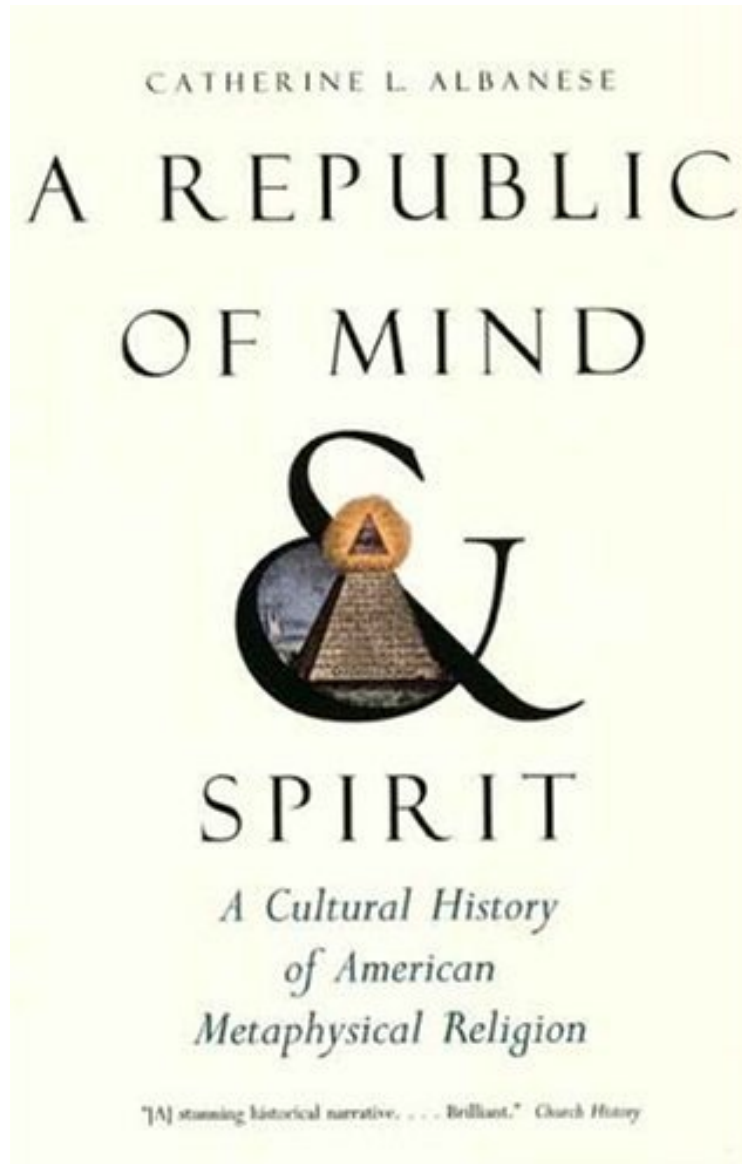


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# A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion

Catherine L. Albanese

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Catherine L. Albanese : A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. FascinatingBy AnonymousThis is an important history of American

metaphysical religion; however, this book is somewhat overwhelming in its scope: being a synthesis of metaphysical religion from the 1400s through the 20th century. When relevant, Albanese traces the roots of metaphysical thought all the way back to its ancient origins. It is overwhelming not only in scope of time covered, but in the variety of faith movements that are given attention. At times Albanese argues for a specifically Americanized version of metaphysical beliefs rooted in other cultures. Without a conversant knowledge of the foreign manifestations, it can be difficult for the reader to judge how exactly the American version differs, but Albanese always clearly defines what the American version is. This is a very ambitious and admirable book, and a transformative work for the field of American religious history. 18 of 19 people found the following review helpful. Not for everyone! By Paul Giurlanda As another reviewer has noted, this is a dense tour of the field. If you're a casual reader of religious matters, you'll find this tough going--it's definitely an academic work, with 80 pages of footnotes. I think the author, who is highly regarded in her field, has done about as good a job as can be done in one book. The material is so voluminous that the book at times reads like a series of encyclopedia entries. She carefully shows the roots of the American "new age" in the Hermetic tradition, the origin of which is itself lost in mist and controversy. If there's a theme, it's that the American appropriation of the metaphysical tradition reflects American optimism and American "combinativeness," the tendency to take whatever works and use it, regardless of its source. A minor criticism would be that she over-emphasizes the idea of combinativeness. In my view, all philosophies and religions that spill out of one culture or language inevitably do this. If Christianity isn't "combinative," I don't know what the word means. To conclude: if you consider yourself an intellectual and are interested in the topic, you have to read this book, or at least dip into it to see what Albanese says on a topic. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great! By J. Laurel A dense, incredibly well-researched, fascinating piece of work. It's not my field of research, sometimes goes a bit over my head--but I'd rather have the depth and ability to return as I learn more. From what I can tell (I'm in American literature), likely a revolutionary work in religious history.

This path-breaking book tells the story of American metaphysical religion more fully than it has ever been told before, along the way significantly revising the panorama of American religious history. Catherine L. Albanese follows metaphysical traditions from Renaissance Europe to England and then America, where they have flourished from colonial days to the twenty-first century, blending often with African, Native American, and other cultural elements. The book follows evolving versions of metaphysical religion, including Freemasonry, early Mormonism, Universalism, and Transcendentalism and such further incarnations as Spiritualism, Theosophy, New Thought, Christian Science, and reinvented versions of Asian ideas and practices. Continuing into the twentieth century and after, the book shows how the metaphysical mix has broadened to encompass UFO activity, channeling, and chakras in the New Age movement and a much broader new spirituality in the present. In its own way, Albanese argues, American metaphysical religion has been as vigorous, persuasive, and influential as the evangelical tradition that is more often the focus of religious scholars' attention. She makes the case that because of its combinative nature its ability to incorporate differing beliefs and practices metaphysical religion offers key insights into the history of all American religions.

"Anyone with an interest in American belief systems and contemporary trends will be well rewarded by reading Albanese's book." David Nartonis, *Christian Science Monitor* About the Author Catherine L. Albanese is professor and chair, Department of Religious Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara, and former president of the American Academy of Religion. She lives in the Santa Barbara area.