

The Search for Shared Values

One of the ongoing debates in contemporary theology, philosophy, sociology, and politics is over what role, if any, religion should play in the public sphere, or the routine public exchange of ideas.¹ Led by thinkers such as Jürgen Habermas, there has been a growing recognition of the role Judeo-Christian thought had in establishing Western democratic values and new interpretations of what role faith should continue to have in undergirding those values. Elements magnifying these debates include the increase in Muslim immigration to Europe, Europe's resulting religious identity crisis, the rise and clash of Christian fundamentalism and political Islamism, continued Zionist thought, the explosive growth of Christianity in the Southern hemisphere, the resilience of faith in the United States, and efforts to re-missionise Europe. These developments have led sociologists to reconsider their premise that the world is on an inevitable path toward secularisation, and instead to consider how faith can be an asset—and not a danger—in pluralistic societies.² As Habermas said:

For the normative self-understanding of modernity, Christianity has functioned as more than just a precursor or catalyst. Universalistic egalitarianism, from which sprang the ideals of freedom and a collective life in solidarity, the autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, the individual morality of conscience, human rights and democracy, is the direct legacy of the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love. This legacy, substantially unchanged, has been the object of a continual critical reappropriation and reinterpretation. Up to this very day there is no alternative to it. And

1. The public sphere is defined here as the public exchange of ideas, see Jürgen Habermas' definition in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Polity, 1962). For his later work incorporating religion, see *Religion and Rationality* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002).

2. Peter L. Berger, 'Reflections on the Sociology of Religion Today,' *Sociology of Religion* 62 (2001): 443–54; Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2002).

in light of the current challenges of a post-national constellation, we must draw sustenance now, as in the past, from this substance.³

While thinkers such as Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins have emphasised religion's harmful effects and obsolescence for public morality, thinkers as diverse as feminist theorist Judith Butler and civil rights activist Cornel West are raising new questions about the benefits and dangers of mixing religion and democracy.⁴

Whether they use the terms political religion, political theology, civic philosophy, public philosophy, cultural religion or wax eloquently about metanarratives, speak of cultural mores or 'way of life', or admit what they really mean is something akin to American sociologist Robert Bellah's concept of "civil religion," a new generation of scholars is searching for a value system that can provide direction, purpose, and cohesion for Western societies.⁵ Among sharpening political divides, theorists are questioning whether it is possible or desirable to cull together a civic philosophy in a pluralistic world, or whether society can survive on the remnant left by Judeo-Christian tradition. Many identify shared Western values as a belief in individual liberty and societal freedoms, equality, democratic government, human rights, and the need for a welfare safety net. Many acknowledge—though few investigate—the Judeo-Christian foundation of these values.

Accepting the contention that democratic values are the cement of Western culture, this book explores the role Christians played in undergirding these values as a means of providing historical insight into the contemporary debate on the role of religion in the public sphere. I argue that England and the United States, in the post-Industrial era of the late nineteenth century, intermixed democratic and religious values to form an Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, and democratic civil religion. The era between 1865 and the beginning of World War I saw religious influence over civil society peak in both countries. Dominated by Protestant Christianity, theologians in England and the United States promoted the idea their nations were divinely chosen to spread Protestantism and democracy throughout the world. Connected closely with their theological vision of the kingdom of God, this myth fuelled their calls for

3. Habermas, *Religion and Rationality*, 149.

4. Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great* (London: Atlantic, 2007); Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Bantam, 2006); Judith Butler, Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, and Cornel West, *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (Columbia University Press, 2011).

5. Leroy S. Rouner, Ed., *Civil Religion and Political Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986); Andrew Shanks and Alta Bridges, *Civil Society, Civil Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

social reform and greater democracy at home, in what came to be known as the social gospel. Their desire to Christianise society, however, created interesting tensions with their belief in religious liberty, and was bound up with ideas of Anglo-Saxon superiority. By comparing three prominent ministers in each country—Brooke Foss Westcott, Robert William Dale, and Hugh Price Hughes in England; Henry Codman Potter, Josiah Strong, and Walter Rauschenbusch in the United States—this book will show how these theologians contributed to and hindered the development of Western democratic values. It will also analyse the good, the bad, and the ugly inherent in their nineteenth century brand of civil religion, providing helpful fodder for those aiming to construct a civic philosophy today.

This chapter will define civil religion, review the literature, and articulate study questions. The next chapter will outline the methodology of this book, set the time period under consideration, and introduce the theologians to be discussed. Following chapters will discuss the chosen nation myth and Protestant identity, its impact on social gospel theology, the backlash against those outside the Protestant fold, and the implications of these ideas on religious liberty, social reform, political involvement, and democratic values. In conclusion, this book will analyse where nineteenth-century Protestantism was a boon to American and British society, and where it was a danger.

DEFINING CIVIL RELIGION

Freedom, equality, democracy, individualism, and human rights: these ideals have become the gospel to a secularised world. They are recognised and valued throughout the West, taught from primary education, reinforced in public ceremony, and reiterated in mass media, informing the lens through which world politics and history is evaluated. These values are enshrined in the constitutions of individual Western countries and their unifying organisations. In the United Nations' 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights', approved by the General Assembly in 1948, the equality and freedom of all human beings is declared to be a universal, inalienable right and 'the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world'.⁶

Liberal ideas of democracy and freedom are now the shared vision of the West, but their development has both conflicted with and been bolstered by Christian teachings. In his definition of civil religion, Bellah argued Christianity was used to bolster democracy and the American republic from the writing of

6. 'The Universal Declaration of Human Rights,' www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml.

the Declaration of Independence down to the present day, creating a shared civil religion that endorsed generic Judeo-Christian values and honoured the ‘natural law’ of a divine being. The country was founded on Enlightenment concepts of the Laws of Nature and Nature’s God, and the belief that all people are ‘created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness’.⁷ Biblical archetypes lie behind the civil religion at every point: ‘Exodus, Chosen people, Promised Land, New Jerusalem, and Sacrificial Death and Rebirth. But it is also genuinely American and genuinely new. It has its own prophets and its own martyrs, its own sacred events and sacred places, its own solemn rituals and symbols. It is concerned that America be a society as perfectly in accord with the will of God as men can make it, and a light to all the nations’.⁸

Bellah argued religion could be used to provide the ideology and social cohesion for rebellions and reform movements, or it could serve to legitimise and reinforce the existing social order.⁹ In the United States, shared civil religion provided social cohesion and enabled church cooperation, while still allowing freedom of religion and separation of church and state. From its inception, American civil religion endorsed the values of freedom, equality, democracy, individualism, and human rights now taken for granted in Western culture. Unlike the French, the American Revolution established its civil religion without rejecting Christianity or religion in general. Instead, America’s forefathers relied on divine authority to endorse their values, milking the puritan idea of chosenness to stress that America was a ‘City on a Hill,’ and that the country’s experiment with democracy would be a light onto the world.¹⁰ From the Revolutionary War through today, politicians have borrowed from religious language to support their policies, and clergy have endorsed the republican values of the culture.¹¹ More than 90 percent of Americans still unite around belief in God, or a universal spirit.¹²

While Bellah popularised the concept in the 1960s, Jean-Jacques Rousseau first coined the term ‘civil religion’ in Book IV, Chapter 8 of *The Social*

7. ‘The Declaration of Independence,’ www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/index.htm.

8. Robert Bellah, *Beyond Belief* (London: Harper and Row, 1970), 186; Bellah, ‘Civil Religion in America,’ *Daedalus* 117 (July 1, 1988): 97–118.

9. Bellah, *Beyond Belief*, 35–36.

10. Richard T. Hughes, *Myths America Lives By* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2004), 19–43.

11. Hughes, *Myths*, 34–35.

12. Luis Lugo, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey* (Washington, DC: Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, June 2008), 26.

Contract. Rousseau argued society needed a shared faith or social conscience to function properly. No government, he wrote, has ever succeeded without religion as its base. Earlier philosophers, including Machiavelli, Spinoza, and Montesquieu, had written about the important role religion played in politics, personal morality, and societal cohesion.¹³ Rousseau, however, believed Christianity divides individuals between ‘two legislative orders, two rulers, two homelands, puts them under two contradictory obligations, and prevents their being at the same time both churchmen and citizens’.¹⁴ He instead promoted a civil religion that professed a few simple dogmas necessary for civic cohesion: ‘the existence of an omnipotent, intelligent, benevolent divinity that foresees and provides; the life to come, the happiness of the just; the punishment of sinners; the sanctity of the social contract; and the law’.¹⁵ Other ideas could be held freely, as long as they were subservient to the state and the secular ruler was sovereign. Rousseau was concerned primarily with who controlled religion, but he wanted to harness its functions for the good of society. To Rousseau, religion was the necessary glue of society, but it could also be the means of quickest disintegration.

In the aftermath of the French Revolution, many thinkers attempted to come up with a ‘spiritual power’ that could replace Roman Catholicism, such as the Jacobins’ cult of reason, Robespierre’s ‘cult of the supreme being’, or the early socialism espoused by Henri de Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier.¹⁶ August Comte developed his ‘religion of humanity’ to surpass all. Comte’s positivism, espoused in *Cours de Philosophie Positive*, argued knowledge passed through three phases, the theological, the metaphysical, and the positive or scientific.¹⁷ He believed the advent of the scientific age would wipe away the remaining cobwebs of the theological or metaphysical thinker, and that positivism would triumph as the purest and best philosophy, ushering in a new age of progress and social unification. The disease of the early nineteenth century world was ‘intellectual anarchy’: ‘So long as individual minds do not assent to a certain number of general ideas forming a common social doctrine, there is no hiding . . . that the state of nations will remain revolutionary, in

13. Bellah, *Beyond Belief*, 15.

14. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1968), 181.

15. Rousseau, 186.

16. Gareth Stedman Jones, ‘Religion and the Origins of Socialism,’ in *Religion and the Political Imagination*, edited by Ira Katznelson and Gareth Stedman Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 172–75.

17. Auguste Comte, ‘Cours de Philosophie Positive,’ in *The Essential Comte*, E. T. Margaret Clarke (London: Croom Helm, 1974), 20.

spite of all political palliatives, and that institutions will be only provisional. It is equally certain that if the union of minds in a communion of principles can once be established, suitable institutions will necessarily spring from it'.¹⁸ Comte believed positivism would replace Christianity with a new religion of humanity that supported both individual and collective needs, leading Westcott to illustrate how Christianity encompassed and surpassed Comte's philosophy.¹⁹

The attempts of the French reformers to create their own religion showed the continued importance religion played in the social cohesion of society. The first sociologists of religion, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, feared the loss of faith for society even as they argued scientific progress and materialism would push religion out of the public sphere. Both believed religion had the greatest influence on morality than any other human institution, and that some kind of common, shared ground would need to fill the void left behind as secularisation continued its forward march.

Durkheim, an atheist, argued religion was essential to the functioning of society, and was in fact a creation of society. He argued all religions, in some way, attempt to answer 'the given conditions of human existence'.²⁰ In *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim analysed Australian totemism to dissect those elements such as belief in the soul that are common to religions everywhere. Durkheim defined religion as 'a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them'.²¹ A religious society could not exist, Durkheim said, without a 'collective credo', and the 'more extensive the credo the more unified and strong is the society'.²²

It was Durkheim's definition of religion that most informed Bellah's concept. Durkheim described French civil religion in his discussion of the revolution, which he cited as a prime example of society's ability to 'make itself a god or to create gods'.²³ 'In the general enthusiasm of that time, things that were by nature purely secular were transformed by public opinion into sacred things:

18. Comte, 37–38.

19. Comte, 210–21; Westcott, 'Aspects of Positivism in Relation to Christianity,' in *Gospel of the Resurrection: Thoughts on Its Relation to Reason and History* (London, Cambridge: Macmillan, 1867), 214–16.

20. Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, E. T. Karen E. Fields (London: Free, 1995), 2.

21. Durkheim, *Elementary*, 44.

22. Durkheim, 'Suicide: A Study in Sociology,' in *Durkheim on Religion*, E. T., W. S. F. Pickering (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 47.

23. Durkheim, *Elementary*, 215.

Fatherland, Liberty, Reason. A religion tended to establish itself spontaneously, with its own dogma, symbols, altars, and feast days. It is to these spontaneous hopes that the Cult of Reason and the Supreme Being tried to give a kind of authoritative fulfillment'.²⁴ As science and progress eroded religious belief, Durkheim believed societies needed to create a new, unifying faith, or face 'intellectual and moral anarchy'.²⁵

Whereas Durkheim inferred beliefs from actions, Weber was more concerned with how beliefs influenced actions. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber traced how a Protestant sense of vocation informed the work ethic of a new capitalist age. He argued that as the capitalist spirit took over and wealth grew, the religious responsibility that fuelled and checked capitalism eroded. Religious teaching was co-opted to justify capitalism, making work and wealth acceptable pursuits. Like Durkheim, Weber saw the erosion of religion coincide with the erosion of morality and the dominance of materialism: 'The idea of duty in one's calling prowls about in our lives like the ghost of dead religious beliefs. . . . In the field of its highest development, in the United States, the pursuit of wealth, stripped of its religious and ethical meaning, tends to become associated with purely mundane passions, which often actually give it the character of sport'.²⁶

Long before Bellah popularised the concept of American civil religion, historians, sociologists, and other commentators were writing about the concept in terms of the American Way of Life. Alexis de Tocqueville, in his 1835 *Democracy in America*, saw American ideals and Christianity as so intertwined with each other that 'it is almost impossible to get them to conceive of the one without the other'.²⁷ 'Freedom', Tocqueville wrote, 'sees religion as the companion of its struggles and triumphs, the cradle of its infancy, and the divine source of its rights. Religion is considered as the guardian of mores, and mores are regarded as the guarantee of the laws and pledge for the maintenance of freedom itself'.²⁸ Religion is relegated to a specific role within American society, and will never have the power of a Christendom, Tocqueville wrote, but precisely because of its smaller role it had retained greater influence over the minds of the people than the churches had in Europe. Religion in America

24. Durkheim, *Elementary*, 215–16.

25. Durkheim, 'Individualism and the Intellectuals,' in *Durkheim on Religion*, 65.

26. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Unwin University Books, 1930), 182.

27. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, E. T. George Lawrence (London: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1965), 153.

28. Tocqueville, 21.

served as a check to the worst vices of democracy, individualism, and morality, infusing the country with a strong sense of morality and a belief in progress.

American sociologist Will Herberg used the term ‘civic’ religion and referenced the American Way of Life fairly interchangeably in his 1960 *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*. Herberg described America as at ‘once the most religious and the most secular of nations’.²⁹ Herberg argued America was a ‘triple-melting pot’, as Protestants, Catholics, and Jews all melded into the culture, distinct from each other yet all serving the American Way of Life. Despite their vast differences, Herberg emphasised the generic religious beliefs all three faiths shared, identical to those outlined by Rousseau: a general belief in God, the power of prayer, the Bible as the Word of God, life after death, the importance of religion, and religious education.

Herberg described the American Way of Life as a ‘spiritual structure’ of all of America’s ‘ideals, aspirations and values, beliefs and standards; it synthesizes all that commends itself to the American as the right, the good, and the true in actual life’.³⁰ At the heart of America is a profound trust in democracy, but also individualism, equality, freedom, progress, and free enterprise. It is a pragmatic, dynamic faith, Herberg wrote, one that emphasises ‘deeds, not creeds’. It is humanitarian and forward thinking, and so idealistic it often forgets the difference between espousing ideals and living them.³¹

Contemporary thinkers have explored the usages of civil religion in the development of a civil philosophy. One collection, edited by Leroy Rouner, includes essays from Bellah, Jürgen Moltmann, Richard John Neuhaus, John F. Wilson and Johan Baptist Metz, as they explored the differences between what Bellah called civil religion in America, common or cultural religion, public philosophy and political religion or political theology (as seen in Nazi Germany or even Stalin’s Russia). Most of the commentators advocated the need for some kind of civil religion or civic philosophy to serve as societal glue and to generate shared vision and purpose. They stressed, however, the need for theology to guide the discussion and for a civic philosophy to serve as a prophetic critic to society, uplifting it to its highest ideals, and not a legitimiser of everything a nation does.

29. Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (New York: Anchor, 1960), 2–3.

30. Herberg, 75.

31. Herberg, 79.

MYTHS AND METANARRATIVES

Other thinkers have looked at the use of myths, or metanarratives, that undergird a civil religion. Historian Richard T. Hughes, in *Myths America Lives By*, defined myth as a belief or narrative a country lives by, which gives it purpose, meaning, and illustrates its most dearly held beliefs.³² Several scholars have analysed the use of specific myths in American history. Conrad Cherry's *God's New Israel* explores how Americans have continuously reinterpreted the mythology of their destiny under God.³³ Ernest Tuveson traced the millennial impulse.³⁴ H. Richard Niebuhr traced the power of the ideal of the kingdom of God in American history, but also noted the danger when it became all promise and no judgment.³⁵

American myths elucidate the primary meaning of the nation: its origins and mission. Myths can be a unifying force for a country, but they can also provide sanction for nefarious purposes. The stronger and more truthful the myth, the more powerful and dangerous it can be. Myths that have their grounding in religious faith, and in scriptures upheld by the majority of the world's population to be holy and true, can be the most dangerous of all.

At the same time, a culture without any cohesive values or myths can quickly fall apart. Herbert Butterfield described myth as a way of seeing or explaining an essential process in history.³⁶ The ancient Jews, for instance, were able to turn their 'defeats and distresses' into creative moments for self and national improvement, because they 'interpreted their history differently and saw the hand of God in it'.³⁷ This is the case of the chosen nation myth, which dominated English and American thinking in the nineteenth century.³⁸ Human beings across the globe and scope of time have always used stories, passed down over the ages, as a way of binding the society together and sharing its values. Mythology and rite 'provide the symbols that carry the human spirit forward', mythologist Joseph Campbell wrote.³⁹

32. Hughes, *Myths*, 2.

33. Conrad Cherry, *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny* (Chapel Hill: University of California Press, 1998).

34. Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

35. H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1937), 193.

36. Herbert Butterfield, *Christianity and History* (London: Bell, 1949) 81.

37. Butterfield, *Writings on Christianity and History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 16.

38. Hughes, *Myths*, 41. Clifford Longley, *Chosen People: The Big Idea that Shaped England and America* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2002); Hugh McLeod, *Secularisation in Western Europe* (London: Macmillan, 2000).

Postmodern and poststructuralist philosophers, such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Jean-Francois Lyotard, used the term metanarrative in much the same way as Hughes' use of myth. Metanarratives are universalizing, grand narratives that try to explain or give meaning to all of history and knowledge. Postmodernists rejected the idea that one grand narrative could give meaning to the entire world, or even its Western half. They denied that any universal truth could ever be claimed, and promoted the development of local, individualised narratives.⁴⁰ As Foucault elaborated in *The Order of Things*, modern ways of thinking and use of language blind us to reality and keep us from seeing the truth. Metanarratives to Foucault, to borrow from Karl Marx, are the 'opium of the masses'.⁴¹ Postmodernists do recognise the importance, however, of narrative in constructing purpose and meaning. Psychologists have used the concept of metanarratives in individual therapy to recognise what grand or personal narratives may be negatively dominating an individual's life in order to construct a new, more positive narrative for an enhanced self-image.⁴²

The postmodernist critique, while helpful in illustrating the strengths and weaknesses of the metanarratives that undergird civil religion, fails to provide an adequate explanation for the continued dominance of and need for metanarratives in Western culture. Postmodernist tendency to dismiss Christianity also hinders its ability to serve as a tool of analysis for exploring Christianity's role in developing and fostering today's Western civil religion.

The discussion of myths and metanarratives, the foundation of a civil religion, does point to the dark side of a shared secular faith. Reinhold Niebuhr writes in *The Irony of American History* of the perils that come with the 'ironic tendency of virtues to turn into vices when too complacently relied upon'.⁴³ Many of the scholars quoted thus far have feared what happens when the transcendental or spiritual elements undergirding the civil religion are eroded and fail to perform their role as a check against absolutising forces within the nation.

39. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New York: MFJ, 1949), 11.

40. Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, E. T. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

41. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), xix.

42. Cameron Lee, 'Agency and Purpose in Narrative Therapy: Questioning the Postmodern Rejection of Metanarrative,' *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 32 (2004): 221-31.

43. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (New York: Scribner, 1962) 133.

DANGERS OF CIVIL RELIGION

The number one critique of civil religion is its propensity for misuse, which is more a criticism of how religion has been used to legitimise government actions than a critique of Bellah's description of the phenomenon.⁴⁴ Most critics saw civil religion as idolatrous worship of the state, and believed Bellah's emphasis on its integrative qualities overlooked the dangers of nationalism, despite his use of the term to condemn the Vietnam War.⁴⁵ Bellah has defended usage of the term, calling people of faith to force the country to live up to its values, but in *Habits of the Heart* he chose not to use the term due to its controversial nature.⁴⁶

In recognising the power of religious faith for social cohesion and the propagation of morality, Bellah, Rousseau, Durkheim, Weber, Tocqueville, Herberg, and Hughes all saw the danger of societies assuming divine authority for their actions without divine responsibility. Herberg argued 'civic' religion killed 'the God of judgement', and turned the nation and its ideals into idols. 'Religion becomes, in effect, the cult of culture and society, in which the "right" social order and the received cultural values are divinized by being identified with the divine purpose'.⁴⁷ Many believed the identification of a nation's ideals with God's also led to dangerous arrogance, a truth seen in British and American imperialism and most severely in Nazi fascism. Indeed, some scholars have distinguished between the civil religion of democratic countries and the 'political religion' of totalitarian states, the main difference being that the political religions of the Nazis or Stalinist Russia forced obedience to a 'given party ideology or cult' and suppressed true faith; whereas civil religion is seen as the voluntary, collective creed of a pluralistic democracy.⁴⁸ The propagation of a civil religion, however, can often lead to a national self-righteousness that blinds a country from seeing its social ills, such as America's treatment of blacks and American Indians, mythologised as they were as the cursed descendants of Ham or demonised as Canaanites.⁴⁹ The Americans,

44. Rouser.

45. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant* (Chicago, University of Chicago, 1992); Bellah, 'Comment: Twenty Years after Bellah: Whatever Happened to American Civil Religion?' *Sociological Analysis* 50 (1989): 147.

46. Robert N. Bellah, 'Comment: Twenty Years after Bellah: Whatever Happened to American Civil Religion?' *Sociological Analysis* 50 (1989): 147.

47. Herberg, 262.

48. Tom Crook, 'Civil Religion and the History of Democratic Modernity,' *Religion Compass* 4 (2010): 380.

49. Bellah, *Beyond Belief*; Richard T. Hughes, *Myths*; Richard T. Hughes, *Christian America and the Kingdom of God* (University of Illinois Press, 2009).

Tocqueville wrote, have been ‘constantly told that they are the only religious, enlightened, and free people. They see that democratic institutions flourish among them, whereas they come to grief in the rest of the world; consequently they have an immensely high opinion of themselves and are not far from believing that they form a species apart from the rest of the human race’.⁵⁰ Still others have argued that civil religion is only a ruse used by politicians to bolster their policies.⁵¹ This dark side of civil religion will be discussed thoroughly in this thesis.

Other sociologists have questioned whether Bellah’s description might be too simplistic given the vast diversity of subcultures—religious and secular—within the United States. His emphasis on the Judeo-Christian faith, however, is appropriate to the nineteenth-century period. Another critique is methodological: How do you measure it? How do you isolate what is a shared belief of the civil religion as opposed to something inherent to religious faith? Content analysis has been popular, with sociologists and historians looking primarily at presidential speeches, newspaper articles, or the writings of clergy to find elements of civil religion.⁵² This is a self-fulfilling method, as the researchers often start with a list of generic beliefs like Rousseau’s and look in the culture to find examples to bolster their argument.⁵³ There were a few attempts in the 1970s to test the popularity of specific elements of American civil religion, as defined by Bellah, however with populations too small to be generalisable.⁵⁴ Opinion polls, such as those by Gallop, George Barna, and the Pew Center for Religion and Public Life, have meanwhile tried to assess the religious mindset of the American public, though not specifically in civil religion terms.⁵⁵

For the purposes of this study, civil religion is defined as a shared set of values, beliefs, narratives, and practices that gives a society cohesion and

50. Tocqueville, 197.

51. N. J. Demerath III and Rhys H. Williams, ‘Civil Religion in an Uncivil Society,’ *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 480 (July 1, 1985): 161; Rita Kirk Whillock, ‘Dream Believers: The Unifying Visions and Competing Values of Adherents to American Civil Religion,’ *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 24 (April 1, 1994): 375.

52. Randall Balmer, *God in the White House* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2009); Nicole Janz, *And No One Will Keep That Light from Shining* (Lit, 2011); Cynthia Toolin, ‘American Civil Religion from 1789 to 1981,’ *Review of Religious Research* 25 (1983): 39–48.

53. James A. Mathisen, ‘Twenty Years after Bellah: Whatever Happened to American Civil Religion?’ *Sociological Analysis* 50 (1989): 129–46.

54. Ronald C. Wimberley, ‘Testing the Civil Religion Hypothesis,’ *Sociological Analysis* 37 (1976): 341–52.

55. See gallop.com, barna.org, and religions.pewforum.org.

purpose. Civil religion draws from the highest common factors inherent in the religious faiths of the society, as well as from the society's culture, secular philosophy, and history. The civil religion thus stands separate and apart from spiritual faith, but not in contention. While the term civil religion is problematic in contemporary Western secular society, I am using it in this study to describe nineteenth century England and the United States, which I contend did mix religion and democracy in the way Bellah defined. One might argue it is an anachronism to apply a twentieth-century concept to the nineteenth-century. However, as this thesis illustrates, civil religion was rampant throughout this time period. The six theologians in this study, fuelled by their beliefs in their nation's chosenness, the need to vindicate Christianity, and the desire to Christianise the world, produced a social gospel that intermixed the dominant religious and secular ideas of their age. They were representative of their larger cultural milieu.

The concept of civil religion offers a potentially helpful explanation for the religious elements and motivations inherent within the secular worldview of contemporary society. Civil religion explains how societies retained cohesion and meaning in the face of secularising forces, how indeed they held on to many elements of religion even as the embers of faith grew cold. By investigating nineteenth century civil religion, this study hopes to shed light on what role faith groups might play in the twenty-first century.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Most of the examples used in defining civil religion have focused on the United States because American civil religion, as de Tocqueville noted, is easier to identify. Formed from a blank slate over a few decades rather than several thousand years, left to percolate undisturbed by the comings and goings of European friction, it is far easier to pinpoint the character, origins, and influences of American civil religion. American and international scholars continue to see value in Bellah's description of civil religion for the United States, where democratic values, a generic belief in God and a shared sense of mission still provide societal glue.⁵⁶ There have been a few attempts to apply the concept outside the United States, including several European countries, Israel, Japan, and Malaysia.⁵⁷ English sociologist Grace Davie has looked at the concept

56. Recent examples include Grace Y. Kao and Jerome E. Copulsky, 'The Pledge of Allegiance and the Meanings and Limits of Civil Religion,' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75 (March 1, 2007): 121-49; Katherine Meizel, 'A Singing Citizenry: Popular Music and Civil Religion in America,' *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 45 (December 1, 2006): 497-503.

of a global civil religion from a European perspective, highlighting the religious elements that form European identity.⁵⁸ However, she has also argued that the horizontal power structure of Christianity in Europe, as opposed to the vertical, diversity-encompassing civil religion of the United States, led most Europeans to abandon religious connotations.⁵⁹

The historiography of both countries is peppered with examples of civil religion. Beyond Bellah, Herberg, and Hughes, Conrad Cherry, Sidney Mead, Martin Marty, Nathan Hatch, Mark Noll, and George Marsden have all emphasised the mythic elements of American civil religion in their works, including noting the impact of the puritan idea of chosenness on American identity and the conglomeration of Christian teachings and democratic ideals in shaping public policy.⁶⁰ Most of this historiography focuses on the Revolutionary period and stops at the Civil War. Few covered the social gospel period, or only did so en route to discussions on the rise of fundamentalism. Marty's *Righteous Empire* and Robert Handy's *Christian America* are exceptions, as both traced how the Protestant hope for a Christian nation shaped American culture through the social gospel movement, promoting an idealised America.⁶¹

Books from the right and left continue to promote and criticise American civil religion and its myth of chosenness. Starting with Timothy LaHaye's 1984 book *Faith and the Founding Fathers* and continuing on today with David Barton's books *Original Intent* and *Myth of Separation*, evangelicals have led the

57. See Shanks and Bridges; Michael Minkenberg, 'Civil Religion and German Unification,' *German Studies Review* 20, (February 1, 1997): 63–81; Inger Furseth, 'Civil Religion in a Low Key: The Case of Norway,' *Acta Sociologica* 37 (January 1, 1994): 39–54; Sergej Flere and Miran Lavri, 'Operationalizing the Civil Religion Concept at a Cross-Cultural Level,' *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 46 (December 1, 2007): 595–604; Myron J. Aronoff, 'Civil Religion in Israel,' *RAIN* 44 (June 1, 1981): 2–6; K. Peter Takayama, 'Revitalization Movement of Modern Japanese Civil Religion,' *Sociological Analysis* 48 (January 1, 1988): 328–41; Daniel Regan, 'Islam, Intellectuals, and Civil Religion in Malaysia,' *Sociological Analysis* 37 (July 1, 1976): 95–110.

58. Davie, 'Global Civil Religion: A European perspective,' *Sociology of Religion* (Winter 2001): 455–73.

59. Davie, *Europe*, 41.

60. Cherry; Sidney E. Mead, *The Lively Experiment* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); Mead, *The Old Religion in a Brave New World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); Martin Marty, *Righteous Empire* (New York: Dial, 1970); Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Noll, *American's God, from Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

61. Robert T. Handy, *A Christian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

way in revising American history in support of a Christian America.⁶² Numerous scholars have challenged this vision, promoting a more nuanced view of America's secular and religious roots.⁶³

More explicit works on American civil religion include Gary Laderman's recent digital multimedia work, a textbook with links to numerous documents, videos, speeches, and other examples of American civil religion.⁶⁴ Cherry's *God's New Israel*, originally published in 1971 and updated in 1998, is primarily an anthology of documents related to civil religion. Marty has similarly edited a volume of essays looking at American civil religion, both historically and in contemporary times.⁶⁵ In *Modern Schism*, Marty further argued that a generic, democratic faith superseded and compromised Christianity in the United States.⁶⁶ Much of Stephen Prothero's works are exploring the cultural Christianity of the United States, such as his *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon*, which traced America's history of appropriating the figure of Jesus to suit all purposes.⁶⁷ A few scholars have traced President George W. Bush's use of civil religion to justify going to war in Afghanistan and Iraq.⁶⁸ There have also been several works looking at the 'cultural Christianity' of America, though not in civil religious terms, such as the work of G. G. Hunter and William Romanowski.⁶⁹ Robert Putnam and David Campbell have a new volume out based on extensive survey work looking at both the fault lines in American religious life as well as the growing

62. Timothy LaHaye and Tim F. LaHaye, *Faith of Our Founding Fathers* (Green Forest: Master, 1994); David Barton, *The Myth of Separation* (WallBuilder, 1992); Barton, *Original Intent* (Wallbuilder, 2008).

63. Brooke Allen, *Moral Minority: Our Skeptical Founding Fathers* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2007); Randall Balmer, *Thy Kingdom Come* (New York: Basic, 2006); John Fea, *Was America Founded as a Christian Nation?: A Historical Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011); Edwin S. Gaustad, ed., *A Documentary History of Religion in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Chris Hedges, *American Fascists* (New York: Free, 2006); David L. Holmes, *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) Hughes, *Christian America*, Frank Lambert, *The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Steven J. Keillor, *This Rebellious House: American History and the Truth of Christianity* (Downer's Grove: IVP Academic, 1996); Mark Noll, Nathan Hatch, and George Marsden, *The Search for Christian America* (Westchester: Crossway, 1983).

64. Gary Laderman, *American Civil Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012).

65. Martin Marty, *Civil Religion, Church and State*, *Modern American Protestantism and Its World* (Munich: Saur, 1992).

66. Marty, *The Modern Schism*, 134–38.

67. Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003).

68. Janz; Paul Christopher Johnson, 'Savage Civil Religion,' *Numen* 52 (January 1, 2005): 289–324.

69. G. G. Hunter, III., *How to Reach Secular People* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992); W. D. Romanowski, *Eyes Wide Open* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2002).

embracement of religious pluralism.⁷⁰ Secular historians, notably Howard Zinn and James Loewen, have written about American civil religion in terms of the historical myths promoted in primary school to propel American pride and patriotism.⁷¹

The values of democracy, freedom, liberty, individualism, and human rights make appearances throughout these works, but beyond Bellah's work they are not looked at as a cohesive whole. Other works have focused on particular aspects of American church history that one can argue contributed to the civil religion, such as Christianity's role in abolishing slavery, protecting the poor, caring for the immigrant, fighting for women's rights, and advancing world missions. While these works generally challenged Americans to live up to their ideals, they did not connect these movements to the larger civil religion. For instance, Charles Howard Hopkins' and Donald Gorrell's research on the social gospel emphasised social reform and did not look at the broader impact of the movement on nationalism or democratic ideas.⁷² Herberg, Mead, and Oscar Handlin tell the story of American immigration, but only hint at how Protestant ideas of chosenness impacted religious minorities.⁷³ Few scholars have analysed how England shared or influenced elements of American civil religion. What is available restricted itself to discussions of the chosenness myth, such as Clifford Longley's work, or to issues of social reform, the best example being Hugh McLeod's work comparing the working class in Berlin, London, and New York.⁷⁴

Works discussing civil religion in England are rare, but it is present throughout the historiography of the last three hundred years. Herbert Butterfield, for instance, pointed out the tendency of English historians to promote a whig or Protestant interpretation of history, analysing the past so as to glorify the present and dividing the world into 'friends or enemies of progress'.⁷⁵ In this vein, Herbert Skeat and Charles Miall credited Nonconformists with advancing both religious toleration and democratic

70. Robert D., Putnam and David E Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (Simon & Schuster, 2010).

71. Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: Perennial Classics, 1999); James Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

72. Charles Howard Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940); Donald K. Gorrell, *The Age of Social Responsibility* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1988).

73. Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1951).

74. Longley, *Chosen People*; Hugh McLeod, *Piety and Poverty* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1996).

75. Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London: Bell, 1931), 13.

government.⁷⁶ Èlie Halèvy, of course, argued that the popularity of Methodism and the conservatism of its leaders had a dampening effect on democratic sentiment circa the French Revolution, saving England from its terrors.⁷⁷ E. P. Thompson both affirmed and corrected Halèvy's theory, loose as it was on facts, to argue that Methodism both hindered and encouraged working-class activism, uniting with utilitarianism to inform working-class values.⁷⁸ Thompson further explored the mythology of the free-born Englishman.⁷⁹ Halèvy, Charles Raven, Maurice Reckitt and others also have argued utilitarianism and *laissez-faire* political economy merged with Christian thought in shaping the English psyche.⁸⁰ In his essay collection, *Puritanism and Revolution*, Christopher Hill explored the mythology behind the English Civil War, the puritan sense of providence and national sin, and the Norman Yoke, illustrating how these ideas were applied to politics throughout English history.⁸¹ Finally, author T. S. Eliot, sociologist V. A. Demant, and Archbishop William Temple all questioned the growing secular humanist philosophy of England in their day, which threatened the Christian social order they were pursuing.⁸² Temple argued Christians must control the social order because the social order shaped the culture's dominant values.⁸³ The ideas of William Beveridge, which laid the foundations for the post-war British welfare state, were based in the same late nineteenth century tradition of philosophical idealism as Temple's. The 'civil religion' of Beveridge and Temple, thus legislated, encompassed British thought until the 1980s, when Margaret Thatcher questioned aspects of the welfare state.⁸⁴

More recently, Linda Colley, in *Britons: Forging the Nation*, dived into the formation of the British national character in language consistent with that

76. Herbert S. Skeats and Charles S. Miall, *History of the Free Churches of England* (London: Alexander & Shephard, James Clarke, 1894).

77. Èlie Halèvy, *The Birth of Methodism in England*, E. T. Bernard Semmel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

78. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1968), 34–47, 386–433.

79. E. P. Thompson, 85, 103.

80. Halèvy, 3; Charles E. Raven, *Christian Socialism* (London: Cass, 1968), 14, 30–35; Maurice B. Reckitt, *Maurice to Temple* (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), 30–52.

81. Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1958).

82. T. S. Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939), 13, 33–34, 63; V. A. Demant, *God, Man, and Society* (London: SCM, 1933), 161–73, 223–24.

83. W. Temple, *Christianity and Social Order* (London: SCM, 1950), 13.

84. William Beveridge, *Social Insurance and Allied Services* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1942).

used to describe civil religion.⁸⁵ Brian Stanley has explored how belief in divine providence and chosenness fuelled mission work and British imperialism.⁸⁶ Stewart Jay Brown portrayed the rise and fall of British belief in providence and the Christian mission of empire in his religious history of the nineteenth century.⁸⁷ Sheridan Gilley and W. J. Sheils, in line with other historians, emphasised the importance of Protestantism in forging the national character of the English.⁸⁸ Several scholars, including Boyd Hilton, Peter D'Arcy Jones, and Edward Norman, have noted the mixture of Christian teachings with secular political and economic theories in shaping British belief and culture.⁸⁹ Numerous other scholars have tried to define English national identity, though generally in secular terms.⁹⁰

While direct references to the term are rare in England, Matthew Grimley referenced civil religion in a 2007 article, arguing that Anglicanism and Nonconformity merged in the inter-war years to form a Pan-Protestant national identity of Englishness.⁹¹ Rather than forming national identity in opposition to Catholics, Grimley argued English Protestantism in this time period was defined in opposition to class warfare, communism, and fascism, and in promotion of democracy and individual rights. Sociologist Sophie Gilliat-Ray also discussed 'civic religion' in a 1999 article, though she limited her definition to civic ceremonies traditionally orchestrated by the Church of England, such as Remembrance Day. Gilliat-Ray cited various instances where 'civic religion' was forced to adapt to the growing pluralism of the local community, and the challenges therein.⁹²

There are many works that generically speak about religion and Western Culture, such as Jacques Barzun's *From Dawn to Decadence* and Christopher Dawson's *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*.⁹³ Many scholars have analysed the use of myth and language in the rise of nationalism in European

85. Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (London: Vintage, 1992).

86. Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag* (Leicester: Apollos, 1990).

87. Stewart Jay Brown, *Providence and Empire* (Harlow: Pearson, 2008).

88. Sheridan Gilley and W. J. Sheils, *A History of Religion in Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

89. Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991); Peter d'Arcy Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968); Edward R. Norman, *Church and Society in England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976).

90. Robert Colls, *Identity of England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

91. Matthew Grimley, 'The Religion of Englishness,' *Journal of British Studies* 46 (October 1, 2007): 884–906.

92. Sophie Gilliat-Ray, 'Civic Religion in England,' *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 14 (1999): 233–44.

countries, notably Adrian Hastings, Eric Hobsbawm, Ernest Gellner, and Benedict Anderson.⁹⁴ Hastings traced the mythic origins of England back as far as Bede, and looked at the role of the church and the Bible in aiding nationalism, whereas the other authors focused on the modern period. Hobsbawm equated patriotism with ‘civic religion.’⁹⁵ Michael P. Fogarty’s work, *Christian Democracy in Western Europe*, included analysis of the development of Christian political movements in the late nineteenth century, but limited it to the continent.⁹⁶ Several scholars have traced the rise of secularisation, a key factor in the development of a civil religion; these include Steve Bruce, Grace Davie, McLeod and Marty.⁹⁷

In conclusion, the study I propose has never been done. Few scholars have written on civil religion in England, and no one has compared the shared civil religions of England and the United States. While excellent scholarship has been done on the social gospel, it is a neglected time period compared to the work done pre-Civil War and on fundamentalism. The nationalism of the social gospellers is generally avoided; hence thinkers such as Strong have not received their due for their social reform efforts. This study thus addresses a major gap in the field.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The unalienable ideals of freedom, equality, democracy, individualism, and human rights are but blips on the screen in the history of the world, the inventions of modern individuals, cultivated from centuries of ideas, and designed to meet the needs of this particular epoch. They are foremost the product of the last two centuries, as modern, nineteenth-century thinkers appropriated the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, seventeenth-century Republican political philosophy, and eighteenth-century Enlightenment ideals for their own purposes. The challenge of this book is

93. Jacques Barzun, *From Dawn to Decadence* (London: Harper Collins, 2001); Christopher Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture* (London: Sheel and Ward, 1950).

94. Adrian Hastings, *Construction of Nationhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 2006).

95. Hobsbawm, 85.

96. Michael P. Fogarty, *Christian Democracy in Western Europe* (London: Routledge, 1957).

97. Steve Bruce, *God Is Dead* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); Bruce, *Religion in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Davie, *Europe*; McLeod, *Secularisation in Western Europe* (London: Macmillan, 2000); Martin E. Marty, *The Modern Schism* (London: SCM, 1969).

to separate the wheat from the chaff—the truly Christian elements in the civil religion from other influences.

Borrowing from Butterfield's contention that one of the main services of history is to search the past in order to better understand and guide the future, this study examines Christianity's role in developing nineteenth-century English and American civil religion as a means of ascertaining Christianity's role in the future of Western values. This book will ask: What role did Christianity play in the forging of national identity? How did the various Christians and their churches respond to ongoing social, political, and economic shifts? How did Christianity help or hinder the development of democratic values? In what ways did their theology undergird the secular thought of their day and in what ways did secular thought influence their theology? Christians have always had to live within the dichotomy of living in the world, but not of it. This book merely proposes a look at one small slice of that ongoing paradox.