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## COVENANT, THE FEAR OF FAILURE AND REVIVALS AS THE CONTEMPORARY SOURCES OF AMERICAN IDENTITY

The relationship between religiosity and the American republic is uneasy, confused but at the same time exceptional among Western people. The American project had its distinctive features which colored the entire political culture. One of such features is the fact that unlike the European historical model American religious life, predominantly Christian, has been from the beginning maddeningly diverse, confusing, one could say, a profoundly baroque experience. It is wild, bizarre on the margins and even in the middle, unpredictable, experimental, complex, but robustly alive and full of passion. Modernity's cultural code is battling particular American creeds, often pushing religion into a kind of justification of one's own autonomy choices. But, in turn, the creeds influence modernity's claim of radical self-autonomy and moral auto-creation. Both influence politics and shape the religious clauses of the First Amendment accordingly.

### Post-European Christianity in the New World

To begin with, the Americans had their modern project rooted in the covenant universal mentality of early Protestantism, that is Puritanism, which subsequently manifested itself in American politics and culture. The first colonies were to be the greatest experiment in post-European, and to a certain extent post-Reformation Christianity. Christianity for the "chosen people" in the New World. There was thus from the beginning a close relationship, albeit ridden with ambiguities, between the new colonies and their religious spirit which translated subsequently into the same relationship in the American republic, making Americans exceptional in their attitude to Christianity and religion in general. The colonists felt chosen, authorized by Covenant to settle

and transform the New World but they could fail. The American political experiment and its religiosity were thus at the beginning deeply interwoven, moreover both have since then exhibited profound features of neurotic fear of failure. It was for this reason that president Abraham Lincoln, the most biblical, prophetically tormented genius, expressing this connection between the American republic and the Covenant, was able to tap to the deepest sources of American identity. During the Civil War he used a phrase “the almost chosen people”. A possible failure of the Union he associated with the failure of God’s plan for America and the world, the plan breaking finally the spell of inhuman politics. In other words the American republican experiment in liberty would derive from its fidelity to nature and nature’s God, the idea expressed in the very Declaration of Independence of 1776.

The cause of liberty was universal because liberty was true fact of natural law given to humans by God, and the plan was to begin with America. American faithfulness to Covenant was American patriotism, and vice versa, since they were natural, stemming from the true, even if ordinary, passions of the people seeking and preserving liberty. For this reason the American constitutional system was from the beginning infused with a sense of being devised “for the ages”, not because it was perfect, but because in its general contours it reflected the best possible regime securing an empire of liberty which was reflecting nature. The Constitution was thought to be based on a universal principle which guided its construction. As justice William Johnson wrote in his opinion in “Fletcher v. Peck” (1810) the constitutional system was drawing upon “a general principle, on the reason and nature of things; a principle which will impose laws even on the Deity”.

This somehow idolatrous comment, reflecting, may be, a deistic inclination of its author, could yet be understood as a statement showing that nature, created and operated by God has an aim of bringing humanity to liberty by its own efforts, however imperfect. In other words liberty was the closest approximate to a peaceful and good, virtuous arrangement humanity could get on this side of existence, something which God definitely would not object too, even if offended. Justice Joseph Story in “Terrett v. Taylor” (1815) stated “we think ourselves standing upon the principles of natural justice, upon the fundamental laws of every free government, upon the spirit and letter of the constitution”. Thus the U.S. Constitution was grounded not in mere ideology, but upon truths “in the nature of things”, that reason could discern. This deep conviction at the time of the founding, that men could discern “the nature of things”, was taken for granted. It was only later, beginning with the Progressivist thought that such a statement was considered to be if not absurd, at least mistaken, and the “nature of things” was taken over by instrumental reason and “the historical process”, as guidelines to a proper ordering of political sphere and the conditions in which liberty could flourish.

The first American settlers were animated by a divine and exceptional mission. But they brought that feeling from England. Next to the Bible the most read work among them was the *Book of Martyrs* by John Fox, which conveyed the myth that the English were the Elected Nation, and interpreted the accession of Queen Elizabeth I as a final act of God’s providence, which saved the only true religion for all

the peoples of the world. This English exceptionalism as a site of true Christianity characterized the efforts to legitimize and justify the efforts of the Anglican Church and the king's role as its head. Thus William Tyndale pronounced in 1528 that "he that resisted the King, resisted God". The future bishop Hugh Latimer began to speak of "God of England" and the future bishop John Aylmer went one step further and overtly declared in 1559 that "God is English". John Lyly stated unabashedly in 1580 that "The living God is only the English God". This doctrine of England as a site of true Christianity and the royalty as its savior, made a connection between a particular civilization and covenantal Christianity. It constituted kind of an official English ideology and was given wide popular acceptance by Fox's book.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century most English people believed that their country accepted Christianity directly from Christ's disciple Joseph of Arimathea, and that the Emperor Constantine was British. This was so because his mother Helena was a daughter of the British King Coilus, who had Christianized the whole world, according to Fox, by "the help of the British army".<sup>1</sup> Protestant dissidents, among them the colonists, held to this myth which then metastasized into the New World. In 1622, in a sermon to the Virginia Company, the Virginia colony being the most striking experiment in the post-European Christianity, John Donne, dean of St. Paul's cathedral in London, declared:

"Act over the acts of the Apostles; be you a Light to the gentiles, that sit in darkness. God taught us to make ships, not to transport ourselves, but to transport Him. You shall have made this island, which is but the suburbs of the old world, a bridge, a galley to the new; to join all to that world that shall never grow old, the kingdom of heaven".<sup>2</sup>

But these deeply religious American settlers were of a special kind. Permeated by dissident Christianity of the most radical kind, they were escaping not only persecution but at the same time the closeness of a society in which they lived. They were sons and daughters of radicalism fuelling religious individualists searching for God outside of the authority structures, not only the Catholic Church weakened by Protestantism, but the very structure of established Anglican Protestantism, a seismic change of approach to God and the World which He created, a cultural revolution which soon was to explode in England into a political one.

To cross the Atlantic Ocean required daring of soul and character, which combined courage with a fierce, not only political but first of all spiritual independence. This was first of all a religious, Christian independence, a new wild, rebellious mind, all that in the age of profound religious beliefs and equally religious disruptions, meshed with the similar social and political developments and rebellions. Dissent was the language of Christianity in the whole of Europe and this dissent produced the most daring stock of people to cross the Atlantic. There was in them a spectacular mélange of character and faith which gave the new settlers a sense of possession of

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<sup>1</sup> W. Haller, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs and the Elect Nation*, J. Cape, London 1963; L. Stone, *The Causes of the English Revolution 1529-1642*, Harper Torchbooks, New York 1972, p. 88.

<sup>2</sup> P. Johnson, *The Almost Chosen People*, "First Things", June/July 2006, p. 17.

a profound truth, combined with unlimited possibilities to listen to no one but one's own conscience and the Bible, a kind of a radicalized Lutheran cry "here I stand and cannot otherwise". This spirit was born in England, sailed to America. This was a religious spirit propelling the faithful to perceive the world as within their power of transformation, but it went hand in hand, by sheer coincidence perhaps, with a feeling of enormous possibilities connected with a development of Baconian science. But this radicalized spirit and a gnawing subconscious perception that the old world was crumbling, which infused the religious dissidents with a hubristic feeling that they were the new masters of the universe, had its darker side as well. It was a burning desire of a tormented soul for certainty amid Christian violent divisions, a gnawing fear that the cosmos of *Christianitas*, of this cohesive world, where everything had a right place in a hierarchical order, was disintegrating. At the same time it was a fear that this frantic search for certainty amid a break of authority as an organizing principle was, instead of creating order, subverting in fact every facet of existing life, beginning with the Copernican revolution through a radical subversion of the divine right of kings and the pope.

It was then, that John Donne gave an expression to this ontological shift permeating every vestige of life, though and soul, this creeping sense of things falling apart. Once it was discovered that the Earth was not the centre of the solar system, the doubt arose whether it was indeed man who was God's preeminent creation and a hierarchy formed by God was indeed an extension of His will. In a striking poem he declared

"And new philosophy calls all in doubt...  
 "This all in pieces, all coherence gone,  
 All just supply and all relation.  
 Prince, Subject, Father, Son are things forgot"<sup>3</sup>

Donne suggested a collapse of this inviolable cosmos of human existence, intimating an overthrow of the old authority patterns in both a state and society, beginning with religion and ending with family. Everything was for grabs again, a real birth of individualism and modern auto-creation. What came with that was an exhilarating feeling, at that dawn of this new humanity when, as Wordsworth said, it was "bliss... to be alive", with all options for the mind and the body suddenly possible and self-justified. Donne, as well as his nearly contemporary William Shakespeare, a literary genius of geniuses and a harbinger of modern insecurities, hubris, and hopes, gave only a poetic English expression to a radical revolution in thinking, soon to be formed into a political system of thought by Thomas Hobbes. On the continent it was expressed in different ways by Machiavelli, Montaigne, Cervantes or Descartes. Individuality and independent consciousness, and with that ontological insecurity, was born.

This consciousness meant in fact a radical dissent towards the very essence of the world. It meant a total and constant soul-searching and agonizing reappraisals of everything, an incessant, burning desire to get the world around oneself and one's

<sup>3</sup> J. Donne, *Poems*, ed. J.C. Grieson, London 1912, p. 237–238.

life in order, and an equally ineradicable efforts to get to the very essence of Being by one's own mental and material endeavors. Cosmos collapsed, hierarchy crumbled, but God and my soul existed, a dissident was only certain of that. "I was called to great tasks to recreate the world anew", seemed to think a religious radical, "I was liberated", all authority was spurious, a connection with God was not only spiritual, to the God of the Bible, the Saviour. Now this connection was immediate, evangelical, a burning, spiritual liberation which constituted at the same time a call to action in this world, an act of massive theological bringing up, the final maturity of a Biblical wanderer limited by historical scaffolding. This was truly an anthropological breakthrough having immense theological consequences, centuries before Karl Rahner gave it a solid German systemic description in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But it was Edmund Burke in a famous "Conciliation with the Colonies" speech in Parliament in 1775, which captured this spirit of incessant rebellion transferred to America, observing that although "all Protestantism, even the most cold and passive, is a sort of dissent (...) the religion most prevalent in our northern colonies is a refinement of the principles of resistance; it is the dissidence of dissent, and the Protestantism of the Protestant religion".<sup>4</sup>

The times, as Donne observed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, were trying human souls and were prone to incessant heresy and dissent. Deeply religious people, to paraphrase a famous definition of heresy by T.S. Eliot, were tempted by radical individualism of interpretation, of taking one particular theological doctrine, one idea, one impulse and pushing it into the most extreme logical conclusion making it a heresy. This constituted a rebellious act fuelled by the logic of autocreation combined with a burning sense of being in the right, and seeking a possibility of transforming the world outside any authority, whether religious or political, not coming and not legitimized by an individual consent. It was this frame of mind, combined with the daring character of people who wanted to strike it *ab ovo*, which gave rise to a peculiar American stock, to people who were confident of being in the right, properly reading God's will.

They had courage to act according to the utter boundaries of such a logic on the Chosen Land before their eyes, which was the virgin Paradise, not touched by delusions, limitations and idleness of Europe. The colonists landed thus in America with a feeling of total corrosion of any state as well as religious authority and bore with them an incessant, question what was the meaning of this wild sectionalism and dissent. And with that they bore its corollary, a question about the right road to salvation in the New World in which everything was for grabs and nothing seemed to have an immediate sense any more, where everything, beginning with land and ending with theological doctrines, had to be redefined anew. The answer to this search for meaning in this sea of doubt and boundless mental and material possibilities was thus as simple as it was inconclusive and double: any meaning, or none at all.

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<sup>4</sup> E. Burke, "Speech on Conciliation with America" (ed.) Joseph Villiers Denney, Scolt, Foreman, Chicago 1892, p. 50–51.

Europe tried to solve this issue of intertwined metaphysical and political orders by combining absolutism with Christianity, making slowly the state to be an arbiter of faith, whether in its Catholic or Protestant versions. This was the very essence of the Augsburg Peace of 1555 with its rule *Cuius Regio Eius Religio*. This development was soon aided by political philosophy justifications of the omnipotence of the state by means of the doctrine of sovereignty, whether in Jean Bodin's or Thomas Hobbes's shape. A blessing duality of Christendom, the net structure of its Two Kingdoms of the Middle Ages *Christianitas* within which modern freedom could be born, was gone. Such a state having subordinated religion and making itself an absolute arbiter of human lives, including their religious life, decidedly so in the Protestant case, much less so, but nevertheless, in the Catholic case, had only to make one last move. It had to eliminate any metaphysical competitor so the state could get an unrestrained adulation. It had to create a new metaphysical point of reference debasing the biblical one. This was done during the French Enlightenment, with reason in the service of a democratic liberal state, since then the source of any authority, with religion slowly being pushed into the confines of private superstition.

But in America there was no one who could provide the coherent structure of the sovereign European state, as well as no religious authority. For a radical, fiercely dissident, daring, religious stock of people, an answer to a question what was the right road to salvation could not be answered with a negative return to the monistic structure of authority, this time provided by the modern sovereign state. Thus began a fascinating American development of religious freedom, based on a passionate individualistic religiosity of different Protestant sects, too weak to subordinate each other, too strong to yield to others, but having enough space and personal wealth to function in an unrestrained way in the public space of their own faithful, from whom there was always a possibility of an exit. The exit outside of it, on a road to establishing one's own denomination in conditions of a general lack of authority. In America there was no heresy, since every faith was in fact heretical.

In the conditions of the frontier society it was impossible to retain discipline of a sect in an organizational sense, as well as uniformity in terms of doctrine. Radical dissent run unchecked and could survive. This was, for instance, a case of Roger Williams who broke away from strict New England Calvinism and found Providence, Rhode Island, which he called "a shelter for persons distressed for conscience". In Europe competing allegiances slowly were transferred to the secular state with doctrinal matters declining in practice. But in America there was no state, just governments, and always a possibility of an exit from competing dissenting groups. Before this situation eventually solidified itself into strong colonial and state churches, it gave a powerful impulse to identification with a congregation of independent church, or sect as a local form of practical operation of social life. A congregation was the State and denominations were, in conditions of utter plurality, not conflicting with each other, but competing for the same faithful.

But congregations were united in a particular way. It was a negative unity of escaping Europe, and a positive one of being given a New Land for settlement and

transformative conversion within plurality of faiths which could coexist. This forced everyone to cooperate and compete in the public, but at the same time permeated public life with a sense of importance and religious understanding of virtue, Christian virtue for all, without which the New World given as a task, could not be ordered. Not a particular doctrine, but the practical operation of faith in public within the wide perimeters of Protestant Christianity was a key to American religiosity and its missionary public character. The congregations stressed moral and behavioral side of human existence, not doctrine and theology, and because of this proclivity they never became the total societies of the European Christian model, mainly because they were led by lay people not the clergy.

This situation created the main problem of democratic modernity in relation to religion of the creedal type like Christianity. It had already suffered long term consequence of theological populism with its emphasis on personal faith, understood in individualistic, not doctrinal terms, an observation made later by Tocqueville. In such a perspective Christianity and its doctrinal content became increasingly open ended, changing form. From a creedal faith through which an individual finds a way to Biblical God, it began to evolve to a faith which was becoming increasingly non-creedal, meaning non-absolutist, all-inclusive, modest and nonjudgmental kind of spiritual psychotherapeutic faith of which another side was a pantheistic desire to become spiritually one with nature. The seeds of such an understanding of Christianity were in America from the beginning, creating conditions for the first individualistic type of faith in modernity, much later described by Peter Berger, as being late modernity's refutation of the secularization thesis. The spiritual dimension of American virgin nature as a site of acting of God's chosen people, filled such a modernistic approach to religion with a pantheistic awe.

These tendencies were to develop further in American history reaching its fulfillment in the post 60's "spiritual", "psychotherapeutic" American society of the unlimited consumerist choice in every sphere including finally one's moral auto-creation amounting to a desire of a moment. Protestantism, dissent and America were at the same time aided by another powerful element of public life contributing to this peculiar and powerful presence in public of religious, Christian denominations. From the beginning the public life was in fact anti-authoritarian, it had a democratic character. The radical and separationist groups of religious dissidents either went to America on their own, or were pushed out of Europe as illegitimate. The Puritans, diggers, Pilgrim Fathers, Quakers, Mennonites and others found themselves in America either by crossing the Atlantic Ocean, or sometimes, through other, like Russia, routs. But because of the conditions of their operation, as well as because of the destination hardships, they were very cohesive and democratic groups.

The people who traveled shared the same convictions, their access was voluntary, they were neither forced or born into them. This created conditions for democratic politics, not so much in terms of the procedures used, but in terms of the authorities chosen freely. Thus religious establishments in America were thus rather popular, not hieratic. A division between laity and clergy, the latter having no spiritual and

communal privileges and the former having them in excess was never sharp, and the orthodoxy of religious and social life, never reasserted itself. That is why there really was in America no inherent, let alone growing, jealous confrontation between the world of the sacred and the world of the profane, the secular and the ecclesiastical world. America was from the beginning not only Protestant, it was born this way with no historical background as a reference point against which to become Protestant through revolt, as was the case in Europe. America's WASP was not built

“on the remains of a Catholic Church or an establishment; it had no clericalism or anticlericalism. In all these respects it differed profoundly from the Old World, which had been shaped by Augustinian principles and violent reaction to them. The word secular never had the same significance in America as in Europe, because the word clerical had never conveyed an image of intolerance and privilege. America had a traditionless tradition, making a fresh start with a set of Protestant assumptions taken for granted [and] self-evident, as the basis for a common national creed”.<sup>5</sup>

For this very reason American religiosity has not, in principle, been antinomian, both in relation to democratic politics, and as well as in relation to a religion's public legitimate presence. The diverse religious, overwhelmingly Christian denominations, did not and do not still today define their identity by means of language and doctrine which recognize democracy as a danger, a case which has been historically visible in the post-Enlightenment continental Europe, with a clear aim of imposing on democracy a dominant system of order. Their identity has in general been coterminous with democracy, it has thrived on it, and has shaped itself in social practice of serving public good. The institutional chains of command of any denomination which came from Europe very quickly dissipated, even the most visible hierarchical Anglican Church, as was the case, for instance in Virginia. This diminished the role of the local clergy, which in America has never had such an institutional power as in Europe. This diminished role of the clergy was an “original sin” already in the post-Reformation England which historically depended on a durability of the economic and social order created by a confiscated Catholic property and the immediate authority of the king was pivotal to its maintenance. In the colonies the faithful quickly established their power to control the hierarchy and to make decisions, including financial ones, and a local congregation became independent and strong.

This experience led, for obvious reasons, even in the most traditional and hierarchical denominations like the Catholic Church, to grass roots democracy and an effective marginalization, doctrinally, socially and first of all culturally, of the clergy factor. This included the episcopate and institutions as such, with the public presence of democratic citizenry. A religious self-government “became a way of American development, shaping all the denominational circles. Even in case of American Catholicism this self-government gave a special character to Ecclesia, making it one of denominations”.<sup>6</sup> This democratic spirit of the religious people was visible in May-

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<sup>5</sup> P. Johnson, *The Almost...*, p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> B. Ostendorf, *Religia i sfera publiczna w USA*, “Teologia Polityczna” 2004–2005, no. 2, p. 60.



flower Compact of 1620, which created authorities and laws based on consent given voluntarily, after first establishing social and political community. Roger Williams's 1644 constitution for Rhode Island defined "the form of government established in Providence Plantations as democratic, that is to say a government held by the free and voluntary consent of all, or the greater part, of the free inhabitants".<sup>7</sup> It was Rhode Island as the first commonwealth which established religious freedom as opposite of just mere tolerance of religion, formulating a theoretical principle and giving reasons for a separation of state and church as a precondition, in turn, for the unrestrained public religious freedom. This separation operated within the context of a strictly limited state structure, which was both independent from any state establishment, but at the same time benevolent to full religious presence in public and its participation in shaping social and cultural mores and first of all language, such religious freedom engaged Enlightenment, soon to be secular, in a rational way as equal, an oddity from the point of view of the French Enlightenment and soon of the majority of the European liberal regimes. The Charter of Rhode Island of 1663 declared that:

"No person within the said colony, at any time hereafter, shall be in any wise molested, punished, disquieted or called in question, for any differences in opinion in matters of religion, and who do not actually disturb the civil peace of our said colony; but that all...may from time to time, and at all times hereafter, freely and fully have enjoy his and their own judgments and consciences, in matters of religious concernments".<sup>8</sup>

What is striking here, is not a language of tolerance and benevolent voluntarism granted to the people of faith, but a language of piety and reverence towards religion as the very essence of fullness of human existence. Reverence, not only as a matter of private conscience against the secular state and public space, but as a matter of ontological certitude constitutive of the very essence of full public activity, something which soon will be defined as full and equal citizenship. This had an additional practical consequence of guarding a voluntary adherence to religious faith as a guarantee of tolerance of all others.

This guarantee was to be the basis of a proper and the only true foundation of social and public religious life, Christianity at first, than any other religion. This grass root voluntarism and democratic impulse of American religious life went hand in hand with a democratic political development. Both exploded at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This was the time of a great proliferation of religious groups, more and more voluntary and sectarian, a process which went hand in hand with a radical democratization of public life during the Andrew Jackson's revolution, as well as an acceptance of the free market doctrine, symbolically recognized by the Supreme Court cases of John Marshall, 'McCulloh v. Maryland', "Dartmouth College v. Woodard" of 1819, and later Roger Taney's "Charles River Bridge Case" of 1837. As Gordon Wood remarked about the new denominations, at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there

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<sup>7</sup> D.S. Lutz, *The Origins of American Constitutionalism*, The Louisiana University Press, Baton Rouge 1989, p. 32.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

“were not just Presbyterians, but Old and New school Presbyterians, Cumberland Presbyterians, Springfield Presbyterians, Reformed Presbyterians, and associated Presbyterians; not just Baptists, but General Baptists, Regular Baptists, Free Will Baptist, Separate Baptists, Dutch River Baptists, Permanent Baptists, and Two-Seed-in the Spirit Baptists”<sup>9</sup>

Thus religious, political and economic voluntarism went hand in hand with an expression of an unrestrained life in the New World, the life of the first people of modernity. At its centre stood an individual conscience and responsibility, looking at the outside world as a task of an unbound creation, an impulse which led increasingly to an individual moral auto-creation. At the same time, this cultural code imposed a duty to make the chosen, covenantal people responsible for progress in history. Individual voluntarism became a virtue to reshape the world anew, against any obstacles of the old corrupted world. This was essentially a religious millenarian Christian impulse, brought to America by democratic Christian settlers. This religious voluntarism was prone to utopian Protestant spirit of egalitarianism, giving way to a democratic revolution of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, considering any rigid inequalities in politics, law, status as not acceptable. Religious pluralism and freedom of conscience gave way to market religiosity and hunting for worshippers, but that forced everyone to share a conviction that faith was constitutive to one's well being as a public person, traveling through different routes towards the same goal of living full life in freedom and in faith at the same time.

Freedom thus became increasingly depending on religious freedom as its precondition, since it was religious freedom which gave Americans a sense of unique democratic and voluntary participation in God's plan, the Covenant with Providence in America, against a corrupted Europe. This idea found its way into the natural law language of the Declaration of Independence which tied it to God of the Bible as the final source and guarantee of freedom as such. Thus in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century America made a sharp rupture with the European absolutist monarchies' state worship, soon to give way to the state worship of the French Revolution, where religion was just a part of a tolerant framework of the secular state.

Henry Vane, the former governor of Massachusetts was expounding this inseparable nature of civil and religious liberty, arguing that freedom of religion as a precondition of freedom as such, required this pietistic reverence for Christian society, in itself a source of democratic freedom. It was for this reason, in fact a very Augustinian one, that

“by virtue (...) of this supreme law [of religious liberty], sealed and confirmed in the blood of Christ unto all men (...) al magistrates are to fear and forbear intermeddling with giving rule or imposing in those matters, which also meant, a revolution indeed, imposing a rule of a secular state on a Christian, that is free society”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> G.S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution: How a Revolution Transformed a Monarchical Society into a Democratic One Unlike Any That Ever Existed*, A.A. Knopf, New York 1992, p. 332–333.

<sup>10</sup> P. Johnson, *The Almost...*, p. 18.

Vane's document, expressed a new idea, that a democratic state and a voluntary religious life were friends, not enemies, supporting each other.

It was then in the 17<sup>th</sup> century that this founding spirit of religious freedom as a precondition of free society for all, began to determine constitutional developments leading towards the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution's First Amendment. The Enlightenment rational writings, Paine's oratory or a powerful secular intellectual influence of Europe, could not thus penetrate this cultural code which made America the most religious, Christian, and at the same time the freest nation of the modern world with a right to shape one's own existence in reverence for God, not because of state's granting, defining its operation, but as the first right of human existence. In such a light the First Amendment's intent seems clear, not to protect the state against the religious people, and religion, but to protect religious people from the state.

This Christian religious understanding was thus a political experiment, but it was an ontological and anthropological experiment as well. It was Augustinian in a sense that the most important duty of a state, was to provide conditions of a properly formed conscience. But for St. Augustine this state had to support the Church, instrumental in providing encouragement and punishment, so this conscience could properly be formed. Americans rejected this Augustinian second precondition of salvation. In this sense they were the first religious people of modernity. It was not authority, not any rigid, institutionally defined doctrine, not any probing from the state which guaranteed properly formed individual consciences. It was an individual worship, a personal relation to Biblical God within the confines of a democratic congregation working in unison to shape the New World, the Promised Land of God's Covenant, shaping a proper conscience and securing salvation.

"We the People", as a congregation of faithful and "I" as a child of God, here in this society of the New World, were responsible for salvation and salvation of God's plan for humanity. The energy which the state and the institutional church of Europe put into creating properly formed consciences was gone. In Europe it gave way to a bloody reaction against this unity of church and state, which restricted freedom and in a messianistic substitution made secularism a precondition of this freedom, and the state a friend of secularism against religion in public space. This has been an essence both of radical secularism of Europe, pushing religion into the confines of people's private "superstition", and of taking over a duty of providing salvation by secular means.

## Covenant and the fear of failure

In America this responsibility for shaping conscience was taken from the institutional settings, whether ecclesiastical, organizational as well as doctrinal, or the state sponsored. Forming of conscience was now solely a responsibility of an individual,

infused with the Christian spirit of freedom of the “chosen people” of modernity, escaping not only religious wars of Europe, but the utter irresponsibility of guided faith and paternalistically organized fate. To be a free man was also to be a free man of conscience to seek God. Fair enough, this was a Protestant idea. But to find God, required nevertheless a Christian society created in freedom. Freedom of religion meant a burden of responsibility for one’s own salvation exercised by an individual in a society, which was a promise of a better life for humanity. This was the meaning of Abraham Lincoln’s famous definition of America as “the last best hope of mankind”, and “almost chosen people”. “Almost chosen” which meant a new society formed with free will to save itself and the world.

This free society, God worshipping and benevolent towards all, was yet not “chosen”, because there was nothing preordained about this experiment, it could fail if Americans failed. American religiosity might be very naïve, evangelical, devoid of doctrinal sophistication and ritual, putting a stress on individuality and a personal experience of transformation, but it was at the same time at its earnest in taking responsibility for the world around, and its transformation as a calling. Americans experience collective revivals, form religious associations and charities, give enormous amount of money to charities, count on themselves, not on the state. Such a stance stems from this personal call treated as a duty towards God and society, being tantamount to an exercise in freedom, and today, an effort to wage a heroic battle to save one’s confused and filled with consumerism soul. This soul is obsessed with a fear of failure, socially and individually, the visible till today remnant of once overwhelmingly Protestant, society. Americans constitute a society which has not ceded personal heroism of facing the world to the welfare state, and one of the reasons this has not happened is this religious, Biblical, responsibility which once shaped their cultural code.

This combination of freedom, individualism and the Christian Covenant with God of the “almost chosen people”, gave Americans a burning sense of duty. This sense of duty infused them with a peculiar mesh of religious fervor applied to individual as well as collective transformations. At an individual level this has always been the recurring experiences of Great Awakenings and a desire to find an immediate transformative redemption, beginning with the Pilgrims and ending with the modern evangelicals. At a collective level this has been an experience of treating any social reforms in America not only as religiously motivated, but also as religiously looked upon and dealt with, as crusades stemming from a great moral scandal of people who have offended God by making short shrift of his promise to them. They thus have to try hard again and be faithful, if America was to be still the Promised Land. If they fail, they consider such defeats as failures of America and at the same time as failures of religious people offending God.

All great American reform movements have always been indignation crusades, at their society and themselves. Nearly all truly transforming reform movements in America started as great spiritual revivals, whether they had truly religious or secular shape. Such reform movements in the past could have a secular and even overtly

antireligious character, but their language, and hope of fulfilling the prescribed task were inescapably religious, nay quintessentially biblical. The tone of the message was biblical. "We have sinned against a dream of America, we are guilty and crying for forgiveness, correction and atonement" have shouted Americans through centuries. This has happened irrespectively whether this religious, biblical, eschatological language has made direct references to betrayal of God, his Covenant with America as an ideal community, something visible in the speeches of Garrison, Lincoln, Bryant, King or Reagan, or whether this biblical, eschatological language has been secular as was the case with Norman Thomas, Lyndon Johnson or recently Richard Rorty.<sup>11</sup>

Americans combined this universality with a secularized universal project of the Enlightenment social contract and its conception of rights. The Declaration of Independence of 1776, the founding document of a new *polis* testifies to that. Because of this unique combination Americans have a natural tendency to analyze their democracy not only in the light of original political ideas, at the expense of the historical evolution and forms they have taken, but also in the light of a particular religious promise, however secularized, which gave these original rights a sense of messianism, a feeling of being on the right side of history. Such a mentality is resistant to any form of disenchantment although it is prone to a constant soul searching and a quasi religious fear of failure, of breaching the terms of God's covenant and a sense of being owned by forces of impersonal control, which the greatness and limitless opportunities of America and the implicit pull of individual strivings elicited. This fear of failure, of moral and social decline is not of course uniquely American. What is rather distinctly American is this double idea of

"failing a past standard of basic character and a past commission to build on that character: to fulfill it, and, more than fulfill it, to progress (...) [this] fear of falling away affects them, for it runs through the culture, surfacing in countless campaign speeches and valedictorian addresses. In its celebration of change and progress it is an existing burden, but a burden it remains, for at any time Rocket America may take a false bearing. Indeed the very industriousness and energy of the nation can betray it here the fear of winding down diverges from the fear of falling away or deplete it so that the people can lose both vigor and virtue. The notion of America as a special ark of Providence-defender of freedom and shining light of progress-creates anxiety as well as hope. When John Winthrop uttered the famous words in his shipboard sermon of 1630 'we shall be as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us', he added the swift negative 'so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world'. It is true that Winthrop and the earliest Puritan settlers had a particular sense of being watched, by Europe as well as by God. But that sense never died, and since America has become a world power, the idea of being on show and test before the world has revived. The fear of failure before an audience is obviously more secular than Winthrop's version, but the shift is only relative: the idea remains both religious and political. The idea of failing away does not always point to a particular generation that has set the standard for its successors. For some people there is just a sense of decline from 'how things used to be. Nor is there total agreement among those who do refer to a specific set of forebears. Some refer to

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<sup>11</sup> R. Rorty, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2002.

their parents' or grandparents generation; others are more likely to summon a mid-nineteenth century picture, of frontier settlers, perhaps of Victorian entrepreneurs. The most common public references, however, are to the era of the Founding Fathers and the first few decades of the Republic (...). The rights and goals announced in the Declaration of Independence and in the Preamble to the Constitution could not be perfectly fulfilled. They would always, therefore, be a challenge to future generations to improve on the past".<sup>12</sup>

For Winthrop this danger of falling away from God's 'special commission' was inseparable from a neurotic urgency to hold together in dire straits as well as in abundance, with caring and generosity blunting materialist ambition and making wealth differences a source of more moral obligation than pride. Colonial New England Puritanism valued productive work bringing material rewards, but scorned luxuries and moneymaking worship as a distraction from God's community.<sup>13</sup> "Will you tell me", wrote John Adams in 1819, "how to prevent riches becoming the effects of temperance and industry. Will you tell me how to prevent riches from producing luxury? Will you tell me how to prevent luxury from producing effeminacy, intoxication, extravagance, vice and folly".<sup>14</sup> Too much commerce, money and consumption would produce greed and dependence, would corrupt character and a soul, bringing debilitating decadence. A century and a half after John Winthrop, John Kennedy expressed the same fear:

"the very abundance which our dynamism has created has weaned and wooed us from the tough condition in which, hence to fore, we have approached whatever it is we have had to do. A man who has extra fat will look doubtfully on attempting the four minute mile; a nation replete with goods and services, confident that 'there's more where that came from' may feel less ardor for questing".<sup>15</sup>

For many this fear of failure meant a call to incessant, neurotic striving. Frederick Robinson, a Democratic state legislator and party leader in Massachusetts in his July 4 speech to Boston Trades Union in 1834 thundered that "the condition of the people can never remain stationary. When not improving they are sinking deeper and deeper into slavery. Eternal vigilance alone can sustain them, and never ceasing exertion is necessary for their social and political improvement".<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> R. Wilkinson, *The Pursuit of American Character*, Harper & Row, New York 1988, p. 80–81; on this fear of failure see: P. Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1956; M. Cunliffe, *American Watersheds*, "American Quarterly" 1961, no. 13, p. 480–494 and S. Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison 1978, also *idem*, *The Rites of Assent: Rhetoric, Ritual, and the Ideology of American Consensus* [in:] S.B. Girgus (ed.) *The American Self: Myth, Ideology, and Popular Culture*, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque 1981.

<sup>13</sup> J. Winthrop, *A Model of Christian Charity* [in:] D.J. Boorstin (ed.), *An American Primer*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1966, p. 26–43.

<sup>14</sup> Letter to Thomas Jefferson, December 11, 1819 [in:] L.J. Cappon (ed.), *The Adams–Jefferson Letters*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill 1959, vol. II, p. 549.

<sup>15</sup> *We Must Climb to the Hilltop*, "Life", September 26, 1960.

<sup>16</sup> J.L. Blau (ed.), *Social Theories of Jacksonian Democracy: Representative Writings of the Period, 1835–1850*, Liberal Arts Press, New York 1954, p. 320; R. Wilkinson, *The Pursuit...*, p. 87.

There was also another element of this fear of falling, expressing itself through a pull of individualism and resistance to church control, strengthened by a distance from the seats of authority in Europe, and a lack of social structures preventing finding a free space. It made more and more people living their own lives, both economically and spiritually, since such a possibility was constantly, unlike in Europe, open. This idea of nonconformist rebellion was personified, for instance, by Anne Hutchinson who used her church's tradition to be challenged by her own religious experience. It convinced her about a necessity of rejecting church authority in matters of worship, corresponding to this neurotic horror of losing the promise of God's covenant, the fear of being owned by impersonal forces. This apprehension was turned, as a religious principle, against churches' institutional authority, at the same time a source of American religious proliferation of denominations and sects, rooted in personal righteousness vis a vis God.

A theme of falling of the New Israel from the exceptional biblical charge to them, and from the alleged virtue of the founding settlers, was a constant warning of the colonial clergy. For the Calvinists this fear of failure and corruption was especially powerful, because of their doctrine of grace, one could never be sure about being saved. To think otherwise was a grave sin of pride. As a consequence of such fear of falling, there emerged in Massachusetts and other colonies a particular type of sermon, the election day sermon – a jeremiad. The clergy addressing a minister in the new legislature would assess a spiritual state of the commonwealth, on many occasions scolding their audience for falling away and apart, for depleting great opportunities given to them. Such a sermon had a particular structure, celebrating the new arrival and coming together of the elected, looking with apprehension backward to assess the imperfect present, and looking then into the future with hope of getting out of dire straits. In the 1770s, election sermons were tied with the rhetoric of Revolution, with an idea of the New World vibrancy and virtue set against the Old World's corruption and political oppression, the charges having then overtly political intent.<sup>17</sup>

This fight for liberty was tied to a call for moral regeneration against the horror of moral backsliding. The Revolution was shaped then by this ethic of failure and regeneration. Failure and regeneration were the polar deadly opposites interposed on another one, power and liberty. This idea was taken from the seventeenth-century English radicals. It was weakness and lust of human nature which made power an aggressive threat to liberty in constant danger, with people always prone to slavery. A visible presence of slavery in America corroborated this. For this reason despotism was not only connected with unlimited power, it was a form of degeneration, when

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<sup>17</sup> See E. Sandoz (ed.), *The Sermons of the American Revolution*, Liberty Press, Indianapolis 1997; A.W. Plumstead (ed.), *The Wall and the Garden: Selected Massachusetts Election Sermons, 1670–1775*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1968. The latter attributed this fear of falling apart directly to the sermons' jeremiads, not the latter reflecting a deep cultural code. See also P. Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1953, chapter 2, 3 documenting also resistance and alternatives to the jeremiad.

liberty was a form of rebirth.<sup>18</sup> Tyranny was sowing discord and was seditious by itself.

No wonder that Thomas Jefferson, when he was writing the Declaration of Independence structured it as a bill of equity against the British king, combining criticism of his tyranny with anarchy dangerous to liberty. He did this in the best Tory tradition of satire against factional dissent. Jefferson wrote that the king had “excited domestic insurrections amongst us” exposing the colonies to internal “convulsions” and prevented the enactment of necessary laws.<sup>19</sup> In other words tyranny corrupted liberty because tyranny was incapable of establishing conditions of virtue without which liberty also could not thrive. For Jefferson liberty

“was held in check by all reasonable men by his sense of duty to his moral compass and to society which guaranteed happiness, not by being prey to animal or material desires. Liberty was the ultimate result of moral virtue, and corruption of it, caused as a consequence of virtue’s destruction, was also a danger to the promise of the American society being universal, in a sense that for the first time enabled men to pursue a goal of moral virtue, if they want to.”<sup>20</sup>

America thus created a civilization, which started a revolution to make possible political conditions necessary for virtuous life, a “regime” not only for themselves, but on behalf of mankind. In comparison to the revolutions that followed, this was a moderate one, and perhaps for that reason it has proved more lasting. The moderation consisted in not seeking a perfect substitute for the virtue that the ancients described, but leaving an opportunity for virtue. The constitutional system was to be created to enable just that.

America in that sense had been “more successful than other regimes by not trying to guarantee success. When you rely on virtue to appear, you may not get it. But when you do not rely on virtue, you have to make a new man, the totalitarian idea which J.J. Rousseau gave birth”<sup>21</sup> Tyranny meant thus a failing of virtue and liberty at the same time, the failing apart of the whole American promise of the New Israel. Sedition was thus tyrannical and the authors of the Constitutions wanted to eliminate factionalism and popular “passions”, which in the parlance of the 18<sup>th</sup> century meant too much democracy, that is the rule of the mob. Passions unchecked could produce the tyranny of the majority, something which George Washington in his Farewell Address called a “frightful despotism”, the “alternate domination of one [vengeful]

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<sup>18</sup> See on this constant theme B. Bailyn, *The Pamphlets of the American Revolution*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1968, also *idem*, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1968, chapter 2, 3; J.P. Reid, *The Concept of Liberty in the American Revolution*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison 1992.

<sup>19</sup> See on that E. Hoffer, *Equity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1986; S. Fender, *American Literature in Context*, vol. I, 1620–1830, Methuen, London–New York 1983, p. 97–121; R. Wilkinson, *The Pursuit...*, p. 87.

<sup>20</sup> D. Freeman Hawke, *A Transaction of Free Men: The Birth and Course of the Declaration of Independence*, Da Capo Press, New York 1988, p. 51–52.

<sup>21</sup> H.C. Mansfield, *Political Philosophy*, ISI Books, Wilmington 2001, p. 42.



faction over another". Factions were thus to be checked by the "extended republic" mechanism of James Madison's Federalist 10.

In the Jacksonian and post-Jacksonian America, increasingly dominated by the party reformulation, a new breed of politicians turned to political managers and the shameful "spoils system". Slavery commentators were obsessed with comparisons to the generation of the Founding Fathers, wondering whether the Americans were worthy of their revolutionary forebears and, whether they were undoing by their divisiveness all that they worked so hard to achieve. The very stability of the constitutional system was in doubt, a mood expressed even by the most farsighted and committed to the preservation of the union people like John Marshall or Joseph Story.

The Constitution was traditionally bound in the American minds with the Union, both as a concept and reality. The two were commonly linked in public rhetoric as a "sacred inheritance", the idea found in the speeches of the most important public figures like Madison in his political testament, John Marshall in his most famous Supreme Court utterances, in the speeches of the Whigs like Daniel Webster, or abolitionists like Owen Lovejoy. The same theme used for different purposes reverberated in the speeches of Southerners and Northerners alike before the Civil War. Jefferson Davies speaking in Boston in 1858 declared that "we became a nation by the Constitution: whatever is national springs from the Constitution; and national and constitutional are convertible terms".<sup>22</sup>

But the fear of failure of the constitutional system began to creep into utterances of public figures. Horace Binney, a member of Congress delivering an eulogy for John Marshall before the Select and Common Councils of Philadelphia in 1835, responding to recent sectional tensions "seized the occasion to point to the Union, established by the Constitution, as the only ark of safety". Another politician with abolitionist sympathies William H. Seward of New York doubted that the Constitution itself was an adequate document to express the essence of the American hope and experiment, since although "the Constitution devotes the domain to union, to justice, to defense, to welfare and to liberty (...) there is a higher law than the Constitution, which regulates our authority over the domain".<sup>23</sup> Many argued along the same line that the Constitution was man-made, whereas America, the Union had been God-made. Therefore they elevated it above the Constitution. In January 1861, some expressed doubts on this point, for instance senator Robert Toombs of Georgia, who termed the customary link between the Union and the Constitution "nonsense", explaining that "union under the Constitution of 1787 had not been an adequate bond".<sup>24</sup>

There was in all such utterances a perceived dissonance between the Constitution as a cultural system, rationalized in various ways, and the Constitution seen on a separate plane as a practical system. A development of that discrepancy between the applied Constitution and the symbolic Constitution "has become a constant theme

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<sup>22</sup> M. Kammen, *A Machine That Would Go of Itself*, Knopf, New York 1987, p. 62.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 63.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*.

of worry till today”.<sup>25</sup> The Constitution emerged as a national symbol between 1789 and 1860 and also as an instrument of governance, the former expressing hopes connected with the uniqueness of the American experiment, the latter treated essentially as an instrument of restraint and a guardian of federalism. This tension between the two approaches to constitutionalism has always been visible in American history. The first made the Constitution a vehicle of American promise and a necessary instrument on the way to fulfill its potential, a sine qua non condition of making the Americans worthy of their eschatological task. Charles Pickney of South Carolina made this point at the Philadelphia Convention.<sup>26</sup> James Fenimore Cooper expressed this feeling in 1830 writing from Europe that “we are unique as a government, and we must look for our maxims in the natural corollaries of the Constitution”.

In 1850 Secretary of State Daniel Webster wrote in the same vein, reminiscent of the future German post World War II constitutional patriotism, that the U.S Constitution “is all that gives us a NATIONAL character”.<sup>27</sup> Herbert Croly expressed the same sentiment half a century later when in *The Promise of American Life* he urged American liberalism to change itself into an instrument of reform, with constitutional mechanism becoming a vehicle of national greatness and progress, kind of “living constitution”, combining this symbolic meaning of the Constitution with its practical utility to fulfill its promise. It was a time when the Supreme Court became heavily politicized, especially in the critical Progressive era years of 1911–12. The word “usurpation” became a battle cry of the reformers, still not accepting the precedent of “Marshall v. Madison” of 1803.

The critics began yet to say that the courts pretending to interpret the Constitution, were in fact disregarding “constitutional morality”, which was there to ensure that the American promise would be realized. This phrase was not clear in 1912, but it was used in a context of impatience with traditional restraints upon governmental change, in this context the Supreme Court, clearly guilty of disregarding “constitutional morality”. The phrase became a battle cry in the 20’s and once again became visible in the context of the Great Crisis and the New Deal.<sup>28</sup> The most influential constitutional scholar of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Edward S. Corwin published in 1936 an essay, which quickly became a classic at the height of the New Deal controversy: *The Constitution as Instrument and as Symbol*. Corwin stressed this dual role of the Constitution and this inherent tension between two meanings of it in the American political culture, arguing that the Constitution was a vehicle of change because it was a symbol regarded by Americans as culturally determinative, thus as a document in need of constant use in response to changing circumstances. Therefore “revision of the constitutional symbol there must be (...) to bring it into conformity with the

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 67.

<sup>26</sup> M. Farrand (ed.), *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT 1937, vol. I, p. 398–399.

<sup>27</sup> M. Kammen, *A Machine...*, p. 94.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 204.

constitutional instrument, regarded as the instrument of a people's government and of a unified nation which has yet lost faith in its political destiny".<sup>29</sup>

For this reason, to treat the Constitution as merely an instrument of restraint, as an institutional embodiment of "constitutional negativism", as some organizations like Liberty League or the conservative Supreme Court during the first stages of the New Deal thought, was in such a perspective untenable.<sup>30</sup> The Constitution was not only an instrument of constrains keeping the American society to the devices of their own organic development. It was an integral mechanism of making this organic development, propelled by the original American messianism, capable of meeting the challenges of the present and the future. The Constitution and "*governmental power must be as little embarrassed by boundary lines*".<sup>31</sup>

## Americans Messianic Destiny as Political Destiny

This symbolic nature of the Constitution was at the same time concrete, institutional. The instrument was both a symbol and a vehicle of change, to make its potential rooted in the American promise realized. History was going to be a testing ground of this messianistic urge, and history was on the "American side, since God was on their side".<sup>32</sup> An American diplomat Albert Gallatin in his speech of 1847 against the Mexican War, raised moral concerns with regard to a newly coined notion of the American Manifest Destiny. He considered this idea to be a dangerous perversion of Americans, who having a mission, had always been in danger of confusing self-interest with morality:

"Your mission is to improve the state of the world, to be the model republic' to show that men are capable of governing themselves, and that the simple and natural form of government is that also which confirms most happiness on all, is productive of the greatest development of the intellectual faculties, above all, that which is attended with the highest standard of private and political virtue and morality".<sup>33</sup>

Such an attitude makes Americans self-conscious of their mission and at the same time prone to self doubt and boasting. Americans, wrote an English cultural critic in 1888 had agreed, as people,

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<sup>29</sup> R. Loss (ed.), *Corwin on the Constitution: The Foundations of American Constitutional and Political Thought, the Powers of Congress, and the President's Power of Removal*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1981, p. 179.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 169.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 179. Corwin applied this to economic reforms but the tone of his article was essentially extremely activist in all spheres of life, in fact the reality of contemporary administrative state.

<sup>32</sup> M. Henry, *Civil Theology in the Gnostic Age: Progress and Regress*, "The Modern Age", Winter 2005, p. 38.

<sup>33</sup> A. Gallatin, *Peace with Mexico* [in:] F. Church, *The American Creed: A Spiritual and Patriotic Primer*, St. Martin's Press, New York 2002, p. 68.

“to deceive themselves that they have what they have not, to cover the defects in their civilization by boasting, to fancy that they well and truly solve, not only the political and social problem, but the human problem too. One would say that they really hope to find in tall talk and inflamed entailment a substitute for that real sense of elevation which human nature instinctively craves. The thrill of awe, which Goethe pronounces to be the best thing humanity has, they would fain create by proclaiming themselves at the top of their voices to be ‘the greatest nation upon earth’, by assuring one another, in the language of their national historian [George Bancroft], that American democracy proceeds in its ascent ‘as uniformly and majestically as the laws of being’ and is as certain as the decrees of eternity”.<sup>34</sup>

American democracy has thus been, from the beginning extremely political. It understands itself as a territory of a fierce battle over its true shape, its real character, and over a proper fulfillment of its ideal. This battle has engaged many sides in American history with a heated moral rhetoric. Beyond rhetoric these arguments have always had a hidden dimension of the unrealized promise of the American dream and at the same time fear, that God’s Covenant and the very republican experiment which was to secure it could be wasted. The rhetoric of the 18<sup>th</sup> century opposition to the imperial rule stressed this corrosive element of British policies to the promise of America embodied in the Covenant.

The revolutionary drive in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was caused by a breach of the ancient rights and republican mores by the king’s government. The reorganization of the colonies in the aftermath of the French-British War of 1756–1763 was driven by an idea of strengthening the administrative control within the Imperial Constitution and clashed with the colonists’ perceptions of being governed by the ancient balanced constitution. Part of this conviction was a lack of the king’s colonial bureaucracy which made their dependence on the local communities and the juries something taken for granted. This dependence was much greater than in England where the local oligarchies were in charge of a political process<sup>35</sup>. The revolutionary conflict was defined as a conflict between bureaucracy and executive power of the English corrupt government and the self-governing people. They in comparison with Europe of departments, boards, agencies, common law courts, corrupted trade and tariff system, experienced a real sense of freedom. The new measures from London, were treated as a blatant violation of their ancient customs.<sup>36</sup>

The conflict was thus from the beginning defined in terms of insurmountable opposition between the imperial “despotic administration of government” and the uncooperative, independent, self-governing by ancient custom colonists.<sup>37</sup>

The crown also closed the frontier in 1763, drawing a sharp line in the West against the colonial expansion, which made them beyond the reach of Americans pioneers. This measure became immediately a symbolic affair. It threatened the New World

<sup>34</sup> M. Arnold, *Civilization in the United States* [in:] Ch. Ricks, W.L. Vance (eds.), *The Faber Book of America*, Faber and Faber, London 1992, p. 249–250.

<sup>35</sup> W.E. Nelson, *Americanization of the Common Law*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1979, p. 14–15.

<sup>36</sup> E. Morgan, *The Birth of the Republic: 1763–89*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1977, p. 36.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 54, 4.

expansion considered by the colonial mythology to be one of the crucial means to upkeep and regenerate the republican societies of the yeomen farmers. In addition London made exceptions to the prohibition of expansion to speculators with political pull, which brought the ever present specter of British political corruption, as contrasted with the colonial virtue, an immediately explosive rallying point.

Moreover, the Quartering Act in April 1765 required the colonial assemblies to billet British troops in empty barns and warehouses which brought the horror of standing armies in peace time, typifying the absolutist monarchy. Last but not least, the British parliament levied taxes, which nullified the basic English right that taxes were offered by consent.<sup>38</sup>

The colonists responded with their own cry of no taxation without representation.<sup>39</sup> In the colonies conflict was rife, with representatives having a distinctly local view. The colonial representation was unsteady, fractious, open, in flux, fiercely local<sup>40</sup>. In contrast the English politics and representation was stable, hierarchical and ultimately harmonious, with some spice provided by the court intrigues and corruption, which was not treated as a great offence at the time, the first anticorruption laws being introduced only in 1792.<sup>41</sup> But this fierce spirit of American messy local politics caused, that all the repressive London measures culminating with the Stamp Act brought the colonists finally “out of the doors” with local committees, national congresses, mass meetings and sheer mobs beginning to act in the name of the people, by passing the formally constituted institutions and seizing political authority and vesting it in ad-hoc, extra governmental political organisms, for instance the Sons of Liberty. Thus began the search for

“extralegal mechanisms to empower the people directly and [which] would animate the revolutionary struggle and become one of the major political legacies. The Revolution introduced a pattern that would be repeated, in all kinds of variations, throughout American history. Underlying tensions create dissatisfaction and unease. The MYTH OF THE LOST ERA in which political and social mobility rested on virtue gains popular currency. The tensions are converted into political action after villain is charged with violating the always evolving norms of popular rule. The indictment [against the powers that be] is cast in the name of ‘the people’ who are repeatedly, almost ritualistically, called to reassert their rightful place. The people, that united, consensual collectivity of classical republicanism-forms the linchpin of this democratic faith and the American pattern of political revolt”<sup>42</sup>

The creed was to be reasserted by the mythical people as its collective eternal guardians, the idea powerfully expressed in the 9<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the federal Constitution of 1787. Thus the common American heritage created consensus at the level of an idea

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<sup>38</sup> E. Burke, *The English Constitutional System* [in:] H. Pitkin (ed.), *Representation*, Atherton Press, New York 1969, p. 175–176.

<sup>39</sup> H. Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1972, p. 60–61.

<sup>40</sup> B. Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins...*, p. 64.

<sup>41</sup> S. Beer, *British Politics in the Collectivist Age*, Random House, New York 1965, p. 19–32.

<sup>42</sup> J.A. Morone, *The Democratic Wish: Popular Participation and the Limits of American Government*, Basic Books, New York 1990, p. 52–53.

and cultural code, but this exceptionalism of a nation based on a particular creed, has not meant that there was no conflict. The foundational myth has constantly caused civil wars over its interpretation with intensity in the media, society and politics similar only to the once violent religious wars between the orthodox and heretics.<sup>43</sup> Thus, in a society, founded both on a religious Covenant and a political revolution, with a constant reinterpretation of the creed, there have always been attempts to confirm, renew or reinterpret foundational values. Such values usually

“involve elements of purification, Puritanism, mass participation, egalitarianism and the renewal of moralistic devotion. In various periods of American history the level of creedal passion has increased generally throughout the body politic. New generations deeply concerned with the gap between the ideal and practice supplant earlier generations that were deeply concerned to bring reality in accord with principle. The question how does [one] reconcile his belief in American values with his perception of American reality is inescapable.”<sup>44</sup>

Americans often fight violent civil wars to defend their interpretations of the same creed. Savcan Bercovich one of the students of the Puritan origins of the American psyche, coming from Canada to the United States in the 60's, was shocked by the intensity of the fight over interpretations of the American heritage. He observed

“I found myself inside the myth of America, a country that despite its arbitrary frontiers, bewildering mix of race and creed, could believe in something called the True America, and could invest that patent fiction with all the moral and emotional appeal of a religious symbol. It gave me something of an anthropologist's sense of wonder at the symbol of the tribe. To a Canadian skeptic, a gentile in God's country... [here was] a pluralistic, pragmatic people bound together by an ideological consensus. It was a hundred sects and factions, each apparently different from the others, yet all celebrating the same mission.”<sup>45</sup>

These civil wars to defend particular interpretations of the same creed, and at the same time a defense of a particular kind of exceptionalism and universalism reflects an astounding American ability to engage in deep conflicts over political and cultural ideas, while at the same time reducing adversarial positions to legitimate deriva-

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<sup>43</sup> See S.M. Lipset, *Consensus and Conflict: Essays in Political Sociology*, Transaction Books, New Brunswick, New Jersey 1985, p. 1–109.

<sup>44</sup> S.P. Huntington, *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1981, p. 131, 85, 84. Gunnar Myrdal had similar criteria of looking at politics of the US, explaining, for instance the sources of the civil rights revolution as a conflict between the American creed and practice. G. Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, Harper & Row, New York 1944, p. 4. Socialist and postmodernist Richard Rorty looks at the source of American passion for reform the same way, titling his book to corroborate his point. R. Rorty, *Achieving Our Country...* Samuel Huntington formulated this return to original sources in a different, paradoxical way, when he remarked that “critics say that America is a lie because its reality falls so far short of its ideals. They are wrong. America is not a lie; it is a disappointment. But it can be disappointment only because it is also a hope”. *Ibidem*, p. 262. What he wanted to say was simply, that great disappointments are usually proportionate to greatness. What America promised is implied in what is criticized, its failures to be all it promised

<sup>45</sup> S. Bercovitch, *The Rites of Assent...*, p. 5–6; also S.M. Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword*, W.W. Norton, New York 1996, p. 291.

tions of American history and development.<sup>46</sup> At the same time the founding myth of America is perceived as fully rational, because, as Allan Bloom remarked America was formed by

“the Framers (...) reasonable men (...) not prophets, poets, or heroes. Other men were not required to believe what they heard from the Framers but had merely to look at what they pointed to and judge for themselves. Convinced that they had the best of any discussion about the good regime, the Framers (...) challenged [everyone] to meet them on the field of reason... to test their conviction. (...) This is the peculiarly American form of patriotism (...) our regime is founded on arguments not commands. Obedience to its fundamental law is not against reason, and it can claim to have resolved what was thought to be the irresolvable tension between good citizenship and philosophizing.”<sup>47</sup>

Both the ideological and rational sides of the American creed meant a futuristic, individualistic project understood as progress, liberating individuals from all artificial shackles. This was a distinctly Enlightenment modern code. Its political expression was an idea of a democratic, republican liberty in practical, not just imagined like in France of 1789, operation.<sup>48</sup>

The American creed, this futuristic, modern project was thus founded on an idea of a nearly religious faith in the unlimited possibilities of human mind and spirit to create the world anew. But to create the world anew entailed a possibility of a better, permanently improved man, a strikingly modern idea wrapped in a traditional biblical language. Capitan Roger Clapp, who ran military defenses for the colony of Massachusetts, wrote this striking passage in 1680, surely a reflection based on a public knowledge of a phenomenon when he addressed the colonists:

“You have better food and raiment than was in former times: but have you better hearts than your forefathers had? If so, rejoice in that mercy, and let New England then shout for joy. Sure, all the people of God in other parts of the world, that shall hear that the children and grandchildren

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<sup>46</sup> This adversarial role of conflicts as legitimate derivations of American creed rooted in history and cultural development is described by M. Foley, *American Credo: A Field Guide to the Place of Ideas in US Politics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007.

<sup>47</sup> A. Bloom, *Introduction* [in:] *idem, Confronting the Constitution: The Challenge to Locke, Montesquieu, Jefferson, and the Federalists from Utilitarianism, Historicism, Marxism, Freudianism, Pragmatism, Existentialism...*, The AEI Press, Washington, D.C. 1990, p. 1–2.

<sup>48</sup> In the twentieth century Europe some leftist thinkers were fascinated by this practical democratic republicanism and liberty, considering such features as the necessary preconditions for socialism. For instance Antonio Gramsci believed that Americans had national ideology as their most defining feature of political egalitarian culture. He wrote in 1920, that for Italy to be socialist the Italians would have to become first like Americans socially and economically, the embodiment of bureaucratic, democratic society without the pre-capitalist past still to be found in Italy and other European societies. Karl Marx in *Das Kapital* had America in mind when making comments that “the more developed country, the less developed image of its future it shows”. In his judgment the United States was in fact less exceptional, because other nations would follow suit, develop and “Americanize”. S.M. Lipset, *American Exceptionalism...*, p. 291–292. Marx was describing “liquid modernity”, something which Oliver Cromwell in a different context had in mind, when he said that no one goes so far as someone who does not know what is his direction. See M. Berman, *Wszystko, co stałe, rozplywa się w powietrzu. Rzecz o doświadczeniu nowoczesności*, Universitas, Kraków 2006.

of the first planter have better hearts and are more heavenly than their predecessors, they will doubtless greatly rejoice, and will say, "This is the generation whom the Lord hath blessed".<sup>49</sup>

With this New World image and its universal potential, the American creed implicitly assumed an idea of the American empire, slowly becoming a secular, civil religion of a nation and an element of national identity. Republican ideology began to be based on virtues which were taken from the millenarian spirit of the puritan, Calvinist in origin ethical code, based on such values as ascetic approach to matter and life, resistance to libertarian license, responsibility in the eyes of God for fulfilling the Covenant, fear of failure in this endeavor. These ideas were at the back of the Founders' project and are visible in *The Federalists Papers*, Washington's *Farewell Address* or Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*. This moral dimension rooted in Protestant religiosity, visible in the Declaration of Independence, provides a framework of a consensus, which blends democratic liberal creed with religious mission realized in history by the "chosen people" of God. The democratic nation rooted in such ideas is equal in the eyes of God and has a common ethical frame of reference, having no other competition, neither from feudal Europe, nor institutional churches, or ideologies of modern times, like Jacobinism or Napoleonic empire building temptation.

Unlike in France American nationalism is referring to individuals in a common enterprise, not nationalism as an extension of Rousseau's General Will, a mythical idea of a nation where individuals participate as the faithful in a communion of a secular church, the nation as heritage, as history, as being French. Nation in America is the people with rights rooted in the transcendent idea of secularized Covenant, whose heritage is their future. Slowly these religious theological myths of the settlers turned into an operational secular civil religion. This civil religion was of course Protestant in its imaginary, and became the only and the most important element uniting all different denominations. The civil religion and the liberal, individualistic capitalism coupled with democratic, voluntary, grass roots participation at one point became one, making modern American ideology as a distinct reality. This ideology was religious, since America was chosen in history as a providential nation where denominational creeds, ethnicities, races do not count as having any right to prominence. This ideology created a nation of believers on the historical march against oppression of the corrupted world.

It is fashionable to think of America as a relatively late empire, not earlier than the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But it was latent in the American psyche from the beginning. Already during the Constitutional Convention Benjamin Franklin remarked that "If a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without [God's] notice, is it probable than an empire can rise without his aid?". Not without coincidence, this was a motto which was put on a Christmas card of vice-president Dick Cheney in the aftermath of the Iraq invasion in 2003. Jefferson used a phrase "the empire of liberty"

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<sup>49</sup> *The Memoirs of Capt. Roger Clapp*, written c. 1680, printed in 1731 in Boston, quoted in R. Wilkinson, *The Pursuit...*, p. 87.



in a context of slavery being the most horrible blemish on it. A theme of empire propelled by a distinctive ideology, has been a constant one in American history.

This American ideological experiment was from the beginning a *mélange* of democracy, capitalism and Protestant, sectarian religiosity. Democracy gives everyone potential participation in national identity and is rooted in a grass root tradition of American Christianity. It has been a desire for equal participation in history even if always prone to populism, vulgarity and bickering. Capitalism was a desire to transform the world and an individualistic desire to better one's lot, possible within the reach of each, an idea expressed so well by Hector Crevecoeur. But religion was crucial too, because religion, that is Christianity, put democracy and capitalism in a narrative frame, gave meaning to the individualistic political and economic efforts, putting them into a wider context of covenantal America marching through history.

This marching was only conditionally triumphant. It was conditioned on harnessing one's desires and reaching beyond the vanities of power. It had its dangers too, an urge for conformity and self contentment, and first of all a danger of idolatry of identifying the real material vulgarity and popular mobocracy with the will of God. But through most of American history

“these three legs of democracy, capitalism, and religion accommodated one another and, at the same time, pushed hard against one another. There is a temptation to call Protestant Christianity the most accommodating religion ever known, but, again and again, the churches managed to withstand the politics and the economics of the age. Indeed, what made them good at accommodation was also what made them good at opposition: In the multiplicity of their denominations, Protestantism could influence the nation in churchly ways without actually being a church-without being a single source religious authority constantly tempted to assume a central political and economic role”.<sup>50</sup>

Protestantism kept America effective and burning of desire to make itself true to itself, to the idea expressed in 1776 in the “Declaration of Independence”, but born in the primitive settings of the first Protestant sects thinking of themselves as chosen people of God with a task in the New World. This has remained so, despite the fact that this Protestant faith was converted to a secular faith of America as a nation dedicated to a “proposition” that “all men are equal and endowed by their Creator with inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”. Despite constant betrayals of this secular faith. The great American crusades have often began with the moral language of the Christian churches seething with indignation over a betrayal of the American promise, universal and commensurate with the biblical moral vision, but they soon translated this religious indignation into social and political programs of crusading reforms. Abolition of slavery, the women's suffrage, the temperance struggle, the civil rights revolution

“every so often, there would explode from the churches a moral and prophetic demand on the nation. But looking back, we can now see that these showy campaigns were mostly a secondary

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<sup>50</sup> J. Bottum, *The Death of Protestant America: A Political Theory of the Protestant Mainline*, “First Things”, August/September 2008, p. 24.

effect of religious' influence on America. Each was a check written on a bank account filled by the ordinary practice and belief of the Protestant denominations. As it happens, the denominations were often engaged in what later generations would scorn as narrow, sectarian debates: infant baptism, the consequences of the fall, the saving significance of good works, the real presence of the Eucharist, the role of bishops. And, yet, somehow, the more their concerns were narrow, the more their effect were broad. Perhaps precisely because they were aimed inward, the Protestant churches were able to radiate onward, giving a characteristic shape to the nation: the centrality of families, the pattern of marriages and funerals, the vague but widespread patriotism, the strong localism, and the ongoing sense of some providential purpose at work in the existence of the United states".<sup>51</sup>

This religious Protestant fire provided an iron cultural backbone of spiritual resilience organizing this democratic, individualistic, capitalist modern nation and giving it a safety valve, making it a profoundly creedal one, converting this ideology to the international context.

This American creed as a kind of secular faith fused with religious, Christian sentiments, was somehow codified at the time of the I World War and politically applied. This development was prompted at the end of the nineteenth century, a transforming time for American universalism in yet another way. American Protestantism, in all its diversity, began to decompose, influenced by the liberal Protestant European theology coming from German universities. It had to confront a question of a relationship between Christianity and modern culture, assaulted by the combined forces of science and biblical criticism. The preachers of the dominant, mainline Protestant churches, as well as the reform rabbis in Judaism came to a conclusion that because reality around them was changing, Christianity was to change with it, as liberal thinkers Croly or Wilson thought the constitution was to be changing, becoming a "living constitution".

Trying, in their judgment, to save Christianity, liberal Protestantism put in its place, in fact, a modernist heresy, a new religion. It differed from the historic doctrine namely the essence of personal Deity, the Bible, the meaning of Christ and the identity of the community of faithful, that is the church. Christian God was going to be an immanent force in history, something like Hegelian spirit, rejecting the original sin as a personal, ineradicable part of human existence and the idea of personal conversion. The original sin was defined as a consequence of historical process, the Christian equivalent of Rousseau's removal of evil from nature into history. Now it was possible to correct it by human means, making history an arena of personal redemption.<sup>52</sup> A secular version of this liberal Protestantism became a basis of its hope for a redemption of the world from evil through a location of its sources entirely in history and social structure, a transformation of which was to bring equal and just society, both domestically and internationally.

Internationally such an approach was visible on a grand scale at the time of the I World War, when progressive Christian leaders in America transformed them-

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>52</sup> See S. Gaustad (ed.), *Religious Issues in American History*, Harper & Row, New York 1968, p. 173–224.

selves from principled pacifists to crusading interventionists, seeing themselves as evangelists for the New Gospel of democracy, international peace and ultimately for a redemption of the entire humanity. This messianism was represented symbolically by Woodrow Wilson's crusade to "make the world safe for democracy".<sup>53</sup> Wilson grounded this feeling as part of American identity:

"Sometimes, he remarked, people call me an idealist. Well, that is the way I know I am an American. America, my fellow citizens, I do not say it in disparagement of any other great people, America is the only idealist Nation in the world".<sup>54</sup>

Domestically, this utopia became visible in a change of emphasis of the Protestant churches from Christian orthodoxy to Christian charity, making Christianity relevant and applied in history, which was to become a vehicle of human redemption.<sup>55</sup> Such an approach influenced the American and in general the Western social sciences after the II World War. They became convinced step by step that human problems were possible to be solved by a proper application of progressive thinking and messianistic zeal of this secularized, heretical, protestant Christianity. It was this philosophy which gave birth to such messianistic liberal programs as "The War on Poverty", "The Great Society" of the 60's or the subsequent different social policies planned and executed by the federal government. Their aim was a hubris of liquidation of poverty, as well as eventually human suffering. Liberal Protestantism gave justification to such secular radical reforms by providing "spiritual" support, resigning at the same time from a pretence of theological transcendentalism to judge the world.

<sup>53</sup> See R.M. Gamble, *The War for Righteousness: Progressive Christianity, the Great War, and the Rise of the Messianic Nation*, ISI Books, Wilmington 2003, p. 89–110, 149–232.

<sup>54</sup> W. Wilson, *Idealistic*, Speech, 8 September 1919 [in:] Ch. Ricks, W.L. Vance (eds.), *The Faber Book...*, p. 249. To which several years later G.K. Chesterton seemed to respond "There is nothing wrong with Americans, except their ideals. The real America is all right; it is the ideal America which is all wrong", "New York Times", 1 February 1931 [in:] *ibidem*, p. 153.

<sup>55</sup> R.M. Gamble, *The War...*, p. 49–68. There are some authors who do not engage in any subtleties and call this prophetic stance a classical case of crude, "exclusionary nationalism", based on messianic religiosity, rampant individualism, and violent militarism, which justified wars of excessive cruelty against enemies perceived and branded as simply evil, whether they were Indians, Southerners, Japanese, Germans, or Muslims. In such a picture such presidents as Andrew Jackson, James K. Polk, and William McKinley were simply "war criminals", and even Abraham Lincoln was just only a little more humane because of his authorization of Ulysses S. Grant's strategy and William T. Sherman's scorch earth tactics in Georgia during the Civil War. F.D. Roosevelt with his bombing raids, Truman's Hiroshima and Nagasaki decisions were as pure nationalistic drives to get hegemony over the world, as was George W. Bush's "war on terror", which is nothing less but the dream of "softly fascist America" with neoconservatives being simply the equivalents of the Islamist ideologist Said Qutb, who do not only seek to "neutralize" their opponents but try to exterminate them. Such an approach was a long staple of the most radical left as for instance is the case with the books of Noam Chomsky and many anti-American pamphleteers in Europe. But recently this simplistic view entered the academic mainstream, to mention just Patrice Higonnet's book *Attendant Cruelties: Nation and Nationalism in American History*, Other Press, New York 2007. Higonnet thinks that the only hope lies in rejecting this half-backed nationalism concocted of religious messianism and violent militarism, and recovering "progressive America", forming a strong link with "forward-minded Europe".

This evolution led liberal Protestantism to a position of being just a tool of liberal reforms causing splits in all the churches.<sup>56</sup> One of the dangers of such an immanently understood redemption of Christ through historical process, the American protestant equivalent of heglism, was a tendency to treat government and the state as an instrument of transforming reality in conjunction with God's plan. That way, liberal Protestantism made Christianity an applied religion making it a tool different from evangelical purpose which was eschatological only in a perspective of individual redemption. This change had another pernicious consequence of considering any resistance to the liberal progressive aims of Christianity, as automatically beyond a pale of legitimate social behavior. Christianity was going to be either social charity similar to the aims of the liberal state and subject in terms of its doctrinal content to intense privatization, commensurate with any other beliefs like for instance magic, or nothing. A rebellion against such a prescribed role for Christianity and religion in general was treated with alarm by liberals as a breach of the I Amendment.

The religious "naked public square" was to be a goal sought and achieved. A therapeutic welfare state with aims commensurate with the progressive liberal philosophy was to be its religion, extremely jealous of any competition.<sup>57</sup> But for the first time such a liberal program was to be universally applied. It eventually established a new understanding of American exceptionalism against the world in need of conversion to democracy. Liberal messianism of this new sort was gradually anti-American, meaning statist and monistic, resembling the European Enlightenment hope which the European Union seized on. No wonder that such a liberal, progressive messianism using a state to achieve its goals is greeted not only with alacrity among the European intellectuals, hoping for a final transformation of America against its individualistic, anti-statist culture, the hope expected and partially gotten from Barack Obama. Such messianistic, progressive liberalism is being slowly defined as the ideology of the world, bringing forth a utopia of the world government operated by transnational progressive elites of Europe and America, allegedly implementing the universal human rights against, recalcitrant Americans clinging to their obsolete and in fact not universalistic but particular and dangerous traditional messianism.

In America this coupling of Christianity with progressive liberalism, a subsequent emasculation of its orthodoxy and an alliance with the secular liberal progressive intelligentsia has not entirely established itself as an alternative cultural code of the post-traditional creedal America. A rebellion of evangelical and conservative mass religiosity since the 70's, essentially a purely defensive reaction, testified to that. Political movement as the Reagan or the Tea Parties revolutions of the 1980's and 2009 were of the same order. This monopolization of the American Creed by the secu-

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<sup>56</sup> See J. Budziszewski, *Four Shapers of Evangelical Political Thought* [in:] *idem, Evangelicals in the Public Square*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI 2006, p. 91–92.

<sup>57</sup> See on that R.J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI 1984; P.M. Garry, *The Cultural Hostility to Religion, "The Modern Age"*, Spring 2005, p. 121–131; R.P. Kraynak, *Christian Faith and Modern Democracy: God and Politics in the Fallen World*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN 2001, p. 1–44.

lar, progressive, liberal monism has not overwhelmingly succeeded, although with the Obama presidency the jury in this case is still out. In Europe it has, making the mission of the United Europe expressed in purely secular, antireligious terms a possibility.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, one may say that this religious dimension enables us to look closer at the American creed, which although rooted originally in the universal Enlightenment ideas does not resemble universalism of the European, continental Enlightenment. The political projects rooted in the Enlightenment in which the United States and the European Union have their origins, were not the same, the fact which accounts for their striking differences and misunderstandings.

## Puritan sources of American modern identity of a “chosen nation” as a universal project of humanity

America, with all its harking back to Puritan origins, to the concept of sin and Providence, was a profoundly modern nation, because it was probably the first nation which grounded its identity in providential religion and at the same time universal idea of common humanity, both defined by progress in history and not tied to social, political and traditional cultural bearings. In this sense America was a self-conscious nation, with its basic cultural ingredient, an injunction to recreate itself anew, to make its consciousness truly “fluid”, free from the chains of history but not “fluid” and free from the chains of biblical morality. It was to be an extremely modern and extremely moral nation at the same time. America had no chains to the past

“there [was] no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity in broad and simple delight one might enumerate the items of high civilization, as it exists in other countries, which are absent from the texture of American life, until it should become a wonder to know what was left. No state, in the European sense of the word, and indeed barely a specific national name. No sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy, no church, no clergy, no army, no diplomatic service, no country gentlemen, no palaces, no castles, no manors, nor old country – houses, nor parsonages, no thatched cottages nor ivied ruins, no cathedrals, nor abbeys, nor little Norman churches; no great Universities nor public schools – no Oxford, nor Eton, nor Harrow; no literature, no novels, no museums, no pictures, no political society, no sporting class- no Epsom nor Ascot (...) such list as that might be drawn up of the absent things in American life, [in other words] what prevails, what sets the tune, is the American scale of gain, more magnificent than any other, and the fact that the whole assumption, the whole theory of life, is that of the Individual's Participation In It”

that is pure potentiality.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup> See J.J. Weiler, *Chrześcijańska Europa: Konstytucyjny imperializm czy wielokulturowość?*, W drodze, Kraków 2003; G. Weigel, *The Cube and the Cathedral: Europe, America, and Politics without God*, Basic Books, New York 2005, p. 72–77.

<sup>59</sup> H. James, *The Negative Side of the Spectacle* and *The American Scale of Gain* [in:] Ch. Ricks, W.L.Vance (eds.), *The Faber Book...*, p. 294–295, 358.

Walt Whitman, was this first truly American poet of fluid modernity and potentiality. He was born before America became obsessively self-conscious, and as Ezra Pound wrote in 1911–1913, when America “was proud of a few deeds and of a few principles [when] the nation had no interest in seeing its face in the glass”. Whitman wrote in 1856 in *Leaves of Grass* about millions coming to America: “We plant you permanently within us, there is perfection in you. You furnish your parts towards eternity, Great or small, you furnish your parts towards the soul”. In *Democratic Vistas* of 1871 this fluid potentiality of self-creation was strikingly vivid:

“Sole among nationalities, these states have assumed the task to put into forms of lasting power and practicality, on areas of amplitude rivaling the operations of the psychical cosmos, the moral political speculations of ages, long deferred, the democratic republican principle, and the theory of development and perfection by voluntary standards, and self-reliance. Who else, indeed, except the United States, in history, so far, have accepted in unwitting faith, and, as we now see, stand, act upon, and go security for, these things”.

For Whitman America was commensurate with history and eternity at the same time, with hope for mankind and with this mankind’s desire for universal love. In his poem *America* of 1888 from *Leaves of Grass* he wrote “Centre of equal daughters, equal sons (...) Strong, ample, fair, enduring, capable, rich, Perennial with the Earth, with Freedom, Law and Love, Chair’d the adamant of Time”.<sup>60</sup>

For Whitman the religious impulse of being “chosen” was secularized into this profound potentiality of creating new civilization *ab ovo* by consciousness without restraints of the past, directed only by democratic equality and anarchical freedom as closest to human essence, thus closest to nature, whether religiously or otherwise interpreted. America was thus the future of the world since it had been able to shed the shackles of artificial obstacles, mental as well as material, setting by its own will in freedom its future course for itself and the world. Modernity was thus in America from the beginning perceived by the Europeans as profoundly destabilizing and at the same messianistic impulse, anachronistically tied to religious roots, however secularized. It was modern, because it destroyed all the traditional ties, it was conservative because this modern, fluid consciousness was nevertheless tied to biblical morality, even if that biblical morality was converted into historical mission of recovering true humanity, thus humanity as demanded by God commensurate with true nature. Actuality and potentiality, the final overcoming of alienation was within the grasp of Americans. This transformation of biblical eschatological impulse into historical actuality, was the most striking heresy coming from Protestant American culture and infecting both the churches, the secular intellectuals, soon to be aided by nascent and anti-Christian psychotherapeutic movement, providing individual salvation within the social context.

The European traditional conservatives looked thus at America with horror as a civilization of vulgarity and fluidity and its religion as nothing more but an egotisti-

<sup>60</sup> Ch. Ricks, W.L. Vance (eds.), *The Faber Book...*, p. 67, 179, 187, quotation of Pound from *Patria Mia* [in:] *ibidem*, p. 278.

cal expression of the Protestant religious individualism gone mad, tied to this sense of unlimited possibilities of the human character and intellect prone to heretical madness of binding history to biblical eschatology. In turn, the European progressives and liberals of all pedigrees, looked at America with horror because it tied, culturally, and practically *en mase* this modern progressive spirit to a religious background and individualism at the same time, the former not allowing progress to be decoupled from any religiosity *a la* post-Enlightenment Western Europe, the latter looking with horror at any idea of collectivism. Here lie the roots of this absolutely inconceivable alliance in any other sphere, of the European conservatives and progressives on the basis of one of the most universal and highly original ideological products of the European mind, its latent and sometimes virulent anti-Americanism.

The most visible instance of this impulse to challenge contemporary America in the name of the glorious ideas of its founding, of coupling history with religious promise, was the famous oratory in fact a sermon by the Baptist preacher and the main leader of the Civil Rights movement since the 50's, Martin Luther King "I have a dream". King delivered it at the civil rights rally in Washington in 1963, combining a language of republican democracy with respectable metaphors of business finance, stating that "The architects of our republic' had signed 'a promissory note (...) of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness to which every American was to fall heir'. America had 'defaulted on this promissory note'; it had 'given the Negro people a bad check'.<sup>61</sup>

Calling for justice King challenged Americans, white Americans, to look back and to march to the just future so to make America a 'great nation' true to its universal principles of justice, to transform its jangling discords into a "beautiful symphony of brotherhood". In this way King invoked the nation's ideas but also fears, and calling from the black injustice pleaded America not to be afraid, since it could accommodate justice to the blacks within the larger framework of American Promise, essentially biblical universal promise, without diminishing itself but, to the contrary, with a chance of elevating itself. The nation should not, argued King, be afraid of falling apart because of the racial strife and resentment. He connected this fear of falling apart with the alleged inability to rise up and live out the full meaning of its "creed", of the Declaration of Independence:

"I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together (...) From every mountainside, let freedom ring".

Towards the end of his speech the King referred to nature-first in biblical idiom and then the language closer to that used by presidential candidates, invoking the range and majesty of the American continent. From "the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado' to lookout Mountain of Tennessee", he summoned a geographical 'E Pluribus Unum'.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>61</sup> A. Meier et al. (eds.), *Black Protest Thought in the Twentieth Century*, Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis 1971, p. 346–351.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*.

At the center of this American fear of a profound loss of its creedal promise is at the same time a “state of nature”:

“a nourishing, stabilizing essential for all future growth. The central fear is that of failing away, but the others are involved also. To lose naturalness is to lose a source of vigor as well as virtue; and the artifice that controls and manipulates people may also sunder natural ties. The Puritan settlers, it is true were ambivalent to nature. If sin, in their eyes, often came through the vices of unnatural living, it also came through natural pride, which should be curbed at an early age. Looking outward too, the colonial Puritans, and indeed many nineteenth-century settlers, viewed the wilderness as a place of desolation and degeneracy, to be resisted or conquered rather than embraced. Yet the colonial America also bequeathed to the Revolution and the early Republic an idea of the New World as a preserve of benign liberty, innocent of the artificial corruptions and oppressions of Europe. Nature’s gentleman, a plain living, plain dealing homesteader, unaffected by fancy ranks and hierarchies, became an American ideal. As it traveled through the nineteenth century, the ideal remained essentially pastoral, but it was quickened by the more assertive qualities associated with frontiersmen”<sup>63</sup>

In that sense the original seventeenth century Protestant, mainly Puritan religious experience paved the way for a distinctively American, modern Gnostic heresy, a unique transformation of Christianity and its immanence in history, without at the same time converting Christianity to a secular project inimical to it, like for instance in the European modernity. The seventeenth-century “Puritan ‘lust for massively possessive experience’, an un-Christian *libido dominandi* for achieving existential security by drawing transcendence into immanence to transform all experience into proofs of divine election” gave the American political culture an extremely messianistic trait. This messianistic, established cultural code is reverberating in America till today, which shows itself in situations of great danger, when the politicians, as in the aftermath of 9/11 2001 attack went back again, even if subconsciously, to the narrative and language of the Puritans.

This language is prophetic, reminiscent of sermons ringing through American history and at the same time in the best tradition of American Puritan jeremiads, it laments over lost, betrayed Covenant. Puritans believed that America was unique not because it was exclusivist, nationalist in the modern sense of the word, that the Americans were right by the very fact of being Americans. It was unique because it tried to establish something unprecedented, a community of people, a new nation in a sense of it being called up to a standard of a universal right. Winthrop’s *City upon a Hill* was not meant to be a boastful comment of moral self-righteousness or self-conceit, where America was a beacon to the entire world by the mere fact of its existence, but more as a warning that Americans have to live up to certain standards because “the eyes of all people are upon us (...) we shall shame the faces of many of God’s worthy servants and cause their prayers to be turned into curses upon us till we be consumed out of this good land wither we are going”<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> R. Wilkinson, *The Pursuit...*, p. 79–83.

<sup>64</sup> J. Winthrop, *City upon a Hill* [in:] D.J. Boorstin (ed.), *An American Primer*, op.cit., p. 26–41.



The Puritan American sense of nationhood had nothing to do with aggressive nationalism. Patriotism of the New World was not tainted by any connection to the German *Blut und Boden*, nor was it compromised by a promethean ideology of the French Revolution, which made history and progress through history the only scene of this destructive fury to remold the entire world against reality, religion, culture, and on its ruins to form a new civilization concocted out of the abstract wanderings of the intellectuals. The Puritan American patriotism, its messianism, was a very dynamic combination of political liberty and Judeo-Christian sense of limitations of human character, which together were going to make history a real drama of the moral, incremental individual improvement, something contrary to a political, totalitarian project.<sup>65</sup> Such Puritanism had an enormous appeal to all groups who came to America afterwards, who initially were despised and treated with disdain by the original WASP elites, but soon accepted its premise as its creedal passion, blending their cultural identity and the American identity at the same time.

There was something in the Puritan thought which enabled anyone to be part and parcel of this millenarian project which recognized frailties of the human character and spirit, and at the same time made it a starting point of transformation through a unique political and social system. For instance, Anti-Catholicism was for a long time a commonly held prejudice of the protestant population, till today it is in fact “the last respectable prejudice” of some intellectual liberal left circles, the “anti-Semitism of the intellectuals”.<sup>66</sup> The same applied to anti-Semitism or racial prejudice, the features of apparently Protestant “waspish” culture. But today there are exactly the Catholics and the Jews who have imbibed the American type patriotism. Together with the Evangelicals, historically the most vibrant and the largest branch of Protestantism’s anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism as the most despicable moral offence, they form bridges to all of them in an effort to stave off the most vicious attacks against American creed. What happened, was simply that

“America happened. The Puritan narrative was convincing enough to assimilate Catholic successfully, and also flexible enough to let them remain Catholics. Of all the transformations wrought by the alchemy of the Puritan paradigm – that was a combination of Judeo-Christianity with old style liberalism”.<sup>67</sup>

This old style liberalism, not to be confused with the modern type liberalism, of the imperial Self gave the American culture this absolute, practical trait immediately implemented in the New World through the constitutional system, the trait of individual autocreation tied yet firmly to religious moorings. This combination of Judeo-Christianity with old style liberalism, mainly in the political sphere, is the one that

“would have appeared most remarkable to 17<sup>th</sup> century forebears. And it’s a good illustration of the distinctiveness of the American style of assimilation. The typical immigrant Catholic

<sup>65</sup> See on that G. McKenna, *The Puritan Origins of American Patriotism*, Yale University Press, New Haven 2007.

<sup>66</sup> In a memorable phrase of Pieter Viereck.

<sup>67</sup> M. Potemra, *A New Kind of Country*, “National Review”, September 24, 2007, p. 60.

adapted to the American way of life without ceasing to be Catholic; the typical native-born Protestant learned to let go of ancient hatreds without ceasing to be Protestant. The result was the enrichment of both traditions”.<sup>68</sup>

The Catholic tradition got enriched, for instance, by reformulation of a traditional concept of church authority not in a doctrinal sense of the world, but in the traditional European sense of clericalism. The Protestant tradition got enriched by the Catholic stress on the Puritan, protestant tradition being reformulated in the lights of the Catholic natural law, which does not function prominently in Protestant thought.<sup>69</sup>

Such developments enabled to translate this American universal, Protestant creed into a rational language of engagement with the outside world as well, the staple of natural law tradition, at the same time staving off the most rabid attacks on religion inside the US by the liberal left, as in fact un-American.<sup>70</sup> It is also here, where Catholics try to salvage American contemporary version of progressive liberalism from sliding into a subjective form of nihilism, where in the process of autocreation of the autonomous subject, the moral life of an individual is being reduced into a sheer act of will and power.<sup>71</sup>

This idea of the “chosen people” has always been tied in America to an idea of political and social revolution as a religious movement of redemption, the American Revolution being the first. John Winthrop expressed this spirit of universal messianism in his *A Model of Christian Charity* of 1630, the founding document of the Puritan mentality, when he proclaimed that

“We shall find that God of Israel is among us, when ten of us will be able to resist a thousand of our enemies; when we shall make us a praise and glory that men shall say of succeeding plantations, ‘The Lord make it likely that of New England’. For we must consider that we shall be as a City upon a Hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world. We shall open the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of God and all professors for God’s sake. We shall shame the faces of many of God’s worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into curses upon us till we be consumed out of the good land whither we are a-going”<sup>72</sup>

The American universalism was rooted in the millenarian English thought of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and it evolved into an idea of the United States as a country responsible for a world-wide redemption. For this, Americans as the “chosen people”, were given

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 61.

<sup>69</sup> See J. Budziszewski (ed.), *Evangelicals...*

<sup>70</sup> The most prominent of the Catholics who engaged in such a project was John Courtney Murray, SJ in the 50’s and 60’s. The most known of contemporary Catholics are the late Richard J. Neuhaus, Robert George or Russell Hittinger. See J.C. Murray, *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition*, Seed and Ward, New York 1960; R.J. Neuhaus, *American Babylon*, Basic Books, New York 2008; R. George, *In Defense of Natural Law*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2000; H. Arkes, *Natural Rights and the Right to Choose*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002.

<sup>71</sup> This task, for instance, was taken up by Christopher Wolfe in his attempt to salvage liberalism by its connection to natural law. See *idem*, *Natural Law Liberalism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007.

<sup>72</sup> D.J. Boorstin (ed.), *An American Primer*, p. 26–43.

a new Promised Land. This promised land was both the Natural Paradise, a glimpse of how, before the fall, Paradise could look like, a confirmation that God after all decided to give humanity a second chance. This time yet this was to be done in accordance with God's will and a Covenant bound with these new people. The tree of knowledge of good and bad was there too, inside of every colonist's soul, waging an incessant battle not to corrupt the promise, so the triumph of the God's "chosen people" would fulfill history. In this sense

"the notions of a grandiose American destiny look rather like those of apocalyptic prophecies -Hebraic predictions of the triumph of God's people they are literally apocalyptic they were regarded as the continuation of the biblical prophecies themselves. Manifest Destiny has been described as a 'nationalistic theology' "<sup>73</sup>

Cotton Mather, observed in 1702, documenting what he defined as "Christ's great deeds in America [that] religion brought forth prosperity, and the daughter destroyed the mother. There is danger lest the enchantments of this world make them forget their errand into wilderness"<sup>74</sup>

This social and moral self castigation, a literary mode of lamentation, this jeremiad present in the American thought and literature from the seventeenth century conveys not only this idea of the "chosen people", but at the same time people who were flawed morally and always on the verge of betrayal of the Covenant. This Covenant was closely related to a mission, divine expressed often in Apocalyptic terms, enhanced by the pristine and absolutely stupendous nature reminiscent of Paradise. America has thus been a country with an underlying unease, of people who loudly proclaimed the Enlightenment at the beginning of their times, and yet trembled at the approaching millennium which would subject them to God's wrath.

On the one hand The United States has been a country which has had an incessant string of religious or quasi religious revivals coupled with a sense of collective guilt and repentance, of which the civil rights revolution of the 50's and 60's, or evangelical Christianity of today seem to be the recent examples. These revivals, seem to have been fighting with the irenic deism of American religiosity, of which the most telling example is the religiosity of the Founding Fathers. They have usually been pious, restive, utopian and apocalyptic, burning with passion and earnestness. Such revivals rocked the country with millions converting in heady mass gatherings, where Methodists, Baptists, Disciples of Christ evangelized aggressively and battled the established Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Episcopalians with the new movements like Mormonism, Shakerism, Swedenborgianism, transcendentalisms, Universalism or Spiritualisms.

<sup>73</sup> E. Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1976, p. 91; out of this 'nationalistic theology' could then be derived such further statements of Abraham Lincoln as "almost Chosen People" or Woodrow Wilson's at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that "America had the infinite privilege of fulfilling her destiny and saving the world". See also A.K. Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny*, Quadrangle Books, Chicago 1963, p. 17.

<sup>74</sup> Quoted in P. Johnson, *The Almost...*, p. 16.

On the other hand there has been among Americans a pragmatic, technological obsession of making reality subordinated to a rational scheme of working.<sup>75</sup> Among the first Puritan colonists there was an idea of imminent Millennium, this conviction that one thousand years of Christian fraternity stretched before them which needs to be used for concrete projects. For instance in the words of Edward Johnson, but not only to him, we find that

“coupling of Genesis with Isaiah and Revelation, which leads to the proclamation that God’s chosen people were commissioned to subdue and improve the New Land (...) .The Puritans were convinced that God had called them to this task. Never did they view themselves as exploiters, but rather as blessed developers (...) the reform of the natural landscapes of America was thus no mere colonial obligation but God’s own imperative. It lay within the inexorable schedule of fixed events in the calendar of scriptural prophecy (...) The Bible offered the Puritans doctrines imparting meaning to their colonizing efforts (...) For the Puritans the emigration to America seemed (...) cosmically momentous, essentially because of their conception of history founded in Christian typology. The messianic Jesus of the New Testament had enabled Christian exegetes from the Church Fathers onward to the Puritans to find a transcendent coherence in the Old and the New Testament. Their exegesis revealed a historic pattern which, in light of the prophecies in the books of Daniel, Isaiah and Revelation, subsumed the past and present and pointed forward to the Apocalypse. In the seventeenth century the Puritans thought the Apocalypse to be imminent. Using Christian typology, they found an ascending pattern of specific events that proved the imminent redemption of Israel, itself figurally the true church or chosen people. Accordingly eschatology, the study of the final events in human history, was a major Puritan preoccupation. Just as Puritans had deduced a formula for the individuals experience of salvation from his effectual calling to his ultimate sanctification in Christ, so did they discern an opposite, demonstrable pattern of events by which a communal Israel moved even closer toward redemption. In the cosmos each progressive step in the pattern was markedly closer to the ultimate redemption of the Day of Judgment. Events of the Apocalypse comprised the finale of this pattern and Puritans believed them to be in Motion ‘and to be happening right before their eyes in America. America was there no mere colonial obligation but God’s own imperative. It lay within the inexorable schedule of fixed events in the calendar of scriptural prophecy (...) The Bible offered the Puritans doctrines imparting meaning to their colonizing efforts”<sup>76</sup>

This idea of the “chosen people” laboring under a yoke and blessing of Covenant runs deep in American history and constitutes the core of the American subconscious. Jefferson used it in a slightly different context of pristine, paradise type of nature, but nevertheless also exclusively possible to be applied only to America. Jefferson, for whom nature and agrarianism was the source of republican virtue, considered America a unique place in this regard, the chosen land by reason of its unspoiled land:

“Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God if ever he had chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue. It is the focus in which he keeps alive that sacred fire, which otherwise might escape from the face of the earth.

<sup>75</sup> See on this uneasy relationship D. Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2008.

<sup>76</sup> C. Tichi, *New World, New Earth. Environmental Reform in American Literature from the Puritans through Whitman*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1979, p. 15–18.

Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example.<sup>77</sup>

Jefferson's "chosen people" were the people of a particular class not a nation, but because as Crevecoeur noticed in his *Observations of an American Farmer* this class comprised in principle an entire nation, this idea of the "chosen people" was in fact tantamount to the experience of a particular, unique type of people, combining nature, character, social structure and Covenant in one. America was favored by Providence because of its mores and an idea of liberty rooted in religious liberty, not necessarily because it was designated by God to play a historical role, but it is difficult to disentangle one from the other. Thus the "chosen people" engaged themselves into political and social revolutions as if these were religious movements.

The American political revolutions follow the steps of the great religious awakenings. The Revolution of 1775–1787 followed the First Great Awakening. It was just a military and political expression of a religious movement, and those who carried it through believed that they were fulfilling God's will thwarted by the British Parliament and the King. The Protestant clergy in their fiery sermons was the most vocal group justifying and supporting it. The Declaration of Independence justified it in the natural law language of the Biblical God who gave an inalienable right to life, liberty and a pursuit of happiness to everyone, within a political order chosen to secure these rights with a right of rebellion. This was combined with equity language and a referral to the common law tradition as a universal tradition of British subjects having rights which were coterminous with natural rights. The Great Awakening which began in the 1730's provided the revolution with a spiritual and emotional energy.

## Religious ecumenicalism as a basis of the American civil religion and the world mission

Jonathan Edwards, the first preacher of this Great Awakening believed fervently that "there was no real difference between a political and a religious emotion, both of which were God-directed. The right kind of politics were, to his way of thinking, no more than realized eschatology".<sup>78</sup> For Edwards

"there was no reason why God should not 'establish constitution' within confines of which humans could cooperate with Him and all might have a knowledge that the hour was coming when God 'shall take the kingdom. [For Edwards] the dawn of a glorious day was near and happily expected".<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Jefferson Notes on the State of Virginia [in:] T. Jefferson, *Writings*, ed. M.D. Peterson, Viking Press, New York 1984.

<sup>78</sup> P. Johnson, *The Almost...*, p. 18.

<sup>79</sup> Quoted in Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1975, p. 152–163.

He introduced kind of religious ecumenicalism deftly corresponding to this individualistic, democratic, Protestant approach to religion, dissolving creedal differences and being the basis of political democratic unity across the colonies, the real ethic of the American Revolution, the first practical instance of the American civil religion, merging religious, social, political ideas into one common creed of distinctive beliefs and standards instinctively held and driving them to revolution. Edmund Burke discerned perceptively this energy and warned about British complacency in his speech in Parliament in 1775.

This Christian, predominantly Protestant ethic, transforming doctrinal differences formed a glue of the civil religion of the new nation set for independence, impossible to argue away. Such an ecumenic, across religions spirit, the sense of destiny of the covenantal people was captured from a hindsight by John Adams who wrote in 1818: “The Revolution was effected before the war commenced. It was in the minds and hearts of the people; a change in their religious sentiments of their duties and obligations.” For Adams, this Protestant, biblically rooted religion of free people was the foundation of the American civil spirit:

“One great advantage of the Christian religion is that it brings the great principle of the law of nature and nations, love your neighbor as yourself, and do to others as you would that others do to you, to the knowledge, belief and veneration of the whole people. Children, servants, women and men are all professors in the science of public as well as private morality (...) the duties and rights of the man and the citizen are thus taught from early infancy”<sup>80</sup>

There has been a long dispute in American history and historiography, in the latter case an enterprise partially partisan in the battle over the interpretation of the First Amendment, how religious the Founders were, or what was a real role of religion in public life at the beginning of the republic. But the issue of leadership’s beliefs is in fact irrelevant. The religious views of the Founders were hotly contested, some thinking that they were orthodox Christians, others exposed them as closet atheists, and still others dispatching them as deists. But whatever the religious views of the Founders, a conviction that a greater religiosity of the Founders would favor the establishment of religion or a dominance of one religious view is peculiar. Separation of church and state was a conscious effort of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Evangelicals and politicians experienced with whatever religious feud there was in the colonies.

James Madison in his youth witnessed the harassment, imprisonment and violent abuse of Baptists in Virginia, for not being Anglican. This “diabolical, hell-conceived principle of persecution” left a deep impression on Madison and later during the drafting of the Constitution he strongly opposed religious establishment, not because he wanted to enfeeble faith but because he wanted to fortify it. In 1785 memorandum Madison wrote: “During almost fifteen centuries the legal establishment of Christianity has been on trial. What have been its fruits? More or less in all places, pride and indolence in the Clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution”. Such argument appealed to evangeli-

<sup>80</sup> P. Johnson, *The Almost...*, p. 19.

cals of all sorts, like Baptists, but also to free thinkers like Jefferson who famously remarked in defense of the right of conscience that “it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods, or no god”. If there was a real debate about religion it was not a question of its establishment, but a question to which extent it formed, any religion, a basis of republican virtue and morality, with Adams strongly in its favor, and Jefferson paying lip service to it.

For this reason the United States was not created as a secular state. It could be more accurately described as a moral and ethical society founded on Christian beliefs, although without a state religion. The people who created it could be not particularly keen on religion as a ritual and doctrine, but were aware of an indispensable role of religion as fostering civic virtue. The “Declaration of Independence” in the first paragraph invoked “the laws of nature and nature’s God” as a natural basis for independence of the American people since only then they could pursue life, liberty and happiness with which they were “endowed by their Creator”. It contained an appeal to “the Supreme Judge of the world” and expressed their confidence in “the protection of Divine Providence”.

The United States was thus a political society, but formed within a religious, definitely Christian framework. The first president George Washington commenced his first inaugural with a prayer to “that Almighty Being, who rules over the universe, who presides in the council of nations”, asking God to bless a government consecrated “to the liberties and happiness of the people”. In addition Washington remarked that in “tendering this homage to the great Author of every public and private good” he expressed certitude that he was speaking on behalf of Congress as well, for

“no people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the invisible hand which conducts the affairs of men more than the people of the United States. Every step by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency”.

In his Farewell Address of 1796 Washington wanted “Heaven [to] continue to you the choicest tokens of its efficiency. Religion and morality are indispensable supports [of] political prosperity [and the] mere politician [ought to] respect and cherish them”.

For him purely secular morality was not enough since “reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle”. Without virtue and morality which were the “necessary spring of popular government”, a republic could not last. Thus no one who supported them could “look with indifference upon attempts to shake the foundations of the fabric [that is religion]”. In some other statements of the Founding Fathers virtue and public morality depended on religion, Christian and nondenominational to be sure, but religion as well. Even Jefferson, an apparent deist, considered religion to be indispensable. The first government under the constitution made the Federalists fiercely denounce the Godless regime of revolutionary France.

Lincoln, like Washington, saw God as the final arbiter of public policy and his language was permeated by a characteristic blend of American public philosophy. On

the one hand it was a belief that there was a providential plan for America, and thus it had to be, for this reason, “the best last hope for the mankind”, on the other that this providential plan was to be connected with democracy and equality of rights. This belief in a sacral dimension of democracy as a framework of the providential plan was to be later secularized and given a purely idolatrous form in the writings of for instance Whitman, Dewey or the most contemporary Richard Rorty. For Lincoln, a democratic process was divinely inspired, and nowhere this showed more than in his *First Inaugural Address* of 1861 where Lincoln stated:

“Why should there not be a patient confidence in the ultimate justice of the people? Is there any better or equal hope in the world? If the Almighty Ruler of Nations, with his eternal truth and justice, be on your side of the North, or yours of the South, that truth and that justice will surely prevail by the judgment of this great tribunal of the American people intelligence, patriotism, Christianity, and a firm reliance on Him who has never yet forsaken this favored land”.

This could still solve, he claimed, “our present difficulty”. In his Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 while appealing to world opinion he also appealed to God for approval, and president George W. Bush praying for God’s inspiration had a good tradition behind him. Lincoln invoked “the considerate judgment of mankind and the gracious favor of Almighty God”. He told his cabinet that the Proclamation was influenced by what he considered to be divine intervention in the battle of Antietam and as Gideon Welles wrote in his diary

“he remarked that he had made a vow – a Covenant – that if God gave us the victory in the approaching battle he would consider it an indication of the Divine will, and that it was his duty to move forward in the cause of the slaves. He was satisfied it was right – and confirmed and strengthened in his action by the vow and its results”<sup>81</sup>

Lincoln has been considered the archetypal American statesman, with an exception of the South of course, because there was in his thought, in his earnestness’ to infuse the American experience with a moral mission, and last but not least in his desire to make the natural law of moral equality of the “Declaration of Independence” applicable to the slaves, the real mediation of a special relationship between Christianity and politics, or in a more generic terms biblical religion and American democracy. In one of his comments he wrote

“The will of God prevails. In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. Both may be, and one must be wrong. God cannot be for and against the same thing at the same time. In the present Civil War it is quite possible that God’s purpose is something different from the purpose of either party; and yet the human instrumentalities, working just as they do, are of the best adaptation to effect His purpose. I am almost ready to say that this is probably true; that God wills this contest and wills that it should not end yet. By his mere great power on the minds of the now –contestants, he could have either saved or destroyed the Union without a human contest. Yet the contest began. And, having begun, he could give final victory to either side any day. Yet the contest proceeds”<sup>82</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Quoted in *ibidem*, p. 20.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibidem*.



Again, in the Second Inaugural Address in 1864, at the time when the European elites were already to a large extent liberal and secularized to the core, in fact, rabidly anti-Christian and anti-religious, he spoke about “almost chosen people”. This was only possible because Lincoln knew that his countrymen would think in the same cultural and religious terms and feel with him this providential and tragic legacy and duty.

The American Revolution and the Civil War, the foundational events of American history and identity till today, were thus infused with religious inspiration which determined its justification. For this very reason the American cultural identity, like the Polish modern one, was intimately connected with the religious, biblical image of a special nation with a mission, and religion has been accorded a special place in the political process and public space, as an ingredient of civil religion, at the governmental level as well as at the popular level. Biblical religion was justifying both the revolutionary quest for liberty and the quest for equality of rights, the engine of the American collective identity and justification of its existence. This was strikingly visible in John Tucker who wrote in his election sermon in 1770–71, at the inception of the American republic:

“The fundamental laws, which are the basis of government, and form the political constitution of the state, which mark out and fix the chief lines and boundaries between the authority of Rulers, and the liberties and privileges of the people, are, and can be no other, in a free state, that what are mutually agreed upon and consented to. Whatever authority therefore the supreme power has, being the authority derived from the community, and granted by them, can be justly exercised, only within certain limits, and to a certain extent, according to agreement. To suppose otherwise would mean to act without a delegated power and constitutional right. Rulers may make laws, and appoint officers for their execution and force them to the effect, i.e. according to their own arbitrary will and pleasure, but to do this would mean “to defeat the great design of civil government, and utterly to abolish it (...) [but] men (...) in the service of the public, considering themselves as accountable to God, as well to men. They look beyond the present state of things, and view their conduct as connected with futurities of a most interesting nature; and will aim at approving themselves, not only to the people, but to their own minds, and to god the Judge of all. Such Rulers will best answer the great ends of their institution. In the last place then, [let us] take notice of the principles from which submission and obedience to government should flow. And these are, a sense of our duty to God, as well as to civil Authority, connected with and animated by a sense of liberty. True religion, A sacred reverence for the Deity: – the love of virtue and goodness, are as necessary to make good subjects, as good Rulers: and a spirit of liberty is requisite, to render obedience true and genuine both to God and man. Even the supreme Ruler of the world, is not despotic, arbitrary Monarch, nor does he require obedience by mere authority. His sacred laws, all framed agreeable to their perfect rectitude of this nature, and resulting from this infinite goodness, and righteousness, are wisely adapted to the human system, and calculated for its good. Agreeable to the nature and tendency of these divine mandates, the obedience God requires of us, is not of slaves, to a tyrannical master. It must be free, a matter of choice, and not of force, driving us on against a reluctant mind”<sup>83</sup>

Tucker then proceeds to extol the British Empire and the Constitution “founded in the law of God, and of nature; on the principles of reason and equity: a form of gov-

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<sup>83</sup> See the sermon in Ch.S. Hyneman, D.S. Lutz (eds.), *American Political Writings during the Founding Era 1760–1805*, Liberty Press, Indianapolis 1983, vol. I, p. 158–174.

ernment admirably contrived for the due support of authority, and the security of the rights and privileges of the people".<sup>84</sup>

This nexus was a reason that the American presidents openly declared to seek inspiration of good judgment from God, and also prayed to realize his mission through American democracy inside and outside. Since Lincoln, this missionary zeal of making America a nation in search of monsters to kill so the world would be more civilized and moral has been visible in many American presidents, apparently in accord with the population at large. During the Spanish Civil War President McKinley at the gatherings of his co-religionists Methodists stated that he was "not ashamed" that he

"went down on my knees and prayed Almighty God for light and guidance more than one night. And one night late it came to me this way. There was nothing left for us to do but to take them all and to educate the Philipinos and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God's grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellow men for whom Christ also died".<sup>85</sup>

This was a striking statement where the universalist urge, imperialist in fact, was justified by reference to religiosity and done so in sincerity. European imperialists would be afraid to utter such nonsense from their point of view, treating imperialistic endeavor if not in cynical terms, then at least in purely human, civilizational terms, being corrupted enough and self-conscious at the same time, not to mix orders which would cause derision of treating their public as half-wits.

The same mixture of religious and political missionary zeal was visible in Woodrow Wilson's speeches. He was in fact the first US president to play a large role on the international scene and his democratic missionary idealism was justified in the "chosen nation" terms, coupled with religious justification of "making the world safe for democracy". J.M. Keynes during the Versaile Treaty proceedings was shocked that Wilson was not behaving like a politician at all, that is European politician, but a religious preacher instructing the flock:

"The president was like a Nonconformist minister, perhaps a Presbyterian. [He] thundered commandments from the White House [and when in Europe] he could have preached a sermon on any of them or have addressed a stately prayer to the Almighty for their fulfillment, but he could not frame their concrete application to the actual state of Europe".<sup>86</sup>

The European observers have always been shocked by this most pervasive characteristic of American politicians, the quasi, or even overt religious character of their rhetoric, irrespective of their particular faiths. The same was visible in a Puritan Calvin Coolidge, Catholic John Kennedy, men of the nondenominational Christian faiths like Herbert Hoover or Ronald Reagan, or Baptist Jimmy Carter. It was also expressed, as if knowing that America was inseparable from a religious sense of exceptionalism rooted in culture shared by the Americans, by such utter cynics like F.D.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>85</sup> P. Johnson, *The Almost...*, p. 20.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibidem.*

Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson. The Biblical oratory was part and parcel of American political culture, and no presidency was immune to it.

George W. Bush had the same rhetoric, and in his case it was coupled with a true Evangelical spirit of Bush's personal conversion. Still before his second election he declared that Jesus was the most important of philosophers adding that "I cannot imagine being a president of our country without a relation with God". Several months after the outbreak of the Iraqi war in 2003, Bush was allegedly telling the Palestinian politicians that his decision to build a new Middle East was a task he received from God:

"I came to you with a mission from God. God told me: 'George, go and defeat terrorists in Afghanistan.' And I did this. And then God told me: 'George defeat tyranny in Iraq.' And I did this. And now God came to me and told me: 'Go and offer the Palestinians their own state, and security to the Israelis.' And with the help of God I want to do this"<sup>87</sup>

Such words were the direct consequence of a type of faith the president represented. Bush was a Methodist, but at the same time he belonged to the great current of Evangelicalism of which the most characteristic features are: the very personal contact with God, shown in a conviction that God talked personally to someone, the conversion in adult life, which is called 'born again' or 'warming up of heart', and a conviction that God has special tasks for the United States. Evangelicals belong to all churches, the conservative and liberal wings, although they are mainly in the conservative wing. Bush was the first American president to be an adult convert to evangelicalism and as such his faith was both very personal and very seriously held, which showed in his activities against abortion license under "Roe v. Wade" of 1973, and stem-cell research and its federal funding.

This religious rhetoric of the US politicians drives the European elites crazy, because their cultural code is strikingly different, and references to religious imaginary seem to them immediately a threat to the liberal order. It was exactly against the religious establishment that modern liberalism and democracy were created in Europe and the European elites, strongly secularized, consider references to religion, let alone justification of any policy by it, as a threat to the very essence of liberal democracy. But in America a political culture is strongly religious for a similar reason. The political process and the religious establishment have never been thought to be in conflict there. To the contrary they strengthened each other. It was out of the religious impulse of the First Awakening that the Revolution of 1775 got spiritual strength, and out of the Second Awakening that the anti-slavery crusade followed. This harmony of religion and liberty in the United States was of course caused by multiplicity of establishments, or practical religious plurality and thus freedom, but also by a feeling that American experiment was unique and dependent on a special relationship with Providence, without which its predicament would be in danger.

Religious, that is biblical, Christian Protestant mostly, cultural imaginary was thus, again, the very mainstay of American identity as a nation, and whoever of the politicians did not understand it, run the risk of being rejected. It is not, that this rev-

<sup>87</sup> An interview in "Washington Times", January 2005, after "Wprost", 31 sierpień 2008, p. 87.

erence for religion should be for a particular faith, let alone that a politician should be overtly religious, but the ritual of paying its due to this metaphysical dimension of American identity, not as a problem, but as richness, has been the mantra of every politician, otherwise running the risk of being cast aside. After the 1968 revolution the liberal left elites of the US have also been secularized the way the European elites have been. But every politician knows that you do not win elections by the elites vote.

This harmony of religion and liberty, the very opposite of the European cast of mind, struck Alexis de Tocqueville

“In France I had always seen the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom pursuing courses diametrically opposed to each other; but in America I found that they were intimately united, and that they reigned in common over the same country. Religion was “the foremost of the political institutions” of America for many reasons. Not only for historical ones, but also for structural ones connected with the very essence of republican, democratic government in essentially modern conditions first created in American mass democratic society. Unlike in Europe republican government in America was built from bottom up, with the minimal use of authority and power of government and it stayed this way for a long time. There was never any attempt to organize, in the European noblesse oblige style, the conduct of the society from top down. The question of social cohesion, of norms of individual behavior of the self-organized society stood at the centre of a society which could not rely on rules provided by the state authorities or religious monopolistic establishments. Republican democracy had thus to prod itself up by religious sanctions, voluntarily accepted as providing not only individual norms of behavior, but also providing, for historical reasons a sense of belonging to a nation which was one by the very fact of its choosiness and its special relationship with Providence of whose actual shape was individually, not collectively defined. The meaning of a generic Providence and God was provided from bottom up, every American could find a way of this collective identity for himself, but the very nature of this collective identity was beyond doubt”.<sup>88</sup>

It was for this reason that president Dwight Eisenhower could utter his famous remark, which otherwise would be considered to be either a statement of an ignorant religious syncretic, relativist or a cynic, but which in fact was neither. His attitude was typical of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, as Lincoln’s was of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. This was the heyday of public Protestantism as a utility religion of American democracy, soon to be shattered by the coming counterculture. Eisenhower said “Our Government makes no sense unless it is founded on a deeply felt religious faith, and I don’t care what it is”.<sup>89</sup> Eisenhower was indifferent to any creedal distinctions, but this had a deeper purpose, and reflected somehow the nature of religious America, which has always been concerned more with moral conduct than dogma.

It was not theology which was important, but a behavior of the faithful and a recognition of religious life for the well being of the republic. Here the diversity of different denominations fighting for the adherents guaranteed seriousness of faith of both the ministers and the faithful and eagerness to fulfill the obligations to God and the country. The meeting ground with the others was not dogma, but the common moral framework of biblical Christianity. For some this competition for the new souls mir-

<sup>88</sup> A. de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2000, p. 278–280.

<sup>89</sup> P. Johnson, *The Almost...*, p. 18.

rored the competition in the market by different firms, where a role of the state was minimal, just to ensure that the competition be fair. Thus the First Amendment did not make America a secular state and by the twentieth century

“the American republic had come to rest on a tripod of forces: religion, democracy, and capitalism. All were mutually supportive; each would fall without the others. Indeed, any two would fall without the third. When Coolidge said that ‘the business of America is business he might equally well have added’ and the religion of America is religion. That was exactly what Eisenhower meant”<sup>90</sup>

But in fact the Americans were the first people of modernity, perceiving that there was no imposed and coherent official truth, and every purported truth was just an interpretation of an individual, also his relations to God. This meant a sub-conscious agreement to live in a pluralistic world by default, in which interpretations confront and battle each other. This plurality of interpretations made the American framework the common denominator uniting them. Since this common denominator was successful, a thought that such a situation was the proper one because the Covenant worked could be entertained. This plurality ensured diversity of cultures, and guarded against hubris of thinking that you can institutionally impose the truth, in this case a religious dogma beyond mediations of many denominations reaching a compromise. Moreover this diversity was to express the essential features of human condition in modernity concerning one’s freedom.

This religious diversity guaranteed thus freedom in a modern world of seeking one’s God through different routes. But this diversity applied to other spheres of social life as well, giving it an unusual dynamic to change and invent itself by a constant comparisons and contrasts. Americans seek God through an individual search and are spiritually always on the move, neurotically trying to root themselves in anything stable. But in fact such a culture is restless, self-probing, in constant reformation. Only other’s gazes and opinions, limit the excesses of thought, relativize it, and impose upon it its own critical gaze. Continual progress in the human world necessary passes through the acceptance of comparisons. Religious pluralism of America was one of the most striking condition of such modernity in operation, when my religious beliefs could coexist with my neighbors beliefs. For the first time an individual’s meaning of life was derived not from a uniform culture, dogma or the state power, as in Europe. The individual had to choose it for himself with a realization that this is just one of many.<sup>91</sup>

American religious pluralism ensured and explained why a growth of the state education system, at least until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century never became a source of conflict as in Europe, where it was pitted against the religious instruction, mainly Christian education. In America it was nonsectarian, but it was not nonreligious. An author of this system Horace Mann made sure that religious instruction

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 21.

<sup>91</sup> This was the essence of Kant’s defense of diversity as a precondition of modern liberty in his utopian “Perpetual Peace”.

should be taken “to the extremist verge to which it can be carried, without invading those rights of conscience which are established by the laws of God, and guaranteed by the constitution of the state”.<sup>92</sup> For this reason religious instruction in the public schools was focused on morality and character formation rooted in generalized Protestantism. The dogmatic, religious content of the Protestant core was thus further diluted giving way to biblical cultural-religious frame, finally being converted into an ethical and moral consensus of Protestantism. It became the official spirituality of the American Republic, which then was certified as an expression of the American Way of Life, the official philosophy of American civilization.

This is true that this general Protestantism was contested fiercely by Catholics and Jews, the former creating their own parochial schools so no to corrupt their religious teachings by the Protestant interpretations of the Bible. The Catholics have always had difficulties with this dilution of Christianity and its adoption as an official ideology of the American republic as bordering on idolatry. In turn Protestant America looked at the Catholic Church in America through the lenses of a potential conflict of loyalties. But in 1884, for the first time a Catholic prelate Archbishop John Ireland of St. Paul declared

“there is no conflict between the Catholic Church and America, and when I assert, as I now solemnly do, that the principles of the church are in thorough harmony with the interests of the republic, I know in the depths of my soul that I speak the truth”.<sup>93</sup>

For immigrant Jews the issue of religious freedom was even more crucial since for them America, in between 1881–1914, became a promised land of opportunity. The overwhelming majority came from Eastern Europe, especially Russia and Austro-Hungarian Galicia and their primary motive of immigration was an escape from systemic discrimination and poverty. But what attracted Jews to America was not so much its liberal, secular regime, but freedom of religion, religiosity. This motive of religious freedom has been very much on the minds of the persecuted. America was neutral towards religion but in another way as for instance France was, which became after 1870 a democratic liberal regime neutral towards religious denominations in a hostile way. America was neutral in a Tocquevillian sense as benevolently neutral, despite the cultural code of Protestantism.

But both the Catholics and the Jews, culturally separated from the dominant Protestantism recognized nevertheless America as a unique country where their practices, despite occasional discrimination, were tolerated and eventually respected. This respect could be discerned from the beginning of the republic, and George Washington’s letter to the Newport Jewish congregation was a proof of that. The secular Jewish intellectuals challenged this Protestant Christian orthodoxy by contributing mightily to the rise of psychotherapy at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But both the Jews and the Catholics were included into the very mainstream of Protestant Christianity by a somewhat artificially construed concept of Judeo-Christian civilization in the years

<sup>92</sup> P. Johnson, *The Almost...*, p. 21.

<sup>93</sup> P. Allitt, *Religion in America since 1945: A History*, Columbia University Press, New York 2003.

after the Second World War. For the Catholics it was only John Courtney Murray in the 1950's who provided the doctrinal and political philosophy reasons why it was so, via natural law of the Declaration of Independence. This bond of Catholics with America was certified in the 1970's and 1980's, when millions of Catholics persecuted in Indochina found refuge there. All of the faiths also recognize, that America was and is the only world power which significantly makes the religious freedom issue one of the most important elements of its human rights policy. This includes also blocking of policies of different liberal-left lobbies which try to capture the human rights policy also against the religious freedom. In this sense America could not be described as a secular state but a land of religious exceptionalism.

## Religious revival, the fear of liberal monism and the public square in America

This importance of the religious impulse in American public life, present from the beginning has had consequences. Religious argument is not considered to be an oddity in public, the case to be considered an oddity if not an outward reactionary stance in Europe. That is true, that with the New Humanism of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Protestantism lost power of argument, apart from its cultural presence. Also the liberal-left counterculture of the 1960's has changed the cultural code of America substantially. Nevertheless the revival of Catholic natural law language of the last 30 years as well as evangelical's political revival, both revolts against liberal Christianity accepting the terms of debate of the cultural liberal-left, make this public presence of religion still fairly well maintained.

Of course, religion has also had in American history not only unifying potential, kind of a cultural code gluing American republic and democracy, as Tocqueville described it. It has been often at the same time a force of disruption, even if "creative destruction". The Revolution was inspired by the first Great Awakening but it divided the colonial society, with a quarter of loyalists emigrating to Canada. The Second Great awakening aroused a nation against slavery. It abolished it but with the Civil War as a price, which nearly destroyed the Union and made the resentment between the South and the North a part of the American cultural code. The Third Great Religious Awakening of 1875–1914 resulted with a misbegotten attempt to introduce prohibition, the most overt attempt in America in moral social engineering, pitting Americans Catholics against Protestants, natives against immigrants and the provincial America against the urban one. One could say that the Fourth Great Awakening preceded the Civil Rights revolution of the 50's, in a sense that it was a religious inspiration of the Southern Baptists with M.L. King. During the last couple of decades we have had the Fifth Great Awakening which has also become divisive, but it shows the American religious exceptionalism today with great force, as a vivid presence in the public, legitimate arguments.

In the U.S. church affiliation was 43% in 1910 and stayed like that in 1920. But it was 49% in 1940 and rising to 55% in 1950 and 69% in 1960, a decade later falling to 62.4%. This relative decline corresponded yet to a split of American Christianity into two wings. The liberal one which comprises the mainline Protestant churches in relative decline, as well as the liberal wing of the Catholics and the Jews, and the conservative religious wing, comprising mainly Protestant evangelicals and “born again”, but also the conservative Catholics as well as the Jews. Suddenly in the 1970’s, religion began to break out in all places in the public square. Its reality was yet different, characterized by a great split in American religiosity into two wings increasingly hostile. It was a split between the old understanding of religion as being able to accommodate to modernity and the new stage of the liberal regime to the mutual advantage of both, and the new understanding of a mutual feud between an aggressive secular liberal-left, post 60’s state, and allied with them by default liberal denominations, and an increasingly besieged religious conservative denominations which refused to play the role of domesticated and psychotherapeutic departments of the liberal welfare state.

The split cut through the Protestant, Catholic and Judaistic faiths and has become the major factor of contemporary religious life in the United States. A defense of orthodoxy and its right to be expressed in public brought together conservative wings from the so far rather distrustful towards each other faiths. They came to a conclusion that the new liberal regime gave them no other choice but to defend their turf in the name of freedom of religion. In wit, a liberal regime of pluralistic America of the I Amendment was to become a liberal regime of a monistic ideological type, interpreting the I Amendment as a mandate to separate religion from the public square and consign it to the private, purely inconsequential sphere. A symbolic act of this resurgence came with an entrance into political life of the evangelicals and “born again” Christians of the Protestant, Catholic and Jewish variety, forming an alliance which became supportive of the conservative political movement.

This alliance was branded, somehow imprecisely, the Religious Right. This conservative religious wing constitutes the Fifth Awakening and has had powerful political consequences, like the rise of Ronald Reagan’s coalition against collectivism and counterculture of the 60’s and 70’s, especially concerning questions of public morality, abortion, church-state relations and the family issues. For the second time such a Great Awakening embraced a large number of Catholics, it appealed also to non-practicing Christians and non-Christians like Jews, all who feel that the subversion of the Judeo-Christian ethics would subvert the morals that underlie the American republic. Evangelical Christians in all denominations constituted a major part of this coalition.

Evangelicals have always been present in the United States since the colonial period. Baptists have been quintessential evangelicals. Evangelicals belong to all churches, they are both in the conservative and liberal wings. But today the Evangelicals belong mainly to conservative churches, because for them it was the personal conversion which should be the foundation of faith and engagement in social and political life, not the change of the social structures. The reasoning went that if Jesus changed



personal life of people they could change society. Social activity was thus to be subordinated to a personal ethic and prayer. For the social gospel Christians, who became liberal and modernists a Christian should first of all focus on changing sinful social and economic structures, so they would be congruent with the ideas of God's justice. Since the 60's the liberal churches allied themselves with the Democratic Party and since 1968, by default, accepted its program of liberal-left issues like abortion, homosexuals in priesthood, so called "homosexual marriages", as well as issues of peace, sexual, feminist type equality, or radical cultural sexual inclusiveness. This liberal, modern social gospel stance clashed with a traditional civil religion of America supported by the mainline Protestant churches.

Of course, civil religion was a peculiar form of Christian idolatry, with a confluence of honor, family, the nation, religion and the flag. Since the 70's these civil religion values were purged from the mainline, liberal churches for the sake of liberal left social gospel values. As a result the traditional believers, including evangelicals, drifted away to the conservative Protestant churches, as well as began to organize inside the Catholic Church, both beginning to build bridges to the Jewish orthodox communities and the Orthodox Church with the majority of evangelicals, forming a coalition of Christian Right.

This phenomenon has no visible counterpart in Europe, except may be in Poland. But it shows that religion and politics are organically linked in America and mutually reinforcing. Just as

"the strength of religion in America sustains and nurtures democracy, so the vigorous spirit of American democracy continually reinforces popular religion. Thus while America remains the world's most powerful and enthusiastic champion of democracy, it is likely to preserve its exceptional role as the citadel of voluntary religion."<sup>94</sup>

An inclination to consider America as another developed country moving towards secularism become untenable. Because of America, although not only because of it, a general theory of secularism collapsed. The enmity of secular intellectuals towards the Religious Right is as big as it is riddled with utter ignorance and contempt, the mockery of their presumed fascination with tolerance and recognition of the "other". In their definition, the "other" somehow nearly always turns out to be someone like them. But the Religious Right constituted essentially a self defense mechanism. The religious people began to perceive secular culture as imposing its dogmas on them and their families, by, for instance, public education and administrative rules, erasing classical liberalism's distinction between the public and the private. A message of the Religious Right was clear: "we understand that you hate us and would like to wipe us out. But you do not really expect us to cooperate with you".

As far as the intellectual statements of the Religious Right were concerned these included, among many others, three declarations. The so called Hartford Appeal for Theological Affirmation of 1975, the Evangelicals and Catholics Together of 1992 with its follow up "That They May Have Life" of 2006, and the "Dabru Nemet" [To

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<sup>94</sup> P. Johnson, *The Almost...*, p. 22.

Speak the Truth] of 2000, a statement of hundreds of Jewish scholars and rabbis dealing with their relations with Christian America and Christian-Jewish past. In 1984 Richard John Neuhaus published an influential book *The Naked Public Square* in which he pointed out a distorted way the First Amendment was interpreted both in the scholarly literature and the Supreme Court adjudication, as a mandate to push religious people and religious arguments from public square. He also put forth a reasoned argument for the legitimate presence of religious argument in the public space of a free, democratic society. The book caused enormous response but mobilized also the secular intellectuals fearing the conservative alliance between the orthodox wings of Protestantism, Catholicism as well as Judaism.

The reaction of the Jewish community to the rise of the Christian Religious Right was especially nervous, since the Jews were escaping, in general, Christian intolerant societies of Europe, considered America to be a model of secular society in which the official religious code was kept in check and treated de-Christianization, in general, as part of blessed secularization in which they would feel safe, the Haskala myth of the Enlightened European Jewry of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the contemporary American context especially virulent and expressing such an approach has been the Anti Defamation League leadership, for instance Abe Foxman who declared that the resurgence of religion in public posed a lethal threat to everything secularists cherished in America, and to the Jews in particular, taking into consideration what kind of emotions Christianity evoked in them. Joining forces with the traditional rigid secularists, ADL in conjunction with ACLU, railed against the dangers of the Religious Right, insisting that religion meant simply privately held views.<sup>95</sup>

Some secular Jewish intellectuals, with a certain portion of the religious Jewish establishment, are determined to caricaturize Christianity because in essence they view it, for historical reasons as a threat. For the secular Jews that enmity towards Christianity stems additionally from the fact that they are alienated from Judaism as such. They gave up their religious particularity in order to be homogeneous liberals in the American “we”. They expect the others to accommodate them by giving up their own religious particularity and resent it when the others don’t do it, thus becoming in their view at an instant intolerant, charging that the others are not behaving like good liberals of their own kind. There was a milder version of this approach, represented, for instance, by Michael Lerner of the liberal-left TIKKUN magazine, who simply stated that religion in public was here to stay, since liberal democracy was having a deficit of “politics of meaning”, but it was necessary to argue religion into accepting “progressive” ideology. This idea was not new, since that was exactly a course of liberal Protestantism since the turn of the 20 century. But it was exactly this Protestantism’s crisis which gave rise to the Religious Right, especially evangelical Protestantism. Lerner found some allies inside of the latter, for instance, Jim Wallis who in his “God’s Politics” tried to built bridges to the Jewish religious liberal left, but it was not credible.

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<sup>95</sup> See A. Sears, C. Osten (eds.), *The ACLU vs. America*, Bradman and Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN 2005, p. 123–171.

There was yet another response of Jewish, mainly, secular intellectuals, loosely connected with the neoconservative cultural and political movement, like Midge Decter or Irving Kristol. They essentially understood Christian Religious Right's assertiveness as a defense mechanism, which forced it to mix religious activity with political and cultural issues. Moreover, they considered this activity as a blessed corrective to the regnant, different strands of secular liberalism. But they did not so much care about the content of Christian beliefs, as they stressed the social and political usefulness of the Christian Right beliefs. This mutual alliance between the Christian Right, especially its evangelical wing, and some of the Jewish intellectuals was aided by the fact that this evangelical Christianity was also overwhelmingly supportive, for biblical reasons, the state of Israel. Some conservative Jews made yet an overt alliance with public Christianity, for instance Rabbi David Lapin and his movement Toward Tradition, or such thinkers as Michael Medved, Don Feder, Denis Praeger, or David Klinghoffer who adamantly rejected an accusation of the liberal-left Jewish community, that they were simply the Jewish wing of the "Religious Right".

Of particulate importance in this context was a role of rabbi David Novak and hundreds of Jewish signers of "Dabru Nemet" declaration in 2000. They were, in general, on the orthodox side of Judaism and the conservative moral, social as well as political issues, but their major concern was a relationship between Christianity and Judaism in America, a new opening of the venerable, but for a long time stalemated "liberal" Christian-Jewish dialogue. A large group of conservative Jews professed their faith in the necessity of grounding a free and just society

"in shared Jewish and Christians warrants. It is understood that, while there is not a shared Judeo-Christian religion, there is a shared Judeo-Christian ethic. In the long and troubled history of Jewish-Christian relations, this is an enterprise that goes deeply and could have the most lasting consequences".<sup>96</sup>

"Dabru Nemet" was also path-breaking in its unequivocal statement than Christianity had nothing to do with Nazism, the accusation which began to be recurrently repeated since the 80's in some Jewish circles, making a continuous line between anti-Judaism of Christianity and anti-semitism of Hitler, implicating that there was an implicit, fundamental moral mistake in Christianity which resulted with the Holocaust.

One of the first on the Jewish side, who protested strongly against this slander was Milton Himmelfarb in an article *No Hitler, no Holocaust* of 1984.<sup>97</sup> Not denying that Christian anti-Semitism was and is sometimes a reality, he compared criticizing Christianity with an implication of it being responsible for Holocaust as a vile tactics. This was so, since chastising what is left of Christendom, even by some of the Christians now, has tended to be if not pro-neopagan then at least anti-anti-neopagan. Himmelfarb pointed out, that for many American Jews the enemy was exclusively the religious Moral Majority, never mind that it was pro-Israeli and that

<sup>96</sup> R.J. Neuhaus, *De-Christianizing America*, "First Things", June/July 2006, p. 56.

<sup>97</sup> M. Himmelfarb, *Jews and Gentiles*, Encounter Books, New York 2007, p. 99-119.

its morality was close to traditional Jewish morality. Liberal Jews thus provided an excuse for continuing to locate danger in Christianity especially the Christian Right, but missing was a realization that the common element in anti-Israel/anti-Jewish animus today had long been leftism, not Christianity, Christian leftists-and Jewish ones, the latter being fellow travelers of anti-Christian leftists, far more powerful and numerous. But the truth is that

“Hitler made the Holocaust because he wanted to make it. Anti-Semitism did not make him make it. Hitler was ex-Christian and anti-Christian. Hitler’s anti-Semitism was anti-Christian. Marxist anti-Semitism also is anti-Christian. Anti-Christian anti-Semitism descended ideologically from pagan disdain for Judaism and the Jews. Jews now have more to fear from anti-Christians than from Christians, and from the Christian left than from the Christian Right.”<sup>98</sup>

Accusations of Christianity as a soul brother of the Holocaust, visible, for instance, in making Pius XII an ally of Hitler, whatever the former’s failings, has had of course much more to do with a contemporary hatred of the Catholic Church and Christianity by the liberal-left. By making the Church implicit in the Holocaust it tries to delegitimize it morally in contemporary debates by an old method of criminalization by association, but this time in relation to moral issues which for the liberal-left have become the icon of progressivism: abortion, euthanasia, sexual and marriage ethics.<sup>99</sup>

The mainline academic public intellectuals considered to be experts on things religious, were taken by surprise by this emergence of the Religious Right. One would not consider such public intellectuals to be serious, were it not for their seriousness about the subject matter. There has been an annoying tendency on their part to pretend to adjudicate in a canonical way what is real and proper and what is only apparent and not real in Christianity, the latter being the faith of the overwhelming majority of Americans. From the beginning they seemed to disregard the basic fact as a starting point of their analysis, which is crucial to the understanding of the Religious Right, namely that it was an authentic, mass bottom-up movement, bound together by a legitimate sense of grievance. Such thinkers as Alan Wolfe, David Brooks, Harold Bloom, Stanley Fish or Adam Kirsch took different approaches as they put forth the proper, in their judgment, role for Christianity, or in general religion in a liberal democratic society. For instance, for Kirsch the only possible “vision of faith is pragmatic, experimental, internal, more interested in love and forgiveness than judgment and punishment. More of this kind of faith, at least, can’t hurt the republic.”<sup>100</sup> This amounted to a safety neutered Christianity. Alan Wolfe, a nonreligious person and a sociologist of religion, analyzing the religious people in America in general concluded that Christians do not really believe what they say they believe. They are despite what they say, in fact, good liberals, may be except homosexuality.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 111, 115–116.

<sup>99</sup> On this fundamental antagonism between liberalism and Jewish tradition from the nineteenth century to the present day see E. Alexander, *Classical Liberalism and the Jewish Tradition*, Transaction Books, New Brunswick 2005.

<sup>100</sup> Quoted in R.J. Neuhaus, *De-Christenizing...*, p. 56.

As far as the Religious Right is concerned he considers it to be extremist and hardly worth mentioning. What we have here is essentially an understanding of religion which seeks spirituality in service of the “self”, kind of “I am religiously everything and therefore I am religiously nothing”, the voice of truly Emersonian Gnosticism.

What we have in this approach is the non-Christians negotiating their place in a dominantly Christian society and their standing as experts on that society. This pertains especially to their religious expertise in that society. Taking into consideration that 85% of Americans consider themselves to be religious, this amounts essentially to a judgment that they live in a state of false consciousness by thinking that they are, in some way that really matters, Christians. An interesting case is provided here, by Stanley Fish, who argued that American Christians were not serious Christians because Christianity is a comprehensive account of reality and as such it is of necessity fanatical. And since Christians in America are not fanatical but tolerant and nice, except apparently the Religious Right, which must be so because of its apparent being un-American, it follows that these tolerant and nice Americans must be, an assumption also of Wolfe and Kirsch, good liberals. Such liberal Christians do not believe in the comprehensive account of reality, and thus, by implications are not really Christians at all. This way Fish as the others excluded the religious serious people from America.<sup>101</sup>

The secular elite has been definitely surprised by the emergence in the last generation of the Religious Right, meaning the religious public opinion which does not share their liberal positions termed by them to be the essence of civilized politics. For this reason their apparent belief that secularization is a law of history was shattered, leaving them incapable of understanding that the public expression of religious views might be a legitimate way in which American democracy is exercising itself, engaging in issues of grave concerns for the citizens at large. Such issues which the standard liberal orthodoxy has considered to be decided once and for all, might be considered to be a particular instance of the hubris of intellectuals of the day. Their flaw here is as charming as it is truly paranoid and hysterical and they are impervious to the facts of life and its inconvenient, from their orthodoxy point of view, consequences.

Their overwhelming desire behind such a style is a fear of “theocracy”, that is the fear that religion would be imposed on others, and they search for marginal instances of such a behavior, so to corroborate their taken for granted thesis of danger which must be just around the corner. This constitutes of course a mirror image of their ideological bias, a projection on others what they themselves represent and which the religious people perceive as a real danger. This danger is simply an attempt by the liberal intellectuals and secularists to impose a rigid ideological monism on them and relegating them to the second-class citizens. But the alleged American “theocracy” is simply an ideological view how the modern American liberal democracy should legitimately operate and what issues should be debated and which should be excluded from public debate. Such ideological limitations were exactly the ones which pro-

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibidem.*

voked the religious people to enter politics in the first place as a defense mechanism against the imposition of a radically different secular “religion”. This secular “religion” which tries aggressively to change majority’s culture and morality.

Thus the nature of this horrible, alleged “theocracy” stems, in fact, from a surprising realization on the part of the secular liberal intelligentsia, a fairly narrow group in America, that

“a large number of Americans are actively engaged in democratically pressing for certain public policies. Most importantly they argue that the unlimited abortion license imposed by [Roe v. Wade] is egregiously unjust and must be remedied. They contend that same – sex marriage is a very bad idea that would do great damage to marriage and the family. They believe that students in the classroom should be free to, even encouraged to raise questions about neo-Darwinist evolution. Some of them believe that the free exercise of religion should permit prayer in public schools. These are political positions, which is to say they are positions pertinent to what their advocates believe is the just ordering of society. Political arguments should be engaged by political arguments within the bonds of civil discourse. Our constitutional order is in the service of deliberation and decision about political positions through the process of representative democracy. Those who disagree with the above positions are of course also participating in that process. Nobody is trying to drum them out of the public square. When [secular intelligentsia] attempt to demonize those who disagree with them and deride their political opponents as ‘theocrats’ and enemies of democracy, they are doing a profound disservice to the democracy that that they claim to be defending. Demonizing opponents is a tactic of desperation. The public influence of these people and of the platforms available to them makes it hard to understand their apparent state of panic. They do have arguments to make and are capable of making them. Robust and civil argument is to be warmly welcomed, whereas vulgar caricatures and name-calling are simply tedious”.<sup>102</sup>

The rise of the Religious Right and its entrance into a public sphere has been misunderstood by the liberal progressive culture, because the latter does not understand its monistic and in fact totalitarian pretensions. The Christian Right of essentially fundamentalist and “born again” variety entered politics because politics attacked them. It is thus impossible to understand American fundamentalist religiosity entering politics without realizing that it was essentially a self defense mechanism.<sup>103</sup> The liberal progressive erasure of a classical liberal line between the private and the political, when the New Left slogan “the private is political” has in fact been accepted by modern liberalism, and the rise of the federal government to be a vehicle of implementing social programs of a “Good Society”, have given the fundamentalists and

<sup>102</sup> R.J. Neuhaus, *While We’re at That*, “First Things” June/July 2006, p. 67–68; see also M. Olansky, *Add, Don’t Subtract: How Christian Conservatives Should Engage American Culture* [in:] Ch.W. Dunn (ed.), *The Future of Conservatism: Conflict and Consensus in the Post-Reagan Era*, ISI Books, Wilmington 2007, p. 79–100.

<sup>103</sup> This was indicated by one of the contenders for the US presidency on the Republican side in 2008 Mike Huckabee. Huckabee, at the same time a fundamentalism pastor, in the farewell speech as a chairman of the Baptist State Convention in Arkansas said “*We do not change the world if we do not take part in the institutions deciding about the direction, in which marches our society*”. As a governor of Arkansas he remarked in 1998 yet that “*I did not enter politics because I thought that the state has better solutions. To the contrary, I knew that the state has no true solutions, that the only true solution depends on accepting Jesus Christ to our life*”, quoted in L. Clarke, *Pastor prezydentem USA?*, “Dziennik”, 19–20 January 2008, p. 13.

born-again Christians essentially a very little space for an autonomous activity. They knew that to survive they had to enter politics because politics entered their private world, threatening its autonomous status.

But one form of Protestant fundamentalism has essentially always been an enemy of liberalism yet at a deeper metaphysical sense, exhibiting an essentially antinomian, anti-commercial and anti-capitalist stance of a certain abnegation towards the material. That was, for instance, the essence of the Southern Protestant civilization which was somehow mired in a peculiar stance of metaphysics inimical to bourgeois commercialism well into the 60's, and even today is a home to the most fundamentalist religious thinking, and a particular approach to culture, best captured by the writings of the Southern Agrarians in the 30's and 40's, and writings of their late, post-liberal heirs like Genovese.

Fundamentalists, at a social and political level are to contemporary liberals a horrible, menacing crowd. But the conflict is much deeper. Fundamentalists in America, as well as in Latin America or Africa, are probably the last people who deeply believe in metaphysical life as an organic whole, they are the last Mohicans of the metaphysical culture in the West, the truly antinomians, who have challenged the liberal self-righteous culture and monistic liberals, exposing their smugness which has led America and the West into a religious void, a cultural abyss. Such fundamentalists, paradoxically, try to live in modernity in a very confusing, maddeningly contradictory ways, resembling the famous injunction of St. Augustine from his *On the Gospel of St. John* "Understanding is the reward of faith. Do not therefore try to understand in order that you may believe; but believe in order that you may understand". This stance was best captured by one of the most profound metaphysical American writers Flannery O'Connor, the Great Daughter of the South. The whole opus of O'Connor was a defense of this metaphysical sense of the Southern culture against vaporized progressive liberalism. This progressive liberalism claimed O'Connor, became the new American civil religion which was successfully converting faith into individual preference, and in its modern versions, also in religious masks converting faith into psychotherapeutic preference for a psychological well being of people of happiness in a common, organized by welfare state civilization of "love".<sup>104</sup>

O'Connor was recalcitrantly unpluralistic, insisting that metaphysical orthodoxy, 'dogma', was instrumental for penetrating reality and only the fundamentalists of the South possessed it. To her, the Southern backwoods fundamentalists were, to use the biblical phrase popularized in modern times by Matthew Arnold and T.S. Eliot, "the saving remnant" of the civilization. Fundamentalists still saw the Bible as objective truth and kept hold of the supernatural which made them a powerful witness to a modern corrupted, materialistic age. The South was moral and metaphysical not

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<sup>104</sup> This is also a stance expressed again in 2008 by Mike Huckabee, who said about his work: "At the beginning I approached [my task] very idealistically, with a conviction that the majority of my faithful expected me to be a captain of a warship, which carries the God's troops into the battle to change the face of the world. With the passing years I was coming to a conviction that the people want me to be a captain of a love ship, on the board of which all have a wonderful time", L. Clarke, Pastor...

because it produced the better people morally. O'Connor was from the South and knew its demons of the past and of the present. It was moral because it was still in its religious fundamentalist culture not so much Christ-centered as, in her memorable phrase, "Christ haunted". For her this metaphysical sensibility was crucial to the preservation of civilization as such. It prevented a conceit of liberal utopianism. It kept in mind an image of man as a person not of himself and for himself, it retained a sense of sin, damnation and salvation not as just as inward states of consciousness, but as objective states of both immediate existence and final destiny of humans.

O'Connor, unlike the other Southern Agrarians in the 30's, did not make this civilization of the South the answer to modern barbarism of which the tepid hubristic progressive liberalism was just a false fig leaf. It was religion which was such a defense, and the South and its fundamentalism just happened to possess this sensibility in the most striking, even if in the most disorderly and confusing way, pointing to a transcendental reference in human existence, the most conspicuous preservation of the Pilgrims obsessive millenarian "errand into a wilderness". O'Connor, who is beginning to assume the central role in the American cultural pantheon, herself paradoxically a pre-Vatican II and at the same time a post-Vatican II Catholic in the tradition of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, found in the obscure fundamentalist Protestants of the South an embodiment of real, vital and true America and its greatness. At the time of her writings in the 50's they were not noticed, for their time, and the time of their America had not yet come.

Judging from a hindsight she was a prophet, being also a forerunner of the religious antiracist approach to race scandal in the South. She possessed the same sensibility which prompted Martin Luther King, *nomen omen* her contemporary and a Baptist minister, to launch the civil rights movement, which had essentially religious, biblical inspiration, considering racism a scandal offending God himself, and at the same time an American promise of the "Declaration of Independence". O'Connor was intimating also a future corruption of the ethics of equality against natural law and biblical teachings transcending race, with the progressive liberal approach treating it as a springboard for building its elitist pretensions of being better than the majority of Americans.<sup>105</sup>

This "saving remnant" of the South of her time, also visible in the writings of her contemporary Walker Percy, as well as in innumerable charity works of the Christian and Jewish communities, constituted a warning against America of liberal smugness, combined with a hubristic belief of the social transformation by means of the state. It was also in the best tradition of American religious as well as secular jeremiad of going back to the roots of American greatness, the Holy Grail of American promise from the beginning, which being the most entrepreneurial and individualistic had at the same time metaphysical roots. They geared these down to earth, democratic and materialistic impulses, to the religious-haunted conscious-

<sup>105</sup> A fascinating study of O'Connor stressing this religious aspect of fundamentalism as a "saving remnant" against progressive dead end elitist liberalism see R.C. Wood, *Flannery O'Connor and the Christ-Haunted South*, William B. Eerdmans Publishers Company, Grand Rapids, MI 2004.



ness and to common republican good. In Walker Percy's novel of 1971 *Love in the Ruins* Percy's protagonist-antagonist Dr. Thomas More tried to unite both the Christians and secularists, the liberals and conservatives, the blacks and whites of the region in which he lived, to serve the common good conceived in terms of liberal progressivism, separating the Church from the State in the most brutal way of pushing the faith into the cellar.

What Percy was suggesting, anticipating a rebirth of religious orthodoxy across America, an alliance of religious people united against debilitating civilization on which ruins the regnant progressive liberalism singed "hallelujah", was a recovery of roots. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the liberal progressive gospel of progress and enlightenment which caused the greatest material civilization and the most charitable at the same one, which wrote in its founding document of the "Declaration of Independence" that no one could be treated as chattel or plant and people of all races, colors, and creeds were due basic fairness and justice of citizenship, this civilization has cut itself off from the essentially religious roots of its inspiration grounded deeply in Christian *caritas*. This civilization has committed innumerable sins but at the same time has been able to recover itself in the true sense of religious revivals, which have always been the greatest source of its vitality converted into social programs.

This revivalist spirit of religiously haunted consciousness, stretched across time, from the Puritan preachers, through Lincoln, Bryant, King to name just a few, animated at the same time the great secular minds of America. But this spirit seems to be converted today into a debilitating liberal progressivism, using the state for the operation of the intellectually devised programs. This liberal progressivism created at the same time an arrogant caste of manipulative intellectuals who treat the nations as its property for the sake of social experimentations. The latter seem to be conducted in the name of the allegedly impossible to be overcome white guilt and "emancipation" from all Western "oppressions". This white guilt is used in turn as a constant reminder of the liberal progressivism's moral sense of superiority, a dissociation of pure "selves" from the recalcitrant immoral America in need of destruction, so the latter can be saved against itself. This liberal impulse, so well described by Christopher Lasch, coming from a Christian tradition, and Philip Rieff, from a Jewish tradition, cuts itself from solidarity with others, and in America a large part of it has been in a rebellion against people's religiosity. Progressive secular liberalism is here incapable of understanding this metaphysical dimension of life. The fundamentalist and religious America reminds the Western civilization in the most brutal and chaotic way about this dimension, which at the same time constitutes in fact a repetition of the old metaphysical impulse visible in the classical political philosophy, that man rises above his or her city only by means of what is best in him, the impulse captured wonderfully by St. Augustine's quip "Love and do whatever you want".

Thus politics, seem to argue religious fundamentalists, is good only insofar, as it knows that there exists something above it, and thus above human ego, which without God always reverts to debased utilitarianism of the impulse of the moment, expressed by

an individual calculus or the calculus of social policy.<sup>106</sup> The fundamentalist revival, as well as very diverse religious attempts to keep moral issues open in the American public sphere, like abortion, stem cell or marriage issues, constitutes thus a reminder of this gravity of issues which can only be discerned in the light of truths, which although are not utilitarian ones, are the truths nevertheless, an attempt to form a community drifting away from its Christian roots. The fundamentalists have essentially reinvigorated American politics from its small liberal progressive smugness, and have made the American civilization divided dramatically by “culture wars”, which form at the same time the most vibrant front of contemporary moral debates.<sup>107</sup> The rise of the religiously minded people in the public square has definitely changed America during the last generation, and has made it incomprehensible in largely secular Europe. But American religious revival cannot be understood in any other way, but as a reaction against the liberal monism and its cultural image of a society born out of the counter-cultural revolution, which has caused many aspects of American life to slide into crude barbarism defined proudly by the liberal left as “liberation” and victory of “rights”.

Even the non-religious observers discern this radically civilized character of the religious presence in the public square in the best tradition of the American reform movements.<sup>108</sup> Thus although it is true, as one of the commentators remarked, that the religious revivalists

“have been associated culturally mainly with conservatism and politically with the Republican Party, (...). this was the process done by default, the suicidal change inside of the Democratic Party into an ideological party of the liberal-left, with its radical cultural program excluding religious people by definition”.<sup>109</sup>

But the program of the religious Right, mainly based on a huge alliance of evangelicals and Catholics was at the same time “God-infused politics of social reform”, a program of social reform in the best tradition of the abolitionists and the populists, the progressives and the suffragettes, the civil rights crusades and even the antiwar activism of the middle 1960s when many of them cut their teeth. Thus

“like the Victorian reformers who strove to mitigate the worst consequences of the industrial revolution, religious conservatism, at its best, is a response to the excesses of the sexual revolution—the fatherless children and broken homes, the millions of abortions and the commodification of human life. The eras aren’t parallel, but these are similarities: The Victorian reformers passed the laws against abortion that [the religious Right] yearn to restore, and waged war

<sup>106</sup> This is the basic misunderstanding, which the progressive liberals have with the fundamentalists, namely a constant surprise that they, “primitive” people do not understand that economic interests are the basic ones over the spiritual ones, and if they don’t, then the fundamentalists possess false consciousness. See Th. Frank, *What’s the Matter with Kansas?*, Holt & Co., New York 2004; N. Mellow, *The State of Disunion: Regional Sources of Modern American Partisanship*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 2008.

<sup>107</sup> See on this from a liberal left perspective S. George, *Hijacking America: How the Secular and Religious Right Changed What Americans Think*, Polity Press, Oxford 2007.

<sup>108</sup> This aspect of it is especially stressed by Christopher Lasch.

<sup>109</sup> See on that A.C. Carson, *From Reagan Democrats to Social Conservatives: Hard Choices Facing the Pro-Family Cause* [in:] Ch.W. Dunn (ed.), *The Future of Conservatism...*, p. 1001–1112.

against the same kind of crude, politicized Darwinism that's associated with the contemporary culture of death. Given these obstacles, religious conservatives have made great strides – but for now, at least they changed American politics without fundamentally changing America. There have been gains: the abortion rate has dropped, and the country is marginally pro-life than 30 years ago; the divorce rate has dropped as well; and the erosion of religious faith that prompted Time magazine to ponder the death of God has been halted, though not necessarily reversed. The push for euthanasia has been largely turned back so far, and if the courts are not yet prepared to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, there is greater reason for pro-life hope than in 1970's or the Clinton years. There is a good chance that the religious people like the Progressives or the civil rights reformers before them will someday be able to look back over the patient work of decades and see a nation transformed by their labors.<sup>110</sup>

What we have here is a clear statement showing that the public rise of the religiously minded people in America was done in the name of the community and was essentially self defensive. This was so, because the “liberation” of the 60's and radical secular modernity began to threaten the very essence of society as such, the moral order of civility. What the American society was committing was a kind of institutional suicide defined as final and long awaited freedom, abandoning habits, disciplines and communal life in favor of “emancipation”, which in too many instances turned out to be a liberation into oblivion or disaster. The grudgingly accepted opinion, that the religious public presence is a civilizing cultural and social force in America, is only marred by one cliché, of calling the movement and its leaders “theocons”, as if suggesting that what we are about to have is a theocratic state despite the overtly humanistic effects of such people's efforts. This constitutes an ominous case of not such a subtle case of criminalization by association, when the very word “theocon” elicits images of theocratic government like Iran or Saudi Arabia, where ordinary life may be in certain aspects civilized, but the regime is horrible from the liberal point of view. This prompted Richard J. Neuhaus, the editor of an influential journal “First Things”, one of the major leaders of this culturally conservative, by the liberal-left standards of definition, religious coalition to remark that:

“I don't think I'll go along with being called a theocon, not even accepting it with ‘a wink and a grin.’ To too many, the term inevitably implies theocracy, which is the very opposite of what my friends and I have been contending for all these years. I will never tire of insisting that the alternative to the naked public square is not the sacred public square but the civil public square. The purpose is to renew the liberal democratic tradition by, among other things, opening the public square to the full and civil engagement of the convictions of all citizens, including their religiously informed moral convictions. I am guilty as charged by some conservatives. I am a liberal democrat. For instance, I have argued over decades that the pro-life position is the position of a liberalism that has an inclusive definition of the community, including unborn children, for which we accept common responsibility. Similarly, it is the liberal position to support the right of parents to decide how their children should be educated through vouchers or other instruments of parental choice. On these and many other questions, liberalism was radically redefined beginning in the 1960's, with the ironic result that I and others of like convictions are called conservatives. Our cause is the restoration and renewal of the liberal democratic tradition, which is the greatest political achievement of our civilization. There is

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<sup>110</sup> R. Douthat, *Theocon Moment*, “The Wall Street Journal”, April 6, 2006, p. A14.

yet another and more important reason to decline the ‘theocon’ label. No political cause and no political order deserves to bear the name of God. That honor is reserved to the Church of Jesus Christ, which its faith and Eucharistic liturgy enacts and anticipates the authentically new politics of the promised kingdom of God. America is a nation under God, but not even at its very best is it God’s nation”<sup>111</sup>

The covenantal mentality of the Americans is a deeply ingrained cultural code of a society still living in a state of nervous vigilance over its mission, its potential and its promise of redemption, not only of them but eventually of the entire world. From a perspective of the European metaphysical boredom this is a sign of eternal immaturity of Americans, kind of an adolescent fever to be discarded as quickly as possible. But Americans are the last heroic, self-conscious people believing in their civilization, in fact the last people of the Western world considering it, as collectivity, worth preserving and defending. For this very reason this mentality of covenant, mission, fear of failure as well as a desire to fulfill the promise of their own “proposition” is a sign of vitality and, not a dangerous sign of a civilization which strayed into wilderness of history and is slowly decaying, the fate into which, for instance, the European Union might have chosen to march.

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<sup>111</sup> R.J. Neuhaus, *While We’re at That*, p. 70.