

Introduction

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Over the last three decades, there has been an explosion of scholarship related to American Protestantism. Hundreds, if not thousands, of monographs and journal articles have appeared on this broad topic across the fields of history, theology, ethics, politics, sociology, and literary studies. Numerous scholarly societies – including the American Academy of Religion, the American Historical Association, the American Society for Church History, and the Southern Historical Association, to name just a few – have taken the breadth and diversity of American Protestantism as a subject for extensive discussions.

Taken collectively, this recent torrent of scholarly activity has dramatically altered and enriched our understanding of American Protestantism. First and foremost, by shifting the focus away from narrow denominational histories and the stories of elite theologians and institutions, recent scholarship has yielded a much more dynamic understanding of the relationship between Protestantism and American culture. On this front, several early works (relative to the period under consideration) were especially influential: Nathan Hatch's *The Democratization of American Christianity* (1989), Randall Balmer's *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory* (1989), David Hall's *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgement* (1990), Jon Butler's *Awash in a Sea of Faith* (1990), and Roger Finke and Rodney Stark's landmark work, *The Churching of America* (1992).¹

All of these helped permanently shift historical focus away from the traditional focus on New England Puritanism and further challenged and complicated our understanding of the relationship between church and American culture. Instead of telling the story of American Protestantism through the lens of denomination-building or through the lives and thought of significant theological figures, these works focus our attention on the dialectical relationship between American culture and Protestant religion. They broaden the categories of which religious movements are considered acceptable and interesting to explore historically, and they also identify larger Protestant groups or movements that

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cross denominational boundaries in ways that both reflect and ultimately shape American cultural and political sensibilities.

In the thirty or so years following the publication of these landmark works, the scholarly study of American Protestantism has continued to focus on the relationship between Protestant religion and American culture, and the dynamic (and often deeply contested) identities of larger subgroups within American Protestantism. With respect to the first category, scholars have examined Protestant attitudes toward and involvement in numerous aspects of American culture and politics, including (but not limited to) war and violence, mental illness, the penitentiary system, slavery and race, gender, sex and sexuality, education, consumer culture, religious pluralism, populism, and popular culture.² A second major area of recent scholarship consists of works that examine the dynamic and often contested identities of major subgroups within American Protestantism, most notably evangelicalism, liberal or “mainline” Protestantism, and Pentecostalism.³

How to make sense of such a broad, diverse, and deeply rooted tradition? This survey volume treats American Protestantism in all of its forms. It is interdisciplinary in scope and covers a wide range of topics. The list of contributors includes scholars who are personally affiliated with a branch of American Protestantism as well as scholars who have no such affiliation.⁴ Together, the chapters serve to trace the way in which Protestantism and America have reacted on and reacted against each other.

The first part of this *Companion* provides readers with an historical overview of American Protestantism, beginning with the early colonial period and concluding with the present day. Chapters 1–4 give readers a wide-ranging narrative backdrop against which they can more readily understand the more specialized topics that follow. Chapter 1 surveys major events, figures, and developments in early American Protestantism against the backdrop of Reformation roots, while Chapter 2 examines American Protestantism from the time of the Revolutionary War through the Civil War, especially the role of Protestantism in the building of the new republic. Chapter 3 turns to major developments in American Protestantism during the Industrial Age, including the emergence of the Social Gospel and progressive movements, the growth and influence of Protestant liberalism, fundamentalist-modernist debates, and Protestant involvement in and reaction to the world wars. Finally, Chapter 4 explores the shifting landscape of both American Protestantism and American culture from the 1960s to the present day, including the growth and influence of evangelicalism, the

impact of mass media, the numerical decline of mainline denominations, and responses to political and social turmoil.

The second part of the volume deals with a diverse list of topics and themes essential to understanding the religious culture of American Protestantism. We begin with Protestants in church, seminary, and Bible study: Chapter 5 explores the ways in which American Protestants have understood and used Scripture as well as the intimate connection between Scripture, doctrine, and theology, and Chapter 6 explores worship and preaching in the Protestant tradition, especially the prominence of the revivalistic tradition to trends in liturgy, music, architecture, and sacramental approaches.

We then move outwards to consider Protestants in school, workplace, and civil society. Chapter 7 discusses the deep commitment to education in American Protestantism as well as the tensions that have arisen; Chapter 8 focuses on views of work and vocation, locating them within the larger horizon of American Protestant understandings of providence and divine call; Chapter 9 provides an overview of attitudes toward and involvement in American politics and government; and Chapter 10 discusses American Protestantism's perhaps most characteristic reform, the temperance movement.

We next turn to a set of significant issues that have often divided American Protestants: gender and sexuality (Chapter 11), race (Chapter 12), divine healing (Chapter 13) and a companion essay on mental illness (Chapter 14), and relationships with Roman Catholics (Chapter 15). Finally, in Chapter 16, we look at the strong missionary impulse that has always motivated the American Protestant tradition.

The third part introduces readers to major theological traditions within American Protestantism: Anglicanism (Chapter 17), Reformed (Chapter 18), Lutheran (Chapter 19), Mennonite and Brethren (Chapter 20), Baptist (Chapter 21), Wesleyan and holiness (Chapter 22), Stone-Campbell (Chapter 23), and Pentecostal (Chapter 24). These chapters provide a brief historical and demographical overview, a description of theological and liturgical characteristics, and an analysis of the respective tradition's disposition toward American culture. This part will assist readers to apprehend and appreciate the diversity and complexity of American Protestantism in a way that moves beyond binary categories of evangelical and liberal.

The dominance and influence of Protestantism in American history, culture, and politics is difficult to understate. Yet at the same time, that influence is not monolithic, and that dominance has surged and ebbed. This volume reveals it to be a multifaceted, living tradition.

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NOTES

- 1 Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989); Randall Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: Evangelical Subculture in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); David Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776–1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), rev. ed. *The Churching of America, 1776–2005* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005).
- 2 On violence, see Harry Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2005); Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Jeffrey Williams, *Religion and Violence in Early American Methodism: Taking the Kingdom by Force* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010); and George Bogaski, *American Protestants and the Debate over the Vietnam War* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014). On mental illness, see Heather Vacek, *Madness: American Protestant Responses to Mental Illness* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015). On the penitentiary system, see Jennifer Graber, *The Furnace of Affliction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014). On slavery and race, see Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Katharine Gerbner, *Christian Slavery: Conversion and Race in the Protestant Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019). On gender, see Susan Juster, *Disorderly Women, Sexual Politics and Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996) and Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003). On sex and sexuality, see Amy DeRogatis, *Saving Sex: Sexuality and Salvation in American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) and R. Marie Griffith, *Moral Combat: How Sex Divided American Christians and Fractured American Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 2017). On education, see George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) and *The Soul of the American University Revisited: From Protestant to Postsecular* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021). On consumer culture, see

- Kathryn Lofton, *Consuming Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017). On religious pluralism, see Thomas Kidd, *American Christians and Islam: Evangelical Culture and Muslims from the Colonial Period to the Age of Terrorism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013). On populism, see John Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America, 1770–1820* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1998) and John Fea, *Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to Donald Trump* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020). Finally, on popular culture, see William D. Romanowski, *Reforming Hollywood: How American Protestants Fought for Freedom at the Movies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- 3 Recent significant works on evangelicalism (and its relationship to fundamentalism) include Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Darren Dochuck, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011); Grant Wacker, *America's Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Frances FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017); John Wigger, *PTL: The Rise and Fall of Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker's Evangelical Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Matthew Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2017); and Kristin Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (New York: Liveright, 2020). Recent significant works on mainline Protestantism include Gary Dorrien's monumental three-volume work, *The Making of American Liberal Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001–2006); Steven Tipton, *Public Pulpits: Methodists and Mainline Churches in the Moral Argument of Public Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Elisha Coffman, *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Margaret Mead: *A Twentieth-Century Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021); Seth Dowland, *Family Values and the Rise of the Christian Right* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); and Christopher Evans, *The Social Gospel in American History* (New York: New York University Press, 2017). Significant recent works on Pentecostalism include David Martin's *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002); Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); and Estrelida Alexander, *Black Fire: One Hundred*

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Years of African American Pentecostalism (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011).

- 4 Contributors include scholars affiliated with Anglican, Wesleyan, Baptist, Reformed, Lutheran, Stone-Campbell, Brethren, and Pentecostal traditions, as well as Roman Catholic contributors and those with no religious affiliation.