



The New Holland Honey Eaters

present

‘A Christ- Haunted Land’ **The American South and Fundamentalism**

In the 17th century, religion was a serious matter indeed. During those turbulent hundred years, Britain had no fewer than seven monarchs and went through the trauma of religious-inspired civil war and dictatorship. It was also the time of British settlement of North America, with most of the original thirteen American colonies being established along religious lines as various denominations, fleeing persecution, came hoping for freedom to follow their faiths. There were the Puritans in Massachusetts, Dissenters in Rhode Island, Dutch Reformed in New York, Quakers in Pennsylvania, Catholics in Maryland and Anglicans in Virginia and the Carolinas. In addition, Baptists, Anabaptists, Amish, Moravians, Huguenots, Scots-Irish Presbyterians, and Wesleyans (to name but a few), quickly made the New World their home.

This broad denominational mix combined with the geographical realities of the new nation to exert a profound influence on its culture; as early as 1835, Alexis de Tocqueville saw the effect of religion on the American character, noting that “...that they hold it to be indispensable to the maintenance of republican institutions. This opinion is not peculiar to a class of citizens or to a party, but it belongs to the whole nation and to every rank of society...”. Over the years,

religion has maintained its hold on the American psyche, evolving as it has coped with national questions of race, indigenous peoples, sectionalism and civil war, colonial expansion, industrial revolution, international relations and massive immigration. One of the results of that evolution has been the rise of Fundamentalism, and although it is a nationwide phenomenon, it is particularly strong in the ‘Christ-haunted land’ (to borrow writer Eudora Welty’s evocative phrase) that is the American south.

In parallel with religion, there also developed in the south diverse and dynamic musical forms, including shape-note hymnody, Afro-American spirituals, jubilee quartets and gospel. These in turn have had a huge influence on secular musical styles including old-time country music, ragtime, blues, jazz, bluegrass and rock. It would be no exaggeration to say that generations of southerners learned to sing in three-or-four-part harmony on Sundays, even if, during the rest of the week, they honed those skills in string bands or jug bands, on minstrel stages or simply on their back porches.

Today *The New Holland Honey Eaters* (Rebecca Gottschalk, Stan Gottschalk, Jane Ray and Steve Ray) will tell the story of southern religion from a musical and social perspective. They will use some 20 tunes and songs drawn from a wide range of traditional musical genres, both secular and sacred, and will illustrate the tale with slides and readings from historical sources.

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