

Introduction

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Thank you for being here for the first of five annual AAR sessions on Religion and US Empire. San Diego is an ideal place to begin this shared inquiry into the intersection of American expansionism and religious ideologies and practices. From my hotel room window I can see the Pacific, the setting for my new work on American missionaries, science and religion, and American empire in Hawai'i and beyond. In few cities is the US military presence more visible. San Diego is the principle homeport of the Pacific Fleet. Advanced warships come and go. Thousands of new Marine recruits arrive every year to train for deployment and military action. There are the skyscrapers that mark the bustling business district and old Southern Pacific signs that recall the industrialization and American settlement of the West. Then, of course, in the distance, is the militarized border with Mexico, established through conquest and always a contested zone of separation and intimacy, commerce and creativity, racialization, and violence. Even the current drought reminds us of empire—and its fragility—an agricultural, commercial, and real estate development empire constructed with dams and reservoirs and canals.

In 2013, Sylvester Johnson and I formed a group of scholars to address what we felt was an urgent need to examine religion and imperialism in the United States. Fifteen scholars met twice at Creighton University in Omaha to share ideas and to develop our own work. This AAR seminar is an attempt to enlarge and enrich the conversation.

Early in our discussion, Sylvester asked me if I had read Martin Marty's *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America* (1970). I had not at the time. It seemed curious to us that more than forty years ago a major scholar of American religion had employed the term "empire" and yet, with few exceptions, "the imperial angle of analysis" had not taken hold in the field. This is changing now. It is appropriate, then, that we take some time to revisit *Righteous Empire* to see where we've been and to consider where we might go. We thank Professor Marty for agreeing to be here with us today.

The Imperial Angle: Martin Marty Narrates U.S. Religious History

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In the June 1970 edition of *Church History*, Yale historian Sidney Ahlstrom published, "The Problem of the History of Religion in America." In it, he described the recent decade's historiography as an "earthquake of revisionism."¹ These new historical works were a far cry from Robert Baird or Philip Schaff's work in the 1840s, Daniel Dorchester's assessments in the 1880s, or even more recent writing by William Warren Sweet in the 1930s and 1940s. Histories of American religion written in the 1960s included substantial sections on long neglected groups: Catholics, African American Protestants, Mormons, and Jews. Focusing on new subjects led to innovative arguments. Some historians argued that the U.S. could no longer be described as having a white Protestant center surrounded on the margins by racial and religious others. Instead, they posited that the U.S. was religiously plural, a post-Protestant nation. According to Ahlstrom, the "problem" for historians in 1970 was finding "a new plot, a new rationale, a new set of priorities, and new angles of vision" that accounted for this progression from Protestant unity to religious diversity in U.S. history.²

1970 also boasted the publication of *Righteous Empire*, one of the books that Ahlstrom would have associated with the revisionist "earthquake" of the 1960s. While many scholars at the time responded particularly to Marty's thesis about the two-party Protestantism that emerged as the righteous empire crumbled, I would like to consider another aspect of the book, what I call its "imperial angle." By that, I mean two things. Most basically, Marty used the word "empire" to describe American Protestants' creation of a domain of allegiance and adherence, of manners and mores.³ More important, Marty employed what historian Paul Kramer has called "imperial analysis" as a way to interpret the righteous empire he described.⁴ If Sidney Ahlstrom invited historians to initiate new angles of vision, Marty took an increasingly popular plotline of Protestant rise and fall and explored it from the "imperial angle." From that perspective, he highlighted the "dimension of power" in which Protestants "enable[d] and produce[d] relations of hierarchy...dispossession...and exploitation."⁵

Marty's use of the word empire as a descriptor, as well as the imperial angle of his analysis, requires revisiting. To begin, I offer a genealogy of empire and imperial analysis to explore how historians, including Marty, connected the U.S. to the continent's imperial past as well as the nation's territorial expansion. Next, I explore the ways that imperial analysis shaped Marty's intervention in debates about the relationship between religion, power, and efforts at social ordering, also known as benevolent or social reform, as well as the scholarly conversation about centers and margins of American religious life. In light of this reassessment, Marty's book stands as an important point in the genealogy of imperial analysis of American religious life, one that can help us see what important work is left to be done.

Colonial Pasts, Territorial Expansion

For decades, chroniclers of U.S. religious history made European exploration and colonization the starting point of the continent's religious story. They did not, however, necessarily consider it a good start. These historians, some of whom were Protestant clergymen, often accessed European empires for their ability to Christianize the "discovered" continent. Most agreed that the Spanish were bad at it.⁶ A few thought the French had potential, even if they eventually blundered.⁷ Most reserved their praise for the British project, which included settlers, especially in New England, wed to a distinct form of Reformed Protestantism.⁸ But even those historians who praised the Puritans assumed there was a sharp break between the colonial past and the U.S. founding. The new nation was strikingly different from its colonial origins. It was a place of disestablished religion and an emerging marketplace of free ideas and practices.

Righteous Empire officially starts in 1776, but Marty drew no firm boundary between the founding era and the colonial past. That is because he started his story with Indian removal. When you start with Indian removal, it is much more difficult to distinguish between U.S. leaders and European imperial authorities. To understand what shaped the new nation's Indian policies,

Marty included accounts of English colonists in Virginia who argued that Indians should first be addressed apostolically and, failing success, then imperially.⁹ He highlighted Cotton Mather's claim that Indians were tools of the devil working to stop the advance of Christianity.¹⁰ Marty noted that, after the founding, white Americans held more moderate views about Indians' nature and capacity. But he was clear that this attitudinal shift did not benefit American Indians. Just like their British forbears, early Americans were committed to appropriating Indian lands.

Marty's focus on land matters. He opened his chapter on Indian removal with the claim that "empires occupy space."¹¹ The "righteous empire" of manners and mores was no ethereal reality. It was peopled and those people demanded lands on which to live. In this way, Marty identified British and American land appropriation as a continuous project. While Marty mentioned changing attitudes about Indians in the early American republic, the "imperial angle" he took demanded he acknowledge that more moderate views on Indian difference did nothing to hinder ongoing violence against Indians or takeover of Indian lands.

Marty's reflections on the earliest steps in U.S. dispossession of Indian lands also shaped his consideration of territorial expansion to and across the Mississippi. Again, Marty inherited interpretations of this expansion from more than a century of historiography. In earlier works, some historians questioned whether "empire" was the right word to describe American westward expansion. In 1946, Harvard theology dean Willard Sperry wrote that the U.S. was certainly not an empire and using a more appropriate word mattered for understanding the history of global missions.¹² Sperry argued that imperial powers, like England, had a duty to missionize the colonies they ruled. The U.S., however, did not share a colonial obligation, but instead, freely chose to send missionaries around the world. U.S. missions, he concluded, were different.

Unlike Sperry, most historians of U.S. religions working before 1950 frequently described America's founding and expansion in terms of empire. They used the word proudly. In the midst of heated discussions in the 1840s about the U.S. annexing Texas and fighting Mexico, Robert Baird wrote that the Protestant Reformation laid the groundwork for "a Christian empire in the new world."¹³ Accolades to America's growing territorial empire continued in the writings of Philip Schaff, Leonard Bacon, Peter Mode, and Winthrop Hudson.¹⁴

Mode's 1923 book, which focused on American Christianity's "frontier spirit," provided an especially interesting evocation of territorial expansion and the workings of empire. Mode presumed that Providence had enabled Americans to create an empire that stretched to the Pacific and even across it.¹⁵ He was also among the first American religious historians to express caution about this trajectory. In the book's final pages, Mode considered the dilemmas raised by rapid territorial and economic expansion. Unfettered economic growth posed "grave dangers to the spiritual life."¹⁶ Mode wondered, "How effeminate, indeed, might our Christianity have become, without the responsibility of establishing Christian institutions commensurate with our economic advance."¹⁷ Despite the potential dangers, Mode insisted that Americans had done the work of empire exceptionally well.¹⁸ Through diligent circuit riders and relentless home missions, Christianity had won the American West and was posed to take the Pacific Rim.

Mode considered the term "empire" to be the most appropriate descriptor for the extension of American dominion, both territorial and cultural, even as he expressed concern about that very extension. As the decades progressed, more historians expressed uneasiness with the term and what it denoted about power relations. Later historians of American religions inherited these questions. Here, I see a third important consequence of Marty's use of an imperial angle: his engagement with the emerging historiography of religion and social power.

Religion and Power, Centers and Margins

In narrating the righteous empire, Marty connected to, as well as modified, the emerging literature on "benevolent empire." The phrase "benevolent empire" had a life before historians attached it to social reform movements among American Protestants. The term had circulated in popular formats for many years, often in apologist writings about British imperial history. Further, Americans had been describing their own social pursuits as benevolent for many years. But in 1933, British historian of economics Gilbert Barnes used the phrase to describe American evangelicals' involvement in antislavery activism. Barnes argued that Charles Finney and Theodore Dwight Weld inspired a cooperative religious effort at moral influence and societal change.

He called it the “benevolent empire.”¹⁹ Recall, though, that Barnes was an economic historian. He was particularly interested in how American antislavery had British precedents and how it required significant financial backing of new merchant fortunes, such as that of the Tappan brothers. He had an interest in colonial connections and the workings of economy.²⁰

After Barnes, historians continued to focus on the social and political precedents for and outcomes of American Protestant reforming activity. In the 1940s and 1950s, intellectual historians such as Henry May and Merle Curti referred to the “benevolent empire.” Curti focused on the British precedents for American social reform, while May explored the socially and theologically conservative contours of the reformers’ arguments.²¹ For these historians, America’s “benevolent empire” had colonial precedents, depended on capitalist expansion, and necessitated regimes of social ordering. In short, the benevolent empire was about power.²²

In contrast, historians of American *religion* approached the benevolent empire in a decidedly different way. To be sure, they recognized Protestant reformers’ efforts to transform society on a national scale. But these historians were far more likely to investigate the inspiration for reformers’ “benevolent” work than the effects of their activist “empire.” For instance, William Warren Sweet’s 1952 chapter on reforming societies focused on Hopkinsian disinterested benevolence.²³ John Bodo’s 1954 book on clergy reformers emphasized aspirations to theocracy.²⁴ One of the most important books on the benevolent empire, Timothy Smith’s *Revivalism and Social Reform*, claims that a theology of radical perfectionism and holiness inspired Protestant social movements.²⁵ In short, historians of American religion focused on the theological principles that propelled reformers into public action.²⁶

All the while, historians outside the subfield of American religious history kept the focus on economy and power. In his influential 1957 article, “Religious Benevolence as Social Control,” Clifford Griffin mentioned reformers’ theologies, but focused on the social and political power they wielded in their effort to shape the nature of the American west.²⁷ Charles Foster described similarities between American reforming societies and their British precedents, in which middle-class Christians sought to contain the influence of revolutionary enlightenment or democratic ideas. Depending on which part of the historical guild one consulted, the benevolent empire was either the Holy Spirit realized or a bourgeois power play.

Marty surely monitored this ongoing debate about the benevolent and reform societies that featured in his story.²⁸ In *Righteous Empire*, Marty brought the analysis of power employed by historians outside the religion subfield to a scholarly and popular audience that considered theology to be the benevolent empire’s most important feature. While not ignoring theology, Marty included the populations subject to, and sometimes harmed by Protestant activism. Marty’s imperial angle allowed to him see clergy and leading citizens, as well as Indians, African Americans, and immigrants. For Marty, analyzing the imperial demanded attention to intentions and dreams, as well as the exclusions and abuses of power.

Reviews of *Righteous Empire* revealed readers’ surprise at Marty’s focus on the effects of empire rather than inspirations for benevolence. Writing in *Christianity Today*, editor Harold Brown criticized Marty for characterizing the righteous empire as “a self-righteous, self-serving spiritual propaganda machine of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, intended to subjugate ethnics.”²⁹ Even historian William McLoughlin, who praised the book as the “first post-Protestant history of American Protestantism,” worried that Marty had overlooked the “anguish and sincerity” of Protestants caught between “moral idealism” and the work of “nation building.”³⁰ But Marty’s imperial angle required that his narrative follow expanding lands, moving populations, and negotiations of power.³¹ Elucidating the righteous empire, Marty offered a way of seeing American religion as a consequence of, if not a powerful force in the history of American domestic empire.

Finally, Marty’s imperial angle allowed him to enter the conversation about characterizing U.S. religious life in the 1950s and 1960s. These conversations, I argue, mirrored larger debates about the meanings of citizenship shaped by the geopolitical realities imposed by the Cold War.³² The synthetic histories and textbooks produced in this period—as well as reviews of these efforts—show that American religious historians disagreed deeply over how to characterize the population’s religious character. These historians lived in the midst of the mainline Protestant surge following the Second World War, as well as the cultural upheavals and immigrant arrivals of the 1960s. Some scholars, such as Robert Handy, Bob Bellah, and Edwin Gaustad, continued to produce books emphasizing a mostly-unified Protestant center holding out even into the 1960s.³³ Others, including Marty, explored the contours of the new religious pluralism.³⁴ They experimented with new explanations for how this pluralism

had come to be. And while most of these historians, including Marty in parts of *Righteous Empire*, focused on the forces that had broken down the Protestant center, other observations were newly possible. The traditional narrative sequence of Protestant dominance could be interpreted in new ways. In *Righteous Empire*, Marty attended to the people who lived in the wake of Protestant dominance. He investigated them not simply as occupants of a marginal realm, but as people integral to the righteous empire's creation and maintenance throughout the nineteenth century. He made Indians, enslaved people, and immigrants central to the story, not simply as present, but as active participants in the developing story of Protestant power.

Conclusion

Constructing this genealogy of empire as des-criptor and angle of analysis in the study of U.S. religions has forced me to adjust my own account of our field's history. As a graduate student in the early 2000s, I received a particular story about how our discipline has developed. In that account, major change came to the field in the 1980s and 1990s through Catherine Albanese's radical textbook, scholars' focus on lived religion, gender analysis, the use of ethnographic methods, and a new attention to material culture.³⁵ According to the account I received, the watershed moment in our field had occurred in my lifetime. As a result of that transition, religious pluralism would be our subject and everyday people and real things would be our evidence.

This account I received, in which dramatic change occurred in the 1980s and 1990s, helps explain more recent conversations in which scholars have questioned whether attention to pluralism has come at the expense of a critical analysis of power. For instance, in a recent forum in the journal *Religion*, Rosemary Hicks explored the controversy over New York City's Cordoba House, known popularly as the mosque at ground zero. She argued that pluralist narratives of American religions leave questions of defining and regulating religion unasked and therefore unanswered. What is held up as inclusive, Hicks writes, is simultaneously regulatory.³⁶ To be sure, some early work on lived religion, particularly of Robert Orsi's *Madonna of 115th Street*, attended to questions of power, especially about gender.³⁷ Some scholarship on the secular has also explored dynamics of power in great detail.³⁸ Even so, Hicks is right. We need more work on the intersections of religion and the production of hierarchical relations. If the transformation of our field in the 1980s and 1990s has not delivered in this way, perhaps we should return to the "revisionist earthquake" of the late 1960s and early 1970s that Ahlstrom described. As Marty observed, the righteous empire occupied space. It claimed Indian lands in the American southeast and west of the Mississippi. Empires continue to occupy space and regulate how people move through those spaces. As Hicks has shown most eloquently, religious people continue to live in regulated spaces, including lower Manhattan.

From my perspective, Marty's most important contribution was his willingness to explore U.S. religious history from the imperial angle. He considered the righteous empire's effects on the millions of people who experienced its power as coercive, if not destructive. When Marty wrote the book, he was living through the tragedies of Vietnam and the most explosive years of civil rights protest. He has acknowledged the way Reinhold Niebuhr's career as a critic and public intellectual shaped his writing at that time.³⁹ To be sure, we do not inhabit the same era. But we certainly live in an age filled with equally agonizing debates about and experiences of American involvement abroad and the experiences of minority populations here at home. As historian Paul Kramer has noted, scholars turn to empire as an historical category and analytical tool at just these sorts of moments.⁴⁰

If Marty offered us the possibility of imperial analysis, I hope that we can continue that effort and combine it with scholarly methods that have emerged since then. For instance, we can take the methods of lived religion paradigm and apply them to situations of empire, looking at life on the ground for both the purveyors of empire's power as well as those forced to respond to its imposition. In writing the lived religion of empire, we can move beyond mere pluralism and explore the workings of power. In 1970, Marty opened a door for us. The question is: how we will walk through it?

¹ Sidney Ahlstrom, "The Problem of the History of Religion in America," *Church History* 39:2 (June 1970): 224.

² Ahlstrom, "The Problem," 233.

³ Martin E. Marty, *Righteous Empire; the Protestant Experience in America* (New York: Dial Press, 1970), foreword. This is different than Marty's use of the word imperial in an earlier book, in which he argued that the church, at times throughout its long history, operated as an imperial power and occupied particular places and wielded power. He contrasted the world of the early 1960s as a world of "displacement" in its urbanism, pluralism, and secularity. See Martin E. Marty, *Second Chance for American Protestants* (New York: Harper & Row, 1953).

⁴ Paul A. Kramer, "Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World," *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 5 (December 2011): 1350.

⁵ Kramer, "Power and Connection," 1349.

⁶ Leonard Woolsey Bacon, *A History of American Christianity* (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1897), 7-8.

⁷ Bacon, *A History*, 18-22.

⁸ Robert Baird, *Religion in the United States of America, Or, An Account of the Origin, Progress, Relations to the State, and Present Condition of the Evangelical Churches in the United States with Notices of Unevangelical Denominations* (Glasgow: Blackie and Son, 1844), 15; Daniel Dorchester, *Christianity in the United States: From the First Settlement Down to the Present Time* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1895), 29; Peter George Mode, *The Frontier Spirit in American Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1923), 11; William Warren Sweet, *Religion in the Development of American Culture, 1765-1840* (New York: Scribner, 1952), ix-x.

⁹ Marty, *Righteous Empire*, 5.

¹⁰ Marty, *Righteous Empire*, 6.

¹¹ Marty, *Righteous Empire*, 5.

¹² Willard Learoyd Sperry, *Religion in America* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), 140-141.

¹³ Baird, *Religion in the United States*, 32.

¹⁴ Philip Schaff, *Church and State in the United States: Or, The American Idea of Religious Liberty and Its Practical Effects, with Official Documents* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1888), 26; Dorchester, *Christianity in the United States*, 260, 274; Bacon, *A History of American Christianity*, 334; Mode, *Frontier Spirit*, 11, 37; Winthrop Still Hudson, *American Protestantism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 77, 85. Writing in 1930, William Warren Sweet put westward expansion at the heart of the early national story, devoting two chapters to it and only afterward taking up questions of reform, missions, and slavery. See William Warren Sweet, *The Story of Religions in America*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1930), 205-242.

¹⁵ Mode, *Frontier Spirit*, 37.

¹⁶ Mode, *Frontier Spirit*, 185.

¹⁷ Mode, *Frontier Spirit*, 184.

¹⁸ Paul Kramer notes that the rhetorics of empire often include comparisons with other empires and conclusions that a new and better form of empire is at hand. See Kramer, "Power and Connection," 1351, 1358.

¹⁹ Gilbert Hobbs Barnes, *The Antislavery Impulse, 1830-1844* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1933), 18.

²⁰ Barnes, *The Antislavery Impulse*, chapter 2.

²¹ Henry Farnham May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America* (New York: Harper, 1949), 17-28; Merle Curti, et al., *An American History* (New York: Harper, 1950), 397-99; Merle Curti, et al., *A History of American Civilization* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1953), 232.

²² This conversation was probably also shaped by writers concerned about benevolence proffered by industry. For example, see William James Ghent, *Our Benevolent Feudalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1902).

²³ Sweet, *Religion in the Development in American Culture*, 235. See also Dumond's book, which argues that benevolence inspired antislavery reformers. Dwight Lowell Dumond, *Antislavery: The Crusade for Freedom in America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961).

²⁴ John R. Bodo, *The Protestant Clergy and Public Issues, 1812-1848* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954), viii-ix. See also Cole's argument that puts evangelical fervor at the heart of reform. Charles C. Cole, Jr., *The Social Ideas of the Northern Evangelists, 1826-1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954).

²⁵ Timothy Lawrence Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980). See also James's argument on the "humanitarianism" at the heart of Quaker antislavery. Sydney V. James, *A People among Peoples: Quaker Benevolence in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 316-334. See also Edwin S. Gaustad, *A Religious History of America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 171.

²⁶ These works also tended to tie the benevolent empire to what historians identified as the Second Great Awakening. Smith's is probably the most explicit tie. At least one historian interested primarily in religion, Donald Mathews, tried to balance his interest in the theology of the revival and reform movements with the social and cultural circumstances that also shaped them. See Donald G. Mathews, "The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830: An Hypothesis." *American Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1969): 23.

²⁷ For a response, see Lois W. Banner, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of an Interpretation," *The Journal of American History* 60, no. 1 (June 1, 1973): 23-41.

²⁸ Marty cited Bodo, Foster, Cole, and Smith in his chapter notes.

²⁹ Harold O. Brown, "Righteous Ethnics," *Christianity Today* 16, no. 23 (25 August 1972): 21.

³⁰ William G. McLoughlin, "Review," *American Historical Review* 76, no. 3 (June 1971): 830.

³¹ In his review of *Righteous Empire*, historian Stephen Stein identified Marty with a “kind of imperial school of American religious history.” See Martin E. Marty, *Righteous Empire Revisited* (Boston: American Antiquarian Society, 2007), 47. Historians in this period invoked American empire in very different ways. For instance, Winthrop Hudson’s 1970 sourcebook on religion and nationalism includes Josiah Strong’s “Plea for the West” as well as religious defenses of Philippine invasion in a section called “the renovation of the world: from continentalism to imperialism.” See Winthrop Hudson, *Nationalism and Religion in America: Concepts of American Identity and Mission* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).

³² Nikhil Pal Singh. “Culture/Wars: Recoding Empire in an Age of Democracy,” *American Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (1998): 471–522.

³³ Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955); Robert T. Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus* 96:1 (Winter 1967): 1-21; Edwin S. Gaustad, *A Religious History of America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966). In his presidential address to the American Society of Church History, Marty said that arguments about unity in America religion were focused only on white people. Martin E. Marty, “Ethnicity: The Skeleton of Religion in America.” *Church History* 41, no. 1 (March 1, 1972): 19.

³⁴ To be sure, these historians had very different responses to the pluralist reality they described. Also, some volumes included writers making both kinds of arguments. See William Gerald McLoughlin, *Religion in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968).

³⁵ Catherine L. Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1981); David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: Knopf, 1989); Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Barbara G. Myerhoff, *Number Our Days: A Triumph of Continuity and Culture Among Jewish Old People in an Urban Ghetto* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980); Sally M. Promey, *Spiritual Spectacles: Vision and Image in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Shakerism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

³⁶ Rosemary Hicks, “Between Lived and the Law: Power, Empire, and Expansion in Studies of North American Religions,” *Religion* 42, no. 3 (July 1, 2012): 415. See also Kwok Pui-lan, “Empire and the Study of Religion,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 2 (June 1, 2012): 285–303.

³⁷ Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*.

³⁸ Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

³⁹ Marty, “Righteous Empire Revisited,” 51-52.

⁴⁰ Kramer, “Power and Connection,” 1348.

Mapping Martin Marty's *Righteous Empire*: Missionaries, Missions, and Where Protestant Empire Happens

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In the foreword to *Righteous Empire*, Martin Marty defines “empire” in a parenthesis with a concise clarity that stands in stark contrast to the reams of paper that have been filled in defining empire and its relation to the United States in recent years. An empire, he explains, is a “domain” or “realm.”¹ In spite of the simplicity of this definition, throughout the book itself Marty describes a Protestant empire that is messy and contested. It is at once rooted in place and yet still boundless. The Righteous Empire of 19th century American Protestants was grounded in the land of North America, was concerned about the continental expansion of the country, and was simultaneously interested in developing a global reach. As we commemorate the significance of *Righteous Empire* for American religious history today, I would like us to think about the issue of space and where empire happens. These multiple directions that the Protestant Empire takes Marty in his book continue to shape the ways that scholars talk about empire and religion. If it is much harder to define empire in a parenthesis now, that is partly because of the ways that scholars are looking at American empire and imperialism in different places, each offering a different picture of what empire is and how it works.

One major development in US historical scholarship in the decades since *Righteous Empire* was published has been the so-called “global turn” that has sought to reorient our vision of American history from a continental focus to a global one. Historians have been urged to think about how the questions of United States history fit into a global story and the ways that global stories have shaped the history of the United States. For historians of American religion who have been inspired by this global turn (myself included), missionaries have been an ideal group for thinking through these issues. In this piece, I will focus on them as a way to envision the “where” of American religious empire. Missionaries allow us to think about this empire as a process that occurs in multiple locations and directions: there is the sending out, with its implications for the expansion of American influence; the experience in the field, with its attention to the dynamics of contest and exchange; and finally the returning home, either of the missionaries themselves or of their writings, with the suggestion of an outside influence perhaps changing the home culture itself. We can see the Protestant Empire in all of these spaces, but each offers a slightly different picture of what the Empire actually is and how it works. As we ask the “where” questions of empire, in other words, we are pushing ourselves to think more deeply about the “what.” What is this Protestant Empire, anyway?

The idea of American Protestants as imperialists, or of American Protestantism as an empire, is clearest if we view the history from a position within the United States, looking at the sending out of missionaries to places throughout North America and the globe with the goal of spreading the Protestant faith along with, to varying degrees, American culture. This is the “where” of empire that Marty is most interested in within his text. In the nineteenth century, when the Protestant Empire was at its height, missionaries believed that conversion would be externally evident in behavioral and cultural changes including clothing, marital practices, agricultural styles, gender roles, and so on. The cultural imperialism of these missionaries is difficult to deny: they were exporting their values and culture—what they called “civilization”—alongside their religion, attempting to change foreign cultures by importing a new system of religious order. In fact, for much of the nineteenth century, they found the two to be completely enmeshed. For evangelical Protestants of this era, religion and “civilization” were co-constitutive, and it was difficult to imagine one without the other. Missionary promoters might debate the direction of causality (did Protestantism bring civilization in its wake, or was civilization a necessary prerequisite for the planting of Protestantism?) but it was clear to all involved in this conversation that both were key.

Of course, the extent to which bearing civilization was the job of American missionaries was subject to debate. William Hutchison’s landmark study of American foreign missions made this issue a central question: to what extent did Christ and culture get joined together, and to what extent did missionaries seek to separate them?² This Christ/ culture question has been a central one to the study of American missions, as scholars have tried to untangle the complex snarl of motives, justifications, and

practices for missionaries of the 19th and 20th centuries. In part, it depended on where the missionaries were going, and in part it depending also on when they were going.

If the early nineteenth century saw American missionaries assuming overlap between the work of Christianization and civilization, by the mid-19th century, mission boards in the U.S. were instructing their missionaries to separate the two. Rufus Anderson, the leader of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission who guided its policy in the mid-to-late-19th century, was insistent on this point. The problem with early 19th century missions, he believed, was their linkage between culture and Christianity. Anderson insisted, on the contrary, that there was no necessary connection between the two. Civilization would probably follow Christianization, he expected, but this was not the missionaries' job. He denied the imperialism of missions by articulating their goal as simply the planting of native churches. In other words, he wanted missionaries to go in, build a religious infrastructure, and leave as soon as native converts could be counted on to run it.³ In practice, however, we might ask how much missionaries ever actually practiced this message. For our discussion of religion and US empire, this is precisely where we ought to push, thinking more deeply about imperialism as it shaped missionary encounters with non-Christians and non-Americans. For if Anderson was denying the imperial ambitions of American missionaries, the question of when to get out, and how you would know that the time had come, would mean that there was frequently a significant gap between the sending out and the coming home.

The political imperialism of these missionaries is also a complicated issue, and parsing the difference between these different types of imperialism is essential for our understanding of American empire and religion. The connections between political empire and religion—particularly missions—have long been a central question of British imperial studies, and the idea that the missionary map overlaps considerably with the imperial map has been generally accepted in that field.⁴ In my own research on American foreign missions, I have worked to bring these questions to bear on the US experience. A key part of the imperial connections in the “sending out” is evident if we superimpose maps of empire with those of American missions. For Americans, too, the missionary map follows the map of empire. Missionaries went where they could count on British or American political or commercial power providing them with some sort of protection. Dependent on empires to provide much of the infrastructure of their work, American missionaries at times supported political and economic empires with enthusiasm, and at times hoped that their own presence would serve to temper what they found to be the overly secular and even oppressive aspects of empire.⁵

Already, then, we can see a difference between the sending and the in the field perspectives. Whatever Anderson was telling missionaries, they often attempted to bring about cultural change once they were in the field. And these challenges to political and economic empire usually took place outside of the domestic United States, once missionaries saw empires in action. This “in the field” perspective, then, gives us a different understanding of American empire and religion. If the perspective from the U.S. focuses on American ambitions and plans, the view from the field is what we have when those ideas come crashing into reality. As we think about the implications of these dynamics for our understanding of empire, we need only think about the important studies that look at conversion and syncretism to help us remember that the imagined strength of the Righteous Empire was always challenged by those they hoped to reach.⁶

One of the major differences between the sending and the in the field perspectives is precisely about this question of strength. It is worth noting here one key point of chronology. If the Righteous Empire was particularly strong in the nineteenth century, the American empire that political historians are more comfortable tracing gained its strength in the late nineteenth century, as the power of the Righteous Empire waned.⁷ When the Righteous Empire was strong, then, American political and economic power abroad was relatively weak. The dynamics between this assertion of strength by American Protestants and the reality of weakness in the field is an important issue to grapple with if we wish to understand the links between empire and religion.

This question is guiding wonderful recent and ongoing work on American missions. Ussama Makdisi's discussion of American missionaries in *Artillery of Heaven* is particularly useful to our discussion here. He describes their militancy as a reflection of their “idealism, their denigration of other religions and cultures, [and] the magnitude of their self-appointed errand to the world. Above all,” he writes, “they embodied a reinvigorated sense of mission born from the crucible of white conquest and Indian

defeat in the New World." Here, the continental/global connection that Marty identifies in his book is apparent. The connections between what happened in the continental United States was affecting what happened abroad. Yet the particular context of the Middle Eastern mission that Makdisi focuses on changes the story. For if American missionaries attempted to universalize the story of American's experience with North Americans, expecting other places around the world to be more similar than different in many important ways, Makdisi has helped us to understand the ways that particular contexts matter a great deal. This is difficult work for a scholar, involving familiarity with foreign archives and demanding multiple languages, but Makdisi's work reveals the ways that changing the frame and looking in new spaces can in fact tell us a different story of religion and American empire.⁸

In addition to the sending and the in the field experience, there is one additional space and dynamic of the Righteous Empire that we ought to think about today. Using the insights of the "new imperial history" coming out of British historiography, we might also look at the influence of the missionary experience on religious life within America.⁹ Indeed, the idea that foreign experiences would and should affect American religious experience had been present from the beginning of American participation in missions. That foreign missions could lead to a revitalization of religion at home was a point that missionary supporters almost always included in their list of justifications for foreign mission work.¹⁰ It was an easy defense against potential critiques that asked why missionaries directed their attention to places far away when there were needs at home still to be met. This is not to say, though, that missionary supporters did not have particular ideas about what kinds of influence they wanted for missionaries to have on their own religious lives. The effects were supposed to be a spurring of religious enthusiasm, and decidedly were not about incorporating foreign forms into American practice. Again, the best-laid plans did not always work out as American Christians envisioned them, and this could be a major point of tension.

We can think about this feedback loop in a couple of ways. In the first place, American missionary supporters wanted to celebrate American benevolence in a way that would become self-fulfilling. By making themselves into the sort of country that sent missionaries out into the world, they could encourage American Protestants to live up to that reputation by giving more support to missions and by being more faithful in their own religious practice. Becoming a missionary sender, then, would make America look more like the kind of country that Christians thought ought to be reproduced elsewhere.

In addition to this, missionary work had another intended effect on domestic religious life. By contrasting their own lives with those of the potential converts, missionary supporters hoped to make American Protestants more aware of the particular blessings that they enjoyed as Americans. This would have the tendency to reify American culture as it existed. In gender norms this dynamic is perhaps the most obvious and complex. Missionary literature frequently focused on the poor conditions that women lived in elsewhere in the world. Polygamy, cloistering, and a lack of women's education were frequent themes. American Christianity, it was both implicitly and explicitly stated, by contrast provided women with an elevated role in society. Reading these stories were intended to have the effect of making American women glad to be where they were, even as they were moved to contribute their mite to help other women who had not been so fortunate.

Yet there were unintended consequences even to this. Women did become very involved in mission work, and were central figures in these missionary dynamics. In the mission field, women were doing work that they were not able to do at home. Abroad, they were in fact trans-forming the ideas about what women's work ought to look like. Their participation gave them the tools to claim a sacred authority in talking about their own rights.¹¹ If God demanded women's participation in certain areas of the mission field, then why not also in American culture?

As Amy Kaplan explained in her study of the culture of American empire, empire always existed as both a "dream and a nightmare" for Americans, with the nightmare focusing on the potential dangers and risks to the American nation and culture as a result of imperial interactions.¹² The challenges that could emerge out of the missionary experience then had the potential to destabilize the Righteous Empire itself, as foreign experience could give American missionaries and their supporters the tools for challenging that culture.

This examination of the multiple spaces of Marty's Righteous Empire gives us, then, at least three views of the connections between religion and empire in American history. In the sending, we see imperial ambitions, however complicated, of spreading American culture with religion. Often these ambitions work alongside, and sometimes they challenge, political

empires. This view from the metropole shows us the American view of what western influence could and should be. In the space of conversion, we see the difficulty of enacting that vision, and the contested nature of American empire. We can see the experience of non-Americans as important actors shaping the contours of the imperial dynamic. In the returning home, we can see the hopes for triumphal effects on American culture, but the reality of the contested meanings of foreign interactions. Here, we can see the ways that the imperial relationship was not unidirectional, and the ways that this dynamic could cause anxiety. If we follow Marty's insight about how the Protestant experience in America can be understood as an empire, in other words, we can continue to think with increasing specificity about what empire means in the American context and how it has changed over time and also, importantly, over space.

¹ Martin Marty, *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America* (Harper and Row, 1977)

² Current research by Barbara Reeves-Ellington challenges this notion, looking at how even after this policy was pushed by mission boards, missionaries continued to be active in politics abroad, seeing "culture" and "civilization" as central to their evangelical work. In the British context, the relationship between "Christ and civilization" is similarly debated. In his article "Commerce and Christianity," Andrew Porter argues that these were separate, if related, categories and missionaries debated which needed to come first in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Non-evangelicals in particular felt that "civilization" under a British government should come first (along with commerce) and bring Christianity in its train. British evangelicals found this to be a problematic prioritizing of commerce over religion, and consistently pushed to have religious interests more fully represented in the empire. See William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), ch. 2; Barbara Reeves-Ellington, "Religion, Diplomacy, and Anglo-American Relations in Nineteenth-century Istanbul," (Annual Conference of the SHAFR, Lexington, KY, June 19, 2014); Andrew Porter, "'Commerce and Christianity': The Rise and Fall of a Nineteenth-Century Missionary Slogan," *The Historical Journal*, v. 28, n. 3 (Sept. 1985): 597-621; Penelope Carson, *The East India Company and Religion, 1698-1858* (Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 2012)

³ Hutchison, 77-90.

⁴ For examples of British work on this theme, see: Jeffrey Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines: Christianity and Colonial Power in India, 1818-1940*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); Elizabeth Elbourne, *Blood Ground: Colonialism, Missions, and the Contest for Christianity in the Cape Colony and Britain, 1799-1853*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002); James Greenlee and Charles Johnston, *Good Citizens: British Missionaries and Imperial States 1870 to 1918*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999); Anna Johnston, *Missionary Writing and Empire, 1800-1860*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

⁵ Emily Conroy-Krutz, *Christian Imperialism: Converting the World in the Early American Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).

⁶ Though from an earlier period, the work of Fisher and Leavelle are instructive here. Linford D. Fisher, *The Indian Great Awakening: Religion and the Shaping of Native Cultures in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Tracy Leavelle, *The Catholic Calumet: Colonial Conversions in French and Indian North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

⁷ As Lisa Joy Pruitt points out in *A Looking Glass for Ladies*, the antebellum period is underrepresented in American missionary studies. Far more prominent are late-19th and early-20th century works. The recent edited collection *Competing Kingdoms* includes a single essay on the pre-Civil War era: Mary Kupiec Cayton's excellent discussion of the memorialization of missionary wife Harriet Newell. Mary Kupiec Cayton, "Canonizing Harriet Newell: Women, the Evangelical Press, and the Foreign Mission Movement in New England, 1800-1840," in Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Barbara, Kathryn Kish Sklar, and Connie Shemo, *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812-1960* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 69-93; Lisa Joy Pruitt, *"A Looking-Glass for Ladies:" American Protestant Women and the Orient in the Nineteenth Century*, (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2005).

⁸ Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008). Quotation on p. 4

⁹ Drawing on postcolonial theory, feminist theory, cultural theory, and to a certain extent, linguistic theory, the new imperial history generally takes a cultural view over an economic or narrowly political one. One of the major focuses of this body of work has been the connections between metropole and colony, with a particular attention to the ways that empires and colonies shape the metropolitan culture. See, for example, Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, eds. *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (1997); Catherine Hall, ed. *Cultures of Empire: Colonizers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (2000); Antoinette Burton, ed. *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation* (2003); Kathleen Wilson, ed. *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and Its Empire, 1660-1840* (2004); Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose, eds. *At Home with the Empire* (2006).

¹⁰ For an example of this argument about the effects of foreign missions on the domestic churches, see Gordon Hall and Samuel Newell, *The Conversion of the World: Or the Claims of Six Hundred Millions and the Ability and Duty of the Churches Respecting Them*, 2nd ed. (Andover: Printed for the ABCFM, 1818).

¹¹ There is a rich literature on American women in foreign missions. See R. Pierce Beaver, *All Loves Excelling: American Protestant Women in World Mission* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968); Patricia Grimshaw, *Paths of Duty: American Missionary Wives in Nineteenth-Century Hawaii* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989); Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Patricia Hill, *The World Their Household: American Woman's Foreign Missionary Movement and Cultural Transformation, 1870-1920* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985); Amanda Porterfield, *Mary Lyon and the Mount Holyoke Missionaries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Pruitt; Reeves-Ellington, Sklar, and Shemo; Dana Lee Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercy University Press, 1996); Jennifer Thigpen, *Island Queens and Mission Wives: How Gender and Empire Remade Hawaii's Pacific World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

¹² Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002)

Righteous Empire Revisited: Theoretical and Methodological Reflections on the Study of Religion & US Empire since 1970

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I want to begin by expressing my appreciation to Professor Martin Marty for agreeing to join us in a consideration of how his now classic study of American Protestantism raised questions about religion and U.S. empire that we are continuing to grapple with as a field. As my colleague Jennifer Graber has so eloquently argued, *Righteous Empire* made a singularly important contribution to an emerging body of revisionist scholarship by reconsidering the Protestant triumphalism that had characterized so many previous histories of religion in the United States. Marty's decision to deploy the framework of empire as an interpretive key for analyzing the ambitions and achievements of Anglo-Saxon American Protestants, as well as the exclusionary and exploitative effects of their expansionism for Native Americans, African Americans, Catholic immigrants and other "outsider" groups, provoked widespread consternation in a field unaccustomed to critically examining the connections between religion and power.

In the almost half-century since *Righteous Empire* appeared, scholars in a variety of disciplines have developed increasingly sophisticated methodologies for illuminating the relationship between Protestantism and imperialism that Marty was among the first to expose. In this essay, I will discuss several of these developments and their implications for the ongoing study of religion and U.S. empire. In his own path-breaking work, Professor Marty anticipated some of these new directions in scholarship. Others he did not foresee in *Righteous Empire*, but I would venture to guess that over the course of his immensely productive career, he has engaged with or reflected upon these analytical frameworks for scrutinizing dynamics of power in American religious history.

Let me begin by highlighting a historiographical development that Marty did foreshadow in *Righteous Empire*. In an intriguing passage about half-way through the book, Marty writes: "Most of this book (and of many other histories) is made up of reference to the public, the noteworthy, the exceptional, the result of shaping rhetoric or shattering activities. Yet a pause is in order, now and then, for a description of life in the private place which people set aside for religion away from the public world. It does contribute to history."¹ The brief "pause" Marty took from narrating "public" history—the history of prominent figures and their influential ideas—presaged a major shift (or set of shifts) in the study of American religion that has provided scholars with new ways of probing the connections among theology, spiritual practice, and power. While the turn to social history that privileged the experiences of ordinary people was already well underway by the late 1960s when Marty was writing *Righteous Empire*, studies of popular religion became increasingly widespread in the 70s and 80s. Coupled with calls for historical analysis of cultural practices, this developing approach eventually gave rise to efforts to synthesize the study of "noteworthy" or "exceptional" events and the "everyday thinking and doing of lay men and women;" to bring together elites and common folk, institutional structures and extra-ecclesial organizations, theology and devotional disciplines.²

As theorist Robert Orsi has explained, the study of religious practice or "lived religion" undermined the "well-maintained boundary between public/private" that so many scholars of religion had taken (and continue to take) for granted, and in so doing directed attention to the cultural work that this segregation actually performed: namely, obscuring the inherent and intimate connections between (in Pierre Bourdieu's terms) "the texture of everyday life" and the "disciplinary social field." To put this another way, the study of "lived religion" has enabled scholars to analyze how supposedly "private" aspects of religious experience have served as media "through which power has been asserted, contested and resisted"—or, for our particular purposes, to scrutinize how religious practices have acted as means through which American imperialism of various kinds has been imposed, inculcated, and challenged.³

Although some critics have alleged that lived religion is a "pointellist" methodology that has yielded a slew of highly particular micro-histories that are ultimately insignificant for understanding religion in broader social and political contexts, theorists like Orsi have argued persuasively that this approach to studying American religion is productive *precisely because* it has the capacity to illumine the connections between the personal and the public, between religious practice and imperial power.⁴ As

religious studies scholar Catherine Bell observed, “practice theory... emerged in conjunction with greater attention to the lingering effects of colonialism, the political ramifications of routine cross-cultural encounters, and the various social effects of economic and cultural domination.”⁵ Exemplary works of lived religion like Orsi’s *Madonna of 115th Street*, Michael McNally’s *Ojibwe Singers*, and Laurie Maffly-Kipp’s essay on missionary endeavors in the Hawaiian Islands have demonstrated that the exploration of devotional practices can expose how proponents of Protestant empire have worked to promote, enforce, and maintain political and social dominance both within and beyond the United States; while also highlighting how less powerful social actors have deployed religious rituals to open up spaces of negotiation and enact resistance to the exercise of imperial power.⁶ Although Professor Marty only hinted at the possibility that attending to both the “public” and “private” aspects of religion would provide a fuller picture of the relationship between Protestantism and empire-building, others have developed this insight in crucial ways that have offered an indispensable perspective on this history.

The emphasis on practice that scholars of “lived religion” have promoted is intimately connected to the emergence of two related theoretical developments that have advanced the study of religion and U.S. empire over the past forty years: the rise of women’s history and of gender analysis. Reflecting back on his seminal work in 2006, Professor Marty recognized that “the most obvious ‘miss’ in *Righteous Empire* was the role of more than half the ‘imperial’...characters...: women.” Although he did attempt to redress this oversight in a 1986 revision of the book by including a chapter entitled “The Protestant Majority: The Struggles of Women,” Marty acknowledged that simply tacking on this additional material was ultimately insufficient: “A historian knows that a theme such as this must pervade a text.” In other words, as many scholars have argued, you can’t simply “add women and stir.” Marty went on to observe that female scholars working in the field of American religious history had “changed many of the concepts and choices of subject matter. Now there is much more accent on social history—stories of marriage and divorce, childrearing, women in ordained ministry, health and illness, care and cure, works of mercy.” He then asserted that “‘Political’ history such as stories of ‘Empire’ and ‘Party’ do not possess the near-monopoly they once did. ‘Patriarchy’ would stand a better chance of being treated by women than would ‘Empire.’”⁷

While I very much appreciate Professor Marty’s commitment to highlighting the influence of women’s history on the shape of the broader field, I would like to challenge him on this last point which seems to reassert the boundary between public/private, political/domestic that proponents of women’s and gender studies (like advocates of lived religion) have worked so hard to dissolve. When Marty made these observations in 2006, scholars such as Joan Wallach Scott had been arguing for two decades that gender was a useful category for analyzing “the conception and construction of power” not only in the presumably private “female” spheres of family, education, and care-giving, but also in “those areas of life” traditionally assumed to be “male”: war, diplomacy, economics, “high politics,” and imperialism. In her groundbreaking 1986 article on this topic, Scott argued explicitly that employing gender as a category of historical analysis could illumine how projects of empire were imagined, executed, and defended. “Power relations among nations and the status of colonial subjects,” she wrote, “have been made comprehensible (and thus legitimate) in terms of relations between male and female.”⁸

Building on this insight, American Studies professor Amy Kaplan, in her pioneering 1988 article “Manifest Domesticity,” analyzed “how the ideology of separate spheres in antebellum America contributed to creating an American empire by imagining the nation as a home at a time when its geopolitical borders were expanding rapidly through violent confrontations with Indians, Mexicans, and European empires.” Demonstrating that discourses of “domesticity” played “a key role” in demarcating racial and civilizational logics that helped formulate and legitimate the concept and practice of U.S. empire in this period also enabled Kaplan to show how women “acted as potent agents for national expansion” through their activities within the household as well as in domains that they deemed part of the female sphere—such as the “arena of antislavery politics” or the mission field. From this perspective, the development of American nationalism, foreign policy, and imperialism in the nineteenth century cannot be understood without attention to the influence of gender norms and women’s activities.⁹

Since at least the 1980s, but especially since the turn of century, historians of American religion have drawn on the work of scholars like Scott and Kaplan to produce incisive analyses of the connections among gender, race, and empire. Developments in postcolonial theory and trans-national studies over the past several decades have also provided scholars with theoretical tools for honing their insights about these intersections. Anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler, for example, has challenged historians of

United States empire to consider how relations between “colonizers and colonized” in “intimate domains [such as] sex, sentiment, domestic arrangement, and child rearing... could powerfully confound or confirm the strictures of [imperial] governance and the categories of rule.” She also urged scholars to assess how “imperial politics of intimacies” in the making of U.S. empire compare or converge with “those of empires elsewhere” (2001, 2006).¹⁰ One exemplary work that attends to these concerns is the 2010 volume *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812–1960*. The essays in this book examine “women’s activism in a broad transnational context” and also “build on the insights of postcolonial scholarship” in order to reveal the complex “ways that ideas of domesticity were reworked and appropriated in various [colonial] settings.”¹¹

Probing how the politics of domesticity and intimacy, of ritual practice and lived religious experience, have contributed to the conception, creation, and contestation of U.S. Empire has prompted scholars to expand the range of sources they examine to elucidate these fraught and entangled processes. The final development I would like to discuss is the turn to material and visual culture in the study of religion and American imperialism. In the mid-1990s, scholars of American religious history began to make a strong case for analyzing objects, architecture, images, and adornments as key means for assessing how theological ideas are embodied, experienced, perpetuated, and altered. Works such as Colleen McDannell’s *Material Christianity* (1995) and David Morgan’s *Protestants and Pictures* (1999) urged scholars in the field to take seriously the central role of sensory and “physical dimension[s]” in expressing, but also fashioning, religious beliefs and assumptions. This approach, they argued, was especially useful for illuminating the integral connections between faith traditions and prevailing economic structures such as class formation, industrial production, and mass consumption that have been constituent elements of market capitalism in the United States (and therefore, I would argue, essential forces in the elaboration of American empire at home and abroad).¹²

At the same time that historians of American religion were making a material turn, scholars of empire were also embracing the study of visual archives in their efforts to expand their analyses of imperial dynamics. In *Picturing Empire* (1998), for example, James P. Ryan scrutinized the “complex ways in which [Britain’s] Empire was represented in photographs” while also showing how images functioned as “cultural forms of imperial power” that shaped both the “the imaginative geography” and structural realities of British imperialism.¹³ Laura Wexler’s *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (2000) demonstrated how first-generation female photo-journalists constructed pictures of domesticity that “differentiated... the lives of ‘civilized’ Americans from the lives of a variety of people not considered adequately domestic.” The images these women produced reified the social and racial hierarchies that justified oppressive policies toward African Americans; colonialist practices in the “insular areas” of Hawaii, Guam, and Puerto Rico; and the ongoing exercise of military power in the Philippines.¹⁴

Among participants in the Religion and U.S. Empire project, analysis of material and visual cultures has provided a particularly fruitful avenue for research. In her forthcoming book, *The Gods of Indian Country: Religion and the Struggle for the American West*, Jennifer Graber employs Kiowa ledger drawings to track cultural and religious change over time among American Indian communities that left very few written documents in archives. Materials like these enable Graber to investigate (as she put it earlier) “life on the ground for . . . those forced to respond to” the imposition of Protestant power.¹⁵ For Jonathan Ebel, the architecture and images of American military cemeteries in France offer fascinating (irrefutable) testimony to the United States’ desire to present itself as a force for good and right, an explicitly Christian power willing to sacrifice to save the world.¹⁶ My own study of the role of religious media in the making of U.S. Empire draws on images in popular magazines to show how American evangelicals came to see missionary activity, humanitarian intervention, and American economic and military expansion as integral features of Christian benevolence.¹⁷

These projects, and those of our other colleagues in the Religion and U.S. Empire working group, remain deeply indebted to the pioneering analysis of Martin Marty’s *Righteous Empire*—a book that helped put questions about privilege and power at the center of American religious history. Since 1970, several developments in scholarship—including the study of religious practice, the emergence of women’s history and gender analysis, the rise of postcolonial theory, and the turn to material and visual culture—have provided researchers in our field with tools for probing the connections between religion and imperialism in new ways.

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- ¹ Martin E. Marty, *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America* (New York: Dial Press, 1970), 168.
- ² David D. Hall, introduction to *Lived Religion: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), vii.
- ³ Robert A. Orsi, "Is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant to the World We Live in? Special Presidential Plenary Address, Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Salt Lake City, November 2, 2002," in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 42: 2 (Jun., 2003): 169-174; Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, Leigh E. Schmidt, and Mark Valeri, introduction to *Practicing Protestants: Histories of Christian Life in America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, 2006), 1-18; Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
- ⁴ Orsi, "Is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant," 169.
- ⁵ Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 76-77.
- ⁶ Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985); Michael D. McNally, *Ojibwe Singers: Hymns, Grief, and a Native American Culture in Motion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, "Assembling Bodies and Souls: Missionary Practices on the Pacific Frontier," in *Practicing Protestants: Histories of Christian Life in America*, ed. Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, Leigh E. Schmidt, and Mark Valeri (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, 2006), 51-76.
- ⁷ Martin Marty, "Righteous Empire Revisited," in *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* (2007), especially pages 56-57.
- ⁸ Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," in *The American Historical Review*, 91:5 (Dec., 1986): 1053-1075.
- ⁹ Amy Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity," in *American Literature*, 70:3 (September 1998): 581-606.
- ¹⁰ Ann Laura Stoler, "Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies," *Journal of American History*, 88:3 (December 2001): 829-865.
- ¹¹ Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Kathryn Kish Sklar and Connie Shelmo, eds. *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812-1960* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), back cover.
- ¹² Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995); David Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures: Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). See also the Material History of Religion Project <http://www.materialreligion.org/> (accessed October 31, 2014) and the Initiative for the Study of Material and Visual Cultures of Religion <http://mavcor.yale.edu/material-visual-cultures-religions> (accessed October 31, 2014).
- ¹³ James R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

¹⁴ Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2000).

¹⁵ Jennifer Graber, "The Imperial Angle: Martin Marty Narrates U.S. Religious History" [paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, San Diego, California, November 22, 2014].

¹⁶ Jonathan Ebel, "Overseas Military Cemeteries as American Sacred Space: Mine Eyes Have Seen la Gloire," in *Material Religion: A Journal of Art, Objects and Belief* 8:2 (July 2012): 184-215.

¹⁷ Heather D. Curtis, "Depicting Distant Suffering: Evangelicals and the Politics of Pictorial Humanitarianism in the Age of American Empire," in *Material Religion* 8:2 (July 2012): 154-183.

Violence, Biology, and Illusion:
Thoughts on *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America*

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In Chapter Ten of *Righteous Empire*, Martin E. Marty described what he called “The Great Transformation.” Taking place in the middle of the nineteenth century, the “prime years of the evangelical empire,” the Great Transformation began in the industrializing city and moved outwards from there. It seems to have moved inwards as well, as Protestants took to heart an “American business creed,” and, intermingling it with a theology attuned to recognizing status differentiations among human souls, behaved as if the business of business was the business of religion. Or, as Marty proposes while channeling the vision of German-American journalist Francis Grund, it seemed as if the motto “NO ADMISSION HERE, EXCEPT ON BUSINESS” was a banner hung out over the docks of American seaports.¹

Chapter Ten was the most important chapter of the book for me when I read it in the mid-1970s, during a seminar conducted by its author. Rereading the book decades later, Chapter Ten still resonates. The center of the book is there, in the phrase, “the economy of God and empire.”² That phrase appears in the chapter as both coda and provocation, and evokes the themes of theology and materiality that decorate the imperial ambitions of nineteenth century American Protestants. It broaches the interpretation that an assortment of interrelated economies of empire—involving space, ideas, authority, and feeling, among others—were intertwined with Protestantism. It represents a religious history that is about ongoing trans-actions: what is given and taken, lost and gained. That is what empire is about: takers and givers, winners and losers.

There are three themes evoked by *Righteous Empire* about which I offer some thoughts: the extension of empire, the frustration of empire, and the maintenance of empire. The three topics I propose in order to do so are violence, biology, and illusion.

First of all, what imperial ambitions?

Violent ones.

That, certainly, is one thing we know about empire—that it is bloody. And violent in other ways as well. Historians who wrote in the decades before Marty narrated Christian progress westward, the salutary social outcomes arising from the activity of religious voluntary societies, the bright future of ecumenical collaborations, and the moral core of Americanness. They overlooked violent confrontations among religious groups and they did so partly because the previous generation—writers representing the Age of Innocence—had scrubbed most of it from the history books. Flush with confidence about the triumph of the principle of religious freedom in America, textbook authors at the turn of the century had all but written religious violence out of American history, and in its place erected a conceptual monument to religious peace and equality. Albert Bushnell Hart had written in his *American Ideals Historically Traced, 1607-1907* (1907) that “the country has completely accepted a second noble ideal, that of religious toleration.” His contemporary Joseph Henry Crocker likewise had affirmed in *Problems in American Society* (1899) that “our fathers established, not simply universal toleration, but perfect religious equality....” Other writers followed suit, foregrounding the visions of harmony, the incidences of cooperation, and the positive, hopeful enthusiasm of Americans—read “Protestants”—for the luxe future of the Christian continent. Towards the end of the twentieth century, a somewhat similar vision recurred in the historiography. In praise of pluralism, persons writing about religion in America made harmony the realized ideal of American religion, characterizing it as the product of Constitutional freedoms, metaphysical harmonial imaginings, a common sense approach to increased religious diversity, and/or a growing privatization of religion that curtailed occasions for dangerous confrontation by draining religion out of the public square.

Righteous Empire recognized religious conflict, and it recognized how such conflict was entwined with race. The first chapter, about the removal of Native Americans, set the tone. So also did a chapter on African Americans. Subsequent mentionings of confrontations between Catholics, Protestants, Mormons, Jews, infidels, and others were not as detailed, but when they occurred in the narrative they were contextualized by the discussion of empire given at the beginning of the book.

Discussion of such confrontations were situated within a terrain defined by the book's emphasis on economics as transaction. Groups bargained with each other. Some bargained from positions of power. Others were weak and did not do as well. *Righteous Empire* points to an economics of religious violence in American history that is the expression of imperial aspirations established in early encounters with Native Americans. Religiously-inspired violence against Native Americans, which was reenacted throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, remained the template for how Americans addressed each other when they did so as highly aggravated religious opponents. The aims of empire, shaped by a mentality of economic transaction in which there were winners and losers, were the aims of religion. Battles such as between Protestants and Catholics in Philadelphia in the 1840s, then, were episodes in the outworkings of the economics of empire. Mountain Meadows, Wounded Knee, Mystic, Nauvoo, Waco, and elsewhere were expressions of business violently transacted under an umbrella of "the economy of God and empire."

The manner in which *Righteous Empire* structured encounters between groups—including between Protestant groups—as enactments of imperial aspiration matters today perhaps even more than in 1970. Referencing primarily the evangelical wing³ of Protestantism: How are we to understand the global initiatives of American mission organizations that work to erase local cultures? Is there an imperial American Protestantism informing violence against homosexuals in central Africa as some have claimed? In what ways has "the economy of God and empire" shaped American military deployments in regions where Islam is identified with terrorism? How is the twenty-first century polarization of politics in America expressive of a factional economics that has been hardened by religious ideologies? Is the globalization of corporate commercial enterprise, which has been dominated by American business, the outcome of ingrained cultural predispositions of an American Protestant *Righteous Empire*? Is carbon-based violence against nature the prerogative of the *Righteous Empire* of Texas or of American Protestantism more broadly?

In *Righteous Empire*, Protestants are people who feel. Especially evangelical Protestants, but liberals, too. Protestants did not feel randomly, however. That is, they did not experience emotion absent the social and cultural frameworks for its expression and concealment. Individual performances of religious feeling took place on stages constructed out of Protestant expectations for what a person was to feel and how they were to feel it. And just as there is a pursuit of an imperial economy of violence there is incentive to establish an imperial economy of emotion. The Protestant empire was an empire of feeling. To feel a certain way was to be Protestant and to be Protestant meant to feel a certain way.

Or did it?

In *Righteous Empire* Marty first broached this topic in discussing African American religious practice. In discussing "Overlooked Americans" in Chapter Three, he commented that "emotionalism" among African Americans "derived both from the African past and from the evangelical present."⁴ In other words, there was an economics of emotional styles in religion, framed by empire—and quite dramatically in this case as we are talking about slaves—in a chapter about the marginalization of black Americans. That economics of emotionality was constituted by negotiations between an African past and an American evangelical present. We might surmise that emotional expression as it took on certain forms among African Americans was a negotiated outcome of the clash of white Protestant feeling rules and those that governed African emotionality. Empire thrives on uniformity.

But in this case, uniformity could not be enforced.

We know that whites attempted to suppress black religious emotionality, and that such suppression was characteristic of agendas of surveillance and disciplining of imperial subjects. Yet some of Africa seems to have survived in black Protestantism. Does white failure to sterilize black religious practice of its African emotional rules—especially in a setting where there were great power differentials—signal the limits of imperial reach?

In his recent *The Body of Faith: A Biological History of Religion in America*, Robert Fuller argues that genetics have a lot to do with religious styles in America.⁵ Flipping the claim by some American religious historians that culture is "pressed into the body," Fuller argues that "bodies press themselves onto culture." For Fuller, revivalism, nineteenth century sectarianism, apocalyptic movements, Mormon itineracy, and the development of Protestant denominationalism all have much to do with biology. With regard to emotion, the population of Appalachia—which has developed from colonial times through ingroup

propagation—offers an example of how a collective genetic profile can be correlated with a certain kind of emotional style. The same can be said of African American emotionality. The empire of emotion is challenged by the DNA of the body.

This possibility is especially important in making sense of the bifurcation of Protestantism into evangelicals—who typically are quite expressive in their emotionality—and liberals. Was the *Righteous Empire*, as a fully cross-denominational Protestant phenomenon, fed by culture but starved by biology? The most striking difference between the two Protestant camps that Marty identifies is their differing emotionality. Is that cultural difference? Or the role of genes in frustrating empire in America?⁶

Lastly, how was the *Righteous Empire* maintained? Leaving aside for now the question of exactly what has survived down to the present, we could ask how, in a historical environment of rapidly changing demography, increasing pluralism, technological revolutions, emerging global adventures, and other disruptive factors, American Protestants were able to reinvest continuously in the vision of a Righteous Empire? How does empire survive as contradictions and ambiguities multiply?

Francis G. Hutchins, in his classic *The Illusion of Permanence: British Imperialism in India*, argued that empires coax fidelity from both overseers and subordinates by persuading them to believe that the order of things—in this case, the social order of things, especially—is permanent. Arjun Appadurai, commenting on Hutchins' book title, summarized it in a way that helps our own discussion of American Protestantism: "It's a lovely phrase because it captures a kind of desire of the imperial system, but simultaneously the anguish and the ambivalence involved in these things: the arrogant conceit of certain grand projects, like the imperial project, but also the humble thing that ordinary people seek constantly to create."⁷

It is that "humble thing," the aspiration of ordinary people, that is important. In American Protestantism, the aspiration to permanence, the hope for a secure, lasting empire, paradoxically is so humble that it is layered with expectations of the end. American Protestantism is rich in eschatological thought, and is especially recognizable for its apocalyptic strains. While we might debate the relative extent to which each side of the Protestant aisle embraces apocalyptic we could probably agree that there is enough apocalyptic to go around. For Protestants, it is an expression of their claim of ambivalence about empire, their publically-expressed doubts about its permanence, and their willingness nevertheless to remain committed to empire as a vision for the nation. The Protestant empire in America has required of its subjects the cultivation of belief in permanence alongside admission of the empire's transitoriness. In this particular economy of belief and disbelief, it may be the case that one side polishes the other. That is, the illusion of permanence remains powerful as an antidote to fear of the end, while hope for the end gathers strength as a prospective resolution to the high-stakes, demanding enterprise of maintaining the imperial realm. The machinery by which this empire has been maintained has been to foster illusion, in a sense, by challenging it.

This brings us back, in closing, to violence. What kinds of illusions are necessary in order not only to maintain empire but to extend it violently? Is it the illusion of yellowcake, discovered by a born-again president to have arrived in Iraq where it purportedly is being used to build bombs? Is it the hawkish American exceptionalism of the Fox News network in America, a mass media organization that has grown rich on marketing illusions to an audience that appears eager for them? Is it the illusion of righteousness in the violent rhetoric of religious leaders who burn the Koran and call for war on Muslims? Is there a liberal side today that has grown decidedly less comfortable with the illusion, that decries carbon-fuelled violence against the environment? Is the membership of a national activist group such as the Evangelical Environmental Network comfortable with empire but also not?

Righteous Empire goes a long way in setting the historical frame for debating these questions. It is a narrative that remains powerful, provocative, and inspiring. It offers an entry point into discussing American religious history that avoids the shopworn and overreaching categorizations of "culture wars" approaches and at the same time does not shy from indicating the complex, oftentimes competing, economies of empire. It is also a story with strong, distinct chapters, and for that reason remains relevant even as the plot overall seems to have changed in important ways over the last five decades.

¹ Martin E. Marty, *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America* (New York, 1970), 101, 108.

² *Ibid.*, 110.

³ “Today one might write a book titled *Righteous Empire: The Evangelical Experience in Recent America*, but not ‘The Protestant Experience.’” Martin E. Marty, “Righteous Empire Revisited” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 117, Part I (2007), 39.

⁴ Marty, 32.

⁵ Robert C. Fuller, *The Body of Faith: A Biological History of Religion in America* (Chicago, 2013).

⁶ A view of emotion in culture as genetically-shaped behavior is Baldwin M. Way and Matthew D. Liberman, “Is There a Genetic Contribution to Cultural Differences? Collectivism, Individualism and Genetic Markers of Social Sensitivity” *Social Cognitive & Affective Neuroscience* 5 (2010), 203-11.

⁷ Francis G. Hutchins, *The Illusion of Permanence: British Imperialism in India* (Princeton, 1967); Arjun Appadurai, “Illusion of Permanence: Interview with Arjun Appadurai” *Perspecta* 34 (2003), 47.

Religion and U. S. Empire—Beginning a Five-Year Seminar
A response to four commentators on the book *Righteous Empire* by Martin E. Marty at AAR 2014

Martin E. Marty

The four responders in this session took their assignment seriously and, for our purposes, fulfilled it generously and helpfully. I will follow their example and try to fulfill mine, which is to help envision and sketch some approaches to the seminars and studies of “Religion and U. S. Empire” in the seasons and years immediately ahead. While all four critiques offer many possibilities, I’ll locate something central to each contribution, suggesting ways they can contribute to this project’s continuing work.

1) *Heather Curtis, on “lived religion” and ‘imperialism’ in American history.*

All four panelists in many ways reframed the inquiry and taught me something basic about my own often-limiting perceptions and strategies in the writing of *Righteous Empire*. While not all use the same terms, they all directly or indirectly ask whether my reflexive resort to a distinction between “the public” and “the private” in religious conceptions, concerns, and activities relating to empire will serve us as well as I would have thought it did in 1969. My investment in references to “the public” throughout my career to date will likely remain constant, but these critics have helped question whether the “public/private” distinction, prominent in that book, serves well for determining what we need to focus on and hope to learn in inquiries about “empires,” whether they be righteous or not.

Heather Curtis focused this questioning directly by reference to theorist Robert Orsi’s undermining of what she calls the “well-maintained boundary between public/ private’ that so many scholars of religion had taken (and continue to take) for granted.” In the process, she observed, they obscured “the inherent and intimate connections between.... ‘the texture of everyday life’ and the ‘disciplinary social field.’” How could this step toward revision, which she suggested, have a bearing on the particular subject of American imperialism? The study of “lived religion,” she points out, has helped scholars analyze “how supposedly ‘private’ aspects of religious experience have served as media ‘through which power has been asserted, contested, and resisted.’” Further quoting Curtis: through study of “lived religion” scholars have been better able to ‘scrutinize how religious practices have acted as means through which American imperialism of various kinds has been imposed, mediated, and challenged.’”

Professor Curtis offered two examples, first citing forty years of “women’s history” and of “gender relations.” Her comment on my 1986 revision and expansion of the book included a delicious chastening comment about my chapter on “The Protestant Majority: The Struggles of Women.” Speaking also for other historians, Curtis adds, “You can’t simply ‘add women and stir.’” My original text reflected the work of our not sufficiently enlightened generation back in 1969, but as a community we now have urgent concerns: that as historians we should find ways to link gender analysis to histories of American imperialism in ways they will inform, enrich, and transform our stories.

While I have not done research or much writing about the history of “lived religion,” my approach always showed and shows interest in it. When I am asked what I think my historical inquiries are about, I quote José Ortega y Gasset on how historical changes—or, in terms the respondents here (and I) often use, “transformations”—occur. The distinction Ortega makes is overdrawn, but still helpful in our quest to discover what we have been missing and what we need to treat more justly and fairly when speaking in connection with “Religion and U. S. Empire.” Ortega wrote: “Decisive historical changes do not come from great wars, terrible cataclysms, or ingenious inventions; it is enough that the heart of [the human] incline its sensitive crown to one side or the other of the horizon,” a thesis for which he provides examples. Of course, wars, cataclysms, and ingenious inventions, *are* decisive in many ways in our stories, despite Ortega’s word. These were usually treated as belonging to the public realm, while “the crown of the human heart” was often neglected as it tilted toward the events, nuances, and trends in what is now called the history of “lived religion.” That term is a code-name, one among many, for getting close to what people think and

do as they respond to change and create transformations. It is, happily, a major preoccupation of historians of religion in America today.

However my writings in general show me being alert to what Ortega called the occasions for historical change, I do find that my own bibliography over-used the “private/public” distinction. One quick verbal “selfie-illustration” would demonstrate how in some ways I have led a double life in writings. First, though all my works are naturally informed by historical studies, they are not all historical works. Note the key words—dealing as they do with “lived religion” in seven and more of their titles: “behavers,” “the child,” “health and medicine,” “friendship,” “education” “absence” (as in death), “trust” and others. To re-emphasize: *none* of those are works of history, but they do dwell on subjects which lend themselves to “lived religion” stories. If what the critics have outlined is to be a kind of charter for the expositions of future imperial studies, and if it is in any way followed in our future work together, I can foresee refreshing discoveries and lively argument.

2) *Emily Conroy-Krutz, on the place of ‘place’ and ‘privilege’ in the study of imperial history when it stresses ‘lived religion.’*

While I have made the stress on “place” central in all my imperialism studies, the four responders helped link the study of “place” concepts such as “privilege” with imperialism. Concern for “place,” critics noted, was central in my historical work already years before I was com-missioned to write this bicentennial history of American Protestantism. (Incidentally, the title of my earlier, in fact my second book on religion in the United States, was to have been called *The Displaced Christian*, a concept which shows up in seven of nine chapter titles. Alas, I accepted and replaced it with the publisher’s recommendation, *Second Chance for American Protestants*.)

“Empires” can live in the mind, can be the subject of theories, and may appear in the names of games. But for the historian of most ages and places, empires, whether favored or feared by publics, have been compelling as themes that historians would connect with “power.” Emily Conroy-Krutz suggestively “mapped” a major scene and setting of the *Righteous Empire* by focusing on the role of missions and missionaries and then accenting “where Protestant Empire Happens.” Her provocative verb reinforces her point. “Empire” is not a static entity, one that is produced in virtually every case by military conquest or, for that matter, economic aggression. No, empires rely in no small part on the powerful word and words of men and—yes, very often, women!—to spread the religious and social message, convert people, and educate residents of other empires or no empires. Most of these endeavors, as Conroy-Krutz makes clear, appeared under the guise of or were connected with the goal of spreading civilization.

The field she covers is especially fertile for historians of empire, since missionaries left so many documents in the form of often short-sighted and arrogant letters, promotional materials, and triumphalist language. “Can we whose souls are lighted by wisdom from on high, can we to men benighted, the lamp of life deny?” asked Sunday school hymn-singers. The (especially “foreign”) “mission fields” were far away from home base, and yet stories of them spread knowledge of “lived religion” in remote places. These often paralleled domestic imperial practices as, for instance, on the frontiers in the West. The missionary “sending” literature regularly advertised the privileged life of American Christians as the model or reward for converts. Informative literature from “in the field” and other forms of transmitting knowledge were passed to American home fronts, and regularly these were paired with and contrasted with descriptions of the life of “the heathen in their blindness” who would or should welcome the “saving” language of Western civilization, American style.

Conroy-Krutz also contributes to the agenda for future seminars and historical writing when she lists “the global turn,” which influences her and in which missionary history looms large. Here, as in the other cases, I have to note with some chagrin what I did not include in my history of American imperialism and then to cheer for what I have since been adding—even if it sometimes appears to follow the “add... and stir...” syndrome. My first book was *A Short History of Christianity* (1959), the kind of book which a veteran might write at the end of her career. But what did I know? Arthur Cohen of Meridian books asked me to write it, and, with my recent Ph.D. examination notes intact, I did. One line in that history anticipated our current intentions. Referring to domestic growth in Protestant numbers and sway, I summarized: “So pervasive was this influence that by the middle of the nineteenth century America seemed well on its way to becoming a Protestant empire—who could refute the prophets who

saw this to be so?" The book included chapters on Catholic and Protestant "foreign missions," but in at least the Protestant case there was not yet much connecting of missionary activities with imperial intentions and claims.

Perhaps reflecting awareness of some geographical restraints within our discipline: I was supposed to have been an "historian of American Christianity." But while in teaching and writing, I now and then apologized for pushing the boundaries of my own assigned American turf, when linking the study of American history with forays into parts of Western Europe, I then borrowed the concept of "North Atlantic History." The super-obvious idea that young America was in no small measure the product of often religiously enhanced imperial ambitions among the Spanish, Dutch, and English, was beginning to foster in me the interest in treating "their" American heir as an imperial power, to be developed when the United States had manifestly become one itself. Finally in 2007 I had 'gone global' by writing *The Christian World: a Global History*, which treated the story in ten "episodes." "The North American Episode" had to wait for Chapter 10. The accent of the book, however, did not allow for much attention to the American Protestant search for domain, though it did recognize that, from the first, "saving souls" in the New World was matched by the call to "the ordering of society," the society whose privilege and power had become evident.

What does the Conroy-Krutz analysis potentially mean for the future of American religion and imperialism? The critic's most helpful accent here is not on the "where" of the imperium, but on the "what." Pointedly she asks, "What is this Protestant empire, anyway?" Her accent is on the need to discern the history of mission boards as they wavered between "Christ and Culture," when, on one hand, they were fused and, on the other, when "Christ and Culture" were separated. Most important, she urges that "we ought to push" studies of how much missionaries were to "Christianize" cultures of converts, inevitably using the Protestant Christian culture as the norm for measurement and inspiration. She has devoted much attention, and asks for more, to the question of "how the missionary map follows the map of empire." Missionaries, she reminds us, would go to places where British or American diplomatic, trade, and military presences could protect them. Ordinarily this practice led the missionaries to support political and economic empires with enthusiasm, though it is also important now to tell more stories of instances in which they tempered imperial ambitions. Conroy-Krutz suggests that historians should also give more attention to the push-back by subjects of efforts to convert them to Christianity or to civilize them.

She advances the studies by using the insights of the (British) "new imperial history" to look at the "influence of the missionary experience on religious life within America." She speaks of this as a "feed-back loop." Supporters of foreign missions often advertised that their work would revitalize religion in the United States, but consistent narratives relating to these efforts are generally lacking, and we are usually left with anecdotes. She, however, recognizes that many partisans of sending agencies thought that, in effect, the stories of their efforts might "clean up the act" of religious endeavors and thought in the United States, and promote reform and revitalization. She is certainly right when she points to the ways in which some privileged and powerful American women and the "civilization" in which they were so prominent, could lead to smugness and blinding self-satisfaction—just as it could point to reform in the roles of women in the sending cultures. Again, we need more than the counsel to "add women and stir."

3) *John Corrigan, on violence and its corollaries in imperial religious history*

John Corrigan recognizes that empires always are sustained by dreams of ever-more power, and that they often resort to violence to effect their ends. Paul Ricoeur called violence "the dirty secret of history," and saw politics as one means of having a chance of reducing the potential and exercise of violence. Certainly, the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, which have inspired so many imperial ambitions and actions, also in America, contained many texts which inspired and authorized violence. At the same time, some of the prophets and Jesus, the central figure in the Christian story, also are connected with messages of and calls for reducing violence and advocating peaceful kingdoms.

Few tensions within the Christian story in its American Protestant version reflect the polarity of violence and peace more than those of the imperial reach. Corrigan should be of help to the imperial study seminars by his focus on "the economy of God and empire," a phrase he quotes from *Righteous Empire*. That phrase, Corrigan writes, "evokes the themes of theology and materiality that decorate the imperial ambitious of nineteenth century American Protestants" and, dare we add, of their heirs?

Briskly, in summary: "That is what empire is about: takers and givers, winners and losers." Recognize that reality, Corrigan proposes for understanding today and for the continuing imperial seminar agenda, which should focus on "the extension of empire, the frustration of empire, and the maintenance of empire." He poses "violence, biology, and illusion" as condensed ways of addressing the three.

In a mini-introduction to how the topic had been handled among historians of America, including religious America, he noted how generations of historians downplayed violence, especially as they represented "the Age of Innocence." Albert Bushnell Hart and Joseph Henry Crocker had spoken in triumphal and Utopian terms about the achievements of "our fathers" who set up American institutions. A later version of their theme had emerged in post-World War II and Cold War America; it was often coded in part as "Consensus History." Richard Hofstadter, Clinton Rossiter, and my teacher Daniel Boorstin were influencers in the 1950s. But while I sat in seminars under Boorstin, as he spoke of "seamlessness" in much of the American experience, I also moonlighted weekends as a minister in the ghettos of black Chicago and, countering them, also some defensive blue-collar white congregations. I witnessed the conflict and violence of the sort that broke out among many citizens in the decade before I wrote *Righteous Empire*.

Corrigan sees the influence of these views of conflict and the accent on privilege and power in the framing of *Righteous Empire's* opening chapters, on Native Americans and Black Americans. As in domestic affairs, there was also an explosive potential in foreign and especially military expressions. Corrigan's summary: "*Righteous Empire* points to an economics of religious violence in American history that is the expression of imperial aspirations established in early encounters with Native Americans," and extended from there to other peoples and situations. I might not have gone so far as Corrigan in another summary sentence, but am in essential agreement: "The aims of empire, shaped by a mentality of economic transaction in which there were winners and losers, were the aims of religion."

As I recently reread *Righteous Empire* and other writings that I'd not read for some years, I had to resist making references to the bearing all this history has on current events. But without doubt, during the next four years as historians and other scholars in the AAR continue these seminars, others who might reference *Righteous Empire* will likely agree that the way the book structured the encounters of imperial aspirations "matters today more than in 1970." You have heard in his response the probing questions Corrigan posed about "imperial American Protestantism informing violence against homosexuals in central Africa," or in many actions integrally linking Islam and violence, or elements of the "violence against nature" in the *Righteous Empire* of Texas or of American Protestants.

Especially provocative is Corrigan's notice of white Protestant American critiques of "emotionalism" in black America; equally provocatively, he suggests that "the economics of emotional styles was constituted by negotiations between an African past and an American evangelical present." I hope a future seminar will address what he has to say, or ask, about genetics and DNA in that particular transaction of emotions.

4) Jennifer Graber, *the Imperial Angle: Martin Marty Narrates U.S. Religious History*

Professor Graber sees *Righteous Empire's* "imperial angle" to be one contribution to what historian Sydney Ahlstrom had called an "earthquake of revisionism" in and after the 1960s. That meant two things: first, the book's 'righteous empire' was a challenging revision to many earlier images, (e.g. of Protestant America as a 'benevolent empire'). The new description saw American Protestantism as a "domain of allegiance and adherence, of manners and mores," More important for our purposes is the second use which, by reference to a nudge by historian Paul Kramer, she points to "imperial analysis" as a way to interpret the narrative in *Righteous Empire*. This approach focuses on the "dimension of power," which enabled and produced relations of "hierarchy, dispossession, and exploitation."

While I do not think we historians have begun to exhaust the traces which remain from the concept of the "benevolent empire," an imperial angle suggests a corollary agenda which deals with the empire of conquest, power, and privilege. She homes in on the phrase which is appropriate for this book: "Empires occupy space." In this story, territorial expansion and missionary endeavors were part of a new international colonial endeavor. This "angle" led to inquiries which stressed material goals and

achievements more than, say, theology. In that context, the accent fell more frequently than before on people who were subject to the imperial leaders—Indians, African-Americans, immigrants and “clergy and leading citizens” more than on formal theologians. It is easy to see how in this case, the balance shifted toward “lived history,” while it also evoked some criticism from defenders of the “benevolent empire.” Harold Brown and William McLaughlin both noted this. Brown saw the righteous empire in this telling to be the story of a “self-righteous, self-serving spiritual propaganda machine of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant” while McLaughlin, I believe more accurately and still pointedly noted in the book a neglect of focus on the “anguish and sincerity” of Protestants caught between the “moral idealism” and the work of “nation building.” That “moral anguish” does, indeed, deserve fresh examination. It may be that the cultural atmosphere in which we historians wrote in the “late sixties” helped lead us to overlook that anguish, and I’ll be eager to read more on that in the future.

Graber notes how, while scholars Will Herberg, Robert Handy, Bob Bellah, and Edwin Gaustad kept emphasizing “a mostly-unified Protestant ‘center holding,’” *Righteous Empire* changed focus to the beginning of the loss of a “center” under the canopy of “pluralism.” Graber is right: this shift of accent calls forth a revised agenda, but she also has a chastening word for those who would simply jettison the “benevolent empire” theme and replace it with what might be called a situation of “mere pluralism,” which often prompted “post-modernist” approaches to history. To pursue this would carry this response beyond my assignment and scope, but I believe the many recent works, often *Schadenfreudlich*, sometimes mournful, about the decline of “mainline Protestantism,” point to the new landscape and the need for new inquiry. Where does and where will the larger culture locate its ethos and “ideology” when the pursuit of the common good has become so unstable and unclear? New generations of American historians should have a field day on this scene, while they add new discoveries, new insights, and new paradigms to the rich store they and we all have inherited.

Consider me to become a regular interested reader in the seminars on “Empire,” as I thank the responders for their contribution to the cause—and to my continuing education.