

# *America in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*

## *Sources*

Sidney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 2nd ed. (2004)

George Marsden, *Religion & American Culture*, 3rd ed. (2018)

Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform* (1980)

Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (2006)

Martin Marty, *Righteous Empire* (1970)

## I. Characteristics of American Christianity

### A. Pluralism

1. Complete freedom of religion, not merely toleration
2. Equality of religions
3. Yet a distinctively Protestant heritage

### B. Voluntary Support

### C. Impact of the Frontier

1. “Safety valve” & “laboratory”
2. Role in “democratizing” religion?
  - a. Jacksonian democracy = Jacksonian religion?
  - b. “Equality” & “free will” in religion (Methodists, Finney)

### D. Protestant Hegemony (Dominance)

1. Cultural dominance of evangelical Protestantism → Unofficial “established” church
2. “Benevolence empire” of ministries (American Tract Society, Bible Society, etc.)
3. Interdenominational emphasis (e.g., urban evangelism)
4. Downplayed creeds & distinctives but generally orthodox
5. Reform-minded (temperance, Sabbath-keeping)

### E. Revivals: Means of imparting religious & American values

## II. Revivals

### A. Second Great Awakening (Early 1800s)

1. Eastern Revivals (colleges & churches)—Reviving cold saints
2. Western Revivals—Winning the unchurched
  - a. Camp meetings (Cane Ridge)
  - b. Circuit-riders (Francis Asbury)
3. Charles Finney and the New Measures
  - a. Introduces much evangelistic methodology (e.g., altar call) → New methods to create an effect
  - b. Theologically suspect (practical Pelagianism)
4. Profound impact on American Christianity (González, 326-28)

### B. Civil War Era (1857-65)

1. Prayer Meeting Revival: “When America stopped to pray.”
  - a. Lay leadership—“businessmen’s revival”
  - b. Influenced ’59 Revival in Britain (esp. Northern Ireland)
2. Civil War army revivals

### C. Urban Revivals (Late 1800s & Early 1900s)

1. Citywide “union” meetings uniting churches in evangelistic efforts
2. D. L. Moody: Major leader
3. Billy Sunday: Height of urban evangelism

### III. Slavery Issue

#### A. Background

1. Slavery disliked but accepted for years
2. Issue radicalized in the 1830s
  - a. Abolition
    - 1) Immediate abolition: William Lloyd Garrison (Unitarian)
    - 2) Evangelicals: Slaveholding as a sin (Finney)
  - b. Defense of slavery as “positive good” (not just “necessary evil”)

#### B. Denominational Splits

1. Methodists (1844), Baptists (1844-45), & Presbyterians (1857, 1861) split over slavery
2. Significance
  - a. Three largest denominations in US
  - b. A form of secession before the Civil War

### IV. “Unorthodoxy”

#### A. Unitarianism

1. Socinian variety
2. Captured Harvard
3. Large cultural influence
4. Extreme: Transcendentalism & Ralph Waldo Emerson (virtual pantheism)

#### B. Cults (González, 344-47)

1. Result of religious free market
2. Mormons
  - a. Founder: Joseph Smith
  - b. “All-American religion”
  - c. Center: Utah
3. Jehovah’s Witnesses
  - a. Founder: Charles Taze Russell
  - b. Grew among lower classes
  - c. Prophetic extremism
4. Christian Science
  - a. Founder: Mary Baker Eddy
  - b. Illness is an illusion
  - c. Elitist: “Cult for the Cultured”

#### C. Catholicism

1. Growth by immigration (González, 324)
2. “Ghetto mentality” in Protestant America
3. Americanism controversy

#### D. “Modernistic” liberalism

1. Pulpit: Henry Ward Beecher (evolution)
2. Social Gospel: Walter Rauschenbusch
3. Schools (higher criticism): William Rainey Harper & University of Chicago