

# Robert Neelly Bellah

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**Robert Neelly Bellah** (February 23, 1927 – July 30, 2013) was an American sociologist, and the Elliott Professor of Sociology, as well as Professor Emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley. He was internationally known for his work related to the sociology of religion.<sup>[1]</sup>

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Robert Neelly Bellah	
<b>Born</b>	February 23, 1927 <div>Altus, Oklahoma</div>
<b>Died</b>	July 30, 2013 (aged 86) <div>Oakland, California</div>
<i><b>Alma<span> </span>mater</b></i>	Harvard University
<b>Occupation</b>	Sociologist <div>Book author</div>
<b>Children</b>	Jennifer Bellah Maguire <div>Hally Bellah-Guther</div>

## Education

Bellah received a B.A. from Harvard University in 1950, and a Ph.D. from Harvard in 1955. He was a student of Talcott Parsons, sociologist at Harvard and he and Parsons remained intellectual friends until Parsons' death in 1979. Parsons was specially interested in Bellah's concept of religious evolution and the concept of "Civil Religion." While an undergraduate at Harvard, he was a member of the Communist Party USA in 1947-1949 and a chairman of the John Reed Club, "a recognized student organization concerned with the study of Marxism".<sup>[2]</sup> During the summer of 1954, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard McGeorge Bundy, who later served as a national security adviser to John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, threatened to withdraw Bellah's graduate student fellowship if he did not provide the names of his former club associates.<sup>[3]</sup> Bellah was also interrogated by the Boston office of the FBI with the same purpose. As a result, Bellah and his family spent two years in Canada, where he was awarded a post-doctoral fellowship at the Islamic Institute in McGill University in Montreal. He returned to Harvard after *McCarthyism* declined due to the death of its main instigator senator Joseph McCarthy. Bellah afterwards wrote,

...I know from personal experience that Harvard did some terribly wrong things during the McCarthy period and that those things have never been publicly acknowledged. At its worst it came close to psychological terror against almost defenseless individuals. ...The university and the secret police were in collusion to suppress political dissent and even to persecute dissenters who had changed their minds if they were not willing to become part of the persecution.<sup>[2]</sup>

—Robert N. Bellah

# Career

Bellah's magnum opus, *Religion In Human Evolution* (2011), traces the biological and cultural origins of religion and the interplay between the two. Philosopher Jürgen Habermas wrote of the work: "This great book is the intellectual harvest of the rich academic life of a leading social theorist who has assimilated a vast range of biological, anthropological, and historical literature in the pursuit of a breathtaking project... In this field I do not know of an equally ambitious and comprehensive study."<sup>[4]</sup>

Bellah is also known for his 1985 book *Habits of the Heart*, which discusses how religion contributes to and detracts from America's common good, and for his studies of religious and moral issues and their connection to society. Bellah was perhaps best known for his work related to American civil religion, a term which he coined in a 1967 article that has since gained widespread attention among scholars.<sup>[5][6]</sup>

He served in various positions at Harvard from 1955 to 1967 when he took the position of Ford Professor of Sociology at the University of California at Berkeley. He spent the remainder of his career at Berkeley. His political views are often classified as communitarian. An academic biography of Robert Bellah, "the world's most widely read sociologist of religion",<sup>[7]</sup> is currently under way.<sup>[8]</sup>

# Personal

Bellah was born in Altus, Oklahoma on February 23, 1927. His father was a newspaper editor and publisher and died when he was 2. His mother Lillian moved the family to Los Angeles, where she had relatives. Bellah attended Los Angeles High School, where he and his future wife, Melanie Hyman, were editors of the student newspaper. They got married in 1948 after she graduated from Stanford University, and he began studying at Harvard University after a service in the Army. His wife passed in 2010. He was fluent in Japanese and literate in Chinese, French and German, and later studied Arabic at McGill University in Montreal. Bellah died July 30, 2013 at an Oakland, California hospital from complications after heart surgery. He was 86 and is survived by his daughters Jennifer Bellah Maguire and Hally Bellah-Guther; a sister, Hallie Reynolds; and five grandchildren.<sup>[9]</sup>

# Works

Robert Bellah is the author, editor, co-author, or co-editor of the following books:

- *Tokugawa Religion: The Values of Pre-Industrial Japan* (1957)
- *Religion and Progress in Modern Asia* (1965)
- *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World* (1970)
- *Emile Durkheim on Morality and Society* (1973)
- *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (1975)
- *The New Religious Consciousness* (1976)
- *Varieties of Civil Religion* (1980)
- *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (1985)
- *Uncivil Religion: Interreligious Hostility in America* (1987)
- *The Good Society* (1991)<sup>[10]</sup>
- *Imagining Japan: The Japanese Tradition and its Modern Interpretation* (2003)
- *The Robert Bellah Reader* (2006)
- *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age*

(<http://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674061439>) (2011)

- The Axial Age and Its Consequences (<http://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674066496>) (2012)

## Awards and honors

Bellah was elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1967.<sup>[1]</sup> He received the National Humanities Medal in 2000 from President Bill Clinton, in part for "his efforts to illuminate the importance of community in American society." In 2007, he received the American Academy of Religion Martin E. Marty Award for the Public Understanding of Religion.<sup>[1]</sup>

## See also

- Lifestyle enclave

## References

- <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> Robert Bellah's profile at Hartford Institute for Religion Research (<http://www.robertbellah.com/>)
- <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> Bellah, Robert (July 14, 1977). "To the Editors" (<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1977/jul/14/veritas-at-harvard-another-exchange/?pagination=false>). The New York Review of Books. Retrieved 7 August 2013.
- <sup>a</sup> Fox, Margalit (August 6, 2013). "Robert Bellah, Sociologist of Religion Who Mapped the American Soul, Dies at 86" (<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/07/us/robert-bellah-sociologist-of-religion-who-mapped-the-american-soul-dies-at-86.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>). The New York Times. Retrieved 7 August 2013.
- <sup>a</sup> "About Religion in Human Evolution" (<http://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674061439&content=reviews>). Harvard University Press. Retrieved 7 August 2013.
- <sup>a</sup> Bellah, Robert Neelly (Winter 1967). "Civil Religion in America" ([http://web.archive.org/web/20050306124338/http://www.robertbellah.com/articles\\_5.htm](http://web.archive.org/web/20050306124338/http://www.robertbellah.com/articles_5.htm)). *Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* **96** (1): 1–21. Archived from the original ([http://www.robertbellah.com/articles\\_5.htm](http://www.robertbellah.com/articles_5.htm)) on 2005-03-06. From the issue entitled *Religion in America*.
- <sup>a</sup> Woo, Elaine (2013-08-03). "Robert N. Bellah dies at 86; UC Berkeley sociologist" (<http://www.latimes.com/news/obituaries/la-me-robert-bellah-20130804,0,776196.story>). *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved 2013-08-27.
- <sup>a</sup> "Of God, justice, and disunited states" ([http://www.berkeley.edu/news/berkeleyan/2006/10/26\\_Bellah.shtml](http://www.berkeley.edu/news/berkeleyan/2006/10/26_Bellah.shtml)). *The Berkeleyan*. UC Berkeley NewsCenter. 26 October 2006. Retrieved 7 August 2013.
- <sup>a</sup> Bortolini, Matteo (2012). "The trap of intellectual success. Robert N. Bellah, the American civil religion debate, and the sociology of knowledge" (<http://www.springerlink.com/content/g147gv19432950m2/?MUD=MP>). *Theory & Society* **41** (2): 187–210.; Bortolini, Matteo (2011). "The "Bellah Affair" at Princeton. Scholarly excellence and academic freedom in America in the 1970s" (<http://www.springerlink.com/content/d7k2h8l32255l615/>). *The American Sociologist* **42** (1): 3–33.; Bortolini, Matteo (2011). "Before civil religion. On Robert Bellah's forgotten encounters with America, 1955-1965" (<http://www.sociologica.mulino.it/journal/article/index/Article/Journal:ARTICLE:442/Item/Journal:ARTICLE:442>). *Sociologica* **4** (3).
- <sup>a</sup> "Robert N. Bellah dies at 86; UC Berkeley sociologist" (<http://www.latimes.com/news/obituaries/la-me-robert-bellah-20130804,0,776196.story>)  
track=rss&utm\_source=feedburner&utm\_medium=feed&utm\_campaign=Feed%3A+latimes%2Fnews%2Fobituaries+%28Los+Angeles+Times+-+Obituaries%29&utm\_content=My+Yahoo). Los Angeles Times. Retrieved 5 August 2013.
- <sup>a</sup> Andre, Claire; Manuel Velasquez. "Creating the Good Society" (<http://www.scu.edu/ethics/publications/iie/v5n1/homepage.html>). *Santa Clara University*. Retrieved 2008-05-05. "The social problems confronting us today, the authors argue, are largely the result of failures of our institutions, and our response, largely the result of our failure to realize the degree to which our lives are shaped by institutional forces and

the degree to which we, as a democratic society, can shape these forces for the better."

11. ^ "Book of Members, 1780-2010: Chapter B" (<http://www.amacad.org/publications/BookofMembers/ChapterB.pdf>). American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Retrieved May 30, 2011.

## See also

- American civil religion
- Sheilism
- Sociology of religion

## External links

- Robert Bellah's website (<http://www.robertbellah.com/>)
- Bill Moyers interview with Robert Bellah on PBS ([http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/archives/bellahwoi\\_flash.html](http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/archives/bellahwoi_flash.html)), September 27, 1988
- The Immanent Frame (<http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/author/bellah/>), a SSRC blog with posts by Robert Bellah

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Categories: 1927 births | 2013 deaths | American sociologists | Community building

| Fellows of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences | Harvard University alumni

| National Humanities Medal recipients | Sociologists of religion | University of California, Berkeley faculty

| People from Altus, Oklahoma | People from Los Angeles, California

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