

Christian Pragmatism

Christian Pragmatism:
An Intellectual Biography of
Edward Scribner Ames, 1870–1958

By

W. Creighton Peden

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IN MEMORIAM

“Frissy” McKnight Peden
1944–2008

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	ix
Historical Context.....	1
Biographical	7
Theology from the Standpoint of Functional Psychology (1906).....	23
Psychology of Religious Experience (1910)	27
Divinity of Christ (1911)	43
Mystic Knowledge (1914).....	51
The Higher Individualism (1915)	55
The New Orthodoxy (1918)	63
Beyond Protestantism (1919)	71
Religion in the New Age (1920).....	73
Religion in Terms of Social Consciousness (1921).....	75
Unsectarian Membership in the Local Congregation (1921).....	77
The Validity of the Idea of God (1921)	79
Religious Values and the Practical Absolute (1922)	83
Letter to Alexander Campbell (1922).....	87
What is Religion (1923)	89
The Religion of Immanuel Kant (1924)	91
Religion and Philosophy (1928)	93
What Salvation Can the Church Offer Today? (1928)	97
Locke (1928)	99
Religion (1929).....	101
Religious Values and Philosophical Criticism (1929)	133
Imagery and Meaning in Religious Ideas (1932).....	137

Letters to God and the Devil (1933)	141
Three Great Words of Religion (1933).....	153
Christianity and Scientific Thinking (1934)	155
The Religious Response (1934).....	157
Man Looks at Himself or Personality Pictures (1935).....	159
The Philosophical Background of the Disciples (1936)	161
A Pragmatist's Philosophy of Religion (1936).....	165
Liberalism in Religion (1936)	175
The Reasonableness of Christianity (1937).....	179
This Human Life (1937)	183
The Philosophical Background of the Disciples (1937)	197
A New Interpretation of The Will to Believe (1937).....	201
When Science Comes to Religion (1938).....	205
Religious Implications of John Dewey's Philosophy (1939).....	209
Training for Wisdom (1940).....	213
Encompassing Ames' Primary Ideas	221
Evaluation.....	231
Notes.....	237
Bibliography	253
Books.....	253
Index.....	257

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this work is to expose the life and the philosophical and religious thought of Edward Scribner Ames. In order to see the development of Ames' thought, we will consider his books according to when they were published. Selected articles will also appear according to their dates in order to broaden the scope of our understanding of the issues and concepts as they evolved throughout Ames' career. The volume will end with a conclusion that encompasses the key concepts which Ames developed and an evaluation of his contribution. Ames was a significant churchman as well as a distinguished philosopher and administrator. Our primary focus will not include the hundreds of Ames' writings which were published in Disciples' periodicals, leaving these writings to a Disciple who can place Ames' denominational contributions within the evolution of the Christian Church. For a complete list of Ames' publications, check the web site: www.pragmatism.org.

Superscript numbers in the text refer to endnotes. When a reference is made to a document for the first time, publication information is included in that endnote. Each referenced document is given a symbol, so that additional endnotes that refer to that same document will only give its symbol and the appropriate page number(s).

For the past fifty plus years I have been working on the Chicago School in Theology and in Philosophy. Ames' contributions are so varied and significant, that I have been amazed that so much could be accomplished in one life. As a graduate student at the University of Chicago and interested in the Chicago School in Philosophy and Religion, I was strongly influence by Edward Scribner Ames, Albert Eustace Haydon and Henry Nelson Wieman and find myself after these many years returning to these thinkers as I reflect on the development of my own thoughts.

When one is old and travel is difficult, amassing research materials is dependent upon many people. I am especially indebted to Mary Ann Sloan of the Hudson Library in Highlands, NC, to Adam Bohanan of the Meadville/Lombard Theological Library for supplying the articles and books needed, and to Becky Bohanan, a divinity student, for photo copying the unpublished words of E. S. Ames. Appreciation is expressed for the assistance provided by the research librarians at the University of Chicago Library. I am also indebted to Karen Hawk for her editorial

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W. Creighton Peden
—Winter, 2011

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Disciples of Christ (Christian Church) emerged from similar movements in the early 1800s, one in Kentucky and another in western Pennsylvania that rebelled against the rigid denominationalism of that period. For example, a dogmatic sectarianism kept members from different denominations from sharing in a common communion service and often kept different groups within the same denomination from taking communion together. These movements also shared a rejection of the use of creeds for determining one's membership or fellowship and the right to take communion.

It is interesting to note that the leadership in both movements against dogmatic sectarianism shared a common Scots' heritage. Barton W. Stone and Walter Scott were Presbyterian leaders of the movement in Kentucky, with Scott having been trained at the University of Edinburgh. Desiring to shed denominational labels, Stone and Scott favored a name for their movement that was scriptural and inclusive. They called themselves simply as "Christians."¹ Thomas and Alexander Campbell, a father and son team, were Baptist leaders of the movement in western Pennsylvania. Both men had trained at the University of Glasgow. Sharing similar reasons in selecting a name for their two groups, the Campbells simply called themselves Disciples of Christ, feeling that the name "Christian" was somewhat presumptuous.²

Although these movements can be described as American expressions of a frontier religion, they differed from other frontier religions in that their founders were educated as classical scholars who could read the New Testament in Greek. From time to time these founders also taught Greek and Latin, as well as French and German. They supported general education for all persons and considered higher education a necessity for the growth of their fellowships. From their beginnings, these movements sought to establish colleges. The first was Bacon College in Kentucky, which emphasized the sciences. Francis Bacon's name was selected to reflect the beginning of the modern era, which these movements reflected. Bethany College in West Virginia was founded by Alexander Campbell and also emphasized science, as well as bringing Christian education to all students. The undergirding conviction of these colleges was that truth is to be found in all disciplines; therefore Disciples were encouraged to seek the

truth which sets us free in all areas of learning. This emphasis on higher education continued and by 1850 there were over ten colleges established to serve the expanding growth of the Disciples.

The heritage of Disciples is seen in their considering themselves as reformers for a free non-creedal form of Christianity in which a union of all Christians was advocated. They preached an intelligible but simple form of faith which appealed to practical persons. Instead of condemning other interpretations as heresies, they viewed them as new expressions of faith. The dominant historical influence of Disciples was the Renaissance and not the Reformation. It was from the English Enlightenment, as seen in the contributions of Bacon, Locke, and Newton, that new ways of thinking enriched the foundation principles of Disciples who sought a religion based on a more intelligent and reasonable reading of the Bible. All books in the Bible were to be studied from the perspective of their dates, authorship, cultural context, style and purpose. This was the approach that is now known as "higher criticism." This approach was illustrated in Alexander Campbell's famous *Sermon on the Law* in which he postulated that the two Testaments represent different "dispensations."

These leaders were influenced by the Renaissance acceptance of the Greek notion of the dignity and worth of all citizens, which led them to reject human depravity and original sin. Ames later noted that "the doctrine of predestination and election was vigorously rejected in favor of individual moral responsibility and power of choice according to the opportunities, education, and 'lights' of each person."³ Other doctrines flowed from human depravity, such as salvation being possible only by an act of divine grace. All these doctrines were rejected by Disciples, who focused on the life and teachings of Jesus. Whoever accepted Jesus' teachings in faith and desired to pattern their lives after them was a Christian with the assurance of divine mercy and fidelity. Thus, individuals are involved in their own salvation based on intelligible action which provided greater incentives for living a Christian life. Conversion for them was more like become a citizen of a country. There were steps to be taken and allegiances to follow. When these occurred, one became an adopted member of the society with all rights, privileges, and responsibilities.

The church was considered a voluntary association of those seeking to live by the teachings of Jesus. By establishing a voluntary association, no ecclesiastical structure could be accepted that tried to impose itself upon local authorities. Local initiatives and experimentations in an effort to promote religious ends were encouraged. The Disciples postulated a strong sense of individualism in line with the Protestant principle of the right to

private judgment and interpretation of the scriptures. Thus, the ideal for Disciples was a religious fellowship in which differences are not just tolerated but incorporated in the interest of growth and efficiency.

The Disciples have been committed to the union of Protestant Christians so that they might present a firm institutional presence as does the Roman Catholic Church. It is questionable whether this dream was or could be a reality, given their strong emphasis on individualism, the right to private judgment, and local congregational control as a voluntary association. Loving ones enemies and those with whom one disagrees is a noble ideal, but it is questionable whether such love can provide enough practical agreement to sustain a voluntary association. The spirit of democracy evident in the Disciples' movement was basically the same in the American political process, as both sought for the people to direct their own lives premised on the reasonableness and cooperation of the people. This democratic faith failed to support the traditional differences established between the specialized professional ministry and the laity.

Although the Disciples in principle sought union with Protestant Christian churches, in reality they were seeking a reformation not of Catholicism but of Protestant churches. Their reformation would restore primitive Christianity with the focus on the spirit of Christ instead of a set of rules or forms. All doctrines and forms were rejected as essential for being a Christian. "No power of clergy, or of councils, of bishops or of secretaries, should rule over the conscience of the individual or of the local church."⁴ This democratic religion premised on reasonableness and cooperation of people was strengthened by the rise of modern science, which Ames considered as the most striking fruit of the Renaissance. Francis Bacon supported the Disciples' rejection of metaphysics and traditional theology, confident that we could control nature in order to serve our wants. What made this possible was the revolutionary method of modern science. Calvinism and Lutheranism were oriented to the medieval world view, but the founders of the Disciples employed higher criticism, modern science, and the common-sense philosophy of the Enlightenment, especially as presented by John Locke, as a basis for their interpreting religion.

This renunciation of old forms of religious thought is more clearly seen in the Disciples understanding of what loyalty to Jesus meant. The traditional view was that Jesus must be conceived as supernaturally divine which is also revealed in his miraculous activities. The problem with traditional theology is that it began with an idea of a supernatural God which required a conception of Jesus which conformed to this perspective of God. The Disciples, in their practical, common-sense approach, began

with the person and life of Jesus and let this foundation determine the idea of God. The Disciples did not feel a cleavage between humans and God, as is evident in Calvin's theology. Ames explained: "For them, in his natural state, man was not completely alienated from God; nor was God, in his holiness completely transcendent beyond man. It was a father and son relationship. God was thought able to make his will clear to man, and man was thought able to understand that will sufficiently to be guided by it and to follow it."⁵ The Disciples rejected the separation of the sacred and the secular of traditional theology. They have always viewed nature and humans as God's creation, with the laws of nature being just as divine as those of the spiritual realm. The contrast of the sacred and secular in modern times is due to the false secularism of science. If science is viewed properly as a method of understanding and controlling the forces of nature and human nature, science is understood as an ally in seeking the goods of life. Certainly science may be used for negative purposes, but increasing science promotes human welfare. If life can be integrated in support of constructive ideals, the best possible religion will occur. For the Disciples, an objective of religion should be enhancing the natural goods of life in abundance so that the life of all members of society would be enriched. The separation between the secular and the sacred is based on outmoded theology and inadequate ministers who fail to appreciate the power for good inherent in the vast number of educated and social enlightened men and women. It was a goal of Disciples to support in their interpretation of religion the social idealism related to the life and teachings of Jesus.

The question of slavery was a crucial issue for Disciples. Alexander Campbell said the issue was one of opinion, since scripture did not make slavery incompatible with being either a master or a slave, although he considered it to be an economic evil. However, in time most Disciples rejected slavery because it violated "the principles and tendencies of the teaching of the New Testament."⁶ Jesus had made clear the contrast between the old and new interpretation of moral obligations, noting that the old was fulfilled by the new.

Disciples had a distinctive view of conversion as they considered it in a more practical and intelligible fashion as a change of direction, of purpose and of allegiance. The key is to what one is converted. The Disciples were primarily concerned with Christian union, but a union that would only be real when it is based on intelligence, mutual support and a free fellowship. Ames postulated that such a union could only be based on the quality of love. "That this quality of love may come to full flower in human life is proved by all those who manifest it, and that it is capable of being radiated and cultivated in further ranges of human life in the reasonable faith of all

who believe in its value and in the susceptibility of mankind to enlightenment and refinement. It is the soul of religion and the strength of every religious movement in the degree it is presented.”⁷ Before the Disciples can bring this union to others, it was essential that they experiment with union amongst themselves and gain an understanding of the practice and spirit of union. Ames suggested three ways for enhancing the spirit of union. One way was for the Disciples to engage in the great social causes of the time. A second way was to develop attitudes and conditions which strengthen the family in piety, forgiveness, and social idealism. A third way was for each Disciples church to evaluate their characteristics which may serve union.

From early in the nineteenth century neo-orthodox theology repackaged the old theological tradition based on human depravity. It was impossible to develop a Christian union on the basis of this theology which holds as a basic assumption that humans are incapable of a committed and vital fellowship of love. Even divine grace cannot always make a saint out of a sinner. The neo-orthodox do not trust their own scholarship for understanding the intelligibility of the scriptures, proclaiming some scripture as mythology to cover their inability to determine its meaning. Neo-orthodoxy also fails to fully grasp the importance of science to modern people. As science reveals the secrets of nature, we begin to understand that humanitarianism provides more adequate understanding of humans and of God. God has provided humans with intelligence, which includes science. To reject science because of the world’s evils is to reject God who is the source of our intelligence and of the world.

Disciples are neither Trinitarian nor Unitarian as they interpret God based on the personality and teaching of the historical Jesus. They made no distinction between clergy and laity, with any member able to administer any ordinance. Conversion is a natural process of turning to Christ. They employed the New Testament as the primary guide for Christians, while stressing the right to private interpretation of scriptures. Salvation is a process of growth, which encourages experimentation. On the basis of these points, Disciples were able to practice union within their congregations. They supported missionary activities and employed literature from different traditions when appropriate. They invited all to participate with them in communion and their practical activities in support of important social movements.

The Disciples had an amazing growth from beginning with ten members in 1812. By 1822 the Disciples had reached 20,000 members; by 1850 there were 120,000 Disciples; by 1900 over one million persons had

become Disciples; and by 1940 Disciples included one million and eight hundred thousand members. It should be noted that young children were not included within these numbers. From these perspectives, we gain an understanding of the world into which Edward Scribner Ames was born and reared, and to which he provided important leadership in American philosophy and liberal religious thought.

BIOGRAPHICAL

Edward Scribner Ames was born in Eau Claire, Wisconsin on April 21, 1870, the youngest of four children. His parents were from New England, where his father, Lucius Bowles Ames, was a shoemaker before attending New Hampton College in New Hampshire. To cover his expense while in college, Lucius Ames taught singing classes in various towns in the area. While teaching in Plattsburg, New York, one of his pupils was Adaline Scribner, with whom love flowered and they married. He became acquainted with the teachings of Alexander Campbell through the Disciples of Christ in West Rupert, Vermont. Taken with their freedom from creeds and sectarianism and their commonsense approach to understanding the Bible, he became the minister of the Disciples in West Rupert in 1864.

Following the Civil War, the Ames family moved to Eau Claire, Wisconsin. The father held various jobs, such as a fruit farmer, in between serving small churches. His longest pastorate of four years was in Toulon, Illinois. Young Scribner remembers these four years as the happiest of his childhood, “where I learned to throw curves and to catch the ball with my bare hands.”⁸ It was in Toulon that he became aware of religious influences, recalling “that the greatest religious influence of my childhood was the mood of piety in home and church.”⁹ It was from his early childhood experiences that he gained the conviction “that religion bound people together in closer bonds than any other interest.”¹⁰

The Ames family of six was always confronting the threshold of poverty, but their economic situation did not detract from a happy home life. Young Ames recalled one of the great events of his life was when a small yellow dog, almost frozen, was whining and scratching at their front door. His mother let the dog inside and Ames and the dog immediately bonded as best friends. He recalled: “my dog, Trip filled a real place in my soul and remains yet the symbol of dumb affections and good fellowship.”¹¹

At the age of eleven, Ames’ family settled in Davenport, Iowa. What impressed him most in this new environment were the river and the hills. Hours were spent with a friend watching the river and the men handling the various ships’ cargoes. One day the news spread that a ship had wrecked on stone piers with the crew lost. Young Ames stood by the river,

wondering and depressed by this tragic event. He was moved by the fact that life which had disappeared in the river made no difference to the stream. At this age he also discovered in his father's library two volumes, entitled *Arctic Explorations* by Elisha Kent Kane. He noted that "the simple woodcuts stirred my soul: great ice fields and glaring snow, dog sleds and fur-covered men. The pictures bore out stories of hardship and privation."¹²

When Ames was twelve he encountered death first hand, when his older sister brought her husband home to die. All accepted that this illness was God's will, but to Ames this was a mystery which caused him to realize that tragedy could come to his own family. Another event that year brought a different experience of the realization that terrible things can happen to his family, and especially to him. An older boy provoked Ames into a fight where it was very obvious that he was beaten. The principal of the school sent a note home to his parents explaining the situation. Ames' mother was brokenhearted with her sense of family pride wounded. He noted: "I felt I had brought disgrace upon us all. The immediate result was a little better control of a hasty temper and a more wholesome respect for the other fellow. Both these experiences helped me toward the next step."¹³

In June at the age of twelve, Ames accompanied his father who was to preach in a small town where they had previously lived. On the ride to the town, Ames told his father that he had decided to join the church. He recalled: "As I sat by an open window in the church, the beauty of the world grew on me and a religious mood deepened in me... At the close of the sermon, when the customary 'invitation' was given, I went forward. He asked me the one simple question: 'Do you believe in Jesus Christ?'... That afternoon we went out in the country where I had hunted, to the river where I had gone fishing and swimming, and I was baptized. Peace and happiness filled me, and a new comradeship with my father. My sins were washed away. Perhaps they were not great, but to me release from them was salvation... I felt closer to Christ and to all the good spirits who had fought and labored in his cause... I was setting forth upon a far journey."¹⁴

When Ames was fourteen the family returned to Toulon where his father had been recalled for a second pastorate. He felt that he should have a job in order to contribute to the needs of the family. The job available was in a general store earning seventeen dollars a month. He opened in the morning, cleaned the store, delivered packages, as well as selling plugs of tobacco to farmers and calico to their wives and daughters. In the winter he was responsible for the furnace, which required many hours in the dark cellar. Ames considered selling to be fun and this job provided a sense of

importance to him. The store remained a symbol for Ames of hard work, but he valued most the contact with a wide diversity of people. "I learned for the first time the most important lessons of enterprise, hard work, patience, and courtesy in practical dealings."¹⁵ From that one year of work, while living at home, Ames had been able to save one hundred dollars, which enabled him to pay tuition at college for ten years.

In the spring of his fifteenth year, the Ames family moved to Des Moines, Iowa, in order that young Scribner and his sister, Mattie, might attend Drake University. Having only the equivalent of one year of high school, he spent his first year at Drake in the preparatory department. During his five years at Drake he completed the college degree and took one year of graduate work.

As with many college students, it was necessary for Ames to earn money during the summer in-between his course work and he gained experience in a variety of enterprises. One summer, he and a friend, Will Reynolds, decided to be traveling salesmen, with their product being Kilbourn Brothers' stereoscopes and views. At first there were few sales, but in time they gained more confidence and skill and were able to secure larger orders. During another vacation period Ames sold two dollar memberships for a circulating library with over two hundred volumes. He later became a general agent for this library, with commissions received from other fellows working for him. In one town, a group of citizens became upset upon realizing that if they had pooled their money, they could have bought the books for their community, although they did not take into account that without the missionary sales agents they would have continued without the basic works of literature, the citizens' indignation increased, and they sent word to the sheriff in the next town to arrest Ames. Fortunately, Ames had eluded the sheriff without knowing it.

On July 6, 1887, a very important event occurred in Ames' life. He had canvassed the village of De Soto for subscriptions where he had received the names of several families who lived out from the village who might subscribe. Ames got a ride on a hay wagon part way, and then started walking. As the road turned, he saw in the distance a brick home. After receiving a subscription from the lady of the house, he was introduced to her daughter, Mable Van Meter, who would enter Drake in the fall. "Three years of college courtship were to follow, then three years of engagement before we were married on July 6, 1893, in the Brick house."¹⁶

At Drake, Ames took the classical course which focused on Greek, Latin, mathematics, history, literature, logic, morals and the history of philosophy. He noted that "the work was all very elementary, superficial, and hurried."¹⁷ It was the activities outside of the classroom which were

most valuable for Ames' education. The Philomathian Literary Society provided his most important educational experiences. The Society met every Saturday night with programs including orations, declamations, readings, speeches, music and a debate. Ames recalled: "The glorious Saturday nights in old Philo were the hot and formative times of our young lives. Studies in English were the only ones which had vital and constant significance for that real world."¹⁸ With no organized athletics, the big event of the academic year was the oratorical contest, with the winner representing Drake in an interstate contest.

Ames was editor of the *Delphic*, the college newspaper. Through the exchange department of the *Delphic*, the paper's staff was in communication with many other colleges in different parts of the country. This exchange of information was important to Ames because it introduced him to Eastern universities which led to his resolution to do graduate studies at an Eastern school.

Social life at Drake was limited due to dancing being prohibited. There were sleighing or skating parties and an occasional "social." Of course there were favorite walks which were populated with strolling couples. There was daily chapel and church on Sunday which Ames attended, but he noted that "I was not especially concerned with religious thought and activity during the college years. I took no courses in religion..."¹⁹ He did sing in the church choir, along with Will, his summer business partner. During the sophomore year an evangelist came to Des Moines for special meetings for three months. Ames attended many sessions and found the evangelist to present a reasonable kind of religion but stressed that emotion could not serve as a test or guide. He viewed his religious and social attitudes to be very conservative, as is illustrated by his being disturbed with his bride-to-be returning on Sunday evening from a weekend at home and in the process often missing Sunday evening worship. Sometime at religious services he would be deeply moved, which he attributed to his reflecting on the practical enterprises of the church. The union of Christendom seemed a great and appealing task, as did missionary efforts. Ames realized that these tasks required intense preparation and wondered whether he was capable of such vast religious responsibility.

While at Drake, Ames had profound experiences of nature. His spirit was often lifted by the vastness of the sky into wonder and awe. Ames recalled: "One evening I was waiting for a train at a little station out on the prairie. I was alone... Great white cloud banks covered the western sky. The sun went down, touching the rim of the clouds with bands of gold, as

if they were the very isles of the blessed. Perhaps for all who had lived on earth it was given at such moments to see the glory of life beyond.”²⁰

In 1889, at the age of nineteen, Ames graduated from Drake feeling impelled to continue his education. Being undecided about his future, he decided to do an additional year at Drake in order to focus on church history, Greek and Hebrew with the view of becoming either a teacher or preacher. An event occurred in January, 1890, which provided direction for his future. He had gone for the weekend to Prairie City, Iowa, where his father had taken a pastorate. When he arrived, he discovered that his father was ill. On an impulse, he asked his father if he could preach for him. His father had reservations, but sent him forth. He spoke in the morning mainly using what he could remember from a sermon recently presented in the college chapel. While in the pulpit that morning he realized that he would be expected to preach in the afternoon, so when the announcements came he gave the title, *Hope*, for the afternoon sermon. From this experience, he felt moved to become a preacher. Soon he was getting requests to preach at various churches without a minister. The church at Perry, Iowa, with over one hundred members was without a minister and to Ames’ surprise the church issued him a ministerial call. He decided to accept and was ordained in September, 1890. Ames had become engaged several months prior to the ordination.

Shortly after ordination, Ames had two experiences of bronchial hemorrhaging which threatened his future. His fear was tuberculosis. On the advice of Dr. Wood Hutchinson, he went to Texas for the winter and lived outdoors. He settled in Burnet, Texas, and preached in neighboring towns. His days were spent walking in the healing sunshine. He encountered a young woman who had read Darwin and Spencer and decided she was an agnostic. One day the woman came to him and asked if when she died she would go to hell. Ames replied immediately, “Yes.” His answer shocked her to the extent that she converted and joined the church.

In 1891, Ames went east for more graduate study. He was drawn to both Yale and Harvard, but his conservatism led him to Yale Divinity School, which was in the conservative Congregational tradition, whereas Harvard was considered a Unitarian institution. Unfortunately, the Disciples’ leadership provided little encouragement, probably because they could not see the need for additional education based on their personal experiences. He was able to borrow money from Minnie, his sister, and secured additional funds by filling the pulpit at the Central Christian Church in Des Moines that summer.

Because of previous graduate study and ministerial experience, Ames was placed in the senior class at Yale. He did not find the courses exacting. Philosophy of Religion, using Otto Pfleiderer's *The Philosophy of Religion on the Basis of Its History*, proved to be most significant. Ames recalled: "There I wrote a paper which gave me a new outlook upon religion and upon the Hebrew religion in particular... I came upon the idea that this religion had developed through natural processes from the very humble beginnings to the heights of the great prophets. This revolutionary conception displaced in my mind the idea of a supernatural, miraculously inspired religion, providing instead the more interesting and fruitful notion of a religion growing up with the life of a people and being modified by their changing experiences."²¹ Pfleiderer included all religions in this process of development without reducing them all to the same level due to their different environments.

This approach to religion was radically different from Ames' background, where it was assumed that there was one true religion, with the rest being at least faulty. This true religion was based on divine revelation and provided absolute and complete redemption to all who believed. Within this conception, the responsibility of the church is to evangelize and convert all people to the true Christian religion. Ames found himself challenged: "The idea that Christianity, too, was a natural religion seemed to destroy its significance as a soul-serving power and to suggest that it might also be infested with imperfections of doctrine and practice. If it were limited and imperfect in any respect, how could any of it be valuable?"²²

Ames discovered that few students took Philosophy of Religion and that most considered philosophy to be dangerous if not useless for theological students. Even so, it was impossible to escape the evolutionary conception of religion as it was overtaking all the departments. William Sumner was also teaching on folkways, providing a revolutionary perspective of humans and society. William Rainey Harper has been teaching this new view of religion in his courses on the Hebrew language and literature, so the students had to come to terms in some way with this approach. Ames noted that Harper had left to become the president at the new University of Chicago.

Although Ames' readjustment to this new approach to religion was not easy, it did not cause him significant emotional strain. In the Disciples tradition, Alexander Campbell had stressed that the Old Testament inheritance had been superseded by the teachings of Jesus Christ, so applying the new method to the Hebrew Scriptures did not lessen their value. Disciples viewed themselves as dissenters from Protestantism by

their encouraging liberty of opinion with only a few clearly established essentials. Ames was also helped in this adjustment by the Disciples tradition regarding devotion to the truth; “wherever the truth appears it must be acknowledged, whatever it commands must be done, whatever it reveals is at last harmonious with the divine mind and will.”²³

Although Ames grew intellectually at Yale, he also grew through participation in religious activities. He preached often at Disciples Churches in Boston and New York and regularly filled the pulpit for Sterling Place Christian Church in Brooklyn where he gained new insights into the phases of human living. Ames explained the importance of these opportunities: “I have long been convinced that practical participation in religious work is a wholesome influence in keeping one’s religion vital in the midst of intellectual perplexities. Such participation emphasizes the deeper springs of the religious life and helps to keep in the foreground the practical value to which in the end all theoretical considerations must yield for their final test.”²⁴

The year at Yale raised more questions for Ames than it settled. Holding the view that the significant questions in theology had been previously considered in philosophy, he was determined to return to Yale or go to Harvard the next year to study philosophy. Ames’ financial situation was helped by being invited to supply the pulpit of the South Broadway Christ Church in Denver. This was his first encounter with the Rocky Mountains which raised in him strong religious feelings. Ames recalled: “They overawe me. They make an impression of agelessness and unshaken strength. The sight of them gives me a sense of kinship with those who in contemplation of them find sublimity and peace.”²⁵

Following his experiences in Denver, Ames went to Cambridge to begin his studies in philosophy. One reason for going to Harvard was to be closer to his fiancée who was doing graduate studies at Wellesley College. Shortly after arriving he discovered that William James would not be in residence that year. He then had an interview with Josiah Royce, who took it for granted that he would be studying metaphysics. With James not being in residence and Ames not feeling interested in, based on his Midwestern practicality, or prepared to devote himself to metaphysics, he returned to Yale. Here he took seminars on William James, Otto Pfleiderer, Immanuel Kant, and Arthur Schopenhauer with George T. Ladd. It was the study of James’ *The Principles of Psychology* which opened for Ames an understanding of the human mind. James had turned his back on metaphysics and approached “psychology without a soul” based on the living stream of experience. In light of James, he focused attention on the physical nature of the self, on the forces of human habits

and to innovative interpretations of the emotions and the will. No longer would he focus on the mysteries of our inner lives because James made “clear the growth of ideas through the functioning of the sense organs and the brain, in relation to things and events of the environment. The wonders of memory and imagination were put into terms of imagery derived from sense perception and the operation of the laws of the association of ideas.”²⁶ In James, he found useful handles for the task of developing and reconstructing our human idealism.

Ames found the study of Kant painful and laborious as Kant “uprooted naïve ideas of the customary common-sense view [and]... by making a cleavage between the physical and the spiritual realms, it left science free to pursue its quantitative, evolutionary hypotheses and opened an independent over world of moral and religious values. Above the levels of scientific demonstration it put the objects of faith and the realities discerned by intuition.”²⁷

Many scientists and theologians felt that with this perspective the conflict between science and religion was over. Ames doubted whether many philosophers would in his day agree on the separation of knowledge and faith. “My own thought remained for years unsatisfied with this dualism until further explorations in other systems led to quite different interpretation of the nature of human knowledge and religious values.”²⁸ Ames found the study of Schopenhauer not only challenged “all my traditional beliefs but attacked the very foundations of all moral and religious values.”²⁹ Schopenhauer employed science primarily for the purpose of demonstrating that the world is evil and life tragic and futile. Humans have an insatiable desire which is but an expression of our blind will. “The deepest character of the world is not reason or intelligence but will, restless, capricious will... There is no cure for these evils of life, and the greatest possible wisdom is in seeking escape from them.”³⁰ Humans are forced to make decisions based not on our mature judgment, but on impulse and illusion. The effect on Ames of studying Schopenhauer “was a deepening [sic] conviction... that the only serious enemy of religion is pessimism, for when a man turns completely sour on life there is no chance to get any leverage on his will or conduct... The problem is to live in such a way that life is good and satisfying in spite of all its pain and defeat.”³¹ Ames felt that Christianity has at times been too pessimistic, especially when it understood afflictions as judgments of God instead of being the results of human recklessness. Our faith does not require that we believe that the world is completely good, but it does require our recognition of values in life which can be amplified.

In the summer of 1893, Ames visited the World's Fair in Chicago with his bride-to-be and her mother. When the women returned to Iowa, Ames remained with Frank Morgan, his co-editor of the newspaper at Drake. On the third of July he wrote Mable Van Meter and proposed that they be married on July 6th. A license was secured and Morgan conducted the service. Following a short trip to Des Moines and St. Paul, the rest of the summer was spent at the Brick House. Later in the summer a reception was held for the new couple before they returned to New Haven.

In the summer of 1894, Ames was offered a fellowship in philosophy at the University of Chicago by President Harper. During the year 1894–95, Ames was able to complete the doctoral thesis he had begun at Yale. Ames found himself moving into a new world of philosophy led by James H. Tufts, George H. Mead, Addison W. Moore, and later John Dewey. From these thinkers emerged an American school of thought known as pragmatism or radical empiricism, which Ames also labeled as “practical idealism.” While working on his thesis, Ames took a seminar with Tufts on the writings of John Locke. He learned that the empiricism of Locke, modified and developed, was to be found in the philosophy of pragmatism. Ames opined: “His significance does not lie in any finished and formulated system of philosophy or of religion. It consists rather in his practical, experimental, and common-sense attitude on all questions which he discussed. It was above all a method, a method of patient and reverent inquiry, and a courageous dismissal of old traditions and superstitions which could not justify themselves in the light of practical reason.”³² Ames received from this study a new perspective for “promoting religion without creeds, in cultivating a simple, practical kind of faith, with the broadest tolerance, and in experimenting gradually with all matters of organization, of interpretation of forms of worship, and of methods of religious education.”³³ Ames was convinced that this approach provided fruitful avenues for fulfilling the Disciples’ desire for Christian union with all religious people of all faiths.

In 1895, Ames stood an oral examination for the Ph.D. degree in philosophy. This was his first introduction to John Dewey, who was the new head of the department. His thesis was “The History of Agnosticism,” which had little appeal to Dewey. The exam was searching enough, with the result that Ames was invited to become an assistant professor in the department. In associating with these pragmatists, Ames “found a point of view and a method of thinking which transformed my thought and made philosophy a living, practical way of life.”³⁴

Ames noted that Dewey’s philosophy was not involved in intellectual abstractions but, rather, was an empirical method for understanding real

human problems and guidance for solving the problems. Our minds are not separated from our experiences but are part of the endeavor to control and direct activity to positive ends. His adjustment to Dewey's thought was assisted by his teaching a course on William James' *Psychology*. In January, 1896, Ames taught a course on the theology of Alexander Campbell for the Disciples Divinity House through the University Divinity School, with primary focus on the relation of Campbell's thought to that of John Locke. Campbell rejected the assumptions and method undergirding traditional theology and speculative metaphysics. Both Locke and Campbell agreed on the possibility of revelation, but insisted that the revelation be tested by reason. They also agreed that Christianity was a layperson's faith and not based on ecclesiastical authority and also agreed on the principle of biblical interpretation, which later became known as higher criticism. Locke sought a new way of ideas which "was the empirical and pragmatic temper applied in religious matters."³⁵ Ames became very involved with the effort to establish Disciples Divinity House as the first theological school for the Disciples' denomination. The immediate task was raising ten thousand dollars to purchase land for the future Disciples Divinity House. The University of Chicago would teach the divinity courses "in a genuinely undenominational spirit... taught... as objectively and as free from theological bias as mathematics or biology."³⁶ Ames found fund raising very difficult.

During this first year of teaching and fund raising, Ames preached on Sunday at a mission church in Evanston, Illinois. Evanston was an established community with well established churches. There were around forty people who came together at a revival and became the core of the mission church, which would attract potential members from the underprivileged members of the community. These people were not acquainted with each other and shared no common doctrines or ideas of organization. In time new people joined and there developed a religious fellowship.

Ames had spent the year teaching, raising money, and starting a mission church. None of these efforts provided adequate remuneration and kept Ames doing three different things at the same time. Late in the year he received an invitation from Butler College to teach, with no other responsibilities. Just after he accepted the Butler offer, he learned that President Harper had intended to appoint him full time in the philosophy department with a minor administrative post. Ames had no regrets with the move to Butler, for it provided him a focused job teaching philosophy, his primary interest.

Butler College, a Disciples related institution founded in 1850, was located in Irvington, a suburb of Indianapolis, Indiana. This provided a small town environment with the benefits of a larger city nearby. Ames' appointment was as professor of philosophy and education, with the position combined because the resources of the college could not justify two different appointments.

Ames' first taste of the charge of heresy occurred shortly after taking up his position at Butler. He had recently published an article in the *Christian Quarterly* entitled "A New Epoch among the Disciples." In this article Ames presented the import of higher criticism and evolution for the Disciples. A professor at Bethany College wrote long articles in the orthodox *Christian Standard* charging Ames "with infidelity and pantheism and disloyalty to the cause."³⁷ The charges had no impact on his position at Butler, but the event did impress him with the difference between teaching in a tolerant academic environment and being either a teacher or preacher under conservative constraints.³⁸

His duties as a professor of education placed him in the role of a teacher without religious questions arising. In addressing various groups of teachers, he felt a common, public interest among open-minded and free professionals who were seeking facts and methods that would result in reasonable and practical value. Ames reflected: "The journey home on the train that night was strangely happy. I felt that I had found my way into an open world where we were dealing with vitally important human problems simply in the light of the best knowledge and experience available... We might be mistaken about many things, but in an enterprise like that of education we had a right to make mistakes if they were made in efforts to find better ideas and systems of work, and if we were willing to recognize the mistakes when found and to do what we could to correct them. This attitude brought the zest and incentive of genuine responsibility."³⁹ William James continued to be a dominant influence on Ames. He realized that James had unsettled the traditional conception of a soul, the common view of God, and the ordinary conception of human nature being ruled by a unyielding determinism. James rejected the claims of any external authority and focused on the usual experiences which provided an account of truth which could be tested. The test involved acting on an idea and if it provided satisfactory results the idea is true.

James' doctrine of the self provided Ames with a perspective for understanding his own experience. He had been reared in a reasonable kind of piety sheltered by traditional ideas. This became his ministerial self who placed great store in the value of preaching instead of experimenting and testing to determine "whether it would work effectively in

making religion a really useful and powerful agency in conquering the world, the flesh, and the devil.”⁴⁰

Ames’ other self developed after graduation from the divinity school due to exploring the fields of science and being exposed to pragmatism and the thinkers developing this perspective. He explained: “This self looked out upon a different scene. It was the scene of an evolving human race endeavoring through adventures and experiments in all directions to find its way into better conditions and fuller understanding of the meaning and destiny of its life... That was a thrilling scene. There were confusion and tragedy enough, but there was no general and complete surrender or despair.”⁴¹

From the understanding of two selves, Ames considered the possibility of bringing the two together in mutual understanding. On the one hand, he would apply the scientific and philosophic method of criticism and experimentation to the interpretation of religion. On the other hand, he would apply the faith, hope, and love of the aspiring self in order to get below the surface claims of religion by applying native intelligence with an increase of skill and insight. “Why should not the genuine values of religion as well as of education be taken for what they are and dealt with the same spirit and with same gradual fruitfulness?”⁴² Ames suggested that if a minister could look upon the ministerial role as being engaged in a normal and reasonable job without claim to a special or mysterious call, the ministerial self could have an inner consistence with itself, regardless of the piety or patronizing efforts of members of the congregation.

During Ames’ three years at Butler, in addition to his teaching he also took courses in biology. From this experience he gained an insight into the amazing microscopic world. Especially exciting was the growing realization of the ascending animal world leading to humans. “What a pity, it seemed to me that so many students go on, one college generation after another, spending all or most of their time on so-called classical studies, without the slightest awareness of these interesting and illuminating fields of the natural sciences.”⁴³ Ames suggested that a primary aim of a college education is learning that one plays a part, however small, in the total drama of nature and society.

In the summer of 1900, Ames was invited to give some courses in philosophy at the University of Chicago. During the summer, the Hyde Park Disciples Church found itself without a minister and invited Ames to become their pastor. He noted that, in the ten years since graduating from Drake College, he had been more or less a minister in filling short pastorates and supplying pulpits. Upon deciding to accept the position, Ames had no indication of any possibility of teaching philosophy at the

University. He explained that he decided to make the change based on three reasons. The first was that he just liked the city of Chicago. The second reason was, being a founding member of the congregation who was present at the first service; he had previously formed a close association with the people. "The third reason... was an opportunity to carry forward the development of a Disciples church in the larger traditions of the Disciples, with awareness of the need for interpreting religion in keeping with the spirit of the new age of thought, and in recognition of the outlook and manner of life in a great and rising city."⁴⁴

Ames reflected on his childhood religious heritage. Since childhood, he had considered the Disciples as a very important religious movement which should appeal to all right-minded persons. He understood this perspective to be based on the view that the teachings of the Disciples were in conformity to the New Testament. The chief stress was on the conditions of salvation. One needed to be converted, which required, according to the New Testament, "faith, repentance, confession, and baptism."⁴⁵ Of course baptism was by immersion. Creeds and doctrines were replaced by one's personal commitment to Christ. If the churches were united in this personal commitment, Christianity would rapidly convert the world. Some years after being at Yale and after reading widely in psychology and philosophy, Ames made a discovery about his Disciples heritage—"the discovery that there was back of the body of ideas and attitudes of the Disciples a very important and respectable philosophical interpretation of man and religion... It was the philosophy of empiricism... which gave me a new interest in religion and attracted me to accept the Chicago pastorate."⁴⁶

In October, 1900, Ames began his pastorate at The Hyde Park Church, which was six years in existence with less than 100 members.⁴⁷ The church was a little brick building, located on the land of the Disciples Divinity House. The interior consisted of the sanctuary equipped with opera chairs. This room could also be arranged for church dinners and larger gatherings. There were three small rooms off the main room; the kitchen and two multi-purpose rooms. There was another large room at the back of the kitchen which could be shut off by folding doors. It also served multi-purposes as the library, committee room, and meeting place for prayer meetings and other small gatherings. The financial strength of the church was very limited, with a debt on the building and a salary for Ames of \$1800 a year. Although their finances were limited, "from its beginning the church contributed generously to foreign missions."⁴⁸ Sermons were not the center of the life of this congregation, just as the historic churches gave little prominence to sermons. "They developed and maintained their

religion by dramatic, ritualistic services, by music and symbolism, and by the human associations and idealisms that envelop all religious institutions.”⁴⁹

Ames found deciding on his sermon topic ten days in advance, for announcement in the calendar, to be a good discipline. He did not like the word “theology” and openly expressed that he did not want a theology. He had ideas about religion, but these ideas were always open to revision and certainly were not to be imposed upon others. His first printed sermon was “A Personal Confession of Faith,” in June 1902. He stressed that he did not want to represent a “devitalized orthodoxy”. “I wanted it to be understood that this would be a free pulpit, that the denomination to which I belonged had discarded creeds, encouraged by individual liberty, and taught that characteristic religious experiences, like conversion, are capable of rational statement and have their true significance in ethical and practical life.”⁵⁰ Ames stressed that the process of evolution continues in the life of the church. Salvation was conscious participation in deed and thought in the holy life and was not an escape from the consequences of original sin. He opined: “Salvation is ethical. It means developed character. It is a life process and signifies the realization of the natural powers of the soul. I believe that heaven is this participation in the divine life and that it may be enjoyed here and now. I believe that hell is the failure to attain this realization of one’s powers... I believe that there are two essential conditions of salvation, faith and repentance. Faith is the recognition of the ideal, repentance is the adjustment to it. I believe that Jesus Christ is the proper object of faith because his words and example inspire men to the highest spiritual life.”⁵¹ Ames had little interest in traditional doctrines, like the trinity, the pre-existence of Christ, the virgin birth, miracles, and substitution atonement. He proposed two lines of evidence which he thought modern persons could entertain regarding the supremacy of Christ. One line was found in Jesus’ inspiring teachings and the other in the tremendous influence of Jesus for the past two thousand years. Ames stressed that the church is essential to the salvation of the world but not because it was founded by Jesus. “The redemption of men is a social as well as a religious problem, and it therefore requires a social institution. All the great, persistent interests of humanity embody themselves in social organizations.”⁵² The church is just the natural product of the religious life. All who possess religious truth have the responsibility to share it with others. Although Ames felt that the contemporary church still suffered from ascetic ideals, he believed that Christianity was entering upon the most profound transformation since the encounter with Greek thought. “It will be freed from many encumbrances,