

Review Article

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Religious Archives and the Study of History and Religion: An Essay Review of Recent Titles

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Being Religious, American Style: A History of Popular Religiosity in the United States. By Charles H. Lippy. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994. Bibliography, index. x, 284 pp. Cloth. \$65.00. ISBN 0-313-27895-4.

A Century of Pioneering: A History of the Ursuline Nuns in New Orleans, 1727-1827. By Sister Jane Frances Heaney, O.S.U. Edited by Mary Ethel Booker Siefken. New Orleans: Ursuline Sisters of New Orleans, Louisiana, 1993. Appendix, bibliography, index. xv, 431 pp. Cloth. ISBN 0-9635044-0-1.

Christian Science in the Age of Mary Baker Eddy. By Stuart E. Knee. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994. Bibliography, index. xii, 158 pp. Cloth. \$49.95. ISBN 0-313-28360-5.

Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination. By Robert H. Abzug. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. Index. ix, 285 pp. Cloth. \$30.00. ISBN 0-19-503752-9.

The Future of Our Past: The Central Zionist Archives and Its Collections. Jerusalem: The Central Zionist Archives, 1994. In English and Hebrew. Glossary, illustrations, maps. xxi, 43 pp. Paperback.

About the author: Ronald D. Patkus has been Head, Archives and Manuscripts in the John J. Burns Library of Rare Books and Special Collections at Boston College since 1993. From 1988 to 1993, he was Archivist of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston. He holds a Ph.D. in History from Boston College, an M.S. in Library and Information Science from Simmons College, and an M.A. and Certificate in Archival Management from the University of Connecticut.

Guide to the Spanish and Mexican Manuscript Collection at the Catholic Archives of Texas. Compiled by Dedra S. McDonald. Edited by Kinga Perzynska. Austin: Catholic Archives of Texas, 1994. Illustrations, maps, selected bibliography, index. 140 pp. Paperback.

Holiness Manuscripts: A Guide to Sources Documenting the Wesleyan Holiness Movement in the United States and Canada. By William Kostlevy. Metuchen, N.J. and London: The American Theological Library Association and the Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1994. Index. xiv, 423 pp. Cloth. \$49.50 ISBN 0-8108-2861-8.

Priceless Spirit: A History of the Sisters of the Holy Cross, 1841-1893. By Sister M. Georgia Costin, C.S.C. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994. Bibliography, index. xi, 268 pp. Cloth. \$24.95. ISBN 0-268-03804-X.

Spreading the Word: The Bible Business in Nineteenth-Century America. By Peter J. Wosh. Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 1994. Illustrations, index. xii, 271 pp. Cloth. \$35.00. ISBN 0-8014-2928-5.

Starting from Scratch: Creating the Synagogue Archives. By Kevin Proffitt. Cincinnati: The American Jewish Archives, 1994. 36 pp. Paperback. \$ 10.00.

THE ARCHIVAL PROFESSION has changed greatly in the last twenty-five years, and one of the most remarkable occurrences has been the proliferation of archives programs. As a result of this growth, archivists from academic institutions and historical societies no longer constitute the only major groups within professional organizations like the Society of American Archivists. Religious archives programs have become especially widespread, and archivists of religious collections today form a large body within the archival community. This new presence has been noteworthy, but it has not automatically brought about a clear sense of mission among religious archives. For many years archivists of religious collections were unable to identify their uniqueness or explain it to others.¹

In recent years, however, the community of religious archives has begun to deal with the issue of identity. Through a variety of activities—addresses, discussions, and surveys—archivists of religious collections have been asking themselves important questions: Who are we? Where have we been? What lies ahead for us? Obviously these are some of the most basic questions that can be posed by a group or other collective entity, and responses are not always something that come with any appreciable degree of alacrity or reliability.²

Nevertheless an important discussion has begun. Previous attempts to assess the state of the religious archives community have focused on particular issues, and this has been useful, for by examining special concerns we can learn much about general conditions. Nevertheless we may ask ourselves whether it is possible to learn more. Where does the community of religious archives stand today? What issues have presented themselves as

¹James M. O'Toole, "What's Different About Religious Archives?" *Midwestern Archivist* 9 (1984): 91-92.

²See August R. Suelflow, "Where Have We Been? A Survey of Work in Religious Archives," delivered at the Society of American Archivists' Annual Meeting, St. Louis, Mo., 1989, available from Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, Mo.; Russell L. Gasero, "Conceiving the Next Generation: Growing into the 21st Century," delivered at the Society of American Archivists' Annual Meeting, Indianapolis, Ind., 1994, available from the author; and "Friends, a chance to talk," *The Archival Spirit* (March 1995): 1.

being particularly relevant to this segment of the archival profession? These are broad questions, and as a matter of course they deserve extended treatment. Although a full consideration is not possible here, there are some initial responses which may be suggested.

One useful exercise is to examine the professional literature. A number of publications have appeared in recent years which, in one way or another, relate to the field of religious archives. Some of these have originated directly from religious archives, and taken together they deal with a range of topics. Of special interest are titles concerning administration and description. These include annual reports, handbooks, and various guides. Among the guides are titles which are published not by a specific archives, but which relate to collections in several institutions. What is more, many works in the field of religious history which somehow relate to religious archives and particular collections held by them have appeared.

The examination of works like these can be useful on several counts. In a general way it can naturally help us to measure the value of certain works to those who may wish to consult them. In addition, a look at recent publications can provide a means for gaining insight into some key issues for religious archives. This article will discuss some publications dealing with the administration, description, and use of religious archives, and will also attempt to assess the significance of several issues raised by, or contained in, these same works.

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Organizations and institutions exist for a variety of purposes. A college or university, for instance, may not only educate students, but also participate in other ways in the larger society. Regardless of the particular functions supporting institutional existence, however, it remains true that few organizations operate primarily for the purpose of creating records. Certainly records are created in the course of daily business, but that is not what guides organizational priorities. The culture of organizations is important, and for those that choose to maintain an archives, or otherwise care for their non-current records, the particular values of the parent entity can affect archival operations in various ways. Those who staff organizational archives may at times feel that institutional traditions and professional principles often collide. Some may even find themselves asking where their ultimate loyalty lies.³

The existence of both organizational culture and professional archival principles can present certain problems. For one thing, administrators, managers, and others who oversee the archival program may often find themselves well versed in the organization's mission and goals, but practically nonconversant in matters relating to archival management. Though the intent of caring for historical records may be sincere, this does not by itself translate into an effective archival program. In addition, the parent institution may often choose to staff its archival program with individuals drawn not from the professional archival community, but from within the organization. One ramification of this latter option, of course, is that in many cases internal staff have not received any appreciable

³This question has special reference to religious archives. See O'Toole, "What's Different About Religious Archives?" 99.

amount of training in archival principles and practice. In both cases education is necessary, and the need to address this issue can be felt suddenly and keenly.⁴

The issue of educating personnel in religious organizations about archival management has long occupied the attention of members of the archival community. One of the most frequent approaches to dealing with the problem has been to provide information about archival standards while simultaneously showing an understanding of, and sensitivity to, the culture of the parent body. Put differently, there exists a perceived need to tailor the general theory and operating principles of archival management to specific audiences. In the field of religious archives this has resulted in a number of publications. In 1980, for instance, the Society of American Archivists published as part of its Basic Manual Series *Religious Archives: An Introduction*, by August Suelflow. In more recent years a number of publications have appeared which describe how specific religious denominations and organizations might deal with their historical records.⁵

Another recent example of this trend is *Starting from Scratch: Creating the Synagogue Archives*, by Kevin Proffitt. This work is part of the brochure series of the American Jewish Archives and it succeeds an earlier publication of the same organization entitled *Your Congregational Archives*. It emphasizes six major themes: authorization and support; collection policy and appraisal; physical facility and supplies; organization and procedures; preservation and conservation; and access, reference, and security. Under each heading there is a brief discussion of both theory and technical matters. The brochure provides a useful overview of archival principles, and references are made to other possible reading sources, including the SAA Archival Fundamental Series. In this way the basics of archival administration are presented in an easily digestible form for synagogue archivists and others in charge of records documenting the Jewish experience in America. Readers are also encouraged to contact the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati if they are in need of more information.

In and of themselves, handbooks such as these can be useful, but they are not the only means of addressing the issue of how to educate people in organizations about archives. Another attempt to deal with the training problem involves workshops. In the late 1980s, for instance, a Religious Archives Technical Assistance Program (RATAP) was organized in metropolitan New York. This project offered special workshops for those charged with the care of religious archives. Despite certain successes, the project also noted a number of distinct challenges. The problem of education therefore is an ongoing one. A multifaceted approach, one including publications, workshops, and other means may well be necessary for the foreseeable future.⁶

The discussion of how to educate about archival management also raises other questions. One of these concerns coordination. Are the various means of addressing archival education, particularly as they relate to religious archives, following any larger plan, or are they simply being carried out piecemeal? This is an important matter because of the

⁴The training received by many religious archivists is discussed in Peter J. Wosh and Elizabeth Yakel, "Smaller Archives and Professional Development: Some New York Stories," *American Archivist* 55 (Summer 1992): 476-77.

⁵See, for example, James M. O'Toole, *Basic Standards for Diocesan Archives: A Guide for Bishops, Chancellors, and Archivists* (Chicago: Association of Catholic Diocesan Archivists, 1991); Denis Sennett, S.A., comp., *A Divine Legacy: Record Keeping for Religious Congregations/Orders* (Garrison, N.Y.: Franciscan Friars of the Atonement, 1993); and David A. Haury, ed., *Heritage Preservation: A Resource Book for Congregations* (Newton, Kans.: General Conference Mennonite Church/Faith and Life Press, 1993).

⁶An overview of the project is provided in Wosh and Yakel, "Smaller Archives."

way it affects all kinds of resources on the local and national levels. Archivists have begun to discuss this question, but serious proposals for resolution seem not yet to have appeared.⁷

Another question concerns who should administer archival collections in the first place. Does it make sense to expend energy trying to educate untrained managers and archivists, or would it be better simply to deposit noncurrent records with other institutions which already possess the requisite resources and knowledge for archival management? Much of the literature argues in favor of religious organizations keeping their own records, since there are distinct advantages to maintaining the stuff of corporate memory on-site. At the same time, some have begun to question this practice and have offered new models for preserving institutional records.⁸

One option is to deposit religious collections with related religious collections. This approach has actually been used by a number of religious archives. Whenever the records of a local church are deposited at a regional headquarters, this option is being carried out. There are even more elaborate cases of this approach. The archives of some denominations, for instance, have been transferred across geographical boundaries to other kinds of denominational archives centers. By using either of these options, small religious groups or communities are able to have two benefits: their records are managed by professionals, while at the same time they are kept "within the fold," and thus they maintain ties with the specific religious organization.

Another option is to deposit religious archives with other institutions, such as colleges, universities, or local historical societies. This approach necessarily entails special arrangements. The donating organization may want to impose access restrictions or other provisions which affect the way the collections are used. These stipulations will need to be observed carefully by the accepting institution. In addition, the accepting institution will need to train its staff in the unique value and uses of the religious collections.

It seems that, in the end, a variety of models may be useful. Religious organizations must consider a variety of issues in determining who can best care for the records they have created. The question of education and training can have an important influence on the final decision. Organizations which house their own records will find publications, workshops, professional meetings, and other means helpful in addressing these issues. All archivists, not just those who staff religious archives, should be interested in participating in these activities. The entire archival community can assist in preserving the historical record, even as it relates to certain areas such as religious archives.

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One strength of the religious archives community is its commitment to arrangement and description. While other archival functions—preservation and outreach for example—may sometimes suffer, the traditional tasks of organizing collections and describing their contents continues in a regular fashion.⁹ Interestingly, this orientation toward description has not resulted in any general guide to religious collections in the United States. A project of this scope obviously presents some special challenges. One of the most critical is the

⁷The problem of coordination is raised in a review by Elizabeth Yakel in *American Archivist* 58 (Summer 1995): 351-54.

⁸For an example of institutions maintaining their own records, see Suelflow, "Religious Archives," 8. An opposite approach is raised in Peter Wosh, "Keeping the Faith: Bishops, Historians, and Catholic Diocesan Archivists, 1790-1980," *Midwestern Archivist* 9 (1984): 24. See also Yakel, review, 353.

⁹An emphasis on arrangement and description in religious archives was noted in the RATAP. See Wosh and Yakel, "Smaller Archives," 480-81.

identification of collections. Should all materials relating to religion be included? How does one define a “religious collection”? Inclusive responses to these questions make the project a massive one, and possibly an impractical one as well. On the other hand, if the scope is limited to the archives of religious organizations only, the usefulness of the proposed guide then comes into question. Added to this are other structural difficulties, such as the availability of several church directories: because of basic information provided in these publications, a certain amount of overlap may occur.

While no general work has been published, certain cross-repository guides have been made available. Perhaps the most famous example in this regard is *Women Religious History Sources: A Guide to Repositories in the United States*, by Evangeline Thomas, CSJ. Thomas’s work identified historical materials held by various communities—not just Catholic—of women religious. While the work listed many repositories, its scope was clearly defined, and therefore it has enjoyed a certain usefulness in the religious archives field.¹⁰ Large subject guides, if well-conceived, can be worth the effort.

A recent example of such a guide is *Holiness Manuscripts: A Guide to Sources Documenting the Wesleyan Holiness Movement in the United States and Canada* by William Kostlevy. Though scholars still debate the precise origins of the Holiness Movement, most return to the 1830s in American history, when Methodists revived John Wesley’s doctrine of Christian Perfection. Accordingly, most of the collections mentioned in this work document “antebellum perfectionism and the subsequent post-war Holiness Movement.” Also included are collections documenting the Keswick Movement, Pentecostalism, and the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church. Descriptions of individual collections are brief and arranged geographically; access is enhanced through the inclusion of a subject index. The work forms part of the American Theological Library Association’s Bibliography Series, which is worth noting because the first number of the series was actually Charles Edwin Jones’s lengthy reference book, *A Guide to the Study of the Holiness Movement*. Kostlevy’s work provides a useful complement to that of Jones insofar as it focuses on unpublished material.¹¹

Other publications focus on specific archives. *The Future of Our Past: The Central Zionist Archives and Its Collections* is an example from this category. It provides information on the Central Zionist Archives, which is located in Jerusalem, and serves as the official repository for records of the World Zionist Organization, the Jewish Agency, the Jewish National Fund and Keren Hayesod, and the World Jewish Congress, as well as many collections of personal papers. The holdings of the Central Zionist Archives are described in summary form; detailed information about the contents of specific collections is not provided here. A more precise description of the collections, however, is available in another publication of the Archives called *Guide to Archival Record Groups and Collections of Documents*. *The Future of Our Past* thus serves mainly as an introduction to the Central Zionist Archives, and researchers will need to consult other works should they become interested in particular records.

Still other guides bring primary or even exclusive attention to one particular part of an archives. *Guide to the Spanish and Mexican Manuscript Collection at the Catholic Archives of Texas* shows how an archives may provide a high level of access to one section

¹⁰Evangeline Thomas, CSJ, ed., *Women Religious History Sources: A Guide to Repositories in the United States* (New York: R.R. Bowker, 1983).

¹¹For a comparison, see Charles Edwin Jones, *A Guide to the Study of the Holiness Movement* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1974).

of its holdings. It is worth noting that a preliminary inventory of the Catholic Archives of Texas (CAT) was compiled in 1961, but because of resource constraints a complete inventory to the Spanish and Mexican Manuscript Collection was never published. The focus on this collection seems justified, given the fact that much of its contents originates from Spain and Mexico; now the work of researchers is facilitated considerably. A 1993 grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission made this possible, illustrating in the process how financial support from this federal agency, when applied in a practical way, can produce projects of benefit to those who wish to use archival collections. The guide's supplementary material, including a general description of CAT, a glossary of terms, and an index, is useful. The description of the Spanish and Mexican Manuscript Collection itself is sufficiently detailed to prepare any user for research in the holdings.

Important as they are, guides are not the only means of describing archival collections. In addition to traditional means of description, such as guides and finding aids, archivists have in recent decades been utilizing other tools, especially those that are designed for use in an automated environment. Many archives, for instance, have taken advantage of the MARC format in order to describe collections at various levels in national bibliographic utilities and local databases. Certain religious archives have participated in these efforts; many religious archives either create records for the utilities themselves, or contract with agencies like the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections (NUCMC) to have it done by others. Still, the more typical scenario in religious archives seems to be one without MARC description of holdings. There may be a number of reasons to account for this—lack of resources, lack of training, etc.—but nevertheless the result is that many religious collections do not appear in the research tools used by many researchers. It is difficult to know if the problem can be addressed adequately at this late date, but potential solutions should not be ignored.¹²

In the very recent past the description of collections has found yet another environment: the Internet. More and more repositories have chosen to mount their guides, or similar access tools, on the World Wide Web.¹³ One reason why this type of activity has become so widespread is that the latest generation of researchers frequently visits sites on the Web for information of this kind. Increasingly the question for an archival repository has become not whether it will mount its own Web page, but when. Here again religious archives have not used this newer technology to the same extent as other repositories. Perhaps this situation will change, but in the meantime, use of religious collections may suffer. Religious archives may not reach their full potential until their collections are described in what today are considered to be the most promising information arenas.

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In recent decades there have been substantial changes in the way history is written. Beginning mainly in the 1960s, historians began to depart from traditional practices in an effort to learn more about the past. Previously, most work had concentrated on the lives of powerful individuals and institutions, but then increasingly more and more attention was given to the stories of those without any great political influence. History was being

¹²The relative lack of use of the MARC format among religious archives is noted in Wosh and Yakel, "Smaller Archives," 481.

¹³Only a slight presence of religious archives is seen on the most extensive list of archival websites. See "Repositories of Primary Sources," at <http://www.uidaho.edu/special-collections/Other.Repositories.html>.

written “from the bottom up,” and in the process a revolution of sorts took place within the historical profession.

Similar changes occurred in the sub-field of religious history. For many years religious historians emphasized the growth and development of particular churches and their theology. In many cases, in fact, the history of religion was simply equated with linear progress; specific religious groups appeared, confronted certain obstacles, and eventually grew into prosperous communities. In such accounts the role of the clergy was usually highlighted, sometimes to the exclusion of other groups. As the limitations of this approach became more apparent, historians of religion began to focus on new topics. By the late 1970s, they had developed a larger perspective on the past, one which included, among other things, the particular experiences of the laity. No longer were the history of church institutions and dogma the only valid subjects for study. Conflict and religious symbols were examined, and before long the study of “popular religion” had emerged.¹⁴

In the last years of the twentieth century, religious history is being studied from a variety of perspectives. Many historians are still working within the older tradition which looks most closely at the development of particular churches and official doctrines. At the same time, others have continued to delve more deeply into the area of popular religion. In addition, even newer trends have emerged within the historiography. During the 1990s, some historians have begun to use the concept of “belief” in their research and writing. This view contends that written texts and institutional structures, as well as more popular forms of religious expression, such as images and architecture, can all provide useful information about the history of religion. In some instances historians may even draw on several perspectives.¹⁵

One may argue that each of the approaches currently used by professional historians possesses its own special utility and limitations. Regardless of approach, however, these trends are of special importance to archivists of religious collections. Although undoubtedly primary sources can be used for a variety of purposes—administrative, genealogical, and others—it nevertheless remains true that they also serve as an important means of conducting historical research. Religious archives must be aware of the major developments in the field of American religious historiography if they are to understand the special needs and concerns of one of their most significant constituencies.

One example of the traditional approach to religious history is *A Century of Pioneering: A History of the Ursuline Nuns in New Orleans, 1727-1827*, by Sister Jane Frances Heaney. Though published only recently, this work was actually written in the 1940s as the author's doctoral dissertation at St. Louis University. Even fifty years ago the bibliography of Catholicism in Louisiana was substantial, and several titles had appeared which dealt with the history of the Ursulines in particular.¹⁶ Heaney's book con-

¹⁴The development of trends in religious history is discussed in Thomas Kselman, ed. *Belief in History: Innovative Approaches to European and American Religion* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 1-15. Also of some use is David G. Hackett, *Religion and American Culture: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1995), ix-xi.

¹⁵Kselman, *Belief in History*, 6-9.

¹⁶For an excellent overview of the historiography of Louisiana Catholicism, see Charles E. Nolan, “Louisiana Catholic Historiography (1916-1992),” in *Cross, Crozier and Crucible: A Volume Celebrating the Bicentennial of a Catholic Diocese in Louisiana*, edited by Glenn R. Conrad (New Orleans: Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New Orleans, 1993), 584-634. Previous works on the Ursulines in the city include Mother Therese Wolfe, *The Ursulines in New Orleans and Our Lady of Prompt Succor: A Record of Two Centuries. 1727-1925* (New York: P.J. Kennedy & Sons, 1925).

centrates on the first one hundred years of the religious order's presence in New Orleans, and is useful as a chronicle of the early efforts of an important community of women. It recounts the origins of the Ursulines in sixteenth-century Italy, their rapid increase in Europe and the New World—especially their labors in Louisiana's major city—and occasionally corrects certain suppositions which had made their way into the literature.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the book betrays a certain datedness in that it possesses none of the language or methodology of current research, and there is little analysis of special topics, such as the economic and social origins of community members, their particular religious outlook and activities, and the role of gender in daily life. Like many works of Catholic history written half a century ago, the work emphasizes more than anything else institutional growth and development, in this case that of the Ursulines in New Orleans.

A similar perspective is given in *Priceless Spirit: A History of the Sisters of the Holy Cross, 1841-1893*, by Sister M. Georgina Costin. This book discusses the origins of the order as part of the Congregation of the Holy Cross in nineteenth-century France, its settlements in the United States, and various activities in places like Indiana, Michigan, and New Orleans. The administrative history of the sisters is highlighted, with primary attention being given to the emerging attitudes and resulting events—including internal conflicts—which led to separate incorporation in 1869. Although the book is framed in chronological terms, and occasionally readers are invited simply to draw their own conclusions about various events, Costin is at times in dialogue with other histories, and attempts to debunk certain arguments. She is mainly concerned with presenting a new view of Rev. Edward Sorin, the founder of the University of Notre Dame and long-time guide for the Sisters.¹⁸ While previous writers have portrayed the priest in less-than-sympathetic terms, and at times even wanted "to make Fr. Sorin look as bad as possible," Costin continually suggests that, to the contrary, he was a man of good intentions who regularly exhibited genuine concern for the welfare of Holy Cross communities in America. For example, while one Holy Cross tradition holds that Sorin was disobedient in not accepting a call to leave the Indiana mission and serve in Bengal, Costin argues that instead he was expressing a deeply-felt, even "mystical connection" between himself and Notre Dame.¹⁹

In addition to the works by Heaney and Costin which examine Catholic institutions and organizations, works on other religious groups have formed a part of the recent literature. Some of these publications have provided new interpretations of religious organizations. In *Christian Science in the Age of Mary Baker Eddy*, Stuart Knee discusses aspects of the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Church of Christ, Scientist. Topics covered include the roles of early followers in shaping the new organization, the influence of both ancient and contemporary philosophies on church theology, and the views of leaders of other denominations and faiths towards Christian Science. Individual chapters are therefore independent but also interrelated; together they provide an organized analysis of this new religion during the lifetime of its founder. Overall, Knee sees Christian Science

¹⁷See, for example, the discussion of the convent house, p. 132 ff.

¹⁸Costin is particularly in dialogue with two works by Canon Etienne Catta and Tony Catta, the first being *Basil Anthony Mary Moreau*, translated by Edward L. Heston, CSC, 2 vols. (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1955), and the second *Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors and the Origins of the Marianites of Holy Cross (1818-1900)*, translated by Edward L. Heston, CSC (Milwaukee: Catholic Life Publications, Bruce Press, 1959).

¹⁹Costin, *Priceless Spirit*, 66.

as the “highly personal, occasionally untranslatable, extremely intense vision of one individual,” that individual of course being Mary Baker Eddy. This unique vision was responsible for the success as well as the failures of the young church. In the end, Knee argues, early members of the organization were thus more occupied with understanding and interpreting their beliefs than in taking part in social activities and movements.

Peter Wosh’s *Spreading the Word: The Bible Business in Nineteenth-Century America*, is another study of a particular religious organization, in this case the American Bible Society (ABS). The ABS was founded in New York in 1816; over the course of the nineteenth century, it changed in significant ways. Several narrative histories chronicle the growth of the organization, but as might be expected, this is done in an uncritical fashion, with little reference to developments in society at large.²⁰ The goal of *Spreading the Word* is not simply to present another narrative account of the ABS; rather, the author examines three specific themes which are central to its early history: the relation of the society to other social action movements of the period, personnel conflicts and competing goals within the organization, and the ways in which the organization transformed itself over time. What emerges is a clear and convincing discussion of how the ABS grew from a relatively small society to a complex corporation, and how this movement reflected changes in American religion as a whole. This is a sophisticated work which in many ways serves as a model for contemporary institutional history. Archivists will want to pay special attention to chapters which touch upon the subject of recordkeeping at the ABS, for they shed important light on the changing nature of archives in nineteenth-century religious organizations.²¹

Charles Lippy’s *Being Religious, American Style* is an important contribution to the field of popular religion.²² The author believes that “ordinary men and women for generations have sought access to the realm of the supernatural,” and that this access has sometimes been gained “through religious traditions and institutions, but more often through fusing together an array of beliefs and practices to construct personal and very private worlds of meaning.” He uses the term “religiosity” to describe “both beliefs and practices associated with traditional religion as well as those that come from other sources.” In covering the period from early colonial America to the late twentieth century, Lippy accordingly discusses traditions, institutions, and the clergy but little; his main concern is with the religious experience of the laity. In the chapter on the Puritan period, for instance, he concentrates on early American interests in magic, astrology, and the occult. This approach certainly provides a corrective to much of the previous historical writing on religion, but it must be weighed carefully, for in emphasizing particular aspects of lay religion, the complete view—one including both traditional and popular religion—can easily become obscured.

Another recent work written outside of the traditional institutional approach is Robert Abzug’s *Cosmos Crumbling*. This book provides a reappraisal of the role of religion in the antebellum reform movements. To some extent this is nothing new; other historians

²⁰Narrative histories include Henry Otis Dwight, *The Centennial History of the American Bible Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1916), and Creighton Lacy, *The Word-Carrying Giant: The Growth of the American Bible Society (1816-1966)* (South Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1977).

²¹Portions of Wosh’s book appeared in “Bibles, Benevolence, and Bureaucracy: The Changing Nature of Nineteenth Century Religious Records,” *American Archivist* 52 (Spring 1989): 166-78.

²²The opening chapter of Lippy’s book provides a useful overview of the historiography of popular religion.

have traced the origins of the specific social crusades to particular religious beliefs.²³ Abzug's contribution is to focus on the cosmologies, the full *Weltanschauungen*, of individual reformers. "We can only understand reformers," he writes, "if we try to comprehend the sacred significance they bestowed upon worldly arenas." Abzug is therefore less concerned with the details of efforts supporting temperance, freedom for slaves, and women's rights than with the religious imagination of their principle promoters. He begins with a discussion of the foundations of reform cosmology, then moves on to consider aspects of evangelical reform, and concludes by treating the last stage of radical transformation. Abzug's perspective is refreshing in that it returns us to the world of the reformers themselves; it supports an interpretation of the reform era that is consequently free of many late-twentieth-century suppositions.

Among those writing religious history there are differences in the degree to which archival sources are used. As evidenced in their citations, Heaney, Costin, and Wosh rely heavily on organizational records to set forth their arguments. Knee and Abzug also make use of primary sources in their works, but most of their references are to published sources, as opposed to those of an archival nature. Lippy claims to have consulted a large body of original material, and although this is not always reflected in footnotes, it does seem to have informed much of his understanding of particular issues. Clearly historians follow no set formula in their efforts to support arguments with extant archival material.

Even more instructive than the amount of use, however, is the kind of use being made of available sources. The works in religious history examined here illustrate several things. First, there is an ongoing reliance on the informational value of records. Often, and sometimes exclusively, historians take a traditional approach to research: available institutional records and manuscripts are studied, and arguments are made according to the information contained therein. As seen especially in Costin's book, which directly challenges previously stated notions about the motives of Edward Sorin, old ideas are updated.²⁴ Second, the evidential value of records can be useful to historians. In *Spreading the Word*, Wosh shows how the American Bible Society shifted and updated its goals over time; the ways in which organizational records changed during the nineteenth century provide important clues to this development.²⁵ Finally, the widening perspective among historians of what constitutes a primary source should be duly noted. Lippy takes pains to point out that a variety of sources can be useful to the student of religion and of popular religion in particular. Not only correspondence and diaries, but also such things as artifacts, visual images, and ephemera can all help historians in search of the past.²⁶

The various research trends and differing uses of archival sources can affect the work of archivists of religious collections. Collection development, appraisal, description, and outreach become especially important concerns. The variety of sources being studied today suggests that archivists need to widen their view of what constitutes a valuable historical source. This wider view will be necessary at the points of both acquisition and appraisal.²⁷ They will also want to be alert to the ways in which they make their collections

²³See, for example, Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History to 1860* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1944).

²⁴Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment*, 17, 61, 119, 128.

²⁵See especially chapters 1 and 7 of Wosh, *Spreading the Word*.

²⁶Note Lippy's discussion on pages 16-18.

²⁷In "Keeping the Faith," 22-23, Peter Wosh discusses how Catholic archivists should respond to scholarly research trends.

known. Clearly not all historians of religion, and probably not all historians of other topics, find the need to use primary sources in their published works. Whether they do so or not is ultimately their own decision, but archivists must at least do all they can to present the sources in their care to potential researchers. Sophisticated means of description and outreach surface again as crucial activities.

Of course special attention to the areas of appraisal, processing, and outreach in religious archives need not take place exclusively as a result of the work of historians of religion. To the contrary, they can be pursued in response to the work of other historians as well. More and more historians have been using religious archives to study nonreligious subjects. The use of religious collections to write about different aspects of history has been publicized in recent years, and this activity should be noted by all religious archivists. Ultimately, it is something that can help archivists of religious collections to be more cognizant of all their various constituencies, including religious historians, social historians, and others.²⁸

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A review of some of the recent literature relating to religious archives is instructive in several ways. Individual titles help us to chart the degree of activity in particular areas while simultaneously providing insight about current issues. Many of the concerns of archivists of religious collections are common ones shared by their colleagues in various archival institutions. At the same time, there are a number of topics which have special relevance to religious archives, among them education and training, management, description, and certain historical trends. These issues are certainly not the only ones before the religious archives community, but they must be included in the discussion of what is happening now. The professional literature, in other words, can assist in developing a fuller awareness of present challenges. Such an awareness, in turn, may assist in the identification of working priorities and ultimately result in better service within religious archives and the archival community as a whole.

²⁸A good overview of this topic is provided in Paul A. Ericksen, "Letting the World In: Anticipating the Use of Religious Archives for the Study of Nonreligious Subjects," *Midwestern Archivist* 12 (1987): 84-90.