

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-66529-3 - Religion in America  
Willard L. Sperry  
Frontmatter  
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AMERICAN LIFE AND INSTITUTIONS

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MASTER OF ST JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

I

RELIGION IN AMERICA

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RELIGION  
IN  
AMERICA

BY

WILLARD L. SPERRY

*Dean of the Divinity School  
in Harvard University*

CAMBRIDGE  
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
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*In Grateful Memory of*

B. H. STREETER

Who was my tutor at  
Queen's College, Oxford

1904-7

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## PREFACE

I have found it a little difficult to decide on a pattern for this book, which might be, variously, a history, a volume of statistics, a social study, an apologia. No single one of these possible plans for its organization seemed promising. Therefore the reader who is concerned solely with history or theology or sociology or apologetics will feel that his concern is not given full recognition here.

I finally decided that the book had best be an implied conversation between myself here in America and you in England. At the risk of seeming at times to understand the English situation better than is possible for one who is not himself an Englishman, I have assumed that we are more or less acquainted and ought to be still further acquainted. Therefore I have made constant use of the gambits 'you' and 'we', 'yours' and 'ours', in introducing one subject after another.

The book is, therefore, informal in its style, and its faults of style are to this extent deliberate. If, at times, serious matters seem to be treated lightly, that impression must be charged against my desire to avoid pedantry or a dispassionateness so studied that it might seem to suggest a lack of personal identification with the subject. I do not profess to be a disinterested observer and critic of the facts which are my theme. And I have assumed that those who have spent a lifetime with churches and religious movements will not misunderstand the rather intimate tone in which one speaks of matters for which one has a deep affection. Moreover, America is an informal country, and these pages would be a wholly false transcript of our life if they were too formally dressed up to 'go abroad'. I have come to you therefore in our everyday clothes, rather than in Sabbath-day garb.

One other note of explanation should be added by way of warning. A disproportionate amount of space in the pages which follow has been given to the small sects in America. They do not in fact bulk as large as their mention here might seem to

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suggest. They are, however, within their rather meagre limits characteristic of us. It was in just such modest terms that the older churches of Europe, once they had migrated here, began their life on this new soil. To this extent our small sects, however recent they may be, run true to historical precedents. Furthermore, the formal separation of church and state has allowed, and indeed has encouraged, the birth of new religious movements among us. This perennial process, which has gone on ever since the beginnings of organized religion, offers the student of theology and the social sciences contemporary source material here in America which cannot always be found in the Old World. It should be understood, therefore, that my failure to dwell at much greater length upon the more familiar types of church life, which we share with you, is not an attempt to minimize the dimensions or the major importance of such churches. But I have thought that you would be more interested to know about religious movements and institutions which are not paralleled in England, than to be told about denominations with which you are already familiar, and which differ from yours only in their local nuances.

Some of the material in the first chapters of this book was used in a series of lectures delivered at King's Chapel, Boston, in 1943, under the auspices of the Lowell Institute.

I am indebted to the Committee which administers the Milton Fund in Harvard University for a generous grant which has enabled me not merely to prepare my manuscript, but to have the help of Mr Ralph Lazzaro, a graduate student in Harvard Divinity School, in the verification of many references and citations of fact, and more particularly in the preparation of a series of appendixes. The material which he has gathered for these appendixes represents much searching in many scattered sources, and his resultant tables give to my text a warrant which otherwise would be wanting.

I am further indebted to many friends who read a first draft of the manuscript and offered both needed corrections and valuable suggestions. In particular I have drawn freely on the many books on American religious life written by Professor William Warren Sweet, of the University of Chicago. He has



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graciously given me the freedom of his pages. Dr Theodore Maynard and his American publisher, the Macmillan Company, have generously allowed me to use his recent book on *The Story of American Catholicism* as the basis of my chapter on that subject. For the rest I am most grateful to my colleagues in Harvard, Professor Arthur Meier Schlesinger and Professor Arthur Darby Nock; to Dr H. Paul Douglass of the Federal Council of Churches; and to Mr Eugene Exman of Harper and Brothers, for wise and friendly criticism.

Finally my thanks are due to Mrs Horace Reynolds for much patient help in seeing the manuscript through a first draft and a subsequent revision.

WILLARD L. SPERRY

*Cambridge, Massachusetts*

24 May 1944