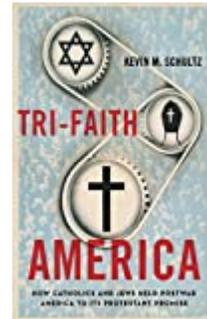




Kevin M. Schultz. *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. viii + 256 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-533176-9.



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Published on H-Judaic (February, 2012)

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Tri-Faith America or New Religious Pluralism?

Kevin M. Schultz has written an important, engaging, and at times frustrating book. The topic is certainly an important one, the growth of religious toleration after 1945. We have plenty of studies about religious and racial bigotry, but not enough has been written about the post-World War II era, when for the first time in American history, religious toleration became widespread to the point of a virtual second disestablishment of Protestantism in American society. This is a major change in American history. Schultz says this was the period when the Catholics and Jews held Protestants to their promise, and when the "Protestant nation" was replaced by what it calls the "Tri-Faith" nation, in which Americans conceive of themselves as a country composed of equal faiths, Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism. One is not sure that the past Protestant "promise" was so tolerant; indeed historically many Protestants believed that the nation should be Protestant. Certainly the prominent social gospel leader Josiah Strong did not hold a tolerant view of Catholics and Jews. He wanted a Protestant (and Anglo-Saxon) nation.

Schultz gives us a brief survey of the extent of bigotry before World War II, focusing on the Ku Klux Klan and its attempt to keep America a white dominated Protestant land, and discusses both anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism in the 1920s and 1930s. This discussion is not controversial; one could begin with the founding of the colonies and the history of discrimination against Jews and Catholics and take the story right up to World War II. As a response to the assertions of those Protestants who insisted that Americanism meant Protestantism, a few post-Civil War religious leaders had suggested another view, and Protestant social gospel leaders around the turn of the century became active in striving for a new vision of America. It was after World War I, however, that Schultz sees the beginning of a major effort to combat the notion of a "Protestant nation." He locates the origins in the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ) in 1924 when the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America set up a committee to explore why persons joined the Ku Klux Klan

From these modest beginnings, the NCCJ grew

in importance with its programs after 1930 and held conferences, published pamphlets, contacted the press, and toured the nation with their message of Tri-Faith. Spokesmen for the three faiths were tagged the "Tolerance Trio." The NCCJ was active in World War II saying that the moral and religious values that Americans fought for were to achieve a Tri-Faith nation, a message that the organization proclaimed was the American way after the war ended. The chapters on the NCCJ are the strongest part of Schultz's book. He does note some tensions among the three during the Cold War era and points out that black Protestants were not included until later. The Catholic Church found increasing acceptance because of its opposition to communism. Yet all was not without conflict. Paul Blanshard's book *American Freedom and Catholic Power* (1949), which sold well and went into a second edition, accused the Catholic Church of being separatist, not accepting separation of church and state, and striving for too much power in American life. And some Jews were held to be communists.

His focus on ideas is followed by a neglect of social change. A little data would have helped. Just when did Jewish quotas end in elite institutions, for example? Just what brought on the Tri-Faith nation? Was it simply the ideas of the NCCJ? What other factors were at work? The whole postwar era was one of growing toleration and opportunity for many of those left out of American society: women, blacks, gays, and American Indians, as well as Jews and Catholics. Moreover, his focus on the three faiths overlooks crucial differences among Jews, Catholics, and Protestants. For example, for those Jews and Catholics (and Protestants in the wake of the *Brown v. Board of Education* [1954] segregation decision), who sent their children to private religious schools, the issue of prayer and other forms of secularism in the public schools were not burning issues. Obtaining state aid was another matter.

In addition, the book makes it appear that the three main faiths did not change over the years. For the Catholic Church, the years after the 1960s have been trying times. The inability of the Catholic Church to attract priests and nuns and the increase in the number of lapsed Catholics has brought a crisis for the church, with a changing membership now 40 percent Hispanic. Much to the disappointment of the hierarchy, many Catholics do not attend mass frequently, or confess their sins, and often disagree with the church's teachings on birth control and abortion. Worse yet the rise of intermarriage has weakened the influence of the church. Modern Catholics, who are not believers in separatism, and Protestants of-

ten see eye to eye on issues simply because they hold the same values. No wonder the intermarriage rates are so high. What it means to be Jewish in contemporary America is a difficult question to answer in the face of strong and growing Orthodox communities alongside rising rates of intermarriage. In Robert Putnam and David Campbell's *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (2010), the authors single out the major changes of recent years, which are truly remarkable. Especially notable are the ways that so many Americans change church membership, they note.[1].

For Protestants, who account for about one-half of the nation's persons claiming a religion, the era after 1945 has also brought significant change. The mainline Protestant churches, which have been less anti-Semitic and more tolerant of Catholics, no longer dominate the Protestant faithful; indeed the mainline and middle-class Protestant churches, such as Presbyterians, have lost membership. The increase of the mega churches and evangelical Protestants point to a different Protestantism, whose followers often disagree with the postwar changes and do not completely accept the Tri-Faith nation. Schultz only briefly notes that the evangelicals scorn American secularism and want to bring prayers back into the schools and adore public places with Christian symbols. And these groups have pronounced views on gay rights, family structure, and abortion, and they point to the important role that religion still plays in politics. Moreover, there are still too many incidents of anti-Semitism, such as the appearance of Nazi symbols on synagogues.

Schultz has two interesting chapters on college fraternities and on the issue of placing a religious question on the census. I found these chapters on the whole convincing insights to the differences of the three faiths and their struggles to achieve a Tri-Faith society yet maintain their own religious cultures. At the same time, he gives only scant coverage to some very important matters in the widening toleration after 1945. There is little discussion of changing employment patterns; Jewish quotas in medical schools, hospitals, social clubs, and elite colleges; the changing role of Jews and Catholics in national politics; the enactment of more tolerant immigration laws; and discrimination in housing patterns. I think that these changes are more important than fraternities and the census question. How can we have a truly Tri-Faith nation without equal opportunity for all? Just when (and why) did the Tri-Faith nation move beyond preaching and lip service become a social reality?

There is another view of postwar America that he

mentions much too briefly in his conclusion. Postwar America has also been characterized by the growth of religious pluralism. Diana Eck has characterized these developments in the subtitle of her 2001 book *A New Religious America* as the process in which America, "A Christian Country" has become the "World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation." The growth of Islam in America has been especially important after 1970, and even before the events of September 11, 2001, when foreign-born Muslim terrorists destroyed the World Trade Center in New York City and damaged the Pentagon in Washington DC, Muslims were viewed with suspicion. There have been a number of negative responses to American followers of Islam since that date. We might have achieved a Tri-Faith

nation, but how Muslims (as well as Mormons and other relatively new groups) will become part of American religious life is by no means clear.

In sum, Schultz has explored an important topic and in doing so has suggested areas for future research. At the same time his study has limits, especially in the area of social change. I think too that Tri-Faith America needs to be set in a broader framework.

Note

[1]. Robert Putnam and David Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 550.

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Citation: David M. Reimers. Review of Schultz, Kevin M., *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise*. H-Judaic, H-Net Reviews. February, 2012.

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