

America250 — Twenty-Seven Voices in American Religious History

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America's religious story is not one stream but many: revival, missions, liberty of conscience, new movements, public preaching, social reform, Pentecostal power, media religion, and political mobilization. These twenty-seven figures give a quick map of the religious forces that shaped the nation.

1770s–1790s

1770s — John Witherspoon. Presbyterian minister, Princeton president, and signer of the Declaration. He joined Reformed Protestant leadership to Revolutionary politics and early national education.

1770s — Francis Asbury. Methodist organizer and tireless bishop. His circuit system and itinerant leadership made Methodism a national frontier movement.

1780s — John Leland. Baptist preacher and religious-liberty advocate. He helped make liberty of conscience and disestablishment central Baptist and American principles.

1790s — Timothy Dwight. Yale president and Congregational minister. His preaching opposed deism and helped shape evangelical revival and Protestant education in the early republic.

1800s

1800s — Adoniram Judson. Baptist missionary to Burma. His career helped make foreign missions a defining feature of American evangelical identity.

1810s — Elizabeth Ann Seton. Catholic founder of the Sisters of Charity. She helped build American Catholic education and became the first U.S.-born Catholic saint.

1820s — Charles Grandison Finney. Revivalist of new measures and public appeals. He tied conversionist preaching to reform, abolition, and moral agency.

1830s — Joseph Smith Jr. Founder of the Latter-day Saint movement. His new scripture, prophetic authority, and communal ambitions created a major American-born religion.

1840s — Ellen G. White. Adventist prophetic authority. Her writings shaped Adventist doctrine, health reform, education, publishing, and global missions.

1850s — Henry Ward Beecher. Famous Protestant preacher at Plymouth Church. His pulpit gave national religious force to antislavery, reform, and liberal evangelicalism.

1860s — Henry McNeal Turner. AME bishop, Reconstruction political leader, and advocate of Black self-determination. He made the Black church a platform for religious and civic leadership after emancipation.

1870s — Dwight L. Moody. Mass evangelist and institution builder. His campaigns, schools, music partnerships, and publishing shaped modern evangelical ministry.

1880s — C. I. Scofield. Popularized dispensational premillennialism through the *Scofield Reference Bible*. His notes shaped evangelical readings of prophecy, Israel, and the church.

1890s — Walter Rauschenbusch. Leading Social Gospel theologian. He argued that Christianity must confront social sin, economic injustice, and institutional evil.

1900s

1900s — William J. Seymour. Leader of the Azusa Street revival. His interracial mission and Spirit-baptism preaching helped launch global Pentecostalism.

1910s — Harry Emerson Fosdick. Liberal Protestant preacher and modernist voice. Riverside Church and his sermons made liberal Christianity nationally visible.

1920s — Reinhold Niebuhr. Public theologian of Christian realism. His work shaped Protestant ethics, politics, foreign policy debates, and critiques of liberal optimism.

1930s — Norman Vincent Peale. Positive-thinking preacher and bestselling author. He blended Protestant piety, psychology, optimism, and self-help culture.

1940s — Billy Graham. The twentieth century's most visible evangelist. His crusades, broadcasting, publishing, and political access made evangelicalism a global public force.

1950s — Oral Roberts. Pentecostal healing evangelist and media builder. He helped move Pentecostal and charismatic religion into national visibility.

1950s — Martin Luther King Jr. Baptist preacher and civil-rights leader. His public theology made the Black church central to America's moral language about race and justice.

1970s — Jerry Falwell Sr. Founder of Moral Majority and Liberty University. He became a central architect of the Religious Right.

1980s — James Dobson. Focus on the Family founder. His media, advice, and activism shaped conservative evangelical views of family, sexuality, parenting, and public life.

1990s — Rick Warren. Saddleback pastor and author of *The Purpose Driven Life*. His church-growth methods shaped megachurch evangelical leadership.

2000s

2000s — Joel Osteen. Lakewood pastor and media preacher. He popularized optimistic, therapeutic, prosperity-adjacent Christianity for a mass audience.

2010s — Beth Moore. Evangelical Bible teacher and author. Her ministry gave conservative Protestant women a national teaching platform and later became a flashpoint in evangelical debates.

2020s — Pope Leo XIV / Robert Prevost. U.S.-born pope and global Catholic leader. His election makes American Catholic formation part of worldwide papal leadership.