

identified by the authorship attributed to each of them (11).

Repetition might be helpful for clarification, but on p. 85 one of the authors states unnecessarily three times the same concept that “the first two hymns of [Revelation] chapter 5 praise the Son (verses 9, 10, 12) and the final hymn glorifies both the Father and the Son (verse 13).”

Some readers might not feel completely at home with the interpretation of the “river of life” in Rev 22:1 as a symbol of the Holy Spirit (88-89). Yet such an interpretation, whether acceptable or not, does not overshadow at all the important role of the Holy Spirit described in several other passages of the Revelation of John (78-91). Other readers could perhaps expect some additional discussion of contemporary theories of the Trinity, but such discussion seems not to be part of the original purpose of the study under consideration.

*The Trinity* succeeds in presenting relevant theological and historical information, understandable even for readers without formal theological training. Although it was written primarily for the Seventh-day Adventist community, the book should be welcomed also by other Christian theologians and ministers interested in the topic under discussion.

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Williams, Peter W. *America's Religions from Their Origins to the Twenty-First Century*. Chicago: University of Illinois, 2002. xi + 601 pp. Paper, \$29.95.

How does one write a comprehensive religious history of a polyglot nation like the United States with such a vast array of religious traditions while achieving balance and coherence? Peter Williams has attempted this monumental task with some degree of success. Williams is perhaps attempting to compensate for the traditional religious-history texts that have focused narrowly on the white, male, Protestant tradition, by producing an incredibly a magisterial study that succeeds in capturing the vast religious plurality of America.

His work seeks to gather in and validate the religious varieties within the mainstream. A task of such magnitude and bold vision runs the risk of simply being an encyclopedic survey of many religious traditions rather than a serious historical analysis of American religious traditions. There are doubts about whether Williams has accomplished this enterprise, but he has definitely produced a credible work and has provided an exhaustive bibliography to fill in the gaps.

Williams's book consists of five major sections with fifty-five chapters. In Part 1, he examines the roots of the major religious traditions of America. He also describes and summarizes the basic religious ideas of Native Americans and African Americans.

In Part 2, he describes the religious traditions during Colonial America, suggesting that the American colonies formed “one of the most elaborate laboratories ever devised for the intermingling of peoples, cultures, and religious and social patterns.”

Part 3 connects the relationship and influence of religious traditions in the formation of the American nation. For Williams, the first major event in American history was a religious event. The Great Awakening helped to prepare the way for the American revolution and nurtured national consciousness. America's birth was seen as a remarkable religious event, in which God unfolded his plan to create a nation that would be his special agent for good in an evil world.

Part 4 deals with the rebirth of the American nation in the aftermath of slavery and the Civil War. America became industrialized and urbanized. The religious hegemony

of evangelical Protestantism was broken because of internal conflicts, the rise of modernism, and the dramatic demographic shift of population due to increased immigration, especially from non-Protestant Europe.

Part 5, covering chapters 42-55, deals with America's continuing evolution as a modern, religiously pluralistic nation. This period also marks the rebirth of neo-Conservatism, which was no longer just Protestant but now allied with conservative elements from other religious traditions.

Williams claims that he is not simply presenting a narrative account in postmodern fashion regarding each "locus of individual or group religious experience as equally valid and useful in understanding something about the American religious scene" (3). He seeks to acknowledge the commonalities of the religious communities and how they interact with the dominant American social and cultural system in which they find themselves. The main feature of his narrative is to delineate the major features of public religion, which he defines as "religious expression and organization of a group of people who have constituted themselves formally as a religious community" (3, 4).

His premise is based on the nature of American history—that each major wave of conquest and colonization and settlement brought people with their religious institutions, beliefs, and practices. Once they became established, he calls them a religious tradition, which provided people with a way of dealing with the ultimate questions of human existence, which can, in turn, be passed on as religious culture.

The strength of the book is the access it provides us to the treasure trove of American religious literature organized according to traditions and themes. There is an incredible inclusiveness about the work, for it covers scores of religious traditions, movements, and leaders that cut across a vast spectrum of ethnic groups, races, regions, and periods.

Williams struggles to bring coherency by attempting to correlate all these religious strands within the prevailing culture, societal, and historical current of the time. However, he has succeeded more in giving us a good survey of the religious history of America. The bibliography alone in his book is worth its price, for Williams has done an incredible job of pointing out the vast scholarship available on this subject. The bibliography on the continuing evolution of native American religious history is noteworthy, as traditional religious history texts simply omit any references to the ongoing evolution of Native American religions.

In his attempt to be so inclusive and pluralistic, Williams has at times failed to emphasize the truly significant and major religious junctures and events and how they may have shaped American history. The sheer volume of the information on the various groups is often overwhelming and lacks a unifying and coherent strand to tie it together. While this work qualifies as an excellent survey, it lacks insightful and profound analysis. Overall, this book makes a contribution to religious history in America and will provide valuable leads to anyone who wants to study in depth any area of American religious history.

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