

***The Delight Makers: Anglo-American Metaphysical Religion and the Pursuit of Happiness.* By Catherine L. Albanese. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2023. 360 pp. \$99 hardcover.**

Why don't comedies win Oscars? The answer, we all know, has to do with our snobby critical sensibilities concerning what constitutes "real" art. There is nothing wrong with having fun, but when it comes to serious filmmaking, the bleaker the better. In a parallel move, Catherine Albanese questions the deep-seated suspicions that govern our critical judgments as scholars of religion. For far too long, she argues, historians of American religion have equated "serious" religion with the pious pursuit of otherworldly goods and the mortification of the body. What would happen, she asks, if our narratives instead centered religious projects of desire, delight, and the pursuit of happiness? What if gods just wanna have fun?

The Delight Makers is the refreshing result—an alternative history of Anglo-American religious life, told through a series of thinkers and practitioners across three centuries. Think of the book as a trimmer, tailored retelling of *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*, Albanese's magisterial history of metaphysical religion. Placing the thematic spotlight on desire and delight recalls the fourth element of Albanese's well-known metaphysical quadrilateral, "salvation as healing," but plenty of attention is paid to energy, powers of mind, and notions of correspondence, which, during the nineteenth century, undergo an evolution into the modern "law of attraction." Devoting individual chapters to intellectual portraits of major theologians of abundance, Albanese structures her alternative history chronologically, marching from the seventeenth century to the twentieth. Two by two they come into the metaphysical ark: Puritans (Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards), Transcendentalists (Ralph Waldo Emerson and Horace Bushnell), theorists of sexuality and free love (Albert Brisbane and Andrew Jackson Davis), New Thought (Warren Felt Evans and William James), and latter-day prophets of profit and prosperity (Emma Curtis Hopkins and Elizabeth Towne, William Walker Atkinson, and Seth and Abraham).

Finding the narrative throughline from Calvinism to Channeling might seem a big ask. But the approach that Albanese enlists, selective or "partial readings" of her subjects' thought, allows her to isolate a waxing concern with delight and abundance in American religious life. One of the gains is to make the familiar strange, setting orthodox figures such as Mather and Edwards against the grain of their historiography—a trend begun by Perry Miller, who suggested that we see Ralph Waldo Emerson as nothing more than an Edwards in whom the sense of original sin had evaporated. Albanese takes Miller's famous intellectual trajectory and stretches it to fit the frame of three centuries. In Mather's orthodox habit of ejaculatory prayer, she glimpses intimations of the later New Thought practice of affirmation, noting that each relies upon a version of the law of correspondence. "The 'law of attraction,'" she writes, "eventually would become a restatement of the law of correspondence as a metaphysical mantra" (36).

As a card-carrying lumper, I resonated with Albanese's comparative approach and with her call for scholars to outgrow the crypto-Christian tendency to privilege suffering and severity as sites of "real" religion over a fuller range of religious experience. So, what gives me pause about this delightfully weird and wonderfully written alternative telling of American religious history? While Albanese is, as always, a sophisticated and subtle splitter when it matters, the overall effect of these "partial readings" can feel like an overcorrection, a too-usable past. Albanese has done us a service by

illuminating Mather's "virtuous Epicureanism," but it is hard to recognize any version of Mather that skirts the deep tension between the theology of abundance and the theology of suffering. The original sin never evaporates. If, as the truism holds, revolutions in thought are accomplished through the subtlest shifts in emphasis, need we find a budding metaphysician in every bushel?

Of course, history is written not for the past but for the present, and the larger hope that animates her partial readings, Albanese writes, is to "allow us to see in a different way the cultural possibilities for Anglo-Americans and fellow travelers," possibilities for those who prefer to imagine human potentialities on earth beyond the "glorification of suffering"—including the "opportunity for prosperity, pleasure, and the pursuit of happiness" (309). As her evocation of that final phrase indicates, American civil religion—the republic of mind and spirit—has always been near the heart of Albanese's work. In this spirit, one might read *The Delight Makers* as the conjuration of an alternative ending to Sydney Ahlstrom's *A Religious History of the American People*. Ahlstrom famously ended his story—for some, the last grand narrative of American religious history—with the damp squib of the 1960s, a period of searching and revisionism, as older narrative models began to disintegrate in the face of a new pluralism. In the metaphysical tradition (which Ahlstrom called "harmonial religion"), Albanese sees not the end of grand narratives but the slow emergence of new ones, the fruition of harmonial seeds sewn in the soil of the national project from its origins, which imagined America less as a wilderness of purifying suffering than as a garden of earthly delights. This book would be a beneficial addition to undergraduate and graduate courses in American religious history, metaphysical religion, and intellectual history, either as a whole or by selecting individual chapters.

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***The Evangelical Quadrilateral.* By David Bebbington. 2 volumes. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2021. x + 382 pp.; x + 358 pp. \$54.99 hardcover, \$44.99 paperback.**

The career of David Bebbington is synonymous with the "evangelical quadrilateral." He coined the term in *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989) as part of an argument for the coherence and thus significance of the evangelical movement from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. Evangelicals in Britain hailed from different churches and traditions and so differed and even feuded on theological, political, and social questions, but they shared four mutually reinforcing characteristics: biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism, and activism. Most of the thirty-five essays collected in these two volumes, which are named for his keyword, appeared in the decades after the publication of *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*. They allow us to assess how useful it remains as a master key to religion in modern Britain. The essays are impressive in their erudition and range. The first volume traces themes in the theology and spirituality of British