against an excessive—one might say hegemonic—emphasis on the theme of pluralism in the history of American religion more generally. This issue has already been raised at this conference, and I don't want to labor it unnecessarily, but let me briefly state the case yet again. Please understand that I am not an enemy of religious diversity, either within or beyond the study of American religion. In my early days, when I worked in religious ethics, I devised and administered a program in comparative religious ethics that brought to Amherst a wide range of visiting faculty, among them scholars from Nigeria, India, and Lebanon. I co-taught courses on Buddhist Christian ethics, Islamic fundamentalism, human rights and religious traditions, and so forth. I labored long and hard to secure an Islamicist for our department. And my own courses in American religious history have been reasonably attentive, I think, to the ever-increasing diversity of American religious life.

But I think it is a problem when the emphasis on religious plurality in America—which almost invariably reflects a normative agenda of some kind—short-circuits appropriate attention to what has been—or has sometimes been imagined or claimed itself to be—a broadly shared, "established," "mainline," or centrally influential religious tradition, something that has variously appeared as the Puritan or Reformed tradition, the evangelical narrative, white Protestantism, or even as Christianity in general. The pluralism narrative also tends to subsume race, to make of African American religion one more item on the long list of America's many. And I think that is a problem too. Let me for the moment start there.



## Wills

When I took up the study of African American religious history in the late 1960s, the immediate context was of course the Black Power movement. And among the several critiques that the Black Power movement provoked, one was centered on the immigrant analogy. The point of the analogy was to deflate the claim, which the Black Power often (though not always) made, that the black experience in America was profoundly distinctive. The point of the immigrant analogy was to argue that black folks should rather be understood as simply the latest rural migrants to urban American, not fundamentally different from the European immigrants who had left behind their peasant villages and come to the United States. And the politics of this was that they deserved no more special treatment than Italians, or Poles, or Slovaks, or Hungarians, or anyone else had ever gotten. No affirmative action, for example.

This particular formulation—centering on the Euro-American immigrant experience—isn't much heard these days, but in a curious way a certain version of it has lived on in the literature of American religious history—often among people with seemingly rather different politics. African American religion gets worked comfortably into a narrative about American religious diversity, about Protestants of the never-thought-to-be-“mainline” type, about Catholics, Jews, Latinos/as, and various groups of Asians. This gets done both at the level of textbook surveys and also in diversity-oriented anthologies. In any case, what worries me about all this is that it tends to downplay or even erase the distinctive realities of black experience in America, which center above all on the truly distinctive historical relation of African Americans to the power realities of American society and the American nation-state. I think there is an important distinction to be maintained here. The story of the religious encounter of blacks and whites in America is not collapsible into the story of ethnic and religious pluralism.

Or am I being hopelessly out of date here? Does the old black-white binary actually still matter? Whatever its relevance to historical studies, is it irrelevant—or even an obstruction—to understanding the America we now live in? Does it belong to back *then*, not the *now* in which we currently live? Some see the Obama presidency as the signal that a post-racial America has arrived—or at least is clearly on its way. I think the Obama phenomenon is very far from being a trivial matter. His election both marks and advances real change. But we don't know how the story of the Obama presidency is going to end, and how it ends will be as important as how it begins. So I think it is much too soon to draw massive then vs. now conclusions about his election. (As another aside, I will note that the narrative Obama presents in his two books is a black/white and common values narrative, not a pluralist narrative.)

Long before Obama had appeared on the national scene, of course, it had also been argued that the “new” immigration of the post-1965 period had fundamentally altered the racial landscape and rendered the old racial binary obsolete. Here too, it is readily apparent that there has been real change in America, but the possibilities of exaggeration are also considerable. Between 1820 and 1920, massive immigration (as well as the westward expansion of the American nation-state) fundamentally altered the ethnic and religious contours of the United States, but the black-white binary remained in place. The “whiteness” literature has been at pains to make this very point (though I think in doing so—to throw out an aside there is no time to develop here it sometimes runs the risk of going to the other extreme and too much downplaying the historical importance of diversity within the “white” world). Surely one has at least to ask whether the structures and mechanisms that sustained the racial binary through the massive changes of that earlier century have altogether disappeared—or whether they are still at work. Or let me raise the same question in a somewhat different way. Is it really obvious, for example, that the presence of an increasing number of people of Asian descent in the American population will alter the distinctive situation of blacks in American society any more than the presence of more Jews and, say, Italians did in the

nineteenth century? Or again: the claim is sometimes made that in the Latin world, the racial duality that afflicts the Anglo world has long since been overcome—beyond black and white to the brown, it is sometimes said? This is an old claim. There is a whole literature about American slavery, going back to Frank Tannenbaum, that was built on this idea—with results that did not stand up so well to subsequent historical scrutiny. There is also, to mention just one more example, a literature about Brazil that challenges recurrent Brazilian claims to have achieved such a post-racial society. So I remain, at least for the moment, skeptical.

I do think, however, that the growing presence of Latinos/as in the United States is a matter of very considerable consequence—for African Americans, as well as everybody else, though I suspect the impact will be a complex one. I think it is important that African Americans, Native Americans, and Mexican Americans (and perhaps Puerto Ricans and Filipinos) have in common a relationship to the American nation-state that has been historically shaped by coercion in a way that is not true in the same sense of anybody else (though it is also not true in identical ways among the three groups themselves). It is further the case—if you will allow me to mention something I can't really discuss—that not all Latino/a immigrants stand in the same historical relation to the American nation-state as Mexican Americans (and Puerto Ricans and Filipinos) and immigrants from the Caribbean and from Africa have importantly different ties to the U.S. than do black Americans. But what I want to emphasize here is that the power issues that are central to understanding the situation of African Americans, now as well as in the past, turn up more among Latinos than in any other group—and that this sets them both in problematic relation to many forms of the pluralist narrative. Look at the incarceration rates. Look at who has massive problems with status before the law.

I come now to my final point. I think the pluralist narrative is sometimes overextended within the history of African American religion itself. The Great Migration-centered before-and-after narrative of African American religious history often carries as one of its central themes the movement away from Protestant Christianity toward religious diversity—from the black church to religious pluralism. There is obviously a very considerable measure of truth to this. One need only mention such things as the growing importance of Santería or Vodou or the major presence of Islam among African Americans—and there is of course much more. One could well ask about African American Muslims whether, even if they fit smoothly into a narrative about growing pluralism among black Americans, they fit so smoothly into larger historical narratives about either Islamic post-racialism or religious pluralism in the United States, but I pass over these important matters here. I want instead to say a few final words about where African Americans fit in relation to the rise of global Christianity.

It took me a very long time to see that the history of African American Christianity is appropriately understood as a critically important phase in the emergence of what now goes by the name of “global” or “world” Christianity. African American Christianity hasn't been much studied from that point of view—either by students of African American religion or by historians of global Christianity, but it should be. Certainly it would be timely. It is increasingly understood—even the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* has lately taken notice—that Christianity is less and less a religion of persons of European descent. European Christianity may be a mere shadow of its former self, but elsewhere—especially in Africa—church membership rolls are burgeoning. And Christians from the “Global South” are increasingly bringing their religion to Europe—and to the United States. This phenomenon has not registered as strongly in the literature of American religious history as its importance would seem to warrant. It is not hard to see why. It fits awkwardly with the pluralism narrative, which prefers to tie immigration and growing religious diversity as closely together as possible. Asian Christian immigrants sometimes have a hard time getting noticed and the Christianity of most Latino/a



**Wills**

immigrants has a way of being downplayed in some of the surveys. The political crosscurrents here are obvious and I will not labor them. From my point of view, a central reality of our present religious situation in the United States is that we are increasingly tied to the religious life of the rest of the world—and this includes *both* a diverse range of religions of limited past relevance to the American scene *and* a Christianity that has a greater global reach than it has ever had. It would help if we could keep both in mind, though in my experience people who want to talk about the one are often not keen to talk about the other. Sociologists of religion, perhaps because they approach the subject, for better or worse (and it is both), as a matter of connecting the generic realities of “religion” and “immigration” rather than a story of the changing balance of religious traditions, seem to do better here. Perhaps part of the difficulty among historians of American religion is that many of us are so deeply invested—not without reason, of course—in a narrative of our own enterprise as one that has moved away from and beyond “church history” to a more inclusive history of religion in the United States. But we have to do a better job of reckoning with the way that American Christianity in general (and African American Christianity in particular) is increasingly tied to the story of global Christianity.

## Part VII: Where do we go from here?

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**James Lewis**  
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Like everyone else in this room, my situational context informs my take on the important issues that have concerned us and the remarks I will make. Consequently I should admit that I am a WASP (a Southern Baptist preacher's kid, in fact, who became a Presbyterian by marriage—the Presbyterian's most successful form of evangelism). In addition I work in a Presbyterian seminary and in an Institute that is supported by a philanthropic institution (the Lilly Endowment) committed to the flourishing of Christian churches in North America. By training, I am a historian, but one who kept finding it necessary to read sociology, both during dissertation research and ever since.

Although I'm not a preacher, as the son of a preacher, my remarks will include a joke and three points.

The joke I owe to Grant Wacker, who told it at a symposium at Harvard Divinity School over a decade ago that involved, in some ways, reflections on the relationship between region and religion. According to Grant, he knew a place in North Carolina "that was so remote that even the Episcopalians handled snakes!"

Now my three points, based on what I have heard the last two days. My first point is that, as historians and social scientists, we are profoundly different and deeply complementary. In some ways, historians and social scientists are something like siblings. We may not always be on the best of terms, and we may sometimes speak somewhat different languages and hang out with different friends. But, at bottom, we're still family. Moreover the topic of religion in North America is so rich and complex that it requires the very best of both historians and social scientists—and more besides, including theologians, practitioners, etc. This conference, in fact, amply illustrates my point.

My second point is that, as scholars of religion, we face a difficult, challenging situation with no easy answers. A number of these problems were articulated by Mark Taylor in his celebrated April 2009 NY Times Op-Ed piece about the "end of the university" that has been repeatedly cited at this conference. In addition, the challenges include a shortage of research funding, the rising costs of graduate school, an exceedingly tight job market for graduates, and a developing crisis in the publishing world at the same time that pressures to publish remain high. Ironically, we may be beginning to feel like mainline Protestant bureaucrats in the mid-1970s who looked around and saw that their world was changing beneath their very feet.

My third point is that the way out of our dilemma will require a bold and sustained engagement with a wider public—in fact, several publics. For the fact of the matter is that it's not always clear to the public what we do or why we do it. The public for many of us includes both pastors and seminaries. (In fact, I've been surprised how rarely seminaries have been mentioned in this conference.) A number of years ago, Jerry Park conducted a survey of some 250 grantees in the Louisville Institute's pastoral sabbatical grant program. He found that they read a lot and that they read very widely. Aside from Rick Warren and popular historians of the Revolutionary War period like David McCullough, there were few titles read by many pastors. But, as readers, they ought to be part of the public we seek to address.

Shortly before he died almost fifteen years ago, Ernest Boyer spoke to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences about a recent Carnegie Foundation report called *Scholarship Reconsidered*.<sup>1</sup> In that address, he proposed a fourfold model of scholarship, a model that is still instructive. First, Boyer said, is the scholarship of discovery that pushes back "the frontiers of human knowledge." Many of you in this room are heavily engaged in just such scholarship of discovery, and it's important that we keep it up. Second, is the "scholarship of teaching" undertaken, in Boyer's words, "in order to keep the flame of scholarship alive." Teaching, that is, remains an important part of our task. Boyer called his third

model of scholarship the "scholarship of integration." This I take to be a scholarship that synthesizes the work of several scholars and makes it more accessible to a wider public. It is as legitimate a form of scholarship as the other three, especially as we seek to communicate with a variety of publics. Finally, Boyer identified a "scholarship of engagement." On the one hand he called for the application of scholarship to the pressing problems of the day, including problems in the cities. But he also advocated a "larger sense of mission" for scholarship by which scholars create "a special climate in which the academic and civic cultures communicate more continuously and more creatively with each other." Several of you have already indicated your engagement in this kind of scholarship on behalf of social justice. And there may be other forms of engagement as well. As we go from here, we could do much worse than recommit ourselves to a scholarship on American religion that includes discovery, teaching, integration, and engagement.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Ernest L. Boyer, "The Scholarship of Engagement," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Vol. 49, No. 7 (April, 1996): 18-33. Accessed online at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3824459>

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My response to the question, "Where Do We Go From Here?" is influenced by the celebration of E. O. Wilson's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday at my university just before the conference on Religion and American Culture in Indianapolis. Two things from that celebration impacted my experience of the Indianapolis Conference and my ideas about where the study of American religion might go from here. One presenter at the Wilson event asserted that evolutionary biology provided such powerful insight into human behavior that it would soon be taken for granted as a basis for experimental work in psychology and other social sciences. A second presenter gave a wonderful presentation on ants, summarizing the contributions Wilson and others have made to knowledge about their social behavior. I learned that ants cooperate to such an extent that their colonies can almost be considered single organisms, that ant colonies involve highly predictable divisions of labor, and that when colonies grow and become more complex, the labor of individual ants becomes more specialized. Without awareness of what they do, ants work together to maintain stable societies and to transform relatively simple societies into more complex ones.

In some ways human beings are like ants. We are instinctively social. We work together to feed, grow, and defend the societies to which we belong in more ways than we know. In many cases, we participate in changes in the structures of our societies through forms of communication and collective behavior that do not require strategic deliberation or free will. To some extent, instinctive social behavior may characterize our academic organizations as well as the human subjects we study.

In many ways, though, we are not like ants. Human beings have a capacity for awareness enabling us to reflect on what we are doing, and even change it. This social awareness is where religion, and the study of religion, comes in. While religion involves awareness of society, and of the self's role therein, the study of religion entails an additional, meta-level of awareness about religion's role in society and identity formation. As an historian of American religion interested in religion as a medium through which social change occurs, I would like to think that "where we go from here" will be toward greater understanding of religion's role as a medium of social communication in American life and history. I also hope that the path we pursue will sharpen awareness of how religion has operated, and continues to operate, within the study of religion.

The twenty papers delivered at the June 2009 Conference on Religion and American Culture touched on too many aspects of the historical and social scientific study of American religion to fully summarize here, and I will attempt only to cluster a few of the insights that stood out for me. Taking some account, then, of the range of issues addressed, my response to the question, "Where do we go from here?" begins with the first set of three papers, focusing on how they defined "here" as they addressed the initial question of the Conference, "How did we get here?" I flag the three versions of "here" adumbrated by Jon Butler, Jay Demerath, and Paula Kane as "narrative," "explanation," and "estrangement," and proceed to cluster insights offered by other contributors around those three terms. I insert commentary of my own along the way, emphasizing the need for awareness of religion's role in American society, and suggesting how that awareness might develop in the future.

Jon Butler raised the flag of "narration." In his response to the initial question, "How did we get here?" He indicated that for historians of American religion, "here" involves narratives about particular religious groups; American religious history is essentially the historical study of denominations. We know a lot about some groups (he mentioned Puritans) and not nearly enough about others, noting that the study of Lutherans had yet to gain momentum. He emphasized that the assemblage of these histories barely constitutes a field, much less a discipline. He did not suggest that the messy eclecticism of American religious history needed to be cleaned up, however, only that its heterogeneity ought to be acknowledged in ways that stimulated more curiosity, more scholarly work, and more discoveries.

Other contributors seconded Butler's interest in stimulating new work on particular religious groups, but some challenged his reticence about organizing themes. Several contributors made the case for more study of minority religious groups and called attention to the fruitful interdisciplinary work in religion now occurring in that area. Dennis Dickerson explained how increased conversation between labor historians and religionists was stimulating important new work in African American history, and indicated that rich archival sources familiar to labor historians had yet to be plumbed by scholars of religion. Adding to Dickerson's enthusiasm for more work on understudied groups, Jerry Park pointed to new studies of religion among Asian Americans and Helen Rose Ebaugh discussed the need for more studies of recent immigrants, as well as the funding available for that interdisciplinary work. Mark Silk emphasized the importance of social science methodologies for understanding religious belief and behavior among different groups and within different regions.

Against this investment in the notion of American religion as an assemblage of denominational histories resistant to generalization, race emerged as an organizing theme. Although Silk protested that the importance of race varied by region, Rudy Busto designated race as "the elephant in the room." Others noted that race-based slavery was deeply implicated in the formation of American ideals of freedom, and in the founding and development of the American nation state. In addition, David Wills argued, attention to black/white issues kept the realities of social power at the fore in discussions of religion. If the United States was becoming less racially divided (a big "if," Wills noted with an eye to incarceration rates) scholars of contemporary American religion would have to find other ways to keep in sight the dynamics of power operative in religion.

Papers by Daniel Walker Howe and Winifred Sullivan also pushed against Butler's approach to American religious history as an assemblage of denominational histories. Taken together, the papers by Howe and Sullivan revealed an important shift over the last century with respect to the relationship between religion and the state. Howe showed that evangelicals in 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century America exercised considerable influence on federal and state governments in areas of education and moral reform. In contrast, Sullivan showed that, in recent years, courts have taken on increasing responsibility for determining what religion is, for managing its "free" exercise, and for expediting state and federal funding of certain religious groups and activities. Agenda items for the future that emerged for me from this discussion included the need for narratives about religious communities now receiving state support, and for more discussion about the push for religion now occurring under the rubric of respect for religious pluralism.

John Corrigan considered another path to the future under the banner of "narration." Interested in the representation of individuals and their embeddedness within social contexts, Corrigan made the case for attention to the crucial role that authorial voice played in revealing the roles that individuals play as social actors. In order for scholars to effectively represent what Penny Edgell referred to as the socially constructed "repertoires" of religious life, Corrigan would draw attention not only to how individuals are "buried" within social contexts but also to the failures in the representation of individual actors that result from an author's forcing his or her own voice upon those of people being represented.

Carol Duncan's paper also addressed the question of authorial voice. But while Corrigan argued for "self-immolation" as a strategy for representing others, Duncan took W. E. B. DuBois and Zora Neal Hurston as exemplary scholars who inserted themselves boldly into their discussions of religion. Their achievements in exposing the dynamics of power working through religion involved strong authorial voice if not outright refusal to engage in the authorial self-immolation recommended by Corrigan. The issues of representation joined by Corrigan and Duncan merit further

## Porterfield

exploration, as do the concerns raised by Busto, Howe, Park, Sullivan, and Wills about how religion mediates power.

Jay Demerath raised a second banner that I will call "explanation." The "here" staked out by Demerath as a site of scholarly work in American religion is made up of a few good independent variables, with a host of dependent variables attending. These heuristic aids have great explanatory power with respect to the social functions of religion, Demerath argued, and their scholarly applications constitute the sociology of religion. He emphasized how hard won the independent variables were, and how hard they were to maintain against perpetual ignorance and misunderstanding.

If sociologists take special responsibility for preserving these methodological insights, many other scholars share the benefits. Historians of American religion rely heavily on the independent variables that sociologists work hard to maintain, and often employ them to construct lenses for studying religious actors and communities. Although historians may bury their theoretical apparatus underneath their narratives, the Durkheimian insight that religion is an exercise in social imagination is a centerpiece around which much of the current theory in American religious history revolves. The Marxist insight that religion is a medium of expression corresponding to but also disguising economic structure may be less called upon by historians of religion but is no less important for understanding the social functions of American religion now and in the past.

In the future, more analysis of the way religion disguises economic forces will help scholars do more explaining. Attention to religion's relation to economic structure exposes the dynamics of power operative within religion, much as attention to race does. It also bears on important questions about funding, not only with respect to religious activities themselves, but also with respect to the study of religion. As we know, investments in liberal protestant religious education supported the rapid growth of religious studies after World War II. Cold War commitment in religious vitality as an essential element of American democracy contributed to the popularity of religious studies as well as to the growth of religious institutions. Even today, if we look at the sources of funding for grants, conferences, departments and faculty engaged in the study of religion, the links back to institutions that promote religion are not insignificant.

As the social scientific study of religion moves forward, explanatory insight from evolutionary biology may increasingly shape research and that development will affect funding for the study of religion in interesting ways. While some support for studies in religion may diminish as reliance on evolutionary biology becomes routine, some grantors whose previous commitment to intelligent design alienated many scholars have begun to change their expectations. Most important, sound application of evolutionary theory to religion promises to open new sources of funding for the study of religion through agencies invested in the sciences. Studies of the role of sex and gender in religion may be hugely impacted by the application of evolutionary theory in social scientific studies of religion, since sex and reproduction are driving forces in evolutionary biology. If sex and gender did not receive the attention they deserved in this Conference, the increasing prominence of evolutionary biology in the social sciences might work to remedy that omission in the future.

Moving on from "narration" and "explanation," I turn to Paula Kane's "estrangement" as a third banner term for conceptualizing where the study of American religion is now, and where it might go in the future. Kane worried about the transformation of subjectivity occurring as Americans become less engaged in the kinds of interiority associated with textual analysis and more engaged in technologies that display personality superficially, demand technical proficiency, and diminish unquantifiable virtues like musicality. Adding to the estrangement provoked by this collective transformation in subjectivity, Kane pointed to the conflict between the abundance of critical resources we have at our disposal through our training as scholars and the forces working against our ability to

employ those resources in thinking about religion. Not only do many of our students lack the preparation for critical thinking we try to engage in them, but forces of resistance against critical analysis of religion, working within ourselves as well as externally, impede our work.

As David Hall pointed out, estrangement is not a bad thing for scholars of religion. I agree. Estrangement is part of what makes us different from ants, and part of what enables us to see through the opiates that cloud awareness of how our thinking and behavior contribute to social organization. Thinking about where we go from here, I would say that more discussion about how scholars of religion do their work in social environments characterized by the ubiquity of religion, and by the presence of forces engaged to protect and promote religion, would be fruitful. I hope we will think more about the linkages between religion and prosperity, and between religion and social order, so often pushed by American religious leaders, politicians, and judges.

Courtney Bender's story about a chance encounter with a chatty businessman may illustrate a kind of estrangement from our subjects that has ambiguous implications. A former Baptist, the businessman had left the confining structures of denominational identity for a more boundaryless mysticism, which he applied to his enterprise as a financial consultant. Religion's role in mediating the current transformation of subjectivity may be evident in this enterprise, with its suggestion of the ubiquity and the universal sameness of religious experience and its linkages to salesmanship and financial prognostication. Perhaps because the implications of such enterprises for scholars are so encompassing and amorphous, Bender emphasized the importance of sticking to a disciplined mode of analysis and avoiding the cloudiness that can result from interdisciplinary thinking. Harking back to the flag of "explanation," Rhys Williams voiced similar cautions about interdisciplinary work.

David Hall's comments about the meaning of "America" and the changing meanings and boundaries of the nation state complement Kane's interest in the transformation of subjectivity. The role that religious communities and leaders play in conflicts over mythologies about America, and their role in mediating changes in those mythologies deserves more study, as does the influence of political, economic, and military power in nation building and political conflict at home and in American influence abroad. One important avenue for future work is analysis of the increasingly ubiquitous and universalizing expressions of spirituality and their relationship to globalization, and to the transformation of the American nation state.

Robert Orsi's call for study of spiritual "presences" in American life suggests a way to come to terms with "estrangement" and also a way to conclude my brief response to the question of "where we go from here." Orsi spoke about the importance of historicizing the "presences" of supernatural visions, voices, and spiritual energies. Experiences of occult, transcendent, and otherwise epiphanous realities reflect the social positions and conflicts embedded in people's lives, and historicizing those realities through narrative offers a way to understand how people manage their positions and resolve conflict.

Ants do not have religion. They communicate by emitting chemical puffs that trigger activity and behavioral change. The queen ant may have more chemicals to puff, but no more awareness of what she is doing than any of the other ants, and no capacity to experience any of the wonderful "presences" Orsi describes, much less historicize or explain them. I would like to say that our job as scholars of religion is to historicize religion through narrative and to explain its social functions, and that these enterprises make a valuable social contribution. Because religion is a powerful medium of social expression, a medium through which authority is instantiated and social change occurs, the future study of American religion may lie in the direction of increased awareness of how religion has worked and continues to work in American society.