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Introduction

Philip Goff

Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture

The purpose of the Biennial Conference on Religion and American Culture is to bring together scholars in the humanities, social sciences, seminaries, and professional schools who study religion in America in order to continue working on big questions and themes we face in our fields. We established in 2009 that this is a worthy endeavor. At that first conference, we spent considerable time talking about the promise and challenges of interdisciplinary research. In 2011 we moved on to discuss the changing definitions of religion and culture, and what this means for the types of work we do. Conversations about changes in our understanding of religion—informed by various disciplines—can promote greater cross-fertilization of ideas and best practices in several fields. We believe this second conference sustained and extended the conversation among different perspectives in ways that highlight the strengths and expose the weaknesses of disciplinary boundaries.

As you will see in these Proceedings, the overarching theme of our second biennial conference was “change.” We were interested in the changing understandings of both religion and culture, as well as the effects these changes have on the ways of thinking about religion’s role in American culture. Of the many changes we could note, most crucial is the transformation over the past few decades toward thinking about religion as it is expressed in everyday life, religion as lived experience. Mirroring gradual changes in public perception—“spiritual but not religious”—new definitions of religion challenge older, top-down models in which religion is defined by large institutions and the ideas, practices, and organizations embedded within them. Each discipline is working on how best to study religion as it is or has been lived, so talking together makes sense as we change the way we study topics that are, themselves, changing in their nature.

We believe that a biennial conference dedicated to new perspectives informed by various disciplines 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 understandings of topics. It is our hope that these conferences will begin serious and sustained conversations among the disciplines and their 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 this conversation.

The Second Conference on Religion and American Culture was held in Indianapolis in June 2011, consisting of a series of roundtable discussions 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.

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 continued a conversation that is gaining strength as more disciplines and backgrounds are brought to the table. We look forward to that in 2013.

A word of thanks is due to a number of 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 wonderfully. I am also indebted to my colleagues Art Farnsley and Peter Thuesen, who helped put together the panels and moderate the discussions. Becky Vasko, the Center’s Program Coordinator, provided liberal support in the planning and execution of the entire conference, as well as the publication of these Proceedings. Without her, there would have been no meeting. There were two organizations that provided funds to underwrite the conference: Indiana University-Purdue University’s Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Lilly Endowment Inc. contributed generously toward the costs of the meeting. I am deeply grateful for their faith in this project.

Part I: Changing What Religion Means

Session 1: What are our academic assumptions about religion?

Bringing together people who work on religious experience with people who study lived religion and social scientists who do work on individual choice, our goal is to consider the effect of newer, “from the ground up” approaches to religious study on older, more traditional models that emphasize organizations and ideology.

Penny Edgell
University of Minnesota

My remarks today are not a “paper,” though they are based on ideas that have been evoked as I have been working on an article for the *Annual Review of Sociology* on new approaches to the study of religion. What I hope to do is to provide some thoughts that will spur on our conversation together. For those who are interested in seeing a copy of the “paper,” please let me know afterward; I have a very rough draft now but by the end of June hope to have a draft that’s ready for circulation.

The impetus for the review article I’m working on is, in many ways, the same impetus behind this conference—the sense that historical circumstances are making it increasingly important, even urgent, to understand religion’s role in “society”—in individuals’ lives, in politics, in public discourse and social movement mobilization, in collective culture and public imagination . . . On the domestic front, several trends raise questions about changes in the religion-politics nexus. Three trends seem to be the most important: 1) the rising % of younger Americans who claim no religious identity and the growing orientation to spirituality as something distinct from “religion,” 2) the rejection by younger evangelicals of some of their parents’ core issues even while the religious right continues to mobilize in new ways, and 3) the counter-mobilization of the religious left. Globally, there is an urgent need to understand the worldwide religious revival of the late twentieth century, to analyze the factors associated with religious extremism, and to rethink Western notions about the relation between religion, state, and society in ways that make sense for Islamic societies.

It seems to me that most of our writing and thinking is both ‘writing for’ and ‘writing against,’ and it’s useful to take a brief moment to tell you what I’m writing against and thinking against—that is, what it is about our current approaches to the study of religion that strikes me as no longer useful and powerful, no longer interesting and *perhaps* not so accurate. In my case, when I say “our” and “we” and “us” I’m generally referring to the way that sociologists study religion, because that’s what I know best. My hope is that perspective, though, will resonate and spark ideas beyond narrow disciplinary concerns.

In a way, I am writing and thinking “against” both of the theoretical paradigms that dominated sociological thinking on religion and society in the 20th century. Secularization theory, of course, was inextricably intertwined with sociology’s founding meta-narrative of modernization—modernization would naturally (inevitably, logically) erode religious belief, plausibility, and authority in social and political life. Market theory, in all its major variants explicitly challenged secularization theory’s core argument that religion is a poor “fit” in the modern world (and I’m thinking, here,

of Stark and Finke’s work but also work by Christian Smith and Steve Warner). Market theorists argue that modernity creates the conditions that foster religious privatization and voluntarism, causing religion to thrive (and, ironically, to retain much of its public significance; others also make this argument, for example, Jose Casanova).

Secularization approaches have been critiqued extensively, and on numerous grounds, so I won’t go into a lot of detail here (those who are interested should look at recent *Annual Review of Sociology* pieces by Gorski and Altinordu, and also by Evans and Evans, as well as an excellent volume edited by Christian Smith). The critiques fall into two camps—theoretical critiques about the problem of seeing secularization and modernization as a kind of mysterious, de-contextualized, transhistorical process that can be invoked, post-hoc, to explain pretty much anything; empirical critiques focus on religion’s continual political and personal relevance in the late-modern world.

Market approaches have played an important role in revitalizing the sociology of religion but there is a growing awareness that market theories suffer from some rather serious empirical and theoretical problems. These include an inadequate understanding of agency and social embeddedness; a preoccupation with the American case and American exceptionalism; the assumption of a strong and unitary religious “effect” on social action; a definition of religion and religious strength which uncritically mirrors specific features of contemporary American Christian orthodoxy; a neglect of non-dominant religious discourses and practices and groups; an almost complete neglect of conflict, division, and power; and perhaps most importantly, a refutation of major empirical claims about the relationship between religious pluralism and religious vitality.

What I emphasize in my review is that *both* market and secularization theories have a *relatively tight focus on the same, very limited, set of questions*. People often miss this, I think, because secularization theory and its market-based challengers make directly opposing arguments—so it is easy to overlook the fact that they have one very crucial thing in common: neo-Weberian in orientation, the major problematic of both theoretical frameworks is *the fate of religious institutions and authorities in the modern(izing) world*, and their research agendas privilege identification of the conditions under which religion either *declines* or *thrives*, is *irrelevant* or *achieves influence* in late-modern societies. This shapes how proponents of both perspectives think about the nature of religion, the sociological significance of religion, and the questions that are worth posing and answering through empirical research. (This is true in all kinds of ways, none of which I have time to outline here).

Edgell

So what is the way forward? If this is what I'm writing and thinking "against," then what am I writing and thinking toward?

There is a large body of research, mostly empirical studies of religious groups, communities, persons and discourses, that either does not draw on one of the two dominant theoretical frameworks or, if it does, pays them lip service. I think that, taken together, this research provides some useful insights into how to move forward in ways that avoid some of the problems with the dominant theoretical approaches outlined above. In the article, I review *four approaches* that I think have a great deal of promise:

- Work on *lived religion*, which focuses on embodiment and religious practice in everyday life. A lived religion approach brackets out questions of large-scale transhistorical processes; it is often applied to study a range of religious expression (not just "the usual suspects"—America, white evangelicals); it takes seriously the need to understand *processes of sacralization* in everyday life—how symbols, persons, objects, places, etc. are made and remade as sacred through the embodied practices of individuals and collectivities. It does not draw a sharp boundary between "religion" and "spirituality" or "religion" and "magic." This is useful, as a focus on traditional religious groups and institutions, and their authority, is increasingly inadequate to understand the entire religious landscape. However, this approach can also be *combined* very fruitfully with other approaches to tackle complex questions and questions of relevance to traditional scholars of religion—for example, one can ask about the *social fields* or *institutional fields* that anchor and facilitate specific forms of religious and spiritual practice; this is a way to link what sociologists call "levels of analysis," or to understand how individual lives map onto, create, and change larger social structural arenas. Exemplary work here includes Nancy Ammerman's spiritual narratives project, Courtney Bender's book on the New Metaphysicals, Daniel Winchester's work on religious conversion, Tim Nelson's analysis of experience and ritual in a Black Pentecostal church, but also work outside the discipline, in particular very rich studies of Catholicism by Robert Orsi and his students, Sarah Pike's work on pagans, and David Smilde's work on the conversion of men to Pentecostal religious expression in the slums of Venezuela.
- Work on *boundaries and inequality*. This body of work analyzes how religious identities and communities *create boundaries that simultaneously include and exclude*, and often reinforce lines of social division and conflict (including racial and gender hierarchy). Exemplary work here includes research on religion and attitudes toward racial equality myself and Eric Tranby; work by Mike Emerson, Gerardo Marti, and others on how religious communities become racially inclusive and exclusive spaces; research by myself, Danielle Docka, and Dawne Moon, among others, on how religious groups and discourses shape ideals of gender, family, and sexuality; and research by Paul Litherman and by myself and the members of the American Mosaic Project team at the University of Minnesota on how religion can come to embed, and be used to imagine, understandings of collective identity, on both a local scale and a national scale.
- Work on religion as a *field of activity*. This research sometimes draws on neo-institutional theory (Powell and DiMaggio and their co-authors), although sometimes it draws on a Bourdieuan framework. This approach is in some ways the most compatible with older, neo-Weberian accounts in its focus on mainstream institutions and how they 'work'—I'm thinking, here, of my own work and of formative statements on the American religious "field" by Steve Warner, Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney, and others. But the field approach need not focus on the American case or be pre-occupied with questions of secularization; nor are all fields "market" based fields (and the American field, while having some market-type properties, also has other non-market-based properties). The advantage of the field approach in part is that it highlights how *resources* are organized to facilitate some forms of religious expression and mobilization over others.

In my review article, I argue that we should care a great deal about this newer work, for two reasons. First, it avoids some of the problems inherent within older approaches. It focuses on power, looks at how religion intersects with other realms of activity (and other aspects of identity), it's not America-focused (or need not logically be, since the displacement of secularization as a central concern undercuts the rationale for a pre-occupation with American exceptionalism). It can encompass newer developments (a focus on spirituality) along with more traditional foci on religious institutions.

Taken together, what is interesting and important about this work is its re-orientation of the contemporary sociological study of religion around a new set of empirical questions:

- 1) *What fields of activity*
 - a) *create structures and discourses that facilitate processes of sacralization,*
 - b) *shape individual religiosity,*

Edgell

c) embed ethnic or national or civic identities within religious identities or cosmologies,

d) foster religiously-based political expression (attitudes, voting) or social movement framing and mobilization,

e) provide moral community and shape moral orders through communal and individual practices of designating a religiously-based sacred.

2) How are these fields of activity mapped onto traditional religious institutions (or not)?

3) What kinds of religious coherence do religious fields and leaders provide?

4) How do religious fields intersect with other fields?

5) How do individuals negotiate religious and other fields, orienting their actions to them explicitly (using “tools” to solve “problems”) and implicitly (through dispositions or the habitus)?

6) How do religious, political, and other fields of activity create historically specific relationships between the sacred, the supernatural, and the moral order?

I'm aware that these comments, without the full review of the literature, may seem quite abstract, but I am hoping that they sparked enough ideas and questions that we can have some useful exploration and discussion as the session unfolds.

Robert Orsi
Northwestern University

The analytical concept “religion” has changed a great deal in recent years. As it is understood today, “religion” is always embedded in particular discursive fields and regimes of power and discipline. It is no longer acceptable to use the word “religion” without a heightened consciousness of the historical and theological freight the word carries, of its entanglement in Catholic/Protestant polemics, for example, its complicity in Western imperialism and colonialism, or of its role in the making of normative secular modernity. We talk more about religious practices now than religious meanings; the historical and conceptual coherence of religious traditions has given way to an emphasis on conflict and multiplicity; the religious body has been revived and with it the full sensorium of religious experience; the formidable lexicon for the others of “religion”—“sect,” for example, “cult,” “magic,” “superstition,” and “primitive religion”—has been critically deconstructed. The centuries-long search for a universal definition of “religion” has come to an end in our time.

But the more things change, as we know, the more obstinately change is resisted. Here is the intractable heart of the matter. A fundamental contradiction persists at the center of the study of American religious history: the individual human subject, autonomous, self-responsible, freely choosing, and self-caring, remains the primary, if not the exclusive, unit of religious experience and analysis, while at the same time, individual religious experience is almost completely invisible. The varied phenomena of American collective religion (Pentecostal meetings, for example, megachurches, and evangelical revivals) continue to be imagined and treated as conglomerations of religious individuals, rather than as thick contexts of intersubjective exchanges among humans and between humans and special others (gods, ghosts, angels, ancestors, and so on), which is what they really are. The irony is that by ignoring the web of relationships in which the subject comes to be and always exists, the individual as a living multi-dimensional reality disappears as well into the mass. The humans who enter religious spaces and times do so as already intersubjectively and socially constituted subjects, moreover, which means that the special others that constitute the interpersonal webs in which religion happens include the internalized figure of the father a man wants to be but feels he cannot, for example, the father he fears, the father he desires, and so on; dead persons present in memory; the absent, the lost, and the renounced. All are in dynamic play, interacting with each other, with other humans, and with local pantheons of gods and spirits. But by ignoring the intersubjective the individual becomes a cypher of discourse, discipline, and power in much writing on religion (which again takes the religious individual

as paramount).

Let me illustrate what I mean by the intersubjective nature of religious experience and religious subjectivity by looking at a recent work that does approach religion as relational, Richard Lyman Bushman’s biography of Joseph Smith, *Rough Stone Rolling*.¹ It becomes abundantly clear in Bushman’s account of the origins of Mormonism that Joseph Smith’s lifelong visions and revelations took place always within dense and intimate interpersonal surroundings. Smith lived in the closest physical proximity with family members and friends in the tightest spaces. From Bushman’s account, I imagine the sound of the Smith family breathing together as one in the still evenings of rural New York and the unavoidable press of their bodies against each other as they go about their days. Joseph’s visions and revelations—not simply their authorization (which was profound and immediate among his family members), but their production—arose in-between his body and imagination and those of his “erotically desirable circle of familial kin.”² The same is true of the supernatural environment at Kirtland, Ohio, in the early 1830s, when the whole gathered community of Joseph’s followers, which was a community not of individuals but of extended *families, together had shared* visions.

But we do not have a critical language to talk about the circulation of religious visions among persons, in particular places or across great distances; about the role of sacred things, such as bones, beads, and stones, in creating and sustaining certain kinds of special connections among people, again in the same place or at great distances; or about the relationship between different levels of consciousness in such contexts, between conscious and unconscious processes, for example, or between one person’s consciousness and another’s. How does it happen that the gods become really-real, socially, psychologically, and existentially efficacious in the “external” environment, in imaginative processes that belong to both individual and collective subjectivities and yet are independent of them both, as Joseph Smith and his followers experienced them?³

Consider the following crucial event in the evolution of Mormon theology. In the winter of 1832, Joseph Smith was anxiously pondering the mystery of salvation, the perennial Christian dilemma of who is saved and who is damned. This is Richard Bushman’s description of how the answer came to Joseph: “The resulting revelation was received in the usual way: in plain sight, with others looking on. More surprisingly, Sidney Rigdon and Joseph . . . viewed the vision together. Sitting on chairs with perhaps a dozen men watching, they spoke in a plural voice . . . Together they saw the ‘glory of the Son, on the right hand of the Father,’ and jointly bore witness.”⁴ Two men having a vision together

Orsi

within a circle of onlookers! Thinking of religious experience as “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider divine” is not going to get us very far here.⁵ Religious experiences such as this one arise not between the one and the one, but among the one, the other, and the many.

We need to speak, then, of an erotics of visionary environments (and of other religious spaces and times, such as shrines, cemeteries, and festivals), by which I mean the flows of desire, need, fear, and denial among persons, at different levels of consciousness, that create and are created by the presence of the gods and humans to each other, and then go on to examine the personal, political, and social consequences of such experiences, within religious communities, among persons, in individuals, and between religious communities and surrounding publics. How much of the violence against the early Mormons, for example, was provoked by outsiders’ (mis)perception of the community’s religious erotics (compounded perhaps by the unacknowledged desires among them to participate in the lurid excesses they fantasized about Joseph’s followers)? How did Joseph become the “articulatory pivot”⁶ of other people’s dreams and hopes and at the same time of others’ darkest fears?⁷

There was a time when scholars of religion, psychologists, natural scientists, and well-informed amateur investigators were intensely interested in such intersubjective phenomena, exploring them with varied methodologies and generating new theoretical vocabularies. Freud introduced the word “transference,” for example, to describe unconscious exchanges between analysts and clients; the concept of “telepathy,” which was developed around the same time, was also intended to name such other-than-conscious pathways of interpersonal communication.⁸ These lines of inquiry have disappeared or have been pushed to the margins in the study of religion, but I am proposing we reopen them in order to develop an empiricism commensurate with the realities we study and more adequate for discussing contemporary religious phenomena with the publics that need to hear from us, including religiously motivated suicides, the violence within and among religious groups, and the regularly recurring feverish anticipations of the end of the world.⁹

Notes

1. Richard Lyman Bushman, with the assistance of Jed Woodworth, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).
2. Gannanth Obeyeskere, *The Work of Culture: Symbolic Transformation in Psychoanalysis and Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 88.
3. I put scare quotes around “external” because clearly what I am aiming at is a view of religion that troubles secure boundaries between “internal” and “external.”
4. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 197.
5. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, in *William James, Writings 1902-1910*, Bruce Kucklick, ed. (New York: The Library of America, 1987), 1-477, quotation on 36.
6. Vincent Crapanzano, *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 140. Crapanzano writes of his relationship with Tuhami, a Moroccan tile-maker and one of Crapanzano’s main conversation partners in the field, “I became, I imagine, an articulatory pivot about which he could spin out his fantasies in order to create himself as he desired. I was created to create him . . .”
7. I assume that anti- and philo- responses to religious others are very often deeply and inextricably entwined.
8. On the origins of the word “telepathy,” see Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible: The Paranormal and the Sacred* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 38, 81. For the origins and development of Freud’s notion of “transference,” see J. Laplanche and J.B.-Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1973). Laplanche and Pontalis say that Freud “never tired of emphasizing” the strangeness of transference and believed that the identification of transference in psycho-analysis “was what cleared the way for the recognition of the operation of this process in other situations,” including relationships between doctor/patient, teacher/pupil, confessor/penitent, and, I would add, gods/humans, with “gods” here being a synecdoche of all the special beings in various religious worlds.
9. For a very interesting description of recent end-times excitement from an intersubjective (and so especially revealing) perspective, see Ashley Parker, “Make My Bed? But You Say the World’s Ending,” in *New York Times*, May 19, 2011, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/20/us/20rapture.html> (accessed June 12, 2011).

Ann Taves
University of California at Santa Barbara

1) What are my academic assumptions about religion? We need to bring a *building block approach* to the study of religion. We can and should distinguish, following Durkheim, between religion (the abstract noun), religions (concretely specified), and things (objects, behaviors, ideas) characterized adjectivally as religious, sacred, magical, and/or superstitious. Doing so allows us to adopt what I have called a building block approach to the study of religion that distinguishes between religions and other specific “paths,” on the one hand, and the more elementary phenomena that comprise them, on the other. At the same time, because the building blocks are not specific to paths in the religion domain, however that is specified, this approach allows us to consider the role of the building blocks in other domains as well.

2) What are the buildings blocks/elementary phenomena? The distinguishing feature of the building blocks is their perceived specialness or singularity relative to other things in their class. The building blocks are things that people set apart from other things in their class. We do this all the time: we spot a special stone while walking on the beach, we set apart a magazine because it’s new and we want to read it. While the special stone and the new issues of the magazine matter more to us than the others in their class, they seem pretty ordinary when compared with other special things. Among the things we set apart as special there are some that really matter to us—our children, our god, our country, our team. From this, we can see:

a) That specialness is always relative to a class of things. When we reposition a thing from one class to another, its relative value changes.

b) The things characterized adjectivally by ourselves and those we study as religious, sacred, magical, occult, superstitious, fetishistic and so on implicitly embed claims about what matters, that is, claims regarding what is, or ought to be, valued or devalued.

c) The things that acquire religion-like labels tend to be those that people view as the most special things in the class of special things, i.e. they are high on the list of things that really matter.

d) Membership in the class of things that really matter is disputed and, therefore, unstable. What counts as most valuable or special is highly contested.

e) The class of things that people consider valuable or special includes things that people do not typically characterize in religion-like terms, e.g. their children, their home. The religion-like descriptors are, thus, a variable subset of the broader discursive field of very special or valuable things.

3) How can we identify the things that matter most to people? People constitute the things that matter to them

by marking them as special relative to other things in their class and ranking them as more or less special on continua ranging from the ordinary to the totally singular. They do so through processes of singularization and de-singularization that they express in words and actions. Verbally and behaviorally, people move things back and forth along such continua, positioning them in relation to other things and, at the same time, debating their placement with others. If something is viewed as a singularity, people may set it apart from everything else and protect it with taboos against comparing or mixing it with anything else. The debate within religious studies over whether “religion” (the abstract category) is *sui generis* can be reframed as a debate over where to position “religion” on a continuum from the ordinary to the singular.

4) How do people decide what things matter most to them? What we as scholars think of as religions, philosophies, spiritualities or more generally as “paths” (marga in Sanskrit), could be construed as more or less formalized, more or less coherent *systems of valuation* that people call upon consciously and unconsciously when making claims regarding what happened, what caused it, and whether or why it matters. They are not, however, the only systems of valuation and may be drawn upon by some but not all participants in an action or event. Nor are highly elaborated, formalized, and coherent systems required for people to make such judgments. Indeed, I would suggest that the more formalized and coherent systems stand in explicit tension with less coherent, but more pragmatic, more automatic, seemingly intuitive processes of valuation.

5) What do people do with the things they consider most valuable or special? People incorporate things they consider valuable or special in a variety of different domains or systems, such as ethics, art, religion, philosophy, economics, sports, or politics. Some domains that we typically distinguish in modern societies rely on shared building blocks that people consider special, e.g., feelings of awe or compassion or oneness; concepts of ultimacy (Good, Truth, Beauty, Reality); or special objects, whether natural (gold, diamonds) or created (masks, costumes, statues).

6) How should we go about studying the processes whereby people decide on the meaning of events and determine what matters most? We can start by describing a “site” or “event” in very basic, generic terms, leaving out everything that matters, since this is what is contested and thus what we have to elicit from those involved in the activity from their point of view. Then we can ask:

--What claims are disputants making about what happened or is happening? From their point(s) of view, what forces, powers, or agents had the power to act in this situation? Who or what caused things to turn out as they did?

Taves

--How do they know this? What resources did they draw upon to make their claims? What kind of evidence do they offer to account for what they think happened?

-- From their point of view, what counts, matters, or is at stake in this activity? How much does it matter?

If we focus our research in this way, we wind up in an interdisciplinary space in which we are no longer simply studying "religion," however we define it. Instead we are studying processes that give rise to religions and many other things.

This paper is adapted from the following publications:

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Part I: Changing What Religion Means

Session 2: Revisiting the Secularity/Secularization Question

Nowhere in the study of religion does the approach one take have a greater impact on the conclusion one reaches. Defined as institutions, organizations, and ideology, secularization seems apparent. Seen from the level of everyday life, religion is all around us. This is an excellent place to focus the conversation about what religion is and what this means to how we think about it.

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In a reflection on the many years she spent writing *The Invention of World Religions*, Tomoko Masuzawa remarked that “working alone in the basement [stacks] for a very long time does have a way of making one feel like a loser,” whatever the pleasures of the texts that keep one company or the liveliness of the conversation partners one manages to think up. This is a feeling to which I can give ample testimony. When I first interred myself in the library basement to begin writing *Culture and Redemption* it often seemed to me that I had no interlocutors who were not dead or imaginary, and that on slow days even they would get bored and disappear, leaving me alone to write for some future audience I could only conjure by hoping for. Above ground, however, a rich discussion about secularism was just then starting to build, not only in sociology, where I vaguely remembered having left it, but now too in literature, philosophy, intellectual history, and American religious studies. And so somewhere in the process of writing about American literature, religion, and secularization I had been lifted out of loneliest scholarly solitude and given a place in a vibrant, and continuing, conversation across a number of fields. This is as good and gracious a thing as has ever happened to me as a scholar, and remains so, whatever my part in the disagreements that sustain our discussions. This conference is both an instance and a reminder of my good fortune, and I extend my warmest thanks to Phil Goff and Becky Vasko, together with the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture at IUPUI and Lilly Endowment, for making our gathering possible.

I want here to offer some very tentative thoughts on a strand of the conversation about secularism by which I’m occasionally made uneasy. This is the advent of the “postsecular,” a term we sometimes hear where before we might have heard “postmodern” as a description for a particular condition or predicament of our age. And like “postmodern,” with its hipster flash of *approval* for this state of things, “postsecular” also at times names an answer to, or at least a right way of navigating, the dilemmas it describes. It’s this function of the term that that concerns me here, those places where the problem of the postsecular can turn on a dime and become the solution of the postsecular.

The term postsecular crops up in the social sciences to take note of the situation given in the program for this session of our conference: that secularization seems apparent when “defined as institutions, organizations, and ideology,” yet at “the level of everyday life, religion is all around us.” We can’t describe this as a regression or a return, because these ways of being religious have long been steeped in processes we had come to think of as secularizing: namely, the formation of the nation-state, the rise of the individual, and

the concomitant emergence of liberalism as a privileged subjectivity and mode of governance. And the more carefully we take stock, the more it appears that these secularizing movements in what we think of as the West are themselves bound up in particular religious trajectories. These secularizing currents, which once seemed inevitable, have now on a global stage come to look increasingly contingent and embattled. So our categories no longer work for us as cleanly as they once did. We can’t jettison the secularization thesis entirely, but we need to acknowledge a great deal that it doesn’t explain. The terms “religion” and “secular” themselves often feel imprecise. In this context, the postsecular describes an environment in which available models no longer serve us, and signals the need for new ones. Framed as an analytic dilemma of this sort, the term postsecular stands in for a lack that it does not presume to remedy.

A lot of fruitful work in literary studies and philosophy, meanwhile, considers the implications of this predicament of the postsecular in our experience and scholarly practice. Starting from the premise that the line between the religious and the secular is never simply *there* but always inscribed in particular contexts, under the weight of particular pressures, and in service to particular ends, literary scholar Michael Kaufmann calls for a postsecular literary history that would read both texts and textual scholarship with an eye toward the performance of this divide. From a different vantage point, my colleague Martin Matustik, in philosophy, suggests that the postsecular condition is particularly illuminated by the question of forgiveness, since in a purely secular world, neither the need for nor the impossibility of forgiveness could ever obtain: every evil or affront could be cashed out somehow and made restitution for; everything would have its price. Literary scholar Vincent Pecora also invokes the postsecular as a placeholder for this remainder or excess, for what stubbornly resists the Enlightenment project of translating or reconstituting all of the truth-values of religion in terms of the secular truth-values of science, philosophy, and the arts. Without citing the postsecular by name, Charles Taylor expounds at length on our secular age and its particular ennui, the sense it induces that “somewhere, in some activity, or condition, lies a fullness, a richness; that is, in that place (activity or condition), life is fuller, richer, deeper, more worth while, more admirable, more what it should be.”

For the more philosophically inclined, then, the predicament to which the term postsecular is fastened is likely to be existential as well as analytic. That is, the inadequacy of secular frames to lived experience is felt not simply as a theoretical shortcoming but a crisis of meaning. And this is also the place where the postsecular is occasionally of-

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ferred as a solution to the problem it names: secular spaces of emptiness become occasions for fullness; the crisis of disenchantment becomes an opening to re-enchantment. For those who write in this vein, the postsecular is given as an interpretive stance, a skill set, a method, a tonic, above all a *discovery*. Literary scholar John McClure, for example, describes his *Partial Faiths: Postsecular Fiction in the Age of Pynchon and Morrison* as “a book about unorthodox ways of being religious in the late twentieth century, and at the same time a book about postmodernist literature. What sparked it as an academic project was my sense that there was something hiding in plain sight in a great deal of the most powerful literature of the last fifty years”—among them writings by Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, Ishmael Reed, Toni Morrison, Michele Cliff, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Louise Erdrich. “And that involved a set of narratives about secularized protagonists who undertake a kind of turn to the religious which is not in any simple sense a return, but rather an attempt to discover a space between dogmatic religiosity on the one hand and dogmatic secularism on the other.” Literary scholar Everett Hamner elaborates: “post-secular thinking—and by extension, postsecular fiction—enables interpretive agility about traditional religions and spiritualities by complicating fixed meanings, embracing ambiguities and diverse subcategories, and recognizing how across history and geography, mystically inflected language is regularly inscribed within secular statements of identity and purpose. This theoretical approach eschews not only the apocalyptic rhetoric of extremist positions, but also the assumption that religious and scientific approaches to questions of ultimate meaning are necessarily incompatible.”

Hamner was a member of the 2009-2011 cohort of Young Scholars in American Religion, which Clark Gilpin and I had the honor of joining as mentors. The passage above comes from an essay on contemporary fiction and genetics that Hamner circulated to our group and that will soon appear in the Duke UP journal *American Literature*. After reading the article in proofs a number of our YSAR group were moved to point out that what Hamner commends here as “postsecular thinking,” with its trademark “interpretive agility,” love of “ambiguities,” and eagerness to complicate “fixed meanings,” is simply what most scholarship on American religion aspires to on a good day. (Who after attending this conference would not agree?) Further, we took issue with the implication that the place of religion in a literary work could be reduced to “mystically inflected language” or “questions of ultimate meaning,” or that the space between religion and the secular, whatever these look like at a given moment, was necessarily dangerous and uncharted terrain, a Strait of Scylla and Charybdis to be heroically navigated by the postsecular critic, and not where most of us in fact live out our quotidian lives. (Good-natured as always about our

criticisms, Everett pointed out that he was writing for scholars whose longstanding habits of suspicion, disparagement, and neglect of all things religious could only be assuaged with flattery and tact.)

These reservations aside, however, what postsecular literary critics like Hamner and McClure are up to does look a lot like what many of us who write about American religion are up to, though our sources are more likely to be historical or ethnographic than literary. An interest in off-the-grid spiritualities, in figures who depart from or look beyond institutional religious frameworks in order to live in ways that seem nevertheless driven by religious desires, animates some of the best work in American religion to come in recent years from Jeff Kripal, Leigh Schmidt, Courtney Bender, Catherine Albanese, and many others.

What the postsecular turn in literary studies also brings to mind, more than these other works, is the subfield of academic religious studies that began in the 1960s and 1970s to call itself “religion and literature,” or as I learned to refer to it as a graduate student in one of its last outposts, “R and L.” Proponents of R-and-L tended to share the New Critical formalism of those who preferred their literature neat, unsullied by historical and political context, as well as the Protestant or post-Protestant theological modernism of those who, like Paul Tillich, saw culture and the arts as privileged sites of religious meaning. What these scholars sought in great literature—not always if ever overtly “religious” literature—was the glint it might return to us of Being, Presence, Transcendence, Ultimacy, the Really Real, the Wholly Other, the *Mysterium Tremendum*, and so on. The discovery of this mysterious tincture of the sacred in erstwhile secular literature confirmed the greatness of the work in question, blessing its aspirations to canonicity, while also testifying to the near-definitional persistence of the sacred in a secular age.

Where postsecular criticism most differs from this scholarly disposition is in the former’s friendliness to popular culture and to postmodernism, both of which old-school religion-and-literature all but passed from this world in decrying. Like their R-and-L precursors, postsecular critics seem to be after the sacred in secular form; unlike them, postsecular critics see postmodernism not as the enemy of the sacred but instead as putting the lie to every grand narrative the sacred purportedly exceeds. Here is James S. Diamond, parsing McClure: “The post-secular is thus a consequence of the post-modern or an aspect of it, though the two are by no means coterminous. Both are part of the larger project of undoing the legacy of the Enlightenment. If modernity and the secular represent the retreat or the containment or even the banishing of the sacred from both public life and individual consciousness, the post-secular involves its return, the re-sacralization of human reality.”

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The “sacred,” needless to say, is a notoriously slippery signifier, both empty and full. Some in R-and-L would resort to an almost technical vocabulary (I remember Nathan Scott’s description of Wallace Stevens’s “new nonsupernatural Catholicism”) in order to ward off the everpresent danger of fuzziness in its neighborhood. The newer postsecular critics, however, seem more or less content to reproduce what I think of as the bookstore vernacular of American religion: a mash-up of various traditions and practices flanked by “Magic and the Occult” on one side and “Personal Growth” on the other. The protagonist of postsecular fiction, in McClure’s readings, pivots from the supernatural to the therapeutic and back again by way of the easy mix of religious materials she might draw from. Thus what brings Sue Monk Kidd’s bestselling *The Secret Life of Bees* into the company of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, for McClure, is that the return to the sacred each narrates in the lives of its characters is not, importantly, a movement “back toward some kind of easily recognizable institutional religiosity, but back into modes of being that take into account a multiplicity of religious practices, powers, and postures.” The flickerings of the sacred in such works are “occult” not only in their honoring of unseen powers, but in their remaining hidden, by choice or necessity, below the sightline of institutional faith. This becomes a space of spiritual self-fashioning from the resources of any “number of traditions without the sense of being subjected to any one of those traditions in its dogmatic or doctrinal purity.”

Again, these sorts of spiritual trajectories are by no means confined to the literary. From Catherine Albanese’s emphasis on the combinative impulse and deep metaphysical strain in American religion, to Leigh Schmidt’s restless souls, to Katie Lofton’s Oprah, the mix of religious sampling, magic, and self-help that McClure finds in postsecular literature has also drawn the attention of American religious studies scholars who work in a variety of genres and periods. For McClure, literature remains a privileged site for those who hunger for the sacred today insofar as it offers the most stable form that the free-floating, anti-institutional, and unchurched energies that drive such pursuits are likely ever to assume. “It may be the fate of the kind spirituality that’s interesting to me to live on . . . through the vessel of the arts. I can’t imagine how else it could reproduce itself.”

Another recent study, Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelly’s *All Things Shining: Reading the Western Classics to Find Meaning in a Secular Age*, doesn’t call on the postsecular by name but nevertheless posits a sacred function for literature in a secular age. Dreyfus and Kelly read the Western canon backward in order to retrace the steps by which we arrived at our current predicament of meaninglessness (monotheism, they decide, was the wrong turn) and

to recover from the ancients an openness to an often conflicting plurality of sacred goods that, they suggest, characterized life well lived in Homeric times. This openness, they suggest, is also a receptivity to “whoosh” experiences that add up to no singular truth but which, in shining moments, restore meaning and fullness to the present all the same. Dreyfus and Kelly join McClure in their diagnosis of our age as one in which the winding down of religion has left a crisis of intelligibility in its wake. This is the spiritual jumble that the project of postsecular re-enchantment takes on anew, mining what remains of depleted forms of religion in a creative spirit of bricolage, or discovering the sacred in erstwhile secular forms, like poetry. Or football: “There is no essential difference, really,” say Dreyfus and Kelly, “in how it feels to rise as one in joy to sing the praises of the Lord, or to rise as one in joy to sing the praises of the Hail Mary pass, the Immaculate Reception, the Angels, the Saints, the Friars, or the Demon Deacons.”

It’s nice, I suppose, to see some literary scholars and humanists rethink the place of their discipline within the bounds of the secular, to reject what Charles Taylor calls “the spin of closure which is hegemonic in the academy” and to open themselves to the sacred whoosh. But I worry about these kinds of projects for two reasons. The first has to do with the readiness of thinking of this kind to sacrifice particular histories, content, and contexts to some essential sacred *something*. In defense of this habit one might plausibly contend that the domain of religion, or the vaguer “spirituality,” is the one place where appeals beyond history and language are allowed, indeed required; that we do violence to whatever we mean by religion or spirituality if we fail to take such appeals seriously, to grant ineffability to the ineffable. McClure tells warmly of a colleague in literature who, newly converted with him to the “stubborn persistence of the spiritual imagination” and equally “unready to resort to the old master discourses, secular or sacred, to explain” it, exclaims: “I have no language for what I am beginning to see”—a condition that for McClure sums up the postsecular sensibility for readers and great writers alike. But it’s one thing to admit to the inadequacy of our descriptive vocabularies, another to let an intelligibility gap stand in for an encounter with the divine.

In the end, it seems, no more historical or theological literacy is required for this kind of move than was ever needed in American literary scholarship’s more longstanding habit of “secular presentism” (David Shields’s term) that made of religion always a cover for politics, sexuality, or ideology, made even overtly theological language always about some *other thing*. Now we’re invited to see instances of religious feeling or expression as pointing always to the same thing, something that readers know when they see it, but

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for which they lack words, or for which they supply words like “whoosh.” Dreyfus and Kelly suggest that the sacred charge a fan might experience when his team scores is what someone else who marched on Washington might have felt on hearing Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech. This is a particularly egregious example of the kind of decontextualizing I mean.

What end is served, I wonder, in abstracting the shimmer of numinosity, the rush of feeling, perhaps even the neural or chemical charge identified with the sacred from its place in particular histories, communities, institutions, struggles? Perhaps to mute the various claims these may otherwise have on us by locating the sacred squarely at the level of individual *feeling*. Or, more constructively, to nudge religion and science into friendlier conversation. (Let’s map the neural pathways of prayer!) Whether we want to line ourselves up with these kinds of projects or not, we should probably at least acknowledge that they too have histories, that their conditions of possibility open up along particular vectors, that they locate us in trajectories that mobilize and constrain us in particular ways.

This brings me to my second worry.

For all its deafness to the multiple pasts of religion that impinge on the present, the postsecular disposition toward the sacred in these examples joins a good deal of recent thought in inventing another kind of past, namely, the past of “institutional” (or “orthodox,” or “credal”) religion as a once robust but now impotent guarantor of truth and meaning. Dreyfus and Kelly offer an unusually subtle account of this decline, but the endgame is the same: the exhaustion of religion in (always) its recognizably institutional forms as a source of spiritual plenitude. Religion once provided the sustenance that comes in experiences of self-transcendence, creative bliss, or divine grace—witness, among the testimonies of the western classics, Paul’s conversion, or Augustine’s, Dante’s heavenly vision, Luther’s faith. Sadly, the moment for such revelatory moments has passed: not simply because, as Charles Taylor implies, the world after 1500 is just *different* from the world that went before, but because the meaning-making possibilities the monotheistic tradition itself nurtured, in its focus on the singular truth of the Christian incarnation and then on singular truth, period, eventually wore themselves down to naught. Where Taylor and Dreyfus/Kelly agree is in their insistence that the secular age *is* radically incommensurable with the supposed age of faith. Now even the vestigial believers among us can no longer assume, as our ancestors did, that there is one truth that satisfies us, one right way of being in the world. Our predicament would be unimaginable, say Dreyfus and Kelly, in the world of Medieval Christendom, where the Church answered all of our questions before they could even be for-

mulated. Precisely because it once gave us everything and now delivers so little, so this and like accounts run, religion as most of us recognize it is no longer a live option.

To which one might reply, *of course* we inhabit religious affiliations, structures, “moods” (a favorite Dreyfus/Kelly term), and so on differently than our ancestors did. So too, it seems not outrageous to assume, did they. We believe differently, act differently, confront different realities, possibilities, and dilemmas than those who went before us. So did they. Why do we instead imagine that their spiritual lives were less encumbered, their questions less complex or pressing? Or that those around us now whose relation to religion more closely resembles those forms we project onto the past are likewise unmoving, stalled at the same unreflecting stage? The myth of a once replete, now moribund religious past not only obscures the different pasts that inhere in and constrain the present. It also assumes a developmental model of religion that, as Bob Orsi and others have pointed out at this conference and elsewhere, continues to drive the study of religion and to shape the way we talk about it in and beyond academia. If those of us in religious studies departments have relied on and perpetuated the developmental model as much as anyone, I hope we’re also in a position to recognize which of its assumptions serve us poorly when we see them reproduced in other kinds of work. I don’t need to tell this audience that those for whom religion (for lack of a word) remains a live option are a sizable and disparate group. Or that there are thoughtful people for whom the mystery of, say, the incarnation, or of monotheism, is not exhausted, for whom a Hail Mary really is different from a Hail Mary Pass, a ritual bath from a midnight swim—for whom, moreover, these latter pleasures may well score higher on a given scale of neural whoosh, but who might also agree that this isn’t really the point.

The “post-” of postsecular implies, if barely, a privileged relation to the past. To be post- is to imagine that we’ve achieved something, that now we get what our forebears didn’t, or got wrong, that we’ve worked through what they, damningly, left undone or unthought. For all our talk at this conference of “winners” and “losers” in the religious marketplace, however, we’ve reflected very little on what the winners have that’s worth gaining, and even less on the content of what is supposedly lost. This is not an argument for returning to the past as the only ground of whatever we might legitimately study or advocate for, but for moving forward with more humility and historical awareness. Otherwise we risk becoming no more than trackers of trends, or exhibits of them.

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Discussions of secularization tend to focus on the process of modernization. The classical “secularization thesis” is simply this: modernization produces secularization. Of course, the complexities of this thesis lead to many measurement and theoretical dilemmas. How do you measure secularization? Does modernization happen the same way in different societies? The questions are endless.

Social theorists have done a very good job of explaining why religion is not compatible with modernity. I will briefly state two perspectives. First, Peter Berger explains why religion is not *philosophically* compatible with modernity. For him, the modern world destroys the “sacred canopy”—an ideological culture in which religious and philosophical beliefs are so “taken-for-granted” as to be unquestioned and woven into the fabric of daily interactions, rituals, and language.

The modern world brings technological and communication innovations which result in ideological pluralism. In turn, this creates a “crisis of credibility” for the believer. No longer is religion “taken-for granted” but it is directly challenged by the fact that people have different beliefs. According to Berger’s earlier work, the modern individual doesn’t know what to believe anymore and descends into skepticism. I think this is a convincing argument and everyone in this room probably knows someone who fits this description.

Second, Emile Durkheim gives us a similarly powerful argument why religion is not *politically* compatible with modernity. For Durkheim, the modern world is mainly characterized by a growing division of labor. With more fields of study and areas of specialization, there are no longer any “Renaissance Men”—those intellectuals who can bring all our various tangents of knowledge into some coherent structure. Similarly and more importantly, no single organization can run society—it is simply too complex.

Consequently, the church cannot fulfill the political demands of the modern era. It must delegate. And in delegating the church eventually loses its power and influence over an increasingly expanding litany of activities. This is what most secularization theorists point to as proof positive that secularization is real and sweeping the globe. The point is theoretically clear and empirically powerful.

So we know why religion is *not* compatible with modernity. Berger and Durkheim, to name just two of a vast number of eminent theorists, have already told us why. Still, religion persists in the modern era. I would like us to think about a different question for a moment. That is:

How is religion compatible with modernity?

Philosophical Compatibility

Some social theorists make the claim that ideology was an invention of the modern era. I think this means that ideology became a conscious means to legitimate governments and motivate large masses of people. Of course, pre-modern cultures had ideologies but, if we are to believe Berger, these ideologies were so monolithic that they were essentially invisible.

In contrast, ideologies become extremely self-conscious in the modern era and individuals tend to overtly self-identify with an ideology. People have strong feelings about whether they are “conservative” or “liberal” or “evangelical” or “secular.” In this way, the philosophical crisis of credibility that came out of ideological pluralism didn’t generate disillusionment as much as force individuals into ideological stances. In fact, extremism is a product of ideological pluralism.

Consequently, modernity can be philosophically compatible with religion, because it creates an ideological culture in which the individual struggles to find meaning and purpose. And what better way to get purpose and meaning than religion? Religious ideologies specialize at providing answers to questions emerging from existential angst and philosophical confusion.

In theory, religions should do very well in the modern era. Of course, they must cede territory to the sciences (Creationism debates are simply ridiculous and will eventually die). But if religious ideologies don’t try to be empirical or scientific, they have almost a monopoly on personal questions of meaning and purpose. Of course, they ultimately may be outflanked by varieties of secular humanism or secular nationalism. But often humanistic and nationalistic philosophies begin to sound pretty mystical even while claiming secularity (think of Marxist-Leninism or the cult of Kim Jong-Il or the eschatology of National Socialism). Secular ideologies often drift into religious language seamlessly.

The ultimate attractiveness of religion in the modern era is ironically its claim to ultimate Truth—a claim which is supposed to be killed off by post-modernism. But humans still seem to want answers to questions like “why are we here?” and “what happens when I die?” In the end, secular or scientific answers (or a lack of answers) to these kinds of questions are probably not going to be as attractive as religious ones.

For this reason and others, I think religion is philosophically compatible with modernity as long as religious ideologies stay where science cannot touch them—namely, in the supernatural realm.

Political Compatibility

Clearly, most political institutions in the modern or post-industrial world are secular. Modern governments are not

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run based on sacred texts but rather complex legal codes. It makes little difference whether the head of the IRS is an Evangelical or militant atheist because he or she is tasked with a job so bureaucratically and legally complicated as to make religious beliefs secondary. Almost certainly, this is the case for most modern professional occupations—they simply require so much standardized training that their activities exceed the scope of religious doctrines.

But we know that religion is somewhat compatible with modern politics simply by the fact that political leaders still utilize religious language. Analyses of religious rhetoric in American politics indicate that it has been on the rise since the Reagan era. And American politicians must report a religious affiliation and indicate some level of faith if they want to be elected.

But to what extent are these things really that important? My best guess is that the political influence of various religious groups and religious ideologies fluctuates in response to a host of factors. When a) political parties can easily categorize voters' interests based on religion, or when b) religious rhetoric fits the style and needs of political elites, we can expect that religion will be a factor in elections and policy proposals.

Two examples in the American context spring to mind. The Supreme Court decision of *Roe v. Wade* made religion politically very important in the United States. The Roman Catholic Church along with Evangelical Protestants mobilized around the issue of abortion. In turn, the Republican Party assured themselves of millions of votes based on the religious convictions of these voters. In this instance, the Roman Catholic Church prioritized abortion over a number of other political positions (like being pro-labor, pro-union, pro-welfare) which would have led many Catholics to the Democratic Party. But because the issue of abortion touched directly on a core religious tenet of the Church, political allegiances we re-aligned.

Similarly, I have conducted research showing that Americans' religious beliefs were the best predictors of whether they supported President Bush's decision to invade Iraq. My sense is that Bush's religious rhetoric, such as identifying an "Axis of Evil," appealed strongly to a certain kind of religious believer. These believers accepted Bush's framing of events because they already understood American foreign policy as a battle of good versus evil. In this instance, religious rhetoric helped to defend a foreign policy decision which was made, most likely, for non-religious reasons.

These two examples indicate that religion can be politically important in modern democratic states, not because any church holds political power but because secular political elites will always attempt to use religion when it suits their ends. Elections naturally polarize issues and if can-

didates can utilize existing religious ideologies to polarize voters, they will.

Final Comments

In summary, I think there are many reasons to think that religion is *not* compatible with modernity. But these reasons do not predict the death of religion—they mainly indicate that religion's influence has and will continue to shift with changes in modernization.

In fact, it seems to me that the modern setting might even make certain religious ideologies more appealing to individuals, because they provide meaning and purpose when these things are no longer taken for granted. In turn, we should expect the political and social importance of religion to ebb and flow as social movements, political elites, and international coalitions hunt for guidance and legitimation in a world teeming with ideological pluralism.

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For much of the 20th century a meta-narrative in sociology was what might be loosely called “secularization theory.” While there were a number of versions of “the” theory, there was a central thread—the development of modern society from tightly knit, faith-based communities into differentiated societies where authority is based on rationality and scientific naturalism. Liberals generally saw this as “progress” and conservatives described it as “declension,” but both saw the general trajectory similarly.

Beginning in the mid-1980s, a series of sociological publications began to pronounce secularization theory “dead”—from Jeff Hadden’s Presidential address to the Southern Sociological Society in 1986 to Finke and Stark’s often acerbically worded manifesto in 1992 to Steve Warner’s recounting of a “new paradigm” in 1993. Something of a triumphal moment for some among this intellectual movement occurred when Peter Berger, whose books such as *The Sacred Canopy* and *The Heretical Imperative* provided the theoretical grounding for some versions of secularization thinking, seemed to recant; Berger decided that his perspective on Western Europe, which had been the paradigmatic case for modernity and secularism, might in fact be the historical outlier as a global region.

In response, proponents of what had been the reigning paradigm in sociological understanding of religion and modernity—that the modern world was inherently secularizing—fired back with gusto (see Steve Bruce’s 1999 and 2002 books). While acknowledging the resilience of religion in the U.S., and occasionally trying to offer emendations to secularization theory, secularizationists among sociologists of religion doggedly maintained the arc of history supported their understandings. By the mid-1990s what had been a more-or-less settled issue among social scientific scholars for half-a-century was a cottage industry of debate (to which, I admit, I contributed—although not as a primary combatant). However, there were aspects of the debate that sometimes took on a kind of “is not-is too” character, producing more heat than light.

In my view, the year 1994 was auspicious for bringing some clarity to these issues. Jose Casanova published a theoretically sophisticated and empirically comparative book called *Public Religions in the Modern World*. He argued that secularization debates too often conflated three processes: religious decline; differentiation between religious and secular institutions; and a privatization and marginalization of religion to the social sidelines. While institutional differentiation was unarguable in the West and many other parts of the world, all other dimensions did not necessarily flow from that. And differentiation did not happen everywhere, even if privatization did develop. While in many places re-

ligion has privatized and sometimes been marginalized, this was not a one-way linear process. Indeed, Casanova argued that what made the contemporary scene interesting was the “de-privatization” of religion in the public sphere. Religion isn’t going away, but the de-privatization came out of a context of institutional differentiation.

Also in 1994, Mark Chaves published “Secularization as Declining Religious Authority” in the journal *Social Forces*. Like Casanova, Chaves pushed to the side whether religion qua religion is “declining” or disappearing. Rather, Chaves urged us to think of secularization as a decline or restriction in the scope of religious authority. When religious figures and religious institutions have less capacity to exert legitimate authority, whether in politics or personal lives, then secularization is evident—even if levels of belief and behavior continue to be robust. Chaves argued that this could be measured at the institutional or societal levels, and these could vary independently, producing a four-fold heuristic in which one can observe religion acting differently among different people in different settings.

What was notable for me about these two efforts were: 1) they disentangled different dimensions of religion in society so as to break up any overly unified notions of “religion” and disrupt the linear notion of social and religious change; 2) they separated religion as the “explanandum” from religion as the “explanandum”; and 3) they created models of understanding that shift the focus toward religion in its public roles and as a cultural and political authority.

This theoretical disentangling is all the more important fifteen years later for a number of reasons. First, for those interested in the US, the interplay of religion and politics continues to be vibrant as well as evolving, while at the same time religious diversity explodes with both new immigrants from around the world and seemingly endless innovations within the religious traditions that already comprise the American religious mosaic. Second, by moving attention to religion as more of an “independent” variable rather than the “dependent” variable, we can investigate rather than assume the ways in which religion matters in the world—removing religion from just being a passive “effect” at the mercy of larger social forces. And, most pertinent to the theme of our gathering here, it allows us to consider different cultural understandings of “religion” and “spirituality” as part and parcel of these changing social dynamics. In this way we can see religion declining, persevering, and transforming simultaneously, depending upon where we look and what we want to know.

I believe this last point is particularly pertinent in the contemporary US, and particularly to our session on religion, spirituality, and secularization. The American religious

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“field” is marked by an institutional field in which organizational forms themselves are becoming more fluid and command less authority and loyalty among many Americans. So many recent studies of American religion—such as Jerome Baggett’s *Sense of the Faithful*, show that while Americans remain involved with and committed to their religious communities, the scope and binding power of organized religious authorities is often quite constrained. For many Americans religious faith has become much more of a spiritual *bricolage* assembled in personal identity work or within small group or congregational settings. More and more religious institutions cannot sanction personal behavior, or control inter-faith marriages, or enforce cultural norms on social mores or folkways.

I argue not for the fabled isolated actor of post-modernism (or post-war “mass society theory” for that matter), assembling an endlessly plastic series of identities based on whim, strategic purpose, ideological resources, or alienated *weltanschauung*. Religious identity, like other identities, is done in social contexts, within interactions, and with and against others who read categories only what subjects themselves perceive as experiences. Thus, religious identity, whatever it is, happens in social settings that are more or less organized, and often within institutions that seek to sanction authority and authorities.

In that regard, religious authorities have a declining scope of control, a powerful definition of secularization according to Chaves. Much of the religious thought that is often raw material for identities comes not from institutional traditions or legitimated authorities, but is picked up in many places in people’s lives. Much of the “cultural power” that is wielded in public politics comes not from traditional religious authorities, but from social movements and other special purpose groups that have less staid institutional forms. And as Robert Putnam and David Campbell recent demonstrated, when political identities and religious identities conflict in Americans’ congregational affiliations, most Americans are likely to change religious congregations to one more in accord with their political commitments. Thus, religious authority is more restricted in public and private life.

This does not make religious authority unique. We live in an historical moment, and in a cultural tradition, in which cultural authority is under populist attack. The attack comes from both the left and right, with the vilified elites and the populist heroes changing accordingly. But maintaining institutional authority—and with it the right to define identities—is increasingly difficult in the U.S.

However, this is not a simple tale of decline or restriction. The flourishing of “spirituality” and other innovative forms of lived religion are pushing spiritualized understandings of the world well outside of established institutional boundar-

ies. The bounded rationality of Enlightenment science and philosophy is undermined on both the right and left, along with other attacks on expertise and experts. Science and scientists have not supplanted religious authority in terms of being able to establish and police identity categories. It is not just institutionalized religious authority that is experiencing a diminished scope in American culture. Thus, one result is that there has been a “sacralization” or at least a spiritualizing of areas previously marked off by rationalism and a particular version of “science.”

A nuanced and more nimble concept of secularization is needed to understand these perhaps ironically paired—but I believe empirically complementary—dynamics. Secularization and sacralization have both worked to undermine institutional elites and their cultural authority, leaving people in the pews or in the streets more room for appropriation and adaptation. “Organizing” religious identity is more precarious, involves more agency, and has less certain outcomes.

In sum, the response to secularization as concept and theory hinges of the question “what do we want to know?” Are we interested in how people practice their faith, or how people vote? Do we want to know how small groups of people work in face-to-face settings, or about the weight institutions can bring to public discourses and issues. These levels of analysis generate different questions leading to different answers, and have differing implications for how religion ‘works’ in society. “What do we want to know?”

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Part II: Changing Religion in a Changing Culture

Session 3: Religion's role in political identity

This session is intentionally broad and those that follow are not mutually exclusive. But recent political battles over sexuality issues or Islam and the Koran or heated partisan rhetoric need to be considered in terms of changing understandings of religion in American society.

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In 2008, Tony Jones declared a new form of American Christianity arising from the modern, American church of the 20th century. While the modern church had been busy endowing denominations, hospitals, publishing houses, and universities, the postmodern, emergent church has sprouted from the cracks of the old denominations, promoted by the disaffection with established elites in religion, politics, and media. Emergent Christianity can be defined, as Jones does, as “the Christianity believed and practiced by the Emergents,” which is not surprisingly very similar to how the APSA defines political science—it’s what political scientists do. It may have a more important definition that is rooted in process. Emergents are in a relational network concerned with the complexities of Christianity, they reject foundationalisms of the left and right, they embrace equality and reject hierarchy (though the coterie of lecturers and authors cannot be dismissed), and thus engage in intensive discussion over what it means to be Christian. Emergent is precisely the right term for this process given that the definition of what it means to be Christian wells up as the product of those conversations. Emergence, in the scientific usage, means that a collective decision, like norm generation, how fast cars are driven, settlement patterns, are generated by a complex process of social interaction without, in collaboration with, or perhaps in opposition to attempts to manage the system. Others might call this process deliberative democracy, which is where the epithet that emergents are “liberals” comes from.

But are American Christians becoming *differently* religious as Jones claims? And what does this have to do with political identity? The argument I would like to make is that Jones is both right and wrong. He is wrong to set up the rest of American Christianity as such a straw man. In fact, emergence is everywhere and that explicit commitment to the principles underlying emergence are vibrant across the spectrum of American religion, even if most clergy would not explicitly adopt that label. But, Jones is right in shining a bright light on the complex social processes of generating faith and politics, whether deliberative or not. There are 3, of course, important lessons to draw about religion’s effect on political choices from thinking about emergent religion that I will outline in brief. But first a bit of data.

In the latest round of the Cooperative Clergy Study, coordinated by Corwin Smidt, only 7 percent of clergy identified with the label “emerging church,” ranging from 14% of Disciples of Christ, 5% of Assemblies of God pastors, to 1% of SBC clergy. Thus, in “modern” denominations, there are a non-trivial number of churches identified with the movement. But that measure is superficial and if there’s any lesson from the emergent movement, it is that labels are arbitrary and their meaning is up for debate.

Instead, what matters most is practice. And the available evidence strongly suggests that the principles underlying the emergent movement are widely shared. One important difference between the modern and postmodern church is the degree of emphasis on discussion. Explicit engagement between people is the central act in post-modern gatherings, while the traditional worship service is, at least rhetorically, the central act in modern churches. That said, modern churches are filled with opportunities for social interaction and a good deal of work of mine and of others suggests this is where the rubber meets the road—where social influence takes place, where religion is linked to politics (e.g., Djupe and Gilbert 2009; Wuthnow 1993).

In several surveys now, I and various colleagues have asked clergy about the norms that govern formal discussion in their churches (Neiheisel, Djupe, and Sokhey 2009; Djupe and Calfano 2009; Djupe and Olson 2010). These weren’t open ended questions because we wanted to capture their degree of commitment to deliberative democracy in adult education sessions, where politics is most likely to be discussed. We asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following:

- We would explicitly encourage participants to think seriously about the opinions of others.
- It would be essential that all those present participate.
- It would be essential that a range of views are presented.
- It would be essential for participants to learn how our values apply to social/political issues.
- It would be essential for participants to learn how to talk through their differences in opinion.

The results were quite surprising. Using survey data from the Cooperative Clergy Study, coordinated by Corwin Smidt, we found that of the 9 Protestant denominations in the study, all of their clergy averaged “agreement” with these principles (see Djupe and Calfano 2010). The lowest support was found among Assemblies of God clergy and the highest among Disciples of Christ clergy, but they all agreed. Self-described emerging churches were more committed to these principles, but only by about 6 percent on average. And one trick is that denominational churches are much more likely to offer adult education opportunities for deliberation than non-denominational churches—in direct contrast to Jones’ claim. So, given these patterns, what are the implications for religion and political identity?

Lesson 1: Just what it means to be a good Christian is most often a negotiated process. In a deliberative environment, it may not be obvious what participants should do, though the process is generally thought to lead to consensus by directing discussion toward common ground (Guttmann

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and Thompson 1996). Thus, deliberative participants bring predispositions to the table that interact with what other participants bring and their discussions are informed and shaped by the broader information environment composed of the issues, events, social contexts like the congregation, and elites of society. Though we can point to some central tendency for the congregation, in reality there are a number of outcomes for the groups that meet within congregations and the outcome may in fact be diversity (see e.g., Djupe and Gilbert 2009).

Lesson 2: Clergy may not have great influence in congregations committed to deliberative norms and engaged in deliberative practices. Indeed, the point of deliberation is to reify equality and reciprocity (Guttmann and Thompson 1996). Research in political science has shown that discussion across lines of disagreement tends to inhibit the influence of elites (Druckman and Nelson 2003). But even in non-ideal deliberative settings, more social interaction should shortcut clergy influence. Thus, if clergy are going to have an influence, it will be by arranging conversations and shaping the issues at stake. They may not control the outcome, but they can play important roles in jumpstarting the process (Djupe and Gilbert 2009). But, clergy also tend to be interested in representing their views in public, especially when they are underrepresented (Djupe and Gilbert 2003; Olson 2000). This serves to promote deliberation at a level above the congregation.

Lesson 3: A key norm of emergent, deliberative, liberal gatherings is openness to others and their ideas. Success in the religious economy is contingent on balancing welcoming others to join while maintaining boundaries toward the world and keeping their members there (Finke and Stark 2005). But research has shown that inclusivity is the religious value much more commonly communicated to congregants compared to exclusivity and communicating inclusivity tends to lead people to consider the interests of others as they compose their policy opinions on such diverse issues such as immigration, gay rights, and US foreign policy (Djupe and Calfano forthcoming). Thus, the process may lead to diversity, but the process itself is governed by norms that encourage particular viewpoints.

The challenge and claims of the emergent movement have given us a new opportunity to examine the practice of American religion. More specifically, we are tasked to ask about democratic practice in places where people meet face to face to confront their disagreements about religion and its implications. These are not just procedural concerns, but may have significant implications for how religion generates support for democracy, shapes the political choices made, and forms the boundaries by which people define the ingroup and outgroup—all fundamental for shaping an individual's political identity.

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Historians of antiquity are quite adept at making sense of any aspect of ancient Roman life while always mindful that Rome was an empire par excellence.¹ In our own day, it seems we have an unprecedented volume of data to absorb for understanding the political reality of American empire and its relationship to religion, but we are short on paradigms for mapping the terrain. This, despite the fact that we live in the most powerful empire that human history has ever known. In light of the Islamist versus Western binary that now dominates American political life, I want to propose **seven** observations that should inform how we interpret American religion and politics with respect to empire.

I

Christianity and Islam, for most of their history, have been religions of empire. This means they have been centrally and formally associated with empires as the official religions of imperial states. For example, Christian and Muslim imperialisms generated frequent and expansive contacts and exchanges with demographic “others” mediated through differential fields of power—conquerors dominating conquered peoples and territories. As a result, Christianity and Islam have developed elaborate semiotic and pragmatic traditions to nurture expansionism and to make intelligible and palatable the radically uneven power relations germane to imperialism.

II

Christianity and Islam have functioned as *civilizations*.² Of utmost importance here is the need to transcend the fanciful notion that Christianity is essentially a creedal religion in contrast to other religions like Judaism that putatively function more as a way of life. Representing Christianity as essentially cerebral—as a religion of belief—is itself an imperial ideology whose currency undergirded the supremacist derision of Muslims, Jews, so-called “heathens” and even Catholic Christians and reached its height in the nineteenth-century taxonomies of religion influenced by Victorian anthropology.³ The actual historical record of Christianity offers a very different account, however. For at least the past millennium, being a Christian has functioned *inter alia* to mean being a member of a particular civilization with a distinctive heritage. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that for centuries Christianity has functioned as an *ethnic* religion. Especially in the wake of the Crusades, being a Christian meant striving to live under the political rule of Christian empires and not Muslim empires. It also meant not being a Jew.⁴ In the western Mediterranean lands, Christian identity fused geography and biology to forge meanings of being white European. This Christian matrix of identity is precisely the source of the very peculiar contemporary discourse of the “West” and “Western identity.” Being Western is not

predicated on adherence to a particular set of dogmas per se so much as it is on belonging to a particular civilization—that is, tethered to the genealogy of a specific society’s heritage. This is the cultural form through which Muslim and Christian identities have imprinted secular societies.⁵

III

The contemporary US American state has been indelibly shaped by the troublesome heritage of *Christian nationalism*, as shaped by its imperial history. What is the nature of this influence? Christianity, in its most dominant expression, desires an empire. And the US American Empire continues to signify its brand of civilization as that of Christianity. This should not lead us to conclude that Christianity is being vaunted covertly as the official, established religion of the US. Although myriad groups of American Christians would like to make that happen, such simply is not the case. Rather, I mean something more far-reaching, well beyond the issue of established religion. I am suggesting that the US American Empire proceeds as the cultural expression par excellence of a Christian heritage that has for most of its history repeatedly found its *raison d’être* in an imperial struggle against Islam.

IV

By the mid-twentieth century, Islam had developed an anticolonial posture. Through myriad pan-Islamic movements such as that championed by Mohammed Duse Ali of Egypt, a fundamental transformation occurred whereby political Islam most frequently represented dissent against Western imperialism, a condition that made Islam especially attractive to African Americans who viewed themselves as victims of internal colonialism in the US.

V

If the chief political adversary of US America is Islamic fundamentalism or more precisely Islamism—the aspirations of political Islam—then what is the other “other” that completes this binary? There is considerable evidence for identifying three major strands in this other that buttress the American Empire’s political-religious counter to Islamism: (1) the Western tradition of political liberalism (qua liberal democracy); (2) the strident and perduring Christian nationalist movement that religious historians have most frequently associated with Christian evangelicalism since the rise of US American fundamentalism; and (3) the imperatives of whiteness as a social identity anchored in the emergence of the US American Empire as a white settler-colonial state.⁶ When we keep in mind the cultural role that Christianity and Islam have played as civilizations, the ties that bind these three strands should become more evident. For instance, what is at stake is *the idea of a way of life* that derives from a Western civilization whose topography is mapped through

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a genealogy of Christian civilizations or polities, and this way of life—this heritage—we are told, must be preserved at all costs.

VI

The political energy and religious linkages that sustain American empire are not chiefly the products of US American extremists. It is not the extreme but the *mainstream* that sustains the exercise of US empire.

VII

The US American Empire is an *imperial democracy*. In other words, it is a democratic empire. This means that in strictly formal terms it is governed by the people, the *dem-os*. But democracies function as *ethnocracies*. So, when the people are in charge, it becomes more important than ever to determine who is an insider and who is alien to the body politic. Given the very worldly, material conditions—the geopolitics of scarce resources—that have shaped the post-9/11 state of American empire, the vitriole, violence, and unrestrained invective marking widespread dissent against an Islamic center near Ground Zero during the summer of 2010 will likely stand as only the beginning of a new phase of hostility and turmoil that will mark the public interface of American religion and politics.⁷

Notes

1. Among the best of these is Mary Beard et al., *Religions of Rome*. 2 vols. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Or, with specific attention to Christianity, see Richard Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).

2. Both Christianity and Islam have for centuries engendered the idea of membership in a discrete civilization. It is not true, however, that Christianity and Islam are empirically discrete, antithetical civilizations. In historical terms, the East-versus-West (the corollary of Christian-versus-Muslim) binary makes no sense. For instance, Western Christian philosophy was a direct product of Arab-Muslim philosophy. It was in response to figure like Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd that the Italian theologian Thomas Aquinas developed his scholastic philosophy. Not only philosophy, but also historiography (as opposed to chronology), sociology (per the influence of Ibn Khaldun), the university institution, the use of Arabic numerals, and what is termed modern mathematics (algebra and calculus)—all of which function as markers of Western civilization—are derived from Arab-Muslim civilization, in which Christianity fully shared. In fact it is precisely because Christians and Muslims lived in the same world—the Mediterranean world—and inhabited the same polities and cultural systems that the ideology of not being the other gained currency. Thus, the alterity-ridden claims of Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington yield much heat but little light on the historical nature of Christian and Islamic civilizations. See Lewis, *What Went Wrong?: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (New York: Oxford University, 2002); and Samuel P. Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World*

Order (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996). For a provocative, critical response to these authors, see Geraldine Heng, “Holy War Redux: The Crusades, Futures of the Past, and Strategic Logic in the ‘Clash’ of Religions,” *PMLA* 126, no. 2 (March 2011): 422–31. Thanks to Douglas Harrison of Florida Gulf Coast University for pointing me to Heng’s work.

3. Among the best studies of this fusion of religious taxonomy, European colonialism, and the influences of Victorian anthropology is that by Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). Concomitant to this imperial formation of the comparative study of religions was the role of European philology, especially under the influence of Silvestre de Sacy and Ernest Renan. The field began to explain language as a lens into the spirit or essence of a race or civilization (Semitic versus white European). See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

4. This is why, for example, Immanuel Kant construed his anti-Semitic musings concerning modernity through the idea of a *Christian West* juxtaposed to a Jewish Other dwelling in the midst of Europe. By this logic, the Jew could not be included in the modern polity (the body politic) because the racial character of the Jew—regressive and ethnically particular—was incompatible with the putatively universalizing racial character of white Europeans. See J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Jonathan Schorsch, *Swimming the Christian Atlantic: Judeoconvertos, Afroiberians and Amerindians in the Seventeenth Century*, 2 vols., (Boston: Brill, 2009); and Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 2 vols., (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1992).

5. See Mark D. Meyerson, *The Muslims of Valencia in the Age of Fernando and Isabel: Between Coexistence and Crusade* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

6. The linkages between religion and militarism are striking and continue constantly to generate disturbing dynamics. In October of 2003, for instance, Army Lieutenant General William G. “Jerry” Boykin began addressing numerous churches on the subject of religion, terrorism, and national security. He repeatedly asserted that the US was a target of terrorism because it was a Christian nation; he insisted, moreover, that the US could defeat Islamic terrorists only if “we come at them in the name of Jesus.” Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld affirmed Boykin’s right to make such claims, even in uniform. “Pentagon Intelligence Officer Says War on Terrorism is Battle Against Satan,” Associated Press, 16 October 2003. Chalmers Johnson, *Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Republic* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), 4.

7. “September 11 Attack Aftermath: Islamic Center Near Ground Zero Advances.” Facts On File World News Digest: n. pag. World News Digest. Facts On File News Services, 5 Aug. 2010. Web. 1 June 2011. <http://www.2facts.com/article/2010525220>. New York City was not alone. Anti-Muslim rallies also appeared in California, Wisconsin and Tennessee to protest the construction of mosques during 2010. As one member of a Florida-based group devoted to defending Western civilization against Islam expressed,

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“As a mother and a grandmother, I worry.... I learned that in 20 years with the rate of the birth population, we will be overtaken by Islam, and their goal is to get people in Congress and the Supreme Court to see that Shariah is implemented. My children and grandchildren will have to live under that.” See Laurie Goodstein, “Across Nation, Mosque Projects Meet Opposition,” *New York Times* 7 August 2010. The growing manifestation of anti-Islamic populism has even included efforts to create a preemptive ban against Sharia law in Oklahoma and other states. See “Judge Issues Permanent Injunction on Oklahoma Sharia Law Ban,” CNN, November 29, 2010 <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/US/11/29/oklahoma.sharia.law/>.

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In 2007 my colleague Joshua Mitchell published a paper in *Journal of Politics* titled “Religion is not a preference.” In his paper, he went on to argue that religion is not a value, it is not a choice, and it is not an identity—and therefore it was nearly impossible for social scientists to study religion. My coauthors on my response to his paper were Ted Jelen, from a long line of Polish Catholics, and Kenneth Wald, whose relatives had numbers tattooed on their arms in concentration camps. Religion is clearly more than an identity, but it can be a central part of political identities for many Americans.

Although many Americans have ties to particular congregations, denominations, or faith traditions, many deeply religious Americans may not have the kinds of religious identities that social scientists study (see Huddy 2001 for a discussion of social and political identity). For social scientists, identities are crucial for organizing the political world, in structuring cognition and affect, and in mobilizing collective action. Identities help people decide who is “us” and who is “other.”

A growing number of Americans do not identify with any particular denomination, and those who do often tell more complicated stories in longer interviews. In a recent research trip to King William County, Virginia, I asked a handful of citizens about their religious identities. I heard a few people mention denominations, such as Episcopalians or Baptists or A.M.E. Others mentioned broad theological categories such as evangelical or Christian. But many people told me various stories such as these:

“I used to be a Methodist but my uncle got me going to Sharon Baptist Church.”

“I am really a Lutheran but I really like the pastor in the Episcopal church.”

“I am a Baptist but I go with my husband most of the time to Catholic services.”

Clearly the religious particularism that divided many denominations and congregations in the early 20th century has dissipated somewhat by 2011. In the 1940s my father abandoned his ties to the Baptist church to become a Methodist to marry. But my parents were accepting as I dated those of other Christian denominations, and finally those of other Abrahamic faiths. David Campbell reports that today more than 89% of Americans say that a person who is not of their faith can go to heaven—perhaps partially because more than three in four say that one of their closest friends is from a different faith tradition.

Political scientists often focus on theological identities. Surveys show that many political elites understand terms such as “fundamentalist” and “Pentecostal” although they often use them in ways that might annoy theologians. But

surveys show that the mass public does not fully understand these terms, so that significant portions of those who call themselves fundamentalists also believe in reincarnation and seldom read the Bible. Pew surveys show that some who identify as Pentecostal do not report having experienced or even witnessed the spiritual gifts that define this tradition, while many others have them frequently but do not identify as Pentecostal or charismatic.

For political scientists, religious identities matter when they are mobilized for politics. Political elites are constantly seeking cleavages to either win votes or to divide the coalition of their opponents, as Legee and Wald describe. One of the more impressive of these efforts occurred between 1978-1996, when Republican elites sought to build the Christian Right.

In 1978, conservative Christians were divided by religious identities. At one meeting of the Ohio Moral Majority, the sermon was titled “Roman Catholic Church, Harlot of Rome.” The sermon went on to say that people who spoke in tongues were controlled by Satan, and that Methodists should stop pretending to be Christian. By the end it was clear that heaven would be a small place populated by some but not all members of the Baptist Bible Fellowship.

The first wave of the Christian Right accepted religious particularism as given, and then built separate organizations to appeal to different groups. The Moral Majority, Christian Voice, the Religious Roundtable and others had particular theological and denominational targets. This made good sense for a movement seeking to grow rapidly, because denominations have important infrastructure.

But the second generation of the Christian Right sought to build ties across theological boundaries. They trained their activists to say that we will learn who gets to heaven in due course, but for now we can work together to decide who gets into the Senate. In the early 1990s, a fundamentalist activist told me proudly that she had a Catholic in her home to work for Mike Farris. She hoped to convert her away from the Catholic cult. Ten years later her new friend was still a Catholic, but she was now convinced that Catholics were true Christians, and that her friend would be in heaven.

Although political elites were trying to use religious identity to build political identities, in the end there was a reciprocal effect. Once conservative Christians came to believe that seculars and liberals and Democrats were undermining America and Christianity, it was far easier to work together. By the late 2000s, Carin Robinson showed in her dissertation that conservative evangelicals were more influenced by messages from Catholics than from Methodists.

The success of this political effort has begun to haunt evangelical churches. Younger evangelicals are far less ob-

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servant than their parents, and many are worried that their churches have come to see the country as a battleground instead of a mission ground. Younger evangelicals also worry that their churches are too hostile to their GLBT friends. This reminds us that there are important differences between pews and precincts, and that religious leaders must weigh the exercise of their prophetic voice against lost opportunities for spiritual voice.

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Part II: Changing Religion in a Changing Culture

Session 4: Religion's role in immigration and globalization

In some ways a subset of Session 3, we want to focus the conversation on questions about the religious components of a movement, particularly immigration, integration, and the impact of globalization on religion in American culture.

Gerardo Marti
Davidson College

In approaching the theme of this session on considering change and the future of our scholarship, I find two literatures competing for our attention. On one side are questions that tie into issues of *race* and *racialization*, and on the other there are questions that tie into processes of *immigration*, *acculturation*, and *negotiated identity*. In my reading, these two literatures rarely meet. Even worse, they are resulting in predictable lines of analysis.

In my past research on multi-ethnic/multi-racial churches, I criss-crossed between the literature on race and the literature on immigration, and I consistently find that those who focus more on “race” typically discuss race as an ascribed characteristic, imposed on a group, and inherently discriminatory. In any discussion of race, the notion of white dominance is not far behind. Overall, I find the literature on race to be rooted in the historic circumstances of the African American experience (which can be augmented with the Native American and Chinese experience). Racial categories developed from the Black experience are readily applied to current Asian and Latino group—sometimes called the “racial middle”—yet the line on that middle usually just means they experience the same oppression as Blacks, just in a different form. Studies oriented around race therefore tend to emphasize macro-level stories, isolate racial groups, see identity as more determinative, and focus on how conflicts and inequities are perpetuated, and the manner in which oppression is withstood.

From the standpoint of the immigration literature, the discussion is less on “race” and more on “ethnicity” as an achieved characteristic. I know many scholars already understand these terms are problematic and quite complicated; but I address my remarks not to the exceptions but to the overall trend. The general shape of the literature reveals writing from immigration scholars who are different from race scholars and who tend to emphasize contextuality, seeing identity as a negotiated and highly contingent process. Ethnicity is negotiated within constraints, and various adaptations and reconfigurations become the focus of analysis which features transnational connections between ancestral homelands, their various practices (origin stories, if you will), and new neighborhood localities.

I blame Will Herberg for accentuating this difference. Herberg in his essay *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* famously postulated that varied ethnic identities become attuned to mainstream culture through association with an American religious affiliation; an American religious affiliation is how immigrants become assimilated to what he labeled “the American way of life.” Herberg essentially sets up the questions that drive studies of immigration: how group identities are formed and protected, the alterations of their religious

identities and practices by being in America, and the extent to which immigrants come to fit into American civil structures of commerce and democracy. These questions are surprisingly robust and continue to be relevant well into the current century.

The problem is that Herberg ignores so much of American religion. Hindu and Buddhist Temples and Mosques are not considered “American,” and Native American religions are not included. Black religions, in particular the vibrant force of the historic Black Church, receive a scant two pages of narrative and are considered exceptions. Herberg believed he could safely ignore Blacks in America because of their “independence” due to their separation based “not along language and cultural lines but along lines of race and color.” If differences are only based in “language and culture,” groups can become American, but differences of “race and color” are defined by the persistence of their separation from the American mainstream. Even if they are “American” (as Herberg says of African Americans), they stand “outside the general system,” and “outside the general pattern of American life.”

With Herberg and others, the literature sets up a contrast: Religion’s role has been understood as either assimilating people into the American way of life (immigration perspective), or religion’s role is oriented around mechanisms of oppression by alternatively justifying alienation from mainstream culture and ameliorating subjection, exclusion (race perspective).

In overcoming this division, scholars generally recognize that “race” isn’t real, and the talk of race is increasingly sensitive to the socio-historical dynamics that create beliefs in racial differences. It is also generally recognized that ethnic practices take on racial stigmas within the American ethos (see Warner and Wittner’s *Gatherings in Diaspora*). Racial stigmas result in ethnic specificity being subsumed under racial designations such that ethnic specific practices become racialized religious orientations. And pan-ethnic designations serve as a point of mobilization for political mobilization and social services. But sensitivities are not reciprocal. It is easier to find immigration scholars applying racialized paradigms than to find race scholars applying contextually sensitive explorations of ethnically-negotiated processes.

The sensitivities are not finding their way adequately into the stream of new research literature. Both publicly and privately, the constraints of two paradigms produce unforeseen analytic conflicts. Do we focus on racial divides? Or do we focus on ethnic negotiations? I find younger scholars in seminar participation, conference presentations, and eventual manuscripts submitted for publication feeling that they need to choose between two approaches. To become

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“scholars,” they look for dynamics, yet follow an idealized conceptual pathway and fail to be surprised in their conclusions.

So while the stream of scholarship may dictate a set of dynamics, our analysis should remain open to revealing others.

Last weekend, I attended a church in Charlotte, North Carolina, a southern, 90% White Evangelical church pastored by an ex-Muslim. Naeem Fazal was born in Pakistan, grew up in the deserts of Kuwait, memorizing the Koran, moved to South Carolina, then had a radical conversion experience that featured a personal encounter with a demon in his bedroom and a face to face meeting with Jesus Christ himself. I’ve gotten to know Naeem and his 700 member church, and I find the pop-culture and relevance-oriented American Christianity expressed in this church to be surprisingly fitting for this Arab convert who has a very poor understanding of church history—but a *great* conversion story.

Naeem is like many immigrants who followed his family, landing in South Carolina because his brother was there. But South Carolina is a pretty bad place to reaffirm a Muslim religious identity and a pretty good place for encountering other Evangelicals. As a student at the College of Charleston (located in the heart of a highly fashion-conscious city), Naeem became “hip.” With his muscle shirts, torn jeans, and long black hair, he is a strikingly handsome man whose persona fits well as a non-traditional pastor in an Evangelical suburban church start-up, a congregation meeting in a rented facility that shares less in common with historic Christian liturgy and more with the media phenomenon of *American Idol*.

What makes Naeem interesting for us is how he constantly negotiates his Middle Eastern identity in the context of American stigmas. Naeem is self-aware and quick witted, joking with his congregation about how people assume he’s Mexican (a population that does not attend this congregation). He jokes about other things, too. Last Sunday he said people think because he’s from the Middle East that he has a bunch of oil wells, and he assured the congregation all he had was “oily skin.” He’s talked several times about his experiences with TSA at the airport, and says that when he flies, he may as well go just dressed in his underwear. Through all this, he carries an undeniable mystique. Our recent history with 9/11, the Gulf War, and now the new “Arab Spring” adds even more mystique. Naeem speaks across the country on his experience converting from Islam to Christianity and is in discussions for a book deal with a Christian publisher. He is also well networked, having converted in a 7,000 member megachurch through which he has built relationships with many high-profile Evangelical leaders. Although Naeem speaks with just a trace of an accent, his

residual “foreignness” allows Evangelicals he connects with to reaffirm once again that their religion has a global reach, that their convictions have global relevance, and that their religion creates a diverse community of like-minded worshippers that cross national boundaries.

Naeem’s story is an interesting one, and he and his congregation suggest avenues of inquiry. While I can read into this situation dynamics of race and racialization, Naeem’s story also ties into complex processes of immigration, acculturation, and negotiated identity. But I’m attentive to the constraints of scholarship here as well. If we overemphasize racial dynamics, Naeem disappears as an active agent complicit in his own self-promotion of an Evangelical faith. If we try to tie him into transnational connections with his Muslim and ex-Muslim family, we miss the embeddedness of his history in the spectacular successes of white Evangelicalism. And, even more, if a student of religion had initially set out to study “Muslims in America,” I doubt that Naeem Fazal and his ministry would have ever been found. His case does not fit into a romanticized ideal of what Muslims in America are like. Even more, I don’t know if there is much research available on ex-Muslims at all; some scholars remarked to me privately that Muslims are reluctant to discuss “apostasy,” yet this can surely be a rich arena for scholarly investigation. Can we overcome a division between analytical approaches, and perhaps see new lines of richness?

Recent works that avoid binary oppositions and provide possibilities for conceptual richness include Omar McRoberts’ *Streets of Glory*, which looks at a particular location and describes particularistic religious clusters in an urban district, home to over twenty religious orientations. In this study, McRoberts reveals how storefront and low rent spaces can become sites for thriving religious particularity. Rather than privileging abstract historical forces, McRoberts pulls these dynamics into a conversation with local opportunities and constraints that reveal largely commuter-based religious communities based on the development of religious niches. Another recent work is Margarita Mooney’s *Faith Makes Us Live*, a transnational study of Haitian Catholics. Mooney’s work reveals not only Haitians’ own particularistic religious accommodation to suffering and uncertainty within three host cultures, it also gives central focus to varying governmental structures and policies toward religious pluralism toward explaining their varying life circumstances and the relative strength of their religious institutions as immigrants, all without merely privileging a story of racial oppression.

My own forthcoming book, *Worship across the Racial Divide*, a study of worship and music in diverse congregations to be published with Oxford, reveals an inherent racism that is both ironic yet transparent. Negotiated ethnic practices

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take on racial stigmas in multiracial churches. Churches that embrace a diversity agenda appropriate visibly diverse bodies of worshipers such that “conspicuous color” becomes a demand (not the result) for achieving racial and ethnic diversity. Especially interesting is the prominent use of “gospel music choirs” and the racialization processes involved—even when there are no African Americans attending the congregation. Here, the study of music and worship provides an intriguing lens for seeing how ethnic negotiations and racial notions affect religious communities, even when religion seeks to overcome them.

Overall, we need conversations that are big and small, sweeping and special, social structural and intimate. We cannot predict religion’s role in immigration and globalization, but we can be more careful and less determinative in what we expect to find to reveal the richness and surprising power of their workings. I commend those who have already achieved nuance toward these issues, and urge them to help others resist easy categorization and seemingly “correct” approaches to emergent dynamics yet to be discovered.

Timothy Matovina
University of Notre Dame

Historians of the United States in various subfields have responded to the reality of immigration and its companion phenomenon of globalization through efforts to examine national history in an international perspective.¹ Various studies of religion in North America have contributed to this important development, such as the late Peter D'Agostino's *Rome in America*, which advances an internationalist perspective for examining my own particular area of scholarly specialization, Catholicism in the United States.² Yet the longstanding influence of the ideology of American exceptionalism—from the Pilgrims to Manifest Destiny to Ronald Reagan's oft-quoted "shining city on a hill" reference—inhibits popular reception and more rapid progress on studies consciously set within a global context that both shapes and is shaped by American religions.

One of the clearest examples of our need to examine international contexts is the study of congregations. Immigration flows of recent decades have dramatically increased the diversity of religions, languages, and cultures in the United States. Reflecting a longstanding practice in American religion, many newcomers establish ethnic enclave congregations.³ At the same time, economic limitations, insufficient numbers of a particular linguistic cohort in a given locale, the desire among some émigrés to be incorporated into the U.S. ethos, and the efforts of various religious leaders to promote interracial and interethnic unity have increased the diversity among a number of congregations. A study of the Program for the Analysis of Religion among Latinos (PARAL) showed that the largest group of newcomers, the Spanish-speaking, is frequently in mixed congregations. Fully three fourths of Spanish-language Latino faith communities examined in that study share church facilities—albeit often in parallel fashion—with coreligionists who worship in another language, usually English.⁴

These changes have been most dramatic within U.S. Catholicism. A century ago when the flows of European immigration were at their zenith, numerous national parishes catered to a particular language or cultural group. Suburban parishes largely comprised of the descendants of these European immigrants grew in number with the rise of U.S.-born generations and greater economic prosperity after World War II. Over the past two decades, the decreasing number of priests, financial constraints, and the closing of many urban parishes have shaped a trend toward larger parishes. Simultaneously, demographic growth over the past half century has made Catholic parishes more diverse, as that growth is heavily rooted in immigration from Asia, the Pacific Islands, Africa, and particularly Latin America. For the first time since the nation's founding, more than half the Catholics in the United States are not of Euro-American ancestry.

Today an increasing number of U.S. parishes—currently some 30 percent, more than 5,000 in all—have significant contingents of at least two language or cultural groups.⁵ Immigration is a major force in the ongoing evolution of the U.S. Catholic parish from the ethnic enclave to the shared or multicultural congregation. The growing number of international priests recruited to work in U.S. dioceses adds yet another dimension to this evolving pluralism.⁶

Intercultural encounters significantly alter the everyday congregational experience of numerous Catholics in the United States. While there are no detailed statistical studies of group relations in shared parishes, ethnographic analyses suggest they are one of the most frequent causes of internal tension within U.S. Catholicism, in some locales even more divisive than the much-commented disagreements between "conservative" and "progressive" Catholics. James Rutenbeck's 2009 film *Scenes from a Parish* explores communal dynamics in "a Catholic parish struggling to reconcile the ideals of faith with the cultural realities of a globalized United States." Filmed over a four-year period at St. Patrick parish in Lawrence, Massachusetts, the documentary examines the lives of new pastor Father Paul O'Brien, recent Hispanic arrivals to his parish, and established, predominantly Irish-descent parishioners. Rutenbeck's series of vignettes on select parishioners illuminates the various transformations that interethnic contact incited among them. He poignantly contends that "life at Saint Patrick's anticipates what lies ahead for all Americans: how [we] perceive each other, whether we choose to withdraw or whether we can forge community from disparate consistencies, are matters [of] consequence that will shape the future of our country." The provocative title of a *Boston Globe* review of *Scenes from a Parish* encapsulated the significance of Latino and other newcomers for numerous faith communities like St. Patrick: "In One Parish, the State of the Church."⁷

Simultaneously, immigrants exert considerable influence on their ancestral homelands. The remittances immigrant workers send home—which in some years have averaged as much as \$2 billion per month to Mexico alone—do not solely support family members. They also fund community projects such as the sponsorship of feast-day celebrations and the construction and upkeep of churches, religious shrines, and schools. The conspicuous flow of fiscal resources reflects less often noted cultural and religious exchanges, like the experiences immigrants have in parishes, prayer groups, and church renewal movements in the United States that they carry with them when they return home to visit or resettle. Mexican parishioners from Nuestra Señora del Rosario parish in Coeneo, Michoacán illustrate the transformative influence immigrants can have on religious

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practice in their native land. The numerous baptisms and marriages émigrés return home to celebrate, especially during the weeks surrounding the Christmas holiday, has notably shifted the ritual calendar of parish life. Previously a parish whose core worship life revolved around a cycle of traditional devotions and annual feast days, patterns of migration are the driving force in the growing predominance of a cycle of sacraments and family gatherings that revolve around the schedules of returning immigrants.⁸

Examining North American religion within a global perspective requires particular attention to the context of the Western hemisphere, both historically and in the present. Following the Spanish colonial presence in lands now part of the United States and throughout the hemisphere (which included the African diaspora in numerous locales), U.S. political and economic expansionism led to the conquest of nearly half Mexico's national territory at the midpoint of the nineteenth century, consolidated U.S. occupation of Puerto Rico five decades later, fueled economic shifts that led to the origins of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century immigration from Mexico, resulted in a U.S. presence throughout the Caribbean and Central America that helped induce migrations from those regions, and has driven the globalization process that in recent decades fed an immigration explosion from throughout Latin America. This latter process accelerated the development of previous links between the United States and the rest of the Americas. We scholars have only begun to assess the immense influences these developments have had on religious bodies and practices, especially among Roman Catholics, Pentecostals, and evangelicals at home and throughout the American continent.

Notes

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4. Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo, *The National Survey of Leadership in Latino Parishes and Congregations* (report, Brooklyn College: Religion in Society and Culture, 2002), part I, pp. 3, 8, 34.
5. These figures are based on data from the Secretariat of Cultural Diversity in the Church of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.
6. Dean R. Hoge and Aniedi Okure, *International Priests in America: Challenges and Opportunities* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006).
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8. Luis E. Murillo, "Tamales on the Fourth of July: The Transnational Parish of Coeneo, Michoacán," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 19 (Summer 2009): 137-68. See also David A. Badillo, *Latinos and the New Immigrant Church* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 125-41; Robert Courtney Smith, *Mexican New York: Transnational Lives of New Immigrants* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), esp. chap. 7 "Padre Jesús, Protect Me': Adolescence, Religion, and Social Location."

Fenggang Yang
Purdue University

Many people here are probably familiar with the famous saying by historian Oscar Handlin in his *The Uprooted* published in 1951, “Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America, then I discovered that the immigrants were American history.” I am very pleased to see this session on religion and immigration included in the program of the Conference (that is) on Religion and American Culture, and delighted for the opportunity to bring in an Asian immigrant perspective to the conference.

Until the 1950s, various waves of European immigrants had brought a variety of religions, which resulted in American religion’s peculiar structure, as rightly described by sociologist Will Herberg with the title of his book, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* published in 1955.

Since then, however, most of the immigrants have come from Asia and Latin America. Latin American immigrants have further diversified American Christianity (which is recognized by many scholars). If we turn our attention to the other shores of post-1965 immigrants, we realize that Asia is the birthplace of all of the major world religions, including the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Asia continues to be home of the more different religions—Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, etc.

An important question is, *Have the post-1965 Asian immigrants de-Christianized American religion?* That seems to be claimed by Diana Eck with her influential book *New Religious America: How A “Christian Country” Has Become The World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation*, published in 2001. Sociologically speaking, however, Eck’s so-called “new religious America” distorts the American religious landscape and misrepresents religion of the new immigrants in particular, although it might have been done with good intentions.

The post-1965 immigrants are certainly different from the earlier European immigrants and have indeed brought changes to American religion. But instead of de-Christianizing American religion, it is in fact de-Europeanization of American Christianity. I would like to highlight three significant differences and changes in this regard.

(1) Mass conversion to Christianity. According to Will Herberg, the earlier European immigrants retained their old religions while giving up virtually everything else of the “old country,” including language, nationality, and manner of life. Similarly, many of the new immigrants have brought with them their old religions. But what is new is the phenomenon of “mass conversion”—not the conversion ordered by a king or a patriarch, as it happened in pre-modern Europe and elsewhere, but “the phenomenon of religious conversion happening to many individuals in a society within a

relatively short period of time” (Yang and Tamney 2006: 126). Christianity is not a traditional religion in East Asia, but now about 70 to 85 percent of Koreans in America are Christian and about a third of them converted after their arrival in America. Among the Chinese in America, Christianity has become the most practiced religion, with about 30 percent of them identifying with Christianity while about 20 to 25 percent with Buddhism. And between one-third and two-thirds of Chinese Christians in America are first-generation converts. Unfortunately, the mass conversion phenomenon remains understudied and underappreciated.

(2) Adhesive Identity construction. Think of Will Herberg’s point again. If these new immigrants have given up their old religion in favor of a “native American substitute,” does that mean they have given up everything in favor of becoming plain American? Actually, it does not. They continue to affirm their distinct ethnicity, including attending ethnic congregations and forming new denominations such as the Korean Presbyterian Church in America. In the meantime, the new immigrants from Asia are as fervently American as the earlier European immigrants and their descendents. Not only do they naturalize and take up American citizenship as soon as they are allowed; they tend to strongly identify with the arguably Christian foundation of America. These new immigrants are integrating multiple identities instead of replacing the old national identity with the new American identity. I call this “adhesive identity construction”—that is, “adding multiple identities together without necessarily losing any particular one.” This is done through a complex process of selective preservation and selective adoption of multiple cultures. This is not an “either-or” choice but a “both-and” adherence. Someone might call it the Asian way of thinking; I would call it the new American way of being.

(3) Protestantization of non-Christian religions. Even if the new Asian immigrants have brought non-Christian religions with them, those religions are undergoing profound transformations in American society. Three processes are most important to note: organizational congregationalization, theological pristinzation, and social universalization. The temple-based and parish-based religions in the old country now become more like Protestant congregations and denominations. Instead of claiming monopoly of a religion over an ethnic group, they have to compete for membership by providing congregational services. To strengthen its unique appeal within religious pluralism that is taken for granted, every religion tries to return to its theological foundations, go back to the original roots and be purified from cultural add-ons, as the Protestant Reformation did by going back to the Bible in sacrifice of tradition. Socially, individuals cannot be commanded to stick to their parents’

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religion anymore. It is also difficult to refuse conversion by individuals of other ethnicities. For centuries, Zoroastrians have condemned conversion as sin, either converting out or converting in. However, after so many Zoroastrians have intermarried with people of other ethnicities, it becomes impractical to refuse to accept their spouses and mixed-blood children as converts.

A final point: While these processes are happening in America, it is not merely Americanization. What has been experienced by the immigrants in America has often heralded worldwide trends. Globalization has accelerated the information flow and mutual influence of religious beliefs, practices, and organizations across national borders. Many of these processes had started before immigration and are happening without immigration. The separation of church and state, religious voluntarism and pluralism have been experimented with in the United States first, but these practices have taken new meaning as essential components of modernization.

Part II: Changing Religion in a Changing Culture

Session 5: Religion's role in personal identity

This conversation was left hanging in 2009 and we want to re-focus attention specifically on new understandings of religion and what this says about shifting personal identities (including class, race, ethnicity, and gender).

Sally Gallagher
Oregon State University

In thinking about the topic of religion in personal identity, there are three main points that I'd like to make with regard to a changing American context.

First—I'd like to speak to the "naturalness" of religious belief.

While sociologists are generally squeamish about biological explanations for beliefs and behavior because they are averse to appearing reductionistic, there is increasing interest in unpacking or at least acknowledging how bodies are a necessary but not sufficient condition and foundation for religious faith. After all, our biology provides the sensory tools through which we experience and interpret the world. Still, we employ those tools within the context of community, and it is through interpretive communities that biology becomes persons. In community, identity intersects with experiences and understandings of those "goods" outside of ourselves, including transcendent or religious "goods". This linking of bodies, personhood and the experience or apprehension of transcendence is where interdisciplinary work in humanities and biology can begin to inform sociological analyses of religion, culture and identity. So the first point I would like to make is to underscore how so much more can be done to understand how religion is natural to persons whose experience of the world takes place within a community that transcends the individual self.

Second—I'd like to speak to what I see as the shifting ground around religion and identity within an increasingly diverse American context—one that may be both post-industrial and potentially post-Christian, but one in which religious institutions continue to be important to faith, practice and identity.

While the demise of a Protestant public hegemony did not produce the thoroughgoing secularization once anticipated, it certainly has changed the public spaces and discourses with which and within which people identify. In sociology, the recent interest in the faith and practice of individuals as "lived religion" captures more of this increasing diversity and complexity of American religious experiences. While I think this is an important focus for research, I also believe we should be careful not to abstract those experiences and narratives from the broader communities that inform them—whether that is an historic denomination of Christianity, a local campus fellowship, a meditation group, or an online community or favorite blog site. To be sure, new media have entered the field—but they are the medium, not the message—and so along with the physical dimensions of religion and religious bodies, in my own work I want to remember the salience of institutions and communities as bearers and translators of religious identity.

Third—I'd like to speak to how these dynamics work themselves out within a particular subgroup of Americans—evangelical Protestants—as that is where most of my own research in religion has been focused. Evangelicals provide a good case study for exploring religion and identity in several ways. First, because evangelicalism is a broad trans-denominational, loosely connected network of seminaries, parachurch organizations, publishing houses, summer camps and political action committees, as well as local churches, bible studies, homeless shelters and soup kitchens, the diversity of the movement as a whole underscores how institutional strength contributes to the cultivation of robust religious identity. Second, while core doctrinal beliefs—the divinity of Christ, the authority of the bible, the physical resurrection are each non-negotiable to evangelicals—in other matters evangelicals are quite polyvocal—whether the actual date of the second coming, the timing of end times events, the place or appropriateness of charismatic gifts, the appropriate structure and interconnectedness of individual churches, the meaning of the sacraments, or the role of men and women in church and in families.

What does this mean for identity? If we begin with identity as fluidly forming within and against a community of others, evangelicalism is remarkably robust. It provides a range of venues through which its core message is articulated, and reiterates those narratives through a host of local relationships and experiences. Where evangelical Protestantism is weaker has been in its acknowledgement of the physical body. This is somewhat ironic given the doctrine of the incarnation and the physical resurrection, or the usefulness of the body as explanation among conservative evangelicals for a mid-twentieth century division of household and productive labor, as well as a gendered hierarchy of authority at home and within congregations. Evangelical gender narratives also draw on metaphors of a community of persons—specifically the Trinity—as explanation for hierarchy on the one hand or, within the minority evangelical feminist movement, a community of oneness on the other. Part of why I think conservative gender ideals remain so salient among evangelicals is not simply the convenient sub-cultural boundary they represent, because in practice most evangelicals look very much like other white Americans in both their paid and unpaid family labor, but because of the successful linking of a hierarchical gender narrative with ideas about the Trinity. Finally, returning to the salience of the physical body in religious identity—part of the emerging church submovement within or out of evangelicalism is an effort to reclaim and reintegrate the physical body and the relevance of tangible senses in religious identity and experi-

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ence. While the emerging church is variously defined and not yet particularly well researched—as a young movement of mostly white relatively privileged young urban adults, it illustrates the points I’ve made above—that better research and better theorizing moves across each of these levels of analysis—the physical, institutional, narrative and experiential in understanding the interplay of religion and identity.

Su'ad Abdul Khabeer
Purdue University

I feel, perhaps because this is a conversation on religion, as if I should begin my remarks today with a confession. Despite spending the past seven years studying and doing ethnography about American Muslim identity, I continue to find myself deeply ambivalent about religion as a topic of academic study. In my attempts to unpack why, I discovered it was because the topics that I believe to be most central to any conversation about American Islam—namely race, blackness, white middle class normativity, and power—are bracketed in the religious study of Islam. When examining the place of race in the study of American Islam, it quickly becomes clear that an immigration narrative dominates. Despite histories of enslaved African Muslims in the US and Arab Muslim migration to the US from the Ottoman Empire, in this narrative the history of Islam in America seems to begin in 1965 and then again in 2001. As a result, the narrative frame of American Islam is Diaspora in which Muslims emigrate from an “Islamic homeland” to the “West.” American Muslims are then seen as analogous to other “ethnic” immigrants who engage the challenges of integration and assimilation into the white American mainstream making an ethnicity-assimilation paradigm the prevailing interpretive framework for the study of Islam in America. Within the last decade, it has become increasingly more common to include the African American Muslim experience, and to some extent the AfroLatina/Latina/o and white Muslim experience as well in academic treatments of American Islam. Yet, the move toward inclusion has not completely trounced the immigration narrative but rather led to a bifurcated narrative of American Islam—parallel histories and experiences that are, to use the terms common in the academic field as well as US Muslim communities, “indigenous” i.e. African American and “immigrant” i.e. Arab and South Asian American. As a result, if there is a discussion of race, it is typically limited to the analysis of African American Islam, whereas the study of Muslim immigrants and their descendants focuses on ethnicity, which as anthropologist Nitasha Sharma (2010) argues has on the one hand successfully escaped a black/white framing of race, but on the other fails to recognize that the experience of ethnicity still operates within the power differentials of race in the US. Furthermore, this approach fails to recognize that the very categories that frame the ethnicity-assimilation paradigm “American” and “Muslim” are themselves racial projects. Through historically specific processes of racial formation, “Muslim” is not simply a label of faith but a racialized designation, which mediates access and restrictions to the privileges of being an American, also a racialized category.

I must also confess that after reading the proceedings from the previous conference I was somewhat pleased to

find, perhaps perversely, that the bracketing of race is not unique to the study of Islam in America. Two years ago, Professor Rudy Busto commented on the general academic flight from demands of race, which generates what he called “the abuse of ethnicity,” such that the term is “divested of any substantive content” (Busto 2009). According to Busto this “strategy of substituting [race for] ethnicity is one of the most strategic, useful, and pervasive moves in American Religion” (Busto 2009). Importantly, the flight away from the demands of race is just as pervasive beyond American religion. This is because the racial logic central to America’s sense of itself is constructed through a black-white binary in which other groups are, as Claire Jean Kim (2003) usefully theorized, triangulated.

So what happens when we actually meet rather than flee from race? Much, including bringing attention to *meaning* and *history*, two areas that the other panelists at the 2009 conference argued were typically absent in the study of American religion. I will use my own research as a brief and specific example. I studied the role of hip hop in the religious self-making of young American Muslim artists and activists who were black, Pakistani, and Palestinian Americans and grew up in the Chicago metropolitan area. I aimed to work with their racial and ethnic diversity as it intersects with larger discourses on race and class in America and found that blackness plays a key role in shaping American Muslim identity. The religious identity of my young Chicago Muslim interlocutors is informed by hip hop’s preoccupations with race and place and as a result, establishing connections to specific notions of blackness and the ‘hood become important techniques in configuring a sense of Muslimness. These techniques, what I call “Muslim cool,” are located in the everyday performance of self, including how, by way of style and activism, the body is a site of American Muslim self-making. Here, because of the relationship to blackness, it is race and not ethnicity that gives meaning to religious identification. The meaning-making of Muslim cool is a counter cultural stance—that is never absolute—in reference to different yet overlapping systems of social norms, specifically white American normativity and the hegemony of the “ethnoreligious” norms of Middle Eastern and South Asian American Muslim communities. Further, because of Muslim cool’s relation to race and discourses on blackness more than “newness,” Muslim cool underscores of history and continuity. Through narratives of indigeneity, i.e. Muslim claims of being native to the US rather than perpetual foreigners, on which my interlocutors draw, many Muslims in the US are making sense of their identities by connecting themselves to an American Islam that predates 2001 and 1965. They are able to do this because America’s

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Muslims are not only new immigrants, and Muslims who are not from immigrant backgrounds are not marginal to this religious community—but central. This centrality is manifested in practices, traditions, and knowledges developed by African American Muslims as *racialized* subjects that have become materials of self-making for American Islam. The key point I seek to make here is that this religious self-making vis-à-vis race is not transcendent, but is working and reworking race to live the religious self.

Laurie Maffly-Kipp
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

I begin with what I hope is a provocative assertion and an occasion for stimulating discussion. Let us start by problematizing our category: I submit for your consideration that we, scholars of American religion, have surrendered. Our thinking is fenced in by a noble cause, or at least a laudable cause. We are straitjacketed by our own good intentions, our efforts to give voice and agency to those who have been previously occluded in the work of our predecessors.

I'm speaking here of the use of the term "identity" since the 1960s as both a practical political stratagem and as an analytical category. The first point to make is that the rubric of identity is *never* just personal—or, as the feminists told us long ago, the personal is political. Even if our religious subjects see identity as a choice that individuals have (those atomized liberal subjects mentioned by Bob and Tracy yesterday), it is a choice that is doled out differentially, affording varying amounts of cultural capital—some identities are necessarily marked—by gender, by skin color, by dress, or by behavior, while other identities are rendered culturally universal or invisible. But in either case, inevitably, that marking relates people to larger groups, living or dead, with which they are conceived (by themselves or by others) to share commonalities. So, identity is inherently political (small p) both because it is reliant on social meanings and because it connects us to broader communities.

I want to do several things today: first, I want to lay out my understanding of how we arrived at the widespread use of this term and assess why I think it has become a problem. I'm a historian, so I always have to trace genealogy: the term "identity" first came into humanities and social science parlance during the 1960s, in part as a way to advance collective agency on behalf of people (African Americans, women, Native Americans) who had less social power than white, Euro-American men. Marking themselves as a group sharing common interests or features served vital political purposes: first, it countered the negative markings bestowed on them by others, and second, it enabled political and social action and appeal on behalf of groups larger than the self. Although these political goals were laudable and a needed social corrective, they often relied on a static and reified notion of identity as something essential or natural to individuals. Following on Erik Erikson and other psychological theorists, an identity was something that everyone had, whether they knew it or not. It had to be developed or discovered, but it persisted over time and connected people to others with whom they shared common histories, features or interests.

Times have changed. Since the 1980s, social theorists who were attentive to the fractures and inconsistencies within communities increasingly have asserted the tangen-

tial, fluid, or multiple nature of identities. Scholars no longer talk about identities as fixed—instead they are malleable and strategic (and we all pay homage to this constructivist turn). They change over time. Now, we could just see this all as a good thing and pat ourselves on the back for being so enlightened about cultural theory—for finally getting identity right and showing up those psychologists. Unfortunately, I want to suggest today that this hasn't worked as well as we might have liked.

Where has it brought us? Even with all of our rhetoric of flexibility and constructedness, scholars still fall back on essentialized definitions in our work. "Black religion," "The Asian experience," and so forth are codes by which we try to represent and to give voice—an important objective—but nonetheless a strategy that leaves us stuck with reified categories that make our narrative choices seem stark and equally distasteful: we feel forced to choose "between an American history flattened into the experiences and "cultures" of bounded groups and one equally flattened into a single "national" story.¹ Where is the room for a metanarrative, we are left to wonder, in the profusion and proliferation of bounded identities?

I believe this is a false choice, one brought on by our conviction that the best way to attain the worthwhile political goals of inclusion is to serve the very identity politics that we also try to analyze. I would suggest that instead we need to be much more supple and reflexive about identity, focusing more on the process of formation and connection and less on the product of something called an "identity." Here I am following on the work of sociologists Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper who have suggested that we jettison the term altogether; the category of identity is either too rigid (in its essentialist form) or too squishy (in its constructivist form) to yield anything analytically new. They suggest that if we take these categories at face value, accepting the self-identifications of our subjects, we are in danger of reinscribing the very social processes that we seek to explain. As Brubaker and Cooper assert: "Setting out to write about 'identifications' as they emerge, crystallize, and fade away in particular social and political circumstances may well inspire a rather different history than setting out to write of an 'identity,' which links past, present, and future in a single word."²

So, how might this focus on process illuminate new features of American religious history? If various forms of connectedness, including denomination and the nation-state, alongside gender, race and class, are characterized not as enduring states of being but as emergent properties of particular settings, we may be better able to assess both how they arise and diminish, and also how they are interrelated.

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Such a framing puts into sharper relief the many factors that constitute practices and rhetorics of belonging, and showcases the extent to which our connections are often mutually constituted.

Let me just give one brief example from my own recent work in African American religious history. I was led to study African American sacred narratives in large measure by the problems I saw with the state of the field: the study of African American Christianity, particularly in the 19th century, was caught in a stranglehold by the politics of black nationalism. For all the evident virtues of the work of scholars such as Gayraud Wilmore and Sterling Stuckey, they conceived of African American religious identity as authentic and salient insofar as it contributed to the particular political project of liberationist movements. This framework for black identity, for all the political work it did, fit uneasily with my reading of the varied and conflicting sources. Not only did African Americans disagree about many things religious, but their thinking about religion was entirely imbricated with their diverse understandings of race and nationality.

Rather than leading to a coherent and unified sense of racial identity based on certain understandings of religion, as many leaders would have liked, the process of seeking commonality highlighted the malleability and the interpenetration of religion, race and nation as mutually constituted.

Doing so brings into sharp relief the varied careers of two African American missionaries to Africa, both of whom made use of racial, religious, and national affiliation to shape their careers. Consider Thomas Johnson, a Baptist preacher and former slave who celebrated his own humble origins and spoke in sentimental terms of saving the barbaric Africans for Christ; and William Sheppard, the hunter who dressed in a white pith helmet and celebrated his own heroic exploits in engagements with the natives. In different ways, both men simultaneously embraced and exoticized Africa, and both employed longstanding racial narratives that countered white renderings of racial degradation yet inspired their audiences to action. Thomas Johnson had not spent more than half a year in Africa but always referred to himself in two ways: as the “ex-slave” and as the “African missionary.” He literally put on the garments of the place he denoted as the “land of my fathers,” and used maps to familiarize his audiences with the continent. He juxtaposed the slave shackles of enslaved New World Africans to the fetishes and idols of the “enslaved” heathens in Africa. The implication could not have been clearer: African Americans had a particular obligation to rescue Africans from the bondage of life without Christ.³

William Sheppard, son of a Presbyterian barber from Waynesboro, Virginia, drew on very different collective memories and yearnings in his life and work in Africa. His

white linen clothing and his daring deeds celebrated U.S. national notions of progress and the triumph of masculine prowess, in line with the European and Euro-American explorers he so admired. But in the continental interior Sheppard recovered the ancient and glorious civilizations that African Americans had always known existed, those African societies that would prove, once and for all, the temporarily obscured potential of the race. In retrieving that grandeur in physical form for African Americans, in artistry, textiles, and photographs, Sheppard delivered confirmation of their own illustrious history. The dramatic rendition of his initial encounter with the Kuba king who immediately embraced the missionary, believing him to be a reincarnated member of the Kuba elite, fulfilled the fantasies of many African Americans about what it would be like to return to the homeland. “You are ‘muana mi,’” explained the king, “one of the family.” Although he protested consistently, Sheppard later mused, “They knew me better than I knew myself.”⁴

So where is the identity here? Is it racial, religious, national? Even as it is tempting to see Sheppard and his African American colleagues in the mission field as simply capitulating to Euro-American equations of whiteness, Christianity, and civility, African-American encounters with Africa upended that easy calculus and prompted counternarratives of African progress. The missionary practices of the display of bodies and material artifacts opened new modes of interpretation and awareness, highlighting different kinds of achievement. The result was a messy mix of ideas, to be sure: rather than looking for the stasis and the general form in this story of configuration, connection, and dispersal, I think it is more revealing to conceive of this as a process—one that can perform certain kinds of cultural work at particular moments.

Notes

1. I’m following the argument set forth by Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper in “Beyond ‘Identity,’” *Theory and Society* 29 (2000), pp. 1-47 (citation on p. 33), available at <http://works.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=wrw>, accessed June 1, 2011.

2. Ibid, p. 30.

3. Despite his display of simple piety, Thomas Johnson was well versed in African American historical literature; in his text he relies on the work of at least two contemporary authors: Edward Johnson, *School History of the Negro Race in America from 1619-1890* (Raleigh, NC, 1890) and Joseph Thomas Wilson, *The Black Phalanx: A History of the Negro Soldiers of the United States in the Wars of 1775-1812, 1861-65* (Hartford, Conn., 1890).

4. Walter Williams, *Black Americans and the Evangelization of Africa, 1877-1900* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 94; William Henry Sheppard, *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo* (Richmond, VA, 1917), 108, 101; Pagan Kennedy, *Black Livingstone: A True Tale of Adventure in the Nineteenth Century Congo* (New York: Viking, 2002), 92.

Part II: Changing Religion in a Changing Culture

Session 6: Market models for understanding religion

Somewhat of an outlier in this group, we believe economic models are now so widely used across the social sciences (and as an unquestioned metaphor for the humanities) that it would be impossible for us to ignore this as a key factor in changing definitions of religion in a world increasingly shaped by economic models.

Roger Finke
Pennsylvania State University

Nineteenth century European visitors were often intrigued by American religion. Alexis de Tocqueville is quoted most frequently, but there is a long list of European clergy, statesmen, and early historians who described American religion as a new “religious economy,” a “sect system” and the new “voluntary principle.”¹ They celebrated the new system for reviving the churches, but they lamented the sects for shattering the unity of God’s kingdom. Today I want to review the consequences of the religious freedoms granted in this new system. Rather than focus only on the consequences for religious groups, however, I also want to look at the consequences for the society as a whole.

With the exception of the earliest surveys of American religious history, which were written by Europeans, the unique religious economy of America received little attention. Despite the attempts of Sidney Mead, Franklin Littell, and others to display the transforming power of religious freedoms, these freedoms never regained a central role in explaining religious change for the historical surveys of American religion.² But in the 1980s scholars from multiple disciplines began to argue that religious freedoms were central to understanding American religion, and that American religion was flourishing because of the rich pluralism and not in spite of it. I and many others have argued that as the religious establishments were dethroned and freedoms were granted to all, religious groups were on equal footing and potential members could choose any religion, or they could choose none at all. A summary thesis for much of this work is that religious freedoms *change the incentives and opportunities for religious producers (churches, preachers, revivalists, etc.) and the viable options for religious consumers (church members).*³

When applied to many of the conversations at this conference, religious freedoms allow for a diversity of ethnically based religions, a diversity of experiential religious expression, and a segmentation of social groups by class and power. Understanding the specifics of this diversity is essential, but it is equally necessary that we understand the origins and consequences of this diversity. Moreover, we need to understand how and why groups compete for resources and power within religious market niches, across niches, and with secular groups. Some of our discussions have centered on whether the study of religion should focus on the specifics of lived religion or the more general trends and movements. But, for me, this is a false dichotomy and is like asking if a photographer should be limited to close-ups or landscape shots. We want to appreciate the beauty of each flower’s petal, but we also want to know if the flower is perched alone on a Grand Canyon cliff or is in a lush meadow with an abundance of other flowers. My focus today is on the larger landscape of American religion over time.

When explaining religious change, this focus on religious freedoms, or what I often call religious deregulation, gives attention to supply-side changes. The First and Second Great Awakenings are explained as resulting from the abundance and diversity of new religious suppliers, rather than a sudden shift in the culture. We acknowledge the diverse range of religious demand, but view the open market as matching this diversity with multiple new suppliers. Historian Terry Bilhartz was perhaps the first to use the supply-side imagery for American religion; Rodney Stark and I developed a more formal market model for explaining the churching of America and the rise of upstart sects; and Steve Warner described a broad version of this approach as a new paradigm for the study of American religion.⁴ All of this work tried to understand how religious freedoms and the new religious economy transformed religion in America. In particular, this work has focused on religious groups and members of those groups.

But I would argue that religious freedoms, like other civil liberties, have consequences that go beyond religious groups and members. These freedoms change the way these groups interact with each other and the way they interact with the larger culture. For example, my recent cross-national research with Brian Grim, Jaime Harris, and others has shown that religious freedoms result in less social conflict and violence, both between the government and religious groups and between religious groups. Restrictions placed on religion often foster the very conflict they are attempting to prevent.⁵

When applied to American religion, I am suggesting that religious freedoms not only make a diversity of religious suppliers possible, these same freedoms also allow for a peace and tranquility between the disparate groups of religions that result. Consider the tensions between Catholics and Protestants in the nineteenth century. The influential Lyman Beecher warned of a plot by the Pope to seize the Mississippi Valley and his son Edward wrote a book on the *Papal Conspiracy Exposed*. Social and political movements, such as the Know-Nothings and the Ku Klux Klan, were openly anti-Catholic and, at times, did enact violence against Catholics. Yet, despite the perceived threat of Catholics, the violence was remarkably limited and Catholics never lost their religious freedoms. The freedoms not only allowed for more peaceful relations between groups, they gave the Catholics an entry into shaping the larger American culture.

These same freedoms are even more crucial for the numerically small religious minorities. Twenty-five years ago R. Laurence Moore explained how religious outsiders of earlier eras, such as Jews, Mormons, Fundamentalists, and African-

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American religious groups, helped to shape the American culture and negotiate what it means to be an American.⁶ I agree. Indeed, I would suggest that many other groups could be added to this list, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses. From 1938 to 1946 alone, they were involved in twenty-three Supreme Court rulings, prompting Supreme Court Justice Harlan Fiske Stone to note that "Jehovah's Witnesses ought to have an endowment in view of the aid which they give in solving the legal problems of civil liberties."⁷ Or, for a more recent example, we could consider the Muslims, Hindus, or Buddhists of today. For example, a 2007 global survey by the Pew Research Center found that Muslims in the U.S. were more integrated into the American culture than their European counterparts and they were far less likely to support terrorist acts. Like the Catholics of the 19th century, religious minorities of any century rely on religious freedoms to both exist in relative peace and to gain entry to the larger culture.

It is tempting to conclude that religious freedoms are securely embedded in the American culture and structural supports are seldom needed. Numerous examples, however, could be used to illustrate the capricious will of the majority. Let me offer one. A 2000 national survey by the First Amendment Center found that nearly 73 percent of Americans agreed: "the freedom to worship as one chooses . . . applies to all religious groups regardless of how extreme their beliefs are."⁸ Seven years later, and six years after 9-11, the percentage dropped to 56%.⁹ Valuing freedom is not the same as valuing freedom for all. And, valuing freedom for all is not as deeply embedded into our culture as we might expect.

Notes

1. See Milton Powell (Ed.), *The Voluntary Church: American Religious Life (1740-1865) Seen Through the Eyes of European Visitors* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1967).
2. Sidney E. Mead, *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976 [1963]). Franklin Littell, *From State Church to Pluralism* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1962). Although Robert T. Handy does not treat the voluntary principle as the central motif in his survey *A History of Churches in the United States and Canada* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), he does explain how religious liberties helped to "remould the churches" during the Revolutionary era and stressed the importance of voluntarism during the early nineteenth century.
3. Roger Finke, "Religious Deregulation: Origins and Consequences," *Journal of Church and State* 32 (1990): 609-626.
4. Terry D. Bilhartz, *Urban Religion and the Second Great Awakening: Church and Society in Early National Baltimore*. (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1986); Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992; 2005); R. Stephen

Warner, "Work in Progress Toward a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States," *American Journal of Sociology* 98 (1993): 1044-1093.

5. Roger Finke and Jaime Harris, "Wars and Rumors of Wars: Explaining Religiously Motivated Violence." In *Religion, Politics, Society and the State*, Jonathan Fox, ed., (Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers, 2012); Brian J. Grim and Roger Finke. *The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Violence*. (Cambridge University Press, 2011).
6. R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).
7. As quoted in Shawn Francis Peters, *Judging Jehovah's Witnesses: Religious Persecution and the Dawn of the Rights Revolution*, (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2000).
8. The results are based on the First Amendment Center's annual State of the First Amendment survey conducted by the Center for Survey Research and Analysis at the University of Connecticut. Results from the survey were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.theARDA.com.
9. Both surveys were conducted by the Center for Survey Research and Analysis at the University of Connecticut. Results from the survey were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.theARDA.com.

James Hudnut-Beumler
Vanderbilt University

This morning I want to talk about the value of economic analysis for interpreting American religious behavior. In just a few minutes I want to hit three topics. First, how I was introduced to market thinking about religion in the first place. Second, some of the possibilities it offers to humanities-inclined scholars of American religion. And finally I will offer a few words about research that I have found compelling, even exemplary recent attempts to address markets and religion effectively.

I was having lunch one day in the fall of 1988 with fellow faculty members, whose fields of study were politics and economics. We were joined by a colleague, recently promoted to full professor. At one point in the conversation, this professor, one Ben Bernanke, turned to me and said, "So you do religion, right?" and went on to say, "I can explain that." This piqued my interest. "How is that?" I said. "Women's wages are less," said Bernanke, and proceeded to introduce the table to the thought of University of Chicago economist Gary Becker, who attributed the gendered choices families made with their time to rational calculations of the best use of their members' time so as to obtain maximum benefit. Thus, "because all prayers are equal before God, women predominate in organized religion where they can get a differentially better return on their effort than if they traded places with men and received a lower wage in the secular labor market." To say the least, I was impressed with the sweep of the argument, even if it produced a lingering feeling that something was missing.

Scholarship in the last quarter century has featured a growing willingness to consider religion in the United States as an economic entity and a special part of the so-called independent, or third-sector, or not-for-profit organizations. This turn toward seeing the religious sector as an employer, an institution developer, a user of land, and as a charity provider has proven salutary for expanding the ways historians, sociologists, and economists study and understand organized religion and even religious devotion. In treating the not-for-profit sector (and religion) as analogous to other sectors such as manufacturing and banking, charitable practices and institutions that were formerly somewhat immune from social scrutiny have been held up to examination by utilitarian measures. On the whole, this loss of special privilege for religion has been accompanied by a rich set of new insights into religious organizational life and prospects, though not without some worried sounds from the sector itself.

I myself am always skeptical of any claim that goes "the numbers prove," but I have noticed that the numbers do tell you where to look in your analysis. I'm amazed by the claims that are made out of boxes of sermons alone, and the market revolution in my own thinking is to ask, "yes, but

were the people buying those sermons and how might we know so?"

I think the challenge from economists to the rest of us is to use more quantitative analysis in our work, rather than merely following figures and ideas we find congenial. Important terms to pay attention to are: more and less, and success or failure compared to what. Let me provide a telling example of such from a much worked over field: mainline Protestant decline.

When people inside the faith group think about their plight they compare themselves to their former glory. They say, "We've lost a third of our members since 1965." Market analysis, however, provides a much dimmer view. In 1958 52% of all American adults belonged to a mainline Protestant church. Today the comparable number is 13%—and they are older as a group by 10 years. That's merely a fourfold market decline over a period of just over 50 years. Mainline indeed. My point is, the numbers tell you where to look and suggest different comparisons from the internally generated literary sources many of us rely upon.

One of the best things about numerical statistics is that, since the early national period, people have been obsessed with tracking numbers: in churches, or at the revival, or dollars given in offerings, or spent on new buildings, or children in Sunday schools, or members in the rabbinical association. Our job is to meaningfully weave these numbers into the stories we are telling when we write about American religion, so that they provide telling comparisons with our own time that help our readers understand how things have changed and what's important.

One more example: have you ever had students come up in the middle of an American religion course and say something like, "Why aren't we giving equal time to the Buddhists in this textbook?" Population and affiliation charts measuring groups' strength over time are tremendously helpful in seeing what's common and not so common over the course of time. Smaller groups are an important part of the story in their own right, and for their (sometimes disproportionate) cultural impact, but not according to some proportional representation scheme, nor in terms of some textbook fairness doctrine.

Numbers were essential to my own work in writing a history of American Protestants and their money (*In Pursuit of the Almighty's Dollar*, UNC Press 2007). In it, among other goals, I wanted to interrogate three myths of the religious past:

1. Clergy were paid better (or worse) in the past than is now the case;
2. Prior generations were more generous than our own with their religious giving; and

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3. In the old days people just built their houses of worship and stayed in them and they didn't keep spending too much money to change them.

I covered a great deal more in the book, but the answers to those questions came from carefully developing and analyzing numerical data. To those of you interested in the results, however, the answers are that religious employment pays relatively much worse now than in the past when compared to other professions, that we are about equally generous as our forbearers relative to our respective household incomes, and that a steady rate of periodic spending went into making that 250-year-old church look so good, even as it looks so old.

And of course these answers lead to much more interesting and fundamental questions like what is a priest, a minister, or a rabbi worth and why? What does religious giving represent? Why does every generation seem to need to rebuild the Lord's house?

Finally, let me offer a few quick shout outs to some authors whose books get the balance of religion and economics right in my opinion.

To Mark Valeri and Stewart Davenport for books about how earlier Christians reconciled themselves to the "hidden hand" of the market in the 18th and 19th centuries.

To Richard Callahan and Candy Gunther Brown for placing religion in the industrial contexts of mountain coal mining and publishing, respectively.

And John Giggie and Diane Winston, whose *Faith in the Market: Religion and the Rise of Urban Commercial Culture* has all kinds of examples of the way in which religion has played markets for its own ends.

Religious Americans have thought about, resisted, continuously used markets, and been victims of them for a long time. They do not explain everything about religion, of course. Yet if we are not musical about markets and religion we might fail in our goal to better understand religious America. At the beginning of the 21st century America remains a place where you can have as much religion as someone is willing to pay for, and understanding religion in that context is an investment worth making.

Kathryn Lofton
Yale University

In February 2011, actor George Clooney appeared on the cover of *Newsweek*. Clooney was not promoting a film or television show. Instead, he was promoting an international problem and himself as a missionary seeking to resolve it on our behalf. While the cover announces, “Mr. Clooney, The President Is on Line 1,” the article headlines with more declarative ascription, calling Clooney, “A 21st Century Statesman.” “In January, Clooney was back in South Sudan,” we learn, “directing his star power toward helping its people peacefully achieve independence from the northern government of Khartoum after two decades of civil war.” No mention of religion is made in the article—no spiritual awakening seems to have brought Clooney here. Instead, the article infers that Clooney possesses a basic decency inherited from his journalist father. Indeed, it was the influence of his hard-nosed patriarch that led Clooney to co-write and direct *Good Night, And Good Luck* (2005), a film depiction of Edward R. Murrow’s famed facedown of US Senator Eugene McCarthy. *Newsweek* consistently presents Clooney as a form of responsible rationalism of a pre-infotainment age. He is the celebrity who wields his celebrity to the good beyond celebrity. The article concludes: “In this new environment—fueled by social networking—fame is a potent commodity that can have more influence on public debate than many elected officials and even some nation-states.”¹

Just as cookbooks advertise *Deceptively Delicious* ways to get your kids to eat broccoli, so do we now believe that political understanding requires shimmering surfaces to simplify our receipt of complex problems. As the political necessity of celebrity and the celebrity circulation in politics continue to expand, it will be useful to recall that such projects do not merely have their origin in ideologies of secular reason. The power of celebrity to expand and contract, to fit the image of the given moment, and to belong in the crevice of every crisis, is not because that image is denuded of meaningful religious authority. It is precisely because they possess such spectral power that they may direct attention to their causes. “As a rock star, I have two instincts,” said Bono, the lead singer for U2. “I want to have fun, and I want to change the world. I have a chance to do both.”² This is what transports the celebrity from the Life pages to the News pages—practicing their spiritual ambitions with missionary zeal complicit with the new geopolitics of neoliberal power.

What I want to share today is a set of questions I have about that word, *neoliberalism*. I began with a most surface example—a cover story of a cover boy. I do so to suggest that the labor to know the structures that produce this cover is not the labor to read celebrity as much as it is to read the economies of the magazine and politics of the place it

seeks to cover. I want to suggest here a connection between Clooney on the cover and mortgage foreclosures; Clooney on the cover and prosperity gospels; Clooney on the cover and the superhero banner headline above his face on the same issue: NIALL FERGUSON SOLVES THE DEBT CRISIS. *Newsweek* brings us to the Sudan and its multiple crises through not the term of its crises, but through the coding of Clooney’s particular transacting power. As Manfred Steger and Ravi Roy have written, the neoliberal modes of public administration “redefined citizens as ‘customers’ or ‘clients’ and encouraged administrators to cultivate an ‘entrepreneurial spirit’.”³ The circulation of images is powerful in any ideological formation, yet for neoliberalism image is inherent to the policies themselves. All ideologies propose they will result in a better world for you. Neoliberalism says, in its simplest form, that the better world comes through free markets. Yet the agent of this better world was himself an image: the *consumer*. Clooney is just like you—a regular guy who was bothered by the news. The only difference between you and Clooney are the media mechanics of which he has become a circulating master. You too could join his fight with the right link-ups, networks, and likes. No training required.

Immediately it may be worth remarking that such a set of questions is a bit premature. We have only begun to name what neoliberalism is, and we are perhaps too chronologically proximate to its consequences to observe it with any scholarly precision. However, it seems inviting to me to begin to take it up as a term that contains a description of a possibly present reality (“this is a neoliberal age”) as well as a series of policy assertions that may continue to format future realities. I’ll offer a few more descriptive words about neoliberalism to conclude, but before I do, here are the three questions that I would like to pose this audience:

First, what *effects within* American religions might we connect to neoliberalism? This question seeks to observe how, for example, the evangelical gang ministries written about by Kevin O’Neill might be linked historically as effects of neoliberal economic policies, or how certain spirit-infused whole food movements are connected to Agricore.⁴

Second, what *articulations* of American religion might be identified with neoliberalism? This question seeks to observe how, for example, neoliberalism may be a more historically expansive category, including as it does the rapid development of the non-governmental sector. Scholars of neoliberalism emphasize that the number of NGOs increased dramatically during the fall of communism and the emergent global economy of the late twentieth century. However, international non-governmental organizations have—as we especially all know—a much longer history,

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one associated with many reform movements including abolition, suffrage, and disarmament.⁵ Yes, NGOs become enshrined as categorization post-1945. (It was in the U.N. charter that NGOs got formal political license—see Chapter 10, where provisions are provided for a consultative role for organizations which are neither governments nor member states.)⁶ Yet is there any utility to thinking about the transition of missionary operations from denominational auspices rooted in national settings to the more international structures that emerged in the late nineteenth century? Using this bold—perhaps overblown—example of the NGO, is there any sense to thinking about religion itself in the modern era as a certain articulation of neoliberalism?

Third, what problems do you see with the very terming of *neoliberalism* as a category for scholars of American religion to deploy? Here I meander to the productive and problematic deployments of *socialism* or *liberalism* in the study of American religion. We are as interested in these terms as our subjects are (be they Catholic Workers or Transcendentalists), but we are also interested in the way our subjects are affected of the economic problems named by these terms. This seems to me a silence in our consideration of market models—we tend to either imagine that markets explain religious choice, or that religious choice replies to market problems. I wonder if the term *neoliberalism* offers an opportunity to wonder at what we're missing, and what we're gaining, when the market's models become component to our study.⁷

In the time remaining I want to think together about the utility of the category *neoliberalism* to describe American religious history.⁸ The term “neoliberalism” has several histories: first, it has a history as an economic postulation first circulated by the Freiburg School in post-World War I Germany as a revival of classical liberalism. This postulate would continue to circulate throughout the twentieth century in the writings of neoclassical economists like Milton Friedman. Second, neoliberalism has a history as a translation of *neoliberalismo*, a word that described how Latin American economists adopted a pro-market model for that continent's economic development. And since the early nineties, neoliberalism has been a pejorative deployed by critics of such market reform in the global South.

Neoliberalism is therefore a friend and an enemy, a position and a polemic on behalf of a position, a doctrine and a description. Neoliberalism may be seen as an ideology, a mode of governance, and a set of effects. I would even argue you can lay out these historically, and remark that as an ideology, neoliberalism might be seen in the eighties ideologies of Reaganomics and Thatcherism; that as a mode of governance it can be discerned in the nineties modes of governance articulated by Bill Clinton's espousal of market

globalism and Tony Blair's Third Way; and that as a set of effects neoliberalisms may be found in the increasing iconic and quotidian sway of corporate power, NGOs, and government contractors, signaled in the opening example of George Clooney but also in the militainment promotions of the Second Gulf War. This constructs too neat a history by half, establishing a genealogy that plots from idea to implementation to result without the many crises and crashes that have, as we know, intervened. For now, I still the multiplicity and complexity of the term neoliberalism to see what comes of our own free-associations around it.

As perhaps an orienting document, I offer these, the ten points of the Washington Consensus. Of the many definitions of neoliberalism I consulted to prepare these remarks, this 1990 document by John Williamson is most often cited as the organizing precept for its terming, with the phrase “Washington Consensus” often used interchangeably with “neoliberal policies.” Williamson wrote this as a paper to be given at a conference hosted by the Institute for International Economics. “I made a list of ten policies that I thought more or less everyone in Washington would agree were needed more or less everywhere in Latin America, and labeled this the ‘Washington Consensus’,” he would subsequently recall.⁹ It is interesting to note that for Williamson this is a document that represented political consensus and not ideological partiality.

Washington Consensus (1990)

1. fiscal discipline
2. redirection of public expenditure priorities toward fields offering both high economic returns and the potential to improve income distribution, such as primary health care, primary education, and infrastructure
3. tax reform
4. interest rate liberalization
5. competitive exchange rate
6. trade liberalization
7. liberalization of inflows of foreign direct investment
8. privatization
9. deregulation (to abolish barriers to entry and exit)
10. secure property rights

As we have sat in these proceedings, I have been struck by two problematic circulations: first, the question of history; and second, the question of data. On each of these points we could dwell and diagnose together (What do we mean when we speak now and then of the *transhistorical*? What is secularization if not a *historical* theory?), but I want to focus our attention on the latter. For me, the question of what data comprises our subject of study is a central one.

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When I list “fiscal discipline” or “trade liberalization” as datum for our study, it is not because I think we can explain religious behavior through economic forces any more than I think we can neatly explain religious behavior through racial, gendered, neural, or political forces (meaning, we can only insofar as we know we’re not, really, quite). What I am asking is whether we believe markets provide contexts not only for religious decision-making, but also for religious domains, systems, or fields of valuation. To that, I say: *yes*. What would it mean to include such a document as a component to the study of American religion? How does it offer anything new to descriptions of the *effects of or articulations within* American religion? It is to these subjects that I’d like to draw our communal attention.

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Notes

1. John Avlon, “A 21st Century Statesman,” *Newsweek*, February 21, 2011, <http://www.newsweek.com/2011/02/20/a-21st-century-statesman.html>.

2. Edna Gunderson, “Bono: You too can make Y2K better for 3rd World,” *USA Today*, October 7, 1999. On Bono as the soundtrack to neoliberalism, see Chad Seales, “Burned Over Bono: U2’s Rock ‘n’ Roll Messiah and His Religious Politic,” *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, vol. 14 (fall 2006), <http://www.usask.ca/relst/jrpc/art14-bono.html>

3. Manfred B. Steger & Ravi K. Roy, *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 13.

4. Kevin L. O’Neill, “The Reckless Will: Prison Chaplaincy and the Problem of Mara Salvatrucha,” *Public Culture* 22:1 (2010): 67-88.

5. As sociologists track the increasing role of parachurch operations in the formation of “congregational” life, might it be useful to track such operations alongside the scholarship on NGOs?

6. Victoria Bernal and Inderpal Grewal, eds., *Theorizing NGOs: Feminist Struggles, States and Neoliberalism* (in progress).

7. Here I am seeking to query whether the use of “market models” are themselves articulations of neoliberal effects. Note in particular the controversies surrounding such market modeling in the field of sociology of religion circles during the 1990s.

8. The next two paragraphs emerge from my nascent readings in the scholarship on neoliberalism. The bibliography lists the texts currently informing my thinking and description of that form. I note, too, that the short introduction mention in Steger and Roy was an indispensable starting place for bibliography and chronology. See also Paul Treanor, “Neoliberalism: Origins, Theory, and Definition,” <http://web.inter.nl.net/users/Paul.Treanor/neoliberalism.html>.

9. Williamson and the “Washington Consensus” appear in most of the works listed below. Williamson’s own reflections on the Washington Consensus may be found in Williamson, “A Short History of the Washington Consensus,” a paper commissioned by Fundación CIDOB for a conference “From the Washington Consensus towards a new Global Governance,” in Barcelona, September 24–25, 2004. The Center for International Development at Harvard University offers this overview of the Washington Consensus: <http://www.cid.harvard.edu/cidtrade/issues/washington.html>.

Part III: Changes in the Future, Real and Imagined

Session 7: Changes in the understanding and uses of scripture

In 2011, the 400th anniversary of the King James Version of the Bible, we hope to use this session to forward the Center's interest in changing attitudes toward scripture. Scripture, especially the Bible, continues to play a formative role in American life. If understandings of religion are changing, it stands to reason understandings of scripture are changing too. We want to think about why and how.

Charles Cohen
University of Wisconsin-Madison

The very term “The Bible” evokes the grandeur of the timeless Word of God, and for many believers its existence and meaning are eternal and unchanging. Scholars, however, regard it as historically contingent. What we ordinarily mean by “The Bible” is the scripture that proclaims the Gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ, a text whose canonical Old and New Testaments took centuries to compile and whose constituent books exist in myriad variations, both in the original tongues and even more copiously in translation. “The Bible” is not uniform, nor have its history and interpretation been immune to context. That the ground rules for colonial American culture were drafted by English Protestants with a strong Reformed coloration has helped configure the Bible’s peculiar prominence in the United States: theologically, it has seemed perfectly consonant with republican institutions, and, literarily, the cadences of the King James Version have so infiltrated common speech that some of the faithful seem to regard that edition as the ur-text underlying the Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic. American Christianity comprehends far more than Protestantism, of course, but a heavily inflected Protestant understanding of the Bible has underwritten normative senses of American nationalism and its political vocabulary. But not all Americans consider The Bible their Bible. Jews, Mormons, and Muslims, for instance, are each deeply connected to but have different relationships with it. Too, the self-understandings that they derive from their own bibles and the fact that those bibles overlap but are not perfectly congruent with The Bible influences how partisans of The Bible—Christians—regard their eligibility for full membership in the highly biblicized American republic. Here I want simply to urge a reading of American religious history and culture that recognizes this multiplicity of bibles.

Tanakh relates the history of the People of Israel absent, needless to say, any Christological speculation. Formed from Abraham’s line through his younger son Isaac, *‘Am Yisrael* crystallized at Sinai; its political instantiations, confederate and monarchical, came later and are epiphenomenal to the notion of nation- or people-hood. How one understands who belongs to the People of Israel is a vexed question, but one might construct the category as a group defined both ethnically through rules of lineage guarded by *halakha* (though even those rules are in dispute) and religiously by self-identification as people who have covenanted with Adonai. Devout Jews read the Tanakh as divine revelation, so-called secular ones as a national epic substantial parts of whose historicity archaeological and other explorations have authenticated. To the extent that the Tanakh is identical with the Old Testament, The Bible Part I, Jews can be assimilated into America’s biblical republicanism; to the extent that

Tanakh is not Part II, they can be ghettoized. The popularity since the 1940s of the locution “Judeo-Christian tradition” (more so, ironically, among Christians than Jews) suggests that the former position is becoming more prevalent.

The Book of Mormon puts forth a Christian view of Abraham as a progenitor of Christ and a distinctively typological one at that: according to Jacob 4:5, Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac “is a similitude of God and his Only Begotten Son.” Although proclaiming itself a continuation of the Gospel, “Another Testament of Jesus Christ,” the Mormons’ scripture has helped to demarcate them as a very particular group, perhaps in part because the book narrates what might be called a family history on a continental scale in which grace attaches so strongly to lineage and God seems a respecter of certain tribes. I have argued elsewhere that Mormons comprise not just a church, though they surely do, but more accurately a people whose identity issues from a theological and ethnic self-understanding that is grounded in their scriptures and fortified by experience, and that warrants comparison with the forms (if not precisely the content) of Jewish nationhood, so that the term Mormon people, *‘Am Mormon*, is not unjustified. The authority Latter-day Saints accord the Book of Mormon has for some Christians warranted excluding them from the Christian communion, though since 1890 they have gained a firm footing within the American republican polity.

If few Americans know much about the Book of Mormon, even fewer know anything about the Qur’an; indeed, the Pew Center’s Forum on Religion & Public life recently found that only 54% recognize it as Islam’s holy book. Though an indeterminate number of Muslims arrived in colonial Anglo-America, scholars will probably never know much about its American career prior to the more robust migration of Muslims beginning in the twentieth century. A substantial number of early American Muslims surely knew their text, given Islamic habits of memorizing and reciting it, but evidence about their practice is lacking. Thomas Jefferson owned a printed English translation of the Qur’an, but his evaluation of it as a “halfway point between paganism and Christianity” may serve as a shorthand explanation for its minimal impact on American religious culture. In its own perspective, the Qur’an situates itself as a repository of Jewish and Christian scriptural insight though going beyond them; Muhammad is the culminating prophet in the line that begins with Abraham and includes his older son Isma’il as well as Jesus. How much Muslims may be assimilated into America’s biblical republicanism depends in some measure on the extent to which Christians and Jews in the United States can view the Qur’an as a cousinly example of an Ancient Near Eastern monotheistic scriptural tradition, i.e.,

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if the “Judeo-Christian tradition” can be expanded into an Abrahamic one.

In the United States the Bible is (still) The Bible—the Christian testaments. None of the other scriptures, with the partial exception of the Book of Mormon, has thus far had any widespread cultural impact, though one might expect that situation to change. Nevertheless, a deeper history of the Bible in America needs to move beyond a single focus on The Bible to explore how sacred texts within the extended Abrahamic traditions interpenetrate and what those interpenetrations may have meant and mean for American religious history.

Kathleen Flake
Vanderbilt University

It seems to me we are in the midst of an extraordinary renewal of cultural and social interest in scripture. Some people are burning it, others are passing Congressional resolutions honoring it, and still others are singing and dancing about it—on Broadway, that is.¹ Another signal comes from Princeton Press's new series "Lives of Great Religious Books." Note that it has attracted the interest not only of *The Immanent Frame*, but also the *Maui News*. Of course, even if we speak only in narrow terms of the Bible, Americans of a variety of religious stripes continue to find meaning—both religious and political—in scripture. If this were not the case, why would we still (and often) poll the public for who knows what about it and find their answers newsworthy (even scandalous)?²

Our question today invites attention also to the fact that America has been and continues to be unusually fertile ground for the production of new scripture. Fifteen examples are provided by Laurie Maffley-Kipp in her new Penguin anthology *American Scriptures*.³ Beginning with Jefferson's "wee little book" that purged the miraculous from the New Testament, the anthology ends with Levi Dowling's 1907 *Aquarian Gospel*. In between are such standards as *Key to Science and Health*; *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*; and, of course, *The Book of Mormon*, now available in 107 languages and celebrating the printing of its 150 millionth copy. The Penguin collection does not pretend to be exhaustive. Other texts could easily be added to the list, such as Ron Hubbard's "space operas," which are now in process of being edited for inclusion in Scientology's canon.

Meanwhile, except for a sentence or two in response to reporters' questions about the above—burning, legislating, singing, dancing, and polling—scholars of American religion have been (with notable exceptions) silent on the subject of American scripture. It is a strange situation when the creators of *South Park* have more to say about the narrative function of canon than most of us. And that indeed is what their Tony nominated musical "The Book of Mormon" is about. Behind the satire is the very good question: how does story telling both advance and confound religious and humanitarian purposes? Or, if we were to place our categories on theirs, we would say they are interrogating the tensions inherent in canon construction and deconstruction in light of the demands of praxis and as an exercise in theodicy. No wonder they are up for a Tony and we are at a loss.

Now, I may have overstated my case in order to engage your attention, but I think you would agree that the topic of this panel has generally been ceded to those who study East Asian and West Asian scripture, especially linguists, tradition specific historians, and theologians. Today, I invite

you to consider and discuss how our shared field of American religious studies—our particular set of questions—can contribute to an understanding of scriptural production and canon construction and, thereby, to the religion-making imagination. In service to that conversation, permit me to suggest one approach. It begins by asking you to reflect once more on the fact that for twenty years, at least, the study of American religion has been increasingly dominated by the turn from denominational to popular and lived religion. Perceived as product of organized (even magisterial or priestly) religion and heteronomous in its claims on the believer, scripture has been a predictable causality of this turn.

Let me briefly note three ideas that invite a recovery of the idea and historical fact of scripture to the study of American religion and do so in a way consistent with our present concerns for authority and agency, as well as our methodological preferences for social history and ethnography. These ideas come from scholars more at home in religious studies, theology and philosophy, respectively. Wilford Cantwell Smith deserves the first word for his having advised our academy forty years ago that "What produced the Qur'an is an interesting and legitimate question, but a secondary one; less minor, less antiquarian, religiously much more significant, is the marvelous question, What has the Qur'an produced?"⁴ Obviously, the same could be said not only of the Bible and the I Ching, but American scripture as well, especially the Book of Mormon. What have American scriptures produced?

Second, from a 1997 international conference on canonization and decanonization, comes the helpful observation that prophets may write scripture, but communities make canon. Moreover, they do so self-consciously or aware of other possibilities. In short, canonization is the product of decanonization of something else. Seeing scripture as not merely resistant to pluralism, but also a product of it illuminates existing debates about religious authority.⁵ The modern context of American scripturizing makes it an especially useful locus for post-modern questions regarding, for example, the plausibility of master narratives or, better, how that plausibility is achieved and negotiated over time.

Finally, a word from philosophy. In his essay "Towards a Hermeneutic of Revelation," Paul Ricoeur asks "Why is it so difficult for us to conceive of a dependence without heteronomy? Is it not because we too often and too quickly think of a will that submits and not enough of an imagination that opens itself? . . . For what are the poem of the Exodus and the poem of the resurrection . . . addressed to if not our imagination rather than our obedience? And what is the historical testimony . . . addressed to if not our imagination?" In sum, reason's best access to an understanding of

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personal and collective faith comes from analysis of the engagement of the believer's imagination with a given claim to experience the divine. That claim is most nakedly made in scripture and its affect on will—expressed in religious ethos and ethic—is most openly observable in the canonization process. For this reason, I wager American religion cannot be adequately understood without attention to what its new scriptures are and do.

Conclusion:

At the first Biennial Conference Jon Butler admonished us with a rare “must.” “I think we must,” he said, “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.” I suggest that scripture study offers one way of overcoming such fault lines, which are it seems to me artificial to our subject, however much they may be naturalized by our contemporary scholarly prejudices about the nature of religion and religious bodies, in both senses of the word.

Notes

1. *Times Topics: Terry Jones (Pastor)* http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/j/terry_jones_pastor/index.html?scp=1&sq=burn%20koran&st=cse; Concurrent Resolution: Recognizing the 400th anniversary of the publication of the King James Version of the Bible,” <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c112:H.CON.RES.38>; “The Book of Mormon: ‘Missionary Men With Confidence in Sunshine,’” <http://theater.nytimes.com/2011/03/25/theater/reviews/the-book-of-mormon-at-eugene-oneill-theater-review.html>
2. See, e.g., “U.S. Religious Knowledge Quiz,” <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1745/religious-knowledge-in-america-survey-atheists-agnostics-score-highest>
3. Maffly-Kipp, Laurie F., ed., *American Scriptures: An Anthology of Sacred Writings* (London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 2010). See also, Stephen J. Stein, “America's Bible: Canon, Commentary, and Community,” *Church History* 64, 2 (Jun. 1995), 169.
4. Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. “The Study of Religion and the Study of the Bible,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 39, 2 (June 1971): 131-140, 133.
5. Wilson, Jonathan R. “Canon and Theology: What Is at Stake?” in *Exploring the Origins of the Bible: Canon Formation in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective*, edited by Craig A. Evans and Emanuel Tov, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 241–53, 251.

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Abraham Lincoln put his finger on it—it being the biblical dialectic of divine authority and interpretive subjectivity—almost 150 years ago, in his Meditation on the Divine Will and the Second Inaugural Address: “Both read from the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other.” “In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. It is quite possible that God’s purpose is something different from the purpose of either party.”¹

For Protestant decision-makers North and South, and for the Protestant majority of the population, that “same Bible” was the King James Version. The book that helped shape the culture of the early Republic was now instrumental in rending its unity.² There was also a third “party” identified by Lincoln—African American slaves, whose “interest,” he said, “was somehow, the cause of the war.”

To them, the Bible was “the Talking Book” that told a very different story from the white sermons they heard. No straightforward book of rules, it was, writes Allen Dwight Callahan, “both healing balm and poison book.” By some miracle, they were able “to make the Good Book a book that would truly be good for them.” For African Americans, “the Bible has not been a book that answered questions” but rather “their license for calling things into question.”³

Lincoln and the slaves identified a modern reality, that the Bible could not be appealed to as unquestioned authority, that its truth was not self-evident. This shift anticipated the effect wrought by the introduction of higher criticism in the seminary training of ministers. In the academy, the Bible was soon relegated to treatment alongside other ancient texts. In a more recent “hermeneutical turn,” as David Kling puts it, “the ultimate meaning of the text is as much the reader’s contribution to the text as the author’s.”⁴

My point here is that relativism with regard to Holy Scripture in American culture, so evident in today’s social climate, has been emerging for a long time. Changes in religious attitudes in society are usually rooted in long-developing, enduring themes.

The idea that we all “read from the same Bible” was and remains true only in a general sense for Christians. Even in the 1860s Lincoln’s aphorism veiled the complexity that the King James Version was not the only translation in use. Insistence on the Douay Version in the education of children was a key element in the rise of the American Catholic education system. And of course, to Jewish Americans the words “Bible” or “scripture” meant something different from the Old and New Testaments—as it does to American Muslims, and adherents of other faiths in today’s far more complex society.

The book called the Bible today is viewed (I won’t say “read,” because it’s actually read far less than it is invoked) by all—faithful believers, inquisitive seekers, desperate sinners, academic scholars, nominal church-goers, progressive reformers, hostile scoffers—in the social context of religious pluralism, as a text among competing texts. By the twenty-first century this fact could not be wished away.

The proliferation of Bible translations beginning with the Revised Standard Version in the 1950s, while making scriptural language accessible to modern readers, ironically, further undermined a sense of singular scriptural authority. People wonder if they can trust that what they have in their hands is really God’s Word. Still, after initially resisting the shift from the KJV, more conservative evangelicals not only got on the bandwagon but led the parade, producing a staggering variety of fresh translations published in a wide range of editions with interpretive annotations in attractive formats, print and digital, designed for every possible specialty market. Pastors are now often asked, “Which Bible is best for me?”

The naïve earnestness of that question is indicative of a signal fact: despite its enduring power as a cultural icon, people today are overwhelmingly ignorant of the Bible’s contents, of what the book actually says. Results from surveys like those of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life come as no surprise to most pastors. For mainline, evangelical, and Catholic clergy the persistent biblical illiteracy of members, even regular worshippers, is the environment in which they work. For many, the Bible is like the cross, an enduring symbol of religious identity, the wallpaper of a faith that finds more vital expression in fellowship and prayer groups, soup kitchen activism, yoga, and a theology leaning toward Christian Smith’s “moralistic therapeutic deism.”⁵

People who turn seriously to the Bible often do so looking for the answers to life’s persistent questions, or, more particularly, for answers to questions that are specific to their personal experience or issue. Popular preachers supply this demand with sermons, lectures, blogs, and books setting forth “biblical principles” for everything from a happy marriage and successful parenting to business prosperity and a godly political agenda. The Bible, God’s deposit of eternal truth, is to be mined for gems, memorable verses that providentially illuminate the preacher’s points. Varieties of such “biblical rationalism” are also deeply rooted in American Christianity, as Brooks Holifield has shown.⁶

A recent piece in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* gives voice to a different hermeneutic. To religion professor Timothy Beal “the Bible is anything but univocal about anything. It is a cacophony of voices and perspectives often in

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conflict with one another.” But he stands apart from critics like Bart Ehrman and the New Atheists, arguing that “Bible debunkers and Bible defenders are kindred spirits. . . . They agree that Christianity stands or falls, triumphs or fails, depending on whether the Bible is found to be inconsistent.” Upholding its value “not as a wellspring of truth but as a pool of imagination,” he trumpets, “The Bible is dead; long live the Bible.” It’s a common perspective in progressive God-is-still-speaking-type Protestant pulpits.⁷

More theologically significant is the turn toward understanding the Bible as the book of the church, the narrative that shapes the community of faith over time and in the present. Historical criticism still has a place, but efforts to get behind the text to some prior reality have yielded to an embrace of the canonical text as God’s gift to the church. In this vein, interest in the history of interpretation, especially that of the early church, has soared, giving rise to such projects as the 29-volume *Ancient Christian Commentary* (InterVarsity Press) and web and print publications of groups like Emergent Village.⁸

Hans Boersma sees evangelical and Catholic thought converging with this understanding of the essential interdependence of scripture and tradition, as he compares the writings of Kevin Vanhoozer and Yves Congar. “Vanhoozer concurs with Congar that the Christian tradition is what happens when, under the guidance of the Spirit and with apostolic authority, the church passes on its interpretation of scripture in the light of Christ.”⁹

Miroslav Volf, in a recent essay “Reading the Bible Theologically,” not only affirms the ancient tradition of “theology as scriptural interpretation,” but consciously writes as a theologian in fellowship with biblical interpreters from the early centuries of the Church and the Reformation era to Karl Barth. While appreciating its richly plural voices, he affirms “that the Bible as a collection of texts deemed canonical by Christian communities, also has an internal unity. . . . It tells a single basic story.” The Bible is “a sacred text . . . from the past through which God addresses all humanity and each human being today.”¹⁰

New Testament scholars like Edith Humphrey and Richard Hays share a similar perspective. This approach, Hayes says, “rather than ignoring historical issues, takes them up into a larger interpretive project” of discerning a central “moral vision” for Christians in churches to “live the text.” Humphrey warns that “we must get the story, or the pattern, right, and we must know the major character of the story, if we are not to walk right out of the biblical narrative into a world of our own imagination.” Like Volf, she discerns “the pattern of the whole biblical narrative” in the “God-initiated and God-sustained love” that is made manifest in the person of Jesus Christ.¹¹

But not all Christians discern the pattern of God’s redeem-

ing love in the same way—a fact that can still get you huge media attention if you’re a latter-day William Miller with money for billboards. Or on the cover of *Time* magazine if you’re Rob Bell, rock star pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church in the evangelical Mecca of Grand Rapids and author of warmly edgy books like *Velvet Elvis* and now *Love Wins*.

What strikes me about *Love Wins* is that in both style and content it could have been written by a mainline Protestant in the 1950s. That and the fact that Bell’s reading of scripture is so different from his critics that one might wonder that they “read from the same Bible.”

And so the Word of God endures.

Notes

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5. <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1745/religious-knowledge-in-america-survey-atheists-agnostics-score-highest>. Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
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7. Timothy Beal, “The Bible is Dead; Long Live the Bible,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 17, 2011.
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10. Miroslav Volf, *Captive to God’s Word: Engaging the Scriptures for Contemporary Theological Reflection* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2010), 6, 22-23, 39.
11. Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 9. Edith M. Humphrey, *Ecstasy and Intimacy: When the Holy Spirit Meets the Human Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Mich., Eerdmans, 2006), 210-211, 214.

Part III: Changes in the Future, Real and Imagined

Session 8: The future of religion in America

This is a big question, but what is the point of assembling a group like this unless it is to take a step back and ask the big-picture questions from a variety of perspectives? Here we want to think about not only how the study of American religion is changing, but about how religious beliefs and practices are changing at the broadest level. How will technology change religion, or be changed by it? What sacred domains exist beyond what has traditionally been called religion? How will civil religion relate to traditional religion? At its core, this session is concerned with how people will be religious in the coming years.

Julie Byrne
Hofstra University

I caused the end of my book. I caused the worst ending of my book. I made my worst fears come true. The book as I knew it was over.

I was researching an American church of people I can most succinctly describe as Catholic metaphysicals. They are not part of the Roman Catholic church. They are Catholic, with seven sacraments, the Virgin Mary, mass and bishops. They are also metaphysicals, with its characteristic understanding “as above, so below” and “mind over matter,” or, more accurately for them, “mind is matter and matter is mind.” Thinking is action, conceptualizing is manifesting, and prayer works. In this Catholicism, the sacraments both mirrored and caused the reunification of all things in divine oneness; the church members themselves were both reflections and agents of this oneness.

There are about three hundred separate groups of independent, non-Roman Catholics in the United States today; about a third of them share some or all of this fundamental metaphysical orientation. Active in the U.S. since at least the nineteenth century, independent Catholics have been nearly invisible in popular awareness and scholarly literature, and there are a number of reasons for this. But the reason germane to my talk today is that they are very hard to count. And they are hard to count because they are tiny institutions that are constantly launching, splitting, reorganizing, sputtering, and resurrecting again. Back when I started this project, I looked long and hard for some Catholic metaphysicals who would buck the trend and stick around. I wanted them to stick around long enough, of course, for my book to come out.

Then, they broke up. It was a spectacular church split. It happened last fall. In a flurry of passion and recrimination unrivaled except for all the other times American Christians have gone through church breakups, the once unified church was in pieces. Each piece was smaller than ever, headed by three or four separate bishops. All were hurting. I felt for them. I loved them. I felt for myself. And they felt for me. How now could I even name whom I was writing about?

Then, worse, I found out that I made them break up. It was in an email from one of the bishops, Michael. “I wanted to touch base with you to see how you were doing, knowing that your book in some ways will need some modification,” he wrote in February. “I know that there are those in [our church] who made decisions based upon the assumption that your book will cause people to flock to [us], and some of those decisions were made to the profit of organizational [structure], and as result people were much the poorer.” So, basically, what this meant was, I had nothing to write a book about, because I had started writing a book ...¹

I am dramatizing, of course. I didn’t make them break up. Not solely, anyway. And Bishop Michael is only one person. I am acting a script, the researcher betrayed by her subjects, as if they should submit to her narrative and on time for a publishing deadline. But, then again: did I make them break up? In the way Bishop Michael put it, which was that their anticipation of the book had an effect on policy discussions already under way?

At the very least, the anecdote goes to highlight something already well known as a feature of ethnographic research: you change what you study. This is sometimes called, riffing on the Heisenberg uncertainty principle in quantum physics, the “ethnographic uncertainty principle.” More comfortably these days than in times past, the metaphor of the uncertainty principle is pushed to indicate that not only do you change what you study, but also it changes you. The relationships of ethnographic research—power, desire, aversion, respect, responsibility, and the generally “mutually negotiated nature of knowledge”—are increasingly mentioned and incorporated as part of the texts we read, part of the knowledge we know.²

Less frequently, the model is suggested for methods outside ethnography. I would want to see it applied there, too, though. Whether we work primarily as sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, textualists, historians, or religionists, it seems to me that as soon as you’ve admitted a *little* mutual constitution of knowledge between you and your evidence—whether people, artifacts, data or events—you’ve given away the whole store. You change what you study, and it changes you, and that changes what is known, and round and round: at faster or slower speeds, in smaller or bigger vectors, such is the case with whatever knowledge is produced within all the methodologies and disciplines.

Now, that might be controversial or it might not, but given the time constraints, I cannot linger there. I want to press further to suggest that the ethnographic uncertainty principle, riffing as it does on the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, is usually not taken up at its full epistemological implications. In fact, deployed by those of us who are ethnographers, we usually do not deal with the uncertainty part at all. The least of the Heisenberg implications, actually, is that what we know derives from a particular position in a particular relationship. The punch of the principle, rather, is that the relationship, alignment, or constellation *is* the knowledge. That it is radically indeterminate and unreplicable knowledge. That apart from that, “there is no there there,” but only your swirl in the midst of the dancing constellation that is artificially parsed out as observer and observed.

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To put it another way, what is known does not count as knowledge at all, in the way knowledge is authorized in “the modern project”; it does not support the Enlightenment epistemology that frames the terms of critical scholarship: reason, truth, freedom, causality, verifiability, and, behind those, the imagined thriving citizenship of the modern nation-state. Instead, it is knowledge that, in our guild, is immediately suspect or disallowed: it is solipsistic, apolitical, amoral, irresponsible, decontextualized, quietist, collaborationist, reactionary, or just not knowledge at all. So, we better just stop at the part where we admit that we and our evidence relate in some way, right?³

Especially it is best for scholars of religion to stop there, since religion, our subject, has been constituted in modern epistemology to function as a primary carrier of the unmodern. Rather than be contaminated with unmodernism in the sight of the academy and citizenry, it is much safer to align oneself and one’s work with good morals and good politics. Yet, as members of this field have showed us, good morals and good politics themselves partake of religion. Perhaps they partake of the Protestant-secular establishment, as Tracy Fessenden put it; of empire, as Sylvester Johnson put it; of neo-liberalism, as Kathryn Lofton put it. And there’s nothing wrong with that. Except that all the good morals and good politics don’t seem to be working very well. As the recently departed spoken word giant Gil Scott-Heron said: too often freedom was FREE DOOM ...⁴

So, what if we didn’t stop short of taking the Heisenberg metaphor further? What if we let the ethnographic uncertainty principle reconfigure knowledge as fundamentally indeterminate, as indeed the abject and the other of the modern? What would that do to what we know about religion? Can we take this last session on the last day about the future to imagine what could happen? I will leave most of this imagining for our discussion. But I will offer one impression, one image, and one suggestion:

1) My impression is that this has happened and is happening already. There is much experimentation going on across the field, much constellating of new ideas, genres, materials and persons. There is creative impatience, I sense, with the boundaries of critical scholarship as it’s been done. It’s a very exciting time. (Some examples raised in the formal and informal discussion that followed included, in no particular order: advisors allowing novel writing or “performance ethnography” [Su’ad Abdul Khabeer] as part of dissertations; film and visual arts counting as part of tenure files; Ann Taves’ exploration of the uses of naturalistic approaches; past and recent experimentation with topic, style and genre in *Souls* by W.E.B. DuBois, *Mama Lola* by Karen McCarthy Brown, *Silence of Sodom* by Mark Jordan, *Authors of the Impossible* by Jeffrey Kripal, and *Oprah* by Kathryn Lof-

ton; Lofton and John Modern’s Frequencies project with The Immanent Frame/SSCR; Thomas Tweed and Jennifer Scheper Hughes describing the “agency” of objects; Lauren Winner’s cooking 18th-century recipes to write about Anglican material culture; and Robert Orsi’s discussions of abundant history.)

2) The image I want to offer is of me, walking around my neighborhood after I got that email from Bishop Michael, and wondering if indeed I had caused the collapse of the church, caused my worst fear to come true. Yes—because I started a book that figured in church members’ conflict. But I mean beyond that. Perhaps when you are in relationship with a tiny and chaotic group, it doesn’t work to talk about them in the usual narrative ways. Perhaps you start yourself to become fragmentary or realize fragmentarity in their midst. Perhaps I hadn’t really known what I wanted, or what I intended, or where my agency ventured when I wasn’t looking. As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari wrote on the first page of *A Thousand Plateaus*, “Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd.” I thought I just had “fear” of the church breaking up. But maybe I actually derailed the book. Because ... maybe I didn’t want to write that version. Maybe I wanted to write another version, one that did not have coherent ordering, a neat ending. One that abandoned the fiction that knowing stood somehow apart from relating, from I in them and them in me and cross-currents of our many selves melding in the cosmic surge. And, just like that, I was afloat in the metaphysical flow!—I looked around on my walk, and it suddenly seemed that we were all interconnected, all one, everyone just working and waiting for the whole world to realize it at once. Oh, yes, the Catholic metaphysicals had changed me; they changed my mind. Now ... did my mind change events?⁵

Or, to put it another way: if knowledge is not only relational but is the relation, then mind is matter and matter is mind. If our subjects are better understood as intersubjectivities, then so are we. And it is possible to propose that the Catholic metaphysicals spoke me, made my thesis about them and then undid it too, even as my desires acted upon them in turn, but none of it having necessarily to do with me or them as such. Which goes to their metaphysical point about oneness and connectivity. I ask again, did my mind change events? These are the dynamics of intersubjectivity that we are still only starting to talk about.

3) My suggestion is: Make Art, Not Monographs. Monographs can be art, of course, but less often in our present execution. And I’m not picking on monographs, but on any projects indifferent to the aesthetic of the modern knowledge regime. Make art, not monographs. It could be any kind of scholarship-art. We don’t know what this would look like. And I’m not trying to effect an easy, romantic jump to an-

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other aesthetic tradition with its own history of imbrication and critique, including with regard to constructions of religion. But there is a long tradition in some art-making of dealing with kin to the uncertainty principle, and we need help. We need help realizing its deepest implications of the fragmented, multiplied or annihilated artist. In art-making, the interrupters of the integral self go by names, such as process, serendipity, inspiration, muse, angel, demon, *duende*, and luck. They are selves beyond self. They already densely populate us. We don't know who or what they are, because we've barely asked. But if we're talking about intersubjectivity, we've already invited them along. Make scholarship-art. It might teach us new things about religion. At the very least, it might be fun.

Notes

I wish to thank Philip Goff, Rebecca Vasko, all the Center staff, and the Lilly Endowment for this Second Biennial conference and the opportunity to give this talk. I also wish to mention two journals that helped me think about this talk: "Key Words in Material Religion," a special issue of *Material Religion* (March 2011) edited by S. Brent Plate *et al.*, and a forthcoming special issue of *Religion* on the state of the subfield of American religion, edited by Finbarr Curtis. Thank you to Plate and contributors, and to Curtis and *Religion* editors Steven Engler and Michael Strausberg, for the opportunity to review those provocative articles.

1. Email to author from Bishop Michael, February 10, 2011. I am reserving the full names of the church and its members for now.
2. For example, see this discussion in Sarah McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology* (Harvard, 2007), p. xviii-xx.
3. The phrase "there is no there there" is Gertrude Stein's, *Everybody's Autobiography* (1937), Chapter 4.
4. Gil Scott-Heron, "Comment #1," *Small Talk at 125th and Lenox* (RCA, 1970).
5. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (University of Minnesota, 1987), p. 3.

David D. Daniels
McCormick Theological Seminary

How will people be religious in the United States in the coming years? What a thorny question for an historian to untangle and probably one an historian should resist. Since this query appears to assume the expertise of a futurist or trend-caster, I opt to spotlight contemporary religious trends that might still be current in the next few decades as my topics. I should note that it is uncertain whether involvement in institutional religion will increase, plateau, or decline further, but it is predicted that religion will be vital to American society.

A major shaper of future religion in the United States will be demography. First, there will be the continued impact of the Boomer Generation on American religion. Their quest for spirituality will probably go unabated. As the internet makes available for sampling more religious options, segments of the society that extend beyond the Boomer Generation will pursue new religious experiences, possibly drawn from Filipino mountain religions or Dinka desert religions as Buddhism and Hinduism were tapped during the previous century.

The retirement or post-retirement employment of Boomers will supply the religious enterprise with a significant volume of volunteers. With the segment of socially-conscious Boomers aligning with socially-conscious Millennials and others, social engagement as core to religious practice and identity might be more pronounced across generations in future decades. Through congregational ministries, religious agencies, and other entities, being religious will continue to involve efforts to fill in the gaps in public education, access to health care, and insufficient economic and community development as government revenue shrinks. Being religious for a larger segment of people might involve transforming urban spaces bereft of adequate public services.

Faith-based agencies will continue to engage in relief work and recruit volunteers from religious communities. If the U.S. climate is beginning to see changes in weather patterns related to the increase in the number of hurricanes, tornadoes and flooding related to the increase in precipitation, then religious relief efforts might respond to global warming with increasing emergency and disaster services. Practices related to the "greening" of Christianity will continue to grow. With the current youth and increasing segments of contemporary Christianity becoming more committed to ecological issues, the ecologically attentive lifestyles and practices will be central to religious practice, especially in arresting global warming.

Second, religion in the near future United States will be marked by the proliferation of primal and other religious worldviews or the fragments of these worldviews that inform various 21st century immigrants, especially from the

Global South. As they erect, sustain, or revive communities across the United States, they will invent or reproduce religious practices that are embedded in these religious worldviews or their fragments. Central to how people will be religious in subsequent decades are the religious worldviews or toolkits of religious worldview fragments that mold the religious sensibilities which will frame being religious; the previous discussion refrains from assuming a causal relationship between religious worldviews and being religious; they could be deemed as co-constituting each other.

Religious worldviews are different; each possesses distinct concepts of time, ranging from linear to cyclical to spiral, and sense of space along with myths of the origins of creation, the aims of life, and notions of divinity. What's pivotal is that these worldviews or fragments informed by religious systems such as Korean shamanism, Hinduism, Neo-Yoruban religions, and Mayan religion often resonate with and reinforce the worldviews or fragments of worldviews indicated by the polls on the religious beliefs of Americans: beliefs in God, angels, and the devil to UFOs, ghosts, and witches. These polls indicate the persistence of American beliefs in the supernatural or paranormal into the 21st century. These religious practices could range from warding off or exorcising evil spirits, invoking or channeling good spirits, spirit possession, communicating with other life forms, along with spiritual journeying. Future American religion will be constructed by religious innovators who mount new religious movements with affinities to selected beliefs from the array of worldviews and fragments of worldviews.

According to different polls such as Pew (2010) and Harris (2009), Americans hold to a range of religious beliefs: 82% in God, 72% in angels, 75% in heaven; 42% in ghosts; 32% in UFOs; 26% in astrology; 20% in reincarnation. The millennials, according to Pew, possess the following religious beliefs: 64% in God, 67% in angels, and 74% in heaven. While these statistics do not reflect the religious practices in which they are embedded, they do provide glimpses to the various worldviews and fragments of worldviews that shaped American religion. These worldviews or fragments of worldviews will become constitutive of religious practices, generate spiritualities, and frame sacred rituals of a significant segment of the religious population of the United States in the next few decades.

Third, Charismatic Christianity embedded with Pentecostalism and other Protestantisms along with Roman Catholicism and Orthodox Churches which navigate the above mentioned American worldview(s) infused with the supernatural will reflect the way the people in the next 25 years or more will be religious. It is unclear whether trances, visions, glossolalia and Spirit possession which marked Charismatic

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Christianity in the 20th century will be in the forefront of its practices in the 21st. Possibly senses of the Holy Spirit's presence will be marked by holy boldness or courage. The emphasis on healing could expand to include the ecological and social as well as the physical/bodily and psychological; the "healing of the nation" could seek cures for political and economic ills. The mounting cultural productions—music, films, plays—directed to the general public such as the ones by the televangelist T. D. Jakes that are infused with Christian values along with Christian perspectives on life and portray a world that especially counters secularism and occasionally challenges racist and sexist culture could be classified as attempts to heal the culture of its maladies. As Charismatic Christianity in the United States during the late 20th century was a product of the movements during that century, Charismatic Christianity leading up to the mid-21st century will probably be more influenced by the rise of socially engaged global Pentecostalism as well as the deepening and proliferation of the religious worldviews carried by 21st century-immigrants from the Global South. The rate of growth of this style of Christianity will continue even though the racial/ethnic composition of this sector of Christianity will differ from the late 20th century and first decade of the 21st century; a shift in composition related to the changing racial demography of United States.

Lastly, being religious in the United States in the next few decades could be informed by reproduction of religious practices in an environment that is set nearly 50 years after the end of legalized racial segregation and defined by a different process of racialization. Albeit the contemporary context is marked by racial re-segregation in many settings, both residential and religious, the increase in interracial dating and marriage along with the slight increase in interracial and multiracial congregations signal new racial dynamics. Being religious in the near future might ground this trend with large segments of whites joining predominately black, Latino, or Asian-American congregations and denominations. The bi-racial, interracial, and multiracial leadership cohorts by crossing racial boundaries fashion new forms of religious leadership and being religious. White religionists when they join so-called racial/ethnic or minority congregations and denominations challenge the dominant religious and social system built upon white privilege, power, and prejudice and locate new bases and sources of racial identity formation. By whites joining blacks, Latino/as, and Asian-Americans in inverting racial categories, they collectively promote race-crossing as a religious practice. Race-crossing also occurs when Asian-Americans joins African Americans, African Americans join Latino/as, Latino/as joined Asian-Americans, etc. Sectors with American religion will erect a racial order framed by the equality of the races which will change the American religious landscape.

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Mark Silk
Trinity College

Taking to heart this morning's session on Market Models and also because we're in the Midwest, I've decided to approach the question of the future of religion in America by imagining myself on the floor of the Chicago Board of Trade. I mean, what is the futures market for religion in America? Where should I take a long position and what should I short? Is there a fancy derivative that will make me a winner? Let me say at the outset that after what happened—or rather, didn't happen—on May 21, I've decided to take a real long position on there actually being a future for religion in America after October 21. I'm not sure how many buyers I've got on that one but I'm sure you're all relieved.

For the rest, I'm basing my remarks largely on the 2008 American Religious Identification Survey, the third in a series of very large telephone surveys presided over by my colleague Barry Kosmin, and the first in which I was directly involved as a collaborator. I reported on some of the findings two years ago at the first biennial conference, and I'm afraid some of what I have to say now will be repetitive, but I know of no better way to begin to get a picture of the future than by carrying forward the trajectory of the past. And the ARIS surveys give us three points in time to do so: 1990 and 2001 along with 2008.

So what am I shorting? Mainline Protestantism first and foremost. Not that I expect to make a lot of money on that bet. The decline of the Mainline has been a familiar story since the 1970s, but even so its precipitousness in the past decade is stunning. After more or less holding their own through the 1990s, mainliners shed 6.5 million members between 2001 and 2008, dropping from over 17 percent to under 13 percent of the population. And given that they are significantly older than the other major Christian groupings—evangelicals, Catholics, and African-Americans—the prospects for recovery are, to put it kindly, remote.

I'm also shorting Roman Catholicism. Now, if you know anything about American religious demography, you know that the proportion of Catholics in the American population has held steady at 25 percent for decades. In recent years, the number has held not because of natural increase or conversion, but thanks to immigration. Disproportionately, immigrants come to the U.S. from Catholic countries, most of them south of the border. So the smart money has been on Catholics holding their own. But I don't think that's going to continue to be the case. Immigration is unlikely to increase, and to the extent that it comes from Latin America, it will comprise a smaller proportion of Catholics than before. Over the past decade, for example, the percentage of Catholics in Mexico has declined by five percent. To be sure, the latinization of American Catholicism will continue apace,

but as the Latinos acculturate some will move out—into evangelicalism, and out of religious affiliation altogether. I should add that nothing that has happened in Roman Catholicism over the past decade—and I certainly would include the sexual abuse crisis—bodes well for growth.

I'm also betting against the Southern Baptists, who represent a faith tradition that has surrendered 3.5 percent of its market share since 1990. Don't look for that Great Commission Resurgence to turn it around. I should point out that overall, no actual religious body of any size, including the Mormons, did better than hold its own in percentage terms over the past decade except for the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Seventh-Day Adventists, and both of the latter only managed to improve their position sufficiently to get back to where they were in 1990.

Outside the Christian world, I'm betting against the Jews, or at least those who identify themselves as Jewish by religion; they're down by close to half a million since 1990 and now constitute just 1.2 percent of the American population—thanks to declines in natural increase, anti-Semitism, and just plain religiosity. Among the non-Judeo-Christians, the significant growth of the 1990s pretty much hit a wall in 2001. Although membership in new religious movements grew significantly from a low base, I'm not placing bets one way or another on any of them.

Where then are my long positions? The first is with those who call themselves “non-denominational Christians” or “evangelical/born again” or just “Christian.” Since 1990, these have jumped collectively from five percent to nearly 12 percent of the population—nearly equaling the number of Mainline Protestants. Who are they? Let me, *ex cathedra*, pronounce them to be the kinds of evangelicals typically found in megachurches and other congregations that call themselves things like “community church.” The only growth in the American Christian population has occurred among them, and I'm betting that it's going to continue.

The other group I'm going long on are the Nones—those who when we ask, “What is your religion, if any?” answer “None.” Let me hasten to say that the 2008 ARIS showed rather little growth in their share of the pie since 2001—from 14 percent to 15 percent—compared to the very substantial increase in the 1990s. Nonetheless, I'm prepared to take a flyer and bet they will improve their position substantially; call it the Great Decommission Resurgence. Why do I say this? Increasingly, Americans have come to recognize None-dom as a place to be—signaled, for example, by President Obama's pronouncement in his inaugural address that we are “a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and nonbelievers,” and even more by the proclivity of many to identify themselves as “spiritual but not religious.”

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In a country where roughly one-third of the population has always been pretty indifferent to religion, “None” has become an available category that Americans will increasingly avail themselves of.

What’s my bottom line? Looking down the road 10 years or so I’d say that mainliners will have shrunk to 10 percent of the U.S. population, Catholics to 20 percent. On the other side, evangelicals of various types will bump up to 40 percent and Nones to 20 percent. That leaves 10 percent for everyone else: Mormons, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, etc. and, of course, those who won’t say what they are.

None of this, I suspect, will have come as a surprise to any of you. Indeed, the prognostications are based on data that is pretty consistent whether you look at ARIS or the Pew data or the GSS or Putnam and Campbell’s Faith Matters surveys for their book *American Grace*. What I want briefly to consider, however, is an interesting divergence between our data and Putnam and Campbell’s regarding African-Americans. I should say that in addition to the 63,000 interviews for our extensive survey, we assembled nationally representative 1,000-person “silos” of four religious subgroups: Catholics, Mainline Protestants, Evangelical Protestants, and religious African-Americans. We asked each group an additional battery of questions dealing with religious beliefs and practices. Over 93 percent of the African-Americans turned out to be Protestants of one sort or another, so they match up well with the African-American Protestants surveyed by Putnam and Campbell. Comparable questions on beliefs and practices were asked.

What Putnam and Campbell found was that their folks were by almost every measure more religious—more orthodox in their beliefs, more regular in their practices—than white evangelicals, and thus occupied the most religious niche on the Protestant spectrum. In *American Grace*, this serves as the prime demonstration of how ethnicity reinforces religious identity. By contrast, on almost every measure, our silo survey showed that the African-Americans were *less* religious than evangelicals, occupying a middle position between evangelicals and mainliners. Who is right? The Faith Matters survey comprised 3,108 respondents in its entirety, and whites were over-represented; under the circumstances, it cannot have included more than 300 African-Americans; ARIS started with 6,000. Given the well-known difficulty in putting together a nationally representative sample of African-Americans, I believe there’s ample reason to be confident that our findings are more dependable.

But what do they signify? In a nutshell: the opposite of what Putnam and Campbell conclude. For what we found was a bifurcated African-American population, 58 percent of whom consider themselves evangelical or born again,

and 39 percent not. In the silo, the 19 percent who identified simply as “evangelical” scored just about the same as white evangelicals; those who didn’t more closely resembled mainliners. The conclusion is that, as is increasingly the case throughout American society today, the old solidarities of descent don’t matter so much. It’s choice that counts, even if that choice is a kind of illusion, as in the Southern Baptist or Assemblies of God church that rebrands itself non-denominational or just Christian even as it retains its denominational identity.

So looking to the future, the derivative that really needs to be shorted is ascribed religious identity. If you’re going to go long, go long on choice—on those traditions that do the best job of persuading their own people as well as outsiders that they’ve actually chosen to be in the fold. That comes easier to some traditions than others—which may be the whole point when it comes to the future of religion in America.

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