RSA 15-16 (2004-2005)

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A Nation with the Soul of a Church? The Strange Career of Religion in America: A View from Europe[1]

For most Europeans the role of religion in American politics is a vexing puzzle that has become, after the collusion of neocons and theocons around George W. Bush, a full-fledged enigma. A panel in New York with European intellectuals drawn from the political Left and Right ended on a sullen note: "The role of religion in U.S. politics was an affront to European secularism" (Anderson 143). Behind this transatlantic discord there is a longer story of crossed purposes and mutual misunderstanding. As early as 1830 the French aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville noted with surprise that in the U.S.A. religion and democracy were not in opposition (Tocqueville I, 310ff.). Unlike in Europe there was a marked compatibility, if not reciprocity, between religious and democratic passions (I, 319). After all, had not the American clergy supported the revolutionary struggle (I. 310-18)? James Bryce, British ambassador to the U.S. from 1907 to 1913, noticed that Christianity in America, although based on doctrinally weak voluntary associations, had become the "common law of the United States" (Bryce 560-1). And the English novelist G. K. Chesterton concluded in 1920 that the U.S. was "a nation with the soul of a church" (Mead).[2] Chesterton captured the synergy between religion and nationalism and called it "civil religion" which he, like Max Weber, attributed to the influence of Puritans and Calvinists on the American body politic.

But how do the observations of Tocqueville, Chesterton and Bryce square with the institutional separation of church and state? For the republic was conceived by the founding fathers as a radically secular state with an enlightened constitution, a document which does not mention God at all. This is remarkable in view of the current brouhaha over the constitution in supposedly secular Europe where a sizeable portion of the

parliament demands that God be mentioned in the preamble. In the U.S. God was referred to in the ratifying conventions for the constitution, but only abstractly as "supreme ruler of the universe" (Bailyn 547). As a follower of the French and Scottish enlightenments, Thomas Jefferson saw a wall of separation between church and state. He, James Madison and particularly George Washington were sympathetic to freemasonry. To this day the iconography of the one-dollar note speaks for the historic impact of that decidedly secular tradition. Like their friend, Benjamin Franklin, they were at best agnostics or deists who kept a respectful distance to God and the established church. In the *Federalist Papers* James Madison had argued eloquently for a perfect separation between ecclesiastical and civil matters. The first amendment secured these positions of the Federalist debate: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

Eight years later congress had an occasion to test the first amendment in political practice. At this time the young republic was developing new markets in the Mediterranean. In 1796 U.S. Consul General Joel Barlow negotiated the treaty of Tripoli with Muslim representatives of the Barbary Coast in North Africa. The Barbary States were the rogue nations of their day who made money through piracy and extortion on the high seas. The treaty was designed to curb the raids of Muslim pirates on the American merchant marine, hence its wording was penned to prevent religion from interfering with the commercial progress of the young republic. Congress recognized these secular priorities and ratified the treaty by unanimous vote. It was signed into law by President John Adams in 1797.

> As the government of the United States is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion, - as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion or tranquillity of Messelmen [sic], - and as the States never have entered into any war or act of hostility against any Mohammedan nation, it is declared by the parties that no pretext arising from religious opinion shall ever interrupt the harmony existing between the two countries.[3]

Would a similar treaty with the rogue nations of today, say with Iran, Syria or Libya, be conceivable and would it receive a unanimous vote in

Congress? Not if we go by current political leaders and their understanding of the relationship between religion and politics? The platform of the Republican party of Texas states unequivocally: "The Republican Party of Texas affirms the United States of America is a Christian nation..." On the occasion of the Republican convention Senator Sam Brownback from Kansas urged his party on 3 Sept. 2004 to reconsider the separation of church and state, and Tom Delay, Republican majority speaker in the house, left no doubt as to his religious roots or credentials:

> Only Christianity offers a comprehensive worldview that covers all areas of life and thought, every aspect of creation. Only Christianity offers a way to live in response to the realities that we find in this world — only Christianity. (Cooperman A 05)

Nominally George W. Bush belongs to a mainline religion — he was raised Episcopalian and thanks to his wife is today a Methodist, but he testified as a born-again. Thus his world view, particularly as it surfaces in his political rhetoric, must be called evangelical. His first attorney general, John Ashcroft, is a member of a premillenarian denomination with an apocalyptic world view expecting Armageddon and the second coming of Christ (and the conversion of the Jews) to be just around the corner. The willingness of the new political class to embed foreign policy decisions in religious rhetoric stands in marked contrast to the institutional secularism of the founding fathers. The current mood marks a turning point in the role of religion and secularism in American public life.

Most European observers tend to dismiss the new religious turn in American politics either as a loopy ideology ("opium for the people") or as a cynical ploy to curry favor with religious voters. Therefore they would just as soon ignore it. This would be a serious mistake. We are dealing with a new religious awakening and a moral realignment with far-reaching consequences for policy making in years to come. And yet, to the religious historian there is precious little that is truly new. One secret for the continued vitality of religion in the U.S. lies in the very logic of the First Amendment which put in place a powerful dialectical

tension between institutional secularism and a series of grass roots religious responses. Thirty years after its ratification James Madison praised the wisdom of this reactive logic in a letter to Edward Livingston, adding a comment that reveals his ulterior motives: "Religion flourishes in greater purity, without than with the aid of Govt" (Koch 465-6).[4] He expected that the institutional secularism of the Republic would in the long run encourage religious energies rather than suppress them. He figured that it would be best to leave the production and organization of religious energies to the market, that is to the vote and control of the consumer. In short, the separation of church and state has given a boost to a market oriented religion. Divesting established religion of all power and turning the religious controls over to the customer, this constitutes Madison's conservative cunning in preparing the ground for an exceptional American popular religiosity with a patriotic spin.

Since the times of the founders the religious market has come a long way, but where exactly are we now? Have the formerly secular institutions been over-layered or even displaced by the tidal wave of religious passions pushed relentlessly forward by the booming religious market? Is the institutional secularism in danger of being dislocated by the growing theocratic passions of leading politicians and their clienteles? Are not the United States today by common consent a Christian nation? The question arises: Are we witnessing a return to an older theocratic disposition, or is this a new and "post-secular" religiosity that is qualitatively and politically different? What long range effect does the commodification of religion have? Does it set limits to its doctrinal import and thus curtail its influence on politics? Is commodification in fact a new, subtle form of secularization? Are we dealing with a form of religion that has more to do with individualized life-style politics, less with classic religious doctrine? This is ground for much debate on both sides of the Atlantic. A key question is, what were the intentions of the founders? It seems that such historical knowledge has been dimmed over time; indeed there is an increased revisionist debate by Christian-nation advocates that the intentions of the founders with respect to religion were different from what the First Amendment says. This change of interpretation may have to do with the

measurable changes in the religious life of the republic since the founding fathers. More people attend church today (60%) than in 1789 when Finke and Stark estimated a mere 17% churchgoers. The sense of national identity has undergone a profound change too, and political realignment has taken a religious turn. There is currently a partisan division between those who go to church and vote overwhelmingly Republican and those who don't and vote Democrat. But there is also a growing recognition that Americans base their national identity, including their quotidian patriotism, on beliefs that have a religious origin. This symbiosis of a robust nationalism and commodified religion makes secular European observers nervous. To unravel this puzzle of religion and politics from a transatlantic perspective and to move beyond stereotypes let me start with six working hypotheses that mark the differences in the historical unfolding of the American religious experience.

First: The secularization of the public sphere, which we in Europe associate with the French revolution and with Napoleon's radical disenfranchisement of the church, did not play itself out in quite the same way in the U.S. Whereas the modernizing thrust of secularization reached certain cosmopolitan segments of the population, it did not affect the lower or middle classes.[5] Although the forces of modernization, which Max Weber names as the primal causes of secularization, were in the U.S. more rigorous than in Europe, they did not lead to a disenchantment with religion. The explanation for this development lies in the logic of the First Amendment: The institutional disestablishment of religion combined with the empowerment of individual believers led to its phenomenal success on the free market.

Second: After the foundation of a secular republic a process of reactive desecularization has set in, first regionally, then nationally and more in the lower to middle than in the upper and educated classes. Animated by the First Amendment's "free exercise" and protected by the "anti-establishment clause" a series of popular religious reactions from the 18th to the 21st centuries occurred. The last of these awakenings began after the liberal revolutions of the sixties which provoked popular and regional responses. Since then the formerly "silent" or "moral majorities" have

become politically active. After the prayer-in-school decision in 1962 and after Rowe vs. Wade in 1973 desecularization accelerated rapidly and seriously impacted the national political arena in a divisive fashion pitting a conservative moralism against a "secular humanism." Out of this confrontation grew the so-called culture wars with their politics of denunciation and resentment (Frank).[6]

Third: The American political arena is energized by a pendulum swing between secular and religious passions. Within this highly charged and divided battle zone new forms of religion have emerged whose types of worship and performance styles are quite (post)modern. These are designer-religions attuned to the metaphysical needs of those individuals who grew up in that melodramatic confrontation.

Fourth: The new religious turn is energized and channeled by popular culture. Over the course of American history there has been a cumulative indigenization of popular, religious, apocalyptic and millenarian fantasies of religious fringe groups that fled European persecution. These found a welcome home in America where they could develop their exceptional character in an open religious market.[7] Particularly the premillenarian, Gothic and melodramatic fantasies of the apocalypse have found a niche in the popular culture market as the success of Tim LaHaye's and Jerry Jenkins' *Left Behind* series testifies (Boyer).

Fifth: The demands of the market have honed the ritual and shaped the choreography of American religions and have over time lead to an increasing commodification of religion and to its *mise en scene* as spectacle. The popular culture market has hijacked religious symbolism and has brought religious rhetoric as added moral value into the secular sphere. We may roughly distinguish four groups that are competing in the public sphere: First, the pre-secular fundamentalists of the "old time religion"; second, an urban educated class belonging to mainline religions that is comfortable with a separation of church and state; third, post-secular revivalists and evangelicals on the one hand; and fourth, postmodern life-style and designer religions offering metaphysical nurture in a complex world on the other.

Sixth: Tocqueville understood the symbiosis of millenarian and

grass roots democratic passions, also their absorption into a religiously based popular patriotism. He wrote: "Thus religious zeal is perpetually warmed in the United States by the fires of patriotism" (I 317). This fusion resulted in a sacralization of national rhetoric, which has over time become a habit of the American executive office. The president is expected to speak as the high priest of civil religion, particularly when addressing matters of national concern. Europeans tend to find such executive rhetoric hypocritical and hard to stomach.[8]

These six deviations from the European secularization paradigm have given a special religious spin to America's political culture which seems odd to many Europeans. I shall try to chart the cumulative momentum of this mysterious symbiosis of politics and religion in fourteen historical transformations that are placed in a rough sequence from Colonial times to the present. Each transformation represents a new stage in the cumulative Americanization of religion and contributes to its exceptional character.

1. *Myths of Conquest and the Foundational Ideology*

The motivations and impulses which in the 16th and 17th centuries led to the peopling of the Americas contained strong religious yearnings. Even before the so-called discovery of America the *reconquista* of the Spanish peninsula was driven by religious motives, as was the entire project of the Reformation with its self-propelling missionary zeal. The conviction of many groups to act as an agent of God's purpose and to be a chosen people or a redeemer nation speaks for itself. These utopian projections went into the making of the foundational ideology of Massachusetts Bay and created a narcissistic myth of origin with high demands on the elected people. John Cotton reminded his congregation: "Where much is given, much is demanded," thus instilling a sense of civic gratitude which persists until this day. For the entire world to see, a city upon a hill should vindicate the god-given experiment, an experiment which should unfold in time and become manifest in the historical practice of its indi-

vidual members. The norms of this new commonwealth were recorded in a covenant "knit together by voluntary consent." The stakes were high, so high that after one generation the new Americans had the feeling of falling behind their intended goals necessitating a halfway covenant.[9] The city upon a hill was in permanent danger of slipping and becoming a sink of iniquity. This danger of imminent moral decline was heralded in innumerable sermons and jeremiads. However, the jeremiad was always prompted by an optimism, that such decline could be stopped in time by proper reform. Thus this tension between real or imagined fear of decline and the energetic reversal has become a strong motive of all reform movements in the U.S. Typically these would like to return to a better previous condition, or expressed differently, they want to correct the ill effects of the most recent modernization in order to return to a sacred tradition embedded in the myth of origin and thus embark on a new and much improved future. Here lies one core impulse for the vitality of religious revivals and for the stability of a situational conservatism. The proper text type is that of the jeremiad which is designed to prime the pump of reform. Therefore it does not surprise that many books of social criticism are written in the style of the jeremiad. Regardless of illegibility they end up on the unread bestseller lists, for they touch the central nervous system of national identity. They are an expression not only of a feeling of crisis that the American dream is in grave danger, but also of the optimism, that with a change of the bad ways on the part of the faithful its fulfillment is just around the corner.

2. *The Tradition of Dissent*

The dynamics of settlement in the New World (1607-1760) was choreographed by the export of European religious radicalism and its divisive secessions. The founding fathers of New England were "non-conformists" who resented the "acts of uniformity" of the established church. Among them we find many sectarians and antinomian spirits who wanted a better religion and politics. They were pushed out by the corrupt feudal

powers in Europe and pulled in by the relative freedom in the New World. A concerted spirit of dissent united religious individualists and seekers of God to establish freedom in the New World. The tradition of "here I stand" strengthened the individual consciousness and the anti-authoritarian particularism; it established the tradition of the right to dissent and the belief in individual responsibility. This frame of mind motivated the dissenters in their own midst — say Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams - to fight the emergence. of new power structures. Hutchinson challenged the patriarchy of religious authority in general, Williams stood for a separation of church and state — at a time when Massachusetts Bay was a patriarchal theocracy. Indeed there was much intolerance against dissenters within the New World: The radical belief to be in possession of the correct faith led to a zero-sum game within a Manichean dispensation. This ideological rigor is at work to this day and may help to explain the binary options of political correctness. You are either good or bad, for the coalition of the willing or against it; you are either born again or left behind, smoker or militant non-smoker. Bumper stickers reinforce such binary alternatives: "America love it or leave it." Those lukewarm middling positions, so typical of Europe, find no place in this zero-sum game.

3. *Structural Exclusion*

In Europe whose political centers were subject to the feudal dictum *cuius regia, eius religio* (which captures the collusion of feudal authority and religious power) the churches were gradually cleansed of deviant religious fantasies. Incompatible faiths were forcibly ejected both by the religious and by the secular authorities, and the New World became the receptacle of these unwanted religions. Soon radical, democratic, and separatist fringe groups of the reformation withdrew to the politically safe periphery of the colonies. The Puritans, Pilgrims, Anabaptists, Mennonites, Hutterites, Amish, Herrenhuthers, Schwenckfelders, Diggers, Quakers, Pietists and Shakers — all ended up in North America, some after a detour via Russia. In 1855 Philip Schaff aptly called America "the Phoenix grave

... of all European churches and sects" (Mead 263). These religious groups bonded on the basis of a voluntary consent of individual dissenters. They implanted local habits which later would become the *grass roots* of democracy. As Soren Kierkegaard put it: Radical Protestantism threw out King or Pope and set the public on the throne. On the American continent religious groups did not define themselves on the basis of a hegemonic, top-down doctrine ("Roma locuta, causa finita"), but on the basis of their practical Christianity, basically through a visible moral life in plain daylight, as Hawthorne put it. American religiosity on the basis of its voluntaristic origin — and this is an important difference from Europe — never stood in opposition to a grass-roots politics of individual rights. While Europe held on to deeply rooted *ecclesias,* America received footloose denominations. Their survival depended on their ability to solicit new converts in the public sphere. This enhanced their personal mission and it prepared the ground for learning the high art of religious mobilization.

4. *Distance between Metropolis and Colony*

The geographic location of the colonies on the periphery of the Western world led to a gradual uncoupling of the New World faithful from the centers of ecclesiastic power in Europe. The sheer distance between Virginia and the homeland disrupted the chain of command. The authority of the central ecclesia was no longer active, the power of the bishops waned and the entire idea of belonging to a high church was perforated by each new day of congregational practice in the New World. Local clergy in Virginia "went native", and the faithful took the running of religion into their own hands. As a consequence the authority of the local congregation increased *vis a vis* the national church. Even within the more established Anglican groups this fact strengthened the budding grass roots democracy and weakened the authority of the episcopacy or the institutional power of the home church. Westminster was appalled by what happened in Virginia. Religious self-rule

within local congregations (hence congregationalism) became the American way and shaped all incoming groups. Even American Catholicism adjusted to the American temptation by practicing a critical, studied distance to Rome and by joining the market as a fighting denomination among equal denominations. For a long time the Vatican maintained a hostile stance toward such creeping "Americanization."

5. *Open Frontier and Call of the West*

In a geographic space defined by an open western border there emerged an East-to-West trajectory of declining normative constraints. Whereas in the earlier settlements along the Atlantic coast line religious persuasions stabilized and became hegemonic, the populist-radical energies moved towards a frontier whose liberating appeal was proverbial. As a rule the East tended to be structurally stronger and hence more conservative whereas the West was structurally weak and hence open to radical innovation. Typically the first two awakenings of 1730 and 1800 had their strongest following along the respective frontiers. Even today cults and sects become more exotic and unrestrained towards the West. This loosening of norms encouraged a vernacularization in terms of religious performance and the waning of liturgical constraints. We should not underestimate a concrete motive in moving West: That the availability of real estate in the West made new utopian religious communities possible. The Mormons dominated Utah and the Bhagvan sect simply bought up a region in Oregon. The Branch Davidians holed up in a ranch in Waco, Texas. Any number of cults or sects from Satanism to New Age find refuge on the West Coast.

6. *Pluralism & Territorialization*

In spite of the theocratic intolerance of Massachusetts Bay, a territorial pluralism set in relatively early. Already before the revolution Puritans,

Pilgrims, Baptists, Catholics, Quakers and Anglicans shared the New World territories and coexisted on what a German leftist called "islands of equality and happiness" (Wagner 100-113). The availability of land permitted groups to avoid confrontation and to exercise tolerance by maintaining a safe geographic distance. Yet, all these groups bonded against the radically other, Indians and Africans, and despite all doctrinal differences there emerged a new solidarity in a nativism with a White-Anglo-Saxon Protestant spin. Here we may look into the function of racism for the stabilization of a civil religion or national identity. The right to pursue one's individual religious path, which the first awakening proclaimed, became an important ingredient of the pre-revolutionary ideology which, when properly secularized, found its articulation in the declaration of independence. The individualization of religion via voluntarism contains its future development into a marketable commodity within a service industry. A cartoon in the *New Yorker* captures well the temptations of a proprietary individualism within free exercise: Two Pilgrims step off the Mayflower. One says to the other: "My initial motive in coming here is religious freedom, but eventually I am going into real estate."

7. *Institutional Separation of State and Church*

Grass-roots political practice had already developed during colonial rule. A pragmatic consensus emerged that, given the unavoidable geographic proximity, there was no alternative to religious tolerance. The liberal strands of the French enlightenment, the idea of proprietary individualism, and common-sense philosophy found a direct echo in the American experience. Hence the political positions of the founding fathers which were drawn from the Scottish and French enlightenment came together during 1750 to 1776. Even the clergy spoke of an American way and interpreted the revolution as the realization of God's providence and as progress on the road to the new Jerusalem. "The will of the people is the will of God," became a mantra of the constitutional debates suggesting

that natural rights were divinely sanctioned. Here again we need to remind Europeans that in contrast to the anti-democratic instincts of European churches, the Protestant basis in America was never anti-revolutionary. Indeed, during the course of the first half of the 18th century chiliastic and political rhetoric merged and fed directly into secession. Now the American revolutionaries had the practical problem of bringing regionally dominant religious groups under one political umbrella. This led to the separation of church and state, or better, to the non-involvement of the state in the religious affairs of its citizens.

During this period (1776-1789) the church as *ecclesia,* that is as an institutional power was effectively dismantled. The constitution guaranteed the rights of proprietary individuals and reacted nervously to any other power. This alone would help to explain the long hostility against a Rome-driven Catholicism. The political federalism which grew from Colonial practice corresponded to a so-called denominationalism within a wide and doctrinally vague Protestant frame. Not church, not religious dogma, not liturgy, but denomination — this is the principle of religious organization in the United States. The First Amendment tied these habits into law: It protected the access to the smorgasbord of religions as part of the individually guaranteed freedoms, but it forbade the establishment of religious power. To wit, the founders tried to avoid the religious divisiveness which in Europe had led to centuries of conflict. And yet, it would be wrong to read the First Amendment as hostile to religion. Indeed the founding fathers strongly believed in the necessity of religious morals for the running of state matters. The development of sound republican virtues of its ruling class fell to the educational institutions (Meyer). Hence the political culture of the young Republic adopted the moral framework of a widely defined Protestantism. Religion served as a moral, not as an institutional buttress. Benjamin Rush defined the function of religion as public education for the stabilization of Republican virtues: "The only foundation for a useful education in a republic is to be laid in religion. Without it there can be no virtue, and without virtue there can be no liberty, and liberty is the object and life of all republican governments."

8. *Civil Religion*

The millenarianism of the city upon a hill was secularized after the revolution and became part of a political self-definition as God's own country with a manifest destiny (Bellah 1-21). This republican ideology was based on virtues which were gleaned from the Calvinist-Puritan ethos. A general disposition that Max Weber diagnosed as *innerweltliche Askese* was buttressed by accountability and stewardship. The fear of libertarian tendencies and divisive faction remained strong as the Federalist Papers and the farewell address of George Washington testify. Until then it was generally believed that republics of large size were bound to fail. As Louis Hartz reminded us, there were no estates, no feudalism, no trades and guilds, no ecclesia nor a system of civil associations. Hence civil religion acquired an important centripetal and pedagogical function, and the religiously based foundation myths went into the making of a secular civil religion which was supposed to keep the heterogeneous construct together. While denominations fought each other in the market they were held together by a common civil religion which joined forces with the ideology of a liberal laissez faire capitalism. It is paramount that everyone accept the civil religion of the American Creed without compulsion, as a free and individual choice. This Arminian turn and the implied personal acceptance are often repeated in publicly ritualized confessions of loyalty. Five ideological pillars stabilize this creed: 1) democracy as the voluntary consent of free individuals, 2) freedom in the dual sense, freedom from political repression and freedom to pursue one's individual happiness, 3) opposition against tyranny and central authority as a consequence of a strong grass roots localism, 4) individualism, both as a set of rights and a set of obligations in the sense of proprietary individualism and Calvinistic stewardship, 5) belief in progress within a providential, divine plan.

9. *Voluntarism*

Grass roots localism and voluntarism which flourished In the young

republic also shaped the new religious movements. Religious voluntarism founds a political parallel in the liberal consensus and its economic parallel in the free market economy. It was a basic experience of everyone in the young Republic that religious and political voluntarism go hand in hand, indeed define and support each other; for both derive from a desire for political progress and for the expansion of democracy. Voluntarism became the basic moral ground of a progress-oriented new nationalism. In the early 19th century many new denominations flourished on Republican soil — Mormons, Millerites, Disciples of Christ, Campbellites, Darbyites, some of these based on radical protestant utopias or on revolutionary social programs, but all devoted to a robust nationalism. Here the arguments of Adam Smith and James Madison for a free market of religions were prophetic: The new freedom imparted to American religions a high energy level; at the same time the many denominations immunized each other. By setting all religions free, many of them prospered, yet no single one could dominate the market. Denominations that did not survive this struggle disappeared without a trace and were consequently forgotten.

10. *Immigration and Ethnic Religions*

After 1830 immigration introduced an new ethnic marker into the religious landscape. Ethnic boundary maintenance destabilized established religious groups. Now the *una sancta catholica* split into Polish, Irish, French, Italian and German varieties of Catholicism. Lutheran synods had a German, Swedish, Finnish and Dutch wing. Self-identification was given an ethno-religious turn: Dutch Reformed, Irish Catholic, German Lutheran, Greek Orthodox. Jews were an exceptional case, for they could be seen both as an ethnic and religious group. Solidarity and community were redefined in ethno-religious terms. As the religious landscape began to fragment evermore, the American Creed with its rituals, national symbols, the flag and pledges, became important as an integrational ideology. Civil religion also helped to Americanize the European religious

imports and their bad habits. This nativist honing of European religiosity is particularly evident in the Americanization of Catholicism. During the last 100 years American Catholics challenged the authority of the Roman ecclesia most effectively, beginning with the dogma of the infallibility of the Pope to the marked dissent of American nuns to the Pope's notion of gender roles. African-American religions developed their own institutions and structures after the revolution within the dialectics of the slave experience and of current racism (Waldschmidt-Nelson). And yet, all denominations considered the American Creed their common denominator. Currently a burning question concerns the role of Islam within a U.S. civil religion: Can Islam be Americanized or denominationalized? Can Islam join the Judaeo-Christian consensus? There are profound reservations on the part of orthodox Jews and Christians.

11. *Revivals and Awakenings*

After 1730 the centers of religious power or the emerging theological establishments were repeatedly shaken by revivals and awakenings. These served to de-hierarchize, de-stabilize and de-institutionalize the emerging religious power structures. This is particularly true of the Second Great Awakening. The born-again experience personalized the religious commitment and thereby reduced the importance of religious institutions and their role as deputies. Through a personal awakening the individual had a "personal hotline to God", as a current televangelist put it. This universal apostolate confirms the religious self-reliance of the common man and thus introduces radical democracy into American religious practice. Who would then require religious authorities for the understanding of doctrinal matters? The individualized experience of a conversion increased the importance of personal agency: "Have you chosen Jesus Christ as your personal savior?" became the litmus test of religious authenticity. While traditional Calvinism had believed in the relative powerlessness of the individual — for the state of grace as well as the acceptance into the circle of the saved depended on outside agencies and

the arbitrary doings of a *deus absconditus* — the new evangelicalism rook an Arminian and democratic turn. The born-again status and the salvation of one's soul now depended on the active willingness of the individual to be "saved" rather than be "left behind." Political responsibility now received another moral and individualistic turn; the individual was called upon and taken to account as believer. This may help to explain the moral rigor, the robust sense of self and the doctrinal aggressiveness of the saved. But this salvation, though individualized, is rarely an "intimate" or "private" experience, but as a rule has a collective, even contagious character. The individual is member in a redemption community or of a redeemer nation. The sharing of such experience by public testimony is more or less mandatory. Mass revivals do for religions what realignments do for parties. The interaction rituals are remarkably similar. Religious awakenings played a central role after 1830 as agencies of moral renewal in a period of rapid modernization. They brought deviant social behavior into line.

In the course of American history there were five religious revivals, each one led also to a political realignment. The Great Awakening of 1730 culminated in the American revolution. The religious revival of the 1800-1830 resulted in the democratic reforms of Jacksonianism. The fundamentalist and spiritualist religious passions of 1890-1900 fed into progressive reform. And during 1965-70 we witnessed the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement under the guidance of religious leaders such as Martin Luther King or the equally chiliastic Nation of Islam. At the moment we witness another such awakening determined to Christianize the American nation and global politics. The most radical wing of the current religious mobilization argues for a repeal of the separation of church and state. But even the televangelists are motivated by a dream for a better America or a better world, and they produce a great number of modern jeremiads to achieve their goals. These are, in contrast to Europe, not necessarily reactionary. Evangelicals believe in political progress and in the opening of democratic choice "for our people." Revivals and awakenings have a special role in political mobilizations. In this context the *mise en scene* of party rallies and national conventions is remarkably similar to reli-

gious revivals. Conversely the religious mobilizations of Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, Billy James Hargis' Christian Crusade, the Pro-Life Movement and Billy and Kenneth Graham's crusades have acquired a new political edge. There has been a convergence of purpose between religious and political mobilizations. All of these mobilizations in politics, media, or religion have taken a vernacular turn and have become part of the popular culture market and its rules of performance.

12. *Religious Spectacle*

Religious authority is not maintained by institutional dogma, religious doctrine or traditions of liturgy, and least of all by the hermeneutical monopoly of the clergy. In America only popular revivals serve to give new direction to religion. Only strategies of awakening will lead to the personal acceptance of Jesus as a personal savior. During the course of the 19th century these mobilization strategies became part and parcel of the political process. Hence such "spectacles of civil religion" are important for political mobilization and for stabilizing the American creed, as may be witnessed in election rallies, football games, parades, and naturalization rituals. The patterns of this mobilization and remnants of its religious zeal may also be found in secular causes, as in the anti-smoking campaigns or in advertising, whose moral and soteriological claims may at times assume the aggressive tones and the fighting rigor of a mission. "Mobilizing converts," "mobilizing voters" and "mobilizing customers" require similar strategies of persuasion. Spectacles are useful vehicles for such mobilizations within a free-market format.

There are elected affinities between religious and all other spectacles, whereby the latter profit from the residual religious energy in its *mise en scene.* This affinity between religion and markets may help to explain why the founding fathers of modern advertising, Claude Hopkins, Bruce Barton or Artemus Ward, were sons of protestant ministers who had been earmarked for the clergy. When they defected to the enemy they simply transferred their soteriological know-how to the promotion of commodities. Strategies of religious awakening could easily be secularized for the mobilization of customer desires. Advertising refined these strategies from 1900 to the 1960s. Now televangelists have bought these promo-

tional strategies back into the management of religion. Media-oriented religiosity is choreographed as spectacle, in which doctrinal differences become ever more unimportant just as the conversion coefficient is increasingly more important. Few followers of Billy Graham, Jim Bakker or Robert Schuller know or care what denomination these leaders belong to. Doctrinal differences are played down. In fact these televangelists openly recruit Catholics or Jews — formerly objects of virulent hatred of traditional Protestants — as new religious customers. While in terms of doctrine these new media religions are vaguely defined, there is a noticeable political orientation. Most are opposed to the rapid liberalization and secularization of life-styles after the sixties.

13. *Modernization and Fundamentalism*

Fundamentalism is popularly explained as a reaction to the process of modernization, liberalization and secularization of the public sphere. This is plausible. Individuals and groups embrace their right to free exercise by compensating the felt excesses of modernization and by taking recourse to simple, traditional answers. Instead of believing in a scientific materialism that remains forever open-ended they withdraw into a closed system of total explanation called "intelligent design." To combat the loss of moral orientation within a hedonistic libertinism, which is supported by the media and by a hungry market, individuals reach for normative religions which provide simple and radical solutions to complex problems. They reduce the multiplicity of moral options and the social complexity which weigh heavily on the individual consumer. This desire to reduce complexity may also help to explain the popularity of conspiracy theories in religions with their penchant for a moral Gnosticism and its division of the world into good and evil. Conspiracy and resentment go together, a coalition that has fed into the culture wars and into a politics of denunciation (Ostendorf). Fundamentalism and literalism of the Bible are particularly successful in those groups who have felt the impact of modernization most directly. And yet, despite such sim-

plistic reductions there is an element of choice in the free market of religions. There is a wide selection of fundamentalist denominations or sects to suit a variety of individual tastes and customers. The proliferation of new religions is a function of what a target group specialist Michael Weiss has called the "clustering" of America.[10] Among these we find returns to a pre-secular fundamentalism, but post-secular hybridity and New Age metissage have their religious followers. David Brooks in his bestseller *Bobos in Paradise* quotes a 26-year-old BoBo (Bourgeois Bohemian), daughter of a methodist minister, who positions herself in the religious market as a "Methodist Taoist Native American Quaker Russian Orthodox Buddhist Jew." A rabbi from Montana preaches "flexidoxy", which satisfies the conflicting demands of his faithful for both flexibility and orthodoxy.

To sum up, this central and increasing tension between a simultaneous secularization and sacralization of the public sphere and its *Aufhebung* in a post-secular religiosity must be explained historically. The forces of secularization have advanced steadily as a consequence of modernization. The enlightenment project proceeded via the practical implementation of constitutional law and its current interpretation by the Supreme Court and, until recently, by the educational system. Secularization was also supported by the market, through the dynamics of consumption and life-style politics. The speed of such processes differed greatly between the feudal South and the progressive North, the structurally strong East and structurally weak West, the tradition-orienred country and the cosmopolitan city. Hence the impact of modernization and secularism did not touch everyone the same way throughout this highly territorialized space with its ideological and lifestyle clusters. This fact led to an uneven impact of the modernization drives and hence to a marked difference in the reaction of regional groups. There emerged a patterned landscape, islands of local resentment in a sea of cosmopolitan secularism.[11] These religious islands experienced such rapid changes as a threat to their lifestyle. The process of differential modernization led to a regionally differentiated revival activity and to socially layered processes of pentecostalization, fundamentalization and

evangelicalization. Whenever secularization proceeded nationally, say during the twenties or the seventies, a strong anti-modern fundamentalism was not far in coming. Martin Riesebrodt writes that every fundamentalist wave marked a particular crisis of modernization and, caused a reaction to secularism. Today the major battle lines in the so-called culture wars run between red suburbias and blue cosmopolitan centers. Current American conservatism feeds primarily on religious passions and on a new moral divide.[12]

14. *Selling Jesus and the Commodification of Religion*

Over time the demands of the market have honed the ritual and shaped the liturgy of American religions and have led to an increasing commodification of doctrinal content and to a spectacularization of religious performance styles.[13] Such religious spectacles use as mobilizing strategy a melodramatic and Gnostic conflict between the forces of good and evil. They promise their customers salvation and emotional satisfaction if and when they make right personal choice. At the same time the commercial sphere has hijacked religious symbolism as a mystic or charismatic added value. Such religious symbolism, Graham Ward writes "lives in commercial business, gothic and sci fi fantasy, in health clubs, themed-bars and architectural design, among happy hour drinkers, tattooists, ecologists and cyberpunks. Religion has become a special effect, inseparably bound to an entertainment value." This post-secular commodification of religious symbolism, he adds, serves as "an aesthetic diversion from the profound uncertainties, insecurities and indeterminacies of postmodern living" (Ward). To survive in the market new religious denominations had to learn the business of selling Jesus, primarily via the new media and with the aid of new advertising strategies. Jon Butler quips: "Only in America was Christianity hawked as a 'bargain'" (Moore backcover). Therefore a MBA-driven market language has become perfectly normal in religious discourse and has acquired, in the view of the majority, God's sanction. It is telling that some of the pastors of these mega churches hold

degrees from business rather than from divinity schools. And it shows. The new crowd has graduated from selling Jesus to the marketing of churches and of religious ideologies as commodities. The vanguard in the business now teaches the art of mobilizing paying customers: Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois, with a $ 48 Million budget attracts more than 21,000 people to its weekly services. It services faithful from 90 denominations. The executive pastor Greg Hawkins is a Stanford MBA and an ex-consultant at McKinsey. The Willow Creek Association is headed by Jim Melado who holds an MBA from Harvard and who runs workshops on methods for creating more effective religious markets (Business Week). Most of the new and improved designer denominations are low on ritual and favor an anti-liturgical, iconoclastic, popular and common man bias. The reduction in doctrine makes them more marketable. Today target group research determines the metaphysical needs of the faithful. The return of religion has accelerated another development which has to do with the disappearance of class. In current U.S. public discourse morality and authenticity drive out economics and income disparity. The battle lines run between Joe Sixpack and effete snobs, between genuine, authentic and religious folk and a French speaking Volvo-driving Eastern establishment. Not class, but lifestyle marks the cutting edge of difference. And here the political bottom line is no longer income or class membership, but moral authenticity. In that sense religious beliefs serve as a particularly effective form of self-authentication as full-blooded Americans. The market thus tends to enhance the popular and vernacular service functions of religions which also stabilizes a religiously based anti-intellectualism.[14] The latter trend currently plays itself out in the mobilization against evolution which deeply affects the teaching of natural sciences in the school system. Finally, the need to mobilize and please religious customers from a variety of cultures or classes has led to the inclusion of all sorts of therapeutic lifestyle services which has given some of the new mega churches the aura of a metaphysical wellness club.

Summary

As has become evident patriotism and religion have become partners within a conservative American identity, a symbiosis that has evolved since 1789 and that finds its current manifestation in the above-mentioned collusion of neocons and theocons. Behind this development we see the contours of Madison's cunning. But would he have been happy with the results? His ulterior motif may well have been to design an automatic pilot for the ship of state, a machine that would go of itself. The pilot should control the excesses of an enlightened secularism by leaving the countervailing force of religion to the market and in the hands of the people. At the same time the free exercise of religion within an open market should, as in the system of checks and balances, rein in extreme religious passions. The latter would be self-immunized by the sheer scale of religious competition. In that sense the politics of the founders could be characterized as a type of conservatism that Samuel Huntington labeled "situational" (Huntington, Conservatism). Situational conservatism implies a skeptical attitude toward any change and is based on a conservative anthropology which endeavors to defend the institutional status quo. In America such a conservatism would aim towards the conservation and consolidation of the progressive liberal tradition of the founders as expressed in the *Federalist Papers* and as outlined by Louis Hartz. This yearning for stability inspires the "myth of origin" that is so popular in revivals and renewals. A spin-off of Madison's cunning was to keep the republic. united by an invisible bond of religiously based patriotism. In sum, a liberated and popular religiosity helped to hold the nation together at the very grass roots level. Walter Russell Meade relates the emergence of such grass roots populism to the Jacksonian tradition in American Foreign Policy. What Madison could not foresee is the degree of the commodification and popularization of religion which would pull its doctrinal teeth and thus trivialize its political import. Popular religion has also served to divert attention from class division and thus stabilize the gulf between rich and poor. Madison had warned in *Federalist* X that the "most common and durable source of factions has been the various

and unequal distribution of property." Would he have welcomed the disappearance of class division for the price of a trivial pursuit of a commodified happiness?

I would like to close this archeology of civil religious passions by quoting the American creed rendered in form of a national prayer. A clerk in the House of Representatives, William Tyler Page, penned this symbiosis of religious and political rhetoric in 1918 using as his basis the Lord's Prayer. Most Americans who consider themselves patriots will feel comfortable with the sentiments expressed:

> I believe in the United States of America as a Government of the people by the people, for the people; whose just powers are derived from the consent of the governed; a sovereign Nation of many sovereign States; a perfect union, one and inseparable; established upon those principles of freedom, equality, justice, and humanity for which American patriots sacrificed their lives and fortunes. I therefore believe it is my duty to my country to love it; to support its Constitution; to obey its laws; to respect its flag, and to defend it against all enemies. (Huntington, *American Politics* 159)

NOTES

1. A shorter version of this essay appeared in Delaney and Janssens.

2. Chesterton coined the phrase in answer to persistent queries about what made America special. The question "who are we" has preoccupied Americans from Crevecoeur to Huntington. It is a key issue at ritual moments such as centennials.

3. Joel Barlow is best known as the author of the *Vision of Columbus* (1787), revised 1807 as the C*olumbiad*, an epic poem on the destiny of the young republic. A friend of Jefferson and Paine he shared their disdain for established churches and like them was a strong advocate of the separation of church and state for the sake of inspiring "the passion of commerce" (cf. Rob Boston 11-14).

4. See also Madison's earlier letter of 1774 to William Bradford on Liberty of Conscience (Koch 435-436), or Jefferson's deism in his letter of 1803 to Doctor

Benjamin Rush on "The Morals of Jesus" (Koch 344-346).

5. An interesting case of massive secularization may be witnessed in the funeral practices. Here the role of the churches both concerning grief management and disposal of the body was totally eclipsed by the funeral industrial complex. The Funeral Director has effectively displaced the priest (Laderman passim).

6. The *locus classicus* on resentment politics is Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* (1887). A politics of resentment is a reaction to injury or indifference by those who feel deeply wronged and who seek revenge in a world divided into good and evil. Their own goodness is defined by the projected evil of others. This has resulted in the denunciatory revaluation of liberalism as a term of abuse: Reagan's famous "L-word" is a residual term which includes everything that "Joe Sixpack is not." After the 70s any number of resentment genres emerged in Hollywood. After revenge fantasies came hate radio and in your face television which have contributed to the melodramatic social divisions of the so-called culture wars.

7. Many scholars argue that European secularism is not the rule, but the exception. The return of religious fundamentalism is after all not an American curiosity, but a world wide phenomenon. For an excellent review of the new religious history see Hochgeschwender.

8. The charge of hypocrisy is a stable trope, says Samuel Huntington: "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 a disappointment only because it is also a hope" (Huntington, *American Politics* 262).

9. The covenant tradition and the fear of decline are alive and well: To combat the rising divorce rate after the introduction of the no-fault principle Arizona and Louisiana incorporated into statute the "covenant marriage": "We solemnly declare that marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman who agree to live together as husband and wife for as long as they both live."
www.supreme.state.az.us/dr/Text/Covenant.htm. (See also Michael Coester.)

10. In America which favors the idea of a large "middling class" the European notion of class does not work, certainly not in terms of a class-consciousness. Instead life-style is considered more or less a voluntary free market option. Which of the 49 clusters you choose to belong to is your business. The voluntarism of religion corresponds to a voluntarism in life styles.

11. Thomas Frank presents short biographies of movers and shakers in the conservative movement. Key moments were the school prayer decision of 1962 and Roe vs. Wade (171).

12. Samuel Huntington considers moralism a constant of the American Creed. "In the United States, ideological consensus is the source of political conflict, polarization occurs over moral issues rather than economic ones, and the politics of interest groups is supplemented and at times supplanted by the politics of moralistic reform. America has been spared class conflicts in order to have moral convulsions" *(American Politics* 11). He continues the argument in "Robust Nationalism." "Conservatism is rooted in religion; liberalism is not . . . . In contemporary America, religious commitment and conservatism march arm in arm in battle against secularism, relativism and liberalism."

13. Commodification and spectacularization are not unique to America nor to its New Religious Movements. In our celebrity-obsessed media culture, Pope John Paul II was called a "pop star pontiff' whose special talents as a charismatic communicator were much appreciated by the entertainment industry. The enthusiasm generated at mass spectacles in Catholic Europe, however, does not translate into fuller churches or to an increase of clergy.

14. It is telling that the antichrist in Tim LaHaye's and Jerry Jenkins' *Left Behind* series is a polyglot, cosmopolitan intellectual from Roumania, Nicolae Carpathia, who speaks six languages, who believes in liberal values and who is the designated secretary general of the United Nations. There is a comic side to the plots of an apocalyptic and melodramatic imagination.

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