

Civil Religion in American Politics

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Abstract

Scholars can gain valuable insights into American leadership and the political system of the United States through analysis into the fundamental values that were preeminent in the national ideology during the state's establishment and its periods of crisis or reformation. This paper seeks to understand these elementary values and doctrines through analysis of Robert Bellah's theory of civil religion, applying a historical methodology to theories regarding the role of religion and religious values in the United States. Early colonists and colonial society, the Founding Fathers, and subsequent American leadership during times of crisis are investigated in order to evaluate the existing evidence for Bellah's theory. This paper ultimately argues that a societal sphere known as 'civil religion' exists in the United States that has influenced political decisions and societal preferences since early colonization. It continues to impact public and foreign policy and could have widespread implications for American democracy and governance both now and into the future.

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Introduction

In the most recent American Inaugural Address, Donald J. Trump, the newly elected President of the United States, provided America's citizens with a quote from the Bible, stating "how good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity' ...There should be no fear...we are protected by God"¹. For most individuals listening to this speech, nothing about Mr. Trump's statements stand out as unique. American politicians have quoted religion and appealed to God in nearly every major political address in history; whether they speak at length about God's mission for the country, or simply express "God bless America" to conclude their speech, the influence of the Almighty is noticeable in the politics of individuals from every political party and every age in American history. It has been repeated and normalized to the point where most Americans don't think twice about it.

Despite its broad acceptance, questions might be asked about this American norm. After all, a central pillar of democracy and governance in the United States is the strict separation of church and state. The very first Amendment to the Constitution states clearly, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof". This has historically been interpreted to mean that religion should not exert a strong influence over American politics, especially not the drafting of laws or the executing of foreign policy. If we as citizens have accepted a separation between church and state, then why is it acceptable to join the two in the rhetoric of our leadership?

Scholars may argue that perhaps this rhetoric is not expressly religious, in the sense that it does not adhere to a specific religious sect (like Christianity). In fact, it may be difficult to argue that the Christian religion, or any specific religion, plays a major role in American politics and governance. For example, the United States does not maintain a nationally recognized religion. Though they mention God, leaders rarely (if ever) mention Christianity specifically, and tend to skate over the specifics on their belief in Jesus Christ. Religious beliefs remain illegal to discuss in the public school system, and the right to same sex marriage (which many consider a religious issue) is protected by law. Despite the doubt these facts cast on the idea that presidential rhetoric represents a great influence that religion has on American politics, questions remain regarding

¹ Trump, Donald J. "The Inaugural Address." Washington, D.C. 20 January 2017.

what exactly the role of this rhetoric is. What does it mean for American politics that our nation's motto remains "In God We Trust"?

Upon beginning this research, it became clear that several philosophers, sociologists, and political scientists had already generated theories to address this question. Sociologist Robert Bellah attempted an initial explanation in 1967 with his now classic work "Civil Religion in America". Mr. Bellah argues that a strong ideological framework exists in the United States that expresses itself as a type of religion. While it is inaccurate to say that the rhetoric utilized by leadership and immortalized into American history is expressly Christian, it does carry many of the symbols, values, and concepts of this religious sect. These adopted doctrines have been incorporated into an ideology that combines them with the values and symbols of American patriotism that has been iterated across the United States since its inception in 1776. This ideology can be identified in political documents, the rhetoric of leadership, and the overall value sets held by almost every citizen of America. Robert Bellah calls this ideology our "civil religion".² Civil religion can be defined as a sphere of American society and governance that draws from the Judeo-Christian tradition to develop values and belief systems that a majority of Americans can recognize and relate to. It serves to tie the American people to one another and to American governance without generating religious intolerance.

This paper will argue that the United States and most of its leadership have historically maintained a 'civil religion' that can be traced through the beliefs and rhetoric of the Founding Fathers and former Presidents of the United States. This ideology and its rituals have played a crucial role in the development and legitimation of American institutions. To investigate this phenomenon, this paper will first identify and analyze vital academic resources that have informed and contributed to the development of the concept of civil religion. It will then set forth its findings regarding the role religion has played in the lives of pivotal political figures throughout history, starting with early colonizers and the Founding Fathers. The terms of former Presidents Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Ronald Reagan will be analyzed in order to discover how civil religion impacted the trajectory of American politics and policy during pivotal periods of history: The Civil War, each of the World Wars, and the Cold War. The findings will then be discussed to

² Bellah, Robert N. 1967. "Civil Religion in America". *Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*. 96 (1): 1-21.

analyze the role of civil religion in the United States, and how it can be expected to impact the country in the future.

Literature Review

Defining Civil Religion

While the term “civil religion” was articulated in literature as early as the mid-1760s, the theoretical framework was developed most extensively by sociologist Robert Bellah beginning in 1967. Bellah’s article “Civil Religion in America” was initially considered controversial, as it advances an unfamiliar concept that many scholars considered vague and antithetical to the American political ideology. In his argument, Bellah states that contrary to American mythology, “the separation of church and state has not denied the political realm a religious dimension”³. Bellah analyzes John F. Kennedy’s inaugural address, highlighting the former President’s pleas for God’s blessing on the path that the US had chosen in the 1960s. Bellah seeks to explain the meaning and background behind this type of presidential rhetoric. The sociologist argues that rhetoric of this kind is an expression of a public religious dimension that he names “civil religion”. This concept is quite complex and not easily defined. It centers on the idea that an ideology exists which surrounds politics and the public sphere in America that borrows values and symbols from the Judeo-Christian tradition and combines them with unique aspects of the American way of life to create a belief system that influences everything from political rhetoric to institutional development. This ideology originated from common elements of religious orientations that are broadly shared by a majority of Americans and has caused the development of a religious framework in the United States that has impacted the evolution of the American political sphere⁴.

Contrary to his critics, Bellah argues that this civil religion is not exactly contradictory to the First Amendment, or the idea that religion should not play a role in politics. In fact, Bellah argues that the rhetoric does not reference any specific type of ideology of the kind we typically consider “religion”. For example, the term “God” used by Kennedy does not reference the

³ Bellah, “Civil Religion in America”, 2.

⁴ Bellah, “Civil Religion in America”.

Christian God, or any other specific “God” from any particular religious sect. Instead, the term is meant to appeal to a symbol that most Americans could understand, recognize, and relate to, no matter their religious beliefs. This type of symbolism is an example of an expression of civil religion. The ideological sphere serves to tie the American people together by providing a common set of values that allow citizens of vastly different backgrounds to relate to each other and form a cohesive ‘American people’⁵.

The term ‘civil religion’ first appeared in literature in 1762, introduced by one of the foremost philosophers in history, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. His work The Social Contract outlines his theories on the creation of a modern political community, and it remains one of the most influential political texts ever written. In addition to such salient concepts as sovereignty and the institution of democracy, Rousseau also discusses the concept of civil religion in Book IV. In this final segment of his work, Rousseau states:

“There is therefore a purely civil profession of faith of which the Sovereign should fix the articles, not exactly as religious dogmas, but as social sentiments without which a man cannot be a good citizen or a faithful subject”⁶

Rousseau’s greatest contribution to the theoretical framework of civil religion is his explanation of these “religious dogmas”, which he argues account for the basic values and essential framework of civil religion. They include the existence of God, the belief in life after death, the reward of virtue and the punishment of vice, and the rejection of religious intolerance.⁷ All religious beliefs outside of this basic list should not be embodied by the state’s civil religion; clearly Rousseau is assuming Christianity as the implicit base. Reflecting on these central dogmas, Bellah explains that civil religion is often mistaken for Christianity because of the fact that it “borrowed selectively from the religious tradition in such a way that the average American saw no conflict between the two”⁸.

The Influence of Civil Religion on American Society and Governance

Civil religion has played a major role in the development of political institutions and continues to influence the political system of the United States today. On an elementary level,

⁵ Bellah, “Civil Religion in America”.

⁶ Rousseau, Jean Jacques. (1988). The Social Contract. Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, pg. 135.

⁷ Rousseau, The Social Contract, 35.

⁸ Bellah, “Civil Religion in America”, 8.

Rousseau argues that civil religion unites citizens through a mutual love of the country and its laws. Civil religion teaches Americans that service to the country is by extension service to God.⁹ This conceivably impacts how citizens view and act towards their leadership and community, binding them to a set of values whose affiliated behaviors and attitudes ultimately benefit the state. Tocqueville also addresses the role of civil religion in the framework of the American political community, explaining that the religious sphere in American society (that we have defined as civil religion) serves to both facilitate and limit the growth and development of American institutions and general society. The role of civil religion is such that political beliefs are limited in scope because of the central parameter values dictated by civil religion. This applies to all areas of American society, as Tocqueville explains, “At the same time that the law permits the American people to do everything, religion prevents them from conceiving everything and forbids them to dare everything”.¹⁰ Tocqueville believes that Americans are restrained by the values set forth by American civil religion, and this limits their range of innovation.

Bellah followed up his iconic article with a book entitled Varieties of Civil Religion, where he expands upon the concepts introduced in his original text. One idea introduced in this book is the concept of civil religion as a mediator of primary American ideologies. Bellah explains that above all else, the United States champions both liberalism, which Bellah equates to self-interest, and republicanism, or virtuous self-government.¹¹ Upon analysis, it can be shown that these two ideologies are contradictory and antithetical. In his work “Habits of the Heart”, Bellah argues that if left unchecked by virtuous values, liberalism, or individualism, would lead to despotism and the fall of democracy.¹² How can a state be drastically self-interested and individualistic while also maintaining a system of government that relies upon virtue and consideration of the needs of others alongside oneself?

Bellah believes that this question can be answered with the concept of civil religion. Civil religion provides “the symbolization of an ultimate order of existence in which republican values

⁹ Rousseau, The Social Contract, 131.

¹⁰ Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 279.

¹¹ Bellah, Robert and Philip E. Hammond. 1980. Varieties of Civil Religion. Eugene, OR: Harper and Row Publishers.

¹² Bellah, Robert, et al. 1996. Habits Of the Heart : Individualism and Commitment in American Life. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

make sense”.¹³ It provides citizens with values other than self-interest that can be used to explain the need for virtuous self-government, or republicanism. As Bellah explains in “Habits of the Heart”, “Only a civil or biblical form of individualism is capable of sustaining genuine individuality and nurturing both public and private life”.¹⁴ Civil religion helps maintain the virtuous nature of American individualism by providing a figure (God or Jesus) for citizens of the republic to seek to embody. By enumerating God’s virtues and values, civil religion encourages the replication of such virtuous behavior alongside upholding American individualist values.¹⁵ As Johnson helps to explain, citizens identify their individualism in civil religion through individual contributions and individual perception of the word of God.¹⁶ In this way, civil religion provides the adhesive that holds the nation together in the face of destructive self-interest. This concept was recognized by founding figures such as John Adams, who in his role as Vice President, stated “Our constitution was made only for a moral and a religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”¹⁷

Much of the symbolism and rhetoric that will be analyzed in this paper comes from the speeches, private statements, and ideologies of several former presidents of the United States. These leaders serve as instruments to express the ideology of civil religion, as they were chosen by the citizens to represent the institutions and values of the country to both domestic and foreign actors during their terms as president. Much of the rhetoric that will be analyzed bears similarities to that of John F. Kennedy’s statements that are addressed by Bellah in his work. As Bellah discusses, Kennedy stated in his Inaugural Address, “I have sworn before you and Almighty God the same solemn oath our forebears prescribed nearly a century and three quarters ago”.¹⁸ These types of statements are essential expressions of civil religion, as they demonstrate a central component of the ideology. Bellah explains that this rhetoric of expressing a vow under God ties the elected president to an obligation that is higher than that of the people of the United States. Instead of being responsible only to the citizens, this rhetoric, which acts as an expression

¹³ Bellah, *Varieties of Civil Religion*, p. 12.

¹⁴ Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, p. 143.

¹⁵ Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, p. 223.

¹⁶ Johnson, “The Almost Chosen People.”

¹⁷ Adams, John. “Reply to the Massachusetts Militia.” 11 October 1789.

¹⁸ Kennedy, John F. “Inaugural Address”. Washington D.C. 20 January 1961.

of civil religion, demonstrates that the president is ultimately responsible to the will of God.¹⁹ This concept adds a dimension of the divine to the political sphere in the United States.

To some, this may already be an accepted assumption. To others, however, the meaning behind this presidential rhetoric may be disconcerting. It introduces a contradictory element to the concept of government by the people, for the people; especially to those who do not believe in the existence of any God. Holding the Presidency ultimately accountable to God strips the significance from the will of the people. Bellah states that these divine criteria allow for the interpretation that the people could be wrong in their judgment of American leadership, because the true judge is actually God.²⁰ When considered alongside the many responsibilities of the Presidency of the United States, this concept opens a Pandora's Box of political concerns.

This is far from the only potential issue that civil religion may introduce. Leadership may also use civil religion to sway public opinion regarding controversial issues. With tones of warning and concern, Bellah explains that civil religion is regularly utilized to mobilize support for the pursuit of national goals. Tocqueville echoes this sentiment, stating "religious zeal constantly warms itself at the hearth of patriotism".²¹ Granted, this may not always be a bad thing. For example, civil religion could be invoked for such worthy goals as equality, such as when President Johnson declared the mission for racial equality as a mission to fulfill God's will. However, civil religion can also be used to galvanize support for controversial and potentially damaging objectives, such as war. As Rousseau argues, civil religion creates a separation from those not considered to be members of the state. Rousseau explains that "outside the single nation that follows (the civil religion), all the world is in its sight infidel, foreign, and barbarous".²² This tendency to view foreign actors in a negative light will thus influence the state's foreign policy, potentially generating more aggressive and ethnocentric policies. This is a concept that Bellah reiterates. In his initial groundbreaking paper, Bellah explains how civil religion could and has been used by leadership to validate actions such as aggressive, interventionist wars. Leaders claim these wars are necessary to protect and support the values of civil religion in their state, and are manifestations of God's will, but this reasoning is often used as a cover for less valiant goals. An example of this may have been the Vietnam War, which

¹⁹ Bellah, "Civil Religion in America", 3.

²⁰ Bellah, "Civil Religion in America", 3.

²¹ Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 279.

²² Rousseau, The Social Contract, 131.

Bellah identifies as a dangerous continuation of manifest destiny.²³ The concrete impact of this sphere of American society can be investigated through an analysis of the nation's founding, as well as how it has influenced American leadership through history.

Evidence

I. Early Colonization and the Founding Fathers

The origins of civil religion in America can be traced back to the period of early North American colonization, far before the signing of the "Declaration of Independence" in 1776. Much of the emigration to the New World was religiously motivated, and this helped to define the values that North American society would hold far into the future. Among the first settlers were individuals seeking to escape religious persecution in order to attain the freedom to practice their own religion openly. Some colonists were motivated by a belief that they had been given a divine mission and were predestined by God to travel to the New World to create a new religious society. These individuals sought to develop and spread their religious beliefs in their new colonies.

The Protestant Sectarians were one such group that held this belief in proselytization. John Davis, an explorer and leader in this religious sect, stated, "There is no doubt but that we of England are this saved people, by the eternal and infallible presence of the Lord predestined to be sent into these Gentiles in the sea, to those Isles, and famous kingdoms, there to preach the peace of the Lord".²⁴ Other groups held similar ideologies. Those on the Mayflower of 1620 logged parallel sentiments, stating their desire to settle in the New World "for the Glory of God and the advancement of the Christian faith".²⁵ It is possible that the risks involved in moving across the Atlantic Ocean to an unknown land nearly required a belief in Providence, as these trailblazing settlers had to have faith in order to continue forward on the treacherous journey. These religious ideals remained with these settlers long after their arrival. The first generation of colonists elevated the importance of religion in their societies by incorporating it into their governing systems. Many of the first written constitutions of the newly founded colonies

²³ Bellah, "Civil Religion in America", 10.

²⁴ Johnson, "The Almost Chosen People", 79.

²⁵ Johnson, "The Almost Chosen People", 80.

declared the word of God as the ultimate governing establishment, stating that the colony's essential mission was to maintain the purity of the Gospel, as was the case in Connecticut in 1639.²⁶ These colonists were the first to instill an irrevocable importance for religion in the New World through their ideologies and the development of their foundational governance systems.

It is clear that the ideals that the original North American settlers brought with them to instill in their colonial societies had a profound impact on the development of values and institutions in early America. New institutions and leaders were forced to recognize the importance of religion to their constituents and incorporate this set of values into the development of laws, norms, and culture. As the North American colonies continued to develop, the role of religion progressed, and many theorists even argue that it played a pivotal role in inspiring the American Revolution. Historian Paul Johnson goes so far as to argue that the American Revolution was the political and military expression of a religious movement, which was motivated and informed by the Great Awakening.²⁷ He and others believe that the revolution was in effect a religious movement; after all, a well-known revolutionary motto was "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God".

Author Daniel Gullotta explains that the Great Awakening served as a motivating factor for the American Revolution. The religious empowerment generated by the Great Awakening contributed to growing feelings of individualism and divine purpose in the colonies, a fact supported by Robert Bellah. In his work Varieties of Civil Religion, Bellah argues that the Great Awakening led to a recognition of providential religious meaning for the American colonies.²⁸ This ideology served to help create the motivation for independence by inspiring colonists with a sense of a divine right to self-determination. The movement taught colonists that they were fundamentally different from Great Britain in the eyes of God, and that this religious superiority needed to be addressed and acted upon.

Thomas Paine's famous pamphlet, Common Sense, serves as essential supporting evidence of this theory. While Common Sense can be characterized as war time propaganda, it does provide a glimpse into what was important to colonists at the time, as well as what helped to motivate the colonists to revolt against British rule. In this pamphlet, Paine discusses religion

²⁶ Johnson, "The Almost Chosen People", 80.

²⁷ Johnson, "The Almost Chosen People", 82.

²⁸ Bellah, Robert and Philip E. Hammond. 1980. Varieties of Civil Religion. Eugene, OR: Harper and Row Publishers, pg 13.

and the will of God at length, explaining that “the will of the Almighty...expressly disapproves of government by kings”.²⁹ As further proof of the ungodliness of governance by Great Britain, Paine claims that the distance at which God placed the two countries shows that He never intended the one to govern the other. The inclusion of such religiocentric discussions in a pamphlet intended as wartime propaganda exhibits how important these ideologies were to colonists at the time. Lastly, Paine’s pamphlet reflects the value that colonists placed on the protection of religious tolerance. Paine states that it is God’s will to allow a diversity of religious opinions in America as it “affords a larger field for our Christian kindness”.³⁰ This value became increasingly important through the development of the “Declaration of Independence” and The US Constitution.

During and following the Revolution, a key group of individuals were given the responsibility of molding the foundations of American government and society. History has named these individuals the Founding Fathers, and they include Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, George Washington, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin. These individuals were essential to the development and success of the American Revolution. They voiced the concerns and values of the colonists, and later used these to build a new governmental system. When analyzing the origination of civil religion in American history, it is important to investigate the beliefs and ideologies held by these diverse individuals, as they ultimately infused their beliefs into the superstructure of United States governance. They transferred their values into documents such as the “Declaration of Independence” and The Constitution and set the pathways for American institutions that extended far into the future.

There is no doubt that religion was of central importance to many in this group of revolutionary leaders. As George Washington stated in his Farewell Address, “religion and morality are indispensable supports of political prosperity”.³¹ This sentiment was shared by most of his compatriots. In a letter to his friend Thomas Jefferson, John Adams explains, “Without Religion this World would be Something not fit to be mentioned in polite Company”.³² In the

²⁹ Paine, Thomas, 1737-1809. Thomas Paine's Common Sense: the Call to Independence. Woodbury, N.Y, p. 11.

³⁰ Paine, Common Sense, 41.

³¹ Washington, George. “Farewell Address”. *Daily American Advertiser*. 19 September 1796.

³² Jefferson, Thomas and Abigail and John Adams. 1959. The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams. Ed. Lester J. Capron. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, p. 509.

same way that religion played a major role in the lives and morals of most American colonists, religious beliefs and values shaped the ideologies of these Founding Fathers.

Further, the way that these leaders interpreted religion is especially important. It may be surprising for readers to learn that most of the Founding Fathers did not privately prescribe to formal Christian denominations. Instead, many placed an emphasis on general morals or values preached by religion, as opposed to the exact teachings of a specific sect. Scholar David Holmes describes many of the original American leaders as Deists, who primarily valued the belief in God as one being, but rejected aspects of religious teachings they considered to be unreasonable. Holmes characterizes the five central points of Deism as (1) the existence of God, (2) the importance of worshiping this God, (3) virtue as the principal element of religion, (4) the importance of repenting for sins, and (5) the existence of life after death.³³ It should be noted that these central components bear similarities to those dimensions of civil religion as discussed by Rousseau.

Benjamin Franklin was one of the foremost leaders in the American Revolution. He helped to write the “Declaration of Independence,” the first document to introduce religion into the infrastructure of American governance.³⁴ Franklin’s religious beliefs were primarily Deist, as described by David Holmes. Late in his life, Franklin wrote of his religious ideology, stating,

“Here is my creed. I believe in one God, Creator of the Universe: That he governs the World by his Providence. That he ought to be worshiped. That the most acceptable Service we can render to him, is doing good to his other Children. That the Soul of Man is immortal, and will be treated with Justice in another life, respecting its Conduct in this. These I take to be the fundamental Principles of all sound Religion.”³⁵

This ‘creed’ reflects the central components of both Deism and civil religion nearly perfectly, and is echoed by multiple other Revolutionary leaders. As discussed, Thomas Paine had a clear impact on the development of revolutionary ideology that carried over to the drafting of the “Declaration of Independence” and The Constitution, through both his Common Sense pamphlet and his book entitled The Rights of Man. While Paine’s explicitly religious discussions in the

³³ Holmes, David. 2006. Faiths of the Founding Fathers. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 46.

³⁴ Bellah, Varieties of Civil Religion.

³⁵ Franklin, Benjamin. “To Ezra Stiles.” 9 March 1790.

Common Sense pamphlet may lead some to believe that he was a devout Christian, Paine was in fact one of the most radical Deists among American leadership.³⁶ In his much later work “The Age of Reason”, Paine wrote, “I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life. I believe in the equality of man and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavoring to make our fellow- creatures happy”.³⁷ These quotes from both Paine and Franklin are pivotal in shaping our understanding of how these revolutionary leaders contributed to the creation of civil religion in America. The foundational beliefs they espouse shed light on how the religion of early colonization has continued to influence American society throughout history, through the creation of a civil religion.

Thomas Jefferson presents the most interesting and, arguably, the most celebrated religious ideology to influence the development of the American religious sphere. Jefferson held strong religious beliefs that Holmes characterizes as Unitarian.³⁸ Jefferson ultimately sought to reach and promote the essential beliefs, values, and ideas of the Christian Bible while dismissing what he believed to be corrupt additions by followers to the religious ideology. In fact, Jefferson himself developed a work he called The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth, or “The Jefferson Bible” as discussed by scholars. This work replicates Christianity’s New Testament but excludes all passages that describe activities Jefferson believes to be unreasonable, such as mentions of the supernatural, the ‘miracles of Jesus’, and characterizations of Jesus as divine. What remains is what Jefferson calls, “the most sublime and benevolent code of morals which has ever been offered to man”.³⁹ This is the essence of Jefferson’s religious ideology. Jefferson believed most in the values and morals of the Christian religion, almost as one would believe in a particular moral philosophy. These beliefs are the roots of civil religion, and it is clear where they originate.

Following an understanding of the religious ideologies of the Founding Fathers, the question of how their religious beliefs served to influence the drafting of foundational documents such as the “Declaration of Independence” and The Constitution must be investigated. This paper argues that the Deist religious beliefs and the moral elements of religion that the leaders held as

³⁶ Holmes, Faiths of the Founding Fathers.

³⁷ Paine, Thomas, 1737-1809. The Age of Reason. Being an Investigation of True and of Fabulous Theology. T. and J. Swords, for J. Fellows, no. 131, Water-Street, 1794.

³⁸ Holmes, Faiths of the Founding Fathers, 86.

³⁹ Jefferson, Thomas and Abigail and John Adams, The Adams-Jefferson Letters, 384.

their personal faiths were relied upon heavily during the drafting of documents and the development of foundational American democracy. This can be seen clearly in the Declaration of Independence, which begins with the following:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men 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”

This single line represents much of what the leaders emphasized in their religious beliefs: a single God, equality of men, and an essential set of divine values that now include life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In addition to this initial statement, the Declaration concludes with an appeal to “the Supreme Judge of the World for the rectitude of our intentions...with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence”. In their work Varieties of Civil Religion, authors Bellah and Hammond explain that this document infused religion into the superstructure of American governance. They insist upon the great significance of the founders’ reference to a higher authority in such a foundational declaration, as it made religion important for the remainder of America’s existence as a country.⁴⁰

The next step in the development of American society and governance was the drafting and ratification of The United States Constitution. This, of course, was also impacted by the ideologies of the founders, who applied their beliefs to the development of the nation’s first legislation. In a lecture at the Constitution Center in Philadelphia given on October 18th of 2018, author Daniel Dreisbach explains, “Insofar as the US Constitution accredited the common law, the American people incorporated Christianity into their organic law upon ratification and adoption of the Constitution”.⁴¹ By this, Dr. Dreisbach means that the religious traditions, specifically the values espoused by Christianity, were incorporated into the United States Constitution, especially through segments including Due Process, the prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment, and corruption of blood, which Dreisbach claims originate from the Christian Bible. This re-evaluation of the Christian tradition and subsequent transfer of it into the Constitution ensured an incorporation of Christian values and mores into the structure of American governance. From the point of ratification on through the development of the nation,

⁴⁰ Bellah, Varieties of Civil Religion.

⁴¹ Dreisbach, Daniel. 2018. “Faith and the Founding: The Bible and the Constitution”. Constitution Center Broadcast. Philadelphia, PA.

religion would always have a place in American society and policy. As Johnson accurately states, “The USA was not therefore a secular state. It might more accurately be described as a moral and ethical society without a state religion”.⁴²

II. Presidency of Abraham Lincoln

The Founding Fathers were essential in setting the foundations for civil religion in the United States. They developed a set of doctrines that defined this sphere of American society and determined what values would exert the most influence on the lives of the American people. Even more importantly, they set the standards for what American leadership would value and of what their rhetoric would consist. While studying the Founding Fathers and early colonists revealed how civil religion began and what it grew from, analyzing the American Presidencies and presidential rhetoric sheds a light on how civil religion continued to play a major role in politics and political decisions. Presidential actions and rhetoric served to further shape the development of civil religion throughout history. Presidents could strengthen civil religion by tailoring their decisions to its doctrines or add layers to it by contributing rhetoric that would remain significant long past the conclusions of their presidencies.

The American way of life is most challenged during times of struggle, and the most perilous of these times are, of course, wars and violent conflict. Time periods where the United States engaged in war are thus the best demonstrations of the state’s civil religion, as they reveal the foundations of American society which constitute the glue that holds the American people together.⁴³ The Civil War from 1861 to 1865 served as perhaps the quintessential time of trial for the United States and its Constitution. Bellah explains that “the Civil War raised the deepest questions of national meaning”⁴⁴, and the values and rhetoric that emerged during this time were indicative of the ideologies that would be needed to maintain a cohesive state throughout the remainder of American history. Bellah argues that the nation’s self-understanding that emerged during this time expressed itself as civil religion. As a result, The Civil War was conceptually a period in American history where the American public and its leaders were influenced to express themselves in a more religious manner.

⁴² Johnson, “The Almost Chosen People”, 84.

⁴³ Bellah, “Civil Religion in America”.

⁴⁴ Bellah, “Civil Religion in America”.

The most prominent instrument of this wave of civil religion was, of course, President Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln both formulated and personally embodied the ideology of civil religion present during this time of strife.⁴⁵ Lincoln was a deeply religious individual who carried the Puritan beliefs of his parents, as well as the Christian ideology to which he subscribed, into the Presidency during the nation's deepest struggle. Wolf argues that Lincoln's religious development accelerated during his presidency. This was due to personal familial losses, including the deaths of his two sons. Lincoln was also influenced by the anguish caused by the civil war, which tore families apart and resulted in the deaths of 750,000 individuals.⁴⁶ This strife brought deep pain into Lincoln's life that led him to seek a higher authority in God and Christianity.⁴⁷

Many theorists argue that Lincoln was one of the greatest American theologians, who saw the hands of God in the affairs of nations.⁴⁸ To Lincoln, history was a code with the Bible as its key to understanding. One of the most important aspects of Lincoln's religious beliefs was his extreme religious fatalism. Lincoln believed, above all else, that the events of history were controlled by the will of the Almighty God. In a letter to Albert Hodges in 1864, Lincoln wrote the following:

“In telling this tale I attempt no compliment to my own sagacity. I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me. Now, at the end of three years struggle the nation's condition is not what either party or any man devised, or expected. God alone can claim it.”⁴⁹

Lincoln clearly held that God was the ultimate master, who dictated the events of history by manipulating the leaders of nations. Lincoln did not exempt himself from this assessment. While history remembers Lincoln as one of the greatest American presidents, Lincoln believed that he was simply an instrument of God.

Lincoln firmly believed that his role as president was to interpret the will of God and act upon it. This was especially true in his viewpoints on the conduct of the Civil War and its

⁴⁵ Bellah, “Civil Religion in America”.

⁴⁶ Gugliotta, Guy. “New Estimate Raises Civil War Death Toll.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 2 Apr. 2012.

⁴⁷ Wolf, William J. 1959. The Almost Chosen People: A Study on the Religion of Abraham Lincoln. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

⁴⁸ Wolf, The Almost Chosen People.

⁴⁹ Lincoln, Abraham. “To Albert Hodges.” 4 April 1864.

outcome. In his first Inaugural Address in 1861, Lincoln stated, “If the Almighty Ruler of nations, with his eternal truth and justice, be on your side of the North, or on yours of the South, that truth and that justice will surely prevail”.⁵⁰ While his interpretation of God’s will was to support the position of the North, Lincoln still maintained that if God was on the side of the South, that side should and would succeed. As further support, Bellah’s work Habits of the Heart explains that Lincoln’s biblical understanding of the Civil War was deeper than any known theologian, meaning that he understood the role of religion in the war more deeply than any priest or religious leader.⁵¹

Similar to the Founding Fathers, Lincoln also believed in a type of American exceptionalism, especially when it came to religion. According to Wolf, Lincoln held a conviction that America was a chosen nation with a special relationship with God. He held that God had a particular pathway in mind for the preferred nation to further His plan for mankind.⁵² In a message to congress on December 1st of 1862, Lincoln stated “We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope of earth”.⁵³ By this, Lincoln meant that the United States was God’s last hope for a virtuous democratic society. God had favored this country, and the Civil War was threatening this “last best hope”. This type of religiocentrism demonstrated why Lincoln felt so strongly about following the will of God during this pivotal period in American history.

Lincoln’s religious beliefs and religious fatalism were exemplified in both the Emancipation Proclamation and the Gettysburg Address. Though the Emancipation Proclamation was virtually devoid of religious references, statements preceding its declaration exhibited clearly that the action was made with religious motivations. In September of 1862, Lincoln stated, “I made a solemn vow before God, that if General Lee was driven back... I would crown the result by the declaration of freedom to the slaves.”⁵⁴ After the North emerged victorious in the Battle of Antietam, Lincoln further stated, “God has decided this question in favor of the slave”.⁵⁵ Ever an interpreter of the will of the Almighty in the affairs of nations, Lincoln waited

⁵⁰ Lincoln, Abraham. “First Inaugural Address.” Washington, D.C. 4 March 1861.

⁵¹ Bellah, Robert, et al. 1996. Habits Of the Heart : Individualism and Commitment in American Life. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, p. 146.

⁵² Wolf, The Almost Chosen People.

⁵³ Lincoln, Abraham. “Annual Message to Congress- Concluding Remarks.” Washington, D.C. 1 December 1862.

⁵⁴ Wolf, The Almost Chosen People, p. 17.

⁵⁵ Wolf, The Almost Chosen People, p. 19.

for a sign from God to pursue Emancipation. The Battle of Antietam served as that sign. Lincoln interpreted this military victory as the hand of God dictating the outcome of the Civil War. He believed that the outcome of the battle showed that God desired freedom for the slaves, and Lincoln was thereby motivated to pursue emancipation.

The Gettysburg Address was one of the most celebrated and symbolic speeches in American history. It captured the essence of the Civil War and articulated the true implications of its outcome. In the address, Lincoln explained that the war had placed the very foundations of democracy at stake. The Civil War, he said, had the potential to bring about the death of a nation, alongside the deaths of hundreds of Americans. The Gettysburg Address defined Lincoln's presidency, providing essential insight into his ideology. Author A. E. Elmore explains that this speech was much more than just political rhetoric meant to inspire and support the side of the North. Instead, the Gettysburg Address symbolized the importance of the Christian religion, both to Lincoln and to America.⁵⁶ The speech was infused with religious symbols and ideals mirroring major religious texts. It indicated the large role that religion played in American society at the time and demonstrated the power of civil religion during the nation's first time of trial.

The central theme in the Gettysburg Address is the birth, death, and rebirth of a nation. Lincoln equates the American Revolution, the "Declaration of Independence", and the drafting of the Constitution with the birth of the United States, and the Civil War as its demise. Lincoln further insists that the end of the Civil War, and the rejoining of the North and South, would bring a "rebirth" to the nation. This birth, death, and rebirth of the United States echoes the story of Jesus Christ. According to the Christian Bible, Jesus died for the sins of mankind, in the same way that the United States would die for the sin of maintaining slavery. In the same way that Jesus was reborn, the United States would also be reborn following the war. This symbolism can be seen most clearly in the first and final lines of his Address, as Lincoln discusses the birth of the American nation, "conceived in liberty." In his final line, Lincoln calls for the United States to have a "new birth of freedom".⁵⁷ The specific terms that he uses are essential in recognizing the symbolization, as they reference the Immaculate Conception as well as the rebirth of Jesus.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Elmore, A. E. 2009. Lincoln's Gettysburg Address: Echoes of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

⁵⁷ Lincoln, "The Gettysburg Address."

⁵⁸ Elmore, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

In constructing his speech, Lincoln drew heavily from the King James Bible as well as the Book of Common Prayer.⁵⁹ Many of the terms and symbols he used can be found directly within these two texts. The now famous term “four score and seven” appears in the King James Bible in reference to two conflicting tribes of men, describing how many men were present in the tribes. These tribes were called to unify into one force, and clearly symbolized the armies of the North and South in the Civil War. Further, the terms “dedicate”, “consecrate”, and “hallow” were all drawn from a single passage in the Book of Common Prayer.⁶⁰ Finally, Lincoln’s use of the phrase “fitting and proper” is parallel to the Book of Common Prayer’s “meet and right” which is used in some ceremonies of Holy Communion.⁶¹

Elmore argues that there is great significance to the religious rhetoric and symbolism used by Lincoln in his Gettysburg Address. This is partially because of the importance of religion to both sides of the issue of slavery. Many supporters of slavery in the South used religion to support their viewpoints, arguing that slavery was condoned by the Bible. Southerners viewed passages such as Leviticus 25: 44-46, which states “Your male and female slaves are to come from the nations around you; from them you may buy slaves”, as affirmations of biblical support for slavery.⁶² Northerners in turn used the religious values of treating others with kindness and respect as exemplified by the teachings of Jesus, as well as the Biblical concept of ‘one blood’ that all humans share, to argue for the abolition of slavery. Lincoln acknowledged the great importance of religious ideologies in the political arguments of both sides and sought to use this to reduce the hostility between the North and the South. As Elmore states, “Lincoln also recognized that even though Northerners and Southerners squabbled about the meanings of both the Bible and the Prayer Book, he could use these ancient and revered works to bring people together in support of principles of freedom and equality and perhaps, over time, to turn enemies into friends again”.⁶³ Lincoln sought to use the country’s love and respect for the Bible and religion to bring the nation back together. In his eyes, religion and the word of God surpassed political differences and could succeed in reuniting the country.

⁵⁹ Elmore, Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, 2.

⁶⁰ Elmore, Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, 88.

⁶¹ Elmore, Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, 77.

⁶² "Leviticus, Book of." In *A Dictionary of the Bible*. Ed. W. R. F. Browning. *Oxford Biblical Studies Online*. Apr 19, 2019.

⁶³ Elmore, Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, 218.

This religious rhetoric not only served to influence public opinion regarding the Civil War, but it also had profound implications for the development of civil religion in the United States. As stated, the Civil War was a time of national and religious reformation and renewal. Fundamental values were contested. Integral political issues that had previously been under the surface came to light and erupted into violence. The identity of the United States was changing on an elementary level and the nation's foremost leader had profound power and influence over the trajectory of this transformation. The fact that Abraham Lincoln held such firm religious beliefs that he expressed publicly as President meant that the United States would be led down a distinctly religious pathway in order to carry out "God's will". Lincoln's use of religious beliefs to unite the North and South meant that those doctrines were given a role that elevated the standing of religion in the United States. It generated a fundamentally more religious state. The overall religious sphere in America was strengthened, and civil religion was reinforced and given more power as a result.

Over 150 years after the Gettysburg Address was given, Lincoln's leadership during the Civil War period has not diminished in historical significance. In a recent poll of historical experts held by the New York Times, Abraham Lincoln was reaffirmed as the 'Greatest President of the United States', surpassing both George Washington and Franklin Delano Roosevelt.⁶⁴ Clearly, both academia and the American public still idolize this 19th century president. The findings of this poll suggest that Americans consider a president whose every action was based solely on his interpretation of God's will, with the belief that he was acting as an instrument of the Almighty, as the greatest president. What does this concept mean for civil religion today? It suggests that we, as a people, highly value fundamental religious doctrines (or at the very least tolerate them) and believe in their truthfulness as well as their application in the political sphere. By this assessment, civil religion maintains a firm grip on American society and politics today.

V. Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower

America launched into another national crisis following the end of the Second World War. The Cold War began just as World War II closed and consisted of a high stakes ideological

⁶⁴ Rottinghaus, Brandon, and Justin S. Vaughn. "How Does Trump Stack Up Against the Best – and Worst - Presidents?" *The New York Times*, 19 Feb. 2018.

conflict and arms race with the Soviet Union. The Cold War spanned from 1947 through 1991 and was a time period characterized by the threat of escalation to nuclear war in moments such as the Cuban Missile Crisis. Politicians and leaders across the nation engaged in rhetoric demonstrating a fear of a radical communist party gaining power in America. This hysteria was exemplified by the campaign led by Joseph McCarthy, whose political ideology was named “McCarthyism”. Components of McCarthyism were adopted by many politicians, leading to a time period where hostility and fear invaded the nation. The United States was led through many years of this crisis by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who served as president from 1953 to 1961. Eisenhower was arguably the most outwardly religious president in American history, and this played a major role in the pathway that America embarked upon following the Second World War.

Dwight D. Eisenhower was raised in a deeply religious household. The former president’s parents were Jehovah’s Witnesses who led their family in prayer twice daily. Jehovah’s Witnesses are members of a Christian denomination that maintains radical beliefs distinct from mainstream Christianity. The religion holds that the end of the world is inevitable and establishing God’s Kingdom over the earth is the only solution to worldly problems. As strictly religious individuals, Eisenhower’s parents required their children to attend Sunday school and to refrain from sinful activities including smoking, drinking, and gambling.⁶⁵ Eisenhower later rejected many of the more restrictive and extraneous policies of the religion, preferring a more basic, morality-based religion. Despite this, Eisenhower described himself as “the most intensely religious man I know”.⁶⁶ In the months leading up to his presidential race, Eisenhower began to attend a Presbyterian church. In February of 1953, he became the only president to ever be baptized while in office.⁶⁷ This in itself was an enormously symbolic act, indicating the pronounced role that religion would come to play in Eisenhower’s term as president.

As is often the case with new presidents, Eisenhower’s first acts after being inaugurated set the tone for the remainder of his Presidency. It is therefore important to note that his very first action as president was to lead the nation in prayer. At the start of his inauguration speech,

⁶⁵ Smith, Faith and the Presidency, 223.

⁶⁶ Eisenhower, Dwight D. (1948, May 4). Personal interview with Mr. Miller from the New York Times.

⁶⁷ Smith, Faith and the Presidency.

Eisenhower requested that the nation pray with him. He stated: “Give us, we pray, the power to discern clearly right from wrong, and allow all our words and actions to be governed thereby, and by the laws of this land”.⁶⁸ Following this prayer, the remainder of Eisenhower’s Inaugural Address focused on the importance of maintaining faith in the values and morals that America was founded upon. Eisenhower stated:

“At such a time in history, we who are free must proclaim anew our faith. This faith is the abiding creed of our fathers. It is our faith in the deathless dignity of man, governed by eternal moral and natural laws. This faith defines our full view of life. It establishes, beyond debate, those gifts of the Creator that are man's inalienable rights, and that make all men equal in His sight.”⁶⁹

This speech demonstrates the centrality of religion to Eisenhower’s political belief system. By ensuring that his first acts as president were religiously motivated, Eisenhower set a distinct tone for the American political system for the duration of his tenure. Throughout his presidency, Eisenhower opened cabinet meetings with prayer and maintained close relationships with several religious groups in the nation. He also invited influential clergymen, including Billy Graham, to meet with him at the White House.⁷⁰ These actions demonstrated a central goal of his Presidency to be the revitalization of religion in the United States through infusing faith-based values into his policies and religious rhetoric into his speeches.

Eisenhower’s ideology was essential in determining how the Cold War was framed in the United States. Though historians agree that the Cold War was a conflict between great powers with differing political ideologies, the war was often discussed by American politicians as a religiously based conflict. Eisenhower promoted this ideology firmly throughout his candidacy and presidency. In a campaign speech in 1952, Eisenhower stated, “What is our battle against communism if it is not a fight between anti-God and a belief in the Almighty? Communists know this. They have to eliminate God from their system. When God comes in, communism has to go.”⁷¹ Through statements such as these, Eisenhower insisted that America was a distinctly religious nation in comparison to that of the USSR, as it held a firm belief in God and the power

⁶⁸ Eisenhower, Dwight D. “First Inaugural Address.” Washington D.C. 20 January 1953.

⁶⁹ Eisenhower, “First Inaugural Address.”

⁷⁰ Smith, *Faith and the Presidency*, 222.

⁷¹ Eisenhower, Dwight D. “Press Conference following meeting with Marshal Grigori Zhukov.” New York, New York. 22 December 1952.

of the Almighty. Alternatively, he argued that the Soviet Union had replaced God with Karl Marx, and that communism had marked itself as atheist and anti-religious. Eisenhower believed that religion served as a line between free and communist worlds, and that communism's rejection of religious beliefs was directly related to its inferior moral qualities.⁷²

This trend of treating the Cold War as a religiously motivated conflict continued throughout Eisenhower's presidency. Eisenhower sought to utilize the ideology of McCarthyism but diluted his arguments in order to prevent it from tearing the nation apart. Eisenhower insisted that the only legitimate forms of government are those that are based on the values of a religious faith. In December of 1952, Eisenhower stated:

“Our form of government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don't care what it is. With us of course it is the Judeo-Christian concept but it must be a religion that all men are created equal.”⁷³

In Eisenhower's mind, communism was not a legitimate form of government; it rejected religion and divine values. It was this belief that led Eisenhower to pursue a policy of containment, because, like McCarthy, he believed that a spread of atheist communism would result in a deconstruction of American and Western morals and democratic values.⁷⁴

In addition to his ideology regarding the Cold War and communism, or perhaps because of it, Eisenhower made several decisions that directly demonstrated how important the Christian religion was to him and to his goals during his presidency. In July of 1956, Eisenhower signed a bill that declared “In God we Trust” to be the national motto for the United States and passed legislation to legally require its inclusion on all American currency. Further, in 1954, Eisenhower insisted that “Under God” be added to the Pledge of Allegiance.⁷⁵ These actions were taken to attempt to interrelate the forces of “capitalism, free enterprise, democracy, and religion” to help America grow and flourish.⁷⁶ Such policies and actions were direct reflections of the strength of civil religion following World War II and remaining throughout the Cold War period. Beyond this, annexing the religious phrases of “In God we Trust” and “Under God” to central public

⁷² Inboden, William. 2008. Religion and American Foreign Policy 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment. New York, New York: Cambridge University Press.

⁷³ Eisenhower, Dwight D. “Presidential Candidates Stress Role of Religion” *Religious Herald*, Virginia, 25 January 1952.

⁷⁴ Inboden, Religion and American Foreign Policy.

⁷⁵ Smith, Faith and the Presidency, 222.

⁷⁶ Smith, Faith and the Presidency, 224.

exhibitions of American nationalism has had a dramatic impact upon the sphere of civil religion in the United States. The Pledge of Allegiance is recited daily in Elementary Schools across the country, and the phrase “In God We Trust” appears on all American currency. This ubiquitous rhetoric has provided constant reinforcement of the importance of faith and religion to state affairs for American citizens. This has contributed to an overall growth of civil religion in the United States and indicated to the world that the nation maintains a distinctly religious ideology.

Discussion

The findings of this paper may have implications for the influence that civil religion may have on American policy decisions. In the literature review, this paper discussed in broad generality the potential implications of the manipulation of civil religion by political leadership. Bellah suggests that holding presidents accountable ultimately to God reduces the relevance of government by the people; as one may argue that the people can be wrong whereas God is omniscient. Lincoln provides an example of problematic situations that may arise from this religious belief system. Lincoln believed himself to be an instrument of God and interpreter of His will, and this Divine will, which was interpreted by Lincoln alone, would ultimately trump public opinion when it came to political decisions as important as the Emancipation Proclamation. It may be difficult for readers to grasp the gravity of this potential issue because of the nature of Lincoln’s place in the Civil War: clearly, the Emancipation Proclamation was ultimately for the good of the people and for the nation. A more problematic issue that has taken shape across the United States in recent history is the restriction of abortion rights based on religious ideology that condemns a woman’s right to end her pregnancy. Political leaders including today’s Vice President of the United States, Mike Pence, are currently utilizing religious ideology and rhetoric in the political sphere to generate support for the “pro-life” movement. In a tweet from January of 2019 in reference to restraining abortion rights, Pence stated, “We must recommit ourselves to restoring the sanctity of life to the center of American law.” This is an obvious reference to the “sanctity of life” concept in Christianity which insists that life is sacred and holy and must be protected.⁷⁷ This movement has the very real potential to

⁷⁷ Pence, Mike (@VP). “These VA & NY late term abortion bills.” 31 January 2019, 10:33 a.m. Tweet.

restrain the political rights of women to ensure autonomy over their own bodies and is heavily based upon a religious justification and championed mainly by religious constituencies.

Another way that civil religion can be used to manipulate the American public into supporting causes that may not be entirely noble or virtuous is in the realm of foreign policy and American aggression. One modern example that may jump to mind is the second war in Iraq, which spanned from 2003 to 2011. George W. Bush's leadership during this time was reflective of the former presidents discussed in this paper, such as Dwight D. Eisenhower. Author Gary Scott Smith argues that Bush's religious ideology led the former president to embark on a war with Iraq. Further, Bush systematically used religion to sell this war to the public, linking the goals of his administration to divine intention.⁷⁸ In 2003, Bush allegedly informed the Palestinian prime minister that God had instructed him to "strike at al-Qaeda" and Saddam Hussein, as well as the Middle East.⁷⁹ In 2004, Bush stated, "I believe that God wants everybody to be free, and that's been part of my foreign policy."⁸⁰ Such statements demonstrate the centrality of religion to Bush's foreign policy strategies. These ideologies are not unique to Bush and have been utilized by many other presidents as well. The implications of this religiocentric foreign policy strategy are potentially broad and damaging. It is possible that future presidencies could act in a similar manner using civil religion as a justification for their policies. This possibility becomes concerning considering the fact that more than half of American citizens today believe that the Iraq War was a mistake that resulted in over 150,000 casualties.⁸¹

Conclusion

In addition to pursuing answers to questions regarding secularity that may be asked with increasing regularity in the future, this paper has contributed to the field of political science research by investigating a political and societal phenomenon that influences a broad range of factors. From public opinion regarding Supreme Court cases such as *Masterpiece Cake Shop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*, to policy decisions regarding declarations of war, civil

⁷⁸ Smith, *Faith and the Presidency*, p. 399.

⁷⁹ Smith, *Faith and the Presidency*, p. 399.

⁸⁰ Bush, George W. "Remarks by President Bush and Senator Kerry in the Third 2004 Presidential Debate." 14 October 2004.

⁸¹ Gallup, Inc. "Fewer in U.S. View Iraq, Afghanistan Wars as Mistakes." Gallup.com, Gallup News, 12 June 2015.

religion can be influential in a multitude of highly important governmental and societal activities. It is an important and complex topic that should be investigated and discussed further. Readers should become aware of the rhetoric used by leadership and consider the motivations behind mentions of religion in political speeches. In this way, American citizens can differentiate between genuine manifestations of religious values and cheap talk meant to manipulate constituencies into supporting a particular political goal.

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