



Religion in American Life: A Short History

By Jon Butler, Grant Wacker, Randall Balmer

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"Quite ambitious, tracing religion in the United States from European colonization up to the 21st century.... The writing is strong throughout."--*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

"One can hardly do better than *Religion in American Life*.... A good read, especially for the uninitiated. The initiated might also read it for its felicity of narrative and the moments of illumination that fine scholars can inject even into stories we have all heard before. Read it."--*Church History*

This new edition of *Religion in American Life*, written by three of the country's most eminent historians of religion, offers a superb overview that spans four centuries, illuminating the rich spiritual heritage central to nearly every event in our nation's history. Beginning with the state of religious affairs in both the Old and New Worlds on the eve of colonization and continuing through to the present, the book covers all the major American religious groups, from Protestants, Jews, and Catholics to Muslims, Hindus, Mormons, Buddhists, and New Age believers. Revised and updated, the book includes expanded treatment of religion during the Great Depression, of the religious influences on the civil rights movement, and of utopian groups in the 19th century, and it now covers the role of religion during the 2008 presidential election, observing how completely religion has entered American politics.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Yet another history of religion in America? And with all the flaws of previous histories? Religion in this book essentially means Protestant Christianity, with a few side glances at Judaism, Catholicism, Native American religion, Islam, and Asian religions. America generally means the United States, except in the Colonial period, when a few references are made to New France in the north and New Spain in the south. In this short history by Butler (*Religion in Colonial America*), Grant Wacker (*Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture*), and Randall Balmer (*Religion in 20th-Century America*), the reader receives a large catalog of data and events that are difficult to place in any pattern of development or interpretation. The authors seem unable to provide an outline of trends or changes that supply a context for understanding this complex history. The classic work is still Sidney Ahlstrom's *A Religious History of the American People*; to set this story in true pluralistic context, Ahlstrom's book should be read alongside Diana L. Eck's recent and highly regarded *A New Religious America*. The reader would be better served by these two books than this new one. Not recommended.

James A. Overbeck, Atlanta-Fulton P.L., GA

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Review

Praise for the Previous Edition:

"This 'short history' of American religion is actually quite ambitious, tracing religion in the United States from European colonization up to the 21st century. The three authors, esteemed historians at Yale, Duke and Columbia, respectively, each tackle a century or two: Butler takes on the colonial period and the 18th century, Wacker continues the tale with the 19th century, and Balmer explores the flowering of religious diversity in the 20th. If the prose sounds familiar, it's because these three sections were originally issued as three separate books for the young adult nonfiction market; they have been gathered together here as one survey. Each chapter closes with a primary source, as in the original books, and the survey boasts tip-ins of the same facsimiles, photographs and illustrations that made the YA books so special. The writing is strong throughout, and will be accessible to undergraduates."--*Publisher's Weekly*, Starred Review

"... In the realm of American religious history, one can hardly do better than *Religion in American Life*, the collective production of three highly regarded scholars in the field and produced by Oxford in a handsome small-page format that invites rather than discourages potential readers... *Religion in American Life* is a good read, especially for the uninitiated. The initiated, however, might also read it for its felicity of narrative and the moments of illumination that fine scholars can inject even into stories we have all heard before. Read it."--*Church History*

"The three authors' distinct voices come through in their respective sections. And as one ends his century, and the next takes the baton as if a relay race, they overlap on some events and give them different

emphases....This is not a Christian history, though that faith naturally predominates. The homage to minorities strikes a good balance, and is not the forced multiculturalism seen in some textbooks....For a weekend reader who feels beind on a half millennia of American faith adventures, they can be brought up to speed in a fortnight, and certainly before the Apocalypse." -- Larry Witham, *Washington Times*

"This 'short history,' authored by three of the leading scholars in the field, provides an excellent overview of religion in American history." -- Bryan F. Le Beau, University of Missouri, Kansas City, *American Studies*

"It is refreshing to be able to use 'accessible' and 'authoritative' in the same sentence, and even nicer to find these two attributes in a single book. Each author is an acclaimed authority in his period and, happily, each is a gifted writer. The result is a splendid introduction to American religion for the classroom--and far beyond."--Edwin Gaustad

About the Author

Jon Butler is Howard R. Lamar Professor of American Studies, History, and Religious Studies at Yale University. He is the author of *Power, Authority, and the Origins of American Denominational Authority*; *The Huguenots in America: A Refugee People in New World Society*; *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People*; and *Becoming America: The Revolution Before 1776*, and, with Harry S. Stout, editor of *Religion in American History: A Reader*.

Grant Wacker is Professor of Christian History at Duke Divinity School and Director of the Graduate Program in Religion at Duke University. He received his B.A. from Stanford University and Ph.D. from Harvard University. His publications include *Augustus H. Strong and the Dilemma of Historical Consciousness and Heaven Below: Pentecostals and American Culture*. From 1997 to 2002 was a senior editor of the quarterly journal *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture*. In 2008 he served as president of the American Society of Church History.

Randall Balmer is Professor of American Religious History at Barnard College, Columbia University. He is the author of a dozen books, including *A Perfect Babel of Confusion: Dutch Religion and English Culture in the Middle Colonies*; *Protestantism in America*; and *God in the White House: How Faith Shaped the Presidency from John F. Kennedy to George W. Bush*. His second book, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America*, now in its fourth edition, was made into an award-winning three-part documentary for PBS.

Users Review

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