



Chapter Forty-seven

Religious Practices

Americans were Bible-literate in great part,
until multiplying Catholics and secularists
weakened the grasp of the Old Testament.

It was a typical old custom for the head of family to read at table a randomly chosen verse of the Bible and comment solemnly upon it. Its lesson having been figured out, ordinary life might proceed. If one family affected this process 3,000 times, and twenty million families in all underwent the experience, for a total of 6 billion readings, every verse would have been read numerous times, certainly punctuating the country with a Bible-effect, never to be shaken off.

Actually Americans were all along ignorant of religious history and philosophy, although every sect in the world has come to be found here, and several new sects are born every year. No country has had so many of them, counting from the beginning. Going beyond

“religion” into the realm of cults of magic, voodoo, charismatic leaders, religious diet, yoga, psychic health, and so on, again America has led the world in their creation going back to the earliest times.

Modeling itself after World War II on American law, Japan soon was awash in sects and cults, 231,019 of them having been registered by 1993; millions of Japanese were claimed by two or more sects. Probably the Americans numbered as many or more; thousands went unregistered. Their particular cult usually told and tells Americans to ignore the others, and, if of no cult, they were not informed of religion in the schools, nor by the mass media. Society was and remained irreligious and profane. At the same time, popular churches and religions dominated American popular culture in the Nineteenth Century and continued to do so in the Twentieth Century. One may justifiably demand clarification of the apparent contradiction. Probably one explanation is that “Jacksonian democracy” included widespread religious democracy, near to anarchy very often.

But there are other reasons for the intermingling of the sacred and the profane and major developments overtook religion in late nineteenth century America. Definitions may be let to intrude: Religiousness is the mind when it is contemplating what it deems to be the sacred and is doing its bidding.

The American population could be fitted along the continuum of religiousness from zero to nearly a total preoccupation. Religious rites - or worship - are external practices labeled as religious, and are usually activated to put one in a mood to contemplate and conduct oneself religiously. Ritual may be group-performed or personal

. American sects have varied ritually from the most simplistic to the highly ritualistic. Each sect in turn has had a history of internal fluctuation from its average, simplistic to ritualistic and vice versa; thus, its pastors may don ordinary clothing or ceremonial gowns; prayers may be elaborated, or cut back; confession of sin may be public, then private.

A religion or sect or cult is a set and system of practices of a group to accommodate the wish to be religious. America had hundreds of

these in the beginning, given the diversity of Indian nations and the quick settlement of a dozen European sects on the continent. Despite the extinction of most Indian nations, the sects increased into the thousands; in the 1890's there were 143 denominations and 150 independent congregations of considerable size. But of the congregations a hundred had less than 25,000 members.

And of minor cults, there were thousands.

So, too, today.

All are easily subsumed under several large and more significant groupings in the creation of the total picture, never forgetting that to the individual American significance lies in his or her special religion, indeed in a personal religion. Strangely, in America, where the crush for uniformity has been great and religion has like everywhere in the world been an instrument pressing for conformity, a great number of people have used the American religious system to escape some measure of conformity by setting up their own churches.

The word "denomination" is used for sect; that usage began in the early 1700's and we find Benjamin Franklin speaking of "all sects and denominations" interchangeably. Probably the word sect was acquiring the onus of a fraction too small to be important and also *outré*, so that denomination came to be the more respectable word, all the more as sects multiplied and provided embarrassments to the reputable clergy.

Also part of our petite lexicon, "fundamentalist" came to designate those who believed every word of the Old and New Testaments of the Bible and tried to live by them. Evangelists were those who went forward to preach personal conversion to the multitude. Millennialists and Adventists preached that the Second Coming of Christ was to occur soon, and often accompanied their prognostications with the dire forebodings of the Apocalypse, according to which vision of St. John, the Second Coming would be attended by all manner of disaster and an appropriate consignment of people to Heaven or Hell. It was estimated in these years that 95% of Protestant church members were evangelicals.

When to fundamentalism and evangelism were added millennialism and ecstaticism, one had the powerful brew of millions of Americans. Brew it was, for there was a negative correlation always between possession by these three states of belief and possession by alcohol. "Dry" America emerged most forcibly from them. Americans originating from Mediterranean or Asiatic cultures had less of both possessions.



There is a psychological state that can be called pseudo-religiousness and pseudo-religion or secular religion. This occurs when a people satisfy all of the definitions above, except that they deny that they are being religious. Usually this occurs in two forms: with those who claim to be scientific and non-religious, but do not follow the scientific method, and instead worship at the altar of science; and with those who deny religion, but are thoroughly superstitious, and even may be dedicated to magic.

You may add to the scientoid those political systems and political practices that are religious in all but name: the worship of a dictator like Stalin or Hitler replete with ideas and rituals, and employing a religious litany and language, even with a bible such as Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. Marxist communism claimed to follow scientific procedures in the determination of its principles, but enforced such principles religiously and compulsively. Both nazi and communist movements visited America.

But these do not exhaust our categories of the irreligious. Additionally are those who are cynics and experimentalists, dethroning all belief systems to the best of their ability, and we can associate with this rather small and sophisticated group all the disbelievers, backsliders, non-professing, unconcerned, inattentive people. A fair example in literature would be the immensely productive journalist of the early Twentieth Century, Henry L. Mencken.

Finally are all those who observe the external rites of a religion, but in reality are using them largely to achieve other values. Here to be placed are the people who in fact "worship Mammon;" the *wealth-accruing value* dominates them, and they pretend to religiousness in order to facilitate achievement of their true interest among the adherents to the church. Here, too, are all those who wittingly or unwittingly, hypocritically, use the religious system to procure more of the *goods of respect* (for being religious, etc.)

of knowledge (e.g., what is going on in the community, of who the enemy is alleged to be, and of what religion is all about),

of affection (e.g., by displaying oneself in church, by meeting people through the religion, by being officially forgiven - restoring the love of the deity),

of well-being (by the soothing mental effects on neurosis that performing ritual and gaining benevolent attention bring),

and *of power* (as in meeting prospective voters, obtaining collective support of a congregation and denomination, arranging political campaigns through the church connections, and demonstrating one's devotion to God's work).

The changing membership of Protestant denominations during the Gilded Age is part of the swelling up and out of social class configurations, so that religious convictions following the professional theologians (almost none existed to follow anyhow) were readily put aside in favor of convenience and social climbing as grounds for belonging to this or that church - the same family in a larger town, for instance, joining in succession a Baptist, Methodist, Congregational and Episcopal Church, as one's wealth increased.

The Baptist church began as a community church in places such as Providence, Rhode Island, but became a people's church, the poorer people indeed, so that Baptists became on the average the poorest people in the country, not excepting the originally penurious, recently immigrant Catholics; adherence by great numbers of Southern Whites and Blacks explains the paucity of affluent Baptists; correspondingly, the ritual simplicity and bare surroundings of the Baptist churches, with their isolated and independent congregations, held great appeal to poorer people.

Only the Catholic Church in America was open and available to all social strata, and, to a larger extent than in Europe, was ruled by priests of humble social origins.



The theory of evolution as a result of natural selection and the total dismissal of the divine from biological change - Darwinism it was often called, from its sparking by Charles Darwin in 1860 -transported a major proportion of the intelligentsia (as we may call those whose lives are characterized by non-routine mental work) into agnosticism, belief merely in an otiose god, and atheism.

Before Darwin there had come, of course, the Enlightenment, Freemasonry, and Materialistic Socialism, the outbursting Social Science of Auguste Comte(with a religion of Progress that he invented to go with it), and St. Simon in France, and generally a lowering of human eyes from the heavens, so Darwinism's effects were all the more apparent.

There came, too, a tumult of findings in the sciences of chemistry, biology, and geology. George Lyell, Darwin's friend and supporter, routed the catastrophists in England, hence in the United States, with his theory of incremental changes over long periods of time as the explanation for the tallest mountains and deepest seas and all in-between.

Can one dare to estimate the proportions of such persons in the late nineteenth century, or, in fact, for any given period of American history? One may do so, with little chance of success, for even to do so with the people of today would entail a large random sample of the population followed by personal interviews in depth and an analysis by computer at the hands of a group of highly qualified anthropologist-sociologist-psychologists.

If we cannot get such a project off the boards in these days, we cannot expect more than the poorest ore to be extracted with the greatest cost for times gone by. Intimidated by this thought, we shall leave it for the more pedestrian task of tracing the continuing career of the various religious denominations of the nation.



In 1850 there had been a million Catholics, nearly three million Methodists, over 1.5 million Baptists, and just under a million Presbyterians. By 1870 the Methodists with 3.7 millions slightly exceeded the Catholics; Baptists and Presbyterians had risen modestly in numbers, with 2.1 and 1.2 millions. By 1890, Catholics exceeded Methodists, (7.3 to 7.1 millions), but Baptists had risen to 5.9 millions, and the Presbyterians to 1.9. The trend to Catholicism continued until about 17% of the total population and 30% of all adherents to churches was reached by World War I.

Though we have yet to cap these figures, it may be said here that generally Catholics came to number about a third of the population, Protestants another third, and non-sectarians and secularists another third after World War II.

Respecting intellectual and social issues, the secular one-third has always leaned to the Protestant side, preferring it to the centralized, coordinated, sometimes more conservative Catholic Church, with its segregated elite of priests, friars and nuns, and its cosmopolitan leadership in the Vatican and elsewhere.

The demographics often caused confusion; the concentration of Protestants in small towns and country gave them to believe and

act often as if America was theirs. Their isolation also led them to believe that other Protestants were like them. But the differences among Protestant sects was profound. In this period particularly, evangelistic Protestants came to be distinguished from the more urbane and establishment groups, the Lutherans, the Presbyterians and Episcopalians, and the very small but influential groups of Quakers (who had forgotten how to quake), Christian Scientists, and Unitarians.

Mary Baker Eddy of New Hampshire founded the Church of Christ Scientist in 1879, consecrated to the emulation of Jesus's role as healer, and substituted spiritual healing for conventional medicine as far as possible. A small group, widely scattered in over a thousand churches and societies around the world, they were well integrated socially and intellectually.

Predecessors of Humanists and Ethical Culture affiliates were getting ready to play an important role on the fringe of religion with their attempts to derive systematic ethics from the discoveries of science. Their time had not yet come. A more extreme cult, practitioners of Scientology, came forward under L. Ron Hubbard even later, in 1954, professing beliefs in reincarnation over millions of years and a form of psychotherapy that sought to release one from the grip of harmfully bad memories. It was opposed by practically all other religious groups.

The racial separatism of American churches, existing little changed to this day, conveys as much as anything else, perhaps as much as job discrimination and civil rights abuses, the failure of the American myths of equality and fraternity. Less than 15% of the African-American church members belonged to the Roman Catholic Church (8.4%) and bi-racial Protestant churches (5.1) in a 1989 survey.

The mingling of races in America has been mostly in secular settings. Inasmuch as the African churches provided services to their members that arose out of their special social conditions, their separatism permitted the expression of their own leadership and techniques of consolation and redress.

Still, the White churches could have provided, as they did in a few cases, more generous help and a more powerful lift on the way up in society for individuals of another race, not to mention the many White souls who would presumably enhance thereby their momentum toward salvation.

Otherwise about 60% of African-Americans practice their rites in

their separate Baptist churches, in about 35, 000 Baptist congregations. Some 6,000 churches belong to the African Methodist Episcopal faith, another 6000 to the African Methodist Episcopal Zion, 2,300 to the Christian Methodist Episcopal, 10,000 in the Pentecostal Church of God in Christ, 550 in other Pentecostal rites, and the rest belong to a number of religions.

If one can generalize about so disparate a set of churches, one would say that African-American congregations in this period were individualistic and personal, socially expressive, non-controversial, non-racist, non-vindictive, but engaged in social gospel work to take care of the minimal emergency needs of their own flocks.

Perhaps the most significant development in American Protestantism began in a ramshackle church in Los Angeles in 1906 where a self-educated African-American named William Joseph Seymour preached to a few hearers that the Holy Spirit mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles of Christ was willing to descend again upon the faithful and would do so. Fascinated by his words, his hearers began to experience an understanding of one another, despite differences in language, and enjoyed sensations of healing, both social and physical.

Christians, said Seymour, had heretofore built formal creeds and hierarchies that set people apart from each other; God, beginning with the destruction of the pretentious Tower of Babel, had condemned mankind to confusion and misunderstanding. But now the Great Day had come via the Holy Spirit; believers prayed, danced in the aisles with shouts of joy; they felt salvation was theirs. Racial divisions would be no more.

The Church of God in Christ expanded rapidly, taking in people of all races and languages. The American Whites pulled out in the 1920's, returned to the fold in the 1990's; an equality of races was agreed upon for the council overseeing what were now twenty-five different bodies. But meanwhile other Pentecostal churches sprang up in America and around the world, and soon constituted the largest non-Catholic Christian denomination in the world. Its people include millions of the poor, and a small representation of the more affluent classes, thus representing the real proportions of the world as only the giant confessions, Roman Catholic and Islam, do.



Adverting to the membership of non-African congregations, we find

that in the late nineteenth century Methodist congregations were claiming fewer members than their largest competitor, the Baptists, for the Protestant lower income bulk. In 1850, Methodists held 117 adherents per 1000 Americans, Baptists 70; in 1890, Baptists closed in with 94 to the Methodists' 114; by 1926, the churches reversed priorities, the Baptists now holding 106 to the Methodists' 101.

This occurred despite the intellectualizing and seminarizing of Methodism, indeed because of it. For the Baptists, especially in the South, increased their part-time intensely motivated pastorate living close to its folk. In the South, Baptists surpassed Methodists in numbers already in 1890. About then, too, the Baptist-related Disciples of Christ reached out to a million members. The Baptist gains in the South came largely because they were the religion of the continued Southern insurrection against the Union.

While the Methodists tended to accommodate to a new urban-industrial civilization, and therefore waned in the face of Catholics and secularism, the Baptists waxed precisely on the basis of their resentments and ignominy - military, economic, political, and social. One writer (J.W.Flynt) tells that *"they created a version of American civil religion, baptizing the 'lost cause' in the blood of the lamb"*.

Speaking not in these hard terms but in the language of practical theology with a strong functionalist or pragmatic bent, Edgar Young Mullins defined the creedless faith of the Southern Baptists. He was a defender of Evangelical Baptism, exponent of poet John Milton's Inner Light, expounding a personal relationship of the true believer with his God. His influence was enduring, overthrown finally in the seventies of the twentieth century by the complete anti-intellectualism of the fundamentalist right.

The Baptists became the American rural equivalent of a proletarian movement, emotionally demonstrative in their rites, and politically and racially aggressive. As we have noted before, Black and White movements have mirrored each other; African Baptists were equally numerous, but confined by the rules of the 100-year war of reconstruction to the expressive and service aspects of Baptism.

Losses in market share did not affect the growing role of Methodism as the heartland church of Protestantism. We recall that the church originated already acclimated to industrialism in England. John Wesley, whose teachings of salvation by faith alone deliberately repudiated Calvinism in the 1740's, insisted upon method and order in daily life and religion. His was an enormously persuasive evangelical formula, complete with circuit-riding ministers who

brought the good word to the smallest hamlet. They crossed the ocean in 1766 and quickly rounded up souls by the tens of thousands. Within the span of a memorial generation, they had recruited over a million members.

With the Baptists, they made up the Bible Belt, the region crossing the United States from East Coast to the Rockies, and including much of the South, not so much of the North, characterized by fundamentalism, evangelism, ecstaticism, and millennialism in religion, with conservative and paranoiac attitudes in politics and mores.



One might wonder where the progenitor of all these religions would be in this fluid period of religiosity in America: Judaism. As had been the case for two thousand years, Judaism was no missionary religion. It was a defensive religion, seeking to guarantee its survival in the face of repeated attempts to destroy it.

In America it did somewhat more, but always within its Jewish provenance: typically American, it split up into fundamentalists, orthodox, and reform, then other sects as well, Re-constructionists, even sliding off into Ethical Culture, Theosophists, and Jews for Jesus.

Reform Judaism held most of the rich and even after Eastern European Jews began to be numbered among the rich, the Reform Temple over-represented German-Jews, Spanish-Portuguese Jews, and other Jews of older American origins, and came to resemble Congregationalism in manner and purposes. Elohim more than Yahweh was their God.

The Orthodox and Fundamentalists shaded off from this in the direction of the religion of the East European village; it was the religion of the *shtetl*, the settlements of the Jewish Pale of (enforced) Settlement under czarism, which extended from Warsaw to Minsk and from Vilna to the Black Sea from the eighteenth century to the First World War. This Orthodox Judaism became the defensive uncomfortable immigrant religion, marching aggressively, however, under American conditions, like the Roman centurions who advanced with most of their hundred shields held overhead.

Losses to the secular elements of society were heavy. A typical young American Jew of the late century (and his counterpart in Western Europe behaved in the same way) shed the temple for the marketplace or the agnostic intelligentsia as soon and as completely

as one could. Although they remained ethnically Jewish, a large number of male Jews (socialist, agnostic, hating superstition) discouraged the survival of Judaism in America; probably half the male Jews of the second generation did the same. The Orthodox, feeling embattled socially, like the Baptists, retained their fervor and their communicants more successfully than did the Reform groups.



The thrust of religion in this period opposed women's rights. Possibly the women activists were too rational, sober, and secular for the great body of female and male Protestants to embrace. There was no pulling themselves away from the Southern reconstructionist rebellion. The Catholic Church found its greatest support from the Irishwomen of the immigrant period, as we said earlier, but this involved a partnership with the priesthood, a junior and willing relationship, a highly productive one, but not the equal and creative role that feminism would have.

The feminist movement found its leaders and activists among the rather dissociated or loosely associated members of the old established and unaggressive Protestant churches of the Northeast. It began to find them, too, among young Jewish women of East European origin and migrants from the West and South.

Susan B. Anthony was outstanding as writer, organizer, and agitator for women's rights. She paid out of pocket to print her excellent diatribes on the subject. In mid-career, 1872, she led a group of women to the polls, who received ballots, marked them, and cast them into the ballot box. She soon found herself indicted for illegal voting; after several hours of hearing, the judge brusquely ordered the jury to bring in a guilty verdict, then finally cut through a barrage of argument and denunciation from Miss Anthony to fine her, a fine that she refused to pay, but she was not jailed in the end either.

At the end of her life at the age of 86, she said to a friend, *"I have been striving for over sixty years for a little bit of justice no bigger than that [showing part of a finger] and yet I must die without obtaining it. Oh, it seems so cruel"*.

Besides the Irishwomen who labored on behalf of the Church stood a great many nuns of several nationalities. In 1820 there were already 270 of them, more than priests, who counted 150. The ratio of nuns to lay Catholics was 1.4 per thousand. By 1870 the number was 11,424 as against 3,780 priests, a ratio of three to one, and 2.5 against the lay element. By 1900, the ratio of nuns to priests was

four to one, the ratio to laypersons was 4.1 per thousand, and there were in all 49,620 of them. For every thousand Catholics there were 4.1 women-religious and one priest.

At the same time, there had grown up a network of friars of various orders, ranging from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from Canada to Mexico; they lived in their communities, sometimes doing social work or running schools, or taking care of their own souls, and sometimes helping a parish priest. Protestant ministers were more numerous, but many of them were serving part-time.

The most remarkable priest of the early Irish parishes of New York City was Felix Varela, no Irishman at all but a Cuban who had fled the authorities of the Island after leading its fight for independence from Spain. The most powerful of Catholic religious leaders of the times was John Hughes, Bishop of New York. His problems were numerous and immense.

Though Irish, he could be tougher with his Irish priests and laymen than with the Germans, French, and Italians who had some considerable numbers in the district, especially then the Germans, for Italians had yet to arrive in large numbers. The Germans, he said, were *“exceedingly prone to division and strife among themselves”*. When Catholic refugees of the 1848 revolution arrived, he found their interest in public school education and parishioners’ control of the churches obnoxious. The Germans wanted to bury their dead apart from the Irish cemetery, whose custodians, they contended, were insulting and mishandled the burials; he would have none of this.

As for the Irish, too, at one point several of their priests so exasperated him with talk of their rights that he threatened to teach them County Monaghan canon law, and *“send them back to the bogs whence they came”*. Italians held one major parish and this he disbanded, forcing the exile of the priest, who had tried to interpose his will on the Bishop.

His successors pursued and maintained his tight controls over the parishes. His “bossism” was in accord with the trend of the times at the Vatican, and whether it was the church or the city government that came first beneath the bosses, it was surely the Irish hierarchy that at first, with its own bossed constituency in hand, dealt with the Anglo-Dutch bosses of Tammany and later for a century comfortably with the Irish bosses, a line spreading and ending with Richard Daley of Chicago.



The American Catholic Church was in its beginnings French, Spanish, and internationalist. When the great immigrations of Catholics from Ireland and Germany occurred in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the Irish, equipped with the English language and used to resisting British of all types, especially their fellows of Ulster, took over the leading posts. They were less educated and less culturally sophisticated than the Germans: the Germans built finer churches, and established classical music in their churches. Both groups were poverty-stricken manual laborers to begin with.

The Germans moved into farming, smaller towns, skilled labor and engineering management. The Irish went for the political jugular. Their tastes and conduct were so different that they would usually have to build separate churches even though living in close proximity. Actually, the various ethnic strains of Catholicism developed and supported their own churches.

In time Italics came to have a plurality of members, 22%, followed by Irish, Germanics, French-Canadian and Poles, Hispanics, Eastern European, English and Lithuanian.

The Italic strain is found in all regions at the 10% or higher level, except for the West North Central States, and with its highest representation in the strategic Middle Atlantic States. The Germanic strain is found in the Church of the East and North Central States most prominently, 22 and 44% of the Catholics respectively, but rarely in New England. Irish Catholics are distributed around the country. Hispanics are concentrated in the Middle Atlantic and West, Polish Catholics in the East North Central region.

Between three and seven percent of the Catholics in the nation are of British origin.

If ever proof were needed of the continued organizational genius of the Roman Catholic Church it came here in this period in America when the hierarchy held like the strongest spider net the incoming and out-struggling groups. As with the Southern Baptists and other churches under societal fire such as the Mormons, the Catholic church to a considerable extent was compacted by the external discrimination against it.

When the large Catholic immigration to New England was on, in 1835, the famous preacher Lyman Beecher told his Congregational flock that his Roman sources were warning of a Papal plot, with which local Catholics were co-conspirators, that was being hatched

to seize control of the Mississippi Valley, a false rumor of course. (The next evening, the Ursuline Convent school of Boston was burned down by a mob.)

Later we shall note how, when Catholicism reached a high measure of success and adaptation in America, it began to lose members, clergy, and routine worshipers. Again the Celtic analogy could apply. The Celtic Irish Catholics mirrored the Celtic Southern Baptists. They were a defeated and poverty-stricken, largely illiterate people. One stood for the Northern urban laboring classes, the other for the Southern rural laboring classes. Each was aggressive and political in its own sphere. Each would fight the other for control of the national political parties for a century, the Northern Irish being the quitters first because they prospered more and could not so well champion the poor.

Both groups gave ground to satisfy their rank and file, reducing the more complex cultures of their respective churches to more simple formulas and devices. Both were tense religious groups, raising their religion as a flag against all outsiders; both were evangelical churches, although the Irish had mainly to keep their own people in the faith against the hostile cultures and forces around them. Both reproduced children at high rates.

By 1886 over half the Catholic bishops were Irish, by 1900 two-thirds. This condition was to change, but the church was indelibly marked by the Celtic occupation. The Church was non-intellectual, non-aesthetic.

The often-reprinted catechism was put into every child's hands and learned by rote. The Church zeroed in upon the parish, aiming chiefly to preserve the faith. Parishioners were to be baptized, confirmed, given communion and confession at least annually, married, and buried in segregated cemeteries by their priest.

The Church organized a parallel set of auxiliaries so that Catholics would not be drawn to Protestant-dominated organizations. The Church set up fraternities and sororities, social services, recreation programs for youth and adults, revival assemblies, summer camps, orphanages, charities, and, of course, offered a pageantry, processions, feasts, holidays, and the like, overall to dwarf the stripped-down Protestantism characterizing most of America.

All of this activity and its Protestant equivalent has to be considered repeatedly to understand why so many Americans resisted the assumption of social functions by government. They would haply believe that a full and proper volunteerism could take on all

collective obligations and perform them with a spirit
alien to politics and bureaucracy.

The social gospel did emerge strongly in these decades. German influences were strong in defining and agitating for the concept. Religion was no longer to be concentrated upon Heaven and its occupants. Citing relevant passages of the gospels and Old Testament (all religions are complete; they have a divine word for every situation), it was to confront the social ills of mankind and offer support to their treatment, whether by the church or by the state or both together.

The movement was Protestant and rather highbrow. Its early sponsors were Josiah Strong, who led the Evangelical Alliance and sponsored conferences, and Graham Taylor who taught his theories at Chicago Theological Seminary and practiced them at the Chicago Commons settlement house. The movement blended well into the agenda of the Federal Council of Churches after this was formed; it affected Jewish philanthropic activities as well.



Few Jews are anti-semitic, yet a great many devotees of Christianity are, whether lay or clergy. Generally speaking, the closer one gets to the core of a Christian sect, ancient Israel and the Old Testament, the more anti-semitic vibrations one senses. Thus it is a corollary that the closer the relation to Judaism the more the tendency to anti-semitism.

Another prevalent attitude complex is anti-foreignism, isolationism, and anti-immigration. Here the situation again is the above: the closer to the core, the farther from tolerance. The same is true of tolerance of other American sects. Another strange correlation relates to the popularity of a sect: the larger the numbers of a Protestant sect the more likely its members to hold strong prejudices in politics, race, religion and personal life.

The religiously devout were the most concerned about corruption in American life and most likely to blame others for the problem. In regard to science, the more devout were the most hostile, in all denominations. The same is true with respect to women's rights, the right to divorce, and the right to masturbate (for this last is a personal right that American religious groups have expended enormous stretches of time and energy to extirpate - by assuring hell to small boys and girls, by inventing contra-diddling contraptions as cruel as traps intended for wild animals, etc.)

Anti-radicalism and hyper-Americanism also proceed apace as one nears the core membership of a sect. Prostitution, fornication, contraception, abortion, and racial miscegenation make a can of wormy issues that activate with the intensity of affiliation and conviction. Teetotalism is definitely Protestant, lowbrow religion to all drinkers, but the Catholics are exceptional as tipplers on all levels. All denominations are pro-prayer in the schools, although the prayer that emerges always is infantile prattle: *“God is great, God is good, we thank Him for our food, amen”*, or some such, said in one breath mechanically and inattentively.

Even this would probably be deemed judicially to be unconstitutional; still, throughout this period, prayer, Bible teachings, and Sunday School exhortations flourished in the public schools around the nation. The family was exalted, first in its prolific and extended form, then, when that became hopeless as the norm, in the form of the nuclear family of two parents forever united raising two or three children. This concept failed miserably within a century’s time but continued to the end of the twentieth century as the national ideal, preferably to be enforced by law, if anyone could think of a way to enforce it.

As shall be shown, American religion in this period exercised its appetite for imperialism.

It sent its minions abroad by the thousands.

The Mormons even decided that every Latter Day Saint must go abroad to convert all nations. By Y2K, half of all Mormons dwelled outside of the USA.

(Of course, some would say that the Mormons were not even Christian, but in fact the Mormon religion is peculiarly American.)

The Hawaiian Islands were literally conquered by missionary families.

As a final trait of 90+% of all of American religious practitioners, I perceive anti-intellectualism and hostility to cultural sophistication.

So much for church attitudes in America, carried, it must be said, often by generous, hard-working, well-wishing souls. Even in the most remote and small congregation of any religious group in America you might find the needle in the haystack - persons who were compatible emotionally, attitudinally, intellectually, politically, occupationally.

What I am saying about the norms of American sects is not intended to and should not frighten any reader unduly. Still, to conclude, I must repeat the quadrilogy of American religion, including even

some part of the Catholic church and of Judaism: fundamentalism, millennialism, evangelism, ecstaticism. All of these are wrapped up in a personalism, a one-to-one offer to God, who is implored to accept less and less in return from the petitioner.

A typical American, whatever his obeisance to others, would like to constitute a religion of one, as Jefferson declared of himself. He is, if a good person, rather like the Ojibwa Indian who seeks a life of longevity, health, and freedom from misfortunes, and is made to dream as a young adolescent of a personal relation to a great spirit, with whose immanent appearance - once one dreams well - one will have a lifelong relationship and will do one a good turn when it is needed; and all of this will permit the Ojibwa to fulfill his simple wants, be generous to others, assume mutual obligations with one's neighbors, and be unselfish.

There is an individualism and collective and divine relationship that is most suggestive of the shape of American religiousness as a whole. Invariably frustrated in the perfect solipsistic religion, Americans would like next best to be part of a religion of all, of unanimity, of extreme majoritarianism. This would not be likely - this authoritarianism of the majority.

We must leave the Americans uncomfortable with their religions. At the one side stands Protestantism, with an authoritarian God and a libertarian church. At the other side stands Catholicism, with a libertarian God and an authoritarian church. Most Americans by far circulated nervously in-between, then in the Gilded Age, as now.