

# **In God We Trust?**

**America and Religion - Student Conference Volume**



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# Editorial Foreword

In his 1630 sermon *A Model for Christian Charity*, delivered to his followers on a ship *en route* to the New World, Puritan leader John Winthrop famously drew a parallel between what Jesus pronounced to be the essential character of Christianity in his Sermon on the Mount and what Winthrop himself saw as the ultimate ideal of the English settlers:

*For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world.<sup>1</sup>*

Besides living up to his own expectations by founding and successfully governing the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Winthrop also made religion inseparable from a wide range of American intellectual traditions as this analogy became the epitaph of the notion of American exceptionalism. From the early Colonial period on, the issue of faith and religious morality has been present, one way or another, in every aspect of American public life, and as of 2016, it apparently continues to do so. Therefore, it might be safe to assert that the satisfactory understanding of a given American public issue necessarily involves, at the very least, a brief gaze towards its religious connotations.

Governed by this conviction, a few MA students, myself included, at the Department of Religious Studies, and the Institute of English and American Studies at the University of Szeged had decided to organize a joint student conference with the title “In God We Trust? – America and Religion” – an idea warmly received and whole-heartedly supported by both academic units. Besides hoping to enhance inter-departmental cooperation between the two, the primary aim of the conference was to provide an opportunity for master’s and doctoral students concerned with religion and American history and culture to present and discuss their individual research. Emphasizing the interdisciplinary nature of the event, we called for theoretical and analytical papers in history and sociology focusing on religious phenomena across the American continent. Participants were welcomed from varying fields of study; besides quality, there were no restrictions on their choice of subject.

After a less-than-quiescent organizing process during which we applied for and received support to the Embassy of the United States in Budapest, the conference was held in Szeged, on June 13, 2016 and, it might not be overly confident to say, with great success. The variety of topics, the commitment and curiosity of young researchers, and the contributions of senior department members and other visitors during the lively discussions created a unique and inspiring atmosphere.

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1 John Winthrop, *A Model for Christianity*, 1630. Source: [http://winthropsociety.com/doc\\_charity.php](http://winthropsociety.com/doc_charity.php) Last accessed: July 5, 2016.

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So inspiring in fact, that we have decided to realize our final goal and to compile the finest presentations in written form and make them available to all who might be interested. In accordance with the most recent trends in academic publishing and our own commitment to the idea of hindrance-free distribution of knowledge, we have decided to publish the conference volume in an open access form, online and free of charge, with a small number of print versions to commemorate the occasion and to provide for the libraries of the participants' home institutions. As editor, it is my firm belief that the result of our efforts are worth reading and may contribute to more enhanced student research activity at the University in Szeged and elsewhere. Special thanks are due to Professor Zoltán Vajda, and Zoltán Lengyel, for their reviews of the papers closely related to their own fields and their generosity to offer their expertise. Thanks are also due to the other members of the organizing committee, Erika Anita Takács and Ádám Szendrei, without whom the idea of the conference could not have come into being.

I would also like to express my gratefulness towards the Student Union of the Faculty of Arts, who offered free printing for the promotion materials of the conference, and also the buffet furring the event. I am especially thankful for the support provided by the United States Embassy of Budapest, who provided us with a generous grant supporting the conference and the publication of our volume and with this provided a solid base for students of various fields, concerned with American history, society and culture, to pursue their research and share their results with their fellows, for scrutiny, for praise, and for input.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Associate Professor Anna Fenyvesi, Director of the Institute of English and American Studies, for her work as the language editor of this volume, and for the tireless work and countless hours she devoted to the whole project. Similarly, I would like to thank Professor András Máté-Tóth, Head of the Department of Religious Studies, who did not only contribute to the volume but also reviewed the majority of the papers in their initial form. I'm greatly indebted to both of them for the unwavering support they provided from the very beginning.

Márton Tóke, editor