

GOD IN AMERICA

Study Guide



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EXPERIENCE

FRONTLINE

GOD IN AMERICA

EPISODE ONE: THE NEW ADAM



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In New Mexico, Franciscan monks met resistance from native pueblos in the Revolt of 1680.

The New Adam

The New World challenged and changed the religious faiths the first European settlers brought to it. In New Mexico, the spiritual rituals of the Pueblo Indians collided with the Catholic faith of the Spanish Franciscan friars who came to convert them, ultimately exploding in violent rebellion. In New England, Puritan leader John Winthrop faced off against religious dissenters from within his own ranks, and a new message of spiritual rebirth from evangelical preachers like George Whitefield swept through the American colonies, upending traditional religious authority and kindling a rebellious spirit that fused with the political upheaval of the American Revolution.

The Crown and the Cross

On Oct. 12, 1492, Christopher Columbus set foot on an island he named “San Salvador,” or “Holy Savior,” claiming it for Spain and declaring its Native inhabitants subjects of the Crown. Columbus had sailed for “Gold, God and Glory,” sharing with the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella an apocalyptic vision of a New World full of “heathen” souls ripe for harvesting in the name of Christ.

Spain moved swiftly to claim land, search for gold and spread the Catholic faith in the New World. From Mexico City, Franciscan friars fanned out into New Mexico, Arizona, Texas and eventually California. In New Mexico, they encountered indigenous peoples they called the Pueblos, after the townlike structures they inhabited. Religion animated the lives of both Franciscans and Pueblos, but in very different ways. Sin, suffering and salvation stood at the core of the Franciscan faith, but the Pueblos had no concept of sacrifice, redemption or punishment in an afterlife. They had no word for “religion” in the sense of an institution with dogma or creed. What they did

FOR DISCUSSION

What role did religion play in the cultural misunderstandings and colonial relations of Europeans and Native peoples in the New World? How did the religious worldviews of the Europeans and Indians differ?

RELATED CLIP: “Our whole world around us is our religion...I’m going to get this truth in there.”

What is religion? How do you define it? Is it a matter of doctrines, creeds, rituals and traditions, as it was for Catholic Spain? Is it an all-encompassing way of seeing and experiencing the natural world, as it was for the Native inhabitants encountered by the Franciscans?

How would you describe John Winthrop’s vision of a Puritan community, and how attainable do you think it was? What advice was he giving to his companions?

What did the Puritans hope to achieve? What was the goal of their religious and political community? Why did they consider conformity so necessary for their cohesion?



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Actor Michael Emerson (*Lost*) as Puritan leader John Winthrop in 1630.

have was “religiousness,” a way of living deeply attuned to the spiritual forces of the universe that pervaded every movement and every breath, every living thing.

But the friars were determined to convert the Pueblos, convinced they would otherwise suffer eternal damnation. In just 10 years, the Franciscans built 40 missions along the Rio Grande. Friars instructed the Native inhabitants in the catechism, the Eucharist and other sacraments. They organized the workday, sending men into the fields and shops, women to looms and laundry pits. Unmarried men and women were kept in separate quarters. Everyone was required to say grace before meals. Thousands were baptized. Those who resisted were punished. In the process of imposing their faith, the Franciscans tore the fabric of the Native culture that had sustained the Pueblos’ spiritual traditions.

Resentment festered and grew. Drought came. Crops withered. Native religious leaders were punished and hanged. In 1680, the Pueblos’ opposition broke out into open rebellion, led by a man named Pópay. The Pueblos killed settlers and friars, smashing crucifixes and sending the Spanish survivors fleeing down the Rio Grande. For the time being, they rid themselves of the remnants of the Catholic faith, returning to their ancestral ways.

“A Model of Christian Charity” by John Winthrop

Some historians have called John Winthrop “America’s forgotten founding father.” Others have described his words, written in 1630—about the duties of community and the establishment of an exemplary new society in the Massachusetts Bay Colony—as one of the greatest American sermons. Winthrop’s language about being a “city upon a hill” was drawn from the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament. Read the famous closing words of “A Model of Christian Charity”:

“... we must be knit together, in this work, as one man. We must entertain each other in brotherly affection. We must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for the supply of others’ necessities. We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality. We must delight in each other; make others’ conditions our own; rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, as members of the same body. So shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. The Lord will be our God, and delight to dwell among us, as His own people, and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways, so that we shall see much more of His wisdom, power, goodness and truth, than formerly we have been acquainted with. We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies; when He shall make us a praise and glory that men shall say of succeeding plantations, “may the Lord make it like that of New England.” For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world....”

FOR DISCUSSION

How did the Puritan religious community define itself, and how would you compare it to the ways contemporary religious communities define themselves today?

What did conversion mean for the Puritans, and what does it mean today? Is it a single, blinding moment of faith, or is it a prolonged and arduous journey that proceeds in fits and starts, a process that requires commitment and tenacity?

“Anne Hutchinson is the future,” says religion professor Stephen Prothero. What links do you see between her 17th-century understanding that “God is speaking to each of us,” as Prothero describes it, and contemporary American spirituality? Between her religious experience and George Whitefield’s understanding of “inward change”?

RELATED CLIPS: “She’s having an intense prayer session...We need to listen to that voice of God inside us” and “Whitefield ignored denominational lines...what had been was not what was going to be.”

Evangelical preacher George Whitefield embodied “this perennial radical Protestant idea of immediate connection between God and the individual soul,” as religion professor Stephen Marini puts it. Historian Harry Stout calls Whitefield “the divine dramatist,” and Daniel Dreisbach, a law and religion scholar, says Whitefield brought Americans together “by a common message of revival.” How would you describe Whitefield’s message of rebirth?

The Puritan Experiment

How did the Puritans see themselves? Read one modern description in this excerpt from the preface to *God's Plot*, a book on Puritan spirituality edited by historian Michael McGiffert:

"God's plot was the great plan of human salvation. Framed in scripture and developed in Christian theology, the plot centered ON the sacrifice of Christ. Extended to humanity, it embraced all who accepted it as true and committed themselves to its terms. [The Puritans] envisioned a divine scenario governing the living of the lives and the saving of their souls. They became actors with parts to play in a cosmic drama of redemption. God wrote the script, cast the parts, directed the staging; Christ took the starring role; religion explained each act and scene. The emotions and ideas invested in this plot, the meanings made of it, the ways it was lived—these were constituent and dynamic elements of Puritan spirituality."

Religious Individualism and Anne Hutchinson

Anne Hutchinson has been lauded as an outspoken advocate of religious freedom and a feminist hero. But history gives us a more complex picture. The daughter of a preacher, Hutchinson was a literate and pious woman deeply versed in Scripture. A follower of the minister John Cotton, she hosted meetings of women in her home to discuss his sermons. Gradually men joined the group. Having a woman preside over discussions of theological issues tested the accepted limits of women's roles in Puritan society.

Hutchinson insisted that the assurance of salvation did not come from outward conduct, but from the essentially mystical experience of grace—"an inward conviction of the coming of the Spirit." Convinced of her own connection with the Spirit, she believed she was right. She and her followers were not fighting for the freedom to believe what they wished, but rather for the suppression of the errors of her opponents. Each side became self-righteous and closed to further discussion. The Massachusetts Bay Colony reeled under suspicion and intolerance. John Winthrop, heretofore known for his tolerance, was convinced Hutchinson was destroying his "city on a hill." Called before the General Court and sure of her personal union with the Holy Spirit, Hutchinson freely acknowledged God spoke to her directly. This amounted to blasphemy. The court voted to banish her as "a woman not fit for our society."

In the aftermath of the trial, John Winthrop was criticized by those who believed he had allowed too much diversity of opinion and had been too tolerant. But in the end, his determination to save the Boston community prevailed. The center had held. The city on a hill survived the crisis that had threatened its undoing.

Historians have often been sympathetic to Anne Hutchinson, and John Winthrop has been judged as rigid. But Hutchinson was at least as adamant in her views and as intolerant as her opponents. Winthrop understood that a measure of dissent and

FOR DISCUSSION

George Whitefield challenged prevailing church authority and upset the religious establishment when he preached wherever people could be gathered, usually outside of churches. His new form of religion was more in tune with changing 18th-century society than it was with the standing social and religious order. What were the basic differences between George Whitefield and Charles Chauncy, between those who supported revivalism and those who opposed it? Where did each of them think religious authority resides, and who decides?

RELATED CLIP: "In Massachusetts, the Congregational minister Charles Chauncy began...message of rebirth were separating and offering people an alternative."



Actress Laila Robins (*In Treatment*) as Puritan Anne Hutchinson, the woman brought to civil trial in 1638 for "trading the ministers."

COURTESY OF ANTHONY TIEULI © WGBH

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disagreement was inevitable. He recognized that Hutchinson posed a threat not simply because of her insistence on matters of doctrine, but also because of her conviction that she had a special relationship with the Spirit that set her apart from the community and beyond its judgment. That claim was her undoing.

Read a contemporary assessment of Anne Hutchinson and the importance of religious individualism in America in an excerpt from the book *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* by Robert N. Bellah, et al. (University of California Press, 1985):

“Religious individualism ... goes very deep in the United States. Even in seventeenth-century Massachusetts, a personal experience of salvation was a prerequisite for acceptance as a church member. It is true that when Anne Hutchinson began to draw her own theological conclusions from her religious experiences and teach them to others, conclusions that differed from those of the established ministry, she was tried and banished from Massachusetts. But through the peculiarly American phenomenon of revivalism, the emphasis on personal experience would eventually override all efforts at church discipline. Already in the eighteenth century it was possible for individuals to find the form of religion that best suited their inclinations. By the nineteenth century, religious bodies had to compete in a consumers’ market and grew or declined in terms of changing patterns of individual religious taste. But religious individualism in the United States could not be contained within the churches, however diverse they were.”



In New England, Puritan leaders faced off against rebellious dissenters.

FOR DISCUSSION

What democratic overtones do you hear in early expressions of both Puritan and evangelical Protestantism in America? How did religion penetrate early American political thought?

RELATED CLIP: “If I’m being presented with multiple options... the experience of freedom, of being freed from sin.”

What did religious choice and freedom have to do with political choice and freedom in American history? How did personal religious experience of the revivals and Great Awakenings of the 18th century influence the American Revolution?

The American story is many things, including the story of “us in relationship with God,” says religion professor Stephen Prothero at the beginning of this episode. At the end, he compares the American story to the Exodus story in the Bible. Why do you think the Puritans saw themselves as a New American Adam and Eve—new people with a new identity? How was the American experience of freedom and liberty like the story of the Exodus? What made Americans see themselves as “chosen people”?

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LEARN MORE

Books

The Spanish Frontier in North America by David J. Weber

The Pueblo Revolt by David Roberts

The Religious History of America by Edwin Gaustad and Leigh Schmidt

Retelling U.S. Religious History edited by Thomas A. Tweed

Religion in American Life: A Short History by Jon Butler, Grant Wacker and Randall Balmer

A Religious History of the American People by Sydney E. Ahlstrom

Religion in American History: A Reader edited by Jon Butler and Harry S. Stout

America: Religious and Religion by Catherine L. Albanese

American Religions: A Documentary History edited by R. Marie Griffith

A Documentary History of Religion in America to 1877 edited by Edwin S. Gaustad and Mark A. Noll

The New England Mind and Errand Into the Wilderness by Perry Miller

The Puritan Dilemma by Edmund S. Morgan

John Winthrop: America's Forgotten Founding Father by Francis J. Bremer

The Puritan Experiment by Francis J. Bremer

The Times and Trials of Anne Hutchinson: Puritans Divided by Michael P. Winship

Making Heretics by Michael P. Winship

Dissent in American Religion by Edwin S. Gaustad

Sisters and Saints: Women and American Religion by Ann Braude

The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism by Harry S. Stout

America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln by Mark A. Noll

Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life by Robert N. Bellah, et al.

Websites

National Humanities Center TeacherServe: "Divining America: Religion in American History"

<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/divam.htm>

This online curriculum enrichment service includes essays by scholars, bibliographies and primary resources to help students gain a greater understanding of the role of religion in the development of the United States.

Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History

<http://www.gilderlehrman.org/>

A gateway to American history online, with resources for educators, teachers and students.

Library of Congress: Religion and the Founding of the American Republic

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/>

Online version of an extensive exhibition that explores the role religion played in founding the American colonies, shaping early American life and politics, and forming the American republic.

PBS: The West: "The Pueblo Revolt"

<http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/resources/archives/one/pueblo.htm>

The companion website for the eight-part PBS documentary series from 1996.



Spain moved quickly to gain land and spread the Catholic faith in New Mexico.

GOD IN AMERICA

EPISODE TWO: A NEW EDEN



A New Eden Summary

America's experiment in religious liberty involved an unlikely political alliance between evangelical Baptists and Enlightenment figures such as Thomas Jefferson as they forged a new concept of religious freedom, first in Virginia and ultimately in the new nation, as written in the Bill of Rights. These new freedoms had a significant impact on the country as it pushed westward, creating a vibrant religious marketplace where new religions started to take root and new Protestant denominations began to overtake the old. But the definition of freedom was contested, and its meaning ignited political conflicts between Irish Catholic immigrants and the Protestant establishment in New York over the reading of the Bible in public schools.

Religious Freedom in America

Ten years after Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence, the Commonwealth of Virginia's General Assembly passed his Act for Establishing Religious Freedom. The statute was resisted by Patrick Henry and other opponents who thought religious institutions would wither away without state support. In 1785, just a few months before passage of Jefferson's bill, James Madison, also a champion of religious freedom, wrote a statement on religious liberty called Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments in opposition to Patrick Henry's bill proposing religious taxes. Evangelical Christians flooded the Virginia Legislature with petitions opposing state support, and Madison's maneuvering helped result in the eventual passage of Jefferson's bill. Together, Madison's statement and Jefferson's bill remain a powerful argument against harm caused by government support of religion and for an "unalienable" natural right to freedom of religion. The intellectual and political leadership of both men was an important key to victory. They succeeded, however, because they also had the backing of religious dissidents,

FOR DISCUSSION

"People can encounter God and experience God for themselves—in fact not only can but must," says Baptist pastor James Slatton, describing the views of Baptists in 18th-century Virginia. Discuss the shift from Puritanism to evangelicalism in American Protestantism. What changed?

The intellectual Thomas Jefferson and the evangelical Baptists of Virginia set aside their differences and together defend a belief they shared: the right to worship freely. Why does Jefferson argue for religious liberty? Why do the Baptists? What are the similarities and differences in their views?

RELATED VIDEO CLIP: "We tend to think of Jefferson as an anti-religious person...Jefferson joined forces with the Baptists."

What does the First Amendment say about religion? How do its words contribute to sustaining American religion? What do you think Thomas Jefferson's famous phrase "wall of separation between church and state" means?



Thomas Jefferson

particularly Baptists—ordinary farmers and everyday shopkeepers, tavern owners, blacksmiths and housewives who had a vision of the role of religion in society, one that would disestablish the church and, as scholar Daniel Dreisbach has observed, would “allow every religious sect and denomination to compete in the marketplace of ideas.”

Established religion lingered on in the New England states into the 19th century. The famous Congregationalist minister Lyman Beecher fought hard against disestablishment in Connecticut and lamented the day in 1818 when it was finally accomplished: “It was as dark a day as ever I saw. The odium thrown upon the ministry was inconceivable. The injury done to the cause of Christ, as we then supposed, was irreparable.” But eventually Beecher changed his mind. He came to recognize that the end of the church’s dependence on the state made it a more vital, more forceful institution, and he wrote that it was “the best thing that ever happened to the State of Connecticut. It cut the churches loose from dependence on state support. It threw them wholly on their own resources and on God. ... They say ministers have lost their influence; the fact is, they have gained. By voluntary efforts, societies, missions, and revivals, they exert a deeper influence than ever they could by queues, and shoe-buckles, and cocked hats, and gold-headed canes.”

Read an excerpt from James Madison’s 1785 Memorial and Remonstrance:

“The religion then of every man must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man; and it is the right of every man to exercise it as these may dictate. This right is in its nature an unalienable right. It is unalienable because the opinions of men, depending only on the evidence contemplated by their own minds, cannot follow the dictates of other men; it is unalienable also because what is here a right towards men is a duty towards the Creator. It is the duty of every man to render to the Creator such homage and such only as he believes to be acceptable to him.”

Read key parts of Thomas Jefferson’s 1786 Virginia Act for Establishing Religious Freedom:

“Be it therefore enacted by the General Assembly, That no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burdened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinion in matters of religion, and that the same shall in nowise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities.”

“... to compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves and abhors is sinful and tyrannical.”

“Our civil rights have no dependence on our religious opinions.”

FOR DISCUSSION

Stephen Prothero says Baptists “were seen as a significant threat” in colonial Virginia. Why? How did they test religious tolerance in America?

Several of the historians in this episode stress the themes of religious choice, a competitive religious atmosphere, and the rise of the religious marketplace of ideas in early 19th-century America. Do you see similar religious circumstances in America today? Describe the current American religious marketplace.

Cynthia Lynn Lyerly notes that one of the consequences of expanding religious choices in America was opening them up to include “none of the above.” Discuss how freedom of religion allowed ordinary people to take charge of their own religious destinies and the extent of the diversity that resulted.

Revivals and camp meetings followed the expanding American frontier. They were democratic, egalitarian and traditional in their appeal. How did they reshape religion in America? One effect of the revivals was a heightened sense of the “religion of the heart.” Another was an interest in individual moral reform and the improvement of social ills—the creation of a “New Eden.”

RELATED VIDEO CLIP: “Along with that comes this push to change society...creating a kind of heaven on earth.”

The Religion Clauses of the First Amendment

In 1789, James Madison introduced in Congress proposed amendments to the Constitution that would eventually become known as the Bill of Rights. The First Amendment's first 16 words, divided into two clauses, guaranteed unprecedented freedom of religion in the early United States:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Madison had proposed an amendment that would apply to the states, but the final amendment applied only to the federal government. Among supporters there was strong agreement on the second clause, which became known as the Free Exercise Clause. It guaranteed an all-important principle: the right of each individual to worship freely without any interference from the government. But the first clause, the so-called Establishment Clause, was subject to different interpretations. Jefferson, Madison and others understood this clause to prohibit religious denominations, sects and institutions from interfering with the government. The state, they believed, should be completely free of religious interference. But religious dissidents understood the language as protecting the church from interference by the state, which they saw as a corrupting influence. In the words of one scholar: "They sharply distinguished the kingdom of God, identified with Christ's church, from the world in which it operated. The first was holy and pure, the other corrupt and evil." It was precisely the actions of the states that dissident groups believed infringed on their religious freedom. For more than 200 years, the Supreme Court has tried to interpret and balance the inherent tension between the two clauses—the need for government to have some freedom to make religious accommodations and to have some freedom to enforce the values respecting religious establishment.

Thomas Jefferson's Wall of Separation

Drawn to Thomas Jefferson's commitment to religious freedom, in 1801 the Baptist Association of Danbury, Conn., sent the new president a letter congratulating him on his election. The presidential campaign had been a bitter contest in which Jefferson was vilified as a libertine and an atheist. His most ardent critics were members of the clergy. Jefferson fulminated against the "irritable tribe of priests" and believed their real goal was to establish a national church. Once Jefferson received the letter from his Danbury supporters, he wished to reply immediately, recognizing the opportunity to neutralize the troublesome religion issue and justify his decision not to declare national days of fasting and thanksgiving. Anticipating that his reply would be widely published, Jefferson intended to use it as a way of "sowing useful truths & principles among the people, which might germinate and become rooted among their political tenets." He would try to articulate important principles, disseminate his political views and influence public opinion. After receiving suggested changes to the letter from his attorney general, Levi Lincoln, Jefferson amended his original draft, making deletions and inking out portions of the text. He sent the revised and final version to the Danbury Baptists on Jan. 1, 1802.

FOR DISCUSSION

How and why do you think evangelical revivals contributed increased attention to social reform as well as individual piety?

Methodists were key to Protestant expansion in America. What were the characteristics that contributed to this expansion and to the varieties of Protestantism that flourished after 1800?

RELATED VIDEO CLIP: "Methodism is a religion of the earth... Religion had regained its place at the heart of American life."

One impact of Protestant expansion was opposition to Catholicism and suspicion of the Roman Catholic Church. How would you describe the tensions between Protestants and Catholics in 19th-century New York City? How did Archbishop John Hughes appeal to the principle of religious freedom "to see," as he said, "that the religious rights of my flock should not be filched away from them"?

RELATED VIDEO CLIP: "The great fathers of our liberties...The Protestant establishment felt it would be the end of the matter."

How did Catholic immigrants "expand the idea of what it meant to be an American"? Why did Protestants think, as Stephen Prothero says, that "Catholicism threatens the whole American project"?

Modern technology has offered intriguing insights into the difference between Jefferson's original draft and his final version. In 1998, the U.S. Congress asked the FBI to use the latest technology to electronically uncover the inked-out words in the original. The changes show that Jefferson had carefully edited the letter to take into account political considerations. He also subtly shifted the meaning of the First Amendment. Both the first draft and the final version invoked a phrase that would reverberate through American history: the "wall of separation between church and state." But the original version had included the word "eternal," rendering the famous phrase "an eternal wall of separation between church and state." Nevertheless, "wall of separation," while not eternal, appeared to erect an impermeable boundary between religion and the federal government.

There was another change. Jefferson decided to use the word "church" rather than the broader term "religion." In so doing, he put the emphasis on the separation of political and ecclesiastical institutions. This would have appealed to religious dissenters who, like Jefferson, were ardently opposed to established churches but believed religion had an important role to play in public life.

Jefferson's wall metaphor was ignored and largely forgotten for nearly 150 years, until it was rediscovered in 1947. In *Everson v. Board of Education*, Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black invoked the wall of separation, claiming that it must be kept "high and impregnable." Since its resurrection, the wall has fueled ongoing debate over the relation between church and state, with opposing sides claiming to represent Jefferson's true intent. Strict separationists argue that the wall champions a secular order, while opponents believe the phrase has been unjustly used to exclude religion from public life. As one scholar has observed, "No phrase in American letters has more profoundly influenced discourse and policy on church-state relations than Jefferson's wall of separation."

The American Sermon and Religious Liberty

It has been said that sermons represent the earliest genre of American literature and constitute a very American idiom. The shift from Puritan to evangelical preaching sparked an inward turn toward personal, emotional religion in America. One of the most visible symbols of that change was the traveling preacher George Whitefield, featured in the first episode of the series. Many other eloquent American preachers followed him, and their sermons, often extemporaneous, exemplified the power of Protestant revivalism and the importance of the sermon as an expression of religious liberty in American discourse. It was often in sermons that early religious leaders worked out their understanding of both political and religious freedom and what it meant to be an American. This episode mentions a number of American preachers and highlights their role in American history, among them Virginia Baptist Jeremiah Moore; African Americans Sojourner Truth, Richard Allen and Jarena Lee; and the man known as the father of modern revivalism, Charles Grandison Finney. The influence of the sermon in America has been enormous, and as the episode demonstrates, the cause of religious liberty had important roots in the story of a preacher.

FOR DISCUSSION

Historian Richard Shaw says the essence of Archbishop Hughes' argument was that "this country will live up to what it claims to be." Stephen Prothero echoes this idea when he observes at the end of the episode that despite examples in our history of the denial of religious liberty, the American story "is always working on us." Do you agree? What examples or evidence can you cite that this might be so?

What insights do the stories about religious liberty in this episode offer for understanding religion in America today?



In 19th-century New York, public school students were reading the Protestant Bible.

Catholic and American

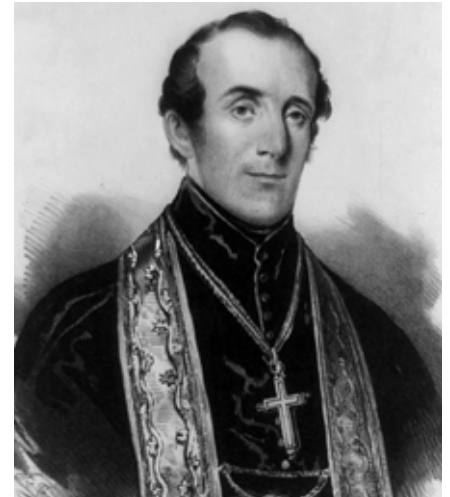
"The interplay between Catholic and American remains poorly understood," historian John McGreevy has written. This episode explores the bitter conflict between Protestants and Catholics over public education in 19th-century New York, especially the role of Archbishop John Hughes, who forcefully engaged with issues of church and state in response to widespread anti-Catholicism. Could Catholics be good Americans? The U.S. Constitution, Hughes believed, gave them the right to be both, and he demanded religious liberty for Catholic immigrants. The public schools, he said, violated the rights of Catholic children by forcing them to read from a Protestant version of the Bible and also from anti-Catholic Protestant tracts and textbooks. The Irish-born Hughes once described his feelings about religious liberty this way:

"I am an American by choice, not by chance. ... I was born under the scourge of Protestant persecution, of which my fathers in common with our Catholic countrymen have been the victim for ages. I know the value of that civil and religious liberty which our happy government secures for all."

During the public schools controversy, historian Stephen Marini observes, Hughes "is making an American constitutional religious liberty case" to challenge the Protestant majority. Hughes addressed the treatment of religious minorities in America this way in one of his speeches:

"Our adversaries accuse us of acting with interested motives in this matter. They say that we want a portion of the school fund for sectarian purposes, to apply it to the support and advancement of our religion. This we deny now, as we have done heretofore. ... There is no such thing as a predominant religion, and the small minority is entitled to the same protection as the greatest majority. No denomination, whether numerous or not, can impose its religious views on a minority at the common expense of that minority and itself."

The story of Archbishop Hughes demonstrates that religious liberty does not come easily. Harvard law professor Noah Feldman has written that "generation after generation, fresh infusions of religious diversity into American life have brought with them original ideas about church and state—new answers to the challenge of preserving the unity of the sovereign people in the face of their flourishing spiritual variety and often conflicting religious needs." While public schools have historically been places where Americans educated the next generation for citizenship, they have also been the setting for confrontations over different understandings of the meaning of "sectarian" and "conflicting religious needs." The experience of 19th-century New York Catholics exemplifies just how hard it has been and continues to be to put religious freedom into practice for the whole nation and to break through the barriers that would limit the full human right of religious liberty.



Archbishop John Hughes

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LEARN MORE

Books

The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America
by Frank Lambert

Religion and Political Culture in Jefferson's Virginia edited
by Garrett Ward Sheldon and Daniel L. Dreisbach

*The Sacred Rights of Conscience: Selected Readings on
Religious Liberty and Church-State Relations in the American
Founding* edited by Daniel L. Dreisbach and Mark David Hall

*Liberty of Conscience: In Defense of America's Tradition of
Religious Equality* by Martha C. Nussbaum

The Godless Constitution by Isaac Kramnick and
R. Laurence Moore

The Rise of Evangelicalism by Mark A. Noll

The Democratization of American Christianity by
Nathan O. Hatch

*The Making of Evangelicalism: From Revivalism to Politics
and Beyond* by Randall Balmer

Blessed Assurance: A History of Evangelicalism in America
by Randall Balmer

Methodism and the Southern Mind by Cynthia Lynn Lyerly

God of Liberty by Thomas S. Kidd

Voices from the Heart: Four Centuries of American Piety
edited by Roger Lundin and Mark A. Noll

American Sermons: The Pilgrims to Martin Luther King Jr.
edited by Michael Warner

Cane Ridge: America's Pentecost by Paul K. Conkin

*Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism
on the Eve of the Civil War* by Timothy L. Smith

Catholicism and American Freedom: A History by John T.
McGreevy

*Dagger John: The Unquiet Life and Times of Archbishop John
Hughes* of New York by Richard Shaw

Anti-Catholicism in America: The Last Acceptable Prejudice
by Mark Massa

American Catholic History: A Documentary Reader edited
by Mark Massa

The American Catholic Experience by Jay P. Dolan

*Catholics in New York: Society, Culture, and Politics 1808-
1946* edited by Terry Golway

*We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American
Proposition* by John Courtney Murray

*Divided by God: America's Church-State Problem—And What
We Should Do About It* by Noah Feldman



Revivals and camp meetings followed the expanding American frontier.

Websites

The Bill of Rights

<http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/>

You can learn more about the Bill of Rights and First Amendment on the website of the National Archives' Charters of Freedom exhibition.

National Humanities Center, Divining America: Religion in American History: "The Separation of Church and State from the American Revolution to the Early Republic"

<http://www.nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/eighteen/ekeyinfo/sepchust.htm>

This essay by University of Delaware history professor Christine Heyrman includes links to primary documents and guides for student discussions.

Thomas Jefferson and His Bible

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/jesus/jefferson.html>

"Jefferson omitted the words that he thought were inauthentic and retained those he believed were original. The resulting work is commonly known as the 'Jefferson Bible.'"

Library of Congress: Religion and the Founding of the American Republic

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/>

The website of this exhibition includes primary historical material on Thomas Jefferson and the Jefferson Bible as well as on religious liberty, early American evangelicalism, religion's role in the American Revolution, and the religious revivals and camp meetings of the 1800s.

Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty

<http://www.bjconline.org/>

This education and advocacy organization in Washington, D.C., works to "uphold the historic Baptist principle of religious freedom."

First Amendment Center

<http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/>

This nonpartisan center serves as "a forum for the study and exploration of free-expression issues, including freedom of speech, of the press and of religion, and the rights to assemble and to petition the government."

Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals

<http://isae.wheaton.edu/>

This research center at Wheaton College in Illinois supports conferences, seminars and publications on evangelical Christianity. Its website includes biographies of many famous evangelicals throughout the history of America and an evangelical timeline.

PBS: School: The Story of American Public Education

<http://www.pbs.org/kcet/publicschool/>

This documentary series chronicles the development of our nation's public education system and includes the story of Archbishop John Hughes.

GOD IN AMERICA

EPISODE THREE: A NATION REBORN



Actor Chris Sarandon portrays President Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War.

FOR DISCUSSION

How would you describe President Lincoln's political and spiritual achievements? How would you characterize him religiously? How would you describe Lincoln's God? How did his idea of God change over the course of the war? What surprises you about Lincoln's religious views and moral vision? Compare them with those of abolitionist Frederick Douglass.

One modern writer has called Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address "the most eloquent response to the virus of religious self-importance ever written." Others have described it as "Lincoln's Sermon on the Mount" and "America's sermon to the world." The speech was rooted in profound religious beliefs. By the time he delivered it in 1865, how had Lincoln come to understand God's role in the Civil War and in American history? What do you hear in his rhetoric about the need for the war and at the same time the need for forgiveness and reconciliation? What connections can you identify between Lincoln's "Meditation on the Divine Will" and his Second Inaugural Address?

RELATED CLIP: "After four grueling years of war...let us strive on to finish the work we are in."

A Nation Reborn Summary

How did religious beliefs shape the origins of the Civil War and President Abraham Lincoln's actions during the conflict? As Northern abolitionists and Southern slaveholders clashed over the question of slavery, each side turned to the Bible to argue its cause. Frederick Douglass, a former slave and abolitionist newspaper editor, despaired that people who called themselves Christians could defend the evils of slavery. Protestant denominations fractured, with each side declaring God was on its side. Meanwhile, Lincoln, who had put his faith in reason over revelation, confronted the mounting casualties of the war and the death of his young son. In his anguish, he began a spiritual journey that transformed his inner life and changed his ideas about God and the ultimate meaning of the Civil War.

The war was a theological as well as a political crisis. There were sharp disputes in America over what God might be doing in and through the war. For some, the turmoil of the war years called into question the belief that America was a chosen nation with a special destiny. The war also moved Lincoln to re-examine his own understanding of God's purposes and the role of divine Providence in human affairs. Six weeks after he delivered his stirring Second Inaugural Address on March 4, 1865, with its sermonlike language, deeply moral sentiments and conciliatory closing words, Lincoln was dead. For many he became a martyred prophet, and the Second Inaugural Address has come to be regarded as American Scripture.

"Meditation on the Divine Will" by Abraham Lincoln

RELATED CLIP: "You have widows and orphans coming....Out of this affliction, what good might come?"

Yale historian Harry Stout has characterized these lines by Lincoln as "a moment of disturbed meditation" about whose side God was really on in the Civil War,

while Mark Noll has described the president's private meditation as "the most remarkable theological commentary of the war" a combination of "confidence in Providence along with humble agnosticism about its purposes":

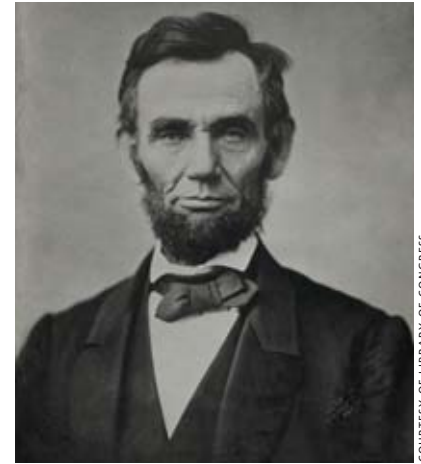
"The will of God prevails. In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. Both may be, and one must be, wrong. God cannot be for and against the same thing at the same time. In the present civil war it is quite possible that God's purpose is something different from the purpose of either party; and yet the human instrumentalities, working just as they do, are of the best adaptation to effect his purpose. I am almost ready to say that this is probably true; that God wills this contest, and wills that it shall not end yet. By his mere great power on the minds of the now contestants, he could have either saved or destroyed the Union without a human contest. Yet the contest began. And, having begun, he could give the final victory to either side any day. Yet the contest proceeds."

"Battle Hymn of the Republic"

RELATED CLIP: "Many Americans considered the war an apocalyptic event...keep the integrity of the Union prominent as the primary object of the contest on our part."

This well-known abolitionist hymn is full of biblical references, many of them drawn from the book of Revelation. The hymn's apocalyptic language and messianic vision borrow greatly from expectations that had long been present in American religious

and political thought. Written in 1861 by the author, antislavery supporter and woman's suffrage leader Julia Ward Howe, the words express sentiments that were popular in the North about the sacredness of human liberty and the righteousness of a war that served God's purposes. As historian Paul Boyer has written, "The simple yet moving lines with their Old Testament vocabulary and cadence captured the somber emotions of a country at war; President Lincoln is said to have wept upon first hearing them sung."



COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

The personal beliefs of President Abraham Lincoln remain a source of mystery to historians and biographers.

FOR DISCUSSION

Historian Allen Guelzo says that many came to believe God was "doing something new in this war." What made emancipation and the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 "a religious moment" and "an event for the soul," as scholar David Blight describes it? Why did freedom for African Americans mean freedom for everyone? What role did evangelical Christianity play in the abolitionist movement?

RELATED CLIP: "Lincoln determined that he must act...an event for the soul."

The "Battle Hymn of the Republic" can still be found in many church hymnals. Its words continue to be sung, and they are also heard in sermons and patriotic speeches. How do you think they speak to Americans today?

The Religion of Abraham Lincoln

Many writers, historians, theologians and Civil War scholars have pondered the subject of Lincoln's religious faith. Harry Stout has written that Lincoln grew steadily more spiritual during the war and that "along with spirituality came a sort of mystical fatalism." Mark Noll says Lincoln's singular faith required the president to hold himself "aloof from the organized Christianity of the United States." And Allen Guelzo identifies "pain and desertion and remoteness" as characteristic of the faith of Lincoln, as well as "a crushing sense of religious worthlessness which he transmuted into the extraordinary goal of a charity for all, a malice toward none."

The Christian theologian and social ethicist Reinhold Niebuhr, an influential figure on the 20th-century American intellectual, political and religious scene, often turned to Lincoln as the model of a political leader—"my hero in religion and in statecraft"—who resisted the temptation to identify God with his own causes and who understood both the religious dimension and the moral drama inherent in human history. Lincoln's theological understanding of the Civil War, Niebuhr believed, was greater than that of any preacher or religious thinker of the time, and he described the president as a "theologian of American anguish." Some scholars have observed that in his use of biblical language Lincoln surpassed the eloquence of Puritan John Winthrop, employing religious speech in 19th-century America in a way that was "both insistently public and politically demanding in its implications."



COURTESY OF TIM CRAGG © WGBH

Actor Keith David as Frederick Douglass during the launch of the newspaper *North Star* in 1847.

FOR DISCUSSION

Themes of sacrifice and redemption were important during the Civil War. What did it mean then to understand death and suffering in a theological way? How and why did the war come to take on a transcendent meaning, or a "holy quality," as David Blight calls it?

RELATED CLIP: "The war dragged on and casualties mounted on both sides...Where ultimately it is not me who is orchestrating this, but God."

Do you agree that America was and is a chosen nation, special in the eyes of God? In 1861, on the way to his inauguration in Washington, Lincoln said in a speech: "I am exceedingly anxious that this Union, the Constitution, and the liberties of the people shall be perpetuated in accordance with the original idea for which that struggle was made, and I shall be most happy indeed if I shall be an humble instrument in the hands of the Almighty, and of this, his almost chosen people, for perpetuating the object of that great struggle." What do you think he meant by "almost chosen people"? Compare Lincoln's words with Stephen Prothero's concluding observation that "we have not achieved what we should have achieved" and that America's special destiny is "always out in front of us."

GOD IN AMERICA

LEARN MORE

Books

Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War by Harry S. Stout

Religion and the American Civil War edited by Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout and Charles Reagan Wilson

Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President by Allen C. Guelzo

Lincoln's Greatest Speech: The Second Inaugural by Ronald C. White Jr.

A. Lincoln: A Biography by Ronald C. White Jr.

The Civil War as a Theological Crisis by Mark A. Noll

Lincoln's Virtues: An Ethical Biography by William Lee Miller

Lincoln Revisited edited by John Y. Simon, Harold Holzer and Dawn Vogel

Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America by Garry Wills

Slave Religion by Albert J. Raboteau

The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible by Allen Dwight Callahan

Giants: The Parallel Lives of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln by John Stauffer

The Radical and the Republican: Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the Triumph of Antislavery Politics by James Oakes

"Lincoln's Religion" by Richard Carwardine, in *Our Lincoln* edited by Eric Foner

Website

**Library of Congress: With Malice Toward None:
The Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Exhibition**

<http://myloc.gov/Exhibitions/lincoln/Pages/default.aspx>

This exhibition commemorates the two-hundredth anniversary of the birth of the nation's revered sixteenth president.



Lincoln's funeral procession

GOD IN AMERICA

EPISODE FOUR: A NEW LIGHT



Summary *A New Light*

During the nineteenth century, the forces of modernity challenged traditional faith and drove a wedge between liberal and conservative believers. Bohemian immigrant Isaac Mayer Wise embraced change and established Reform Judaism in America while his opponents adhered to Old World traditions. In New York, Presbyterian biblical scholar Charles Briggs sought to wed his evangelical faith with modern biblical scholarship, leading to his trial for heresy. In the 1925 Scopes evolution trial, Christian fundamentalist William Jennings Bryan faced off against freethinker Clarence Darrow in a battle between scientific and religious truth.

Israel in America

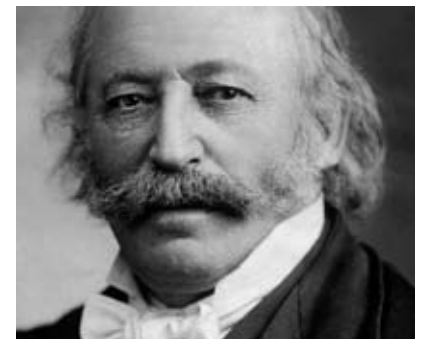
As American Protestants struggled to come to terms with modernity in the nineteenth century, Jewish immigrants also fashioned their own response to the modern world. Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise led a movement for change and developed a Reform Judaism that closely linked the destiny of the Jewish people to the destiny of America. "Liberty," he said, "is our place in history, our national destiny, our ideal, the very soul of our existence." He embraced with enthusiasm America's freedom of religion and encouraged Jews to welcome the new possibilities America offered. "He saw no reason to import all of Europe's problems and all of Europe's religious divisions into the United States," as one historian has observed. The European Jew must become an American Jew "aroused to self-consciousness" and "independent thought," wrote Rabbi Wise, and "in order to gain the proud self-consciousness of the free-born man....I began to Americanize with all my might." Men and women sat together at services conducted not just in Hebrew but in German and English. Choirs were introduced in the synagogue. Dietary laws and regulations were relinquished.

FOR DISCUSSION

Jewish history professor Jeffrey Gurock says some Jewish immigrants to America wanted "to act and look and behave like the Protestant majority without abandoning their faith." In what ways did nineteenth-century America alter the religious identity of immigrants, and in what ways did immigrants alter the American religious landscape?

Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise saw America as a perfect setting for both the preservation and the reform of traditional Judaism, says historian Hasia Diner. He wanted "to sustain Judaism and to change it," Jonathan Sarna has written. Rabbi Wise's dilemma was how far to change Judaism in order for it to thrive, how much to negotiate. What particular American ideas and ideals influenced his alterations of religious rituals, customs, language, and observances?

RELATED CLIP: "He was a builder. He was a mover...He pushed his line harder."



Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise



An important effort at Americanizing took place in 1885, when a group of Reform rabbis set forth their basic principles in a defining document known as the Pittsburgh Platform. Rabbi Wise described it as a Declaration of Independence, and it closely allied Reform Judaism with the spirit of modern times:

"We hold that the modern discoveries of scientific researches in the domain of nature and history are not antagonistic to the doctrines of Judaism, the Bible reflecting the primitive ideas of its own age.... We hold that all such Mosaic and rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity, and dress originated in ages and under the influence of ideas entirely foreign to our present mental and spiritual state. They fail to impress the modern Jew with a spirit of priestly holiness; their observance in our days is apt rather to obstruct than to further modern spiritual elevation.... We deem it our duty to participate in the great task of modern times, to solve, on the basis of justice and righteousness, the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society."

Rabbi Wise saw reform and modernization as ways to revitalize Judaism and unify it in a new land. Although the goal of unifying American Jews eluded him, in the midst of great religious and cultural change he succeeded in advancing a very American kind of Judaism.

Heresy, Higher Criticism, and Holy Scripture

Originating in German academic circles in the early nineteenth century, higher criticism emphasized that the Bible was the product of different authors, cultures, times, and places. It approached the Bible not as revered Scripture, but rather as literature to be investigated. Applying the tools of literary analysis, scholars examined texts to determine when, where, and by whom they were composed. They also evaluated the theological agendas of the different authors of these texts. Their findings shattered familiar assumptions and advanced new hypotheses:

FOR DISCUSSION

Do you agree with Randall Balmer that there is something about America that "seems to encourage particular expressions of the faith rather than any one unified expression of the faith"? Why might this be so? What other examples of this trend toward fragmentation in American religion have you seen in the series?

America raised questions about religious authority and leadership for immigrant religions as "faith pulled in one direction, America in the other," according to Jonathan Sarna. How did Rabbi Wise try to incorporate American values into his understanding of his Jewish identity? What did he mean when he said "in religion only we are Jews, in all other respects we are American citizens"?

Jeffrey Gurock calls the story of Rabbi Wise not just a Jewish story but an American religious story. What makes it so? Hasia Diner pinpoints the American quality of the story when she says in American religion if you don't like something "you leave and you start your own congregation"—a very Protestant characteristic of American religious history.

RELATED CLIP: "Who's in charge here?...By 1880, ninety percent of America's synagogues had adopted his Reform Judaism."

GOD IN AMERICA

Moses had not written the first five books of the Bible; the book of Genesis contained two different accounts of creation and was likely composed by two different authors; David did not write all the psalms attributed to him. Nearly two thousand years had passed since the gospels of the New Testament had been written, and the books of the Old Testament were even older. Meanwhile, modern biblical scholars said, civilization had marched forward, and many of the assumptions, values, and beliefs in the Bible had become outmoded.

By the 1870s, the battle over modernism reached a fever pitch. Some conservative scholars insisted on the inerrancy of the Bible and waged war against new liberal interpretations and Darwin's theory of evolution. Other scholars who embraced higher criticism, however, no longer understood theology as a fixed body of eternal truths, but rather as "an evolutionary development that should adjust to the standards and needs of the modern culture."



During the 1880s and 1890s, this new understanding of theology spread into many strongholds of American Protestantism. In 1891, liberal and conservative Protestants clashed openly in the heresy trials of Charles Briggs, a devout Presbyterian who had studied in Germany and who was appointed to a prestigious chair in scriptural studies at Union Theological Seminary in New York. In his inaugural lecture on "The Authority of Holy Scripture," Briggs attempted to fuse evangelical piety with modern biblical criticism. He hoped to recover "the real Bible," he said, and he explained that his insights came to him "with the force of divine revelation." He described himself as "blessed with a new divine light" and the Bible as "lit up with a new light." Briggs's address and his subsequent trials for heresy raised serious questions about religious and biblical authority in America. Supporters viewed the lecture as "a blazing call to battle for the triumph of a genuinely modern Christianity." Outraged opponents asked, "Can human beings really get along without God?" and "Is nothing sacred?" A wedge was being driven into the major Protestant groups, and the resulting fractures divided members of the same denominations into progressive and traditional, liberal and conservative camps.

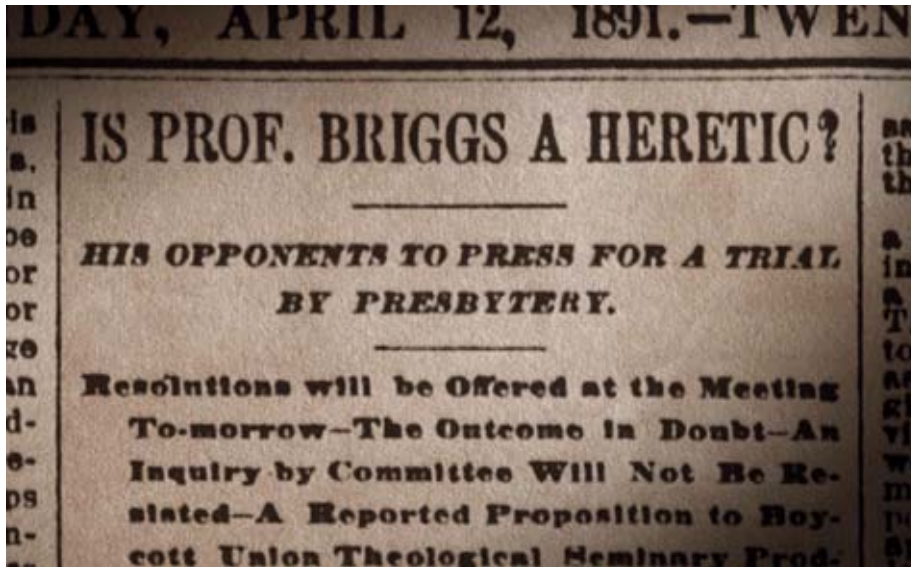
FOR DISCUSSION

Modernists, writes historian Mark Noll, "were Protestants who felt it was important to adjust Christianity to new science, new economic expansion, and new ideals of human progress." They believed God was best understood as "a force working within human society and within human nature" and "the evolving shape of modern life amounted to a revelation of God's ways with the world." Most fundamentalists, he writes, "were not intellectuals working out careful theological positions. Instead, they responded to modernist theology by rallying ordinary believers. Mostly they favored vigorous preaching, stem-winding debate, and popular writing aimed at moving the heart more than swaying the mind." Based on the examples in the series, describe what happens when religious groups confront what Stephen Prothero calls "the onslaught" of modernity and must choose either to embrace it or reject it.

At the end of the nineteenth century, people were reading the Bible differently than they had during the time of the Civil War. What forces in society and the culture at large contributed to this change? Why was what Charles Briggs said and did considered to be so dangerous?

What is heresy? What is orthodoxy? What was the revolution among American Protestants that Charles Briggs began? What were the "new truths" he espoused?

RELATED CLIP: "The Bible has been treated as if it were a baby...We don't have to leave reason at the door when we go to worship."



In his book *How to Read the Bible*, James Kugel, a specialist in the Hebrew Bible and biblical interpretation, sums up the essential issues raised by the story of Charles Briggs and the heresy proceedings against him:

"Charles A. Briggs may have been the immediate defendant in the proceeding, but in a larger sense it was the Bible itself that stood accused. What was it, really? Was it a special book unlike any other, the very word of God? Or was it, as Briggs seemed to suggest, principally (though not exclusively) the product of human industry, indeed, the work of men who lived in a time and place far removed from our own? Are its stories really true? If they are, was not even questioning their accuracy a sacrilege—a heresy, as Briggs accusers charged? Or was it perfectly proper for biblical scholars, like all other university-trained researchers, to pursue their theories untrammelled, looking deeply into every aspect of the Bible and letting the chips fall where they may?"

The Age of Fundamentalism

The savagery of World War I challenged liberal faith in human progress and the ability of mankind to realize the kingdom of God on earth. Before the war, there was a loose array of conservative groups with little interest in political and social issues. But in the postwar climate they coalesced into an anti-modernist movement known as fundamentalism. Fundamentalists were a subset of a broader evangelicalism that traces its roots back to the First Great Awakening of the 1740s. No longer aloof from politics, in the 1920s fundamentalists acquired a militancy that set them apart from other evangelicals. Historian George Marsden has famously observed that "a fundamentalist is an evangelical who is angry about something."

FOR DISCUSSION

Why might some Protestants have thought that Briggs's new interpretation of the Bible threatened the nation's special relationship with God?

Who really won the Scopes Trial? The trial is described as representing "one of the deepest and most persistent conflicts of modern American culture." How does the 1925 conflict compare to current religion and science divides in American culture?

The response to modernism and the Scopes Trial also forced a split between liberals and conservatives and created divisions and quarrels among Protestants themselves, as well as among Catholics and Jews, that still persist. What impact have those ideological fissures within religious groups had on them and on religion in America, and in what ways are the divisions still manifest in current debates over social issues?

How was America's special relationship with God at stake in the Scopes Trial? Cynthia Lysterly suggests "America's covenant relationship with God was in peril." How did the wreckage of World War I contribute to this fear?

RELATED CLIP: "Evangelical Protestants could look out and see... God will have to intervene."

What other threats loomed? Do you agree with the suggestion that "Darwinism undermined the notion of what it means to be an American"?

GOD IN AMERICA

Conservative Protestants who opposed modernizing trends and believed the Bible to be the word of God—that it “means what it says and says what it means,” as history and theology professor Mark Massa observes in this episode—found a powerful advocate in Williams Jennings Bryan, the progressive Democratic politician and orator known as “the Great Commoner.” Bryan has also been described as “the last great exemplar of nineteenth-century evangelical political activism.” He was convinced that an off-shoot theory of Darwinism, known as Social Darwinism, had allowed rich and powerful capitalists to justify trampling on the poor and the weak. He proclaimed that “all the ills from which America suffers can be traced to the teaching of evolution,” and the antidote to social ills was the Bible. “I am now engaged in the biggest reform of my life,” said Bryan. “I am trying to save the Christian Church from those who are trying to destroy her faith.” He also aimed to restore America’s special relationship with God.

At the Scopes Trial in 1925, Bryan faced off against attorney Clarence Darrow, a self-proclaimed agnostic who argued that “the origin of what we call civilization is not due to religion but to skepticism...the modern world is the child of doubt and inquiry, as the ancient world was the child of fear and faith.” For days the two men sparred in the sweltering summer heat in Dayton, Tennessee. Darrow appeared to be losing. Then he called Bryan to the stand to defend the Bible. He backed Bryan into a corner. Bryan’s side won on a technicality, but Darrow won in the court of public opinion. The liberal mainline Protestant magazine *The Christian Century* gloated that “the whole fundamentalist movement was hollow and artificial...It is henceforth to be a disappearing quantity in American religious life, while our churches go on to larger issues.” Journalist H.L. Mencken linked the fundamentalist cause to rural backwardness. He called country people “gaping primates of the upland valleys” and labeled followers of Bryan as “yokels,” “morons,” and “hillbillies.” Fundamentalism had run its course, or so it seemed. The fundamentalists went into retreat, but they did not disappear. In time, they would re-emerge as part of a larger evangelical movement that transformed American religion and politics in the twentieth century.



FOR DISCUSSION

How would you compare Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan religiously, temperamentally, politically?

While Darrow put fundamentalist Christianity itself on trial in Dayton, Tennessee, fundamentalists felt, as Randall Balmer says, that “the integrity of the Bible” was on trial. What issues would you say were at stake in the Scopes Trial?

RELATED CLIP: “Bryan wants to defend...whether reason, humans, science have authority.”

Two trials are featured in this episode of God in America. In both of them, questions about authority and truth—divine, human, biblical, religious, scientific—are important. In both of them, it could be said, “the Bible itself stood accused.” Compare the Briggs and Scopes trials with the issues raised in another trial featured in the series, the trial of Anne Hutchinson in Puritan New England.

Why did religious conservatives withdraw from American culture and politics after the Scopes Trial? What happened to fundamentalism? What were the great divides that dominated the country at the conclusion of the trial?

RELATED CLIP: “The way the media played it out...would come to dominate American religious life.”

How did the meaning and definition of “fundamentalist” change after World War I and after the Scopes Trial?

LEARN MORE

Books

American Judaism: A History by Jonathan D. Sarna

Isaac Mayer Wise: The Founder of American Judaism
by Max May

Isaac Mayer Wise: Shaping American Judaism by Sefton
Temkin

The Jews of the United States by Hasia Diner

American Jewish History edited by Jeffrey Gurock

History Lessons: The Creation of American Jewish Heritage
by Beth S. Wenger

Charles Augustus Briggs and the Crisis of Historical Criticism
by Mark Massa

How to Read the Bible by James S. Kugel

The Divided Mind of Protestant America, 1880-1930
by Ferenc Morton Szasz

*Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's
Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion* by
Edward J. Larson

*When All the Gods Trembled: Darwinism, Scopes,
and American Intellectuals* by Paul K. Conkin

A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan
by Michael Kazin

Clarence Darrow: American Iconoclast by Andrew Kersten

Finding Darwin's God by Kenneth Miller

Fundamentalism and American Culture
by George M. Marsden

Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism
by George M. Marsden

*Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American
Fundamentalism* by Joel Carpenter

The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism
by William R. Hutchinson

Websites

PBS: The Jewish Americans

<http://www.pbs.org/jewishamericans/>

A documentary exploration of 350 years of Jewish American history.

American Jewish Historical Society

<http://www.ajhs.org/>

This group offers access to millions of documents, books, photographs, and artifacts that reflect the history of the Jewish presence in the United States.

Library of Congress: "From Haven to Home: 350 Years of Jewish Life in America"

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/haventohome/>

This exhibition features more than 200 treasures of American Judaica.

National Museum of American Jewish History

<http://www.nmajh.org/>

Located on Independence Mall in Philadelphia, the museum "explores the promise and challenges of liberty through the lens of the American Jewish experience."

Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life: US Religious Landscape Survey

<http://religions.pewforum.org/>

This extensive survey of more than 35,000 adults details the religious beliefs and practices as well as social and political attitudes of the American public.

National Humanities Center: The Scopes Trial

<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/twenty/tkeyinfo/tscopes.htm>

An online essay by historians Grant Wacker and Christopher Armstrong that includes sections on guiding student discussion and recommended historical works.

GOD IN AMERICA

EPISODE FIVE: SOUL OF A NATION



COURTESY OF BILLY GRAHAM CENTER

In 1947, at the age of 27, Reverend Billy Graham began traveling across America hoping to spark a spiritual revival with his own conversion story. Believing he could save America by saving souls, he became the country's most famous preacher of all time.

Summary *Soul Of A Nation*

In the post-World War II era, rising evangelist Billy Graham tried to inspire a religious revival that fused faith with patriotism in a Cold War battle with “godless communism.” As Americans flocked in record numbers to houses of worship, nonbelievers and religious minorities appealed to the US Supreme Court to test the constitutionality of religious expression in public schools, and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. emerged as a modern-day prophet, calling upon the nation to honor both biblical teachings and the founders’ democratic ideals of equal justice.

Christianity and Cold War America

On September 23, 1949, President Truman informed the nation of a startling new development: the Soviet Union, America’s ally in World War II, had exploded a nuclear device. Once a friend, the USSR was now a foe, and the threat of its nuclear capability shattered the post-war return to normalcy. The event was announced a few days before a little-known evangelist named Billy Graham was scheduled to launch a crusade in the city of Los Angeles, home to film stars, sex, and sin. Graham seized the moment, positioning Christian America against “godless communism.” He sought to save souls, but he also sought to save the nation.

As Graham barnstormed across the country, he combined Christianity and patriotism in a way that appealed to many people, including President Dwight Eisenhower, who urged Americans to attend church, adding that “our form of government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don’t care what it is.” At a huge rally in New York’s Madison Square Garden, Vice President Richard Nixon shared the pulpit with Graham and reassured the audience: “I’m sure we all realize

FOR DISCUSSION

How would you describe the role the Cold War played in the convergence of American religion and politics? How did religious and political leaders use Protestant Christianity to counter fears of communism, Catholics, and the national insecurities of the time?

Dwight Eisenhower was the first president to write and recite a prayer at his inauguration. http://www.nps.gov/history/museum/exhibits/eise/President/Presidency/EISE8530_prayer2.html He approved adding “one nation, under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance and “In God We Trust” to US currency. What were the characteristics of Eisenhower-era religiosity?

RELATED CLIP: “It seems to me if we are going to win this fight... we turn our backs on God at our own peril.”

What was evangelist Billy Graham’s message to America, and how did it resonate in the fifties and sixties? How did he represent postwar evangelicalism?

RELATED CLIPS: “In the fall of 1949....in an appealing way for a lot of people” and “Nothing demonstrated America’s merging of faith and patriotism...being aligned with none other than Billy Graham.”

that one of the most basic reasons for American progress in the past and for our strength today is that from the time of our foundation we have had a deep and abiding faith in God."

But some Americans pushed back against this fusion of religion and patriotism. In Champaign, Illinois, a self-described humanist, Vashti McCollum, challenged the widespread practice of "release time," when public school students were "released" from academic instruction and allowed to receive religious instruction on school grounds. Her case eventually reached the Supreme Court. In 1948, in an 8-to-1 decision, the Court ruled the practice unconstitutional. The ruling gave rise to howls of protest and created a lurking suspicion that the Court harbored a secret hostility toward religion.

In 1962, the Supreme Court made another controversial ruling in *Engel v. Vitale*. Brought by five Long Island families of Jewish heritage, the case challenged the longstanding practice of prayer in public schools. The Court found in favor of the plaintiffs, once again unleashing an avalanche of criticism. In the years that followed, the Court ruled on Bible reading in public schools, a moment of silence in public schools, and displays of a Christmas crèche in a public courthouse. To its critics, the Court appeared intent on draining religious expression from public spaces. In fact, it was attempting to find a middle ground that protected religious minorities from unwanted expressions of and exposure to religious symbols and language.

In both the *McCollum* and *Engel* cases, Justice Hugo Black wrote the majority opinion. In *McCollum* he referred again to Thomas Jefferson's letter to the Baptist Association of Danbury, Connecticut and repeated Jefferson's language about "a wall of separation between church and state," as well as the Court's view that such a wall "must be kept high and impregnable." The Court's decision in *McCollum* has been described as "the greatest single safeguard to separation of church and state outside the First Amendment itself." Read an excerpt from it:

Pupils compelled by law to go to school for secular education are released in part from their legal duty upon the condition that they attend religious classes. This is beyond all question a utilization of the tax-established and tax-supported public school system to aid religious groups to spread their faith, and it falls squarely under the ban of the First Amendment...To hold that a state cannot...utilize its public school system to aid any or all religious faiths or sects in the dissemination of their doctrines and ideals does not, as counsel urges, manifest a governmental hostility to religion or religious teachings. A manifestation of such hostility would be at war with our national tradition as embodied in the First Amendment's guaranty of the free exercise of religion. For the First Amendment rests upon the premise that both religion and government can best work to achieve their lofty aims if each is left free from the other within its respective sphere.

FOR DISCUSSION

Stephen Prothero speaks of a "marriage" between religion and politics after World War II. Philip Goff says both Dwight Eisenhower and Billy Graham "marry" religion and democracy. Do you agree? Could the same also be said of Martin Luther King Jr.? What evidence or examples of such a close relationship between religion and democracy do you find in American history, in this episode, and in other episodes in the series? Philip Goff also says "religion is a sign of democracy" and "democracy is, in fact, a public expression basically of a deeply felt religion." What do you think? Is there a contradiction between the marriage of religion and democracy and the separation of church and state?

Professor Frank Lambert observes that the 1950s were a time of "reclaiming this notion that we're a chosen people," a dominant idea in America's self-understanding and one that recurs throughout God in America. How does the notion of a special mission and a special relationship with God come back into play in religion and politics during the Cold War? According to one sociologist of religion, "There has not been a generation since 1630 that has not understood Americans to be in some sense or other a chosen people." What do you think of this conclusion? How do you understand the meaning of Americans as "chosen people"?



“What Kind of America I Believe In”

On September 12, 1960, Democratic presidential candidate John F. Kennedy addressed the Greater Houston Ministerial Association in response to alarm over the prospect of a Catholic president. Evangelist Billy Graham worked behind the scenes to support a Protestant campaign against Kennedy and encourage influential Protestant ministers to endorse Republican candidate Richard Nixon. Just days before Kennedy spoke in Houston, Graham organized a gathering of ministers in Washington, DC presided over by prominent Protestant preacher Norman Vincent Peale.

The Houston address was a dramatic public moment in the 1960 campaign, and the sense was that Kennedy successfully “embraced his faith while specifically denying that it would be a hindrance in carrying out the constitutional duties of the presidency,” as one writer has put it. The candidate spelled out his view of the separation of church and state and addressed what historian Grant Wacker describes in this episode as “a historic Protestant fear that a Catholic president could not possibly be uncompromised in relation to the Vatican.” Read excerpts from Kennedy’s Houston speech:

I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute, where no Catholic prelate would tell the president (should he be Catholic) how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote; where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference and where no man is denied public office merely because his religion differs from the president who might appoint him or the people who might elect him. I believe in an America that is officially neither Catholic, Protestant, nor Jewish; where no public official either requests or accepts instructions on public policy from the pope, the National Council of Churches, or any other ecclesiastical source; where no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials; and where religious liberty is so indivisible that an act against one church is treated as an act against all...I am not the Catholic candidate for president. I am the Democratic Party’s candidate for president, who happens also to be a Catholic.

FOR DISCUSSION

How is the First Amendment tested in the stories in this episode? What is at issue in the two Supreme Court cases that are highlighted? Why did the Court rule as it did? What events and circumstances in the larger world encouraged the Court to move in the direction of protecting religious minorities?

Why was Vashti McCollum’s legal case against the public schools of Champaign, Illinois viewed as such a threat?

RELATED CLIP: “We had a cat lynched...years to more fully define the role of religion in the public schools.”

How do the stories of the McCollum family, the Long Island families in Engel v. Vitale, and their interactions with public education compare with the story earlier in the series of the immigrant Catholic families of New York and the efforts of Bishop John Hughes on behalf of the education of Catholic children?

How would you have decided the McCollum and Engel court cases? Why?



The McCollum family challenged the role of religion in public schools.

I do not speak for my church on public matters, and the church does not speak for me...But if the time should ever come—and I do not concede any conflict to be even remotely possible—when my office would require me to either violate my conscience or violate the national interest, then I would resign the office; and I hope any conscientious public servant would do the same.

“Equal Souls, Equal Votes”

While the Supreme Court moved to circumscribe the place of religion in public schools and public spaces, faith fueled the movement for civil rights. Local activists had worked for years to pave the way, but the man who emerged as the chief spokesman for the movement was Martin Luther King Jr., a Baptist preacher who had studied the teachings of Gandhi and developed his own philosophy of nonviolent resistance. Historians have called his “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” written in April 1963, the tide-turning document of the civil rights movement and an eloquent summation of his political and theological philosophy. King aide Andrew Young wrote that “more than any other document or statement, Martin’s letter helped to lay a strong moral and intellectual basis not only for our struggle in Birmingham, but for all subsequent movement campaigns in the South. It has become a classic in American literature.”

Near the end of his letter King asked: “What else is there to do when you are alone for days in the dull monotony of a narrow jail cell other than write long letters, think strange thoughts, and pray long prayers?” Read an excerpt from the letter that includes King’s famous statement about injustice:

“I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the eighth-century prophets left their little villages and carried their “thus saith the Lord” far beyond the boundaries of their home towns; and just as the Apostle Paul left his little village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to practically every hamlet and city of the Graeco-Roman world, I too am compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my particular home town. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call for aid. Moreover, I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.”

In his Oval Office speech to the nation on June 11, 1963, President John F. Kennedy addressed civil rights as a moral issue that was “as old as the scriptures and is as clear as the American Constitution.” As historian Clayborne Carson points out in this episode, “That’s precisely what King has been saying.” Historian Frank Lambert underscores the point: “Martin Luther King did see America’s founding documents as giving a voice, giving expression to fundamental biblical principles. We’re all equal before God, says the Bible. All men are created equal, says the Declaration of Independence.”

FOR DISCUSSION

Do you agree with Stephen Prothero that public schools “have always been a place where we inculcated this religious sensibility and where we made the connection between Christianity and morality and citizenship”? Should they be? Are there other sources of morality besides religion?

Why did some Protestants fear the prospect of a Catholic president? What did John Kennedy do to address their concerns, and what did he say to try to convince them otherwise?

RELATED CLIP: “As recently as 1960...even though he had worked very hard to derail Kennedy’s election in 1960.”

What relevance do you think the debates about religion in the 1960 presidential campaign have for politics today?

Analyze the moral vocabulary of Martin Luther King Jr. and the way he uses words such as freedom, righteousness, justice, and community. What meaning does he give them? What religious reasoning does he employ? How is his language different from the political discourse of the time?



Martin Luther, King, Jr.

King always “put one foot in the Constitution and the other in scripture,” according to author Taylor Branch, whose three-volume history of America in the King years explores religion’s important role in the civil rights movement. King’s oratory, writes Branch, “mined twin doctrines of equal souls and equal votes in the common ground on nonviolence.”

Read an excerpt from Branch’s book *Pillar of Fire* on how religion and democracy were intertwined in King’s words and thoughts while he was in jail in Birmingham:

Invariably [King] pulled up hope in paired phrases of secular and religious faith. “We will win our freedom,” he wrote, “because the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands.” No fewer than five times he called upon variants of “Constitutional and God-given rights” as the twin footing that grounded his outlook. There was something characteristically American about the notion of divine sanction for democratic values, but King’s own struggle against despair pushed beliefs back to the earliest prophets of monotheism. Centuries before Plato, they introduced a deity that shockingly held kings and peasants to the same moral laws and rejected the forceful authority of state violence as evil. Their concept of equal souls anticipated and lifted up the democratic principle of universally equal votes. To hold the belief in justice among equal souls as the key to religious as well as political conviction seem at once crazy and noble, wildly improbable and starkly human... “One day the South will know,” he concluded, “that when these disinherited children of God sat down at lunch counters, they were in reality standing up for what is best in the American dream and for the most sacred values in our Judeo-Christian heritage, thereby bringing our nation back to those great wells of democracy...”



At the March on Washington on August 28, 1963, thousands of civil rights workers and protestors gathered at the foot of the Lincoln Memorial to hear King’s “I Have a Dream” speech. The moral urgency of the moment pushed John Kennedy to introduce a civil rights bill, eventually passed by Lyndon Johnson. King was euphoric, but he broke with Johnson over the Vietnam War, refusing to compromise his principles in order to retain his access to political power. By the time he was assassinated at age 39, King had assumed the mantle of an American prophet.

FOR DISCUSSION

“Throughout American history the main story we’ve gravitated toward has been the Exodus story,” says Stephen Prothero. What are the themes of the Exodus story, and where do you see them played out in the history of America and in the episodes of God in America?

RELATED CLIP: “Throughout American history the main story... just as it inspired Moses.”

A commitment to religiously rooted nonviolence was arguably the civil rights movement’s most powerful tool for social reform. What became of nonviolent change after the death of Martin Luther King Jr., and why do nonviolent strategies seem to have disappeared?

RELATED CLIPS: “The bus boycott challenged...allowed us to exercise our religion, our faith, and our fight for freedom” and “When we go about two blocks from the jail... done parted the Red Sea one more time” and “It will be detrimental to your safety to continue this march... the God in you that knows it’s wrong.”

The life, death, and legacy of Martin Luther King Jr., says Andrew Young, “point to the fact that this is a religious universe.” What do you think he means by this? What is he saying about the significance of religion for the civil rights movement? How did the civil rights movement demonstrate the public power of religion in America?

GOD IN AMERICA

LEARN MORE

Books

The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II by Robert Wuthnow

Religion in America Since 1945: A History by Patrick Allitt

Spiritual Politics: Religion and America Since World War II by Mark Silk

A Prophet with Honor: The Billy Graham Story by William Martin

The Preacher and the Presidents: Billy Graham and the White House by Nancy Gibbs and Michael Duffy

Original Sin and Everyday Protestants: The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, Billy Graham, and Paul Tillich in an Age of Anxiety by Andrew Finstuen

A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr. Edited by James M. Washington

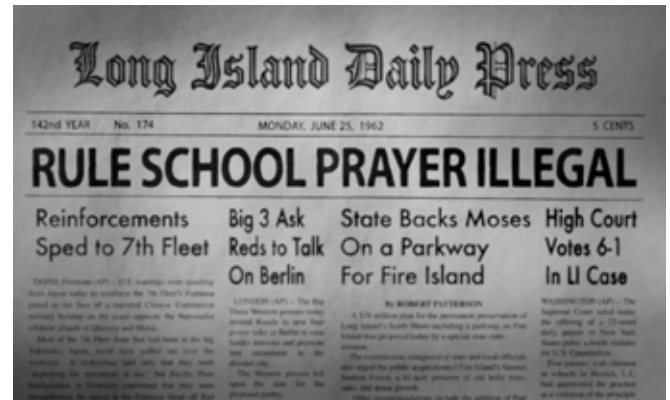
Parting the Waters, Pillar of Fire, and At Canaan's Edge by Taylor Branch

The Preacher King by Richard Lischer

Let the Trumpet Sound: A Life of Martin Luther King Jr. by Stephen B. Oates

Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement by John Lewis

A Way Out of No Way: The Spiritual Memoirs of Andrew Young by Andrew Young



God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights by Charles Marsh

Blessed are the Peacemakers: Martin Luther King Jr, Eight White Religious Leaders, and the Letter From Birmingham Jail by S. Jonathan Bass

Rhetoric, Religion, and the Civil Rights Movement edited by Davis Houck and David Dixon

King's Dream by Eric Sundquist

The Word of the Lord Is Upon Me by Jonathan Rieder

The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy vs Nixon 1960 by Shaun Casey

God in the White House by Randall Balmer

Protestantism in America by Randall Balmer and Lauren F. Winner

Religion in American Politics: A Short History by Frank Lambert

The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind by Mark Noll

The Spirit of the Law: Religious Voices and the Constitution in Modern America by Sarah Barringer Gordon

Separation of Church and State by Philip Hamburger

The Battle Over School Prayer: How Engel v Vitale Changed America by Bruce J. Dierenfield

The First Amendment in Schools by Charles Haynes et al.

One Woman's Fight by Vashti Cromwell McCollum



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Websites

PBS: "Crusade: The Life of Billy Graham"

<http://www.shoppbs.org/product/index.jsp?productId=1911319>
DVD of a public television production by historian Randall Balmer.

Stanford University: The Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute

<http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/>

Stanford is the home of the King Papers Project, an effort to publish a definitive fourteen-volume edition of King's most significant correspondence, sermons, speeches, writings, and unpublished manuscripts.

Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change

<http://www.thekingcenter.org/Default.aspx>

Based in Atlanta, the center is dedicated to research, education, and training in the principles, philosophy, and methods of nonviolence.

PBS: American Experience: "Eyes on the Prize"

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/>

Major documentary series covering events of the civil rights movement from 1954-1985

First Amendment Center

<http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/>

A nonpartisan forum that provides education and information to the public and groups including scholars and legal experts, educators, government policy makers, and students.

Wheaton College: Billy Graham Center Archives

<http://www.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/archhp1.html>

Online exhibits, photographs, oral history collections, and a searchable database

Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum

<http://www.jfklibrary.org/>

Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum

<http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/>

"The Lord Is Not on Trial Here Today" by Jay Rosenstein

<http://jayrosenstein.com/pages/lordfilm.html>

Documentary film on the story of Vashti McCollum and her landmark First Amendment case before the US Supreme Court on the relationship between religion and public schools in America.



GOD IN AMERICA

EPISODE SIX: OF GOD AND CAESAR



COURTESY OF REAGAN PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY

Early in his term as president, Ronald Reagan seemed to put the evangelical's social agenda into action proposing constitutional amendments to ban abortion and reinstate prayer in public schools.

Summary Of God and Caesar

The religious and political aspirations of evangelical conservatives found expression in a moral crusade over divisive social issues. They worried that the nation was adrift on a secular sea, unmoored from its Christian foundations, and they wanted to change the culture. Their ambitions were large, and they succeeded in transforming the religious and political landscape of the country. Their embrace of presidential politics, though, would ultimately end in disappointment and questions about the mixing of religion and politics. Across America, the religious marketplace expanded as new waves of immigrants from Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America made the United States the most religiously diverse nation on earth. In the 2008 presidential election, the reemergence of a religious voice in the Democratic Party brought the country to a new plateau in its struggle to reconcile faith with politics. *God in America* closes with reflections on the role of faith in the public life of the country, from the ongoing quest for religious liberty to the enduring idea of America as the “city on a hill” envisioned by the Puritans nearly 400 years ago.

“I Endorse You”

After the Scopes trial in 1925, conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists sequestered themselves from political engagement. But the social and cultural upheavals of the 1960s, coupled with the Supreme Court decision in *Roe v Wade*, persuaded key leaders it was time to step into the political arena. In the mid-1970s, Jerry Falwell formed the Moral Majority. In the summer of 1980, a defining moment

FOR DISCUSSION

Why did conservative evangelicals reject political engagement for decades, and why did they reenter politics?

RELATED CLIPS: “Jerry Falwell throughout his career... out of their isolation and back into politics” and “If in these last decades of the twentieth century... to make our country a better moral place.”

What was fundamentalist preacher Francis Schaeffer's critique of modern secularism? What did he mean by “secular humanism”? What cultural and political trends was he trying to counter?

RELATED CLIP: “Francis Schaeffer was this kind of funny-looking... we'd have moral decay.”



Jerry Falwell

in modern American politics occurred when then-presidential candidate Ronald Reagan made a speech in Dallas to what was the first National Affairs Briefing of the Religious Roundtable, a caucus founded to involve evangelicals in mainstream politics. The event has been described as nothing less than “the marriage ceremony between Southern Baptists and the Republican Party.” Religious and secular conservatives realized the advantage of joining political forces to confront pressing social issues. With Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and other prominent evangelicals in attendance, Reagan addressed the crowd of 15,000 Christian conservatives:

Religious America is awakening, perhaps just in time for our country's sake. If we believe God has blessed America with liberty, then we have not just a right to vote but a duty to vote. We have not just the freedom to work in campaigns and run for office and comment on public affairs. We have a responsibility to do so...If you do not speak your mind and cast your ballot, then who will speak and work for the ideals we cherish? Who will vote to protect the American family and respect its interests in the formulation of public policy? I know you can't endorse me because this is a nonpartisan crowd, but I...want you to know that I endorse you and what you are doing.

With these words Ronald Reagan launched a relationship with conservative evangelicals that reshaped American politics. As Moral Majority leader Ed Dobson observes, “For someone running for president to affirm us was very significant,” and evangelicals “lined up behind Reagan en masse.” They rejected fellow evangelical Jimmy Carter and helped sweep into office a president who easily summoned the language of faith and freedom. But Ronald Reagan only gave lip service, not presidential authority, to issues of the religious right such as constitutional amendments on abortion and school prayer. By 2000, religious conservatives again believed they had found one of their own in George W. Bush, who spoke of Jesus Christ as his personal friend, and they hoped he would deliver their social agenda.

A New Religious and Political America

At the same time that Christian evangelicals were reentering the public square and seeking political power in order to restore America's status as a Christian nation, the American religious marketplace was undergoing dramatic changes that would have political implications. Since 1965, amendments to immigration laws had brought waves of new immigrants and with them all the religious traditions of the world—Hindu and Buddhist, Sikh and Jain, Muslim, Zoroastrian, and more. By the year 2000, for example, Los Angeles County Muslims numbered nearly 500,000, and they came from Sri Lanka to Somalia, from Malaysia to Nigeria. The mostly white Protestant city that had launched Billy Graham's career as an evangelist 60 years earlier has become known for its religious diversity.

FOR DISCUSSION

Ronald Reagan famously spoke of America as “a shining city on a hill,” recalling and embellishing John Winthrop's description of the “city upon a hill” he and his fellow Puritans intended to found. The phrase “city on a hill” is from the New Testament.

RELATED CLIP: “In the book of Johnmore broadly throughout the world.”

Why do you think Reagan invoked a biblical allusion made by Winthrop in 1630? Does America still understand itself this way? Should it? What do you think Winthrop and Reagan each meant by this phrase? What does it mean in the 21st century for America to be a “city on a hill”? Randall Balmer says Americans “have a sense that America occupies a unique niche in the divine economy. I don't see that abating any time soon.” Do you agree?

Compare Republican presidents Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush, their religious rhetoric, their outreach to evangelicals, and their policy achievements on behalf of conservative evangelicals. What were the similarities and differences between them?



Like the other religious minorities that arrived before them, new immigrants are demanding their place in the American religious landscape. Today the largest immigrant group is Catholics from Spanish-speaking countries. Most remain Catholic, but many are also joining Pentecostal churches, one of America's fastest-growing religious groups. These Latino Protestants are changing the face of evangelical politics. As Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, says, "We don't want to be married to either party...I see the Hispanic Christian community emerging as the game changers and the powerbrokers politically in America."

"The Art of the Impossible"

A major survey conducted in 2007 and released in early 2008 by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports> showed that 16 percent of Americans considered themselves "unaffiliated" with any particular denomination or faith tradition. Yet many in this group said religion was "very important" in their lives. Professor Stephen Prothero argues that the rise in the numbers of unaffiliated reflects widespread disenchantment with the entanglement of religion and politics, especially during the Bush years. Over the past decade younger evangelicals, weary of the hard-edged tactics of the older generation, have begun redefining their mission over the past decade to include such issues as the environment, nuclear disarmament, malaria and AIDS in Africa, and poverty.

At the same time, moderate and progressive evangelicals such as Jim Wallis and others were working to persuade Democrats they could speak the language of faith and still protect the separation of church and state. One person who embraced this new attitude was the party's rising star, Barack Obama. In the summer of 2006, he accepted an invitation from Wallis to address a conference on "Building a Covenant for a New America" sponsored by Call to Renewal, Wallis's faith-based organization. Obama said he wanted to "tackle head-on the mutual suspicion that sometimes exists between religious America and secular America." He argued against the usual Democratic claim that constitutional principles should keep those who are religiously motivated out of the political arena. He also criticized Democrats for neglecting the rich resources of America's religious traditions and for not addressing social problems in explicitly moral terms. To liberals, he delivered the message that "secularists are wrong when they ask believers to leave their religion at the door before entering the public square." To conservatives, he argued that they could not expect to impose their religious values and views on others. They also needed "to understand the critical role that the separation of church and state has played in preserving not only our democracy, but the robustness of our religious practice." As journalist E. J. Dionne observes, "Obama has been trying to make a quite consistent argument that separating church and state is not the same as separating religion and politics. That you can respect religious liberty and respect religion itself, and those two things go together."

FOR DISCUSSION

What role do you see non-Christian religions and new immigrant faith communities playing in American politics and public life? What evidence of their involvement do you observe in your own community? How has the presence of Muslims, Latinos, and Hispanic Catholics in particular influenced the American religious and political landscape?

RELATED CLIP: "In the 2000 election a majority of American Muslims... creating a backlash of its own."

Has religion in America changed since 9/11? How?

Frank Lambert calls America "this great free marketplace of religion." Describe your own experiences and encounters with religious change, movement, diversity, competition, and fragmentation in America.

Do you think America is a Christian nation? In the midst of great religious diversity how does the country find national unity?

Do you think there is a relationship between faith, citizenship, and a sense of political responsibility? How does religion guide your political choices or your thinking about social issues?



GOD IN AMERICA

Read excerpts from Barack Obama's 2006 Call to Renewal address:

http://blogs.suntimes.com/sweet/2006/06/obama_on_faith_and_politics_an.html

If we truly hope to speak to people where they're at, to communicate our hopes and values in a way that's relevant to their own, then as progressives we cannot abandon the field of religious discourse. Because when we ignore the debate about what it means to be a good Christian or Muslim or Jew; when we discuss religion only in the negative sense of where or how it should not be practiced, rather than in the positive sense of what it tells us about our obligations towards one another; when we shy away from religious venues and religious broadcasts because we assume that we will be unwelcome others will fill the vacuum, those with the most insular views of faith, or those who cynically use religion to justify partisan ends...If we scrub language of all religious content, we forfeit the images and terminology through which millions of Americans understand both their personal morality and social justice...Democracy demands that the religiously motivated translate their concerns into universal rather than religion-specific values. It requires that their proposals be subject to argument and amenable to reason...Politics depends on our ability to persuade each other of common aims based on a common reality. It involves the compromise, the art of what's possible. At some fundamental level, religion does not allow for compromise. It's the art of the impossible.

Two-and-a-half years later, in his inaugural address, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/inaugural-address/> President Obama acknowledged America's religious pluralism:

"We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and nonbelievers." But in the fall of 2010, plans to build an Islamic center near Ground Zero, a Florida pastor's denunciations of Islam and his threat to burn the Quran, and questions about the president's own personal faith demonstrate that Americans continue to wrestle with the meaning of liberty and struggle to find unity in a land that has become the most religiously diverse nation on earth.



President Obama's inauguration in 2009.

FOR DISCUSSION

Do you see evidence of a "God gap" in American politics? What changes have there been in Democratic outreach to religious voters in the past few years?

RELATED CLIP: "The Democratic Party would have its own epiphany...gotten from liberals when the religious right was first formed."

Compare John F. Kennedy's 1960 speech in Houston and Barack Obama's 2006 speech in Washington and the way they spoke of church and state, religion and politics, and discuss E.J. Dionne's suggestion that Obama "had a very different take on religion than John F. Kennedy did. He was basically arguing to liberals that liberals had to be open to the idea that, yes, religious people will bring their religions beliefs to the public square." Has Barack Obama articulated "a new political consensus about the relationship between faith and power in America"?

President Obama's inaugural address included the statement that Americans "cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass." Discuss this hope in light of recent religious and political controversies over plans to build an Islamic center near Ground Zero, threats to burn the Quran at a church in Florida, and doubts about the president's own religious faith and identity.

Religion has always been central to the national narrative and to America's sense of mission at home and abroad. How important do you think it will remain to the American story? What religious directions do you imagine the American story might take in the years ahead?

LEARN MORE

Books

With God On Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America by William Martin

God's Name in Vain: The Wrongs and Rights of Religion in Politics by Stephen L. Carter

In God We Trust? Religion and American Political Life edited by Corwin Smidt

Souled Out: Reclaiming Faith and Politics After the Religious Right by E.J. Dionne Jr.

One Electorate Under God: A Dialogue on Religion and American Politics edited by E.J. Dionne Jr. et al.

What's God Got to Do With the American Experiment? by E.J. Dionne Jr.

God's Politics by Jim Wallis

The Great Awakening: Reviving Faith and Politics in a Post-Religious Right America by Jim Wallis

Under God: Religion and American Politics by Garry Wills

Religion and Politics in the United States by Kenneth Wald

From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism by Darren Dochuk

Religion and the American Presidency edited by Mark Rozell and Gleaves Whitney

Religion and the Bush Presidency edited by Mark Rozell and Gleaves Whitney

Religion and Politics in America: Faith, Culture, and Strategic Choices by Robert Booth Fowler and Allen D. Hertzke

The Diminishing Divide: Religion's Changing Role in American Politics by Andrew Kohut et al.

Religion, Politics, and the American Experience edited by Edith Blumhofer

A Public Faith: Evangelicals and Civic Engagement by Michael Cromartie

Caesar's Coin Revisited: Christians and the Limits of Government edited by Michael Cromartie

Onward Christian Soldiers? The Religious Right in American Politics by Clyde Wilcox and Carin Robinson

The Political Meaning of Christianity by Glenn Tinder

Francis Schaeffer: An Authentic Life by Colin Duriez

The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial by Robert Bellah

Religion and American Politics edited by Mark Noll and Luke Harlow

Religion and Politics in America by Robert Fowler et al.

The Faith Factor: How Religion Influences American Elections by John C. Green

Christian America? What Evangelicals Really Want by Christian Smith

American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving by Christian Smith

The Party Faithful: How and Why Democrats are Closing the God Gap by Amy Sullivan

Encyclopedia of Politics and Religion edited by Robert Wuthnow

Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism by Randall Balmer

Religious Pluralism in America by William R. Hutchinson

A New Religious America: How a Christian Country Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation by Diana Eck

America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity by Robert Wuthnow

The Struggle for America's Soul by Robert Wuthnow

Latino Pentecostal Identity: Evangelical Faith, Self, and Society by Arlene Sanchez Walsh

Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham by D. G. Hart

Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture by R. Laurence Moore

GOD IN AMERICA

Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion by Wade Clark Roof

The Rise of Evangelicalism by Mark A. Noll

One Nation Under God: Christian Faith and Political Action in America by Mark A. Noll

Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism by Nathan Hatch

Websites

Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life: US Religious Landscape Survey

<http://religions.pewforum.org/reports>

Based on interviews with more than 35,000 Americans, this survey explored the shifts taking place in the United States and found "that religious affiliation is both very diverse and extremely fluid."

Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life: Politics and Elections

<http://www.pewforum.org/Topics/Issues/Politics-and-Elections/>
News, analysis, and data on religion and politics.

National Association of Evangelicals

<http://www.nae.net/>

Formed in 1942, this association represents more than 45,000 local churches from more than 40 different denominations.

Center for Religion and Civic Culture: The Soul of Los Angeles

<http://crcc.usc.edu/blog/galleries/soul-of-los-angeles/>

Photographer Jerry Berndt has documented the religious diversity of Los Angeles for this University of Southern California research center which supports scholarship "on the civic role of religion in a globalizing world."

Center for Religion and Civic Culture: "Immigrant Religion in the City of Angels"

<http://crcc.usc.edu/docs/immigrantreligion.pdf>

This two-year project studied the role of religion for new immigrants to Los Angeles, a major gateway city and "home to a population where one person in three is foreign-born." It found that "immigrants are a potential source of moral renewal at a challenging moment in United States history."

Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals

<http://isae.wheaton.edu/>

This research center at Wheaton College sponsors academic conferences and seminars, publishes books, and undertakes research projects on American evangelicalism. Its Web site includes an evangelical timeline, a biographical gallery of famous American evangelicals, bibliographies, and links to related resources.

PBS: The American Experience: Reagan

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/reagan/>

An in-depth portrait of the 40th president of the United States.

PBS: Frontline: The Jesus Factor

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/jesus/>

An examination of religion, the political career and presidency of George W. Bush, and the influence of evangelical Christians.

STUDY GUIDE CREDITS:

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