THE CONCEPT OF "CIVIL RELIGION"

IN AMERICAN POLITICAL ANALYSIS

AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

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by

Kalmin D. Smith

B.A. Albion College, 1966
M.A. Western Michigan University, 1969

UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI

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I hereby recommend that the thesis prepared under my supervision by Kalmin Smith

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Approved by:

Dr. Paul F. Power, Chairman Paul F. Power

Dr. Norman C. Thomas

Dr. Gabriel S. Pellathy Gabriel S. Pellathy

Dr. Thomas A. Long Thomas A. Long

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CHAPTER I

"CIVIL RELIGION" AS A POLITICAL CONCEPT

[The]...complete separation of church and state may be possible only in a formal sense. In a secular society where formal religious commitment is weak, the activities of the state may be the nearest one comes to activities of ultimate importance, activities that fundamentally determine matters of death and life and the quality of life. In short, governmental institutions may have significance of a religious kind. The awe inspired by the ultimate power of the church in more pious times may be akin to the awe inspired by modern secular societies by the ultimate power of the state.

Sidney Verba

This is a study of the concept of "civil religion" and its ramifications for American political thought and practice. It is a philosophical analysis which assumes that the study of politics embraces everything that has to do with the activities of man in society. A major purpose of political philosophy is to clarify and evaluate concepts and beliefs. This study will clarify the concept of "civil religion" and critically evaluate the belief that there exists in the United States a consensus of unofficial opinion with a religious reference which forms the foundation of the polity because it interprets and integrates personal and political life in accord with a transcendent order. The study's primary aim is to offer an explanation of the phenomenon called "civil religion" through presentation of "civil religion" in its historical perspective and its contemporary cohesive, divisive and manipulative possibilities. But the study is also normative, because it will attempt to answer the question "should the United States have a civil religion?"

In Sidney Verba's analysis of public reaction to the assassination of President John Kennedy, Verba discovered a primordial commitment to the nation-state and its symbols in America. This "religious commitment," according to Verba, "is reflected in the close meshing of the sacred and the secular in the top institutions of the political system."[1] He also found evidence of this primordial commitment at the deeper levels of political involvement. In the weekend following the assassination,"...a larger proportion of the American population responded to the assassination with prayer or attendance at special church services and religious ceremony abounded in the events of the weekend."[2] Verba observed that the state in modern societies serves at times as a religion.

Verba went on to relate this "religious dimension" of American politics to stability and system cohesiveness and called for careful research on the subject. But does Verba's "religious dimension" really exist? If it does, what is it and how does it function? Is it merely a primordial commitment to the ultimate power of the state or is the state limited and called to judgment by some transcendent and ultimate norm? What is the relationship to the dominant institutional religions of America, and how is it expressed in the political life of the polity?

Our interpretation of "civil religion" is that it is a conceptual explanation of the investment of political ends and institutions with an aura of the "sacred." Civil religion is neither religious nationalism

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[1]Sidney Verba, "The Kennedy Assassination and the Nature of Political Commitment," in The Kennedy Assassination and the American Public, eds. Bradley S. Greenberg & Edwin B. Parker (Stanford: The Stanford University Press, 1965), 352.

[2]Ibid.

nor state religion. Civil religion does not imply the integration of the functions and purposes of church and state. Rather, formal legal separation of church and state has become an accepted value of the civil religion. Governments may seek the support of voluntary religious groups on particular political issues or the religious groups may seek governmental benefits. But these relationships are the results of the politics of competing group interests in American society. They do not constitute civil religion which is concerned with the fundamental principles of the polity. Civil religion is not a common denominator faith, for men may participate simultaneously in two "religions" - - the religion of the churches and the civil religion. Although the civil religion borrows heavily from the Jewish and Christian religions, it is not the borrowed elements only but the American experience itself that creates the commonality of the civil faith.

Publicists of the civil religion argue that this commonality contributes to regime stability by allowing men to refer to one another as "fellow citizens." It is their belief that the common norms and values generated and sustained by the symbols and rites of civil religion in the United States function to preserve the democratic character and traditions of American politics and to greatly reduce the possibility of some radical change in the institutions or the politics of the system. The remainder of this chapter will clarify the symbolic nature of civil religion and the specific beliefs of the American civil religion, relate the American civil religion to its historic roots in traditional political philosophy and the American experience, and demonstrate its relevance for our time. In successive chapters, descriptive indices

will be developed to describe the contemporary phase of civil religion including the impact of great national power on the civil religion and its capacity for both stability and division in the American polity.

I

Civil religion cannot be segregated from analysis of the meaning and function of those social symbols which have religious content. This is because such symbols structure the values of the civil religion by linking man's experience of the "sacred" and the social in his daily life. Thus, explanation of the concept "civil religion" requires prior knowledge of the religious dimension of social symbols.

But controversy exists over the problem of determining when a symbol is religious and when it is not and whether the religious impulse is articulated and reflected in symbols. Clearly, most political symbols are not religious, if we define religion as applying only to belief in God and the creeds and rituals of institutionalized religions. But, like Verba, many theologians and sociologists of religion perceive the existence of a religious impulse in social symbols that involve ideas of the sacred.

What, then, is the "sacred" impulse? As a concept, it is difficult to pin down. At best, it must be understood as an expression of perceived, intangible and invisible realities whose existence cannot be demonstrated experimentally. Durkheim found the "sacred" to be a category which must be defined in terms of particular attitudes rather than in terms of specific contents. He related this vague view of the sacred to the beliefs and

rituals of society which depend upon the supporting attitudes of a community of worshipers for its maintenance.[3] These beliefs and rituals may be characterized as the theologica, the practical and sociological expression of mankind in respect to religious reality.[4] To Nottingham, the sacred is "that which is set apart from the utilitarian concerns of everyday living by the attitudes of respect in which it is held and by the fact that it cannot be understood by the exercise of the empirical common sense sufficient for such ordinary concerns."[5] Tillich simply referred to the sacred as "the ground of being."[6] In our analysis, the sacred is understood to be a perceived, ultimate meaning or object that the individual regards with awe because it defines his role and purpose in history.

Religious symbols, understood as representatives of a sense of the sacred in human life, are significant in the clarification of civil religion and in the explanation of their function. The symbols of the civil religion give ultimate or sacred meaning to social participation and, as Verba suggested, sustain and nourish social cohesiveness and political stability.

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[3]Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (New York: Collier, 1961), 51.

[4]Joachim Wach, Types of Religious Experience: Christian and Non-Christian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 34.

[5]Elizabeth K. Nottingham, Religion: A Sociological View (New York: Random House, 1971), 16.

[6]Paul Tillich, The Courage To Be (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), 156.

Geertz recognized this when he defined religion as a system of symbols that establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating concepts of a general order of existence and clothing those conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the molds and motivations seem uniquely realistic.[7] Rieff suggested the political function of such religious symbols in his argument that religion performs two functions: the therapeutic control of everyday life, and relive from that control by covertly providing opportunities for instincts to express themselves.[8] Finally, Thomas Luckmann and Peter Berger observed religious roots in the formation of the self and the construction of symbolic universe. They saw religion as referring to a realm that transcends everyday life and gives it ultimate meaning. In their analysis, they suggested that the construction of such symbols gives legitimacy to the processes and institutions of society.[9]

Robert Bellah, reflecting on the problems of defining religion and identifying religious symbol systems, proposed that religion be viewed as "a set of symbols" which "define in broadest terms the nature of reality."[10] For Bellah, "the central function of religion is to provide

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[7]Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion (New York: F.A. Praeger, 1966), 1.

[8]Phillip Rieff, The Triumph of the Therapeutic (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

[9]Thomas Luckmann and Peter Berger, The Social Construction of Reality (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1966).

[10]Robert Bellah, Religion and Progress in Modern Asia (New York: The Free Press, 1965), 171.

stable points of reference for human action."[11] Thus, a society is generally officially committed to a particular set of religious symbols shared usually by a majority of the groups and individuals in it, though not necessarily compulsory for all."[12] John Wilson, in his analysis of Bellah, argued that "when religion is put in such terms, it is difficult to discover any distinction between religion as the 'horizon of social symbols' and religion as the 'central cultural values of a society."[13] Wilson provided an accurate description of the American civil religion which this study will adopt. It is precisely the position taken by Robin Williams and, following him, Will Herberg, who argued that the cultural values of the society are religious values because they demand an ultimate commitment and provide a sense of identity for the members of the society.[14] Civil religion, then, affirms the symbiotic relationship of religious attitudes and cultural values which are articulated in powerful religious symbols and expressed in the beliefs, rituals and expectations of the American people. These beliefs, rituals and expectations will be seen to take political forms and may be described as expressions of the American civil religion.

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[11] Ibid., 176.

[12] Ibid., 172

[13] John Wilson, "The Status of Civil Religion," in The Religion of the Republic, ed. Elwyn A. Smith (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 11.

[14] Robin M. Williams, American Society: A Sociological Interpretation (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), and Will Herberg, Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1960).

Civil religion, as an expression of the function and power of American social symbols, is dependent upon the existence and function of such symbols for its epistemological base. Merriam recognized the political function of such symbols when he asserted that no society can be understood without recognizing its prevalent symbols which shape the behavior of its members. He found symbolic systems to be functional because they are based on the affective or esthetic needs of man. He argued that: "Many of the most attractive symbolisms designed by human creative and artistic skill have had for their object figures of the political world, around which they have draped their decorations. No other relationship has supplied more moving imagery for mankind than these political personalities and situations."[15] He further argued that the American system of political symbols has taken over more days of the calendar than any other system excepting the church and that it has endowed building and places with power symbols and names.

Expanding on Merriam, Edelman argued that symbols are created by man to explain himself and his environment. These symbols are powerful because they determine the nature of politics in the community. He concluded that:

> The symbolic side of politics calls for attention,
> for men cannot know themselves until they know
> what they do and what surrounds and nurtures them.
> Man creates political symbols and they sustain
> and develop or warp him.[16]

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[15]Charles E. Merriam, "Political Power," in A Study of Power, eds. C.E. Merriam and T.V. Smith (New York: The Free Press, 1950), 103.

[16]Murray Edelman, The Symbolic Uses of Politics (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1964), 1.

Recognizing the utility of symbols for social science explanation, Mitchell emphasized that the analysis of the symbolic elements of the polity must be an important part of the analysis, for symbols and symbolisms are not only products of the system, but conditioning factors as well. He argued that "We cannot understand patriotism or loyalty, and the general level of support given a system, unless we include the elements of symbolism in the explanation."[17]

Edward Sapir found that all culture is heavily charged with symbolism and noted that: "It is customary to say that society is peculiarly subject to the influence of symbols in such emotionally charged fields as religion and politics."[18] He identified flags and slogans as type examples in the field of politics. He went on to argue that the "individual and society, in a never ending interplay of symbolic gestures, build up the pyramided structure called civilization. In this structure, very few bricks touch the ground."[19]

But are all symbols sacred in nature and can civil religion as a political concept assume that all social symbols express the nature of the American civil religion? Certainly not. Sapir distinguished

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[17]William C. Mitchell, The American Polity: A Social and Cultural Interpretation (New York: The Free Press, 1962), 6.

[18]Edward Sapir, "Symbolism," in the Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, XIV, 494.

[19]Ibid.

between two main types of symbols. The first type is called referential symbolism and embraces organizations of symbols which are agreed upon for purposes of reference. These elements are identified in the same way by different people and they help men to think logically about the environment and to manipulate the environment. Voting statistics and other empirical data relevant to politics would be examples of referential political symbols. Such symbols are not "sacred" but may refer the social scientist to man's belief in the sacred in his social life.

In addition to referential symbols, there are condensation symbols which evoke the emotions associated with the situation. The condensation symbol "is a highly condensed form of substitutive behavior for direct expression, allowing for the ready release of emotional tension in conscious or unconscious form."[20] Men "condense into one symbolic event, sign, or act, patriotic pride, anxieties, remembrances or past glories or humiliations, promises of future greatness: some one of these or all of them."[21] These condensation symbols frequently take on a sacred context as the emotions involved include a feeling of awe in the face of some unknown ultimate concern.

This distinction between referential and condensation symbols is fundamental to political analysis. Empirical political science relies heavily on referential symbols whereas a significant task of political philosophy is to explain or choose among norms expressed through condensation symbols. Edelman recognized the critical importance of

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[20] Ibid., 493.

[21] Ibid., 6.

condensation symbols to political analysis when he argued that:

> mass publics respond to currently conspicuous political symbols: not to 'facts,' and not to moral codes embedded in the character of the soul, but to the gestures and speeches that make up the drama of the state.[22]

To understand civil religion, one must recognize that civil religion is tied to condensation symbols and that those symbols are intrinsically meaningful. A serious flaw in the contributions of Merriam, Edelman, and Mitchell to the study of the symbols of civil religion, is their failure to take symbols as intrinsically meaningful. Unlike earlier European scholars such as Carlyle, Gobineau and Hegel, who may have taken symbols too seriously, the American scholars view symbols primarily as gimmicks whereby the elite of the political community manipulate the less sophisticated. Arnold took a similar approach as he focused on symbols and myths to understand the role of the irrational in political behavior.[23] None of these studies has seriously raised the possibility that symbols might be intrinsically meaningful or that they might represent some attempt to express a "sacred" truth or norm as understood by the members of a political culture. Nor have they raised the possibility that symbols may be the only method by which individuals express and share existentially experienced social reality.

Civil religion is tied to condensation symbols and cannot be understood nor its impact on politics fully comprehended, unless one

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[22] op. cit., 172.

[23] Thurman Arnold, The Symbols of Government (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935).

recognizes that symbols are serious attempts to express and share historical and moral truth as understood by those who participate in a social environment defined, interpreted and internalized in part, at least, by sets of shared condensation symbols. As Winch suggested, the question of "what is real?" for society "is not an empirical question at all, but a conceptual one. It has to do with the force of the concept of reality."[24] Thus the major purpose of political philosophy is not to prove the existence of a world of external objects but rather to elucidate the concept of externality. The symbols of the civil religion articulate the individual's conscious and sub-conscious understandings of his self in relation to social externality.

Eric Voegelin's understanding of the source and function of symbols is particularly relevant to the clarification of the concept "civil religion" and the nature of the American civil religion. He attempted to find, through philosophical study, the historical meaning of the symbols used in the crystalization of political traditions and to identify and understand the symbols and myths that represent the people under analysis in their collective experience as a political society.

Voegelin, following Sapir, found that every social theorist is faced with two sets of symbols: "the language symbols that are produced as an integral part of the social cosmion in the process of self-illumination" (condensation symbols) and the "language symbols of political science"

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[24]Peter Winch, The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Sixth impression, 1970),9.

(referential symbols).[25] Voegelin went on to argue that referential symbols cannot adequately represent and often distort social reality as expressed in the condensation symbols. He found that referential symbols, in the course of "critical clarification," have lost much of the truth value of the original condensation symbol. Other condensation symbols have no corresponding referential symbol "because they cannot be put to any use in the economy of science."[26]

Voegelin's primary concern, then, is with the condensation symbols which are the basic symbols of the civil religion. He is wary of the referential symbols of behavioral political science because they tend to confuse empirical description with the existential reality of society which is articulated and represented by the condensation symbols. Further, Voegelin correctly recognized that a primary task of political philosophy is to direct its concern to the condensation symbols which reflect social reality as experienced and articulated by the members of the social order themselves. It is the assumption of this study that the condensation symbols of a society express the political and social norms of the system and are therefore critical to any understanding of the system.

Voegelin argued that the condensation symbols of Western society are variants of the myths of Moses or the symbols of Egypt, that is, the

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[25]Eric Voegelin, The New Science of Politics (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952), 28.

[26]Ibid., 29.

Desert, the Covenant, and the Promised Land. He further believes, as the Old Testament recounts, that all of these symbols are subject to derailments of various kinds. One of the most fundamental derailments is to forget that the truth of the soul and the truth of society (which is a reflection of the truth of the soul) are transcendental truths and that the function of the basic symbols is to express the relations between political society and God. There are other distortions such as exaggerating one symbol or believing that our utopia can be built in this world without postponement. These perversions are caused, in part, by the confusion of referential and condensation symbols so that government and society come to overemphasize the empirical truth of behavioral political science while emasculating the normative truths of the basic symbols (the civil religion). When this happens, social cohesion will be lost and political instability will occur because the people will sense that their social institutions are not truly representative.

Voegelin's epistemology is consistent with the assumptions of civil religion. As he analyzed the polity, he argued that human society is more than a fact or an event in the external world to be studied like a natural phenomenon. Rather, "it is a whole, a little world, a cosmion, illuminated with meaning from within by the human beings who continuously create and bear it as the mode and condition of their self-realization."[27] He found that:

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[27]Ibid., 10.

> the self-illumination of society through symbols is an integral part of social reality for through such symbolization the members of a society experience it as more than an accident or a convenience: they experience it as of their human essence.[28]

For Voegelin, then, every human society understands itself through a variety of symbols and political science must begin with the "rich body of self-interpretation of a society and proceed by critical clarification of socially pre-existent symbols."[29]

We may conclude that civil religion consists of sets of condensation symbols that express the self-understanding of a society regarding social reality, its purpose, and the nature of its ultimate concern. As a political science concept, civil religion functions in four ways: 1) it is a tool to clarify and conceptualize the central cultural values of a society; 2) it allows the social scientist to focus upon the political implications of cultural values without losing the full meaning of the value-laden language of the "market place" in the more sterile verbiage of behavioral political science; 3) it helps to explain how a society understands itself as a "sacred" compact with the obligations and expectations of citizenship that such an understanding includes; and, 4) it opens the possibility of a fresh explanation of the causes and limitations of public policy in America and the relative stability of the values and procedures of the American democratic system.

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[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

II

The concept of civil religion was not uncommon in the political thought and practice of the Western tradition from which the American civil religion has sprung. Not only did societies produce myths, rites and symbols to provide a sense of identity for their members, but political philosophers recognized the existence of the civil religion and addressed themselves to its purpose and function in the polity. Three common themes are found in this tradition: 1) the existence of a moral dimension in human affairs; 2) the necessity of directing popular beliefs and expressions of commitment to the "sacred" into channels of support for the political system; and,3) the incompatibility of commitment to private religion with civic or political virtue.

The original and generic form of civil religion is found in the cities of the ancient world. For ancient society, the separation of the moral dimension from politics was inconceivable. "The religious idea," de Coulanges informed us, "was, among the ancients, the inspiring breath and organizer of the social order."[30] The Greek's religion was the religion of the city and his religious festivals were civic celebrations. Concepts of the "sacred" were channeled into popular

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[30]Fustel De Coulanges, The Ancient City (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, Inc., originally published in French in 1864), 132.

support for the political system by inclusion of political concepts within the "sacred" symbols. Durant observed that:

> Religion and patriotism were bound together in a thousand impressive rites: the god or goddess most revered in public ceremony representing the apotheosi of the city; every law, every meeting of the assembly or the courts, every school and university, every economic or political association, was surrounded with religious ceremony and invocation.[31]

In effect, as Plato recommended, the state functioned as one great educational structure to secure commitment to the civil religion. The gods functioned as "sacred" symbols and one could not possess the rights of citizenship without participation in the common civil religion. The civil religion was "used as a defense of the community and the race against the natural egoism of the individual man."[32]

The symbols of the civic order and the rites, beliefs and expectations of their peoples, contained a fundamental religious dimension that maintained the "primordial" commitment to the state that Verba observed in the American polity, and united Greek society by giving meaning and purpose to the lives of individuals and their roles as citizens of the state. As de Coulanges suggested, "The piety of the ancients was love of country."[33]

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[31]Will Durant, The Life of Greece from his The Story of Civilization: Part II (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1939), 201-202.

[32]Ibid., 202.

[33]op. cit., 199.

The Greeks understood private religious commitments to be a potential threat to the civil religion because belief in the civil religion motivated men to sacrifice for the common good of the community. De Coulanges observed that: "The Greek or Roman rarely dies on account of his devotion to a man, nor for a point of honor: but to his country he owes his life. For if his country is attacked, his religion is attacked...."[34] For this reason, Plato advocated the censure of poets who undermined the creed of the civil religion. For example, Plato would censure Homer's statement that he would rather be a slave among the living than rule as king of the dead because Plato believed that the fear of death would undermine the bravery of soldiers.[35] In the Laws, Plato recognized the value of belief in the gods to political virtue and he attached three kinds of heresy: atheism, the belief that men can escape divine judgement by bribing the gods or through other means, and the belief that the gods are indifferent to the acts of men.[36] In each case, such beliefs would threaten the harmony of the common life by undermining the religious dimension of the state and thus lessening the power of the state and its gods as "sacred"

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[34] Ibid.

[35] Plato, The Republic, Book 3, intro. by Charles M. Bakewell (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), 88-138.

[36] Plato, The Laws, Book 10, trans. Trevor J. Saunders (New York: Penguin Books, 1970), 410-446.

symbols of shared ultimate commitments. Thus, he forbade any kind of private religious exercises and demanded that rites be performed only in public temples by authorized priests. He made this decision on the grounds that private religion withdraws man from allegiance to the state.

In the West, the dominance of Christianity has made it the private religion most threatening to civil religion. The strict practice of Christian teachings would conflict with the demands of the civil religion because, while civil religion consists of social symbols and the society-affirming acts of public rites and ceremonies, a strict interpretation of most Christian doctrines locates the "sacred" beyond the political society and, carried to its logical conclusion, threatens the harmony of the social order. The potential threat of Christianity to societal religion is most clearly expressed in Calvinist thought. For example, John Calvin held that the will of God is selectively revealed to the elect by God and truth is not to be found in the social institutions of man.[37] Emil Brunner affirmed that God's divine law can only be known to the "believer in the God of Scriptural revelation," and Reinhold Niebuhr argued that the "general principles of justice" have their source in the evangelical law of Christian faith.[38] In each case

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[37]John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. John T. McNeil (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 4, Chapt. 20, 16.

[38]Emil Brunner, Justice and the Social Order (New York: Harper & Brothers), 48; and Reinhold Niebuhr, An Interpretation of Christian Ethics (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1935), 105.

Christianity claims that religion is no longer to be civil and that the citizen's ultimate source of obligation is to God and not the state.

The conflict between Christianity and the civil religion is clearly expressed in the work of Saint Augustine. He differentiated the Christian view of the unjust nature and limited function of the state from the classical doctrine that the state was the noblest form of human association which existed to make its citizens good and virtuous men who had realized their highest potentialities. In The City of God, Augustine analyzed and attacked Marcus Varro's theory of civil religion.[39] Varro had argued that the civil religion formed the authority and the moral horizon for the common and public life of the citizens of Rome. Following Socrates, Augustine rejected any type of civil religion and thus had no need to purify it. For him, the worship of the "true God" excludes the possibility of any civil religion.[40] Attacking the possibility of a Christian civil religion, he argued that the true Christian could not isolate himself from non-Christians and thus could not claim to have a political society of his own. With the triumph of Christianity, the subject of civil religion was largely ignored until modern times.

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[39]Augustine of Padua, The City of God, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), 192-201.

[40]Ibid., 201.

The use of the concept "civil religion" in political analysis and explanation appeared in modern times in the work of Machiavelli, Spinoza, Montesquieu and Rousseau.[41] These philosophers believed fear to be the primary motivation for peaceful obedience in corrupt regimes but saw civil religion to be an effective alternative. Each theorist saw a religious dimension in political affairs, sought to channel the energies of that dimension into regime support, and perceived a basic conflict between civil religion and private religions. This view is central to their thoughts. Further, as they recognized, the threat of private religion was not limited to Christianity. For example, the assumptions of natural law and natural rights theorists as to the religious origin of certain norms encouraged limitations upon the power of the state and justified civil disobedience.[42]

Machiavelli was the first political scientist of modern times to argue for the necessity of a civil religion because it is instrumental to peaceful obedience. He believed that man had a natural need for religion and wrote that "...where the fear of God is found

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[41]Although some argument might be advanced that Hobbes should be included among the theorists of civil religion on the grounds that he placed secular above ecclesiastical authority, Hobbes was no theorist of civil religion. Rather, he emphasized reason as basic to the social contract and denied the instrumental value of religion to political stability.

[42]For an analysis of the use of natural law and natural rights theory to generate support of the rebels in the American Revolution, see Vernon Louis Parrington, Main Currents of American Thought (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1958), especially 186-190.

wanting, there the country will come to ruin, unless it be sustained by the fear of the prince, which may temporarily supply the want of religion."[43]

He observed the origin of religion in the work of the founders of great empires who, seeking long-range political stability and social cohesiveness for their empires, asserted that their nations were founded in the will of God. This was done to secure the primordial commitment to the state that force along cannot achieve. He argued that:

> In truth, there never was any remarkable lawgiver amongst any people who did not resort to divine authority, as otherwise his laws would not have been accepted by the people; for there are many good laws, the importance of which is known to the sagacious lawgiver, but the reasons for which are not sufficiently evident to enable him to persuade others to submit to them; and therefore do wise men, for the purpose of removing this difficulty, resort to divine authority.[44]

Machiavelli's prime example of the prince who used the religious needs of his people to secure peaceful obedience to the laws of the state is Moses. The religious myth he used in the instruction of the Hebrew people was God's Ten Commandments. Thus, for Machiaevlli, the founder of the state uses religion as an instrument to establish a moral horizon within which the people will live as long as the myth is effective. From the perspective of civil religion as an analytical tool, this myth

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[43]Nicolo Machiavelli, The Prince and The Discourses, trans Luigi Ricci (New York: The Modern Library, 1959), 148.

[44]Ibid., 147.

of the founding would be understood to generate symbols and rites to extend the commitment to the state beyond the life of the founder. As new leaders emerge and new myths are created, the society would develop an ever more powerful civil religion.

Like Augustine, Machiavelli found private religion to be incompatible with the idea of a civil religion. But, following Plato, he sought to preserve civil religion in its proper form against the dysfunctional claims of private religion to a higher source of allegiance than the state. He admitted that the teachings of civil religion are false but justified it by its instrumental function of social stabilization.

Spinoza continued Machiavelli's attempt to channel man's need for religion toward conformity to the law. He believed that religion, if not properly directed, would disrupt the political system by subjecting the state to "the diverse judgments and passions of everyone...."[45] He called for democratic government to regulate the opinions of men by means of religion. To do so, he argued that the sovereign power has the right "to make whatever laws about religion that it decides."[46] In effect, Spinoza held that social stability required that religious piety must be made identical with patriotism and obedience to the law. To do so is to create a civil religion.

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[45]Benedict Spinoza, "Theologico-Political Treatise", trans. R.H.M. Elwes, The Chief Works of Benedict Spinoza (New York: Dover, 1951), 268.

[46]Ibid.

Because of the pervasive influence of the Bible in his time, Spinoza recognized that to reject the authority of the Scriptures would destroy any influence that he might have upon society. He therefore sought to interpret the Bible in such a way as to make piety identical with obedience to the state. He did this by distinguishing between philosophy and morality in the Scriptures. He concluded that the prophets were contradictory and inadequate as philosophers but consistent and authoritative in matters of morality. Thus the moral law, not speculative truth, must be the foundation of our understanding of the Bible. But the Biblical injunction to love one's neighbor is an obligation to respect his rights. And since his rights are determined by positive law, piety consists in obedience to the laws of the state.

Thus, like Verba 300 years later, Spinoza recognized the existence of a moral dimension to human affairs that is linked to political action and, following Machiavelli, he argued for a civil religion that is instrumental in the building of the best possible state. By focusing on a common reverence for Biblical teachings, he used the Scriptures to forge a civil religion in which piety is understood in terms of obedience to the political order.

Two Frenchmen, Montesquieu and Rousseau, have contributed to the legacy of civil religion as a paradigm to explain politics. Montesquieu observed strong religious attitudes in the population and argued that the function of religion is to make men virtuous citizens. But this virtue was Machiavellian, not Christian. It consisted of patriotism,

a love for equality and sobriety, and obedience to the laws. Montesquieu criticized Christianity because it promoted civil disobedience in the name of a higher law. For his model of virtue, Montesquieu turned to the ancient Stoic and the great Roman emperors, the Antoines, because they were above all, citizens, not saints.[47] Hence, Montesquieu grounded system stability in the religious attitudes of the citizenry and argued that a democratic society needs to have a civil religion.

Following Machiavelli, Rousseau found the greatest political task to be the establishment of a regime. And, like Machiavelli, he saw the religious dimension to be the foundation of the regime and its continuing stability. He argued that to be understood by the people and to convince them, the founders "must learn the language of the vulgar, and that is chiefly the language of divine inspiration or religion."[48] Rousseau hoped to channel religious attitudes through political control to serve the ends of the regime. For his model, he looked to "the pagan world where no distinction was made between the Gods and its laws."[49]

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[47]Baron De Montesquieu, The Spirit of the Laws, trans. Thomas Nugent (New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1949), 21, 10; 23, 13; 25, 10.

[48]Allan Bloom, "Jean Jacques Rousseau," in History of Political Philosophy, eds. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1963), 528.

[49]Jean Jacques Rousseau, Social Contract, ed. Ernest Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 296.

Rousseau attacked Christianity for destroying the pagan idea that virtue and good citizenship are synonymous. To eliminate the danger of Christianity and to promote political stability, Rousseau proposed a civil religion which would lead the citizen to love his duties. This civil religion contained five clauses: 1) the existence of God, 2) the life to come, 3) the reward of virtue and the punishment of evildoers, 4) the exclusion of religious intolerance (so long as private religions contain nothing at variance with the duties of the citizen), and 5) the sanctity of the social contract and the laws.[50]

Rousseau's vision of the civil religion and its function is not unlike the thought of the contemporary publicists of civil religion in America. His failure was the inability to see that the Christian religion, as translated into the "language of the vulgar," might combine with the emerging symbols of the national experience to produce a functioning civil religion quite unlike the religion of the institutionalized church.

Clearly, neither the concept of civil religion as description and explanation of social reality nor the normative conclusion that the existence of a civil religion is good for society is novel. The legacy of civil religion is well-rooted in ancient politics and the history of political philosophy. The American understanding of civil religion shares a common core with the assumptions of traditional political thought: belief in existence of a religious dimension in politics,

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[50] Ibid.

concern about the relationship of religious belief to political stability, and a recognition that the tension between private and public religion may be a source of conflict in the political system. The American civil religion became distinctly American as it developed additional beliefs supported by symbols and rites unique to the American political experience.

III

Those political theorists who focus on the political and legal distinctions between church and state in America find the notion of a civil religion to be a paradox. For them, the political legacy asserting the existence of a moral dimension in human affairs and its utility to political stability is seldom taken seriously; or if taken seriously, they are alarmed at the challenge to secularism. They find the First Amendment to the United States Constitution which states that "Congress shall make no laws respecting an establishment of religion...." to be evidence that the national polity is to be publicly agnostic. Recent Supreme Court decisions voiding most types of tax support for parochial schools and forbidding official prayers in the public schools seem to support this belief.

Ironically, these theorists fail to recognize that their concern for church-state separation may actually be an American expression of the conflict between public and private religion as identified by Plato and Rousseau. As in any civil religion, the virtuous American must not permit private religion to conflict with his duties of citzenship nor the central cultural values of the community. On

occasion, the state may exempt private religious groups from a particular obligation. But such exemption is an expression of the tolerance of the state, not the rights of private religion. The state determines when and to what degree such exemptions are permitted. Because the beliefs of the civil religion reflect the condensed experiences of reality of generations of Americans and represent the American's understanding of not only who he is but why he exists, few Americans would stretch religious toleration to include the questioning of the fundamentals of the civil religion. As Herberg suggests, "it [the civil religion] is the American Way of Life about which Americans are admittedly and unashamedly intolerant."[51] In effect, the American state functions as a sacred compact of rules and obligations while private religions are voluntary associations demanding little sacrifice and only superficial commitment.

The unwillingness of many social scientists to recognize the existence of a religious or moral character to the phenomena characterized as civil religion may be explained by their inability or unwillingness to distinguish between formally organized religious denominations and an informal but commonly accepted secularized civil theology. Recognition of the American's dual membership in both a civil religion and traditional denominations is obscured by a too narrow definition of "religion" as denoting a single type of collectivity of which an individual can be a member of only one at a time. Luckmann has

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[51]Will Herberg, Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology, op. cit., 88.

criticized American social scientists for their identification of the churches with religion and their mistaken assumption that a "sacred cosmos" must have a "special" or "denominational" basis.[52]

In contrast to those who believe that "religion" is to be restricted in institutionalized denominations, this study assumes that every complex society will inevitably tend to develop one working faith or one inclusive ideology apart from the formal religious system. This conclusion, shared by a number of social scientists and theologians, has led to renewed interest in the concept of civil religion in American social analysis and social philosophy. For example, Robin Williams, Jr., argued that:

> Every functioning society has to an important degree a common religion. A society's common value system - its moral solidarity - is always correlated with and to a degree dependent upon a sacred religious orientation.[53]

Sidney Mead supported this view when he argued that common religious themes and symbols have continuously embodied themselves in America's civil institutions and in her justification of national tasks.[54]

The case for an American civil religion, then, is not to be made by analysis of the influence of formal religious bodies on the state. Rather, the civil religion is to be found in the common rituals, beliefs, symbols and expectations of the American people which express a religious dimension in political affairs. Chapter Two will trace the origins

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[52]Thomas Luckmann, The Invisible Religion (New York: Macmillan Co., 1967), 52.

[53]Robin Williams, Jr., American Society: A Sociological Interpretation, op. cit., 345.

[54]Sidney Mead, The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).

and development of the American civil religion in contemporary political life.

Many political symbols and rites are condensation symbols reflecting the unified equalitarian, pragmatic, materialistic, religious, and idealistic values and normative beliefs associated with American social life. The existence of an American civil religion may be seen in these symbols, the speeches of politicans, in a religious affirmation of America through civil holidays and public rites and in the funerals of prominent American leaders.

The foremost representative of the civil religion in America is the President. He not only serves as chief of state but also functions as the symbolic representative of the whole of the American people. The rituals he celebrates and the speeches he makes reflect the major themes of the American civil religion.

Content analysis reveals that God-talk and the use of theological concepts is common to the inaugural addresses of American Presidents. Every President has affirmed the existence of God and the spiritual dimension of political life. Such reference to God is necessary is the inauguration of American Presidents because the ceremony is an important rite in the civil religion. It affirms the religious legitimation of the highest political authority.

From Woodrow Wilson to Richard Nixon, modern Presidents have argued that God exists and that the American polity can be interpreted in the light of His will. August Hechscher observed that Wilson found religion to be at the heart of politics and insisted on a mission which

America was destined to fulfill.[55] Franklin Roosevelt, in his first inauguration, asked for God's guidance and argued that "larger purposes... bind us all as a sacred obligation...."[56] At later inaugurations, he emphasized the religious legitimacy of his presidency by claiming the inauguration to have occurred "in the presence of our God," and by reference to "the temple of our ancient faith," "Our covenant," "Divine guidance," and the "will of God."

In 1949, President Harry S Truman asked for the help and prayers of the American people. He argued that "all men are created equal because they are created in the image of God." President Eisenhower began his first inaugural address with a prayer to "Almighty God," affirmed the "Watchfulness of a Divine Providence," and condemned the enemies of America who "know no God...." In 1954, after signing legislation officially inserting the words "under God" into the pledge of allegiance, he said that the phrase would "strengthen the spiritual weapons which forever will be our country's most powerful resource."[57]

President John Kennedy continued the affirmation of a God-centered polity in his inaugural address of 20 January 1961. He said:

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[55]August Hechscher, "Woodrow Wilson: An Appraisal and Recapitulation," in The Philosophy and Politics of Woodrow Wilson, ed. Earl Latham (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 244-259.

[56]All quotations, unless otherwise stated, are taken from Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents of the United States (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1969), House Document 91-142.

[57]Dwight David Eisenhower, quoted in the Indianapolis Star Sunday Magazine, April 1, 1973, 3.

> For I have sworn before you and Almighty God the same solemn oath our forbears prescribed nearly a century and three quarters ago...the same revolutionary beliefs for which our forbears fought are still at issue around the globe - the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state but from the hand of God...let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking his blessing and his help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own.

By reference to "Almighty God" as witness to his inauguration, Kennedy attributed a "sacred" quality to that inauguration. By finding God's work on earth to be the work of the American people, he expressed the belief of the civil religion that God has chosen America as a model to all the world. And by identifying his beliefs and goals with those of our forbears, Kennedy grounded his actions in the American political tradition and sought support by association with the condensation symbols of that tradition. In a like manner, Lyndon Johnson reminded the American people that "the oath I have taken before you and before God is not mine alone, but ours together." He referred to "Our destiny," "faith," "The American covenant," and "the judgement of God which is harshest on those who are most favored."

From the day of his first inauguration, President Richard Nixon placed a special emphasis upon the "spiritual sources" of American history. In his speeches, he applied many of the attributes of the Christian deity to the "American spirit", a healing power, compassion for the helpless, forgiveness to the sinner, and man's freedom to choose his own ultimate destiny. Charles Henderson correctly observed that: "President Nixon has systematically used the vocabulary of religion- faith, hope, trust, belief - and applied those words

to his own nation and his own personal vision of what that nation should be."[58] These attitudes which President Nixon avowed are typical of American civil religion. Faith in the purpose and destiny of America, the universal application of American values and goals to all the world, and the belief that God has chosen America and favors her cause in the struggle for ultimate values. Presumably, Nixon believed that, in periods of crisis, political support can be generated by reminding the American people of the spiritual dimensions of politics and the President's role as chief priest of the American civil religion.

These quotes from Presidents Franklin Roosevelt through Richard Nixon are recent presidential expressions of the American civil religion. Although civil religion may be used by presidents for political ends, there is no reason to assume that the presidents do not take these beliefs seriously. Nor is there any reason to doubt the compatability of these presidential views with those of the American people.

Yet, the American civil religion doesnot exercise total domination of American social thought. The voices of private religion are still raised to limit the scope of civil religion in America. Mark Hatfield, an outspoken evangelical Christian and a United States Senator, recognized the threat of the civil religion to private religions when he expressed reservations about the National Prayer Breakfast:

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[58]Charles Henderson, Jr., "Richard Nixon, Theologian," The Nation, 211, (Sept. 21, 1970), 235.

> Events such as this prayer breakfast contain the real danger of misplaced allegiance if not outright idolatry to the extent that they fail to distinguish between the god of civil religions and the God who reveals himself in the Holy Scriptures and in Jesus Christ. If we as leaders appeal to the god of civil religion, then our faith is in a small deity, a loyal spiritual Advisor to power and prestige, a Defender of only the American nation, the object of national folk religion devoid of moral content.[59]

Hatfield also blamed the "cultisms" of the American presidency and its corrupting influence on the White House for the Watergate affair.[60] He faulted the American public for "idolatry" because of its tendency to idolize the presidency and he said that: "We, as Americans, bow to the powers and prestige associated with that office in a way that can be ungodly."[61] James H. Smylie has supported Senator Hatfield's view and criticized President Nixon for appointing himself priest to "celebrate and sanctify his possession and use of power."[62]

Articulation of the American civil religion is not restricted to presidents. Evidence of social symbolism may be found in government buildings, cemetaries and art objects. The grandeur of the White House and the Capitol Building as well as paintings and other mementos remind the citizen of the greatness of the nation's past and symbolize the authority of government. Sacrifice and the belief that sacrifice

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[59] Michigan Christian Advocate, 100 (February 22, 1973), 6.

[60] Chicago Sun-Times, May 4, 1973, 40.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Philadelphia Enquirer, April 26, 1973, 9.

is "sacred" because it furthers America's God-given purpose as a model of liberty and human equality as seen in much of the symbolic content of public architecture. The Lincoln Memorial is awe inspiring for most visitors. It may be perceived as a temple to commemorate a charismatic leader who sacrificed his life to preserve the American union. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier symbolizes both sacrifice and equalitarianism. The national cemetaries, especially Gettysburg and Arlington, perform the same function. All of them evoke patriotic pride, a sense of continuity with the past, and a commitment to future greatness. The flag, the most obvious of symbols, is present at every symbolic site.

The divinization of past presidents and historic events is an important part of the American civil religion because such divinization legitimizes the sacred character of their contributions to the civil religion. For example, at a Memorial Day ritual in New England, one orator was heard to assert that:

> No character excepting the Carpenter of Nazareth has ever been honored the way Washington and Lincoln have been in New England. Virtue, freedom from sin, and righteousness were qualities possessed by Washington and Lincoln, and in possessing these characteristics, both were true Americans, and we would do well to emulate them.[63]

Linking architecture to the divinization of past presidents, John Wilson asked:

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[63]Quotation from Lloyd Warner, American Life: Dream and Reality (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 14.

> What is one to think of the 'father of his country' when he is commemorated by an outsize phallus dominating the landscape" Could it be appropriate except to celebrate a nation whose reach spans the continent and whose mission girdles the globe?[64]

Wilson sent on to argue that the symbolism within the capitol directed toward Washington and Lincoln suggests the first and second persons of the Godhead and that the eternal flame and the open burial plot of the Kennedy memorial evoke the imagery usually associated with the Holy Spirit.[65]

A further manifestation of the civil religion in America is seen in the civil holidays and public ceremonies of American life. These occasions of public worship are not unlike the rites and ceremonies of the ancient city as described by de Coulanges. These rites mark off a sacred year or religious calendar in which religion and Americanism are linked in such a way as to reinforce the belief that morality can only be understood in the context of the state and that the highest morality is conformity to the principles of the American civil religion. Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, Columbus Day, and Veterans Day explicitly fit this interpretation. The recognition given presidential birthdays and, in recent years, Martin Luther King's illustrate the same patterns. There are regional variations such as Confederate Memorial Day (Tennessee and Kentucky), Kamehamehah Day (Hawaii), Pioneer's Day (Utah), and Patriot's Day (Massachusetts).

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[64] John Wilson, "The Status of Civil Religion," op. cit., 4.

[65] Ibid.

These public ceremonies function to sustain the civil theology by reviving memories of the condensation symbols of American society. For example, Columbus Day, the Fourth of July and Pioneer's Day, affirm the vision and the sacrifice of those who gave birth to the American nation and remind us of the principles for which they stood. The birthdays of King and Lincoln evoke memories of sacrifice and the American principle of equality. These ceremonies may also stimulate further sacrifice as the normal anxieties about death are confronted with sacred beliefs which give the community a feeling of well-being. In this sense, the ceremonies perform the same function that Plato assigned to the poets when he argued that they must praise life in the hereafter because soldiers must not fear death. For the American civil religion, the death of a soldier in battle is perceived to be a voluntary sacrifice on the alter of his country. Such a positive understanding of sacrifice will also strengthen the willingness of society to give of its youth and its wealth in the interests of the state.

James Barnett has suggested that even Christmas can be discerned to have America-affirming functions. He found that Christian holidays serve a nationalistic purpose by generating a sense of shared values within the national culture that transcended Christian theology to sustain the civil religion.[66]

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[66]James Barnett, "Christmas in American Culture," Psychiatry, 9 (January, 1946), 137-148, and "The Easter Festival - A Study in Cultural Change," American Sociological Review, 14 (January, 1949), 214-226.

Although Barnett's position may appear too strong, it is clear that Christmas has become a national celebration extending beyond Christian doctrine to promote cultural unity and moral values basic to social stability. The central values of Christmas as practiced appear to have more to do with brotherhood, love, and social unity than with the divinity of Jesus. Symbolic of Christmas is the annual news story of Jewish Americans who volunteer to work Christmas day so that their Christian co-workers or friends may celebrate the holiday with their families. Clearly, the unifying and socially stabilizing values of the civil religion are expressed and practiced in the celebration of Christmas.

The funerals of great Americans also express the themes of the civil religion. Frequently, the divination process of the fallen leader begins with the funeral and emphasis is placed upon the contributions of the leader to the national faith. The funerals of President John Kennedy and Senator Robert Kennedy as well as that of the Reverend Martin Luther King were laden with the theme of sacrifice by collective and individual action toward the ideals and values of Americanism for which these men stood.

The positive reaction of the American public to the "meaningful sacrifice" of the American prisoners of war in Vietnam and the apparent need of most of the prisoners to believe that they had made a meaningful voluntary sacrifice is a further contemporary manifestation of the themes of sacrifice in the symbols and rituals of the American civil religion. The coming home ceremonies of the prisoners of war and

their airport statements have become new rites and provided new symbols in the American civil religion. Consistently, they gave thanks to God, the Commander in Chief and to the American people for their safe return and reaffirmed the basic principles of the American democracy and the "American Way of Life" including such common values as showers, ice cream and a "Frisch's Big Boy."

It would be a mistake to dismiss the ceremonies and symbols of the civil religion as mere rhetoric or a sinister attempt to generate the political support of pious people. Even if the civil religion of the American presidents could be determined to be insincere, it would still have great cultural significance. Trachtenberg has observed that:

> ...speeches might be dismissed as highly conventional and insincere. Sincerity, however, is not a necessary qualification for cultural significance; surely the conventions of language themselves suggest predispositions among Americans to react in certain ways at certain times.[67]

The religious language of American politics suggests predispositions among Americans to react positively to the images of the civil religion.

It would also be a mistake to assume that the civil religion is becoming a thing of the past. The belief that religion has lost touch with the centers of social and political power due to the secularization of American society assumes that secularization weakens

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[67]Alan Trachtenberg, Brooklyn Bridge: Fact and Symbol (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 117.

the power of all religion. A more plausible thesis is that the successful dissociation of the national faith from organized religion has permitted the civil religion to work its way even further into the life of the nation. As secularized religion, the civil theology has become a national theology shared by a people who claim dissimilar formal religious traditions.

IV

The fundamental beliefs of the contemporary American civil religion can be summarized as follows: First, all knowledge of social and political reality is dependent upon sets of symbols which possess an identity-giving function and define reality for the members of the social order. Second, these symbols inevitably reflect the moral dimension of human nature and are grounded in recognition of some transcendent order. Third, these identity-giving symbols include the belief that God has chosen America to serve as a model for the world. Fourth, this model is to reflect the principles of the free society which include the procedural norms and the values of liberal democracy as well as certain rights and obligations of citizenship. Finally, the state is judged by God. Thus, citizens may rightly resist the government if it acts counter to God's purpose or violates its procedural norms and values as articulated in the symbols of the civil religion. This will be pursued in Chapter Four.

Because of these beliefs, it is argued that the civil religion promotes social cohesion and system stability in the United States and sustains the procedures and values of liberal democracy in America. In this context, the concept of civil religion may fill the same function in the United States in this historical epoch that the concepts "natural law" and "natural rights" filled at the time of the Founding Fathers: 1) a set of moral standards governing private conduct; 2) a system of abstract justice to which the laws of men should conform; 3) a line of demarcation around the proper sphere of political authority; and 4), the source of human rights.

It must be observed that civil religion is not unique to America. Voegelin's observation that every Western society has its peculiar version of the myths of Moses or of Egypt has been noted as have the attempts of the ancients and Western political philosophers to create particular types of civil religions for their societies. Templin has observed attempts to revive national sentiments in South Africa by a covenant with the deity not unlike that of the American civil religion.[68] Durkheim concluded his study of the role of religion in primitive society with the claim that a common religion is constitutive of the unity and character of every society. He argued that: "There can be no society which does not feel the need of up-holding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiments

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[68]Alton Templin, "God and the Covenant in the South African Wilderness," Church History, 37 (September, 1968), 281-297.

and the collective ideas which makes its unity and its personality."[69]

Although the idea of civil religion is not unique to the United States, the American version does possess distinctly American features. The American civil religion draws upon American history for its revelatory events and personages. It embodies itself in American institutions and sanctifies American ideals through its symbols and ceremonies. Unlike the civil religion of many societies, the American civil religion requires the formal separation of the functions of religion and the state. This civil religion is not absolutely monolithic. Its rituals and expressions of belief have varied from period to period in American history and now vary from subculture to subculture. Indeed, Cherry has argued that:

> ...a case could be made that our civil religion is composed of a number of 'sects' or 'denominations' ranging all the way from those groups that narrowly proclaim 'America first' during every national crisis to those that view the ideals of the nation as representative of universal human values.[70]

Nevertheless, the themes, symbols, institutions and sources of revelation of the American civil religion are sufficiently continuous and uniform to constitute a clearly identifiable religion that functions vigorously in the public sphere of American society. The national religion possesses at least as much uniformity as Christianity, which has embraced its share of widely differing and quarreling groups.

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[69] Op. cit., 475.

[70] Conrad Cherry, "Two American Sacred Ceremonies: Their Implications for the Study of Religion in America," American Quarterly, 21 (Winter, 1969), 753.

The American civil religion, like all religions today, faces serious problems in the modern world. The ambiguity of its central symbol, "God," its exclusion of Negro and American Indian history from its traditions of revelation, and its tendency to generate nationalism and a belief in the supremacy of American culture, have been dysfunctional in terms of domestic tranquility and the successful implementation of foreign policy. These problems must be resolved if the civil religion is to survive as a vital force in American life. The possibility of survival, however, is another topic in itself. Despite real problems facing the religion, its continued celebration in sacred ceremonies signifies that it has scarcely ceased to operate as a living American religion. Clearly, the civil theology is still so vital a part of our public life that a neglect of it by the scholar will leave it too much in the hands of the propagandist.

CHAPTER II

THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL RELIGION IN AMERICA

> Let every American, every lover of liberty, every well wisher to his posterity, swear by the blood of the Revolution, never to violate in the least particular, the laws of the country; and never to tolerate their violation by others. As the patriots of seventy-six did to the support of the Constitution and Laws, let every American pledge his life, his property, and his sacred honor;--let every man remember that to violate the law is to trample on the blood of his father, and to tear the charter of his own, and his children's liberty. Let reverence for the laws, be breathed by every American mother, to the lisping babe, that prattles on her lap--let it be taught in schools, in seminaries, and in colleges;--let it be preached from the pulpit, proclaimed in legislative halls, and enforced in courts of justice. And, in short, let it become the political religion of the nation; and let the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the grave and the gay, of all sexes and tongues, and colors and conditions, sacrifice unceasingly upon its altars.
>
> --Abraham Lincoln
> An Address on "The Perpetuation
> Of Our Political Institutions"

Two of the publicists of an American civil religion have used Rousseau's normative model to provide a conceptual orientation for their analysis of the American civil faith.[1] But one significant distinction between the theory of Rousseau and the practice of American civil religion seriously limits the applicability of Rousseau to American politics while providing a striking example of the centrality of civil religion in America.

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[1]See Philip M. Dripps, "What God Has Joined Together: Civil and Prophetic Religion," Christian Advocate, 16 (April 1, 1971), 7-9, and Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," in Religion in America, eds. W.G. McLaughlin and R.N. Bellah (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1968), 336-337.

Rousseau would have the sovereign create the civil religion. Thus, for him, civil religion does not represent the existential truth of a society and is conceived as only a manipulative device. The sovereign is neither bound by the civil religion nor is his concept of social reality structured by that religion. According to Rousseau, the civil religion is formal and contrived. In contrast, contemporary views find the American civil religion to be the expression of natural developments. Although political leaders may seek to manipulate the symbols of civil religion, the religion itself is natural and not contrived. The sovereign is bound by the norms of the civil religion and its conception of what is real is structured by the civil religion. It is the civil religion, not the sovereign, which is central to the organization and maintenance of the civil order.

This chapter explains the hegemony of civil religion in American society by analysis of the origins and development of the civil religion. It conceives civil religion to be both creative and stabilizing and focuses on the natural creation and development of social symbols as well as the intended and unintended function of formal institutions to secure a primordial commitment to the norms of the civil religion. Data is drawn from history and contemporary politics as well as the insights of the publicists of the civil religion.

I

"The existence of man in political society," Voegelin said, "is historical experience; and a theory of politics, if it penetrates to principles, must at the same time be a theory of history."[2] The sources of the beliefs of the American civil religion are existentialist in nature because they are rooted in and dependent upon historically experienced "reality" and emotions, not empirical facts. Thus the American civil religion is, at base, a theory or explanation of American history and its beliefs and values are drawn from the national self-understanding of that history.

The creation and definition of the structural boundaries of experienced social reality for Americans may be divided into three phases of the civil religion: the period of the founding, the Civil War, and the period of global responsibility as a major power. It is this historical experience that provides the "creative" or symbol-building element in the socialization of the American civil religion.

Most of the beliefs structuring the national self-understanding of Americans have their origins in the period of the founding. These beliefs include four assumptions: 1) God exists and society is to be interpreted by the nature of its relationship to God; 2) religion is

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[2] Op. cit., 1.

instrumental to political prosperity; 3) God has chosen the American people to serve as an example of freedom and liberty and as proof that man can govern himself in peace and justice; and, 4) the state is to be judged by God.

The belief that society must be interpreted in terms of its relationship to God is grounded in the Puritan emphasis on the centrality of God as a paradigm for the conceptualization of social reality. The Mayflower Compact, the first symbol of the American political tradition, began with the invocation: "In the name of God, Amen."[3] In this way, God was called to witness the founding of the community. Any violation of the compact would have been understood as an offense against God. Nineteen years later, the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut affirmed the existence of God and the relationship of the society to the transcendent order. And in 1641, the Massachusetts Body of Liberties linked "humanity, civility, and Christianity" to human freedoms.[4]

Even the religious skeptics of the eighteenth century used the symbol "God" or some synonym for God for the self-illumination of the nation and its purpose. However, this God that illuminated the meaning and purpose of the nation was not the God of Christian theology. Although all presidents, for example, referred to God in their inaugural

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[3]"Agreement Between The Settlers At New Plymouth" in "Appendix II" of Willmoore Kendall and George W. Carey, The Basic Symbols of the American Political Tradition (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), 157.

[4]Quoted in ibid., 55-56.

addresses, none referred to Christ. Thus, the God of the civil religion appears to be broadly theistic rather than specifically Christian and to be more related to order and law than to salvation and love.

This separation of civil religion from any specific formal religious system was necessary because any particular sectarian view would have increased the probability that alternate religious systems might seriously challenge the symbols of the civil religion and make counter claims on the loyalty of Americans. By expressing the civil religion in such terms, it was possible for Americans to participate in both the civil religion as well as a specific religious sect. An alternative was the creation of a general religion weak in theology but also weak in its claim on Americans. The American civil religion is specific in its content and its claims. But its specificity is its Americanism, not its definition of God. In this way, the civil religion was saved from both the empty formalism of religion in general as well as the social conflict that would result in a narrow sectarian approach. Thus, the American civil religion could constitute the essence of American citizenship as the civil religions of Greece and Rome did for citizenship for their societies and still permit a private realm of religious experience which, in most cases, would not conflict with the claims of the civil religion.

From the beginning, the founding fathers sought to channel religious

belief into patriotism and obedience to the laws of the land. The belief that God witnessed the compact or created men with particular rights placed obligations on the citizen to conform to the expectations of the social order. Washington argued that: "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports."[5] Samuel Adams wrote that: "Revelation assures us that Righteousness exalteth a Nation...."[6] And the Reverend Phillip Payson, speaking to the Massachusetts Legislature, argued that: "The fear and reverence of God, and the terrors of eternity, are the most powerful restraints upon the minds of men,...let the restraints of religion, once be broken down and we might well defy all human wisdom and power to support and preserve order and government in the state."[7] Rossiter summarized this belief of the founding fathers as the assumption that "religion helped put the order in ordered liberty, especially by emphasizing the dependence of public morality on private virtue."[8]

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[5]As found in Robert Bellan, "Civil Religion," op. cit., 337.

[6]Quoted by Clinton Rossiter, The Political Thought of the American Revolution (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1963), 204-205.

[7]Quoted in ibid., 205-206.

[8]Quoted in ibid., 206.

The belief that God has chosen America as a model for the world was generated by the transmission and internalization of Old Testament symbolization into the American experience. The Hebrew people sought to interpret social reality by analogizing existentially experienced referents with the purpose of defining God. Thus, as the Voegelin analogy suggests, the action of Moses was taken by Israel to mean that Israel was God's chosen people for all mankind.[9] This Biblical myth, transmitted to the American polity, provided the condensation symbols for the identity-giving function of the civil religion. It was given immediacy by the existential experience of delivery from the Old World and the successful struggle to tame the continent. Thus, Americans became God's newly chosen people and their self-understood purpose was to serve as a model for all men.

Evidence of this belief is seen in the words of John Winthrop who said that "...the God of Israel is among us...we must consider that we shall be a City upon a Hill, the eyes of all people upon us."[10] Jonathan Edwards argued that: "The other continent hath slain Christ, and...shed the blood of the saints.... God has, therefore, probably reserved the honor of building the temple to the daughter that has not shed so much bolld...."[11] And William Stoughton expressed the thought that "God sifted a whole Nation that He might send

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[9]Eric Voegelin, Order and History, 1 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957), 115.

[10]John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity," in Conrad Cherry, ed. God's New Israel (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1971), 42.

[11]Jonathan Edwards, "The Latter-Day Glory Is To Begin in America," in ibid., 56-57.

Choice Grain over into this Wilderness."[12]

The use of the Moses analogy and the concept of the nation as a model was not limited to the Puritans who sought to build a New Israel at Massachusetts Bay. The view that God had guided the American experience from the beginning found support in every part of the country. Nicholas Street used the Moses analogy when he instructed his parishioners that: "We in this land are...let out of Egypt by the God of Moses."[13] He went on to argue that "We are in the wilderness....And the British ministry have been acting over the same wicked, mischievous plot against the American States as Hainan did against the Jews, and we have reason to hope that they will meet with the like fate."[14] Samuel Langdon asserted that "Instead of the twelve tribes of Israel, we may substitute the thirteen states of the American union...."[15] And Ezra Stiles, preaching before Governor Jonathan Trumbull and the General Assembly of Connecticut, compared the history of the Hebrew people with that of the American states and concluded that:

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[12]Quoted in Clinton Rossiter, "The American Mission," The American Scholar, 20 (Winter, 1950-51), 20.

[13]Nicholas Street, "The American States Acting Over The Part Of The Children of Israel in The Wilderness," in Conrad Cherry, ed. God's New Israel, op. cit., 69.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Samuel Langdon, "The Republic Of The Israelites An Example To The American States," in ibid., 98-99.

> At this period...we have reason to believe that the United States may be of no small influence and consideration. It was of the Lord to send Joseph into Egypt, to save much people, and to shew forth his praise. It is of the Lord that...Christianity is to be found in such great purity in the church exiled into the wilderness of America...with the ultimate subservience to the glory of God, in converting the world.[16]

Nor was the theme of divine guidance restricted to the clergy. Washington, in his first inaugural address, informed the American people that "No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the Invisible Hand which conducts the affairs of man more than these of the United States. Every step by which we have advanced to the character of an independent nation seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency."[17] Jefferson consistently used the symbolization of Israel to interpret social reality for Americans. On one occasion he proposed that the seal of the United States picture "the children of Israel in the wilderness led by a cloud by day and a pillar by night."[18] In his second inaugural he requested "the favor of the Being in whose hands we are, who led our fathers, as Israel of Old, from their native land and planted them in a country flowing with all the necessaries and comforst of life."[19] Later, Jefferson

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[16]Ezra Stiles, "The United States Elevated To Glory and Honor," in ibid., 92.

[17]Inaugural Addresses, op. cit., 2.

[18]Quoted in Clinton Rossiter, "The American Mission," op. cit., 22.

[19]Inaugural Addresses, op. cit., 21.

stated that his generation "acted not for ourselves alone, but for the whole human race."[20]

Albert Gallatin argued that the purpose of America was "to be a model for all other governments and...to exert a moral influence most beneficial to mankind."[21] Tom Paine found that America must "excite emulation throughout the kingdoms of the earth, and meliorate the conditions of the human race" by serving as the model for other revolutions if need be."[22] James Wilson, at the Constitutional Convention, argued that the responsibility of the nation was to extend the concepts of liberty, equality and justice over all the earth. This, he said, was "the great design of Providence in regard to this globe."[23] Finally, the Continental Congress expressed this idea in 1789:

> If justice, good faith, honor, gratitude, and all the other qualities which ennoble a nation and fulfill the ends of government, shall be the fruits of our establishment, then the cause of liberty will acquire a dignity and lustre it has never yet enjoyed, and an example will be set which cannot but have the most favorable influence on mankind.24

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[20]Quoted in Russel B. Nye, This Almost Chosen People (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1966), 173.

[21]Quoted in ibid., 160.

[22]Quoted in ibid., 172.

[23]Quoted in ibid., 173.

[24]Quoted in ibid., 168-169.

Clearly, the belief that America has been chosen by God for a special purpose and the analogy of that belief to the symbolization of Moses in the Old Testament, is central to the origins and development of the American civil religion. It is reflected in the sermons and documents of the Puritans, in the eighteenth century justification for separation from Great Britain, and in the inaugural addresses of the early American Presidents.

The belief that the state is judged by God was most fully developed through the experience of the Civil War. But it was also present at the period of the founding.

Abiel Abbot, reflecting on the many parallels between Israel and America developed by the Puritan clergy, argued that their purpose was "not to raise our national vanity...but rather to excite our pious caution..." regarding the judgement of God.[25] Samuel Adams argued that "...communities are dealt with in this world by the wise and just ruler of the universe; He rewards or punishes them according to their general character."[26] And in the midst of a yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia in 1793, a New York minister insisted that "Jehovah has a controversy" with the Americans, whose "...national sins are enormous."[27]

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[25]Quoted in Merle Curti, The Roots of American Loyalty (Morningside Heights, New York: Columbia University Press, 1946), 67.

[26]Quoted in Rossiter, Political Thought, op. cit., 204-205.

[27]Quoted in Merle Curti, The Roots of American Loyalty, op. cit., 67.

Thus the four central beliefs of the American civil religion were clearly present at the period of the founding. The American self-interpretation of the nature of society and social truth was bounded by the existentialist experiences of Americans and interpreted through the borrowed condensation symbols of the Hebrew people. Section II will treat the Civil War as the second phase in the development of the American civil religion and will introduce the reader to phase three, the current period of the American experience.

II

The self-illumination of a society is not static. The process by which symbol-building structures the perception of reality for members of the society continues over time. The reality is grounded in the on-going process of history. Until the Civil War, the American civil religion was rooted in the symbols of the Revolution. It was expressed in the cult of her heroes, the sermons of her clergy, and in the symbols which functioned to structure political and social reality for Americans just as the myths of the prophets and God's selection of Israel served the Hebrew people. Yet, prior to the Civil War, Americans differed from the Hebrews in that they had no themes of sacrifice or death in their civil religion. Nor was there an understood experience of the nation suffering the judgment of God for disobedience of His laws.

Cassirer argued that myth is the expression of emotion. "It is

emotion turned into image."[28] The Civil War is the second fundamental collective experience that involved the national self-understanding so deeply as to turn emotion into image and to require expression in the symbols of the civil religion. Voegelin might well refer to the Civil War as the "opening of the soul" of America "in search of its humanity and its order."[29] The Civil War brought the themes of sacrifice, death, and judgement into the American civil religion and again raised the question: "What does it mean to be an American?" The experience of that war was responsible for the creation of new condensation symbols and the testing and reaffirmation of many existing beliefs and symbols of the American civil religion.

In 1835, de Tocqueville wrote that the American republic never had been really tested. The Civil War provided that test. At bottom, this test was a religious struggle. Viewed from the perspective of civil religion, the primary question was not slavery but the proper location of ultimate concern. That is, what is to be sacred? For the North, that ultimate concern was the preservation of a particular type of union, one that was more spiritual than political. The question was: "Is America to be a gemeinschaft or a gesellschaft?" A gemeinschaft is an aggregation of people living together because they find it useful to do so. This society might be called a consumer's

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[28]Ernest Cassirer, The Myth of the State (New Haven: Yale University Press, Second Printing, 1966), 43.

[29]Eric Voegelin, New Science of Politics, op. cit, 67-68.

organization because its institutions have been arranged by the members with a view toward their individual wishes. Thus, gemeinschaft is an organic unity while gesellschaft is an artificial one created by man for specific purposes. In the United States, the North sought to make the political union synonymous with a national gemeinschaft based on the beliefs of the civil religion. In contrast, the South sought to preserve regional gemeinschafts within a national political union based on the gesellschaft concept. Thus, the Civil War may be interpreted as America's religious struggle over fundamental principles of ultimate concern. The questions of national self-identity, the scope and meaning of the symbols of the American tradition, and America's relationship to the transcendent were all at stake.

The United States has been described as "The Nation with the Soul of a Church."[30] But at the time of the Civil War, that soul was divided and alienated from itself. The conflict regarding the meaning of the creed and the symbols of the American civil religion can be seen in the literature of the clergy and public officials at the time of the Civil War. Not surprisingly, both Northern and Southern apologists attempted to incorporate the symbols of the civil

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[30]Sidney E. Mead, "The Nation With The Soul of a Church," Church History, 36 (September, 1967), 262.

religion into the defense of their positions. Each section asserted that it represented the true American mission. Each claimed to represent the constitutive principles of the American Republic and each analogized the Moses myth to the benefit of his own section.

Henry Ward Beecher developed the theme of sacrifice as he argued that God's chosen (chosen, of course, to obey the Northern version of the civil religion), were called to suffer for their principles. He argued that: "A thousand times we have cried, 'Let this cup pass from us!' It has been overruled...and we have heard the voice of God saying, 'Yield these never!'"[31] He concluded that God is just and will reward those whom he has chosen to represent His political and social truth.

In contrast, Benjamin Palmer is representative of the Southern usage of the civil religion to explain the Civil War and to defend the position of the South. He used certain Old Testament texts to justify slavery, including the curse of Ham that befell the black race and doomed it to perpetual servitude, and he analogized the Moses myth to attack the Northern attempt to destroy regional gemeinschafts in favor of its version of the civil religion. He asserted that: "Eleven tribes sought to go forth in peace from the house of political bondage [the Northern gemeinschaft]; but the heart of our modern Pharaoh is

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[31] Henry Ward Beecher, "The Battle Set in Array," in Conrad Cherry, ed. God's New Israel, op. cit., 130.

hardened, that he will not let Israel go....[32] Palmer believed that the North had violated the will of God by attacking the existence of slavery and he saw the Civil War as God's judgment and punishment of the American people for their sins.

This conflict over the object of ultimate concern in America provided the themes of sacrifice, judgment and rebirth in the civil religion and, through Lincoln, certain Christian symbolism also entered the civil religion. Lincoln saw the union as one great gemeinschaft incorporating the beliefs of the American civil religion. The concept of a nationalized, unified democracy was the guiding doctrine of his life. He thought of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution as sacred covenants which had divine sanction and were therefore irrevocable. In his first inaugural he stated this in unequivocal terms as he said: "I hold that, in contemplation of universal law and the Constitution, the union of these states is perpetual."[33] As Mead suggested, Lincoln became "...the premier theologian of the religion of the republic."[34]

In his opposition to slavery and his defense of the Union, the idea of the American model was always foremost in Lincoln's thoughts. He repeatedly argued that the cause of liberty everywhere hung on the

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[32]Benjamin Palmer, "National Responsibility Before God," in ibid., 180.

[33]Inaugural Addresses, op. cit., 121.

[34]Sidney Mead, "The Nation With The Soul of a Church," op. cit., 277.

result of the Civil War. His description of the American mission reflected the power of the condensation symbols as he claimed the obligations of the mission to be "felt in the blood and felt along the heart."[35] "His profound distaste for slavery," Rossiter argued, "derived to an important degree from his opinion that the mere existence of human bondage as a legal and social institution virtually destroyed our claim to be the model republic."[36] He asserted that, "For my part, I consider that the central idea pervading this struggle is the necessity that is upon us, of proving that popular government is not an absurdity."[37]

Lincoln's understanding of the civil religion included what Rousseau referred to as the "sanctity of the social contract." He emphasized obedience to the law and conceived the source of that obligation to be grounded in the traditions and condensation symbols of the American people. This belief was reflected in a speech delivered to the Young Men's Lyceum in Springfield, Illinois, January 27, 1838, only six weeks after the lynching of abolitionist editor Elijah Lovejoy at nearby Alton, Illinois, when he argued: "Let reverence for the laws...become the political religion of the nation...."[38]

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[35]Quoted in Rossiter, "The American Mission," op. cit., 24.

[36]Quoted in ibid., 24-25.

[37]Quoted in ibid., 26.

[38]Abraham Lincoln, "The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions," in Robert A. Goldwin, ed., On Civil Disobedience: American Essays Old and New (Chicago: Rand-McNally, 1968), 5.

Lincoln's declaration of the sanctity of the constitutional order, a view deeply rooted in Biblical religion and the symbols of that religion found in the American civil order, undoubtedly bordered on the deification of the American body politic. Thus did Lincoln uphold the American gemeinschaft or civil religion, pointing to that outward and visible sign (the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution), of an inward and spiritual grace. The inward and spiritual grace, of course, must be understood as the content of the condensation symbols of the civil religion and the ultimate meaning they give to American citizenship. For Lincoln, America was clearly the nation with the soul of a church.

Lincoln's understanding of the relationship between the civil religion and the American state may be stated as follows: civil religion is prior to the American state and thus the ordering principle. The order is crucial. The American civil religion requires positive beliefs about the relation of God to the making of the laws. For Lincoln, God is the law, and civil religion, when it is open to the revelations of the transcendent God, is a prerequisite to a viable and effective political state. Without belief in a transcendent God animating the soul of a nation, the political state, arising out of the same wellspring, will find a people who are not attuned to the order of a higher law.

Lincoln not only interpreted and acted upon the civil religion, he became a part of it. The life and death of Lincoln came to symbolize the new themes of death, sacrifice and rebirth which the experience of

the Civil War brought to the civil religion. Lowell found the Gettysburg Address to be a symbolic act in the civil religion. He pointed out the "insistent use of birth images" in the speech explicitly devoted to "these honored dead": "brought forth," "conceived," "created," "a birth of freedom".[39] Lowell went on to argue that:

> The Gettysburg Address is a symbolic and sacramental act. Its verbal quality is resonance combined with a logical, matter of fact, prosaic brevity.... In his words, Lincoln symbolically died, just as the Union soldiers really died-and as he himself was soon to die. By his words, he gave the field of battle a symbolic significance that it had lacked. For us and our country, he left Jefferson's ideals of freedom and equality joined to the Christian sacrificial act of death and rebirth. I believe this is a meaning that goes beyond sect or religion and beyond peace and war, and is now part of our lives as a challenge, obstacle and hope.[40]

This symbolism Lincoln brought into the civil religion is Christian but, in keeping with the civil religion, it is also nonsectarian. Just as the symbols of the formative period were Hebraic without being Jewish in any specific sense, the Christian theme of sacrifice came into the civil religion through Lincoln and the Civil War without being narrowly sectarian. Lincoln's death cemented the theme of sacrifice in the national religion. Following his death, Lincoln was quickly equated with Jesus. His law partner, Herdon, wrote:

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[39]Quoted in ibid., 343-344.

[40]Quoted in ibid., 344.

> For fifty years God rolled Abraham Lincoln through his fiery furnace. He did it to try Abraham and to purify him for his purposes. This made Mr. Lincoln humble, tender, tolerant; broadening, deepening and widening his whole nature; making him the noblest and loveliest character since Jesus Christ.... I believe that Lincoln was God's chosen one.[41]

The Civil War marked a bloody, anguishing climax to the socialization process of the American civil religion. It preserved the Union and made an end to the issue of sectional gemeinschafts within a constitutional order based upon the principle of a gesellschaft relationship between concurring majorities. As the Supreme Court put it in 1869, the war decisively proved that the nation was a gemeinschaft, an:

> indestructible union of indestructible states..., which began among the colonies and grew out of a common origin, mutual sympathies, kindred principles, similar interests, and geographic relations.[42]

Following the Civil War, America could never be the same. In the language of the civil religion, the soul of America had been truly opened in search of its humanity and its order. The event involved the national self-understanding so deeply that the civil religion came to incorporate four new themes: sacrifice, death, rebirth and the ever present judgment of God. It produced new identity-giving symbols including the Lincoln Memorial, the Gettysburg National Cemetery, the Gettysburg Address and Memorial Day. These symbols serve to condense the existentially experienced emotions and beliefs of the Civil War and

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[41]Quoted in ibid.

[42]Texas Versus White, 7 Wall. 700 (1869).

to release them, at specific places and on specific occasions, into the consciousnesses of living Americans. They are, of course, affected by the experiences of the living and the degree to which the symbols and the nature of their contents have been socialized into the individual personalities of the American people.

The third phase of the American civil religion is the period in which we now stand. In this period, the American's understanding of himself and the social order has been dramatically shaped by the emergence of America as a world power. The major concern of the civil religion has been to explain the use and purpose of American power at home and abroad. Since World War II, Americans have come to understand themselves to be locked in a great Manichean confrontation which posits a fundamental dualism between an evil East and a good West. The belief that America is to be a model for all the world has been combined with the ability to exercise power as a world policeman and to force our model of liberty upon other societies.

Senator William Fulbright has characterized the national response to these new possibilities as an "arrogance of power" and the experience of Vietnam is seen as the consequences of that arrogance. Significant challenge has been made to civil religion in its third phase by spokesmen for private religion and secularism. The specific criticisms of fundamentalist religion and the concerns of the Vatican to defend Roman Catholicism from "Americanization" will be recognized in Chapter Three while the specific challenge of the power of the Presidency will be analyzed in Chapter Four. Other contemporary streams of religious

thought contain elements critical of the perversions of the civil religion, but no significant denial that politics has a religious dimension. For example, Jacques Maritain, leading Roman Catholic, intellectual, affirmed the existence of both natural law and a democratic faith and argued that democracy must not ignore religion.[43] And Reinhold Niebuhr, a Protestant theorist, referred to "general principles of justice which define the right order of life in a community...."[44] These general principles of Niebuhr's are not unlike the values and assumptions of the civil religion. These problems and the Vietnam experience in relation to the civil religion will be further developed in Chapters Three and Four.

The historical periods of the American civil religion and their impact on the development of condensation symbols have been reviewed. We now turn to an analysis of the potential dangers of civil religion to democratic values and social stability in the American polity.

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[43]Jacques Maritain, The Rights of Man and Natural Law (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1958), 7.

[44]Reinhold Niebuhr, An Interpretation of Christian Ethics (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935), 140.

CHAPTER III

THE DANGERS OF "CIVIL RELIGION"

> The greatest danger from the theological viewpoint in the development of societal religion is the tendency to idolize the society, the state, its leaders, its processes, and its achievements. The need for prophetic attack on such religion is so obvious that I need not detail it here---I would propose---a distinction between 'integral (intact, totalist, organic, dogmatic) societal religion, which becomes a massive problem for a particular faith, and 'non-integral' (open-ended, tentative, historical) societal religion.
>
> Martin E. Marty

"Ritual, not advantage" Kaplan has suggested, "can unite us in a quest to be the best and most moral men we can be and to recognize this potentiality in our fellows."[1] At their best, Kaplan believes, rituals produce a sense of awe, majesty, and mystery and use these feelings to sustain a normative principle: the absolute inherent worth of all. When civil religion asserts that the state must be dedicated to human self-realization, rituals and symbols provide the best hope for the preservation of liberal democratic values and the construction of the good society.

But, as Kendall and Carey suggested, the good society can be perverted if men forget that the truth of the soul and the truth of society are transcendent truths, and that the function of the basic symbols is to express the relations between political society and

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[1]Morton A. Kaplan, On Freedom and Human Dignity: Importance of the Sacred in Politics (Morristown, New Jersey: General Learning Press, 1973), 67.

God.[2] In such cases, the basic symbols of the civil religion may be so manipulated as to make the nation, rather than God, the central paradigm for understanding the nature and obligations of the social order. In effect, the state (or a prominent representative of the state) becomes the judge instead of the judged, and the inherent worth of the self and others is subordinated to the state. A second perversion will occur if the will of the transcendent God is interpreted too narrowly and the civil religion comes to reflect a dogmatic, sectarian view of God. These are the dangers of civil religion in America.

Historically, with obvious exceptions such as nineteenth century imperialism, Manifest Destiny, and the organic theories developed during the Civil War, the American civil religion has been open-ended rather than restrictive. It has been shaped by historical experience rather than ideology, and supportive of democratic ideals and procedures rather than authoritarian. The emergence of the United States as a world power during World War I and climaxing after World War II, marks a third phase of the civil religion. In this phase, it was no longer necessary for the American role in the world to be purely exemplary. The experiences of military victory and the concentration of power in America could be interpreted to confirm God's selection of Americans as His chosen people and to make the role of the world policeman both possible and necessary. The potential

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[2]Willmoore Kendall and George Carey, The Basic Symbols of the American Political Tradition, op. cit., 144-145.

also arose of extending the American way of life and the American civil religion on a global scale for the benefit of all the world. The foreign policy of Woodrow Wilson during and after World War I is an example of such an attempt to export the American civil religion.

Two questions are central in the third phase of the civil religion. First, what impact has this new power had on the civil religion? Has it strengthened the civil religion and, if so, has this resulted in an even stronger public commitment to the state at the expense of diversity and democratic procedures? And, is it now easier for American leaders to use the civil religion to manipulate society in Rousseauian fashion, or are they still bound by that religion? Second, how is the civil religion to be expressed by a powerful state that is attempting to exert responsible leadership in the world? Should the American model remain a "citii on a hill" or should the United States become a world policeman, imposing the truth of the American civil religion on other societies? That is, should the American civil religion become a new world religion or is it still applicable only to the unique historical experience of the American culture? In effect, is the American civil religion to be an inclusivist or a parochial societal religion?

I

World War II was more than a struggle for power or for national advantage. It may be interpreted as a successful defense of the

American way of life against the challenge of two civil religions: German Nazism and Japanese militarism. Indeed, one might conclude that, at the close of World War II, the American civil religion had increased in scope and intensity. A popular war that is consistent with the claims of the civil religion and conceived to be a defense of its beliefs stimulates interaction, social solidarity and intensity of feelings in a society. Such periods may even produce new sacred symbols built on the foundations of old beliefs and reaffirm the contents of the existing condensation symbols. This occurred in both World War I and World War II. The success of the civil religion in legitimizing World War II and transmitting the symbol-building and symbol-reaffirming experiences of that war is evident in the fact that many contemporary social dissidents have stated that they would have supported the government and submitted to military conscription during World War II on the basis that World War II was a just war. That is, "just" in terms of their understanding of the values and beliefs of the American civil religion.

Warner has observed that most Americans found more satisfaction in the experience of the Second World War than they had in any other period of their lives.[3] This occurred because the basic values and traditions of the American self-understanding were under attack and participation and sacrifice in the struggle for the objectives of

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[3]Lloyd Warner, American Life: Dream and Reality, op. cit., 127.

ultimate concern stimulated a feeling of meaning and purpose in life far deeper than the normal activities of social life. The legacy of that war was not only a reaffirmation of the American way of life. It also produced new myths and traditions, enlarged and reactivated patriotic organizations, and a great increase in church attendance and church affiliation.

In recent years, church affiliation and attendance have dropped. This is frequently taken to mean that after the religious revival of the 1940's and 1950's, the civil religion may be weakening its hold on national life. This assumption likens commitment to organized religion too closely to societal religion. Earlier, it was argued that being Protestant, Catholic or Jew was a basis for self-identification and a means of entry into the civil religion. Thus, the very success of those institutions in providing a sense of identity for Americans may be the cause of their decline. Once most everyone was, in a cultural sense, Protestant, Catholic or Jew, everyone was also a true American and the identification of God and nation is free to work itself more deeply into the fabric of the nation without the necessity of continued demonstrations of formal religious association. In addition, a series of Gallup Polls taken over a ten year span have indicated that the long decline in weekly worship services stopped in 1972 and that attendance at public worship appears to have stabilized thus raising doubts about the alleged every increasing

impotence of religious institutions in the society.[4]

Finally, the decline in religious growth has not been uniform among denominations. It has occurred in those denominations where the leadership has appeared to reject the nationalistic aspect of the civil religion: e.g., the United Methodist, Episcopal and United Presbyterian denominations. Fundamentalist denominations have continued to flourish at the expense of more liberal denominations. For example, the Southern Baptists have passed the United Methodists in membership to become the largest Protestant denomination. Other evangelical groups have shown similar growth. In each case, these religious denominations show no hesitation in blending patriotism and reverence for American symbols and traditions with their religion. Billy Graham, Billy James Harges and Carl McIntire command wider and more enthusiastic followings than Malcolm Boyd, Gerald Kennedy or Duncan Littlefair. Ernest Sandeen has argued that American religious fundamentalism with its blending of religion and patriotism, may represent "a clear and accurate understanding of the past."[5] In other words, it best represents the values and beliefs of the American civil religion. If this is so, then shifts in religious association and the weakening of the more liberal denominations in America may well reflect the continuing strength and impact of the civil religion, not its downfall.

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[4]The Christian Century, 92 (January 22, 1975), 55.

[5]Ernest R. Sandeen, "Fundamentalism and American Identity," The Annals, 387 (January, 1970), 64.

But is the civil religion, with its emphasis on nationalism, a danger to the idea of America as a model of liberal democratic values and the free society? Carleton Hayes found many dangers when nationalism becomes a religion. Like contemporary publicists of civil religion, he found that "Every national state has a 'theology'" and that "nationalism...is an expression of man's 'religious sense'."[6] Hayes feared religious nationalism because: nationalism as a religion represents a reaction against historic Christianity....; it re-enshrines the earlier tribal mission of a chosen people."[7] He went on to assert that "Nationalism as a religion inculcates neither charity nor justice; it is proud, not humble; and it signally fails to universalize human aims."[8] Hayes listed four specific evils resulting from religious nationalism: 1) a spirit of exclusiveness and narrowness, 2) a premium on uniformity of national standards and norms of conduct, 3) an increasingly docile mass disinclined to question the actions of their government, and 4) a focusing of popular attention upon war and preparedness for war.[9] He concluded that nationalism as religion leads to international war, militarism, and domestic intolerance.

Clearly, civil religion in America has the potential to become a totalist or dogmatic and parochial national religion. Indeed Hayes

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[6]Carleton J.H. Hayes, Essays on Nationalism (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937), 109-123.

[7]Ibid., 124.

[8]Ibid., 125.

[9]Ibid., 258-259.

concluded that "Syncretism of nationalism and religion is strikingly noticeable in the United States."[10] Such syncretism could produce a society whose ultimate commitment or sense of the sacred is identified with narrow nationalism rather than the projection of a model of human liberty.

Three dangers are implicit in the American civil religion: 1) the danger of an unbridled and anti-democratic nationalism: 2) the potential emergence and implementation of an organic and possibly fascist theory of the state, and 3) the possibility that, given power, the American civil religion may exert that power in international affairs in ways inconsistent with the inner logic and values of the religion. The remainder of this chapter will analyze these dangers.

II

Civil religion has traditionally meant the sanctification of the society and the culture of which it is a part. This can lead to an uncritical acceptance of extreme nationalism and an intolerance toward any kind of diversity within the society. Verba argued that "a residue of non-rationality," a political commitment that is "implicit" and "primitive", exists in all stable political cultures.[11] He found the feeling of national identity to be primary among these "implicit"

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[10] Ibid., 180.

[11] Sidney Verba, "Comparative Political Cultures," in Political Culture and Political Development, eds. Sidney Verba and Lucien Pye (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 512.

beliefs and, in a later work, he found a "primordial" religious commitment to the nation to exist in America.[12] The danger of such a commitment is that it may be unable to distinguish between loyalty to acts which lead to an open and freedom loving society and acts which are counter productive to the inclusivist society. Caillois found that such implicit beliefs produce a deep-seated dependence upon society and reduce the possibility of critical inquiry within a political system.[13]

Several recent studies have suggested that the uncritical acceptance of authority is linked to religious interpretations of politics. Easton and Hess, after noting early childhood difficulties in disentangling God and country, concluded that: "The fact that as the child grows older he may be able to sort out the religious from the political setting...need not weaken this bond."[14] They concluded that the initial and early intermingling of potent religious sentiment with political community has by that time probably created a tie difficult to dissolve. Edelman has argued that symbols produce political quiescence and Lane found that: "A positive faith in one's political system, like a positive faith in religion, reassures a person that he is properly connected to the powers that be...."[15]

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[12]Sidney Verba, "The Kennedy Assassination and the Nature of Political Commitment," op. cit., 347.

[13]Roger Caillois, Man and the Sacred (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1959).

[14]David Easton and Robert D. Hess, "The Child's Political World," Midwest Journal of Political Science, 6 (August, 1962), 39.

[15]Edelman, op. cit., and Robert E. Lane, Political Ideology (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), 198-199.

Civil religion, based on the uncritical acceptance of the American way of life, can produce gross intolerance within the political system. S.M. Lipset has observed that Americans are not a tolerant people and he pointed out that "each war and most postwar situations have been characterized by the denial of civil liberties to minorities."[16] The forcible removal of West Coast Japanese-Americans from their homes to guarded detention centers during World War II is an appropriate example. Lipset went on to relate this lack of tolerance to the cult of Americanism in this country. He found that Americanism is a political creed and that the national holidays are ideological celebrations comparable to May Day or Lenin's Birthday in the Communist World. Rather than a notion of simple citizenship, Lipset concluded, Americanism has become a compulsive ideology.

To the degree that this interpretation of the civil religion in America is articulated and acted upon, the nation and not God, has become the central paradigm of the social order and the worth of the individual self becomes subordinated to the ends of the state. In the third phase of the civil religion, this perversion has revealed itself in attempts to rally the national majority against the internal "heretics" and "traitors" to Americanism. The right-wing politics of the McCarthy era and the equating of left-of-center politics with atheistic communism are examples of such attempts.

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[16]S.M. Lipset, "The Sources of the Radical Right-1955," in Daniel Bell, ed., The Radical Right (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1963), 264.

Despite the fact that Christian fundamentalists incorporate the religious interpretation of society and the linkage of society to some concept of the transcendent which is basic and necessary to civil religion, fundamentalism is also potentially dangerous to the freedom-affirming aspect of the civil religion. Christian fundamentalists have frequently sought to pervert the civil religion by narrowing the scope of civil religion to make it a more specific Christian interpretation of the culture, legally undergirded by Christian amendments to the Constitution. For example, the National Reform Association, founded in 1863, sought to amend the United States Constitution to insert "God" into the charter. A similar Christian Amendment Movement still exists although it has little support.[17] In 1953, Senator Ralph Flanders attempted to introduce an amendment which read: "This Nation devoutly recognizes the authority and law of Jesus Christ, Savior and Ruler of Nations, through whom are bestowed the blessings of Almighty God."[18] Although the movement failed, it is reflective of the fundamentalist current. The now familiar "Dirksen Amendment" which would alter the

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[17]For example, the Committee To Restore the Constitution, based in Fort Collins, Colorado, is active in its opposition to socialism. regional government and its support of the "Dirksen Amendment." Its symbol is the fish, the same as that secretly used by Christians during centuries of persecution to identify themselves to each other. The Committee of the States based in Birmingham, Alabama, and dedicated to "Constitutional Government, Authority of the States, Christianity with Jesus..." is a second example of contemporary Christian nationalism in America.

[18]Quoted in Martin E. Marty, "The Status of Societal Religion in the United States," Concordia Theological Monthly, 36 (November, 1965), 690.

establishment clause to permit various forms of state-sponsored prayer has little prospect of Congressional approval. Yet, like the earlier Christian Amendment Movement, it reflects strong and enduring fundamentalist support for a national religion.

Such attempts to narrow the scope of the American civil religion, if successful, would exclude many Americans from participation in the civil religion, and as in the Greek cities, such exclusion from the national religion would also effectively remove them from full participation as citizens of the republic. This is what actually happened to immigrant Roman Catholics until their socialization into the norms of the society combined with a popular acceptance of this Americanized Roman Catholicism as a diverse branch of the civil religion. Negroes and other minority groups continue to remain at least partially outside the civil religion and thus lack full citizenship. Racial distinction is particularly important in the black case of exclusion. But black exclusion is also caused by a popular intolerance directed toward those who have not yet fully internalized many of the values and beliefs of the civil religion. In turn, their exclusion from full citizenship reduces their ability for total socialization.

This work may appear unjustly harsh in its treatment of fundamentalist Protestants as compared to Catholic nationalists who tried to get on board civil religion, and on secularists who have no use for religion, civil or theological. This is not so. The implications

of secularism for civil religion will be dealt with in Chapter Five. American Catholicism, in contrast to fundamentalist Protestantism, has not sought to parochialize the civil religion into a narrow version of Catholic theology. Rather, the thrust of Catholic thought and politics in America has been to make Catholicism more "American" and to ensure that civil religion is inclusive enough to include Catholics among the fellowship of believers in the national faith.

Dorothy Dohen, in her study of the development of the fusion of religion and nationalism in the experience of Catholics in the United States, observed that the original Protestant response of the sacred to the secular was quickly absorbed by Catholics in their effort to become identified as American.[19] Firm evidence of the success of that attempt is seen in the response of Cardinal Spellman who, arriving in South Vietnam for a five-day Christmas visit in 1965, responded to a newsman's question about the role of the United States in Vietnam by saying: "I fully support everything it does."[20] Then, paraphrasing the nineteenth-century naval hero, Stephen Decatur, he added, "My country, may it always be right. Right or wrong, my country."[21]

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[19]Dorothy Dohen, Nationalism and American Catholicism (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967).

[20]New York Times, December 24, 1965.

[21]Ibid.

John Ireland, an Irish-born American bishop, played a leading role in the Americanization of American Catholicism. Impatient with those Catholics who desired to keep the language and traditions of the country from which they emigrated, Ireland opted for rapid Americanization and defended the American system of separation of church and state. Although Ireland never claimed that country came before God, his ideas are reflective of contemporary views of civil religion. A close friend of Senator Albert Beveridge of Indiana, Ireland argued that:

> The true Catholic must be the true patriot. In the eyes of the Church loyalty to country is loyalty to God; patriotism is a heavenly virtue, a high and holy form of obedience; the patriot dying for his country wears the halo of the martyr.[22]

Ireland went on to proclaim America to be the chosen nation of the future and sought to link the sense of American destiny and mission with American Catholicism. Ireland was not alone in his attempts to Americanize Roman Catholicism in the United States. Cardinal James Gibbons and Archbishop Corrigan, for example, had taken a broad approach to emphasize the compatability of Catholicism and Americanism and, in 1893, many Catholic churchmen participated in the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago. The result was a strong split in the Catholic Church between those who supported a national Catholic church in the French model and those who favored the Americanization

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[22]Archbishop John Ireland, The Church and Modern Society (St. Paul, Minnesota: Pioneer Press, 1905), 151.

of the Church.[23] In 1899, Leo XIII attempted to temper the alleged excesses of the "Americanism" movement through the papal letter Testem Benevolentiae in which he criticized any tendencies to restrict the Church's right to determine questions of doctrinal and moral nature.[24] Cardinal Gibbons responded by arguing that "Americanism" as he understood it, was not in conflict with the moral or doctrinal authority of the Church. Three years later, Leo XIII praised the Americanization of Catholicism in the United States as the cause of the great success of American Catholicism as compared to the status of European Catholicism.[25] Thus, the movement to ensure the compatability of Americanism and Roman Catholicism continued its successful development.

Clearly, as Dohen has argued, the thought of Ireland as well as that of other leading Catholic Bishops including archbishop John Carrol and more recently, Frances Cardinal Spellman, gives historical and contemporary evidence that Roman Catholics have successfully sought to demonstrate how American the Catholic Church is and to integrate Catholics into American life.[26]

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[23]See John Tracy Ellis, American Catholicism, Second Edition, Revised (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), 119-121.

[24]Ibid., 121.

[25]Ibid., 122.

[26]Dorothy Dohen, Nationalism and American Catholics, op. cit.

However, unlike fundamentalist Protestantism, Catholic support for the civil religion has been motivated by the desire to make Catholics acceptable as Americans and to integrate them into the American culture. Although supportive of the civil religion, the nature of the civil religion it supports is inclusive, not parochial. Thus, Roman Catholicism in America has functioned to mitigate at least one danger of religious nationalism as Hayes described it, a spirit of exclusiveness and narrowness.

The danger that a Christian nationalism which makes the state an instrument of a particular Christian perspective may succeed in narrowing the scope of the civil religion is real. The enduring support for formal and constitutional recognition of religious perspectives as American values is evidence enough. Yet, there are no serious indications that a too-narrow interpretation of the transcendent will emerge to destroy the general religion or abridge the freedoms or democratic procedures of America. Indeed, the civil religion appears to be continually expanding and more inclusive rather than retracting and parochial. The election of a Roman Catholic as President in 1960 affirmed the growing inclusiveness of the civil religion by demonstrating that Roman Catholicism is not a bar to meaningful participation in the polity. Nor has Roman Catholicism seriously threatened to narrow the scope of the national faith. De Tocqueville argued that Catholicism was compatible with the civil religion of America.[27] The leadership of the Catholic

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[27]Tocqueville, op. cit., 287-290.

bishops and the Kennedy Presidency confirmed that observation.

Finally, the role of the Supreme Court in defending the inclusive civil religion against the assaults of the Christian nationalists is significant. Although the Court has not intentionally adopted civil religion as a value to be defended against the challenge of Christianity, its interpretation of the First Amendment freedom of religion clause has had that effect. The result of the decisions has been to protect the broader norms of civil religion from the assault of narrow Christian doctrine and to ensure that the diversities of private religion, although free of government limitations, would not threaten the civil religion. This explains why fundamentalists, who seek a Christian nationalist society or at least a parochial civil religion that is distinctly Christian in nature have become the major critics of the Court in this area.

The United States Supreme Court, in a series of decisions beginning with Emerson v. Board of Education in 1947, has attempted to articulate a viable and principled interpretation of the First Amendment injunction that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion."[28] In that decision, Justice Hugo Black, writing for the majority, concluded that the Constitution would tolerate no public support to private religion. However, he did affirm that the State of New Jersey could reimburse children attending non-public institutions for fares paid on regular bus lines as a public safety measure. Significantly, the aid is given

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[28]330 U.S. 1. 1947.

to the child and not to the religious institution. Yet, this child benefit theory of the Court does aid the religious institution and appears to substantiate the claim by civil libertarians that Emerson really aids private religion. However, the broader impact of Emerson was to strengthen the civil religion by reducing the ability of parochial Christian religions to enforce narrow theological perspectives over the values of the societal religion.

In Engle v. Vitale, decided in June of 1962, a majority of seven justices with Black as spokesman, held that the use of a brief, non-denominational prayer authorized by the Board of Regents of the State of New York for recitation in the public schools was an unconstitutional exercise of state power.[29] Black held that "General religion..." was not to be propagated by government. By "General religion", Black was referring to the use of prayers or the teaching of theological ideas acceptable to all formal religions. It was not a reference to civil religion which is informal and cultural, but a prohibition of government propagation of the teachings of organized religions. Black made it clear that the Court's decision did not "...indicate a hostility toward religion or toward prayer. Nothing, of course, could be more wrong. The history of man is inseparable from the history of religion".[30] Then followed a brief and positive view of wholly unofficial and licit "societal religion" located in the "sentiments" and "hopes" of Americans

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[29] 370 U.S. 421., 1962.

[30] Ibid.

in the past and the present.

The effect of the Court's action has been to prevent Christian religious nationalism from exerting any kind of threat to the civil religion as expressed in the schools and public institutions of America, e.g., the teaching of patriotism, the sense of awe and mystery attributed to the heroes and institutions and symbols of the nation, and the exercise of nationalistic rites. Indeed, the decisions of the Court have actually broadened the civil religion by establishing the legitimacy of religions other than Protestantism, Judaism and Catholicism as diverse expressions of the metaphysical basis of society. In Torcaso v. Watkins, a 1961 decision which outlawed compulsory affirmation of God as a requirement for office holding, the Court held that religious values not necessarily affirming the existence of God, satisfied the legal requirements traditionally associated with religion in American society.[31] In that decision, Justice Black, speaking for a unanimous court, referred to God-less religion as "religion" and thus introduced another dimension to the legal understanding of the American civil religion. He added that "Among religions in this country which do not teach what would generally be considered a belief in the existence of God are Buddhism, Taoism, Ethical Culture, Secular humanism, and others."[32] Although Black's dicta ought not be confused with the substance of the decision, it does reflect the trend toward a much more inclusive

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[31] 367, U.S. 488.

[32] Ibid.

concept of religion as expressed in civil religion as opposed to the more exclusivist private religions. Thus, as reflected in the decisions of the Supreme Court, religious expression that asserts a sacred or ultimate commitment to principles not necessarily linked to traditional concepts of "God" are to be legitimate expressions of the civil religion in its third phase. Other decisions have confirmed the rejection of public support for private religion. In 1962 the Court returned to the problem of religious exercises in public schools, and in Murray v. Curlett and Abington School District v. Schempp disapproved recitation of the Lord's Prayer and Bible readings (as a formal exercise) in public classrooms.[33]

Thus, the First Amendment freedom of religion clause, as interpreted by the Supreme Court, has been beneficial for civil religion. It has weakened the authority of God-centered religion which frequently competes with civil religion, and it has legitimized the more inclusive civil religion by establishing the principle that Americanism is not defined by participation in narrow, parochial religious associations.

It has been shown that, although the danger of an unbridled and anti-democratic nationalism is real, the American civil religion has not permitted its inclusive and liberal characteristics to succumb to religious nationalism and parochialism. The civil religion, despite attempts by Christian nationalists to derail the tradition, has become steadily more inclusivist and less parochial. Although

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[33]374, U.S. 203; 374, U.S.204.

examples of intolerance and anti-democratic tendencies may be observed, the thrust of civil religion in America has been toward a broadening of the groups and values legally and tacitly accepted as American. The decisions of the Supreme Court, the willingness of the leaders of groups once outside the civil religion (e.g., President Kennedy and the Catholic bishops), and the power of the symbols of the civil religion as described in Chapters I and II, have kept the civil religion out of the hands of the parochial Christian nationalists.

III

A second danger of civil religion is implicit in its assumption that social truth is experienced truth and that such truths are expressed through the condensation symbols of a gemeinschaft-type society. This assumption could lead to the emergence and implementation of an organic and probably fascist theory of the state.

The American civil religion appears to have much in common with Rousseau's normative theory that may be described as organic or as metaphysical holism. Metaphysical holism alleges that societies possess a reality greater than the sums of their parts. Society is seen as an organic system. That is, it is conceived to be an organization of entities connected one to the other by a set of internal relations. For the American civil religion, these internal relations would be the shared symbols of the civil order. To remove or to alter the position of any one constituent of a system is to change both the

system itself as well as the character of the individual or symbol in question. The most distinctively human properties are the properties the individual has in common with others. Thus, man is a social being and real only because he is social. To live morally is to live socially, and to live socially is to live civically or politically.

The American civil religion does not hold, as metaphysical holism does, that the state has an existential status independent of that of the individuals who compose it. But American civil religion, like metaphysical holism, does hold that all knowledge of social and political reality is dependent upon sets of symbols which possess an identity-giving function and define reality for the members of the social order. Thus the individual only understands himself through the common symbols of the social order and the creation and maintenance of these symbols is dependent upon his relationship with others. In this sense, the American civil religion would agree with Rousseau's theory of metaphysical holism that being truly human is possible only within, and under the influence of, the social order.

Rousseau, as a metaphysical holist, found the most important function of the state to be its moral dimension. For him, the concept "state" is really a synonym for political community or perhaps culture. He saw the community as a moral person and found society to exist for the moral improvement of its citizenry. For him, state and society were inextricably linked and in the best states no conflict is expected to arise between the constituent members and the requirements of

the state itself. This blurring of distinctions between state and society and emphasis on the moral dimension seen in holistic theories of the state is consistent with modern conceptions of civil religion. The American civil religion is holistic to the degree that it placed primary emphasis on the moral dimension of the social order and the symbolic way in which men communicate and understand that dimension. It is instructive because the shared symbols and rituals teach and reinforce the moral dimension. Finally, the civil order and the social order are inextricably linked as both are expressions of God's purpose (or, at least, for God-less religion, some sense of the sacred) as understood through the American experience.

The danger to American civil liberties and democratic procedures from a civil religion embracing metaphysical holism is clear. In such a society, no area of human existence would be free from the coercive exercise of power by the society. Society, rather than standing in the judgement of God, would become the supreme judge and would exercise complete power with regard to all questions of ultimate importance. Human freedom would be possible only when the individual has internalized all of the laws of the community and recognizes that his interests are synonymous with the common interests of the state. Thus, civil religion, as metaphysical holism and in contrast to the democratic view, finds the state to be an end rather than a means. Such a view is consistent with fascism. Mussolini characterized fascism when he said that "Fascism desires the state to be strong and

organic.... To achieve this purpose it enforces discipline and uses authority, entering into the soul and ruling with indisputable sway."[34]

The danger of metaphysical holism as a potential divergence from the American political tradition first appears at the time of the Civil War. Prior to the Civil War, the civil religion had interpreted God to be the author and guide of the American legal and constitutional arrangement. The nation was conceived in historical terms and the social-contract theory held the nation to be a system of contracted rights and obligations. The God of the civil religion was transcendent and beyond the state. His function, as supreme symbol of the religion, was to legitimate the origins of the contract by His presence and to judge the nation in terms of its fulfillment of the obligations of that contract.

During and after the Civil War, many nationalists tended to look upon the nation as a living organism, an actual personality endowed with a body and a soul that transcended the aggregate of individual bodies and souls. Lincoln's near divination of the state and the law came dangerously close to this position. In the context of the Civil War, the conception of the nation as a living organism with a moral will and purpose was particularly attractive to the defenders of the Union. Robert Ellis Thompson wrote that:

> The historical nation is an organism, a political body animated by a life of its own. It embraces

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[34]Benito Mussolini, The Doctrine of Fascism, trans. J. Soames (London: Hogarth Press, 1933), 34.

> not one generation but many, the dead and the unborn as well as the living. It contemplates its own perpetuity, making self-preservation the first law, and being incapable of providing for its own death or dissolution. There is in its own nature no reason why it should ever cease to exist, and the analogies often drawn from the life and death of the individuals are fallacious.[35]

Elisha Mulford, an Episcopal clergyman and a disciple of Hegel, argued that the nation "has its foundations in God...and subsists in no compact of men, but in the everlasting Will...."[36] He went on to argue that "Its advance lies through unceasing wrestling with evil. The moral being of the nation is its essential principle."[37] He concluded that the nation is the realization of moral freedom and thus in the nation are thesis and antithesis resolved in a growing synthesis. From this Hegelian perspective of the civil religion, the individual can only realize his own moral freedom through the nation. The Rev. Hugh Miller Thompson argued that the "great nation grows slowly upwards to its perfect proportions, as the parent and teacher of man."[38] No wonder that the Rev. Joseph Palmer, a Southern sympathizer, attacked the union by arguing that "We have sinned against God in the idolatry of our History, and in the boastful spirit it has naturally begotten."[39]

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[35]Robert E. Thompson, Political Economy, with Especial Reference to the Industrial History of Nations (Philadelphia: Clayton, Remsen, and Haffelfinger, 1875), 34.

[36]Elisha Mulford, The Nation (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1870), 392.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Hugh Miller Thompson, "The Nation," Continental Monthly, 4 (December, 1863), 608.

[39]Quoted in Merle Curti, The Roots of American Loyalty, op. cit., 136.

The conflict of a national versus regional civil religions in the Civil War forced the organic theorists to come to grips with the tradition of federalism as well as with the problem of just what made up the American religion. These metaphysical holists agreed that the nation is older than the states and that it is their creator. In effect, states may realize their being only as a part of the nation and it would be unthinkable for the state to disrupt the nation. For example, Joseph Fransioli found the idea of "A revolution to destroy the fatherland...to be a monstrous absurdity...a parricide."[40] Thus was metaphysical holism applied to the civil religion to produce a theory of organic nationalism. Instead of the symbols of the civil religion structuring our understanding of reality, they became reality and the state became the object of ultimate concern.

From the time of the Civil War, the American civil religion has contained the danger that it may become metaphysical holism. Yet, it has not. Abraham Lincoln, despite his near divination of the state, played a central role in preventing the state from becoming the source of ultimate concern. He did this by emphasizing that the nation stood under the judgment of God because of the existence of slavery. He argued that:

> If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to

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[40]Quoted in ibid., 178.

> those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe Him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."[41]

Thus, Lincoln's rejection of metaphysical holism is seen in his belief that the state is judged by God and, if the political society fails to meet the demands of a civil religion that recognizes a transcendent and judging God, it will suffer. He insisted upon measuring constitutionalism against the "higher law" reflected in the charter or civil religion of the American people. Despite the input of holistic ideas into the American political system during the Civil War, organic nationalism did not have an immediate or lasting impact upon the American civil religion.

In the third phase of the civil religion, with the growth of America into a world power, the emergence of metaphysical holism as the predominant political theory could have particularly disastrous consequences not unlike those resulting from the organic nationalism of Nazi Germany. Nolte has defined fascism as "resistance to transcendence" in which the enemy of the omnipotent state is seen to be "freedom toward the infinite."[42] For Nolte, "All historical probing

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[41]Quoted in Sidney Mead, The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America, op. cit., 277.

[42]Ernst Nolte, Three Faces of Fascism (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1963), 429-430.

must ultimately encounter something elemental and primordial sometimes this is called 'man,' sometimes 'history,' occassionally 'God.'"[43] According to Nolte, fascism is born of the drive to reach out toward the whole. Yet, unlike the American civil religion, fascism turns against its own drive toward the whole to limit growth to the omnipotent holism of the state rather than the theoretical transcendence of the soul beyond the boundaries of time and nation.

Fortunately, the danger of American civil religion opting to block the theoretical transcendence of the soul for the omnipotent holism of the state is remote in its third phase. There is no evidence whatever of organic nationalism in the political activities or the intellectual currents of the civil religion today. Religious nationalists would have the nation become a theocracy, not an organic nationalistic society. And while Americans may be intolerant about social deviations from the "American Way of Life," this intolerance does not take the form of organic nationalism. Thus, the American civil religion is not an American version of metaphysical holism. The state is not understood to be independent of the citizens who compose it and, despite frequent confusion between the two, the American God is God, not America. Like Lincoln, modern America has thus far refrained from suppressing the drive toward transcendence and the civil religion has reamined open and inclusive and dynamic.

The lack of success of metaphysical holism in America is explained primarily by the fact that the civil religion, in addition to santifying the symbols of the nation, also sanctifies many of the atomistic

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[43] Ibid., 430.

assumptions of the state as expressed by Machiavelli and John Locke. Machiavelli perceived individuals as atomic units each pursuing his own interests. Locke accepted this atomistic view and linked it to his belief that there are certain rights or moral values that are irreducible constituents of the human character and which must be recognized and respected by the civil order. He described these moral values as natural rights. Consistent with this view, the American civil religion emphasizes certain individual rights and freedoms articulated by liberal democratic theory which may not be abridged by the state. Thus, if the social order is to be consistent with the principles of the civil religion, these individualistic norms must be preserved. Nolte might well argue that these norms are the key force in American society responsible for preventing the resistence to transcendance characteristic of the fascist society.

It may be concluded that metaphysical holism does not seriously threaten to erode the American tradition of an open-ended and non-dogmatic society based on democratic principles. American nationalism, to the degree that it exists, is seldom organic. Even during the Civil War which has been interpreted as a religious struggle to preserve the national gemeinschaft, organic nationalism had a limited impact. Although the American civil religion is much like metaphysical holism in that social reality and individual identity are to be defined by the symbols of the religion, it does not give the state an independent existential status. It recognizes some transcendent reality

of value beyond the state and the state is to be judged by its conformity to that reality. The fact that the symbols of the American civil religion also place emphasis on the rights and value of individuals (e.g., the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights and the spiritual individualism emerging out of the Calvinist tradition) stands as an internal check within the civil religion against over-emphasis of its organic aspects. However, the impotence of organic nationalism and the limits on religious nationalism and public intolerance of social deviants do not necessarily eliminate a third danger of the civil religion, the danger that in the third phase in which America possesses great power, she may seek to exercise that power as a world policeman to force the American model of liberty upon other societies.

IV

Herman Melville once argued that "We Americans are a peculiar, chosen people, the Israel of our times, we bear the ark of the liberties of the world."[44] The absolute conviction of Americans that they have a national purpose and the search for a precise definition of that purpose is one of the more powerful threads in the development of the American civil religion. Americans have always believed that God has ordained that America serve as a surrogate or agent for the rest

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[44]Quoted in Russell B. Nye, The Almost Chosen People, op. cit., 164.

of mankind in achieving peace and justice, freedom and equality.

A third danger of the civil religion is the danger that civil religion may result in an arrogant use of power to impose American values on the rest of the world. This danger is related to the problem of determining just how America is to "bear the ark of liberties." Does the idea of an American model imply that the United States must practice active intervention in the affairs of other nations or rather serve as an exemplary model to affect world politics by moral suasion?

Lewis Lipsitz has condemned the "nationalization of the sacred" as responsible for political acquiescence to illiberal values.[45] He found national religion to entail unquestioned obedience to the state and implied that mass participation in civil religion makes wars such as the Vietnam War possible. The question of the Vietnam War, he said, should remind us that the political acquiesence gained by national religion must be overcome by the principle of voluntarism in sacred matters and a far more critical attitude toward political authority than provided by national religion. He argued that "We need standards which transcend existing systems.... The issues involved are not only democracy and stability, but survival and human decency itself."[46]

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[45]Lewis Lipsitz, "If As Verba Says, The State Functions As a Religion, What Are We To Do Then To Save Our Souls?", American Political Science Review, 62 (June, 1968), 527-535.

[46]Lewis Lipsitz, "Response to Verba's 'If, As Lipsitz Thinks, Political Science Is To Save Our Souls, God Help Us!'", American Political Science Review, 62 (June, 1968), 577-578.

As Lipsitz's criticism of civil religion suggests, the question of the relationship of civil religion and foreign policy is a complicated one. There is much in the history of the American civil religion to substantiate Lipsitz's conclusions. The early understandings of America's role were clearly exemplary and have been reviewed in Chapter One. The idea of America as a chosen people was taken to mean that America had a special responsibility to God to prove to the world that free government was possible. America, as the model of freedom and liberty, was to base her appeal on example and moral suasion, not active intervention in the affairs of others.

But in the nineteenth century, the American idea of destiny under God came to be interpreted by many in a nationalistic sense. This interpretation was shaped by the westward expansion of the nation and ideas of Anglo-Saxon supremacy. This was the age of Manifest Destiny.[47] For Mahan and many advocates of Manifest Destiny, force was "a faculty of national life; one of the talents committed to nations by God."[48] Albert Beveridge called for American institutions to follow the westward movement of the flag and he envisioned America as a world policeman as he looked to a period "When

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[47]See Lyman Beecher, A Plea for the West, Second edition (Cincinnati: Truman and Smith, 1835); John O'Sullivan, essay in The New York Morning News (December 27, 1845); and Walt Whitman,"Passage to India," in The Complete Writings of Walt Whitman (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1902), 86-197.

[48]Quoted in Edward McNall Burns, The American Idea of Mission (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1957), 62.

governments stay the slaughter of human beings because the American Republic demands it."[49] H. Richard Niebuhr has described this shift in the idea of destiny from the earliest versions. He found that "The old idea of American Christians as a chosen people who had been called to a special task was turned into the notion of a chosen nation especially favored...."[50]

Although the United States hesitated to enter World War I, once involved, the policing role of the nation was quickly justified and interpreted in the language and symbols of the civil religion. The tradition of Israelite war, the zeal of holy crusades and "just war" theories were all used to legitimate the role of the nation as defender of the values of American culture and God's agent in the war to end all wars.

President Wilson consistently used the religious symbol "covenant" to describe the obligations of America to lead in the creation of a new world order. The identification of patriotism with righteousness was the key to his wartime philosophy. At the end of the war he still saw America as a special ward of Providence. He warned his country that, if the United States rejected the Covenant of the League of Nations, "the vengeful Providence of God" would bring a new war.[51]

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[49]Quoted in Edward M. Burns, The American Idea of Mission, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1957).

[50]H. Richard Niebuhr, The Kingdom of God in America (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 179.

[51]Quoted in Edward M. Burns, The American Idea of Mission, op. cit., 218.

During World War I, the clergy followed Wilson's lead in attempting to sustain the war effort with civil theology. The Episcopal rector at Epiphany Church in Washington, D.C., defended military action to protect the American idea in Europe with a quote from Jesus.[52] Rabbi Abram Simon of the Eighth Street Temple in Washington attempted to ground American intervention in Europe in the tradition of the Founding Fathers.[53] And Roman Catholic Monsignor C.F. Thomas paralleled the hardships of the children of Israel in the wilderness with the hardships of Americans at war and found the American war to be "just and righteous."[54] Methodist Bishop Theodore S. Henderson argued that:

> Methodism and Americanism have been synonymous terms. In this hour of national and international crisis, every Methodist preacher will be a patriotic leader and every Methodist church a center of education in pure patriotism. Deploring and detesting war more than all else except sin, I do not forget that righteousness is greater than peace....[55]

Bishop Henderson was correct to argue that Methodism (like most organized religions in America) was synonymous with Americanism. The danger in the belief of Henderson and the other religious leaders that sin is worse than war and that righteousness is greater than peace is the implicit linkage of righteousness with patriotism and sin with political virtues that are "un-American." Such assumptions threaten

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[52]Quoted in Randolph H. McKim, For God and Country, or the Christian Pulpit in War-Time (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1918), 117.

[53]Ibid., 118.

[54]Washington Post, February 23, 1918.

[55]Theodore S. Henderson, "A Letter to the Pastors," circulated to clergy of the Detroit Conference of the Methodist, Episcopal Church in April of 1917 and reprinted in the Michigan Christian Advocate (October 12, 1972), 3.

to convert American foreign policy into an American religious nationalism. This is a major danger of the civil religion in its current phase. This danger is popularly reflected in the belief that the world is locked in a struggle between the forces of righteousness and the forces of evil, and that the American way of life must be defended and diffused throghout the world.

Adlai Stevenson, in his 1952 presidential campaign, discussed the Korean War in terms of the civil religion:

> God has set for us an awesome mission: nothing less than the leadership of the free world. Because He asks nothing of His servants beyond their strength, He has given to us vast power and vast opportunity. And like that servant of Biblical times who received the talents, we shall be held to strict account for what we do with them.[56]

President Eisenhower, in his first inaugural address, portrayed the world as divided between two opposing forces: "Freedom is pitted against slavery; lightness against the dark."[57] John Foster Fulles, a Presbyterian layman and Eisenhower's Secretary of State, shared Eisenhower's view and grounded his theory of foreign relations in the idea of an American destiny. He believed that America was Providentially chosen to lead the free world against "Godless Communism" and he quoted Benjamin Franklin to argue that "...fighting for liberty...is a glorious task assigned us by Providence;...."[58]

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[56]Quoted in Russell B. Nye, The Almost Chosen People, op. cit., 176.

[57]Inaugural Addresses, op. cit., 259.

[58]John Foster Dulles. An Address delivered to the Philadelphia Bulletin Forum, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, February 26, 1956. From Vital Speeches of the Day, 22 (March 15, 1956), 329-331.

President Eisenhower's Commission on National Goals expressed more than an exemplary understanding of the civil religion when it found that it was still America's historic function "to exert its influence and power in behalf of...a world in which peoples of all nations can find the opportunity for freedom and well being."[59] And in 1963, President Kennedy argued that "The iron of the new world being forged today is now ready to be molded. Our job is to shape it, so far as we can, into a world we want for ourselves and our children for all men."[60]

It would appear that American leaders have not been reluctant to justify the exercise of military power and the emergence of America as a world policeman in terms of the civil religion. The civil religion, through its emphasis on America as a chosen nation with a destiny undergirded by the will of Providence, clearly contains the potential to become religious nationalism. But it has not. Despite Lipsitz's fear that national religion will generate "acquiesence that allows authority to go unchallenged where challenge is needed....", public policy in America including foreign policy has been relatively open and responsive to a stream of critical public opinion.[61]

The power of government to command public obedience is severely limited because, at its core, the civil religion asserts the primacy of God over all human institutions including the American government.

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[59]President's Commission on National Goals, Goals for Americans (New York: Prentice Hall, 1960), 3.

[60]Russell B. Nye, The Almost Chosen People, op. cit., 177.

[61]Lewis, Lipsitz, "As Verba Says," op. cit., 578.

As Mead notes, this idea has been socialized into the American conscience from the time of:

> John Cotton who argued that...all power that is on earth must be limited, to Mr. Justice Clark's assertion in the Schempp and Murray decision that we 'are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being' and Dwight Eisenhower's dictum that our institutions make no sense except in the context of religious faith,....[62]

Reinhold Niebuhr gave insight into the limits civil religion places on religious nationalism in his 1943 essay, "Anglo-Saxon Destiny and Responsibility."[63] In that essay he saw the destiny of America to form, with Britain, the cornerstone of any durable world order and he grounded this destiny in "God's providence in history". However, Niebuhr warned against the idolatrous worship of country or race and argued that a religious interpretation of American responsibility in the world would prevent the sense of destiny from becoming a vehicle of national pride. He also argued that self-righteousness leads to vindictiveness and he warned against "a too simple identification of the nation's purposes with the Divine Will."[64]

The Vietnam war has functioned to revive the question Niebuhr raised in 1943: "What is the purpose of the American destiny and does national pride and self-righteousness endanger the fulfillment of that purpose?" It also evoked renewed discussion of the conflict of

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[62]Sidney Mead, The Lively Experiment, op. cit., 276.

[63]Reinhold Niebuhr, "Anglo-Saxon Destiny and Responsibility," Atlantic, 145 (May 5, 1943), 114-118.

[64]Ibid.

the belief of Albert Beveridge and later John Foster Dulles that America should enforce her values on others with the traditional belief of the civil religion that America's purpose was to be an exemplary model of free government.

Lipsitz has correctly suggested that periods of crisis tempt Presidents to mobilize public support by raising the level of public debate to the point where their decision will be equated with the raison d'etre of the American nation. The language of the civil religion, which expresses that raison d'etre, is a primary tool in the debate. If Lipsitz is also correct to suggest that national religion breeds political quietism, one would expect to see Presidents Nixon and Johnson successfully appeal to the civil religion for public support regarding their Vietnam policy. To the contrary, the experience of Vietnam demonstrates that the civil religion calls the government to meet a higher law than religious nationalism and that it provides that "dose of humane and democratic instability" Lipsitz finds necessary to the free society.[65]

Presidents can and have used the civil religion to generate favorable public support. If the President's position is clearly consistent with the values and symbols of the civil religion, as witnessed in President Johnson's call to Congress to provide the rights of citizenship to American Negroes, his appeal to the civil

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[65]Lipsitz, "Response," op. cit., 578.

religion provides built-in limits on governmental power to impose the interventionist theory on American foreign policy. If the relationship between the government's policy and the civil religion is ambiguous, the raising of debate to such a level can be dangerous to governmental authority. To use the civil religion for justification of public policy is to argue that opponents of that policy are un-American and to threaten them with excommunication from the national faith. If that policy is contrary to a widely accepted interpretation of the civil religion, the government may find itself on trial for "heresy" with the language and symbols of the civil religion directed against it.

Presidents Johnson and Nixon both refrained from calling for religious support for the war or identifying government policy in Southeast Asia with the design of God precisely because it could not be justified in those terms. Consequently, they attempted to shift the level of dialogue from the language of the national religion to a pragmatic and problem-solving approach with a plea to the public to accept the ambiguities and complexities of the foreign policy and to see an already-made decision through to its end. Richard Neuhauss recognized this when he argued that: "The Johnson and Nixon administrations both recognize that the language of morality, conscience, and divine purpose has been corrupted by the opposition: such language is, therefore to be avoided, lest

the protest be given greater legitimation."[66] Interestingly, as will be shown in Chapter Four, President Nixon mistakenly turned to an attempted manipulation of the symbols of the civil religion and suffered for it.

The Vietnam debate confirmed the ability of the civil religion to inspire a critical attitude toward government, to call the judgement of God or higher law upon the state and to limit or redirect government policy. The language and values of the civil religion were frequently used in opposition to the government's Vietnam policy. Many of the churches and clergy regularly invoked the judgements of God against the "war crimes" of the United States to effectively weaken government authority and to legitimize the protests and resistence. Although a majority of clergy and churches did not actively oppose the war, Neuhauss estimated that by the end of President Johnson's term, only about five percent of the clergy actually defended government policy.[67]

In addition, the intellectually respectable publications and the church bureaucracies were under the control of the anti-war protestors. This is significant for two reasons. First, it is clear that although American organized religion did not overwhelmingly resist or protest the government in the name of the civil religion, support for the war was not respectable among the leadership of the denominations.

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[66]Richard John Neuhauss, "The War, The Churches, and Civil Religion," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 387 (January, 1970), 134.

[67]Ibid., 137.

Certainly, as Neuhauss claimed, "If Vietnam is judged by history as being the atrocity that the war's opponents claim it is, American organized religion will come off looking good, compared for example, with German religion in the 1930's."[68] Second, the fact that religious criticism of Vietnam policy was so strong and so successful despite the lack of strong support from organized religion demonstrates that the condensation symbols of the civil religion are much more deeply implanted in the society than loyalty to religious denominations.

The debate about the morality of the Vietnam War, then, was not a debate between Christianity and the government but rather a debate between the public values of the civil religion and a government which appeared to many to have violated those values.

In effect, contrary to the conclusions of Lipsitz, the critical fact of public debate in America has its genesis in the national religion and it is that religion that places limits upon the power of government in the conduct of foreign policy. Arthur Waskow, reacting against a perceived anti-religious bias in the social sciences, remarked that men must reject the worship of science and search for roots of prescientific thought and feeling that might connect them to a sense of mankind and nature again.[69] He found the "religious sense," that is, an urgency for reconnecting mind,

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[68] Ibid.

[69] Quoted in ibid., 136.

body, and spirit, to be a deeply human response to the dehumanizing society. He concluded that the reconstruction of old rituals are necessary to unite us across our separate religious senses. The rituals and traditions of the civil religion appear to have performed that function in generating opposition to the United States government policy in Vietnam.

Although the conclusion of the debate regarding the nature of the American "ark of liberties," is still unclear, it appears that the United States has moved away from the interventionist model and closer to the original idea of an exemplary model. President Nixon gave evidence of this in his 1972 State of the Union message to the Congress when he said: "The United States is not the world's policeman nor the keeper of its moral conscience."[70] He confirmed this position in his 1973 inaugural address when he stated that: "The time has passed when America will make every other nation's future our responsibility, or presume to tell the people of other nations how to manage their own affairs."[71] But he also made it clear that the idea of an American model still holds a significant place in his administration: "We still represent...a force for justice in a world which is too often unjust.... We can be of great influence in the world."[72] He called for Americans to "go

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[70]Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 28 (1972), 7-A

[71]Congressional Quarterly, 31 (January 27, 1973), 131

[72]Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 28 (1972), 7-A

forward confident in hope, strong in our faith in one another, sustained by our faith in God who created us, and striving always to serve his purpose."[73]

The danger that civil religion may be perverted to support an interventionist foreign policy based on the concept of America as a world policeman mandated by God to enforce American vlaues around the globe certainly exists. Historical evidence of that tendency has been demonstrated. Yet, the experience of the Vietnam War also shows that the concept of America as a model and not a policeman endures. Indeed, attempts by the government to implement the policeman's role in foreign policy will be met by great resistence grounded in the condensation symbols of the civil religion. Knowledge of that fact limits and directs the conduct of American foreign policy.

This chapter has analyzed three dangers implicit in civil religion in America: 1) the danger that minorities and individualists will be excluded from participation in the society; 2) the danger of metaphysical holism as a prelude to fascist theories of the state; and 3) the possibility that too much power may lend to the creation of religious nationalism in American foreign policy. In each case, it was shown that, although the dangers are very real and although incidents of such erosions of the American tradition have occurred, that the civil religion contains counter-balancing values that have

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[73] Ibid., 31, 131.

maintained America as a relatively open-ended, inclusive, tentative and historical society. It remains to demonstrate the significance of civil religion for the American presidency and to raise the question of the desirability and utility of the civil religion in the creation and maintenance of liberal democratic values in America.

CHAPTER IV

THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT: CHIEF SYMBOL OF THE SOCIETAL RELIGION

> The relations of the Nixon band among each other, shadowing forth the parallel structures of totalitarian organization...seemed to enunciate a doctrine of a higher law transcending the Constitution, incarnate in the figure of our old friend Tricky Dick.
>
> Mary McCarthy
> The Mask of State

President Taft once remarked that the President is "the personal embodiment and representative of the dignity and majesty..." of the American people.[1] Much earlier, the Englishman John Bright, in speaking of the American President said: "To my mind there is nothing more sacred, than the authority of the freely chosen majistrate of a great and free people; and if there be on earth and amongst men any right divine to govern, surely it rests with a ruler so chosen and so appointed."[2] In the third phase of the civil religion, the President has emerged as the central symbol of the civil religion and has come close to assuming Bright's "right divine" to govern.

Edelman would agree with President Taft that the President embodies the "dignity" and "majesty" of the American people. According to Edelman, "When an individual is recognized as a legitimate leading

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[1]Quoted in Clinton Rossiter, The American Presidency (New York: The New American Library, 1960), 11.

[2]Quoted in ibid., 9.

official of the state, he becomes a symbol of some or all the aspects of the state...."[3] Edelman goes on to argue that the ascription of political leadership is primarily a function of the leader's ability to assume symbolic identification and to manipulate symbols. To the extent that he assumes symbolic identification, the American President acquires political power and affirms Machiavelli's observation that the acceptance of law by the people is related to the leader's ability to resort to divine authority.

In the American society, the President as Chief of State, performs a liturgical function much in the way that the British monarch serves as symbol of the unity and continuity of that society. The President serves as the decisive focal point of America's power and her destiny. "He is," as Michael Novak has argued, "'Prophet" - prophet in the sense of chief interpreter of our national self-understanding....He is 'Priest" - priest in the sense of incarnating our self-image, our values, our aspirations, and expressing these through every action he selects, every action he avoids."[4] The remainder of this chapter will analyze the elements of that symbolic power in the presidency, the growth and exercise of that power, the danger of such power to democratic values and practice, and existing limitations upon that power within the context of the civil religion.

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[3]Edelman, op. cit., 73.

[4]Michael Novak, Choosing Our King (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1974), 52.

I

Thomas Cronin has observed the growth of presidential power and the increasingly significant role of the President in American affairs beginning with the New Deal.[5] Specifically, Cronin has analyzed textbook portraits of the presidency as making the President a symbol of our continuity and destiny as a people. These portraits have focused on the growing responsibilities of the President, the vast resources available for presidential decision-making, and the increased centralization of symbolic power in the person of living presidents. Cronin concluded that "at the root of the textbook presidency image, the men who assume the presidency seem physically (and implicitly almost spiritually) to undergo an alternation of personal traits."[6] According to Cronin, the textbook President is seen as one who "reigns" over the people and functions to "instruct the nation as a national teacher and guide the nation as national preacher." The President receives "reverential orientation" and "provides a visible national symbol to which we can attach our hopes."[7]

Evidence of such a textbook presidency is abundant in the literature of political science. James MacGregor Burns has argued that political scientists and historians from John Burgess to Woodrow Wilson to Burns

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[5]Thomas E. Cronin, "The Textbook Presidency," from Inside the System, Second Edition, eds. Charles Peters and John Rothchild (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 6-19.

[6]Ibid., 9.

[7]Ibid.

have correctly shared the view that presidents can and should influence history.[8] Further, Burns believes that strong presidential government has given Americans freedom and equality at home and a stable and democratic politics abroad. Burns is especially concerned with the relationship of the presidency to the national purpose. He argued that "A nation may be said to exist only when most of its people share some common sets of beliefs, expectations, symbols and ultimate values that together make up a nation's purpose," and he emphasized that every people must "have some transcendental purpose that gives meaning to their everyday activities.[9] For him, this purpose can be found in "religion or in government or - usually - in some combination thereof."[10] He concluded that:

> if a society is to realize its national purpose, there must also be some institution through which social change can be directed and related to that purpose. In other nations the Church or Crown or some economic estate might serve this purpose;--- in the United States---the American Presidency has been the institution best equipped to serve as formulator and symbol of the national purpose.[11]

Although one may argue that Burns' Wilsonian objective of "democratic politics abroad" as a goal of presidential leadership has been replaced with the Nixonian pursuit of a "structure of peace", it is clear that

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[8]James MacGregor Burns, Presidential Government: The Crucible of Leadership (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1965).

[9]Ibid., 239.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Ibid., 240-241.

the presidency as an institution has served as "formulator and symbol of the national purpose."

Edwin Hargrove identified two theories of the presidency, one favoring restraint and one calling for strong leadership.[12] Hargrove clearly favored an active or strong presidency and emphasized that internal needs and drives for power generate the "political personality" necessary to be a strong President. In contrast to Burns and Hargrove, Wilfred Binkley has attempted to conceal his own prejudices for a powerful presidency.[13] Yet, based on his warm treatment of even the weakest executives and his unfavorable treatment of the Congressional opponents of presidential power, it is clear that his sympathies lie with the President.

Clinton Rossiter has emphasized the power and symbolic nature of the presidency. In his American Presidency, he argued that there is no limit to what the President can do and he concluded that the presidency has "elevated often and corrupted never, chiefly because those who held it recognized the true source of the power and were ennobled by the knowledge."[14] To Rossiter, "The American people...have made the presidency their peculiar instrument. As they ready themselves for the pilgrimage ahead, they can take comfort and pride in the thought that it is also their peculiar treasure."[15] Theodore White, in his popular

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[12]Edwin Hargrove, Presidential Leadership (New York: MacMillan, 1966).

[13]Wilfred E. Binkley, President and Congress (New York: Random House, 1962).

[14]Clinton Rossiter, The American Presidency, op. cit., 154.

[15]Ibid.

"Making of the President" series has emphasized the personality of the presidential candidates and, as Cronin suggested, promoted a reverential attitude toward the American presidency.[16] This too, has functioned to impress the reader with awe for the power of the President and his ability to symbolize the best of America.

Unlike most students of the contemporary presidency (at least until the recent linkage of the presidency with the experience of an unpopular war in Vietnam), Edward Corwin expressed concern about the growing power of the President and sought to increase the participation of Congress in presidential decision-making.[17] Yet, Corwin appears to be out-of-step or perhaps ahead of most scholars of the presidency. Robert Hirschfield's collection of ten essays on the presidency is more reflective of the thinking of political scientists from World War II until the war in Vietnam. Only Corwin, in his 1941 essay, saw sufficient menace in a strong presidency to warrant constitutional revision; and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., in a 1968 essay, found himself deeply troubled by the way in Which Lyndon Johnson was applying the thesis of a strong presidency in Vietnam. The other eight authors in Hirschfield's collection were untroubled; in a few cases, almost fatuously so.[18]

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[16]Cronin, "The Textbook Presidency," op. cit., 9-10.

[17]Edward Corwin, The President: Office and Powers 1787-1957 (New York: New York University Press, 1962).

[18]Robert S. Hirschfield, The Power of the Presidency, Second Edition (New York: Aldine, 1970).

Cronin has observed two significant dimensions of the textbook President which he described as omnipotence and moralistic-benevolence. These dimensions were described as follows:

> Omnipotence:
> 1. The President is the strategic catalyst in the American political system and the central figure in the international system as well.
> 2. Only the President is or can be the genuine architect of United States public policy, and only he, by attacking problems frontally and aggressively and interpreting his power expansively, can be the engine of change to move this nation forward.
>
> Moralistic-Benevolence:
> 3. The President must be the nation's personal and moral leader; by symbolizing the past and future greatness of America and radiating inspirational confidence, a President can pull the nation together while directing us toward the fulfillment of the American Dream.
> 4. If, and only if, the right man is placed in the White House, all will be well, and, somehow, whoever is in the White House is the right man.[19]

Cronin's description of the omnipotence and moralistic-benevolence of the presidency as presented and supported by American historians and political scientists is much like contemporary descriptions of the broader civil religion. For example, while the textbook President is onmipotent, the civil religion makes the President chief priest and king. Like the textbook President, the chief priest and king is the strategic catalyst in the American political system and the central figure in the international system as well. Because the nation deals with questions

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[19]Cronin, "The Textbook Presidency," op. cit., 10-11.

of ultimate concern and because the President is the central decision-maker, he is closely associated with the sense of awe and mystery and omnipotence directed toward the nation. The authors of the textbook presidency, by asserting and commending the omnipotence of the President, both describe and accept the role of the President as chief priest and king.

In its description of the presidency as moralistic-benevolence, the textbook President is closely atune to the President's functions as priest, prophet and king in the civil religion. Like the textbook President, the President of the civil religion symbolizes the greatness of a people and functions as a unifying force in the nation. Can Burns' President who serves as the "embodiment of the national purpose, its symbolic expression of the nation's glory and solidarity..." be other than the President described by theorists of the civil religion?[20] As the nation's personal and moral leader, the textbook President functions as chief priest or preacher. And, when he articulates the American Dream and calls the nation before the judgment of history, the textbook President becomes the prophet of the civil religion. Thus, in their description and praise of the omnipotence and moralistic-benevolence of the presidency, the authors of the textbook President reveal themselves to be faithful adherents of the civil religion. However, it must be noted that many of the authors of Cronin's textbook

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[20]James MacGregor Burns, Presidential Government, op. cit., 239-241.

presidency are at variation with the civil religion in one significant way. As Cronin observed, they argue that if the right man is in the White House all will be well and they often imply that whoever is in the White House is the right man. Civil religion makes no such assumption. The significance of this distinction will be discussed later in the chapter.

This textbook theory of the nature of the presidency is not confined to the pages of books. It reflects the values and existential experience of honored and influential persons within the intellectual community. These beliefs are transmitted to the general public where they serve as referential symbols to describe the nature of the presidency and as condensation symbols to stimulate the existential experience of the reader. Further, the textbook President appears to reflect already existing beliefs and emotions shared by much of the public. Fred Greenstein, in a summary of behavioral research on the American President, concluded that the President is the best known political figure in the country and that there is great respect for the President.[21] Cronin has pointed out that on all but two occasions during the past seventeen years, the President has won the Most Admired Man contest conducted annually by the Gallup polls.[22] The exceptions in 1967 and 1968 saw President Johnson lose out to former President Eisenhower.

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[21]Fred L. Greenstein, "Popular Images of the President," American Journal of Psychiatry, 122 (November, 1965).

[22]Thomas Cronin, "The Textbook Presidency," op. cit., 11-12.

Although President Nixon has not been found to be the most admired man since the Watergate events, he has still managed to rate high and one may argue that his decline in popularity reflects a personal judgment on the man for presumed violations of the role of the President rather than a reflection on the presidency.

In a study of the grade-school student's image of political authority, Hess and Easton discovered that two figures appear first on the horizon of the child's political awareness - the local policemen and the President of the United States. The children's attitudes toward the President were highly idealized. They saw him as much more hardworking than most men, more honest, having more liking for people, knowing much more. As a person he was "best in the world" to sixty-one percent of the second-graders, and either best in the world or "good" to all but a very small minority of children. They saw him also as a potent figure, having the main part in making the laws, with Congressmen as helpers and governors and mayors as subordinates. The children have ideas about the office, not just the man. There was, report the authors, "a base line of expectations about the conduct and qualifications of the man who occupies or seeks to occupy it."[23] While the perception of the President in positive terms decreases a bit with age, it stays high, and it did not seem to be dependent on social status or partisanship of the child's parents. Consistently, the American people look

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[23]Robert D. Hess and David Easton, "The Child's Image of the President," Public Opinion Quarterly, 24 (Winter, 1960), 632-644.

to the President to provide moral leadership and to act vigorously and decisively in public affairs. In effect, they expect him to be omnipotent and morally-beneficent and are especially likely to rally to his support when he acts decisively to meet a crisis.

Thus, in the context of civil religion, the four dimensions of Cronin's textbook President are not inconsistent with the concept of the President as high priest and prophet of the American civil religion. In a sense, as the historican Henry Jones Ford wrote in 1898, "The truth is, American democracy has revived the oldest political institution of the race, the elective kingship."[24] As king, high priest, and prophet, the President is symbolic of what we are and chief symbol-maker of the nation. Because symbol systems have built-in capacities for transformation and transcendence, the President provides much of the symbolic framework within which the political issues of America are framed. By gaining symbolic identification with the people, he sets the moral tone of society and has the power to manipulate the public by defining the issues and giving transcendent reality to temporal action. This is done by identification of his action with the symbols of the civil religion and the fulfillment of the American Dream. As Novak has suggested:

> The president of the United States is one of the great symbolic powers known to human history. His actions seep irrepressibly into our hearts. He

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[24]Quoted in Rossiter, The American Presidency, op. cit., 154.

> dwells in us. We cannot keep him out. That is why we wrestle against him, rise up in hatred often, wish to wretch -, or, alternatively, feel good, feel proud, as though his achievements were ours, his wit the unleashing of power of our own.[25]

Clearly, the steady growth of presidential power in this century has been accompanied by an increased use of symbolism to identify the awe and ultimate power of the nation with the President. His importance is symbolized by the provision of a mansion as his home and office. He has military escorts, a seal of office and a higher salary than any other governmental leader. When he enters the East Room of the White House, the Marine band snaps into "Ruffles and Flourishes," followed by the traditional "Hail to the Chief." Many of his predecessors have been memorialized and deified in the arthitecture, postage stamps and coinage of the nation and in the lessons and rituals of the public schools. He has every expectation of similar deification following his term of office and works to secure his "place in history." President Nixon, for example, has sought to stimulate favorable comparison of his presidency with that of Lincoln.[26] The inauguration of President resembles the coronation of a king and, as Attorney General Stanberry told the U.S. Supreme Court in 1867:

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[25]Novak, op. cit., 5.

[26]Detroit Free Press, Wednesday, February 13, 1974, 1.

> ...so far as the great executive office of this government is concerned - I deny that there is a particle less dignity belonging to the office of President than to the office of king of Great Britain or of any other potentate on the face of the earth. He represents the majesty of the law and of the people as fully and as essentially, and with the same dignity, as does any absolute monarchy.[27]

Such symbolism has the effect of conferring upon the President the feelings of love and loyalty contained in the condensation symbols of the civil religion. Anderson and Kalvelage have recounted the story of a businessman who lost control of his emotions and began to cry at a White House party during the Eisenhower administration: "What's the matter?' asked President Eisenhower in alarm. 'I just wanted to tell you, Mr. President..what it has meant to me to spend an evening in the White House.' His feelings will only be understood by the favored few who have been ushered by glittering military aides down the red-carpeted corridor to a White House social function."[28]

Merriam has argued that the greater the power, the greater the need for "garlands to cover the sadder aspects of the incidence of authority."[29] A better description of White House symbolism would be to suggest that the greater the power and the more central the symbol of authority, the greater the need to surround the symbol with rites and ceremonies consistent with the sense of awe and ultimate power attributed to that

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[27]Quoted in Novak, op. cit., 20.

[28]Jack Anderson and Carl Kalvelage, American Government...like it is (Morristown, New Jersey: General Learning Press, 1972), 46-47.

[29]Charles Merriam, "Political Power," op. cit., 103.

symbol. In effect, when Americans elect a President, they are selecting a king, a priest, and a prophet. As Barber suggested, "Whatever his talents - Coolidge-type or Roosevelt-type - the President is the only available object for such national-religious-monarchical sentiments as Americans possess."[30]

II

Civil religion, at least until the recent perceived conflict between the values of the civil religion and those of the Nixon administration, has produced a phase in which the nation and its chief executive possess immense and awesome power. Even under the crippled Nixon presidency, the symbolic powers of the President were great. This symbolic power has generated a critical danger for the polity. The danger is the possibility that the chief priest component of the presidency may be so emphasized as to dominate the nation and negate the influence of other symbols of the civil religion. In effect, overemphasis upon the centrality of the President could distort the civil religion by so emphasizing one symbol (the President) that the inherent values and moral guides of other symbols are lost. The President's character or behavior may assume symbolic identification (planned or subconscious) that functions to mold a submissive and always obedient mass public. This has already happened to such a degree that the President may be referred to as high priest and prophet of the civil religion. Indeed,

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[30]James David Barber, The Presidential Character (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1972),5.

it has been demonstrated that many social scientists whose proper role is critical analysis of society, have become evangelists of a perverted civil religion characterized by an omnipotent and beneficent high priest.

Historically, the American President has not been reluctant to gird himself in the armor of the civil religion to legitimize his own power or actions and to mobilize public support. The use of God-talk in inaugural addresses to legitimize presidential authority and to motivate public support has been reviewed. Such talk is also common in State of the Union messages and other appeals for public and Congressional support. For example, President Johnson, in his appeal to Congress for adoption of the voting rights bill of 1965, argued that:

> Rarely are we met with the challenge, not to our growth or abundance, or our welfare or our security-but rather to the values and purposes and meaning of our beloved nation.... God will not favor everything that we do. It is rather our duty to divine His will. I cannot help but believe that He truly understands, that He really favors, the undertaking that we begin here tonight.[31]

In 1969, President Johnson went so far as to attribute a Christ image to the presidency. In his farewell address to the Congress, Mr. Johnson called for support for the newly elected President Nixon and asked for commisuration with his burdens as he said: "I hope every member of Congress will remember that the burdens he will bear

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[31]Quoted in Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 25 (1969), 5-A.

as our President, will be borne for all of us."[32] President Kennedy frequently enunciated the position that God's work must be our own and President Nixon, perhaps more than any other President, appealed to the civil religion for support. Nixon was the first President to include a full-scale, ecumenical worship service on his inaugural program. He was also the first to schedule three minutes of silent prayer as a national reaffirmation in God and he broke tradition to organize his own Sunday services at the White House led by Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish religious figures.

In his most recent work, The Future While It Happened, Samuel Lubbel described the 1972 presidential election as "Our first total election."[33] Lubell went on to argue that Richard Nixon used the immense powers of the presidency to manage the economy as well as foreign and other domestic affairs to ensure his re-election. According to Lubell, this power has been used by incumbents with increasing effectiveness until it culminated in President Nixon's total management of the presidency to manipulate opinion and generate political support. Lubell also observed Nixon's attempt to appeal to religious opinion and noted that his speeches "seemed to appeal to the traits which characterize Baptists...."[34] This is significant because evangelists have a strong

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Samuel Lubell, The Future While It Happened (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1973), 30.

[34] Ibid., 62.

sense of loyalty to their government, in keeping with the admonition of St. Paul, "Let every person be subject to the government authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God."[35] President Nixon's close association with the evangelist preacher, Dr. Billy Graham, and his association with religious evangelism were used, then, to butress his political power. This effort, combined with Sandeen's observation that religious fundamentalism best represents the values and beliefs of the civil religion, gives evidence that Nixon's total election effort went far beyond Lubell's social-economic description of the 1972 election to dominate and use the American theological perspective as well.[36]

While one may contest Lubell's description of the Nixon campaign as the "first total election", it is clear that the Nixon re-election drive superceded all previous efforts in scope and intensity. His campaign began with his first inauguration in 1969. At the inauguration and thenceforth, he presented himself as the living embodiment of the great ideal which is to guide and inspire all the people of the world, the chief priest and prophet of the civil religion. Charles Henderson described that first inauguration:

> On Inauguration Day the store windows of Washington were filled with 10,000 specially printed cards. They carried a pair of hands, in the attitude of prayer and

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[35]Romans 13:1.

[36]Ernest Sandeen "Fundamentalism and Religions Identity," op. cit., 65.

> the words: Thanksgiving, Blessing, Rededication, Guidance, and Nixon's own campaign slogan-Forward Together. Never has a President gone so far to establish his own religious credentials.... Many of the attitudes which he avows are simply typical of American civil religion. Faith in the Mission of America, its destiny and the universal application of its dream to all people for all time, the belief that God is on our side and favors our cause in the ultimate struggle for freedom and truth. These beliefs are commonly held by members of all American faiths. They are the root not only of our confidence and vitality but also of our arrogance and pride.[37]

Much of the divination of Presidents occurs, in part, in the way Presidents have sought to legitimize their power. Barber has observed that "In our culture the religious-monarchial focus of the presidency - the tendency to see the office as a sort of divine-right kingship - gets emphasized less in chiliastic, evangelical, or even ecumenical ways than in a quest for legitimacy."[38] This work has illustrated that, from the signing of the Mayflower Compact to the inauguration of Richard Nixon, the perceived presence of God at key ceremonies has been used to sanctify and legitimize the structure of power in American society. Thus, although normative theory in America rests sovereignty with the people, the symbolism of the civil religion has implicitly and explicitly given ultimate sovereignty to God. For the civil religion, the will of the people is not the ultimate criteria of public policy but rather the will of God who stands in judgment of the American people.

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[37]Charles P. Henderson, "Richard Nixon, Theologian," op. cit., 235-236. For a more thorough analysis of the public faith of President Richard Nixon see Charles P. Henderson, The Nixon Theology (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

[38]James David Barber, The Presidential Character, op. cit., 450-451.

For some persons, God becomes confused with President; particularly when the President appears to possess great power over such questions of ultimate concern as the life and death of a nation. For the President, because he takes an oath before the people and before God, the temptation is strong to assume that his obligation is to God as the higher criterion. The result is that the Presidents frequently define their roles as that of trustee of the civil religion rather than as delegates of the American people. President Kennedy expressed this view in his early work, Profiles in Courage, in which he glorified those political leaders who rejected constituent pressures to follow their consciences.[39] This trustee model of the presidency, if balanced by the internalization of the assumptions of the civil religion regarding civil liberties and democratic procedures, may be conducive to a healthy and stable democracy. But if the President takes his self-importance too seriously and his subordinates or the public follow him too blindly without regard for other symbols of the national faith, grave distortions of the civil religion may result.

Corwin's fear, expressed in his 1941 essay, of a cult of presidential personality, was timely and perceptive. Yet it does not forsee the true danger to the presidency and to the American polity. George E. Reedy, President Johnson's press secretary when Johnson was commencing to apply the theory of a strong presidency to Vietnam, later sought to

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[39]John F. Kennedy, Profiles in Courage (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956).

explain what went wrong by arguing that the peerless power of the presidency had isolated its occupant from reality.[40] Both Corwin and Reedy grasped partial insight into the truth. The danger of the presidency is not a cult of personality but a cult of the office itself. Not only have the American people idolized the office of the President, but many a president has sought to fulfill his own idolized version of the power and potential of the office. United States Senator Mark Hatfield has blamed "The cult of the American presidency and its corrupting influence on the White House" for the Watergate affair.[41] Because of this cult, presidential "perspective becomes lost and reality is distorted as the ego is constantly massaged."[42] According to Hatfield, "The plaudits, the honor and the answering allegiance can create a moral vacuum so bribes become referred to as inappropriate gifts; crime is reduced to misguided zeal; lies become misspoken words...."[43]

Lyndon Johnson's problem was not, as George Reedy suggested, an isolation from reality. Rather, Johnson was too close to the reality of the symbolic power of the President. Victimized by public and textbook expectations of the nature and success of his exercise of power, President Johnson expanded the scope of presidential action beyond the

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[40]George E. Reedy, The Twilight of the Presidency (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1970).

[41]Chicago Sun Times, May 4, 1973, 40.

[42]Ibid.

[43]Ibid.

limits within which he could successfully function. Following Johnson, many of the Nixon staff and perhaps the President himself, became totally absorbed by the reality of the symbolic power of the presidency. The result was overemphasis upon one symbol of the civil religion and a growing isolation from other symbols within the polity.

Two basic explanations account for the growing identification with the President as the central symbol of the civil religion in its third phase. The first explanation has to do with the epistemology of the civil religion and the nature of human cognition. We have noted that the civil religion seeks to articulate and structure social reality through condensation symbols and that the symbols provide a metaphysical foundation for society by expressing the fundamental meaning and purpose of society in terms of its relationship to God or the transcendent. The power of the presidency arises because of the difficulty that individuals have in understanding and identifying with complex and abstract symbols. Thus, the more concrete and simple the symbol, the easier it is to understand and internalize. This is why Easton and Dennis found that children recognize the authority of the President long before the more difficult and abstract concepts of Congress and the norms of a representative and popular democracy.[44] Verba summarized this point when he argued that "complex social collectivities...are

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[44]David Easton and Jack Dennis, "The Child's Image of Government," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 361 (September, 1965), 40-57.

not easily the direct objects of emotional attachment or commitment. Rather, some common symbol...is required."[45]

The fact is, many Americans do treat America as a religion. Because the President is a concrete symbol of our system of government, we give a "sacredness" and "trust" to that office that conveys immense symbolic powers over "rational" people which they may be loathe to admit. As Verba suggested, the President is the highest symbol in America and "The presidential role is thus endowed with a religious quality."[46] Even when the personal popularity of the President is low, public expectation for moral leadership and successful action remains high. Indeed, the slide in popularity of a President may be due to his inability to meet the high standards expected of him. Because Americans have high symbolic expectations of the presidency, violation of these expectations brings retribution. After barely a week of revelations in early 1973, President Nixon fell from the height of presidential power to the threat of impeachment. His constitutional power did not change; but symbolically he was discredited.

A second explanation for the growing power of the President as central symbol of the civil religion is of a psychological rather than a cognitive nature. Greenstein observed such a psychological dependence

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[45]Sidney Verba, "The Kennedy Assassination," op. cit., 353.

[46]Ibid. For further analysis of religion and the religious function of the American President, see Robert S. Alley, So Help Me God: Religion and the Presidency, Wilson to Nixon (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1972).

upon or attachment to the President that the deaths of Presidents Kennedy, Lincoln, Roosevelt, McKinley, Garfield and even Harding have caused physical ailments for many Americans.[47] These ailments often took the form of headaches, tenseness, insomnia and rapid heartbeat. These reactions may be explained by what Fromm referred to as spread of feelings of aloneness and anomie brought on by the complexity of modern society accompanied by individual feelings of insignificance and powerlessness.[48] He argued that men "need to be related to the world outside oneself,...to avoid...moral aloneness which is.... intolerable."[49] He went on to argue that the insecurity brought on by moral aloneness was responsible for the willingness of Germans to identify with Hitler as a symbol of power and authority and he warned that such submissions to authority could potentially occur in any modern society.

In the United States, identification with a strong and active president who is also the chief symbol of the national gemeinschaft of which every citizen needs to feel a part, fulfills the need of a benign authority figure who embraces the moral collectivity of the nation and represents the relationship of all Americans to an ultimate, transcendent purpose. Barber enforces this view as he says of the presidency:

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[47]Fred Greenstein, "Popular Images of the President," American Journal of Psychiatry, 26 (November, 1965), 122.

[48]Erich Fromm, Escape From Freedom(New York: Holt, Reinhard and Winston, (1941).

[49]Ibid., 19.

> The presidency is much more than an institution. It is a focus of feelings... The presidency is the focus for the most intense and persistent emotions in the American polity. The President is a symbolic leader, the one figure who draws together the peoples hopes and fears for the political future. On top of all his routine duties, he has to carry that off - or fail.[50]

One function of the President, as symbol of benign authority and omnipotence, is to assuage fear and anxiety. Barber argued that "People look to the President for reassurance, a feeling that things will be all right, that the President will take care of his people."[51] Greenstein gives evidence of this as he argues that for an undetermined portion of the population the President is an unconscious surrogate of childhood authority figures.[52] Edelman, reflecting on the problem of alienation and anomie characteristic of the populations of advanced countries, saw the power of the President to lie in the popular belief that he knows what to do and is willing to act when others are bewildered and alone.[53] To Edelman, "the leader serves a vital function by personifying and reifying the processes of society."[54] As chief priest of the civil religion, the President has the power to reify or make real the abstract but fundamental primordial feelings and commitments of the condensation symbols of the civil religion. This function allows him to

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[50]James David Barber, The Presidential Character, op. cit., 451.

[51]Ibid., 9.

[52]Fred L. Greenstein, "Popular Images of the President," op. cit., 523-529.

[53]Murray Edelman, The Symbolic Uses of Politics, op. cit., 76.

[54]Ibid., 78.

appeal to deep human emotions and to arouse uncritical support for actions that can be effectively packaged as obligations or expectations of the civil religion.

III

The most serious expression of the potential perversions of the civil religion by overemphasis of the priestly role of the President is seen in the association of the Nixon presidency with an excessive number of 1972 campaign abuses. On June 17, the Washington police confronted five burglars inside the sixth-floor offices of the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate office building. From that event has grown the worst political scandal in the history of the American presidency.

Watergate is not a matter of an isolated incident of breaking and entering. It was part of a massive attempt to subvert the political process with dozens of persons engaged in questionable handling of funds, using government power to harass and intimidate, stooping to espionage and sabotage, engaging in cases of common burglary and then attempting to cover up all the skulduggery. Watergate opened the floodgate, releasing a torential stream of moral irresponsibility and unrighteousness of massive proportions. It brought discredit and lack of confidence not only to the White House but to many such agencies of government as the FBI, IRS, and CIA. The Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives recommended the impeachment of President Nixon and the President was able to avoid impeachment by the full House only

through resignation. Finally, an implicit admission of wrongdoing was made by the former President when he accepted a full and unconditional pardon from his successor. Many of President Nixon's advisors including Attorney General John Mitchell, White House counselor John W. Dean, appointments secretary Dwight Chapin, chief of staff H.R. Haldeman, domestic advisor John Ehrlichman and campaign aides Hugh W. Sloan, Jeb Stuart Magruder and Fred C. LaRue were eventually convicted of crimes. L. Patrick Gray, President Nixon's choice to serve as director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, was found to have destroyed possible evidence in the case by burning it with his Christmas trash. Such disclosures from Washington about the abuses of power by the servants of a President who made more exuberant display of religiousity than any modern incumbent, illustrate the peril of reification of the condensation symbol of the American presidency in a president.

Thus, the lessons of Watergate demonstrate the potential danger to the American democratic tradition and the broader civil religion if one symbol, in this case the presidency, is overemphasized. It does this in several ways. First, it demonstrates the danger that loyalty to the central symbol (the President) may cause American leaders to lose sight of the broader values of the civil religion. Indeed, Daniel Boorstin has found the "...Watergate scandal as different and more dangerous than other typically American misconduct because it suggests a rise in 'the cult of personality...where loyalty to the leader seems to override everything else."[55] The actions of many of those involved in Watergate

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[55]Quoted in Congressional Quarterly, 31 (July 7, 1973), 1795.

are explained by their blind and uncritical loyalty to the President as chief symbol of Americanism. Herbert Porter, a Watergate defendent, when asked why he abdicated his own conscience, replied: "My loyalty to this man Richard Nixon. I felt a deep sense of loyalty to him. I was appealed to on this basis."[56] Gordon Liddy justified his criminal conduct on the basis of the "virtues" of "duty,loyalty to Nixon, and patriotism."[57] And Bernard Barker concluded his testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee by arguing that those who participated in the Watergate break-in "...did so out of patriotism" and that "they were operating in obedience to a higher law."[58] This emphasis on loyalty to the President was also expressed by John Mitchell's attorney, William G. Hundley, as he made his summary to the jury on December 23, 1974. He said: "Everything Mr. Mitchell did in Watergate, he did because he believed and trusted, and he was completely loyal to..." former President Nixon.[59] Then, appealing to the view that at least the great Presidents deserve loyalty beyond the boundaries of legally acceptable behavior, he asked the jury to acquit Mitchell, saying "Suppose Nixon were a giant," a president such as "Jefferson, Lincoln, Eisenhower, or the late President Kennedy. Then would you think what John Mitchell did to protect the President was so bad,

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[56]U.S. News and World Report, 74 (January 18, 1972), 21.

[57]Gordon Liddy, "Gordon Liddy: A Patriot Speaks," Harpers, 249 (October, 1974), 50.

[58]The Richmond News Leader, May 25, 1973.

[59]Congressional Quarterly, 32 (December 28, 1974), 3251.

was criminal?"[60] The most obvious distortion of the role of the President and the blind, religious loyalty attracted during the Nixon presidency was expressed by the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, who, in December of 1974, said: "This nation is God's Nation. The office of the President is, therefore, sacred."[61] Then, "When Nixon came out of the White House last December 13 to greet Moon's disciples of Freedom Leadership Foundation, they knelt down to worship him."[62] For many of the Watergate participants as well as those who supported Nixon in spite of Watergate, re-electing the President was the goal. Any means to that end were justifiable. The methods, the ethical quality of actions were secondary to coming out on top. If your goal is to protect the chief symbol of the civil religion, then any method that helps you achieve such a goal is justified.

Second, Watergate demonstrates that too close identification of the President with the welfare of the nation may allow "national security" to justify any action by or for the President. James McCord and other defendents in the Watergate trials have referred to their belief that the welfare of the nation was threatened by political attacks upon the President who, apparently for them, had become the personification of the national faith.[63] John Mitchell defended his actions on this basis when he said: "In my mind, the re-election of

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[60] Ibid.

[61] Quoted by Garry Wills in "Piety in the Bunker," op. cit., 18.

[62] Ibid.

[63] U.S. News and World Report, 73 (January 18, 1972), 21.

Richard Nixon...was so much more important in that context."[64]

Most typically, Watergate demonstrates that personal morality in no way assures an adequate understanding of how to operate ethically in terms of political decisions in a democracy. Many of the persons who have already resigned over Watergate were "good" persons. Phillip Potter, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, observed that "In Watergate, we have clean-cut, good looking people devoted to personal success and the glory of the nation but who seem to be defective in moral sensitivity."[65] The President himself had Quaker upbringing. Most of those involved in the Watergate activities consider themselves to be moral persons. Aldous Huxley dealt biographically with the "personally good" man who remained personally pure but became politically demonic as he assisted Cardinal Richelieu in the intrigues of that day.[66] The point of Huxley's work was that personal morality does not translate itself automatically into political morality. In fact, the "good" man in politics can be more dangerous in his use of power because he is tempted by his own self-righteousness. As Jeb Magruder put it: "We had private morality but not a sense of public morality. Instead of applying our private morality to public affairs, we accepted the President's standards of political behavior, and the results were tragic for him and for us."[67] The good

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[64] Congressional Quarterly, 31 (July 14, 1973), 1869.

[65] Cincinnati Enquirer, May 28, 1973, 1-G.

[66] Aldous Huxley, Grey Eminence (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941).

[67] Jeb Stuart Magruder, An American Life: One Man's Road to Watergate (New York: Atheneum, 1974), 318.

men of the Nixon administration conceived themselves to be right and moral. The question of how ethics works in politics, and how morality is related to the use of political power is not answered simply as adherents of the civil religion are prone to do.

The results of the Watergate investigations give witness to the danger of the presidency as central symbol of the civil religion. Frequently, the defense of Richard Nixon was based upon the belief that the symbol of legitimacy (or at least the intrinsic worth of the civil religion) was being attacked. Thus, intrinsic loyalty was given to the presidency rather than the broader values expressed in the combined symbols of the civil religion. For example, Senator Mark Hatfield has revealed that among the many critical letters he received after offering an amendment to end the Vietnam war, one said:

> Why do you think you have the right to interfere with our presidents? Have you forgotten that God's way is to respect and honor those in authority? What higher power is there than President Nixon? God put him there. 'Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God.'[68]

This may be an extreme example but it is illustrative of the point. Hatfield himself argued that "it prevailed at that time and perhaps does so even today amongst many..."[69]

Clearly, there is much danger in the merger of religious piety with

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[68]From "An Address by the Honorable Mark O. Hatfield, U.S.Senator from Oregon," mimeographed and distributed by Senator Hatfield in Washington, D.C.

[69]Ibid.

patriotism and the symbolic power of the presidency. Richard Nixon's perception of the existence of a civil religion and his use of that religion in his quest for re-election gives evidence of the degree to which that danger exists. Yet, the total election strategy of Richard Nixon led to the collapse of his symbolic power. Section IV of this chapter will explore the causes of the dedivination of the Nixon presidency and the concurring forces within the civil religion that limit the excesses of symbolic distortion to maintain a balance of values within the political system.

IV

Despite the potential dangers of a too-powerful presidency implicit in the symbolism of the civil religion, the Presidents have seldom cynically and intentionally used the civil religion to maximize power and encourage political quiesence.[70] The presidency of Richard Nixon may well

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[70]For an example of a power-oriented, manipulative approach to presidential leadership, see Richard E. Neustadt's Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1964). Neustadt is reputed to have had great influence on the thinking and style of President John Kennedy. Still, Neustadt did not anticipate the total election strategy to culminate in Richard Nixon nor did he recognize the deep power resources available to the President as a leader of the national religion. For further analysis of President Nixon's use of religious symbols in the 1972 presidential election, see Bernard F. Donahue, "The Political Use of Religious Symbols: A Case Study of the 1972 Presidential Campaign," The Review of Politics, 37 (January, 1975).

have been the most significant exception. Yet, even in this case, appeals to the civil religion were inconsistent and sometimes paradoxical. The President himself appears to have been as much a victim of the perversion of the civil religion by his staff as the perpetrator of self-seeking manipulation. Indeed, his raising of the values of the civil religion (Particularly those themes expressed most emphatically in fundamentalist Christianity) may be the result of "political instinct" rather than rational manipulation. Over-emphasis on the President as chief priest and prophet of the civil religion may be explained most often as social role-taking, not intentional deception. Presidents simply assume the role defined for them by the public including the authors of the textbook presidency, and their own self-understanding of the obligations and function of the office.

Presidential role-taking is determined by two factors: the President's perception of public expectations of presidential behavior and what James David Barber refers to as the President's "world view."[70] By "world view," Barber means the President's way of conceiving reality and his understanding of the main purposes and central moral conflicts of the time. As a produce of the civil religion, the President's world view is at least partially determined by his understanding of that civil religion. The values of the civil religion as expressed in public expectations and in a President's conception of the purpose of the chief priest of the civil religion, cause him to accept a role as President

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[71]James David Barber, The Presidential Character, op. cit., 7-8.

different from his role as citizen or Senator or candidate. Theodore White and others have noted a great change in men as they shift from the role of citizen to that of President or, in the language of the civil religion, from layman to chief priest. Much of that perceived change is the result of our own expectations about the character of the American President and our assumption that, once ordained, he is indeed different. Because he is President, we want and expect him to be wise, calm and decisive in his actions. He too, shares these expectations and attempts to meet the standards society has set. Through these attempts, he may actually change to some degree as he adapts to his new role. By associating him with the awe and majesty of a transcendent civil religion, our perceptions (and his) of the man and his power come close to divination. From the perspective of private religion, it becomes idolatry. Indeed, the excesses of power of the presidency may well be more the result of such public and personal idolatry than cynicism and deceit.

The primary limitation on the symbolic power of the presidency is found in the countervailing symbols and values of the civil religion. The symbolic function of presidents as omnipotent and beneficent and moral leaders does give them great power to play upon individual feelings of insignificance, powerlessness and moral aloneness. But despite the excesses of many administrations culminating in Watergate, presidents have been unable and usually unwilling to destroy the accepted traditions of a free, democratic, and open-ended society. The President is not the only symbol of the civil religion. He is limited

by the values of the civil religion as integrated into his world view and by the public acceptance of those condensation symbols that commit America to be a model of the free society. In effect, the acts of American Presidents are limited by the national faith and to justify political crimes on that basis, usually become known for what they are and fail.

Fundamental in the symbolism of the American civil religion is the belief that the American model is to reflect the principles of the free society. These principles are understood in terms of the procedural norms and values of liberal democracy. As McCloskey has shown, the American mass public is committed to democracy in the abstract and the influentials of society are strongly committed to the specific practices and values of a liberal democracy.[72] Further, the civil religion affirms that the state is to be judged by God. This belief in the judgment of God must be understood in the context of the American experience; it is not synonymous with the civil religion of the Greek city-state. Whether God is perceived as Lincoln saw Him, to be an empirical reality exercising literal judgment or simply as a metaphor for perfection in terms of the values of the civil religion, American civil religion perceives the nation to be an instrument or reflection of the deity, not the deity itself. Metaphysical holism and the deification of the President have been expressed as perversions of the American civil religion precisely because they actualize God in state or President rather than judging state and President in terms of the enduring values generated or expressed through

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[72]Herbert McCloskey, "Consensus and Ideology in American Politics," American Political Science Review, 153 (January, 1964), 361-382.

the transcendent deity. In this sense, there is no distinction between civil religion and "true" religion. Rather, the distinction between the religion of the churches and civil religion has to do with the scope of the religions and their orientation. Most American churches focus directly on the relationship between God and the individual. If a mediary is provided, it is the church or the priest. The civil religion focuses on the state. The individual is to interpret the transcendent in terms of his social experience and the will of God is understood in terms of state action. The mediator between the individual and the deity is the state or its chief priest, the President. To believe that God is America is a perversion of the civil religion. But if one's relationship with God is defined (at least partially) in terms of his participation in America rather than his participation in a church, as well as his identification with political values, he is a practicing member of the civil religion. For most private religions, man is to be judged by God. For the civil religion, the primary focus of transcendent judgement is directed toward the state. Rather than emphasizing personal salvation, the civil religion sets as its primary purpose the political salvation of America understood in terms of participation in an American Republic devoted to the values of the civil religion. Thus, in contrast to private religion, the highest standard for civil religion is the good society, not personal salvation for the faithful. Damnation is to be found by separation from the values of the religion and the highest ideals of the civil religion are found in light of God who calls

the nation to judgment. This sense of divine or historical judgment in terms of the values of the civil religion plays an important role in the world view of Presidents as has been aptly demonstrated in the inaugural addresses and speeches of the Presidents. It is also present in the thoughts of many Americans and, as shown in Chapter III, it motivated strong moral and religious opposition to America's Vietnam policy during the Johnson and Nixon administrations. These countervailing values are critical in placing limits on Presidents. If the chief priest is conceived to have become a religious heretic, his symbolic authority as moral leader is badly shaken. The wave of public condemnation following exposure of improper and illegal acts during the Nixon campaign gives evidence of this fact.

The Nixon presidency and the total election campaign of 1972 was, in part, a sincere expression of Nixon's world view as shaped by public expectations of leadership, the textbook presidency, and his perception of the purpose and goals of the nation's central symbol, the President. Much of this approach, including his appeal to evangelical values and beliefs, was a legitimate appeal to strains within the civil religion. But this total campaign went beyond traditional engagement with the symbols of the civil religion to attempted manipulation of those symbols to grossly exaggerate the sacred value and power of the President. Further, in what Voegelin would call the most fundamental erosion of a political tradition, the Nixon administration lost the insight that the truth of society is transcendental truth

and that the function of the basic symbols is to express the relations between political society and God. The Nixon campaign violated the national faith in three ways: 1) it sought to manipulate existing symbols rather than to engage them; 2) it distorted the "higher law" dimension of the civil religion to justify civil disobedience for partisan political victory; and 3), in the President's activities, he substituted the presidency for the transcendent deity of the civil religion. The result was political instability. As both the influentials who understand and articulate the specifics of the national faith and the mass public, which is committed to a more abstract conception of that faith, came to understand this heresy, the legitimacy of the Nixon Presidency was challenged.

The purpose of the distortion and manipulation of symbols by the Nixon administration and the Committee to Reelect the President has been to destroy McGovernism by painting its values and policies in contradistinction to the American Way of Life. But public revelation of the misdeeds and cynical manipulation of symbols in pursuit of total victory made a mockery of the President's claim to be a beneficent and moral leader.[73] As use of staged conflicts between the "silent majority" and the violent few, false ads and false signatures, the manipulation of returned prisoners-of-war to support the President's war policy, and other image-creating techniques were brought into focus, the President attempted to defend these acts by way of comparison with the

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[73]For insight into how the story emerged, see Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward, All the President's Men (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974).

illegal antiwar demonstrations of the 1960's. Such acts, Nixon implied, were justified because the individuals were acting in defense of a principle higher than positive law: preservation of the American Way of Life. Jeb Stuart Magruder, testifying before the Senate Watergate committee, argued that his former ethics teacher, William Sloan Coffin, had inspired him by teaching that the breaking of a law was justified for higher purposes. The purpose of this argument was to appeal to a significant dimension within the civil religion that sets limits on the proper sphere of political authority and provides a system of abstract justice to which men should conform. By labeling certain elements of the opposition as heretics of the civil religion, it was then possible to justify the Watergate illegalities as a necessary defense of the values of a higher law. But the purpose of the higher law dimension within the civil religion is to legitimize basic human rights in a transcendent deity. The purpose of Nixon and Magruder was to use it as a moral cover-up for breaking positive law to secure partisan political victory. Again, the strength of the countervailing values in the civil religion is witnessed by the fact that such a misunderstanding or cynical manipulation of the basic symbols and the higher law dimension of the religion was not accepted.

Finally, from a Voegelinesque perspective, Nixon revealed himself to be a heretic by his attempt to elevate himself to the level of transcendence. Unable to recognize or articulate the relationship of political society to a transcendent and omnipotent God, he made

patriotism his public religion. Integrating a dimension of fascist philosophy into his theory of politics, he sought to resist transcendence to limit the expression of the American purpose to the omnipotent holism of the state. Transcendence, to the degree that it was permitted, would be found in the person and power of the President. Thus, in a final sense, Richard Nixon became the chief heretic of the civil religion by denying a fundamental assumption of that religion. This assumption is best expressed in Lincoln's belief that America's god is God, not America, and that civil religion must be open to the revelations and judgement of the transcendent God.

Although he makes no references to Lincoln, Novak's description of symbol-manipulation as opposed to symbol-engagement is descriptive of a critical distinction between Presidents Lincoln and Nixon:

> The one symbol manipulation is manipulation from outside-in; the other is expression from the inside-out. The one tries to execute a prior construct or design; the other tries to allow what is inside to manifest itself...The one regards image-making as a technique of the politician's power; the other regards symbols as social resources in whose light the politician falls under a great judgement. The one regards symbols as transcendent energies calling all to be better than they are.[74]

By using the symbols of the civil religion as strategy to achieve temporary political gain rather than to engage them as personal and national guides, Richard Nixon became the chief heretic of the civil religion.

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[74]Michael Novak, Choosing Our King, op. cit., 251.

Americans expect the Presidents to be moral leaders and they are not reluctant to follow Lincoln's call to judge the nation and its leadership in light of the values of the civil religion. In contrast to his wise handling of the Vietnam issue, President Nixon in his campaign and in his defense after Watergate, mistakenly shaped the debate in terms of the national religion. By identifying the opposition with heresy, he caused his own actions and values to be reviewed and judged by both influentials and the mass public. The language of the civil religion was turned against him. The result was widespread judgment and condemnation of his own behavior in light of the values of the civil religion.

Recognition of the Nixon heresy has now extended to the evangelical heart of the civil religion which was once the center of Nixon's support. "The 1972 appeal of Richard Nixon," Harold Brown has argued, "seems to have been, 'the American Way or godless immorality'".[75] This appeal, successful in the general election, is no longer effective. According to Brown, the long and complex coverup of Watergate, with all its implications of basic dishonesty in high places caused Nixon to lose the approval and moral support of his final source of power - religious fundamentalism. For example, following the Watergate revelations, a number of journals edited and published by evangelicals began to condemn excessive patriotism and to attack Richard Nixon. These included The Reformed Journal, published by William B. Erdman's Publishing Company, and the

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[75]Harold O. J. Brown, "Restive Evangelicals," National Review 26 (February 15, 1974), 193.

Post-American which was founded by students at the theologically conservative Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.[76] Brown has observed that Nixon's patronizing of Dr. Billy Graham, formerly considered by evangelicals as evidence of the President's commitment to their religious-political values, is now cynically compared to the Emperor Constantine's espousal of Christianity after 313 A.D.[77] Put quite simply, Nixon's attempt to incorporate the transcendent deity of the civil religion in his person and to manipulate the symbols of the civil religion for partisan victory cost him the support of that group most likely to combine religious piety, patriotism and support for the President as chief symbol of the civil religion. Without the support of the evangelicals, the President's symbolic power was destroyed and he was unable to complete his term of office.

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[76]W.B. Erdman's Publishing Company is located in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the heartland of the conservative, Calvinistic Christian Reformed Church. It is closely identified with the publication of scholarly works from the conservative Protestant tradition. Many of the contributing editors of both The Post-American and The Reformed Journal are on the faculty of Calvin College of Grand Rapids, a stronghold of Calvinist orthodoxy. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School belongs to the Evangelical Free Church of America. It is the sixth largest Protestant seminary and is continuing to grow. It is committed to the traditional Protestant view of orthodoxy and absolute trustworthiness of the Bible and has become one of the major sources of evangelical ministers for a number of denominations whose own seminaries are more liberal.

[77]Harold O.J. Brown, "Restive Evangelicals," op. cit., 198.

Richard Nixon's massive attempt at manipulation of symbols as opposed to symbol-engagement has been the exception, not the rule in American politics. His loss of power gives evidence of the limitations within the context of the civil religion that make lasting violation of the values of the national faith extremely difficult in the execution of public policy and political campaigns. President Kennedy recognized the limitations of the civil religion placed on the power of the President when he argued that "the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state but from the hand of God."[78] Here, he was stressing his commitment to the belief of the civil religion that the rights of man are more basic than the will of the President or the institutions of government. Thus, when correctly interpreted, the commitment of the President to a higher law than the sovereignty of the people is an obligation on the part of the President to respect the sacred quality of the freedoms and democratic procedures of the American society. Despite occasional public and administrative perversions of the presidential role, the Presidents have been bound by the national faith more often than they have perverted it and the experience of Richard Nixon is likely to ensure that future Presidents continue to observe the limitations placed upon them by the civil religion.

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[78] Inaugural Addresses, op. cit., 267.

V

CIVIL RELIGION AND DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA

In truth, there never was any remarkable lawgiver amongst any people who did not resort to divine authority, as other wise his laws would not have been accepted by the people....

Machiavelli
Discourses

Throughout this study, it has been argued that civil religion exists and that this religion expresses the self-understanding of social reality, man's purpose, and the nature of his ultimate concern for many Americans. Further, we have submitted that a significant function of civil religion has been to support the political system. Two basic value judgments have been made. The first value judgment prescribes democratic government as the best possible political system for Americans and recommends certain attitudes, traditions and procedures as the proper norms of American politics. The second value judgment is instrumental in that it is an explanation of how the normative value is to be reached. No attempt has been made to defend democratic government as a norm. Rather, the primary focus of the study has been on the question of the existence of civil religion, its relationship to American political norms and goals, and its validity as an instrument to achieve and preserve democracy as a given end. Chapters I through IV have stated the case for the existence and function of civil religion.

But does society need civil religion? Tinder has observed that "one of the oldest and most universal convictions is that a stable and decent society can be built only on some kind of religious ground."[1] It is the conclusion of this study that some form of religious matrix (broadly defined) is inevitable and necessary to express the spiritual context of society and as an instrument toward a stable order consistent with that spiritual dimension. The religious dimension has contributed to regime stabilization in America by promoting agreement about the nature and content of social obligations and by providing values that serve to channel the attitudes of a society's members and to define from them the content of these obligations. In this role, civil religion is viewed as helping to create systems of social values that are integrated and coherent. Civil religion, in short, is seen as having accounted, in large part, for the fact that political values are not a mere hodgepodge but constitute a hierarchy. In this hierarchy, civil religion defines the ultimate values and hence coordinates into a more or less integrated system diverse values that might otherwise appear unrelated and meaningless. Second, it is believed that civil religion has also played a vital role in supplying the constraining power that underwrites and reinforces custom. Attitudes of reverence and respect toward especially binding customs or mores are regarded as closely akin

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[1]Glenn Tinder, Political Thinking (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970), 24.

to the feelings of awe which, as seen earlier, are evoked by the sacred itself. In all societies more or less clear notions of appropriate behavior are found. The ideal standards of behavior, these "oughts", that incorporate social values are often referred to by political scientists as norms. The very existence of such norms tends to shape behavior in confirmity with them, for most people internalize norms in some measure and when acting in conformity with them are apt to feel that they are merely doing "what comes naturally."

This argument that societal religion provides many integrative and social-control functions has been influenced by Emile Durkheim who argued that the most significant property of the sacred was its capacity to evoke awe: hence its constraining power over human behavior and its consequent reinforcement of the values of society. Though Durkheim's conclusion, that all objects and entities invested by men with sacred quality are fundamentally symbols of the human group itself, thus making society the ultimate object of human worship, is repugnant to many of the publicists of civil religion, it has nevertheless been influential in the development of their thinking. Even if Durkheim's view is rejected in the form in which it is stated, it may still suggest important clues concerning the moral nature of the constraints that human societies exercise over the behavior of their members. In one of his most famous passages Durkheim wrote:

> Even if society were unable to obtain...concessions and sacrifices from us except by a material constrain, it might awaken in us only the idea of a physical force to which we must give way of necessity, instead of that of a moral power such as religions adore. But as a matter

> of fact, the empire which it holds over our consciences is due much less to the physical supremacy of which it was the privilege than to the moral authority with which it is invested. If we yield to its orders, it is not because it is strong enough to triumph over our resistence; it is primarily because it is the object of a venerable respect.[2]

Other students of religion and politics have gone beyond Durkheim to place emphasis on the creative and interpretive as well as the conservative potential of religion and also its powerful dynamic for promoting both social conflict and social change. For example, Max Weber, in his analysis of 17th century religion found that while certain Calvinistic Protestant sects played an innovating role in the emergence of modern capitalism, some branches of the Roman Catholic Church are undergoing a conservative reaction.[3] Further, both Weber and Talcott Parsons have made much of the interpretive function of religion in which religion provides changing interpretations of societal meaning that make "moral sense" to an established elite or provide justification for rejection of the established ruling structure and public policies.[4] Perhaps Weber's most profound contribution was to restore the importance of ideas and cultural factors after their Marxian, materialistic purge. Weber argued that values have an influence that is not always reducible

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[2]Emile Durkheim, Elementary Forms of Religious Life, op. cit., 28.

[3]Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Scribner's, Students Edition, 1958).

[4]Max Weber, op. cit., and Talcott Parsons, "Christianity in Modern Industrial Society," in Sociological Theory, Values and Sociological Change, ed. Edward Tiryakian (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1963).

to matters of social class or societal structures; he asserted that noneconomic aspects of life are vital, independent forces in their own right. All of these assertions can be seen most clearly in his focus on theology and, of course, make up the central theme of The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. A central question for Weber was: "Given the direction a theology may take, where does it lead?". This question is central to the problem of civil religion and American politics and it is the conclusion of this study that civil religion in America not only exists and sustains political norms, but that it has contributed to a stable, democratic system.

Robert Lane has argued that a belief system is necessary to guide and provide purpose for individuals, to permit members of groups to work together by providing them with legitimate common goals, and to give citizens of a nation a sense of uniqueness and purpose and to explain and justify their origins and destinies.[5] He went on to identify eight areas of the core belief system that, properly understood, could shed light on religious thought and the political order:

1. Beliefs about the self; concepts of identity; self evaluation.
2. Beliefs about the world of "others," classification of human sets, concepts of human nature; beliefs about interpersonal relations.
3. Beliefs about authority, as a specially important set of interpersonal relations; beliefs about appropriate behavior in the face of authority; legitimacy, kinds of authority.
4. Desires, wants, needs, motives, goals and the elaboration of beliefs about them. These elements are values, in one sense of the term.
5. Beliefs about the moral good; ethical systems; concepts of what people should desire contrasted to what they do desire.

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[5]Robert E. Lane, Political Man (New York: The Free Press, 1972), 162-163.

6. Explanatory systems; concepts of causation, habits of causal inference.
7. Concepts of time, place, and nature, where nature is seen as impersonal economy, the order of things, including the Divine order; metaphysics.
8. Concepts of knowledge, truth, evidence, and how to discover the truth; epistemology.[6]

Unfortunately for purposes of this analysis, although Lane observed that societies with similar core belief systems will have similar theologies, he did not explore the possibility that the core belief system is by nature a religious system providing a central and sustaining religious dimension to the political order.

Two political scientists, John Hallowell and Ernest Griffith, came close to the mark in their recognition of the religious dimension of the core belief system and its relationship to the political order. Although they do not address the concept of "civil religion", their analyses of the relationship of the Christian and Hebrew faiths to democracy provides a strong defense of the proposition that religion affects the core belief system and that the impact of this religious influence is strongly felt by the political order. If one accepts the position that the myths and symbols of the Christian and Hebrew faiths are central to the civil religion as does this work, Griffith and Hallowell provide logical argument for the hypothesis that the civil religion is the core belief system of the American political order.

It is difficult to define democracy in a succinct phrase or formula.

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[6]Ibid., 164.

The institutional framework of American democracy rests upon the principle that legitimate government must derive its powers and function from the consent of the governed conceived not as passive acquiesence but as active approval. The American system assumes government by persuasion and deliberation and requires a whole range of civil liberties, a popularly elected legislature to draft legislation in response to the peoples' will, a choice between candidates representing different points of view, and constitutional government, conceived as government restrained by the dictates of a law more fundamental than that enacted by the legislature. As Hallowell suggested, "Our democratic institutions require a philosophy of life to sustain them... without a clear understanding of why these institutions exist, we shall have neither the means of defending them intellectually nor the resolution to defend them by force when the occasion demands it."[7] This philosophy of life Hallowell argued, has its roots "deep in Christian and Greek thought."[8] The words in the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal", Hallowell informed us, "derived originally from the belief that all men are created equal in the sight of God."[9]

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[7]John Hallowell, The Moral Foundation of Democracy (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1954), 67.

[8]Ibid., 81.

[9]Ibid.

Hallowell went on to outline the core of the Hebraic-Greek-Christian tradition and argued that this tradition functions as the cultural prerequisit of democracy. Among the beliefs of this tradition are:

1. History is a dialogue between God and man and that change is dictated less by the social conditions under which men live than by the moral and spiritual response which they make to those conditions.
2. Man is rational and can distinguish between the just and the unjust.
3. Man is a creature of free will and ultimately, all our actions will be judged by a standard which is not our own but God's.[10]

Hallowell went on to assert that to undermine these beliefs would lead to the loss of democratic values and finally the democracy they sustain.

Like Hallowell, it is Griffith's hypothesis that the Christian and Hebrew faiths constitute a powerful matrix of those attitudes most essential to a flourishing democracy. Moreover, he argued that these faiths can cloak such attitudes with "the character of 'absolutes' - a character which is not only desirable, but perhaps even necessary to democratic survival."[11] And like Lane, Griffith began his analysis with the examination of a core belief system, a cluster of basic attitudes or mores which are apparently closely associated with democratic success. Going beyond Lane, Griffith also proposed to "probe still more deeply to discover whether the hypothesis of religious belief as a common

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[10]Ernest Griffith in "Cultural Prerequisites To a Successfully Functioning Democracy: A Symposium", American Political Science Review, 50 (March, 1956), 103.

[11]Ibid.

denominator, an ultimate sustainer, of these attitudes is the correct one."[12]

Recognizing that the extent to which, and the degree with which, particular attitudes must be held to result in democratic government is discussable, Griffith found seven attitudes necessary to sustain democratic institutions:

1. Love for and belief in freedom: best based upon belief in the sacredness of the individual as a child of God.
2. Active and constructive participation in community life: best based upon the obligation of the Christian, the Jew, and other believers to accept responsibilities, cooperating with and working for their brother men.
3. Integrity in discussion: best based upon the inner light of truth being primary in a world God meant to be righteous.
4. The freely assumed obligation of economic groups to serve society; best based upon the Christian insight into the nature of society as set forth, for example, by the parable of the body and its members.
5. Leadership and office holding regarded as public trusts: best based upon or inspired by the example and teachings of religious prophets, such as Jesus, who accepted such a service "to the death".
6. Attitudes assuring that passion will be channeled into constructive ends; best based upon religious faiths that unite an obligation to love and serve with a recognition of the primacy of individual personality.
7. Friendliness and cooperation among nations: best based upon the vision of world brotherhood derived from a faith that we are all children of a common Heavenly Father.[13]

Griffith admitted that many of these attitudes would also help non-democratic forms of government, especially the fifth. However, he claimed that at least the basis of any of them would have only the most precarious

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., 113.

existence except in a democracy. Further, Griffith did not claim that only those who profess and practice the Christian and Jewish faiths will share these attitudes. Rather, he recognized that secular factors may also make for civil righteousness. But he argued that, "As political scientists, we may at least observe the effect on attitude of regarding a man - any man - as a child of God. It provides a norm by which political and economic conduct is to be judged."[14]

Griffith concludes by asserting that religion is a particularly powerful force because it encompasses passion as well as reason. In effect, it undergirds with the "will of God" the attitudes and mores essential to democracy. For him, a central question is:

> will anything less suffice as a cultural prerequisite for sustaining a democratic socio-political order? If not, for which religions may be claimed adequacy to sustain the democratic way? These are coldly objective questions, let those who resist the author's line of reasoning and conclusions, at least face the obligation to answer them.[15]

Griffith's assumption is that only the Christian and Hebraic religions successfully claim adequacy to sustain the democratic way and that his line of reasoning cannot be refuted.

A number of responses can and have been made to Griffith's line of reasoning. John Plamenatz makes two such responses. First, he observes that, while religion may provide a core belief system for democracy, it has not always led to democratic behavior. For example, he calls attention to the acceptance by early Christians of slavery and the

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[14]Ibid.

[15]Ibid., 115.

absolute power of the emperor.[16] Second, Plamenatz would distinguish between the theological view of the value of the human soul and the judicial and political expressions of the individualism of the good democrat. He concedes an historical nexus but questions a logical one.[17] Both criticisms are damaging to Griffith's argument but can be rationalized. In response to the first criticism, Griffith replied that Christianity is a dynamic faith and that the centuries have brought deeper insights into Christ's teachings until it now embraces fields of social action and community life of which the early Christians never dreamed.[18] This response is Weberian in nature to the degree that it finds religion to have a dynamic as well as a conservatizing function and to provide new interpretations of the social order to justify change in the social structure. In response to Plamenatz's distinction between theological and democratic individualism, Griffith makes explicit his concept of derivitives and correlaries. "The rights and duties of a free man", Griffith asserted, "derive from his nature; they must be expressed (among other areas) in political and judicial institutions. My argument stands or falls on whether my reasoning has established this derivitive character of rights and duties. I find no corresponding doctrine of origin in Plamenatz's reasoning."[19] Finally, Griffith argued that:

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[16]John Plamenatz, "Cultural Prerequisites to a Successfully Functioning Democracy," op. cit., 118.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Ernest Griffith in ibid., 103.

[19]Ibid.

> ...of the six nations which we submitted were decisive in the health of democracy, five - the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy - are Christian or Jewish-Christian in their tradition. The sixth, Japan, is Shinto, and this philosophy sustains some but not all of the prerequisites.[20]

Griffith's perspective on religion's role in the preservation of democracy has been complicated by a peculiarity we noted earlier - that the civil religion is distinct from Christian and Hebraic doctrine. Just as not everything about Christian and Hebraic institutions is religious, neither is everything religious reflected only in private religion. Although his direct correlation of Christian beliefs and democratic attitudes is questionable, Griffith is correct to assume that for a society to remain a viable social system its members must possess, or at least think they possess, a common set of values or aims. As Kingsley Davis stated it: "It is the possession of common ultimate ends that gives the key to the integration of ends in human societies ... As between two different groups holding an entirely different set of common-ultimate ends, there is no recourse."[21] The point being recognized is that, short of brute force, people conduct their affairs because they trust each other, and trust implies a common acceptance of the higher aims toward which activity is directed. But how does real or imagined agreement on "common-ultimate ends" come about? A traditional answer, from Durkheim onward and shared by this dissertation, has been that religion, in its beliefs, moral code, and ritual, serves this function; worship, regardless of what else it does for

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Kingsley Davis, Human Society (New York: Macmillan, 1950), 143.

individuals, helps solidify the society by articulating and making "real" the ultimate aims of the worshipers.

But whether or not the Christian and Hebraic traditions serve this function can clearly be questioned in the pluralistic society of modern America. The key, as substantiated throughout this work, is to see modern society as having alternative structural arrangements for performing this function. Or, as Plamenatz put it, the existence of the social prerequisites for democracy in the United States must be explained by a "larger complex" than the beliefs of the Christian-Hebraic tradition.[22] That "larger complex" or structure may be called civil religion, the American Way of Life, or pejoratively, syncretism of American Shinto. Building upon the Hebraic-Christian heritage, civil religion as shown in Chapter I, provides perspective on each of the eight areas of the core belief system outlined by Lane: the self, others, authority, goals, the moral good, an explanatory system as well as a metaphysics and an epistemology. Viewed from the perspective of civil religion, the arguments of Griffith and Hallowell appear to rest on much sounder grounds. While the anti-democratic excesses of private religion are checked by the civil religion, its linkage of such attitudes as love for freedom, participation in community life, the obligation of private interests to serve society, and the brotherhood of man to transcendent purpose and ultimate authority is preserved.

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[22]John Plamenatz, "Cultural Prerequisites to A Successfully Functioning Democracy," op. cit., 129.

The epistemology of civil religion as well as the implications of a public denial of that epistemology give evidence of its instrumental value to democracy. Felix Oppenheim, in his study of moral principles in political philosophy, distinguished between value-cognitivism and value-noncognitivism.[23] The metaethical theory of value-cognitivism claims that valuational and moral statements are assertions about objective states of affairs and have, as such, cognitive status; that is, they are, and can be known to be, either true or false. Thus ethical properties can be apprehended just like physical properties. This is what Aristotle meant when he spoke of the "perception of good and evil, ... and other similar qualities" and it is what Hallowell referred to when he stated that, according to Christian tradition, man can distinguish between the just and the unjust. The philosophy of value-cognitivism in politics holds that political institutions and policies have the objective quality of being good and bad.

The epistemology of civil religion is based upon the belief that, through social symbols, men can gain knowledge about the basic principles of political ethics and the "Ultimate," "sacred," or "God-given" plan for social organization, rights, and priorities. Although seldom expressed in such terms, value-cognitivism is the operating principle through

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[23]Felix Oppenheim, Moral Principles in Political Philosophy (New York: Random House), 1968.

which civil religion defines and integrates the polity. Civil religion distinguishes between this world and a transcendent norm but assumes that insight (value-cognition) through symbols makes it possible for man to bridge that gap to know the "Truth."

Intuitionism as the source of social "Truth" is hardly a new idea. Evidence of intuitionism as a basic source of social explanation and social norms is found as early as Plato and spans the thought of Saint Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Reinhold Niebuhr, Carl Friedrich, and Kurt Baier.[24] In the American tradition, it is most clearly expressed in the affirmations of a doctrine of natural rights and the claims of organized religion. In contrast to value-cognitivism, value-noncognitivism asserts that normative judgements about right political behavior cannot be known to be objectively true. It argues that a distinction between fact and value, descriptive and normative principles, science and ethics exists and, consequently, civil religion provides only preferences, not "truths" about the status and purposes of the polity.

The rise of value-noncognitivism in American social science, politics and religion poses a serious challenge to the legitimacy and effectiveness of civil religion to effect political action and public policy. By its denial of the "truth" of the symbols of the civil religion and the possibility of human transcendence to "higher" or "ultimate" norms,

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[24]See Oppenheim, op. cit., 53-93.

it threatens the ability of the core belief system to sustain democratic values.[25] The danger of denying the truth of the metaphors as representative of a permanent and ultimate norm for all men is that such a denial could result in alienation, social anomie and authoritarianism. Niebuhr suggested such a possibility when he argued that noncognitivism represents "a form of skepticism which---stands on the abyss of moral nihilism and threatens the whole of life with a sense of meaninglessness."[26] Clive Lewis made a similar argument when he said "A dogmatic belief in objective value is necessary to the very idea of a rule which is not tyranny or an obedience which is not slavery."[27]

Thomas S. Kuhn, in his The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, recognized the social utility of metaphors or paradigms with no inevitable or necessary correspondence to any objective universe. According to Kuhn, all paradigms including social and scientific ones, are cultural inventions, "universally recognizable scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners."[28] This metaphor constitutes "truth" about

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[25]In the field of theology, the denial of value-cognitivism is best witnessed in Harvey Cox, The Secular City (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1969) while contemporary pluralist theories of democracy give evidence of the centrality of value-noncognitivism in modern democratic theory.

[26]Reinhold Niebuhr, The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944),133.

[27]Clive S. Lewis, The Abolition of Man(New York: The Macmillan Co.,1947), 46.

[28]Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions(Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970),x.

the nature of reality by definition and consensus. It may provide the inspiration for several bodies of theory and is never completely formulated or spelled out in all of its implications. Its underlying character is metaphysical. In effect, according to Kuhn, the whole vision of truth is a paradigm based on a myth of legitimacy. Something is true because people are disposed to act as though it were. Further, Kuhn argued, elaborate rituals of action are created to substantiate a "truth." An example of such ritual is the mythicizing of an assassinated political leader so that he may continue to serve the function of symbolizing the body politic and the legitimacy of commitments undertaken during his actual rule.

Civil religion provides such a paradigm to establish a definition and consensus about social reality; what has authority, and what has legitimacy, what can be used as the basis for planning future actions, for rationalizing and excusing past actions, and for communicating about common enterprises in the American polity. The particular strength of civil religion as the predominant operating social paradigm is that it introduces the idea of a God in the sense of immanent becoming and thus provides a standard or norm that is absolute in its sustenance of moral law, invokes sanction in such a way as to reinforce the legitimacy of individual rights, and is flexible in its vision of the good society. Morton A. Kaplan, in his study of the importance of the sacred in politics, put it this way:

> If one thinks not of being but of becoming, then the potentiality of the human mind necessarily introduces the notion of God, for it introduces the notion of perfection. Even if perfection can never be achieved

> in the real world, the striving toward better societies and better men is a striving toward this asymptotic state.[29]

This notion of becoming, of course, is an essentially religious notion. It places infinite worth not on human actuality but on human possibility. In the civil religion, the notion of God becomes a metaphor for this possibility and the conception of subordination before God is one that demands reverence for this possibility in each individual human. The obedience demanded is not obedience to a being, whether in heaven or on earth, but in obedience to a moral law invoking sanctions that protect this possibility for all men. The perversions of the civil religion outlined in Chapters III and IV can be understood as heresy because they attempted to actualize God in individual men or as a supernatural being invoking rules denying the legitimacy of human freedom. As H.L. Nieburg has suggested, a truth is only "absolute" among believers who both share the same values, and who deem the "truth" so obvious as to be beyond challenge. According to Nieburg, we become aware of the relative or transitory nature of "truth" only when a "truth" is already dead or dying.[30] The result may be, as Oppenheim suggested, that mature men and a mature civilization will be able to stand on one's own feet without the crutches of a metaphysical underpinning to uphold the values of human dignity.[31] More likely, the

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[29]Morton A. Kaplan, On Freedom and Human Dignity (Morristown, New Jersey: General Learning Press, 1973),42.

[30]H.L. Nieburg, Culture Storm (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), 11.

[31]Oppenheim, op. cit., 183.

insight of Walter Lippman will prove correct. Lippman argued that political ideas only acquire operative force in human affairs when "they have title of being right which binds men's consciences. Then they possess, as the Confucian doctrine has it, 'the mandate of heaven'".[32] He went on to claim that the central crisis for Western society is the inability of the public philosophy to claim such a mandate. For Lippman, the central paradigm of Western society is the philosophy of natural law, which, as noted in Chapter I, is similar in concept and function to civil religion. According to Lippmann:

> Except on the premises of this philosophy it is impossible to reach intelligible and workable conceptions of popular election, majority rule, representative assemblies, free speech, loyalty, property, corporations and voluntary associations.[33]

Leo Strauss made a similar argument when he stated that "once we realize that the principles of our actions have no other support than our blind choice, we really do not believe in them anymore."[34]

Oppenheim has attacked the view of those who link value-cognitivism with democratic politics by arguing that it is psychologically possible for noncognitivists to be dedicated to the value of freedom and he observed that the most ardent defenders of individual liberty in Europe have been essentially agnostic, empiricist and noncognitivist.

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[32]Walter Lippman, The Public Philosophy (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1955), 181.

[33]Ibid., 79-80.

[34]Leo Strauss, Natural Right and History (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), 6.

By example, Oppenheim referred to the Jacobins of 1791, the Liberals of 1848, and the Spanish Loyalists of 1936 who "were willing to risk their lives for the sake of liberty simply because they had committed themselves to this ideal, individually and collectively."[36] Yet, even without reference to the antilibertarian excesses of the Jacobins, one may suggest that in England and the United States, where liberal democracy has been linked to the metaethics of natural rights, government has been considerably more stable and more successful in the defense of democratic freedoms than government in France and Spain.

The potential effects of the loss of the theocentric tradition in American politics require further analysis and clarification by democratic theorists. Civil religion starts its code for human behavior from the purposes of action and explores the order of human life in terms of the ordination of all actions toward a highest purpose, what the political philosophers might call summum bonum. Advocates of value-noncognitivism, on the contrary, insist that there is no summum bonum. But with the disappearance of the summum bonum or norm of the civil religion, the source of order in the life of individual man and his life in society also disappears because the order of life in the community depends on the participation in the common nous understood as an intelligent purposive principle of the world or, what Neoplatonism regarded as divine reason as the first

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[36]Oppenheim, op. cit., 184.

emanation of God. If the existence of a common nous is rejected, man is faced with the problem of constructing an order of society out of isolated individuals who are not oriented toward a common purpose but only motivated by their individual passions. If civil religion no longer provides an unchallenged "truth" to guide and sustain the liberal democratic tradition, what new paradigm will provide that function? Or, as Oppenheim suggested, must American society depend upon the maturity of modern man to sustain our most basic moral and political convictions?

Clearly, for many Americans, civil religion is very real and this religious matrix does promote norms of enduring standards for public and private conduct that many believe to be objectively true. The truth of the norms is independent of the distortions of civil religion or failures to abide by it. Although the normative question of whether or not the United States should continue to have a civil religion has not and cannot be answered beyond any shadow of a doubt, evidence has been provided to indicate that civil religion is of instrumental value to the preservation of democratic values in the polity and that the possible loss of the civil religion raises serious questions about the longevity of the democratic consensus necessary to preserve the system.

II

Civil religion is more than a convenient tool for the construction of democratic politics. As a method of cognition, it is very real in that it expresses individual and group beliefs about the nature of reality and the true ends or norms of social institutions. As was outlined in Chapter I, recognition of the existence and function of civil religion may be useful to political science in a variety of ways. As a political science concept,it is helpful in the identification and clarification of the critical values of the social system and in the explanation of societal goals. This study has provided considerable evidence to demonstrate the religious dimension of political symbols and to link such policy options as "Manifest Destiny," metaphysical holism, and the "Imperial Presidency" as well as democratic restrictions on these policies to the existence of civil religion. The concept civil religion also suggests insight into a number of the traditional concepts of political philosophy as well as contemporary political institutions. For example, Chapter IV analyzed the function and powers of the American Presidency as it is both expanded and limited by civil religion. In this section the potential of the concept of civil religion to contribute fresh insight into the nature of representation in American politics and its manifestation in the American Presidency will be observed.

In contemporary American politics, representation has come to mean popular representation and to be linked with the normative

affirmation of self-government. Yet, with few exceptions, the literature of political science appears to present no fixed meaning for the concept.[37] Heinz Eulau has declared that "Our common conceptions of representation are obsolete."[38] H.B. Mayo has reached a similar conclusion and asserted that "There is no reason to confuse democratic politics by a theory that makes the difficulties appear to be metaphysical or logical within the concept of representation."[39] Without entering into an extended discussion of theories of representation, this study concludes that civil religion as a political concept offers a theory of representation that provides significant insight into the role of political institutions including the presidency and it suggests, in contrast to Rousseau, that effective and legitimate representation is really possible in a large and complex political system.

Hanna Pitkin has analyzed the wide variety of models used to explain representation in the literature of political science.[40]

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[37]Two significant exceptions are Representation, J. Roland Pennock and John W. Champan, eds. (New York: Atherton Press, 1968), and Hanna F. Pitkin, The Concept of Representation (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967) in which serious attempts are made to analyze and clarify the concept.

[38]"Legislators and Magistrates," mimeographed; paper delivered at the meetings of the American Political Science Association, September, 1966.

[39]H.B. Mayo, An Introduction to Democratic Theory (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 103.

[40]Hanna Pitkin, op. cit.

Her analysis, combined with her conclusion that representation means to make present something which is not present in the literal sense, provides valuable insight into the similarities of civil religion with alternative explanations of representation and its differences from them. Among the theories Pitkin observed were two of particular significance to civil religion: the authorization and accountability models. The authorization and accountability models presume that representation must be done by human beings. Thomas Hobbes provides an example of the authorization view as he wrote in terms of the arrangements which preceded and initiated the sovereign as representative and gave it authority to act. In the authorization view, emphasis is placed on action, not accountability. The representative "has been given a right to act which he did not have before, while the represented has become responsible for the consequences of that action as if he had done it himself."[41] Through this definition, representation is understood in terms of a transaction or happening that occurred before the actual representation begins. In this sense, the authorization view is much like civil religion which focuses on an original granting of authority to legitimize the actions of the state and its officials.

Pitkin considered three versions of the authorization view: an Organschaft or group theory of German origins, a theory of democratic

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[41]Pitkin, op. cit., 39.

representative government common to English and American theorists, and the theory of Eric Voegelin. Organschaft theorists reverse Hobbes by beginning with the group rather than the individual. In their view, the representative becomes the specialized organ of the group and its function is to will just as the sovereign did for Hobbes. This argument has much in common with organic theory as expressed in Chapter III. The result of such an approach expressed through civil religion could well be the perversion of civil religion as described in the section on metaphysical holism. Yet, as Pitkin has noted, most of the Organschaft writers, i.e., Georg Jellinek, Hans Wolff, and Max Weber, are far more interested in questions of sovereignty and the legal status of government agents than the metaphor of organic political theory.[42]

The second authorization view observed by Pitkin is seen in the theorists of representative democracy who view elections as the authority-giving transaction that occurs prior to the actual representation. Thus, elections are seen as a vesting of authority in elected officials to bind the constituents by the decisions of the elected representatives. In most cases, these theorists also argue that the vested authority is for a limited period of time between regularly scheduled elections. This is in contrast to Hobbes who saw no reason why men could not give unlimited authority at the outset for

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[42]See Georg Jellinek, Allgemeine Staatslehre, 2nd ed. (Berlin: O. Haring, 1905); Hans J. Wolff, Organschaft und Juristische Person, 2 (Berlin: Carl Heymanns, 1934); and Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, trans. A.M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1947).

an indefinite period of time. It also differs from civil religion in a significant way. While civil religion views free elections as a necessary feature of American society, the authority-giving transaction is based on much more than the acquisition of a plurality of the votes cast in a particular election. This democratic version of the authorization view of representation is reflected in the thought of many English and American theorists including Sir Ernest Barker, Karl Lowenstein, John Plamenatz, and Joseph Tussman.[43]

Eric Voegelin does not use the term "civil religion" in his theory of politics. Yet, of the three authorization views of representation presented by Pitkin, Voegelin's view comes closest to the concept of representation as found in the civil religion. Voegelin's primary concern is neither contemporary politics nor clarification of the nature of representation, but rather the restoration of the classic and Christian basis of Western civilization. However, in the formulation of his argument, Voegelin has articulated many of the concepts of civil religion and provided insight into representation as expressed by the civil religion. Like the theorists of civil religion and in contrast to those who advocate the democratic version of the authorization view of representation, Voegelin has joined the authorization model with the religious perspective to make present

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[43]See Ernest Barker, Essays on Government, 3rd ed. (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1951); Sir Ernest Barker, Reflections on Government (London: Oxford University Press, 1942); Karl Lowenstein, Political Power and the Governmental Process (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957); John Plamenatz, Consent, Freedom, and Political Obligation (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), and Joseph Tussman, Obligation and the Body Politic (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960).

social norms reflective of a higher or ultimate truth that ought to be represented in the institutions of society. For Voegelin, articulation is a primary condition of representation and to function successfully, a representative must articulate or make present and act for the total essence of a society including its basic or essential spiritual nature.

Voegelin derived his insight into the connection between representation and the articulation of the spiritual dimension from Sir John Fortescue who moved beyond organic analogy to explain that mysterious "religious commitment" or social cohesiveness that Verba observed five centuries later. Fortescue grounded this binding force of society in what he called a transferrence of the Christian symbol of the corpus mysticum to the realm.[44] The significance of Fortescue's insight for the concept of representation is that he observed that a representative must represent the whole range of human existence in a society including its spiritual dimension. In effect, Fortescue believed, as do the followers of civil religion, in a kind of social logos which he called intencio populi and which formed the animating center of society. Both Voegelin and the proponents of civil religion graft this transcendental view of representation to the authorization model by emphasis upon the historic God-man or men-in-the-sight-of-God compact. By virtue of such symbolic happenings as the

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[44]Sir John Fortescue, De laudibus legum Anglie, ed. S.B. Chrimes (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1942), chapter xiii.

Mayflower Compact, the nation was justified in the eyes of God, and its political institutions were authorized to both stand for and act for the social logos as well as the empirical needs of society.

In contrast to authorization theories of representation, Pitkin described the formalistic-accountability model which found a representative to be someone who will have to answer to another for what he does. Carl Friedrich, for example, held that "if A represents B, he is presumed to be responsible to B, that is to say, he is answerable to B for what he says and does."[45] Unlike the authorization model, the accountability model defines representation by the formal arrangements that follow and terminate it. Both models assume that the representative is acting for the members of the body politic. And, like civil religion, both models assume that the representative is obligated to fulfill certain duties to retain its legitimacy.

It was Pitkin's observation that models of representation offer "flash-bulb photographs of the structure taken from different angles."[46] She went on to argue that the solution to the problem of clarifying representation as a concept lies not in presenting one more photograph but in determining the angle of vision of each perspective and to explore the assumption and implications imposed by that context. This process, she believed, would disclose the meaning of representation.

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[45]Carl Friedrich, Constitutional Government and Democracy (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1950), 263-264.

[46]Pitkin, op. cit., 8.

Pitkin concluded with a view shared by this study as she asserted that the meaning of representation is clear. Representation means, as the word's etymological origins indicate, "re-presentation, a making present again."[47] Representation in this sense is more than a literal bringing into presence. Rather, it means to make present something which is not present in the literal sense.

The problem for theorists of representation, as Pitkin views it, is not to define representation beyond its etymological meaning but to do justice to the various contexts in which the absent thing is made present. It is in this area of representation that civil religion makes a contribution to the theory of representation in America and it should be considered, not as a vague, all-encompassing explanation, but one insight into the re-presentation of the ideal of genuine representation of the public. This perspective of genuine representation must be understood as one facet of a continuing tension between "outer" institutional aspects of representation and "inner" purposive ones. Civil religion in America deals with "inner" purposive representation and its angle of perspective may give insight into representation as frequently expressed in the Presidency.

While recognizing that representation as expressed through civil religion is a "flashbulb" perspective and not a complete theory, it can be argued that civil religion provides explanations and insight

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[47] Ibid.

that contribute to the clarification of representation as a concept. Civil religion provides additional insight into representation in American politics because it explains one method through which a spiritual content and higher law or ultimate norms are re-presented or made present in the political system. It joins elements of both the accountability and authorization models described by Pitkin and improves upon them by expanding upon the idea of accountability and defining the concent of "misrepresentation". A primary criticism of the authorization view has been that it presents a formalistic view stressing only the representative's capacity to bind others. It provides no definition of "misrepresentation" and expresses no obligation on the part of the representative to conform to some external standard or act in accord with special considerations. Civil religion avoids this problem by combining the authorization view with a theory of accountability. But unlike the accountability theory of many democratic theorists who make elected officials responsible to the voters in a two-way relationship, civil religion creates a triangular relationship in which God, public officials, and the citizen are all accountable to one another. Obligations and external standards do exist and the concept of "misrepresentation" is clear.

As has been demonstrated earlier, the external standards of civil religion are set by God or man's perception of God's higher law. God is given primacy over all human institutions and by means of the historical contracts or expression of God's will, Americans are expected to provide the model of free government to all the world. Elected

leaders are expected to articulate this standard and act for the people in its implementation. To fail to articulate the spiritual nature of society or to fail to stand for and act for the higher law is to misrepresent the social logos and a government which fails in its obligation to represent is bound to suffer the judgement of God or the public or both. The public is obligated to live the values of the civil religion and to change its government when political leaders fail to live up to these external standards. God is obligated by the contract to a special relationship with the American people which involves not only provision of the means to liberty and its fruits, but as Lincoln observed, the punishment due to those who have violated their obligations. Thus, to misrepresent is to articulate values antithetical to the civil religion or to act in a manner inconsistent with those values. Hence, in the contemporary period, the political destruction of one President who committed the nation to an "evil" war in South Vietnam and of another whose aides were permitted to violate basic political mores of the republic are seen as just and supported by the electorate.

The President bears the primary obligation and limitations of political representation in America because of his higher visibility and alleged power which causes the public to expect him to represent all aspects of the society including their spiritual dimension. He becomes both a descriptive respresentative and a symbolic representative. As a descriptive representative he stands for the material concerns of his constituents. And as a symbolic representative, he reflects

the social logos as he seeks to realize the highest possibility of the American people. Thus, while failing to provide a total theory of representation applicable to all phases of the study of politics, civil religion does give insight into an aspect of representation often neglected in political studies -- the spiritual dimension. If, as we asserted on page one of this study, a deeper awareness of the spiritual nature of man and the relationship of that spiritual nature to such concepts as representation is a topic worthy of further research, the American civil religion should be the subject of further analysis within the discipline of political science.

Sheldon Wolin has observed that "political philosophy constitutes a form of seeing" political phenomena and that the way in which the phenomena will be visualized depends in large measure on where the viewer "stands".[48] Wolin went on to identify two kinds of visions. One type of vision emphasizes the descriptive reporting about an object or an event. The second sense in which vision is used is the discussion of an aesthetic vision or a religious vision. He found this second vision to be the uppermost element in political philosophy. According to Wolin, the primary value of this aesthetic or religious vision has been the means by which the political theorist has sought to transcend history. In its architectonic sense, vision has permitted the political imagination to attempt to mould the totality of political phenomena in accord with some vision of the "good" that lies outside the political order. While America has

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[48]Sheldon Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960).

been lacking in social theorists who use the architectonic vision to explain and direct the polity, the civil religion has functioned as a kind of collective architectonic vision of the American people, not unlike Rousseau's General Will.

This ordering vision has spanned over three centuries and has been expressed in different ways. It has met with different degrees of acceptance. In the case of the earliest settlers, it took the form of a compact between God and a newly chosen people whose purpose was to serve as a model for all men. Later, the founding fathers understood the purpose of the polity to reflect basic human rights as intuited through Natural Law. At the time of the Civil War, the ultimate meaning of the nation was frequently viewed in terms of God's higher law symbolized in the Declaration of Independence and later, as symbolized in the death of Abraham Lincoln. From World War II until the present, the vision has sought to express and rationalize American power in terms of the direct application of that power to the construction of a new world on the model of the American democracy. In the Post Vietnam era, the collective architectonic impulse has ebbed but may be merely shifting from the interventionist vision toward a restoration of its original idea of an exemplary model for the world. In each case, these visions have sought to project a future political order based upon the historic, spiritual perspective of the society. By understanding the scope and significance of civil religion as its articulates the American political vision, we can better understand contemporary politics including its metaphysical or religious dimension.

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