

Other Dimensions of Urbanizing America

In this chapter

This chapter examines how the missionary movement and the World's Parliament of Religions added global dimensions to American religious diversity. Then it probes issues of gender, in terms of both the role of women and the religiosity of men. Other aspects of diversity come to light when looking at developments among Native Americans, ranging from missionary efforts to the emergence of new religious movements among tribal peoples. Finally, the chapter discusses how a search for relief from the conditions of urban life through rural retreats, Bible conferences, and adaptations of the camp meeting influenced religious life and increased its variety.

Main topics covered

- the ways interest in world missions spurred diversity
- the World's Parliament of Religions
- how changing gender roles continued to impact religion
- ways men expressed religiosity that diverged from how women expressed religiosity
- new expressions emerging within Native American tribal religious cultures
- the changing nature of camp meetings
- how fresh fascination with the Bible became linked to desires to retreat from city life

American religions encounter world religions

The upsurge in immigration in the later nineteenth century bringing millions of Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox Christians, and Jews to America was only one force prompting Americans to become aware of different cultures and different ways of being religious. The years between the Civil War and World War I also witnessed a dramatic increase of interest in world missions. Much of that interest came to life through some of the same forces that propelled American evangelical Protestants to organize city missions, settlement houses, and other agencies that sought to respond to the problems accompanying rapid urbanization.

The evangelist Dwight L. Moody, an untiring supporter of various home mission enterprises and especially of the [YMCA](#), became a key player in stimulating what that age called foreign missions. Through Moody's influence, religious revivals began to spread among some of the nation's leading colleges and universities in the 1880s, where branches of the YMCA helped stimulate religious fervor. By 1890 several hundred collegiate YMCA groups flourished, as did the cognate organization for women, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). Using the YMCA/YWCA network, Moody organized a conference at his Mount Hermon School in Massachusetts aimed at encouraging collegiate men and women to commit themselves to serve as missionaries carrying the



Fig. 11.1 John R. Mott. John R. Mott, a key figure in the early international missions and ecumenical movement, received a medal on the steps of the U.S. Capitol for his work in guiding YMCA support for the American cause in World War I (courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-DIG-hec-12204).

Protestant evangelical gospel--without regard to denomination--to nations overseas, particularly lands in Asia that had long fascinated Americans. More than 2000 attended Moody's second conference in 1887. This response convinced [John R. Mott](#) (1865-1955), who had a Methodist background and spearheaded YMCA work on the campus of Cornell University, to organize the [Student Volunteer Movement](#) (SVM) in 1888.

In retrospect it is clear that much of this work was designed to nurture the religious zeal of students and thus almost a form of home missionary work. The SVM and then the Laymen's Missionary Movement, organized first in Presbyterian circles in 1906, did recruit some individuals to serve as missionaries. The rationale was complex, but linked to American imperialism and to fears that the new immigration undermined the presumed Protestant Anglo-Saxon character of American society. Efforts to evangelize the world within one generation reflected a desire to impose evangelical Protestant ways on people whose culture and religious heritages were not only extraordinarily diverse, but also very different from what white Protestant Americans knew. In this sense there was an eschatological or apocalyptic undertone to the movement; taking the Christian message throughout the world would hasten the arrival of the kingdom of God on earth.

Enthusiasm for [global missions](#) also represented a desire to Americanize and Protestantize the world so that when immigrants came to the United States, they would already fit the mold that white evangelical leaders thought carried divine approval. Then, too, it allowed Protestant leaders to avoid dealing directly with some of the more pressing problems facing the nation as it was becoming more diverse in terms of both the ethnic backgrounds of its people and their religious styles. Converting the so-called "heathen" who happened to have a religion different from any form of Protestant Christianity deflected attention from other concerns beginning to reveal a growing intellectual diversity within American religion that ignored denominational boundaries, one with roots in ideas associated with evolutionary theory and new methods for studying the biblical text.

Missionary activity did not always result in what was intended. On the one hand, as with those drawn to missionary work during the antebellum evangelical awakening, this generation of missionaries gradually came to recognize that foreign cultures and their religions had an integrity of their own. Some women missionaries became loath to return to the United States, for they enjoyed positions of religious leadership and social respect in mission work denied them in the U.S. Missionaries also came to realize that humans in every culture and of every religion wrestled with the same dilemmas of trying to make sense out of their experiences in life, particularly experiences such as suffering and death that seemed to lack much meaning.

One unintended byproduct of the missionary movement was the birth of a field of study, first in Germany and England, known as comparative religion. At its center was German-born [Friedrich Max Müller](#) (1823-1900), whose interest in Sanskrit and connections between language and belief systems in ancient India led in 1868 to his becoming the first professor of

comparative theology at Oxford University. Max Müller also served as the initial editor of a major publishing project that brought together sacred texts of world religions--Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Jainism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Islam--together in English, making them accessible to millions. What was once alien and exotic, almost always seen as “other,” became humanized and more real. Slowly Americans, particularly through university study, found their religious horizons expanding and a new expression of diversity in their midst.

What made religions whose primary home was in other lands even more alive came when a [World’s Parliament of Religions](#) convened as part of a world’s fair held in Chicago to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus’s first voyage of discovery. The idea of bringing together representatives from various world religions came in part from a Swedenborgian who headed the exposition’s committee on auxiliary meetings. Individuals with ties to the Free Religious Association or to Unitarians and Universalists did much of the organizing. Although Protestant Christians dominated the planning committee, it included a rabbi and a Catholic priest. Max Müller expressed great support for the undertaking, but had to decline an invitation to attend. The goal of the seventeen-day parliament was to emphasize that all religions shared a universal vision. Even though Christian speakers made just over three-fourths of the 194 presentations at the parliament, planners invited representatives from such religions as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Shintoism, Zoroastrianism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Islam, along with numerous Christians and Jews. The interfaith atmosphere became clear at the opening session on 11 September 1893, when the Roman Catholic James Cardinal Gibbons led the thousands assembled in reciting the Lord’s Prayer.

The parliament aroused considerable controversy. Dwight L. Moody, for example, voiced strident opposition. He and many others felt the gathering dangerous. They believed that the presence of non-Christians talking about their own faith and practice meant that organizers did not believe that Christianity was superior to all other religions. Opponents feared that speakers could too easily lure folk into thinking that religions such as Hinduism or Islam also contained truth. At the same time, though, there is little doubt that some organizers had hoped that the parliament would provide the opportunity to persuade non-Christians of the superiority of Christianity to their own beliefs and practices, resulting in their conversion.

Christians--and Protestant Christians at that--dominated the formal sessions, but the hit of the parliament was a young man from India, a disciple of the Hindu thinker Sri Ramakrishna. [Swami Vivekananda](#) (1863-1902), born Narendranath Dutta, dazzled the audience with both his charismatic speaking style and his appearance. Sporting a turban, Vivekananda exuded an exotic authority. He also stunned listeners when he spoke persuasively about a universal religion. By that, Vivekananda did not mean that he hoped the scores of diverse religions that existed would somehow merge into one. Rather, based on his Hindu heritage he described a religious consciousness within all humans that could be awakened. That consciousness was universal, and the same universal spirit could stir it to life anywhere. Vivekananda affirmed re-

ligious diversity, but in a far more expansive way than most Americans, even those coming to terms with the range of ethnic expressions of Catholicism, a host of Protestant denominations, and a variety of other groups in the nation's cities. The diversity he affirmed resulted from the variety of ways this universal spirit awakened the religious consciousness in different people, usually in ways that reflected their own cultural and ethnic heritage. There might be one spirit, but there were diverse expressions of that spirit. In this approach, his understanding was thoroughly grounded in Hindu thought.

Looking Toward a Universal Religious Impulse

At the Chicago World's Parliament of Religions, a Hindu speaker described what he meant by a single, universal divine reality behind all religion. Note how his notion takes in both female and male:

He is everywhere the pure and formless one. The Almighty and the All-merciful. "Thou art our father, thou art our mother; thou art our beloved friend; thou art the source of all strength; give us strength. Thou art he that bearest the burdens of the universe: help me bear the little burden of this life."

(Quoted from John H. Barrows, ed., *The World's Parliament of Religions* (Chicago: The Parliament Publishing Co., 1893), vol. 2, in *A Documentary History of Religion in America since 1877*, 3rd ed., edited by Edwin S. Gaustad and Mark A. Noll (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 72-73).

Vivekananda remained in the United States for around two years, establishing in several cities centers organized around principles of the Hindu teaching of Vedanta that is based on the sacred texts called [the Upanishads](#). He also advocated--and may well have introduced to America--the practice of yoga. Part of the appeal of his [Vedanta Society](#) was its non-exclusive nature. That is, one could attend lectures sponsored by the Vedanta Society and remain affiliated with another religious group or congregation. Its thrust was thus primarily intellectual, for it promoted a hybrid understanding in which those interested could combine beliefs and practices from a variety of sources into a personal style. Few Indian Americans came into its orbit.

The fascination with things Hindu that Vivekananda sparked also gave a boost to other religious alternatives already existing in the United States, but still very much on the margins of religious life. Among them was Theosophy or the [Theosophical Society](#) founded in 1875 by the Russian immigrant [Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky](#) (1831-1891). She insisted that her

teachings had roots in ancient Tibetan Buddhist wisdom, but when [Annie Wood Besant](#) (1847-1933), the estranged wife of an evangelical Anglican priest, became head of the Theosophical Society after Blavatsky's death, several Hindu ideas were added to the core. Besant caused a stir at the 1893 World's Parliament, for by then she, too, affirmed that there was a single universal religious consciousness within every person.

The World's Parliament, while hoping to show commonalities among religions, really demonstrated how diverse religious expression actually was, particularly when one expanded the scope to include traditions that had long flourished outside the United States. For a time, it promoted a mood of toleration and acceptance, leading some to think that through mutual understanding, global harmony would result even if the manifestations of religion remained diverse. The comparative study of religion, already a going concern, received quite a boost, as now many more wanted to understand other religions on their own terms, recognizing that if diversity remained, at the bottom were shared questions and concerns. The parliament also left its imprint on the global missionary movement, for in its wake missionaries became more accepting of the indigenous cultures and their accompanying religious expressions than before. In its own way the World's Parliament of Religions stimulated religious diversity on an even broader scale.

Gender issues add new dimensions to American religion

In the later years of the nineteenth century, gender issues had their own far-reaching influence in American religious life. It was not only that women religious or nuns provided much of the personnel that allowed a burgeoning immigrant Roman Catholicism to flourish. Nor was it simply that women found opportunities to engage in significant social service through settlement houses and other such endeavors. In retrospect, a gender divide sustained diverse religious worlds throughout the entire culture. It was a divide, however, that often ignored the even deeper rupture in American culture and religion stemming from racial discrimination. Gender issues were, in a sense, the luxury of white Americans.

Chapter Six noted that seed of the gender divide were planted in the antebellum period when in areas of the nation where factory villages appeared, the family ceased to function as an economic unit in which everyone--men and women, adults and children-- contributed to provide life's necessities. The separation of paid work from the home increasingly made the home the sphere of women and the world of work outside the home the domain of men. As well, changes in childrearing patterns and even in the religious nurture of children followed. Primary responsibility for both became part of the domestic sphere where women held forth. The acceptance of different gender roles and responsibilities meant, for example, that along-

side the Holiness revivals associated with Phoebe Palmer in the years just before the Civil War there was also a businessmen's revival aimed at strengthening the religious commitment of white Protestant men. As well, because women continued to outnumber men as church members, especially among evangelical Protestants, clergy--though almost always male--spent so much time with women in the course of their work that the ministry itself became a feminized vocation.

These trends, coupled with those idealizing the "true woman" as being spiritually-inclined, became even more entrenched following the Civil War, especially where white Protestant



Fig. 11.2 Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, left, prepared an early feminist edition of the Bible and with Susan B. Anthony, right, strongly advocated woman suffrage and other rights for women (courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC USZ61-791).

women were concerned. For Catholic immigrant women, many of whom were part of the labor force, the "true woman" model bore little resemblance to their lived reality. The same was true for African American women, who experienced not only discrimination based on race in the larger culture but increasingly a discrimination based on gender within the black churches.

Reaction to the trends that dominated white Protestant culture came from both women and men. [Elizabeth Cady Stanton](#) (1815-1902), for example, as early as the 1840s recognized that not only religious institutions, but American society at large denied basic rights to women, the most basic of which was the right to vote. After organizing the a convention in 1848 in Seneca Falls, NY, in the heart of the burned-over district, where calls for women's rights dominated discus-

sion, she not only continued her efforts to call for woman suffrage, which did not come until nearly two decades after her death, but also launched efforts to transform American Protestant religious institutions so that women would no longer have a second-class status within them. Stanton thought that the churches perpetuated a form of slavery when it came to the status of women, a posture reinforced by blind adherence to scriptural passages thought to call for the submission of women to men. Possessed of a keen intellect, Stanton tackled the biblical text itself, near the end of her life producing the [Woman's Bible](#) that eliminated passages denigrating women and offering commentary that highlighted women's spiritual capacity.

Methodist-bred [Frances Willard](#) (1839-1898) took a different approach. A strong advocate for increased educational opportunities for women, Willard, who lived in Evanston, IL, on the edge of Chicago, observed first-hand some of the challenges that urbanization and industrialization brought to American families. At first, she was consumed by a conviction that excessive use of alcohol by working men was destroying the American family; men who spent their wages on alcoholic beverages abused their wives, failed to provide adequately for their families, forced poverty-stricken women into prostitution, and offered bad examples of moral behavior. Willard's reputation stems primarily from her work in organizing and then leading the [Women's Christian Temperance Union](#), an agency whose work paved the way for the national experiment with Prohibition in the early twentieth century. Willard also came to believe that temperance, woman suffrage, and the denial of ordination to the ranks of professional ministry were all intertwined. Women voters could use their influence to control the liquor industry and thus enhance family life which would in turn acknowledge household leadership of women. On the religious front, Willard knew there were far more women than men in the nation's churches; to her, ordaining women as pastors was simply logical. A dynamic speaker, Willard attracted substantial audiences, but also aroused much opposition, even among religious leaders who saw their own prerogatives threatened.

Women Claim Their Place as Religious Leaders

Methodist Frances Willard, after being denied a seat as an elected delegate to her church's General Conference, began more stridently to address issues of gender. She issued the following call to action in her 1888 presidential address to the WCTU:

By a strange and grievous paradox, the Church of Christ, although first to recognize and nurture woman's spiritual powers, is one of the most difficult centers to reach with the sense of justice toward her, under the improved conditions of her present development and opportunity. . . .
Woman, like man, should be freely permitted to do whatever she can do well.

(Frances Willard, “President’s Annual Address,” *Minutes* (Chicago: Women’s Christian Temperance Union, 1888), 41, as quoted in *In Our Own Voices: Four Generations of American Women’s Religious Writing*, edited by Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 229.)

Although most groups refused to ordain them, Protestant women had some opportunities to serve as itinerant evangelists. Among the more well-known is [Maria Woodworth-Etter](#) (1844-1924), who began her ministry with a series of revivals in the midwest in the 1880s. Their success, resulting in large part from her extraordinary speaking ability, led to invitations to hold evangelistic campaigns in major cities throughout the country. Never conventional in her views, Woodworth-Etter pioneered the divine healing that later became more central to Pentecostal expressions of Christianity, although in her case, lawsuits claimed her healing ministry was a form of practicing medicine without a license. Nonetheless, she laid the groundwork for the ministry of female evangelists in the twentieth century.

American Jewish women were also rethinking their roles in religious and public life. The experience of immigration was especially challenging to Jewish women. Even though Jewish life in eastern Europe had been restrictive and women were generally on the periphery of religious activity such as study of the Torah, the role of the wife and mother remained something of a constant. Immigrant conditions often added a pernicious poverty to social dislocation. Jewish women took menial jobs in developing industry, such as doing piece work at home in the expanding garment industry, in order to support their families; some were drawn into labor activism and radical political activity. With the organization of the [National Council of Jewish Women](#) in 1891, drawing mostly from among Reform women, and then the [Jewish Women’s Congress](#), held in conjunction with



Fig. 11.3 Maria Woodworth-Etter. Although usually denied roles as pastors, scores of women such as Maria Woodworth-Etter, pictured here, became well-known itinerant evangelists.



Fig. 11.4 Masonic symbols. The biblical figures of David and Jonathan are shown here surrounded by symbols associated with the Masons, one the larger fraternal orders with ties to male spirituality, friendship, and service (courtesy of the Library of Congress, PGA-Pettibone-In god we trust).

the World's Parliament of Religions, calls resounded to rethink the traditional role of women in Jewish life, provide increased educational opportunities, and end the notion that Jewish women were inferior to Jewish men. None wanted to abandon the role of women within domestic Jewish life, but most wanted to expand it.

Matters of gender addressed not only concerns for the role and status of women in American religious life. As America became more urban and industrial, popular perception held that men were absenting themselves from organized religion in ever greater numbers. Among Catholic immigrants, women indeed seemed more likely to engage in church activities, at least during the time of adjustment to a new environment. But by the early twen-

tieth century, Protestant leaders were decrying the absence of men in the churches, noting that more men belonged to fraternal orders and lodges such as the Masons and the [Odd Fellows](#) than to churches. For working men, who often lacked the power to control the conditions under which they labored, the workplace itself was by no means a setting celebrating their human dignity. As cultural patterns made the home the sphere of women, working men often felt that they had little control over domestic space as well. For millions, at least until the time of the Great Depression, fraternal orders and lodges became "men's sphere" or space where men associated primarily with other men. Religious leaders often looked askance, for they knew that lodges held ceremonies akin to religious rites (often using religious language and images) and therefore functioned to provide a sense of order and meaning for their members that pastors and preachers believed the role of the churches. Many of the lodges reinforced other

cultural patterns, restricting membership on the grounds of race or ethnicity. Most excluded Roman Catholics and African Americans, even if they were also fellow Christians.

Catholic authorities were also wary of secret societies that were Protestant-based, fearing that participation in them that the church did not control might lure Catholic men away from the faith. But the anti-Catholic posture of many fraternal orders in 1882 stirred [Michael J. McGivney](#), a young priest in New Haven, CT, to organize a parallel for Catholic men known as the [Knights of Columbus](#). African American men looked to [Prince Hall masonic lodges](#) for the same sort of fraternal fellowship fused with religious overtones. Estimates suggest that by the beginning of the twentieth century, around 40 percent of all American men were lodge members, a figure much larger than the percentage who were members of an organized religious group.

In both Britain and the United States, the two leading industrial nations of the time, a [“muscular Christianity”](#) recasting the Protestant Christian message in terms designed to appeal to men as men attempted to counter trends that saw women as the bulwark of organized religion and exemplars of genuine spirituality. Social Gospel advocates such as Walter Rauschenbusch portrayed Jesus as a social activist in order to convince men that social service was appropriate for men as well as for women. Evangelist Billy Sunday, as noted before, held services for “men only” and became noted for his use of a crass colloquial style that he believed attracted men. When some New England Protestants early in the twentieth century realized that there were three million more females than males in white Protestant churches in America, they organized a program to draw men into the churches and into social service. Called the [Men and Religion Forward Movement](#), this endeavor involved coordinated efforts in 1911-1912 in cities and towns across the nation to involve men in a series of meetings that would in turn engage them in both religious activity and social service work. Some gatherings promoted world missions. But the main thrust was social service at home, predicated on the assumption that a more contemplative spirituality appealed to women but not to men, but one that involved action and service did. A short-lived increase in the number of men in the nation’s Protestant churches ensued, but much of the impetus stimulated by the Men and Religion Forward Movement fizzled when World War I broke out.

Concerns based on gender thus illustrate another vein of diversity. Simply put, women continued to sustain most of the work of organized religion, but were denied opportunities for formal leadership. Little in organized religion recognized the spiritual identity of women as women, even as society increasingly regarded women as more religious than men and made the home not only women’s sphere but also the center for religious nurture. Men, especially working men in the nation’s cities, continued to spurn membership in organized religion, looking to auxiliary institutions such as fraternal orders and lodges to provide some of the framework of meaning for life that religious institutions thought their particular task. Men and women, regardless of any specific religious label, went about the business of being religious in different ways. Gender thus added yet another layer of diversity within American religion.

New currents among Native American tribal religions

As the American nation spanned the continent, Native American religious life witnessed its own expressions of diversity. The consignment of Southeastern tribes to reservations in Oklahoma by no means ended interaction with the larger culture which remained hostile to Native Americans and insensitive to the dynamics of tribal life. Federal policies continued to deprive Native Americans of access to ancestral lands, extending wherever possible the reservation system that eroded the heart of tribal life. Gradually some religious communities came to regard Native Americans as subjects for conversion, organizing missions on the reservations and other efforts to bring indigenous peoples into the orbit of Christianity. Conversion became equated with “civilizing” native peoples, just as it became identified with “Americanizing” immigrants--all of whom had some sort of religious identity. Among some Native American peoples in the southwest and west, the heritage stretching back to Spanish colonial missions left an imprint, with a residue of Christianity tacked on to tribal custom and practice.

The deep cultural dislocation that resulted from national expansion and official policy stimulated efforts to revitalize tribal life, even if the resulting religious expressions diverged from traditional ways by incorporating ideas drawn from Christianity. Among the earliest is a form of millennialism that emerged in the Pacific northwest in the teachings of a Wanapum prophet named [Smohalla](#) (c.1815-c.1895). Educated at Catholic mission schools, Smohalla experienced numerous visions as did other Native American shamans. By the 1850s, he urged his people to become Dreamers who renounced Euro-American ways and restored traditional ones--but with a twist. Smohalla added a millennialist aspect, insisting that if Native Americans returned to tradition, at some future moment, they could vanquish the Euro-American invaders. This idea enabled Native Americans to adapt to the presence of aliens in their midst, seeing them as a temporary menace whose future defeat was assured; American governmental authorities saw inherent danger in the movement, similar to how dangers earlier generations found links between slave religiosity and possible rebellion. The result was also similar; officials, with military threats supporting them, quashed the Dreamers.

More well-known are movements that came among native peoples in the southwest centering around the [Ghost Dance](#), the first traces of which appear around 1850. A prophet known as Wodziwub (c.1844-c.1873) called on the Paviotso in Nevada to engage in a ritual dance that triggered a corporate ecstatic experience transporting dancers to a realm of supernatural power. Caught up in ritual frenzy, dancers called upon this power to demolish the Euro-American invaders encroaching on their ancestral lands. Apparent failure led most to abandon the dance, but its message remained with [Tayibo](#) (c.1835-?). Thanks to him, by 1870, the blend of future hope and restoration of tribal integrity basic to the Ghost Dance had spread among numerous

Plains tribes from Nevada north to the Dakotas. Its major manifestation revolved around a Paiute named Wovoka (c.1856-1932), who may have been Tavibo's son.



Fig. 11.5 Ghost Dance of the Sioux Indians. The Ghost Dance was a revitalization movement with a decidedly apocalyptic dimension, provoking such fear among governmental authorities that they brutally suppressed it (courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC USZ62-3726).

Wovoka (also known as Jack Wilson) had visionary experience that reveal how native ideas intertwined with Christian ones. He claimed to have entered heaven itself where God instructed him to return to his people with a message of mutual love, high moral conduct, and the practice of the Ghost Dance. Interplay with Christian notions also comes through in the expectation that those who were moral and faithfully practiced the dance would spend eternity in paradise, one with no Euro-Americans present. There is also an eschatological dynamic to the Ghost Dance in that those who practiced it would help restore tribal life to its ideal, one that this time would endure beyond chronological time and extend into eternity.

Wovoka Encounters God

Leading to the rebirth of the Ghost Dance in the late 1880s were visions reported by Wovoka, whose roots were in the Paiute people. In the winter of 1888-89, along in the mountains, Wovoka reported:

When the sun died, I went up to heaven and saw God and all the people who had died a long time ago. God told me to come back and tell my people they must be good and love one another, and not fight, or steal, or lie. He gave me this dance to give my people.

(Quoted in James Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, edited by Anthony F.C. Wallace (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 2.)

Wovoka's understanding spread among many tribal groups in the late 1880s. But when the Lakota Sioux, recently forced by government policy to cede more land, turned the Ghost Dance into a form of militant resistance, brutal suppression followed, climaxing in the [massacre at Wounded Knee](#) in 1890. Regardless of that brutality, the Ghost Dance illustrates ways in which diversity penetrated Native American religious life through the fusion of Christian and indigenous beliefs that resulted in a new form of religious expression.

The melding of ideas from different sources pushed Native American religious cultures in another direction when Apache groups perhaps as early as the 1870s began to combine ritual practices more common among Mexican tribal peoples with Christian notions. Here the practice concerns the ritual ingestion of peyote, classified by the federal government as a hallucinogenic substance but regarded by some Native Americans as a sacramental medicine whose ritual use brought entry into a realm of supernatural power. Adapting traditional sweat lodge purification rites, peyotists identified this supernatural power with Jesus Christ and the God of Christianity. For them, this sacrament involves not only ingestion of peyote, but also prayers to Jesus. This movement, as a distinctly religious phenomenon, owes much of its formulation to the Comanche [Quanah Parker](#) (c.1840s-1911), and it took structure in Oklahoma in 1918 when it received incorporation as the Native American Church. Over the years, as peyote became a federally controlled substance, court cases attempted to restrict or prohibit its ritual use within the [Native American Church](#), but by the late 1990s federal legislation protected its religious use within the church after earlier laws had been found unconstitutional.

In revitalization efforts that ranged from the Ghost Dance to the Native American Church, diversity penetrated Native American religious life as it did the rest of the nation. In most cases, these shifts reflected the ways in which the fusion of tribal ways with aspects of Christianity gave birth to new religious movements even as governmental policy and reservation life continued to eat away at the core of Native American tribal life.

Bible conferences and summer retreats offer relief from urban life

Different faces of diversity come into focus when looking at how city dwellers revamped the old frontier camp meeting to provide some respite from the strains of city life. The transformation of the camp meeting from an evangelical technique to secure converts to a way to nurture believers in their faith also reflected the continuing inroads of the Holiness movement in American Protestantism, the emergence of the Sunday school to complement religious instruction in the Victorian home, and an ongoing passion among Protestant Christians to understand the Bible.

In areas where urbanization and industrialization altered the character of life, summer retreats that adapted the models of camp meetings began to flourish. Some associations built large auditoriums for preaching services and cognate activities, while encouraging folks to take up residence, perhaps in cottages used just during the summer months or in structures that combined frame and tent construction. During the summer season, camp grounds along lakeshores or the ocean became sacred space. Services launching the camp season consecrated the grounds, signalling its transformation into sacred space; those marking its end returned it to ordinary space. Women and children might spend the summer in these temporary quarters; husbands and fathers joined them on weekends. Such religious centers, forerunners of beach and summer resorts, reflected a shift in focus from that of earlier camp meetings. Frontier camp meetings emerged in part because of a lack of organized religious institutions to serve the people; a primary goal was securing converts to religious faith. By the later nineteenth century, churches abounded in the cities, and those seeking respite from the stress of urban life were often already among the faithful. Hence the focus shifted to nurture and spiritual growth.

Some summer associations had strong ties to the Holiness movement, particularly those inclined towards Methodist ways. In 1867, for example, under the leadership of the Methodist [John Inskip](#) (1816-1884), the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness formed after a particularly successful summer event in Vineland, NJ. The evangelist Dwight L. Moody, although never identified with the movement, endorsed much of its efforts to promote sanctification or holiness among evangelical Protestant Christians.

Many summer centers also offered training for those, particularly women, who taught in the Sunday schools being added to the program of many urban churches. Such endeavors needed both trained teachers and curriculum materials. To meet those needs, Methodist bishop [John H. Vincent](#) organized a training program for Sunday School teachers at Lake [Chautauqua](#) in New York in 1874 that developed into a summer institute with a wide-ranging program dealing with topics of religious interest; he also spearheaded development of standardized materials that teachers could use in instruction. Dwight Moody also became involved, forming the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago in 1886 to train lay workers to serve in local congregations. These various educational enterprises helped strengthen the growing identity of many white Protestants as middle-class, for they added a semblance of knowledge and learning associated with the middle-class to much Protestant practice.

Other summer conferences, many of which also had links to Moody, concentrated on Bible study. The most well-known picked up interpretations of scripture developed by [John Nelson Darby](#) (1800-1882), founder of a small British Protestant movement called the Plymouth Brethren. Darby traveled widely in both the U.S. and Canada, promoting the view known as [pre-millennial dispensationalism](#). That perspective believed that scripture showed how God revealed a single truth to humanity but in different ways in different time periods or dispensations. All led to the anticipated Second Coming of Christ that would launch the millennium or thousand year period before the final struggle between cosmic forces of good and evil. Dispensationalists also popularized the idea of the rapture, a miraculous event in which faithful believers would be whisked up into the heavens when the millennium began. Darby insisted that the present, the church age, was the final one before Christ's return. Like the millennialist expectation associated with William Miller decades earlier, this surge of interest in biblical prophecy stirred many to correlate current events with scripture. Many saw urbanization, industrialization, and immigration as signs that the end was near. Dispensationalist teaching made deep inroads into many strands of American Protestantism with the publication in 1909 of a reference Bible prepared by [Cyrus I. Scofield](#) (1843-1921) that used its ideas as the basis for its guide to studying scripture. It also came to dominate schools like Moody Bible Institute that sent graduates to work in local congregations.

Defining Dispensationalism

C.I. Scofield, whose reference edition of the King James Version of the Bible popularized pre-millennial dispensationalism, summarized the principles of that theology in another work when he wrote:

The Scriptures divide time, by which is meant the entire period from the creation of Adam to the “new heaven and a new earth” of Rev. 21:1, into seven unequal periods, called, usually, “dispensations” (Eph. 3:2), although these periods are also called “ages” (Eph. 2:7) and “days”—as, “day of the Lord,” etc.

These periods are marked off in Scripture by some change in God’s method of dealing with mankind, or a portion of mankind, in respect of the two questions of sin and man’s responsibility. Each of the Dispensations may be regarded as a new test of the natural man, and each ends in judgment—marking his utter failure.

Five of these Dispensations, or periods of time, have been fulfilled; we are living in the sixth, probably toward its close, and have before us the seventh, and last—the millennium.

—C.I. Scofield, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth (2 Timothy 2:15)*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Philadelphia School of the Bible, 1923), as quoted in *A Documentary History of Religion in America since 1877*, 3rd ed., edited by Edwin S. Gaustad and Mark A. Noll (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 288.

In these various enterprises, diversity takes on a different character. The later Holiness movement associated with summer camp meeting associations spawned the formation of several new Protestant denominations such as the [Christian and Missionary Alliance](#) and the [Pilgrim Holiness Church](#). It thus advanced the diversity reflected in the sheer variety of religious groups, but it also added to the various ways American Protestants understood the dynamics of the religious life. More emphasis became placed on teaching, nurture, and instruction, making growth in religious consciousness one way of affirming faith, alongside more ecstatic conversion experiences. Some summer centers, such as Chautauqua, attracted folks from many religious backgrounds, even if there was one denomination that propelled them. When Bible conferences organized around dispensationalism became fashionable, another aspect of diversity appeared, for now there were diverse ways to look at and interpret the Bible itself. But soon many of these diverse dimensions of religious expression in American life would bring controversy.

Key Points You Need to Know

- The missionary movement spurred an interest in other religions, stirring some new dimensions of pluralism.
- It also sparked a new field of study, comparative religion, based on the idea that all religions wrestled with the same questions and issues.
- The World's Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in 1893, brought much popular attention to religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, thereby promoting a broader pluralism.
- Women also began questioning the traditional roles assigned to them in all religions that flourished in the U.S., using gender to paint another dimension of diversity onto the canvas of American religious life.
- Working men sometimes found spiritual outlets in fraternal orders and lodges, seen by religious leaders as competing with the churches, and were drawn to an activist faith manifested in service more than in membership in religious institutions.
- Centuries of interaction between Native American religious styles and those of their Euro-American conquerors led to movements that sought to revitalize or reinvigorate tribal life.
- Two of the more well-known examples of this interaction are the Ghost Dance and the Native American Church.
- Others feeling displaced by change resulting from immigration, industrialization, and urbanization revamped the frontier camp meetings into summer institutes and vacation ventures.
- Some used summer conferences for intensive Bible study, drawing on the theories associated with pre-millennial dispensationalism.
- World religions, gender, Native American movements, and new approaches to both the camp meeting and Bible study illustrated wide-ranging aspects of American religious diversity.

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways did the growing missionary movement expand the religious horizons of Americans?
2. How did the World's Parliament of Religions bring new diversity to American religious life?

3. What did differences in gender roles and stereotypes contribute to American religious culture as the U.S. became more urban and industrial?
4. How and why did the lodge and fraternal order movement take on a religious dimension for American men?
5. What new diversity came to Native American religious life through movements like the Ghost Dance and the Native American Church?
6. How do ideas associated with apocalypticism add to our understanding of both Native American and white Protestant life during this era?
7. How did a passion to understand the Bible and a desire to have respite from the stress of urban life change American religion?

Further reading

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