

Religious Pluralism in Religious Studies

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Religious pluralism is a term for religious diversity that imputes positive meaning to religion and encourages appreciation of religion's many forms. As a term used to describe religious diversity in the United States, religious pluralism conveys respect for the contributions that religious traditions have made and continue to make to American society. Implying that religion is common ground in a shared democratic culture, people who use the term often convey idealism about religion's role in upholding democracy. This idealism presumes that different traditions are intrinsically compatible; indeed, resources to be drawn upon for national unity and strength.

Within academic studies of religion, religious pluralism has played an important role in expanding the horizons of many students and encouraging intellectual curiosity and open-mindedness. In this respect, religious pluralism fosters the liberal education, scholarly inquiry, and open exchange valued in academic life. Compared to exclusionary approaches to religion that hold one faith tradition up as true or superior and consider others to be false or inferior, religious pluralism marks an important advance in endeavors to understand peoples and cultures on their own terms. At the same time, though, religious pluralism operates to some extent like a religion itself, a conceptual framework of interpretation that rests in a universal and finally mystical understanding of religion and its essential importance for human existence.

Religious pluralism thrives in academic settings where instructors lead students to slip imaginatively into different religious worlds and belief systems. With students expected to be open-minded learners respectful of others, the classroom is well-suited for such explorations. Removed from the communities, practices, and authority structures of lived religions, students in an academic class are exempt from pressures to conform to the religious beliefs and practices they are studying. Students can examine the structures of various belief systems and ritual practices, including their own, with an investigative spirit and sense of freedom that can be distinguished from participation in the behaviors, beliefs, and emotions that characterize particular traditions, and set those traditions apart from others.

The repressive, violent, and antisocial aspects of religion are hard to ignore, but the significance of these aspects declines insofar as the purpose of interpretation is to appreciate religion's most enriching and beneficial aspects. As a model for thinking about religion and religious diversity, pluralism tends to lift up most inspiring and socially constructive aspects of religion, and downplay those aspects that fall short or fail to harmonize. Thus from a pluralist approach, Islamist fundamentalism is more of a distortion than an authentic expression of Islamic faith. The Ku Klux Klan is not a true Christian movement, despite what its members say, but a misrepresentation of Christianity.

Commitment to religious pluralism as an interpretive framework encourages idealized representations of religion that deflect skepticism and social criticism of religion. It also elevates sympathy as an essential factor in understanding religion. While on the surface, sympathy seems to promote "fellow feeling" and interest in others, at a

deeper level, it is an imaginative, even imaginary process grounded in self-interest. To quote literary critic Elizabeth Barnes in a chapter on “The Politics of Sympathy,” “As one subject views another, she must imagine how the other feels; this can only be accomplished by projecting onto the other person what would be one’s own feelings in that particular situation. According to this model,” Barnes goes on to say, “personal feeling become the basis of both one’s own and the other’s authenticity.”ⁱ

If religious pluralism is predicated on sympathy for religion, and sympathy is a veiled form of self-interest, it has also been yoked to academic endeavors allied with the work of critical inquiry that have led to investigation of religious pluralism itself. Within the study of American religion, the more strenuously scholars have applied religious pluralism as a framework for interpreting American religious history, the clearer its influence as a type of religious idealism has become. Thanks to the work of historians who have used religious pluralism an interpretive framework, we are able to step back from using it to historicize it. As a result, we can now see how religious pluralism developed over time as an idealism linked to the historical development of religious studies and to larger forces within American religious history.

In my comments today, I want to support the claim that religious pluralism is a form of religious idealism with two arguments—first, that religious pluralism in religious studies derived from liberal protestantism after the Second World War in the context of Cold War politics; and second, that recent scholarly investigations of religious pluralism mark an important advance in the historiography of American religion enabling us to study the development of religious pluralism in religious studies and its antecedents in American religious history.

First, pluralism in religious studies derived from liberal protestantism after World War II. From 1940 to 1970, the number of religious studies programs in the U.S. increased by 90%. Undergraduate enrollments in religion courses tripled in private nondenominational schools between 1954 and 1969 and at the same rate in public institutions beginning in 1964.ⁱⁱ Schools affiliated with mainline denominations played an important role in the early stages of this boom and advocates of church support for the study of religion stressed the linkage between the academic study of religion and Christian education, arguing that studying different forms of religion would make church members better informed Christians. As Randolph-Macon's Methodist president William F. Quillian acknowledged in 1953, "Churches often have a particular interest in the religion department.... This is due to the perfectly understandable feeling that the religion department is a direct ally of the church in its program of Christian education." Quillian argued "that no limits be placed upon the range of heterodoxy permissible for individual instructors," with the sole but significant proviso that the teacher be confident "in the validity of the Christian faith and of its power to win the day in free competition with alternative views."ⁱⁱⁱ Confident that liberal protestant thought would "win the day" in any competition with Catholic or conservative protestant schools, Quillian saw the academic study of religion as a means of strengthening liberal protestants in their faith.

Floyd H. Ross, Professor of World Religions at the University of Southern California, advanced this thinking further. Also writing in 1953, Ross was confident that a new "synthesis" of religions would emerge once people let go of sectarian divisions and learned to hold on to those aspects of their faith traditions that truly contributed to civilization. He linked this self-critical and pragmatic approach to religion with

protestantism in its broadest, most universal sense. Thus he praised medieval Jews for holding onto the civilizing aspects of their tradition, and thus for being exemplars of the protestant spirit. Lifting pluralistic wheat from sectarian chaff was “the true protestant function” of religion, Ross believed. In the modern era, no group was better trained to exercise that function than scholars of religion.^{iv} Like many of those who managed the growth of religious studies in the 1950s and 60s, Ross defined it as the antithesis of sectarianism and as a means of advancing interfaith cooperation.

When advocates of religious studies in public universities faced concerns from colleagues in other departments about how religion could be studied without inviting conflict between representatives of different religious groups, they responded by pointing to the interfaith cooperation that already existed among protestant churches. Robert S. Eccles, Assistant Professor at the Indiana School of Religion in the early 50s, explained how religion programs would build on the practice of interdenominational cooperation that mainline protestants had developed over centuries. Eccles told those who feared bringing religion into public universities should know that “Exchanges of pulpits among ministers of different denominations is a familiar enough event.” Such exchanges diminished rather than exacerbated sectarianism and were already providing the base of religious studies at some schools, Eccles explained. Reporting on meetings held in 1950 to explore the issue of teaching religion as part of the academic curricula in public institutions, Eccles pointed to the University of Iowa as a model: “At this university credit courses are offered by a faculty of three instructors, one Protestant, one Roman Catholic, and one Jewish, all clergymen of their respective faiths.”

As far as Eccles was concerned, the real sectarians in academic life were religious skeptics. Psychologists who taught behaviorism came in for special chastisement. Partial himself to Jungian psychology (as many other religionists of the time were), Eccles found behaviorism much more troublesome than fundamentalism, which he dismissed as “a minority reaction within Protestantism” opposed to “interdenominational accord.”^v

Religious pluralism grew out of liberal protestantism in two different senses of “grew out.” In one sense, it outgrew liberal protestantism to become a form of idealism about religion and American democracy that people of different religious traditions, including many non-protestants, came to share. In this sense, religious pluralism emerged as a post-protestant construct that promoted respect for different forms of religion and avoided triumphal, supercessionary rhetoric about protestantism taking over.

In another sense, as a post-protestant version of protestant cosmology, religious pluralism grew out of liberal protestantism in the sense of deriving from, and still carrying traces of denominational and millennial expectations of a universal church characteristic of protestantism. The universal understanding of religion implicit in religious pluralism drew upon protestant understanding of the church as an invisible alliance of Christian saints and communities scattered throughout the world, working more or less independent of one another but also gathering cooperative momentum as time progressed.

Before their partial erasure in religious studies, these denominational and millennial ideals flourished within liberal evangelicalism. Today, we tend to equate evangelicalism with intellectual and social conservatism rather than liberalism,^{vi} but prior

to the First World War, many modern, progressive religious thinkers considered themselves evangelicals. By the end of the nineteenth century, evangelical commitment to the social sciences and modern principles of social reform resulted in an Evangelical Alliance of unprecedented scope despite lack of participation by biblical literalists. As one of its chief promoters, Josiah Strong, described it in 1893, the Evangelical Alliance functioned as “a committee of churches” dedicated to “new and more scientific ways of thinking about humanity that would enable the people of the church to take up their full responsibility as Christians and finally realize their social mission.”^{vii} The liberal theology, social activism, and spirit of interdenominational cooperation characteristic of the Evangelical Alliance led to the founding of the Federal Council of Churches in 1908 and its successor, the National Council of Churches. Liberal evangelicals and the divinity schools they supported also paved the way for the extraordinary growth of religious studies after World War II and eventual establishment of academic programs in religion in most American colleges and universities.

The term religious pluralism gained currency in the 1970s as multiculturalism and identity politics came to the fore on many college campuses. Affirmations of religious pluralism enabled faculty and students to endorse multiculturalism while minimizing some of the conflicts associated with identity politics. In its universalism, denominational approach to religion, and embrace of scientific ways of thinking about humanity and social reform, religious studies in its early days carried on much of the work of liberal evangelicalism. Proponents of religious studies in the 1950s and 60s often maintained that all religions held essential elements in common, and often assumed that universal human religiosity was a good basis for social progress and peace. Such an idealistic

approach to religion and religious difference was not something people could easily imbibe from news reports about how religious actually operated in the world. But they could learn it in religious studies courses. The American college classroom was an ideal space for learning and practicing religious pluralism.

The influence of continental philosophy contributed to this learning and practice especially through the teachings of Mircea Eliade and Paul Tillich. Their neo-Kantian appeals to universal structures of human consciousness, and to a universal human quest for meaning at work in all the different cultures and religious traditions of the world, carried considerable sway in academic studies of religion during its era of great expansion from the 1940s through the 1970s.

Eliade was a Romanian-born student of Indian yoga and Siberian shamanism who urged people to recapture some of the natural religiosity that primitives and mystics enjoyed. He promoted epiphanies of spiritual insight that revealed perennial structures of sacred time and space, and he denigrated historical thinking, suggesting that its deconstructive tendencies were responsible for making modern people alienated and unhappy.

In a complementary appeal to subjective experience, the German-born Paul Tillich affirmed the existence of a universal, ultimately mystical realm of consciousness as the underground from which particular religions, and all forms of human art and expression, emerged. His teachings and those of Eliade influenced the academic study of religion at a critical juncture in its development, providing an idealist philosophical basis for conceptualizing religious pluralism and affirming its importance as a subject of study in American higher education.^{viii}

In addition to the boost it got from the transcendental philosophies of Eliade and Tillich, religious pluralism derived support from the popular notion that religion was essential to American democracy. Commitment to religious pluralism developed as part of a larger cultural willingness to have faith in faith that was linked to Cold War investment in religion as a bulwark against godless communism. Proponents of religion in higher education often presumed that democratic civilization and religious faith went hand in hand, and that the study of religion would advance democracy through appreciation of the spiritual insights contained within the world's many faith traditions. As the United States exercised unprecedented military and economic influence around the world after World War II, religion programs increased in number and size and instructors in religious studies brought idealism about religion to the study of Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions of the world.

But even as religious studies served as a vehicle for faith in religion as an essential component of democracy, it also laid the groundwork for tough questions about religious idealism and pluralism. When historians of American religion began to use religious pluralism as an interpretive framework for tracing the history of religion in the U.S., they history brought the term down to earth, so to speak, as a subject for historical investigation. While scholars of comparative religion might proceed under the assumption that different religious traditions were different expressions of a universal ground of being, historians of religion faced the task of understanding how religious ideals played out in people's lives, how these ideals developed over time, and how they served some interests and obscured others.

Sydney Ahlstrom's monumental work, *A Religious History of the American People* (1972) served as a major stimulant in this important historiographical process. Winner of the 1973 National Book Award and chosen as the Religious Book of the Decade by *The Christian Century* in 1979, Ahlstrom's *Religious History* appeared at a time when the concept of religious pluralism had gelled as an affirmative term for religious diversity, set loose from its protestant origins, and deployed as a challenge to the authority of an elite "Protestant Establishment."

Ahlstrom viewed respect for religious diversity as a good thing, but feared the prospect of religion run wild. Rather than lifting up religious pluralism as the culminating stage in the evolution of public spiritedness, as later proponents of pluralism would do, Ahlstrom worried that religious pluralism was not a sufficiently coherent base for a culture of shared responsibility for common life. At the end of his monumental one-volume effort to describe American religious history in all its diversity, he hoped that more evidence would emerge in the future of the compatibility between religious pluralism and commitment to the common good.^{ix}

Ahlstrom worried that the emerging emphasis on religious pluralism coincided with the erosion of a shared sense of obligation to common life and he thought that both conservative and liberal protestants contributed to this erosion. Pointing to "the eclipse of the Protestant Establishment," which had dominated American culture in "its early colonial life, its war for independence, and its nineteenth-century expansion," Ahlstrom claimed that America's fiercely anti-intellectual "popular revivalistic tradition" exerted "a kind of illicit hold on the national life." As for liberals, the Protestant Establishment had lost its political clout because of its failure to formulate a scientifically informed

vision of social justice and because of its own inequitable “social structures, legal arrangements, patterns of prejudice, and power relationships.” These protestant failures had resulted in inadequate forms of leadership, continuing problems of racism and poverty, the escalation of the Vietnam War, and an “unprecedented loss of confidence in American institutions.”^x

A rosier and much less protestant-centered view came from Catherine L. Albanese’s popular textbook, *America: Religions and Religion*, first published in 1981 and now in its fourth edition. As the first text to celebrate pluralism as the defining theme of American religious history, Albanese’s book marked an important turning point in the study of American religion. She dislodged the grand narrative focused on “the Anglo-Saxon and Protestant majority—and perhaps those most like them—who dominated the continent and its culture into the later twentieth century,” in order to tell a pluralistic story “of many peoples and many religious faiths.” She was especially interested in bumping the Puritans off their center pedestal as the first people of American religion, and made a point of not introducing them until readers were well into her narrative.^{xi}

While Ahlstrom had worried about pluralism’s disunity, Albanese discerned a “larger cultural religion of the United States,” a “oneness” that everyone knew was there but found hard to describe. “The manyness and the oneness are interconnected,” Albanese assured her readers, “each affecting the other and both together writing American religious history.” In this and in other writings, Albanese appealed to idealism about America and also to metaphysical currents available for spiritually-minded people to tap into. These currents accommodated personal and cultural difference and facilitated harmonic coexistence.^{xii}

To explain how “manyness” and “oneness” could be connected, Albanese opened her history with the proverb of the elephant that blind men could feel and describe parts of but not comprehend in its entirety.^{xiii} Albanese noted that Buddhists as well as Muslims claimed this proverb as part of their tradition; she borrowed it from these non-protestant sources to offer a more mystical and more confident picture of religious pluralism in America than Ahlstrom had presented. As Diana Eck later would, Albanese drew parallels between American religious pluralism and non-Western forms of mysticism. In linking American religious pluralism to a vision of many different truths coexisting as part of a larger whole, both Albanese and Eck drew on Mircea Eliade’s emphasis on “the sacred” as an essential component of human life and on Paul Tillich’s mystical understanding of the universal ground of human consciousness.

Trained as a scholar of modern Hinduism, Eck joined her knowledge and profound empathy for that tradition with her commitment to ecumenical understanding and cooperation as a divinity school professor and Methodist lay leader. In her book on religious pluralism in America published in 2001, her earlier CD on religious pluralism for college classes, *On Common Ground*, and the large-scale “Pluralism Project” at Harvard that has employed dozens graduate students to gather data on religious communities in the U.S., Eck has done more than anyone to promote appreciation for religious pluralism as a hallmark of American democratic life. President Bill Clinton awarded her the National Humanities Medal in 1998 for the work on the Pluralism Project.

Eck’s 2001 book, *A New Religious America: How a “Christian Country” Has Become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation*, offered an historical overview of

religious pluralism in America that explained how America had been transformed from a nation dominated by Protestant Christians to a more democratic nation in which many religious groups co-exist in friendly equality and neighborliness. Acknowledging that this transformation was far from complete, the book nevertheless presented America's progressive march toward religious pluralism as a principal source of social harmony and national strength.

Eck's narrative tracked both the increasing diversity of religion in America and the progress protestants made in accepting that diversity, showing how American ideas evolved from religious tolerance to melting pot assimilation and eventually to an egalitarian pluralism in which each religious group retained its distinctiveness and took responsibility for the common good. She devoted considerable space to descriptions of Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic centers in the U.S., and to particular stories of how twentieth-century Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims made America home. She pointed to the underlying unity beneath religious differences and equated religious diversity with pluralism and with democracy. Thus her chapter on Hinduism in the U.S. began with the claim that, "*E Pluribus Unum*, 'From Many, One,' could easily come from the ancient Rig Veda, with its affirmation, 'Truth is One. People call it by many names.'"^{xiv}

Eck did not discuss the relationship between a religious system with many names for truth and a social system based on caste hierarchies, but that oversight made sense in light of her effort to present different religions in the most positive light. Such positive constructions of religion served the idea that many religions were variants of one mystical reality. They also served the underlying argument that religion was fundamental to democracy and social cooperation.

Eck's colleague at Harvard Divinity School, William R. Hutchison, elaborated on several of the main points in Eck's argument and went beyond her in analyzing the history of religious pluralism in the United States. In his 2003 book, *Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal*, Hutchison maintained liberal valuations of religion and religious pluralism. At the same time, he opened religious pluralism to critical inquiry more fully than before by calling it a form of idealism and by charting the conflicts this ideal generated as it emerged over time.

In a book published around the same time, Charles H. Lippy moved historical investigation of religious pluralism another important step forward by identifying a turning point in the historical development of religious pluralism. Lippy discerned a "cultural metamorphosis" occurring in the last third of the nineteenth century that "paved the way for...pluralism coming to fruition in the twentieth century." This metamorphosis occurred across religious traditions as religious life in all its diverse forms became more personalized. For many Americans, Lippy explained, "Personal experience replaced biblical revelation as the starting point for theological discourse; personal experience likewise superseded the community of the faithful as the buttress for belief."^{xv} While Eck saw religion as the common ground in American culture, Lippy defined the common ground more precisely, arguing that what Americans shared was not religion *per se*, but an agreement about how religion ought to operate. For Lippy, this cultural agreement that religion was essentially a personal matter enabled religious diversity to flourish, and allowed that diversity to enrich common life through its individual expressions.

This effort to historicize religious pluralism has also been abetted by scholars who denounce religious pluralism, and blame religious studies for promoting it. In an

acrimonious but important book, D. G. Hart, a church historian at Westminster Theological Seminary, argued that the academic study of religion is a shoddy enterprise based on vague ideas about religion and religious pluralism and their contributions to democratic civilization. In his 1999 book, *How the University Got Religion: Religious Studies in American Higher Education* Hart called for a halt on “trying to secure a religion-friendly university.” He condemned mainline protestants for trying to water down religion to make it relevant in a modern world and pointed to the origin of religious studies in mainline protestant efforts to salvage the connection between religion and American culture. Denouncing tenure and promotion as “so much hay and stubble” and calling “faithful academics” to abandon universities and commit themselves instead to the “enduring rewards” of “new heavens and new earth,” Hart held out the prospect that stronger institutions of religious learning would appear as the liberal university crumbled under the weight of its corrupt standards and intellectual confusion.^{xvi}

However quixotic his crusade against “the modern university,” Hart’s discussion of the origins of religious studies in mainline protestantism makes an important contribution to the historiography of religious pluralism. His alienation from liberal interpretations of religion, and from liberal efforts to make the study of religion a humanizing influence in higher education, enabled him to discern idealistic assumptions within conventional concepts of religion and religious pluralism. Even more important, his history of the development of religious studies in the 1940s and 50s helps us see the role that religious studies played in advancing religious pluralism. As Hart showed, advocates for religious studies in the 1940s and 50s believed that the academic study of religion would serve as a vehicle for inculcating modern liberal democratic values. Hart

argued that religious studies was designed to realize the American Council of Learned Societies' vision for the humanities as a "platform upon which democratically and liberally minded citizens throughout the country may now unite and move in greater harmony and efficiency toward our common goal."^{xvii}

Other critics have emerged to investigate the relationship between religious pluralism and religious studies. Russell T. McCutcheon's *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (1997) and Timothy Fitzgerald's *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (2000), criticized religious studies as an elaborate system of institutional operation geared to uphold religious pluralism. Unlike Hart, McCutcheon and Fitzgerald had no investment in perpetuating the Church, Christianity, or belief in God. Like Hart, however, they criticized religious pluralism as a sentimental, romantic ideal—a kind of wishful thought about the way human beings understood the meaning of life.

While Hart criticized religion, religious pluralism, and religious studies for being antithetical to biblical revelation, McCutcheon and Fitzgerald criticized them for perpetuating mysticism and obstructing critical inquiry. In McCutcheon's view, "because the goal appears to be a theology of religious pluralism, the task at hand is not to develop a testable theory capable of explaining."^{xviii} Fitzgerald connected this theology of religious pluralism with "the wider historical process of western imperialism" and with "the industry known as religious studies" that portrays "an idealized world of so-called faith communities—of worship, customs, beliefs, doctrines, and rites entirely divorced from the realities of power in different societies."^{xix}

Ahlstrom never imagined that the academic study of religion would be perceived as an insidious industry, or that religious pluralism would be seen as a theology in the service of western imperialism. Nevertheless, he did anticipated some of the analysis put forward by McCutcheon and Fitzgerald in his criticism of popular forms of religion that offered idealized worlds divorced from the realities of power. Although he believed that idealism was essential for a democratic American society to work, did not link that idealism to religion *per se*, but rather to a secularized tradition of social thought derived from protestant thinkers and institutions. If Ahlstrom were alive today, he might say that his underlying concern about the viability of religious pluralism as an effective mainstay of democracy had not been allayed. At the same time, he might be pleased that the work of historicizing religious pluralism has enabled us to better assess the relationship between religion in America and democracy.

ⁱ Elizabeth Barnes, *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 5.

ⁱⁱ Claude Welch, *Graduate Education in Religion: A Critical Appraisal* (Missoula: University of Montana Press, 1971), 168-178; for a history of connections between protestant divinity schools and religious studies, see Conrad Cherry, *Hurrying Toward Zion: Universities, Divinity Schools, and American Protestantism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995). Thanks to Shaun Horton for assistance with this section of the paper.

ⁱⁱⁱ William F. Quillian, Jr., "The Religion Teacher and the Churches," *The Journal of Bible and Religion* 21:4 (October, 1953), quotations from 227, 229, 231.

^{iv} Floyd H. Ross, "A Re-Examination of Christian Attitudes Toward Other Faiths," *The Journal of Bible and Religion* 21: 2 (April, 1953), quotations from 79, 82-83.

^v Robert S. Eccles, "What is Sectarian Teaching?" *The Journal of Bible and Religion* 19:3 (July, 1951), quotations from 134, 136-137.

^{vi} In January 2007, for example, an article in the *The New York Times* defined evangelicals as "Protestants who believe that the Bible is literally true." The full definition of Evangelicals given: "Protestants who believe that the Bible is literally true, that salvation requires a 'born again' conversion, and that one must share that faith with others." *New York Times*, Sunday, January 14, 2007, p. 21.

^{vii} Josiah Strong, *The New Era, or the Coming Kingdom* (New York: Baker & Taylor, 1893), quotation from 319.

^{viii} Amanda Porterfield, "The Pragmatic Role of Religious Studies," *The Transformation of American Religion: The Story of a Late Twentieth-Century Awakening* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 202-226.

^{ix} "...one may hope," he wrote in the last paragraph of the book, for "increasing evidence that the American people, in their moral and religious history, were drawing on the profounder elements of their traditions, finding new sources of strength and confidence, and thus vindicating the idealism which has been so fundamental an element in the country's past." Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, quotations from 1091, 1096.

Ahlstrom traced the sense of shared responsibility for the common good, which he perceived to be quickly evaporating, to Puritanism, and he was keen to show how the ethical spirit of Puritanism led to the social gospel movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries rather than to fundamentalism. Proponents of the social gospel reformulated the Puritan sense of social responsibility in modern, secular terms, Ahlstrom argued, because they were eager for everyone to participate in a democratic social covenant, which they understood to be derived from reformed protestant ideas and institutions. For Ahlstrom, "the Social Gospel was anything but new. The major element in America's moral and religious heritage was Puritanism," he explained, "with its powerfully rooted convictions that the shaping and, if need be, the remaking of society was the Church's concern." Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), quotation from 787.

^x Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, quotations from 1090 and 1093.

^{xi} "Over and over again, we have grown familiar with clichés about the fact and experience of pluralism in the United States," Albanese wrote in the preface to the first edition. "Yet when we look at America's history books—and more to the point here, America's religious history books—we find that they generally tell one major story, incorporating the separate stories of many peoples into a single story line arranged chronologically." Catherine L. Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*, 3rd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1999; orig. 1981), quotations from xv.

^{xii} Albanese, *America*, quotations from xv, 17. Also see Catherine L. Albanese, *Corresponding Motion: Transcendental Religion and the New America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1977); *Nature Religion in America: From the Algonkian Indians to the New Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990); *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

^{xiii} Annemarie Schimmel appealed to the same proverb in the opening paragraph of her popular book first published in 1975, *The Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, tracing the proverb to the Sufi poet Rumi and his description of the relationship between the mystical reality of Islam (the elephant) and Islam's various schools and sects (blind men). Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, p. 3.

^{xiv} Eck, *New Religious America*, quotation from 80.

^{xv} Charles H. Lippy, *Pluralism Comes of Age: American Religious Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2000), quotations from 162, 14, 143. Catherine Albanese developed a parallel insight in the third edition of her text: “American cultural religion, as we know it today, roughly began to assume its shape in the late nineteenth century.” By “American cultural religion,” Albanese meant popular culture in its mythic dimensions and elements of sacred time and space. Albanese, *America*, quotation from 465.

^{xvi} D. G. Hart, *How the University Got Religion: Religious Studies in American Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), quotations from 251.

^{xvii} Hart, *How the University Got Religion*, quotation from 110. Also see

^{xviii} Russell T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), quotation from 117.

^{xix} Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), quotations from 8-9.