

Letters

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The South, Religion, and the Scopes Trial

CHARLES REAGAN WILSON

Last November the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities hosted a national symposium entitled "Religion and Public Life: Seventy Years after the Scopes Trial." Ten visiting speakers presented papers on the various implications of the 1925 trial, in which John Scopes was convicted for teaching evolutionary theory in a Dayton, Tennessee, high school classroom. The conference sessions were widely attended and prompted lively debates throughout campus. The Center also sponsored a high school teachers workshop in conjunction with the conference. Interdisciplinary teams of teachers from the Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools and the conference speakers took part in the workshop. The symposium attracted much interest from the national media; articles appeared in the *New York Times* and the *Atlanta Constitution*, among many others.

Seventy-one years after the trial of John Scopes, the issue is still alive and well. This past February an act was introduced in the Tennessee State Legislature that would penalize any teacher or administrator who teaches evolution as a "fact" rather than simply a "theory." The proposed act reads, in part, "any teacher or administrator teaching such a theory as fact commits insubordination. . . and shall be dismissed or suspended."

The following article was originally presented by Charles Reagan Wilson at the November conference. Professor Wilson is Professor of History and Southern Studies at the University of



Panelists from the session on science and religion at the Scopes Trial symposium held in November 1995. From left to right: Michael Lienesch, Bowman and Gordon Gray Professor of Political Science, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Joseph Hough, Dean, Vanderbilt Divinity School; William Provine, Charles A. Alexander Professor of Biological Sciences, Cornell University; Kurt Wise, Associate Professor of Science, William Jennings Bryan College; Wallace C. Smith, Pastor, Shiloh Baptist Church, Washington, D.C.

Mississippi. His most recent book is entitled *Judgment and Grace in Dixie: Southern Faiths from Faulkner to Elvis* (University of Georgia Press, 1995); he is also the co-editor of the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

H.L. Mencken wrote that the Scopes Trial was tragic, representing an outcrop of religious ignorance against enlightened knowledge. Of course, we should note that he also reflected after the trial that he had seldom had as much sheer fun in his life as when he had covered the trial and editorialized about it.

Mencken was the premier critic of the South in the early twentieth century, and few people have enjoyed that role more than he did. He took a special satisfaction in ridiculing southern religion. He claimed to see a tyranny of the "Baptist and Methodist barbarism below the Mason-Dixon Line." He described the 1920s South as "a cesspool of Baptists, a miasma of Methodists, snake charmers, phony real estate operators, and syphilitic evangelists."

Mencken made the South itself the issue in reflecting back on the Scopes Trial. Mencken not only offended orthodox religious Southerners but also progressive young Southerners as well. They

were appalled by the Scopes Trial but even more by the national media's caricatures of their region. They were proud of the progress the region's people had made in the aftermath of World War I, which had drawn the region closer to the nation.

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The energizing force of anti-evolution in the South was religion. By the 1920s, the distinctiveness of Southern religious life was clear, defined by its own predominant patterns and their contrast with those in other parts of the United States.

Tennesseans were especially proud. The National Association of Manufacturers began the decade of the 1920s by electing a Southerner to be their president. John E. Edgerton, a textile manufacturer from Lebanon, Tennessee, became a major spokesman for American business in that decade. His presence symbolized that the South had reached a new stage in its economic and social modernization. A northern reporter saw the changes in Dixie summed up by the appearance of a new social type for the South: the business joiner. He observed that "the rattling knives and forks and pepful jollities of Rotarians, Kiwanians, Lions, and Exchange clubs are filling the erstwhile wisteria-scented air with such a din these days that every visitor must recognize immediately a land of business progress."

Such talk was in some ways simply intensified talk of a New South, bolstering a mentality that had taken hold of southern newspaper editors and businessmen in the 1880s and reappearing in a different guise every generation since. But the 1920s surely represented a quickening of that spirit. The economic development associated with increased industrial activity brought the growth of cities as a tangible sign of modernization. During the 1920s, the South's urban population grew more rapidly than any other region's, from 24 percent to 32 percent. Five of the seven fastest growing metropolitan areas in the country were in the South.

Kingsport, Tennessee, in east Tennessee, not far from the Dayton of Scopes Trial fame, was an unusual example of an entire town built by industrial promotion, combined with community planning. Kingsport was a sleepy mountain village in the Holston Valley until 1909, when the Clinchfield Railway went through to tap the Kentucky coal fields. Kingsport gained brick and cement plants the following year. The Kingsport Improvement

Corporation, a group of investors, hired a professional engineer to plan the city. Eight years later the city had a power plant, a hosiery mill, pulp and paper factories, and a wartime cellulose plant.

Dayton was small but prosperous, the county seat of Rhea County. The town had 2,000 citizens, paved roads, city-owned water and electric plants, and a thriving Protestant church life. Civic leaders boasted of their Progressive Club. No Ku Klux Klan had appeared at a time when it was active elsewhere in the South. About half of Rhea County's people farmed, mostly on small lots of less than 100 acres. Half of the county's people worked in non-farm employment, in sawmills, textile mills, construction, or mining. It was not an isolated community but part of a growing economy.

Amid the bustle of places like Dayton in the 1920s, one journalist offered a new definition of the Southerner. "The average Southerner," he wrote, "is a born booster, and the mood is contagious." A traveler was impressed with that mood. "Down in Dixie they tell you . . . that the South is a new frontier. Everywhere are new roads, new automobiles, new hot dog stands, tea shops, movie palaces, radio stores, real estate subdivisions, and tourist camp grounds."

One needs to pull back and recall that the South, of course, was not transformed in the 1920s. Despite industrial growth in the decade, more commercial activity, and urban expansion, most Southerners continued to live in the countryside and to work in an agricultural economy that did not boom in the 1920s. Traditional southern ways concerning race relations, male patriarchal dominance, and countless other customs held sway for many decades after the 1920s. After a boom in World War I, the cotton economy went into dramatic recession in the early 1920s and never recovered in the decade.

Nonetheless, in understanding the reactions of those religious people who would spearhead a campaign to limit the teaching of evolution in the public schools, we surely must recognize that they lived in a time of perceived change. Change might offer many Southerners new economic opportunities, but it also threatened society as they had known it. The social changes associated with economic development seemed to threaten the hegemony that religion had long held in southern life.

The anti-evolution campaign was a national movement, but held a special meaning in the South. Anti-evolution laws were introduced in eight Northern and Western states but did not pass any legislative house. Every southern state except Virginia, however, seriously considered laws to restrict the teaching of evolution, and Florida, Tennessee, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Oklahoma passed such laws. As historian Kenneth K. Bailey has observed, "Especially in the rural South, unusual anxieties were generated by World War I and its aftermath, then later by a variety of secularistic intellectual trends, by a burgeoning technological revolution, by urbanization, and by drastic departures in common outlooks and behavior."

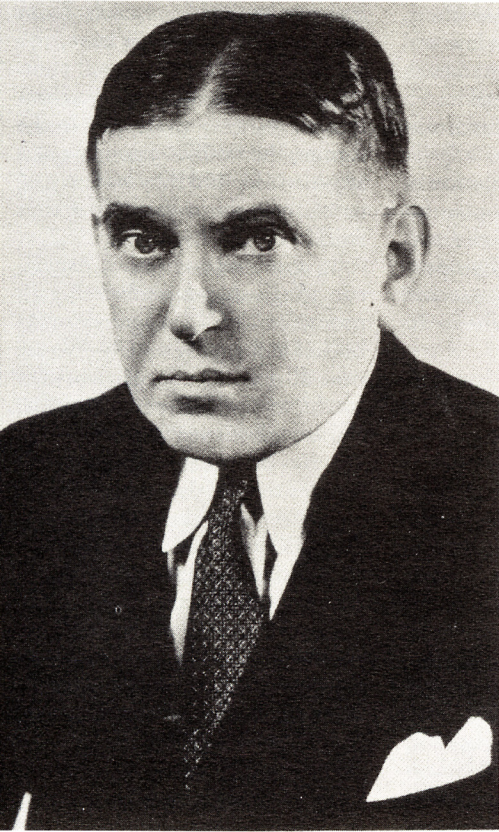
The energizing force of anti-evolution in the South was religion. By the 1920s, the distinctiveness of Southern religious life was clear, defined by its own predominant patterns and their contrast with those in other parts of the United States. Above all, the region stood out for its Protestant dominance. One hundred years earlier, North and South looked similar in regards to religion, both dominated by evangelical groups, especially the Baptists and Methodists who had quickly risen to influence in the early nineteenth century. The Civil War was tinged with the crusading righteousness of evangelical Protestantism, albeit in northern and southern varieties.

But in the late nineteenth century, as immigration remade American society, religion was transformed as well. The Roman Catholic church became the largest American church group and Judaism became a major American faith. But few immigrants came south because the region offered little economic opportunity for them. The South remained overwhelmingly Protestant. To be sure, significant differences existed between the Presbyterian church in the United States and the Assemblies of God, the southern Baptists and the Methodists, and black and white Methodists. But beneath these differences was a broad, interdenominational tradition of shared Protestantism within an American culture that had become much more religiously diverse.

Southern religion in the 1920s was distinctive because of its predominant evangelical nature. Evangelicalism holds that the important aspect of faith is experiential. The central theme of southern religious history is the search for conversion, for redemption from innate human depravity. With a Calvinist-inspired dim view of human nature, it is a religion of sin and salvation. Evangelicalism offers assurance to the faithful through direct access to God. Sinners can be born again, touched by the Holy Spirit and cleansed, washed white as snow, as the old hymn says, by the "Precious Blood of the Lamb." That experience then becomes the foundation for a new, transformed life.

Evangelical groups existed, of course, in other parts of the United States and in other societies as well. The distinctiveness of southern religion by the 1920s was that this tradition had held hegemony over southern life for so long, its reign identified with the good society itself. As historian John Lee Eighmy wrote, the southern churches were in cultural captivity to the southern way of life, as religious folk seemed almost unconsciously to

Mencken was the premier critic of the South in the early twentieth century, and few people have enjoyed that role more than he did. He took a special satisfaction in ridiculing southern religion.



H.L. Mencken

Robert E. Lee was a saint, Stonewall Jackson a martyr. The United Daughters of the Confederacy became the first Southerners to organize and campaign before school textbook committees to ensure that only orthodoxy was represented in schoolbooks, in this case the orthodoxy of regional tradition. For example, the president of the Florida Daughters of the Confederacy told a textbook committee that as a girl "hot blood came to my cheeks" when reading American histories written by Northerners. She and her sisters ensured it would not happen again.

The concern for regional orthodoxy even affected a topic as seemingly alien as mathematics. Daniel Hill, a math professor in North Carolina, before becoming a Confederate general, had included this problem in his post-war book, *Elements of Algebra*: "A Yankee mixes a certain number of wooden nutmegs, worth 4 cents a piece, and sells the whole assortment for \$44, and gains \$43.75 by the fraud. How many wooden nutmegs were there?" The number of nutmegs was only one point of knowledge conveyed through the problem.

Although this example is amusing, the spirit of southern orthodoxy often was not. W. J. Cash coined the term "the savage ideal" to label the traditional southern intolerance toward differences that seemed threatening. "Tolerance," he wrote, "was pretty well extinguished in the mid-nineteenth century and conformity made a nearly universal law."

For religious people in the

South as throughout the rest of the United States, World War I heightened fears of modernism, and modernism became increasingly a target of regional orthodoxy. As early as the late nineteenth century, modern thought evoked deep anxieties in a region dominated by traditional ways in general, especially in religious matters. Modernism appeared before and during the war mostly as an external threat in the South. In a triumph of orthodoxy, advocates of biblical higher criticism and scientific evolutionism had been effectively removed from positions of influence in southern seminaries during the late 1800s.

Looking at the American religious picture persuaded Southerners that they remained the last stronghold of Protestant orthodoxy, which they identified as the heart of traditional Americanism. Southern Protestant ministers in the World War I era complained of northern cities, of the predominance of the foreign born, and, at the center of their religiously based fears, the rise of the Roman Catholic church. The two predominant southern denominations, the Baptists and Methodists, began as sectarian groups and dissenters. They were attuned to issues of religious liberty and still feared persecution without this protection. World War I highlighted what Baptists, for example, saw as a contrast between Baptist democracy and Roman Catholic autocracy. Baptist churches are radically congregational, vesting autonomy in local churches, with little centralized hierarchy. The Catholic hierarchy, with its seemingly autocratic Pope, disturbed them. Southern Protestants feared the Catholic church and sometimes spoke as if Woodrow Wilson's crusade for democracy should target the Pope as well as the Kaiser.

World War I drew the South out of its isolation and into greater contact with Northerners. By comparing themselves to the North, Southerners now saw

their region as the nation's best hope for preserving and extending evangelical faith. The South was to be the sanctuary for orthodox Protestant values, values embedded in a hegemonic culture. This faith was significant because true believers felt it had always been the basis of "pure Americanism." "Americanism" was a construct that evoked the idea of a special American nationality, the concept that, in this context, brought together regional and national ideas of religious nationalism. For Southerners it meant an American version of Anglo-Saxonism. Anglo-Saxonism involved race. "The South above any other section represents Anglo-Saxon, native-born America," claimed Episcopal Bishop Theodore DuBose Brattan. "No race ever had more passion for liberty than the Anglo-Saxon," wrote Baptist minister Victor I. Masters. In the United States, Masters concluded, "the love for freedom of this race found its fullest expression, and in the South their blood has remained freest from mixture with other strains." The Reverend R. Lin Cave had observed in 1896 that "Southern blood is purely American," by which he meant that the South and Southerners had had less contact with recent immigrants than was true in other American regions.

Finally, though, the religious aspect of Anglo-Saxon Americanism was what most firmly linked southern destiny to American destiny under God. Masters summed up the connection, noting that in the South, "the Anglo-Saxon's devotion to evangelical religion has been less interfered with than in other sections." His Episcopal colleague, Bishop Brattan, agreed: "Should this great body of Anglo-Americans ever cease to be Christian, or become less Christian than it is, the effect upon our entire nation would be disastrous beyond the power of thought to conceive."

By the 1920s, then, Southerners perceived that rationalistic in-

blur the distinction between their church ways and their cultural ways associated with being southern.

The defense of regional orthodoxy had long been a key part of the southern way of life, which religious people had buttressed. White Southerners in the Old South had launched a vigorous proslavery argument that saw the region's peculiar institution as a missionary agency ordained from God to bring Christianity to the slaves. Abolitionists caught in the South were lucky if tar and feathers were the only marks left on them before they left the region.

White Southerners rallied around the Confederate States of America when their leaders seceded from the Union, and after the war, they tried to define an ideology that all "good" Southerners should affirm. The Lost Cause movement honored the Confederacy in spiritual terms:

tellectual forces were threatening their evangelical stronghold. State universities seemed infected by this plague and even seminaries seemed not to have evaded the threat. Now their children's textbooks spoke of apes and humans in the same paragraphs. The complex issues involved became simplified into a dramatic social movement against Darwinism. William Jennings Bryan became the crusader Southerners needed, articulating the deeper issues than just textbooks. "The whole modernistic propaganda rests on evolution," Bryan wrote. "They first reject the miracle and then everything in the Bible that is miraculous or supernatural. As this includes the virgin birth, the deity of Christ and the resurrection, nothing of importance is left. . . ."

Bryan visited Atlanta in 1923 to deliver a fiery plea to the Georgia House of Representatives to restrict "the teaching of Darwinism as a fact." Representative Hal Kimberly soon proclaimed his response: "Read the Bible. It teaches you how to act. Read the hymnbook. It contains the finest poetry ever written. Read the almanac. It shows you how to figure out what the weather will be. There isn't another book that is necessary for anyone to read."

The events in Dayton in the summer of 1925 brought out the fears of the faithful and dramatized the gap between southern orthodoxy and the advanced ideas of the nation's intellectual and cultural centers. Except for the litigation at Dayton, the anti-evolution laws passed in the South during the 1920s were dead letters, but the lack of enforcement did not necessarily signify a retreat by the forces of orthodoxy.

Privately controlled religious schools in the South continued to forbid the teaching of evolutionary theory, and in rural public schools, community opinion and local boards of education saw to it that the Genesis narrative was not impugned. This persistence of religious orthodoxy over scientific naturalism went beyond the South, too. Historian Howard Beale concluded in 1941 that more than one out of three teachers across the nation were "afraid to express acceptance of the theory of evolution." State textbook committees remained cautious in consideration of biology texts for schools, and fundamentalists remained vigilant in expressing their concerns.

The evangelical attitude toward evolutionary theory in the schools in the 1920s was part of a

broader redefinition of southern religious attitudes toward law and society. Through the nineteenth century, rural and small town evangelicals had used church discipline to ensure that a pure church would exist as a bastion of morality in society, a utopian institution separate from the corruption of the world. The pure institution kept itself pure and left the rest of the world to its ways.

The early twentieth century saw the church turning to moral legislation. Evangelicals were now increasingly a part of the modern world, through improved communication and transportation, and through schoolbooks that taught Darwinian science. Evangelicals seemed unable to avoid the corruptions of this larger world. They used moral legislation to try to discipline society, most dramatically in outlawing alcoholic beverages through Prohibition. Anti-evolution laws represented the same orthodox impulse toward using legislation to keep not only individuals but society pure, as the faithful understood purity. But this new technique represented a truly dramatic social difference: wanting to deny drink to anyone in society, for example, was a radical step beyond simply discouraging

anyone in one's church from drinking. In the latter case, the faithful were part of a small community, trying to preserve their limited world from danger. In the former, the faithful were part of a larger world, and they were trying to change the meaning of that world.

In more recent times, American religious people have again mounted crusades against symbols of a changing society. We are now all part of a larger world, a world whose context is not just southern nor even just American. It is too easy to say that conservative evangelicals of the 1920s were simply backward and ignorant. History would suggest that they were correct that modernism, whether in religion or in general culture, did promote a radical insecurity, as old standards toppled and modern people learned to live with an increasingly relative world view. The fears of the southern religious faithful facing a changing society in the 1920s have been replicated in an even more modern world, what we would call a postmodern world, but one with continuing anxieties about even the possibility of maintaining moral certitude.

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Statement of Purpose

Established under the sponsorship of the College of Arts and Science in 1988 and renamed the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities in 1989, the Center promotes interdisciplinary research and study in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Members of the Van-

derbilt community representing a wide variety of specializations take part in the Center's programs, which are designed to intensify and increase interdisciplinary discussion of academic, social, and cultural issues.

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Letters, the semiannual newsletter of the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities, has received an Award of Excellence from CASE, the Council for the Advancement of Education. The award is part of the competition for 1995 and is based on excellence in writing, editing, production, and design. The winning entries were exhibited last spring at a CASE conference in Atlanta and will be permanently kept in an archive at Georgia State University.

The Earlier Millennium

PAUL H. FREEDMAN

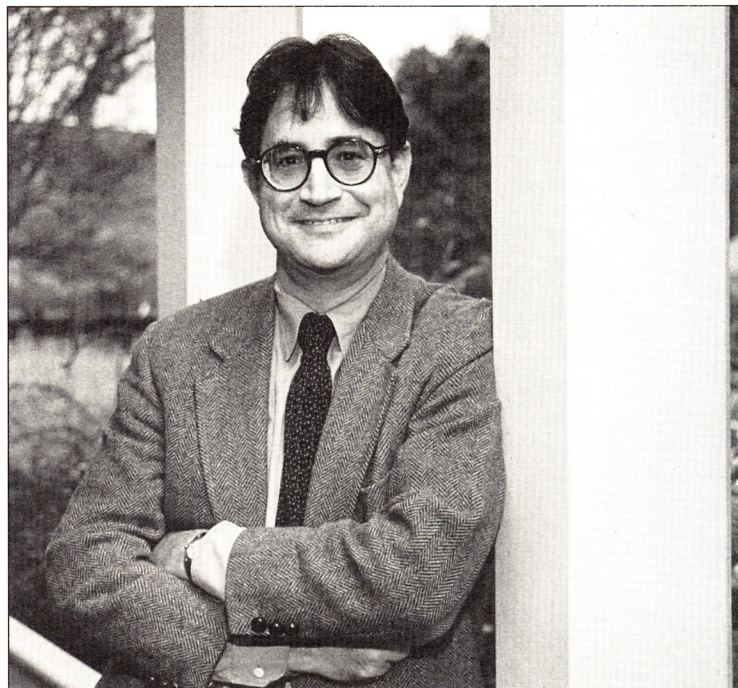
This year's Fellows' seminar at the Humanities Center is concerned with apocalyptic notions and the sense of time, its endings and beginnings, a topic prompted by the impending arrival of 2000 A.D. In the media, the millennial event seems to have prompted only two kinds of stories: an obsession with what to call the first decade of the new century (the "O's," "zeros," "noughts") and the matter of accuracy (the year 2001 is the beginning of the new era, not the turn from 1999 to 2000). Led by Professors Margaret Doody and David Wood, the Fellows have examined issues concerning the rise of apocalyptic fervor surrounding the turn of the century and of the millennium, especially with respect to contemporary culture.

There is, of course, a precedent of sorts within the European system of dating by reference to the year of Christ's birth: the celebrations that attended the year 1000. One would have to wonder if on the eve of the millennium the Europeans, far from hoisting glasses of not yet invented Champagne, were terrified by an expectation of the end of the world. Historians have changed their minds about whether or not there was an apocalyptic climate at the time and the degree to which it was connected to the millennial calendar. Ademar of Chabannes, a monk of Angoulême, and Raoul Glaber, a Burgundian monk, in sermons and historical narratives, describe disasters and terror that inspired the population of southern France. The venerable Carolingian dynasty had been replaced in France by upstarts, culminating with the betrayal of the last Carolingian claimant by erstwhile allies in 991, a deed that reminded contemporaries of Judas. Halley's comet blazed through the sky in the summer of 989; in 992 the date of the Annunciation coincided with Good Friday; as 1000 approached, waves of the frenzy known as St. Anthony's Fire brought on by ergot poisoning (from spoiled

grain) brought on mass hallucinations that seemed to fulfill the prophecy of Revelations 9:5-6. The beginnings of the Peace of God movement to disarm the knights who were the source of so much disorder and misery was started in this era, arising out of a combination of apocalyptic fear and hope brought on by warnings followed by penance and miracles, so ably described in recent works by Richard Landes of Boston University.

And yet most medievalists would tend to dismiss accounts of the supposed fear of the turn of the first millennium. The monastic chroniclers on whom this impression was based wrote at some distance and invented a considerable amount of their stories to publicize and make more vivid the miracles associated with the particular saints' cults of their monasteries. Additionally, the presence of apocalyptic expectation does not mean it was centered on the year 1000. The second coming of Christ has always been a central problem in Christianity, and the last book of the New Testament encourages a hunt for portents that has a similar appeal among many Christians today as it had a thousand years ago.

Perhaps the greatest flaw in positing widespread fear of the year 1000 is the lack of uniformity and even indifference over measurements of time. The custom of dating from the Incarnation, started in sixth-century North Africa and Italy, was adopted by Bede in England and spread to most of Europe by the ninth century. Other systems of reckoning the year were not, however, displaced. Some used the regnal year of a king (thus "in the fifth year of the reign of King Louis") or calculated on the basis of the indiction, a fifteen-year cycle usually beginning with the equivalent of 312 A.D., the year of Constantine's conversion. In Spain, calculations were based on the "era" which began with 38 B.C. ("era millesima octava"



Paul H. Freedman

would equal 970 A.D.). Furthermore, there was very little unanimity about when a new year was supposed to begin. Some calculated from January 1, but the Annunciation (March 25) was far more common and Christmas, Easter, or several days in September were frequently used according to local custom. Finally, in a period that, to put it mildly, was less driven by time calculation than ours, events were thought of in connection with each other (the year of the spring famine, the eclipse) rather than arrayed on an abstract grid of numbers.

Monasteries were certainly quite adept at time calculations both from an Augustinian sense of the passage of sacred history and the practical need to figure out the complex problem of when Easter would occur, which is quite a feat if one cannot simply rely on someone else's calendar. There were unusually intense social and religious movements centered around the year 1000 and in a curious way, medieval historians have replicated, or created themselves, a numerological

mysticism around this event. The standard accounts of the final decay of the ancient world and the beginnings of feudal society give 1000 as the conventional date, as a shorthand (in French historiography, the whole series of changes that are thought to mark the beginning of the Middle Ages properly speaking is expressed as "la mutation de l'an mil"—the change of the year 1000). This convenient coincidence is now being undermined by new interpretations of evidence and different approaches to the utility of such abstractions as "feudal society." At the same time, there is some greater degree of credence given to accounts of apocalyptic movements of the late tenth and early eleventh centuries that might not have had the turn of the millennium as their exclusive motivation, but at least saw the thousandth anniversary of the Incarnation as significant.

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The Cosmology and Eschatology of the *Ghulât*

KATHRYN BABAYAN

My work, in very broad terms, focuses on idealists, optimists and visionaries who believe that justice could reign in this evil world of ours. It explores this sense of immediacy in the desire to experience a utopia on earth. Reluctant to await another existence, perhaps another form, or eternal life ensuing death and resurrection, these men (*ghulât*) who I study, want to hasten the attainment of the apocalyptic horizon of Truth. For them, time is cyclical; the *ghulât* do not see the universe in linear terms of a beginning and an end, but as successive cycles where the end of one era spontaneously flows into the beginning of another. Existence and time are eternal. And they are religious men who maintain the unity of God and invariably yearn to experience God's omnipresence. These spiritually inclined men envisage divinity incarnated in earthly gods, each believer craving to communicate with the divine personally in anticipation of prophetic inspiration and illumination. It is with such a temperament of hope and of continued prophecy that one such group, the Qizilbash (Red Heads) took up arms to fight for Isma'il Safavi, their divinely inspired leader, a venerable godhead in their eyes, to establish Truth and Justice on earth. With Isma'il, it is the added ingredient of charisma that concerns me, an element that so often secures the success of such messianic movements. But alas, it also involves a story of betrayal and of human fragility when confronted with the task of fusing spiritual and temporal power together to ensure a harmonious and egalitarian worldly existence for humankind.

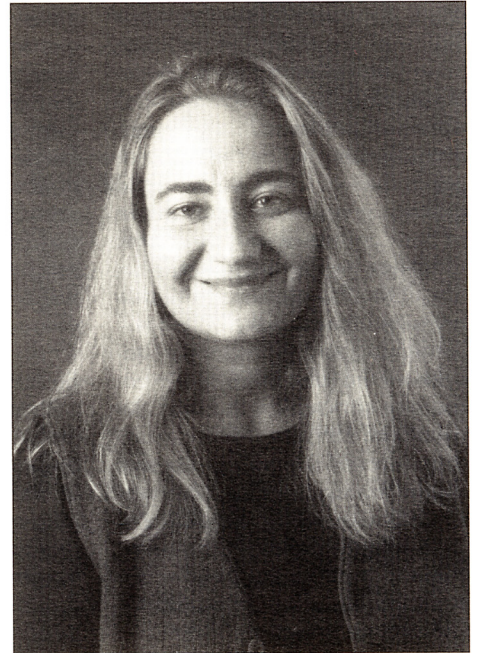
My book attempts to understand how basic issues human beings have been preoccupied with throughout recorded history—where we come from, what our purpose is in this world and in this universe, and where and if we travel from here—animated the spiritual landscape of the Qizil-

bash. What were the particular cultural (social, religious, and political) conditions under which such questions were expressed in the agrarian age and in the geographical and historical setting of early modern Iran, Iraq, and Anatolia? What mixture of traditions did these Qizilbash draw on in the articulation of their syncretic ideals? It is my hope that such a study will shed light on one cultural variety, on a particular option, synthesis, paradigm, and eschatology born out of the age of Late Antiquity: the product of an interaction between the Irano-Semetic and Hellenic cultures. This is the broad outline upon which my study has its inquisitive foundation.

More particularly, I explore the Safavi world (1501-1722), an esoteric chapter in the history of early modern Iran that witnessed the royal enthronement of Isma'il, the spiritual guide of the Safavi order. This mystic (sufi) turned king (shah) claimed to be the reincarnation of a host of prophets (Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad) and kingly heroes (Faridun, Khusraw, Jamshid, and Alexander) from Iran's cultural past. "Prostrate thyself! Pander not to Satan! Adam has put on new clothes, God has come," writes Isma'il in his poetry composed as he, together with his adepts, the Qizilbash, conquered Iran and Iraq (1501). In an attempt to add temporal power to the already existent Safavi spiritual dominion, these Qizilbash allegedly entered the battlefield unarmed, thinking that Isma'il's miraculous powers would shield them. Some are claimed to have devoured men alive in submission and devotion to their godhead. It is not solely on the basis of his personal charisma that Isma'il wielded such power, for he had inherited from his ancestor, the mystic Shaykh Safi al-din (d.1334), the leadership of the Safavi order and, hence, a saintly aura and a spiritual legitimization, which in early modern Islamdom was so

intimately associated with sufism (mysticism) and the dervish culture. Moreover, in the Anatolian context where Isma'il's grandfather, Sultan Junayd (d.1460), had spent over a decade (1448-59) in exile from Ardabil (NW Iran) accumulating Turkman disciples and engaging in holy war against Byzantium, the prestige of this family of saintly men had become imbued with divinity. Indeed, Junayd claimed to be God and his son, Haydar (d.1488), who had introduced the ritual red headgear (hence the name Qizilbash) that symbolized membership in this transformed sufi brotherhood, claimed to be the son of God.

I attempt to understand the religious milieu of the Qizilbash and delineate the web of beliefs that bound them to their Safavi masters—beliefs historians have vaguely termed "extreme Shi'ism." I have adopted a variety of approaches to trace the "spiritual landscape" of Qizilbash Islam, a landscape that was shaped by Islam as a living religion, but was nevertheless incongruous with its textual ideals. I regard this landscape seriously, as a global phenomenon, because a series of similar messianic movements had manifested themselves between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries in the European provinces of the Ottoman empire, as well as in Anatolia, Iraq, Iran, Transoxiana, and India. Safavi historiography, however, has focused on the Qizilbash as political actors, because initially they came to form the military and administrative backbone of the early Safavi empire. In addition, scholars have concentrated on the adopted imperial religion of Twelver Shi'ism, because once Isma'il conquered Iran he altered



Kathryn Babayan

his rhetoric; he adopted the Persian royal title of "shah" and proclaimed Twelver Shi'ism as the religion of his domains. Nevertheless, the nature and origins of Safavi revealed revolutionary beliefs that remain unexplored. Safavi historians have assumed that with the proclamation of Shi'ism as the religion of the Safavi imperium (in 1501), an easy and thorough conversion ensued.

Tensions, however, between the spiritual landscape of Qizilbash Islam and Shi'ism had surfaced from the very inception of Safavi rule. It was not until a century later that the political power of the Qizilbash had waned and Shi'i orthodoxy had received the necessary political sanction to redraw its map of Shi'ism in Safavi Iran; sufism, a tendency so embedded in classical Safavi culture was, then, cast as heretical and expunged from the boundaries of legitimacy. Formalisms began to quench the free-spirited experiment that had given birth to the Safavi idiom. As the intuitive gave way to the cerebral, an age of colloquia between spiritual and temporal, reason and experience,

My work represents an initial effort to reconstruct a system of beliefs that never entered the annals of Islamic history as a coherent body of ideas and practices, but whose doctrines, even today, are adhered to and practiced by communities in Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Anatolia.

mystical and theological came to a close. Since politics and religion were so intimately linked in Safavi Iran, the transformations occurred on all levels; repercussions of the erosion of Qizilbash Islam manifested themselves in the realms of written and oral culture, in forms of sociability, as well as in politics. I believe that a proper assessment of the meaning of change within the realm of religion and politics in Safavi society must consider both as components of a system that embodies behavior and attitudes, as well as ideology. To understand the Qizilbash, religion and politics should be studied as two complementary spheres interacting within a cultural system. For the Qizilbash, a dichotomous line between these two realms did not exist.

The most striking elements that distinguish these types of messianic movements, referred to pejoratively by Islamic heresiographers as the “exaggerators” (*ghulât*), from normative Islam is their particular cosmology and eschatology.* The *ghulât* do not believe in resurrection—one of the five tenets of Shi’i Islam. For them the human being dies but to be reincarnated, returning to this world in a different form. There is no heaven or hell for the *ghulât*. Beyond a recurring cluster of doctrinal precepts, such as the idea of the transmigration of the soul and the belief in the possible incarnation of all or part of the divine in certain men, these movements share a conception of cyclical hiero-history: the notion that prophetic revelation never ceased and a conception of history as a succession of dispensations that would inevitably lead to a Final Era of Unveiled Truth and Utopian Lawlessness on Earth. The advent of the personi-

fication of the Holy Spirit, bearing glad tidings of a new dispensation of social justice, is in the here and now—not at the end of monotheistic time. Beliefs that revelation never ceased, that Muhammad was not the seal of the prophets, and that souls of old prophets could migrate into different human beings at any given time allowed for a constant rejuvenation and continuity of *ghulât* movements in time and space, albeit in varied forms and languages. Not only did it present an alluring platform for aspiring revolutionaries to embrace, but it became a channel through which social and political protest could be voiced.

The theme that runs through my book is the attrition of the Qizilbash. My analysis centers around the dynamics of structural transformations—ideological and institutional—that the Safavi realm had to undergo in the process of its conversion into an orthodox and absolutist empire. I move from the analysis of cabals and coup d’états, through accounts of the moments of emergence of messianic leaders, to the analysis of the formation of vernacular traditions through *hadith* (collection of sayings and acts of Muhammad and the Imams) and storytelling, to the forms of sociability connected with courtly assemblies and coffeehouses of Safavi Iran. I emphasize this cultural change on many levels (courtly, religious, written, and oral) of Iranian society, and show how it is based on the emergence of new paradigms of authority, and on new loci of intellectual socialization.

I explore the spiritual landscape of the Qizilbash in an era when conversion to Shi’ism and the waning of Qizilbash political might was becoming an institu-

tional reality. Shah Abbas I (1587-1629) thoroughly incorporated slaves into the ranks of the military and the central and provincial administrations to counter the autonomous nature of the Qizilbash. Trained at court, these slaves owed allegiance to the shah, as ruler of the Iranian lands, rather than to a spiritual guide whose rule extended into metaphysical domains. Shi’i clerics were to replace the religious role of the Qizilbash. Shah Abbas I patronized the clergy and introduced them into the Safavi court. Shorn of their spiritual aspect, the activities of Safavi kings were now sanctioned so long as they were in accord with the instructions of qualified jurists. At this point some obedient Qizilbash disciples revolted against their master, who had turned into a full-fledged temporal king. I see the language of rebellion both at court and in the provinces—the motifs and symbols evoked in reaction to this betrayal—as revealing aspects of the original nature of Qizilbash Islam.

My work represents an initial effort to reconstruct a system of beliefs that never entered the annals of Islamic history as a coherent body of ideas and practices, but whose doctrines, even today, are adhered to and practiced by communities in Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Anatolia. I have the good fortune of spending this year at the Robert Penn Warren Center for Humanities at Vanderbilt amidst an interdisciplinary medley of scholars who are considering the meaning of time, of beginnings and ends, embedded in different symbolic forms. The fellowship has allowed me time to study *ghulât* movements from the early Islamic era (eighth century through the eleventh century)

more closely and focus on the nature of their spirituality, enabling me to identify the pre-Islamic roots of their belief systems. Many early *ghulât* leaders were *mawâlî* (non-Arab converts to Islam) of Jewish, Christian, gnostic, Buddhist, or Zoroastrian backgrounds. They carried into their understanding and expression of Islam their own perceptions of the cosmos. Such perceptions of time and speculations on the soul are preserved in poetry and epic romances. Alas, these sources remain untapped, because Islamicists have limited themselves to texts emanating from the courtly and religious realms of the legal and theological to reconstruct *ghulât* ideas. All this resonates in our present age, for as I mentioned earlier such groups still exist in the Middle East. The Bahai religion, for example, has its roots in *ghulât* beliefs. The Islamic revolution in Iran (1979) also played on the rhetoric of such messianic expectations, publicly associating Khomeini with the expected messiah who would establish Justice where the injustice of the Pahlavi monarchy reigned. And in this apocalyptic age of ours, we are bound to see revolutionary ideals articulated through such culturally available paradigms.

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*The word *ghuluww* (n.) is derived from the Arabic root “gh-l-w,” literally meaning “to exceed the proper boundary,” hence, *ghâl* (s.)/*ghulât* (pl.) is rendered incorrectly as “extremist.” “Exaggerator” is a more correct rendering of the word. The term *ghuluww* is indeed problematic. *Ghâl* (exaggerator) is a technical term applied pejoratively to individuals with extreme or unorthodox views on the nature of intercessors between a human being and god. For the Shi’i it is the apotheosis of the Imams—those immaculate descendants of Muhammad through his daughter Fâtima. For the Sunnis it is seeing a saintly man (*wah*), a dervish, or a shaykh as a godhead. The term has also been applied rather loosely in different historical contexts to label a variety of dissenters. Despite the ambiguity surrounding the term *ghuluww*, I choose to use it in an effort to make it more specific for the historian of Islamdom.

1996/1997 Humanities Center Fellows

The 1996/97 Fellows Program at the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities is entitled "The Question of Culture." It will be an interdisciplinary investigation of "culture" and how its construction is connected to the demarcation of national, gender, and racial identity. The program will be directed by Jay Clayton, Professor of English, and James A. Epstein, Professor of History. They will be joined by seven Fellows from various academic departments at Vanderbilt University and by the William S. Vaughn Visiting Fellow, the applications for which are currently under review.

JAY CLAYTON is the Spence and Rebecca Webb Wilson Fellow and Professor of English. His most recent book, *The Pleasures of Babel: Contemporary American Literature and Theory* (Oxford University Press, 1994) introduces a wide range of multicultural writings in the 1980s and 1990s. His latest project combines his interests in the 19th century and contemporary literature. He has just completed a manuscript entitled *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace, Or, History in an Age of Cultural Studies*, which focuses on the connections between Victorian culture and post-modernism. He looks at the way that nineteenth-century literature, technology, and consumer practices shed light on aspects of American life in the 1990s, including recent movies, MTV, mall culture, video dating services, and the Internet. He is the co-editor of several books and the author of *Romantic Vision and the Novel* (Cambridge University Press, 1987).

BETH ANN CONKLIN, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, is presently working on a project based on her field research on funeral cannibalism in a South American Indian group. The project aims to understand how the indigenous culture shapes the emotions and behavior associated with a system of ritualized cannibalism. As such, the case study interrogates notions of cultural relativism, both in the assumptions we make about human psychology and the nature of cultural differences. In several recent articles, she has also examined the representation of Amazonian Indian culture in transnational environmental politics, particularly the ways in which the

most effective indigenous activism has been channeled into ethnic identity politics based on a generic essentialism that anthropologists have long questioned. Her most recent articles include "Forging a Middle Ground: Brazilian Indians and Eco-Politics" and "'Thus Are Our Bodies, Thus Was Our Custom': Mortuary Cannibalism in a Native Amazonian Society."

JAMES A. EPSTEIN is the Jacques Voegeli Fellow and Professor of History. His work has concerned working class radicalism and culture in early nineteenth-century England. His most recent book is entitled *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual, and Symbol in England 1790-1850* (Oxford University Press, 1994). Most recently, he has explored in several articles the construction of subjectivity within the culture of Victorian Britain. His current work maps the changing meanings that America has had within British political and cultural discourse during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He is the author of several articles and books, including *The Lion of Freedom: Feargus O'Connor and the Chartist Movement, 1832-1842* (Croom Helm, 1982) and the co-editor of *The Chartist Experience: Studies in Working Class Radicalism and Culture, 1830-1860* (Macmillan, 1982).

YOSHIKUNI IGARASHI, Assistant Professor of History, specializes in the social and cultural history of contemporary Japan. His current project on postwar Japan traces the attempts of certain intellectuals to reintroduce a nationalist discourse and concept of cultural identity back into Japan's political discourse. In postwar Japan, most intellectuals denounced nationalist sentiments which they thought fostered militarism. Moreover, most intellectuals saw culture as coextensive with such nationalism, thereby closing off any other discourse concerning culture. He is interested in examining how these intellectuals provided a more complex notion of culture, identity, and nationalism. His work includes several articles, including "That Which Hermeneutics Cannot Grasp."

KONSTANTIN V. KUSTANOVICH, Associate Professor of Germanic and Slavic Languages, is currently examining cultural transitions in post-Soviet Russia. His project examines how

aspects of Russian culture have remained unchanged in spite of tremendous social and political changes and how new cultural phenomena have appeared in the post-Soviet period. In particular, he focuses on gender roles as two main subcultures whose conflict underlies and is masked by the idea of a unified, national culture. Other foci of his work include the conflict between different ethnic groups within the Russian Federation and the decline of the arts and literature in the face of the revival of religion. He has written many articles on Russian culture and a book entitled *The Artist and the Tyrant: Vasily Askenov's Works in the Brezhnev Era* (Slavic Publishers, 1992).

JANE GILMER LANDERS, Assistant Professor of History, specializes in the cultural impact of Spanish and African contact with Amerindians and the subsequent creation of new multicultural societies in the Americas. Her current project examines the development of free black towns in the Spanish Caribbean in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. She claims that much of the literature that focuses on the black experience of plantation slavery in the nineteenth century overlooks centuries of an earlier, more autonomous, and culturally distinct free African experience in the Spanish colonies of the Caribbean. She studies the cultural practices and kinship networks of these communities and how they facilitated the preservation of African cultures. She is the author of several articles and the co-editor of *The African-American Heritage of Florida* (University of Florida Press, 1995).

RICHARD A. PETERSON, Professor of Sociology, works on the question of the "production of culture." Recently his work has focused on the production of cultural objects and the uses people make of culture. He has most recently finished a manuscript investigating the interplay between audiences, artists, and merchandisers in the production of the cultural object called "country music." Much of his ongoing research investigates the status value of the use of culture in relation to the appreciation of fine arts. Whereas the appreciation of the arts used to be requisite for a higher social status, Peterson claims that since the 1950s the cultural hegemony of the fine arts has

been broken. He is the editor of *The Production of Culture* (Sage Press, 1976) and the author of *The Industrial Order and Social Policy* (Prentice-Hall, 1973).

KAREN SHIMAKAWA, Assistant Professor of English, is concerned with how U.S.-American culture is shaped by and shapes representations of Asian Americans, particularly within the context of the dramatic arts. Her recent work has focused on the representation of the Asian-American body on stage and how national subjectivity intersects with racial and sexual identity, contributing to the construction of a U.S.-American culture. Her claim is that U.S.-American national identity narrowly circumscribes the ways in which we can visualize and understand the Asian American. She argues, in opposition to earlier strategies of Asian-American theater where "false" images are simply replaced with "true" images, that artists must attempt to uncover the limitations of cultural constructions by miming them, representing them on stage, on television, in film, and in photography. She is the author of several articles, including "'fake intimacy': Locating National Subjectivity in Dennis O'Rourke's *The Good Woman of Bangkok*."

MARK A. WOLLAEGER, Associate Professor of English, is currently exploring issues of cultural self-fashioning in a range of twentieth-century novels. These works share a distinctly self-conscious awareness of "Britishness" as a contingent cultural category defined in relation to competing national identities. They register a fundamental tension between the formulation or imposition of particular versions of national identity and forms of disruption or resistance. According to Wollaeger, part of his challenge lies in assessing the kind of work performed by particular novels with respect to the construction and dismantling of cultural identities. By examining a wide range of modernist, popular, and mass texts, he analyzes the ways in which boundaries between various levels and kinds of cultural production are established and how those boundaries influence the reading of particular texts. He is the author of several articles and the book *Joseph Conrad and the Fictions of Skepticism* (Stanford University Press, 1990).