

The Politicization of Early American Christianity (1760s-1890s)

Logan Horton

"The Politicization of Early American Christianity (1760s-1890s)" examines the role that civil religion played in American society during the time frame of 1760-1899. This paper argues that civil religion created doctrinal and ideological issues for both Protestant and Catholic denominations of Christianity. This paper examines five watershed moments in American politics and American Christianity during this time frame, and it argues that the language within civil religion ultimately caused American's identity to be mistakenly conceived as "Christian".

Many philosophical thinkers—John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Montesquieu— influenced American political thought.¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, both actively and passively, held the greatest sphere of influence on American governance specifically political identity, and in turn, his ideologies created systematic and doctrinal problems for early American Christian denominations. Unlike his colleagues and predecessors such as John Locke, Montesquieu, etc. who focused almost exclusively on morality², Rousseau was interested in how these ideals— natural law, nature, morality, etc.—affected the society in which he lived; that is, he concluded that the government is only as strong as its citizens, if the citizens are not morally strong (ideologically virtuous), then the government itself shall not be seen as visibly strong (physically virtuous).³ Furthermore, Rousseau established, in *The Social Contract*⁴, the notion of civil religion.⁵ This ideology had a profound impact on the identity of American politics, specific Christian doctrine, and America's own identity.⁶

Rousseau defined civil religion as the glue that holds society together, or, more specifically, it is a way to bring unification in a nation by giving it guidelines to follow.⁷ Rousseau argued that this idea of "civil religion" (public piety, guidelines) is essential for a virtuous society. In order for

¹ Donald S. Lutz, "The Relative Influence of European Writers on Late Eighteenth-Century American Political Thought," *American Political Science Review* 78, no. 01 (March 1984): 189–97, doi:10.2307/1961257.

² Ibid.

³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract: & Discourses* (J.M. Dent & Sons, 1920); Edward S. Corwin, "The 'Higher Law' Background of American Constitutional Law," *Harvard Law Review* 42, no. 3 (1929): 365–409, doi:10.2307/1330694; Anthony T. Kronman, "Contract Law and the State of Nature," *Journal of Law, Economics, & Organization* 1, no. 1 (1985): 5–32.

⁴ "Rousseau: Social Contract: Book IV," accessed March 14, 2016, http://www.constitution.org/jjr/socon_04.htm; Kenneth D. Wald and Allison Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics in the United States* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).

⁵ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*. Although this is a different edition, and later published, he states this term in the original work on chapter eight, book four.

⁶ Ronald C. Wimberley and James A. Christenson, "Civil Religion and Other Religious Identities," *Sociological Analysis* 42, no. 2 (1981): 91–100, doi:10.2307/3710588; Ted Ritter, "Civil Religion," in *The Encyclopedia of Political Thought* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2014), <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9781118474396.wbept0151/abstract>; Gail Gehrig, "The American Civil Religion Debate: A Source for Theory Construction," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 20, no. 1 (1981): 51–63, doi:10.2307/1385338.

⁷ Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96, no. 1 (1967): 1–21; "Rousseau."

a society to flourish, there must be a moral standard set in place, so the society will not go into chaos. Rousseau argued that “religion, considered in relation to society...may be divided up into two kinds: the religion of man and that of the citizen.”⁸ Furthermore, Rousseau argued that “the dogmas of civil religion ought to be few, simple, and exactly worded, without explanation or commentary.”⁹ To Rousseau, Christianity was a religion “occupied solely with heavenly things.”¹⁰ Rousseau went on to define what civil religion’s main beliefs were, saying they were “the existence of a mighty, intelligent, and beneficent Divinity, possessed with foresight and providence, the life to come, the happiness of the just, the punishment of the wicked...those who distinguish civil from theological intolerance are, to my mind, mistaken.”¹¹ Rousseau’s main argument was that civil religion placed its importance, not on Heaven or hell, but on the betterment of the society.¹² The main ideas that make up civil religion are not expounded upon; that is, he leaves them without any afterthought or explanation whatsoever. Rousseau does this on purpose. He explicitly gives the reader instruction that the terms are to be subjective. This work by Rousseau was published in 1760, and Rousseau’s ideas ultimately had an impact on five major watershed moments to be examined: the drafting of the First Amendment of the Constitution, the Second Great Awakening, The Nativist Movement, The Civil War/Slavery, and Religious Pluralism/American Myths.

The framers of the Constitution were influenced by and borrowed from enlightenment ideologies influenced by Locke, Montesquieu, and other philosophers; these ideologies focused more on civil liberties.¹³ Rousseau’s work proved highly influential in the creation of the First Amendment, as well as Thomas Jefferson’s ideals regarding separation of church and state.¹⁴ Furthermore, scholar Steven Green argues that “religion was so deeply intertwined with Revolutionary ideology that it seems virtually impossible to distinguish between them.”¹⁵ Religion was such a part of the American society, the Founders had to address it—even though the Amendment was not passed until 1791, one year after the start of the Second Great Awakening. However, as Green shows us, “the founders’ conception of church-state relations was heterodox, dynamic, and incomplete—and purposefully so... [and by] 1800 the United States represented the only secular government on earth, revolutionary France excepted.”¹⁶ Thus, we see the goal of the Constitution is to place the governance in the hands of free, liberated humans—not of angels,

⁸ “Rousseau.”

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Kronman, “Contract Law and the State of Nature”; Corwin, “The ‘Higher Law’ Background of American Constitutional Law.”

¹⁴ Corwin, “The ‘Higher Law’ Background of American Constitutional Law”; Lutz, “The Relative Influence of European Writers on Late Eighteenth-Century American Political Thought”; Robert Neelly Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (University of Chicago Press, 1992); Gehrig, “The American Civil Religion Debate”; William R. Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal* (Yale University Press, 2004).

¹⁵ Steven K. Green, *The Second Disestablishment: Church and State in Nineteenth Century America* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 23.

¹⁶ Ibid., pg. 8–9.

demons, or gods. The goal of creating a secular nation did not mean the government barred its citizens to practice religion. Rousseau argued, in order for a society to be truly “civil” it must ascribe to the standard he set forth. However, he did not say through which mechanism these ideas were to be fulfilled.¹⁷ He simply gave the ideas, and he left them open to one’s own interpretation.

Evangelicals, shortly after the passing of the First Amendment, had growing concerns that society was headed on a downward spiral. This concern made them want a “second revolution.”¹⁸ This revolution would be focused on spiritual matters, not governmental. The Second Great Awakening was a movement that aimed to make America socially Christian; that is, create converts who were not lukewarm in their faith but completely surrendered unto Christ. Christians also wanted to create true religious freedom—which was, according to their worldview, the ability to resist temptation.¹⁹ Furthermore, this Awakening was focused on making sure its converts experienced something real and true on an emotional level. For American Protestant Christians during this movement, the constitution was “cold and external, a shell for the pursuit of self-interest rather than a space for the exercise of free initiative in the public interest.”²⁰ One may argue that the ideals of the American Christian and the ideals of Rousseau were at odds. One may also argue that both ideologies wanted to create virtuous citizens. Rousseau advocated for rewards for virtue and vice, that is, punishment for right and wrong; yet, American Protestant Christians were still unhappy with this dynamic wanting their movement to have a ‘concrete’ foundation—namely faith in God, and wanting to begin to make the nation Christian. One may make the argument that in its early stages civil religion itself may have been at odds with Christianity during the Second Great Awakening; however, it was the *ideals* of the revolution, which were influenced by civil religion, that were at odds with Christianity during this time.²¹ American Protestant Christians were focused on creating converts during this era, not necessarily debating philosophical ideas such as personal liberty or autonomy.

The language that Rousseau expressed, in sharing the tenets of civil religion, was left up to each individual to decide. Perhaps theologians could argue that Christianity offered a stronger ability to unify the nation since it gave direct ideas and inputs rather than subjective language that was not purposefully explained or systematized.²² As previously shown by Rousseau, the terms were meant to be left as is—without comment or explanation. This, for Christians especially, is an

¹⁷ “Rousseau.”

¹⁸ Bellah, *The Broken Covenant*, pg. 35, pgs. 166–168.

¹⁹ Donald G. Mathews, “The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830: An Hypothesis,” *American Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1969): 23–43, doi:10.2307/2710771; Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006).

²⁰ Bellah, *The Broken Covenant*, pg. 35.

²¹ Bellah, *The Broken Covenant*; Wimberley and Christenson, “Civil Religion and Other Religious Identities”; Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, Reprint edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

²² *Ibid.*, pg. 43–44; Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus* 96, no. 1 (1967): 1–21; Jose Santiago, “From ‘Civil Religion’ to Nationalism as the Religion of Modern Times: Rethinking a Complex Relationship,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 48, no. 2 (2009): 394–401; Ronald C. Wimberley and James A. Christenson, “Civil Religion and Other Religious Identities,” *Sociological Analysis* 42, no. 2 (1981): 91–100, doi:10.2307/3710588.

issue. They want something concrete, something they can dig deep into—which is precisely why the Second Great Awakening was focused on outdoor tent revivals, emotionalism, and eschatology instead of vague, incomplete, and non-systematized language.²³

One of the ways this conflict played itself out in the Second Great Awakening was the way in which theologians focused on eschatology, end-times theology.²⁴ For example, the main tenet of eschatology during this era was post-millennialism, a belief that in order for Jesus to return, people had to be witnessing to others, actively engaged in spreading the gospel to their neighbors, and if they did not do this, Jesus' return would ultimately not happen.²⁵ This ideology gave birth to groups, such as Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Millerites, whose main goal was to create a society that was pious.²⁶ Furthermore, this piety was not just meant to affect one's religious life, but it sought to affect the entire society and its practices. Protestant Christians began to have views that shaped the way society was conducted. An example of this is the ideology known as Sabbatarianism, a belief that the Sabbath should be honored and revered.²⁷ Sabbatarianism did not just aim to apply to doctrinal ideology. Christians who held to this ideal wanted to change the way their towns and counties were ultimately run.²⁸ For example, some Christians even advocated for businesses to close on Sundays as well as laws that prevented the mail from being ran.²⁹ Thus, we see the Second Great Awakening as a response to the ideology that the Revolution was influenced by, namely enlightenment-based philosophies, and civil religion.³⁰

In addition to the drafting of the First Amendment and the Second Great Awakening, followers of civil religion and Christianity saw themselves in many smaller conflicts during 1800s which would manifest itself at large in the third major watershed moment. The Nativist Movement, particularly Anti-Catholicism, was the larger conflict in which civil religion, American politics, and Christianity found itself. While this issue focused more on Christianity itself rather than

²³ Mathews, "The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830"; Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*; F. Ernest Stoeffler, *Continental Pietism and Early American Christianity* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007).

²⁴ Mathews, "The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830"; Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind*; Patrick Allitt, *Major Problems in American Religious History: Documents and Essays* (Wadsworth, 2013).

²⁵ James H. Moorhead, "Between Progress and Apocalypse: A Reassessment of Millennialism in American Religious Thought, 1800-1880," *The Journal of American History* 71, no. 3 (1984): 524–42, doi:10.2307/1887470; Nancy Koester, "The Future in Our Past: Post Millennialism in American Protestantism," 1995, https://wordandworld.luthersem.edu/content/pdfs/15-2_Revelation/15-2_N_Koester.pdf.

²⁶ Nancy Koester, "The Future in Our Past: Post Millennialism in American Protestantism."

²⁷ Richard R. John, "Taking Sabbatarianism Seriously: The Postal System, the Sabbath, and the Transformation of American Political Culture," *Journal of the Early Republic* 10, no. 4 (1990): 517–67, doi:10.2307/3123626.

²⁸ *Ibid.*; Steven K. Green, *The Second Disestablishment: Church and State in Nineteenth Century America*.

²⁹ Alan Raucher, "Sunday Business and the Decline of Sunday Closing Laws: A Historical Overview," *Journal of Church and State* 36, no. 1 (1994): 13–33; John, "Taking Sabbatarianism Seriously."

³⁰ Mathews, "The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830"; Wimberley and Christenson, "Civil Religion and Other Religious Identities"; Bellah, *The Broken Covenant*; Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind*.

American political thought,³¹ it is still a watershed moment in that it changed what the phrase “Christian” meant to some people; that is, it is the first way in which civil religion began directly affecting Christian denominations.³² During this era, Protestants were the main Christian denomination that had influence in the public schools³³, and educators made sure their curriculum was strictly Protestant in nature. Protestant controls ran into major problems when “the influx of Catholic immigrant children after the 1830s led many educators to resist further secularization and to cling more closely to the Protestant character of their programs.”³⁴ Underneath all of this was the issue of church and state as well as the past influence of civil religion, which one could argue that secularization stemmed from to a degree.³⁵ How could have civil religion, which was left intentionally vague, led to secularization of schools? The reason why civil religion ultimately led to secularization in schools could have been the fact that the doctrines that Rousseau defined were *meant* to be subjective; that is, left up to the individual to decide and find meaning.³⁶ Furthermore, it is important to note that the schools did not automatically become secularized in one day, this secularization lasted well into the twentieth century.³⁷ The school controversy affected Christian denominations; it did so by bringing the Protestant/Catholic battle into America.³⁸ The idea of what was truly Christian; that is, what beliefs one had to adhere to, began to change when Catholics began coming to America, and the idea of what was truly American began to change as well.³⁹ Protestants saw Catholics as un-loyal to the goal of the Second Great Awakening as well as the goal of America—to create a Christian society. Protestants argued that the loyalty of Catholics was not to God and country but to Rome.⁴⁰ What it meant to create a Christian society differed from Protestant to Catholic churches; so much that, some Protestant public school texts began calling the pope the Anti-Christ.⁴¹ The way in which civil religion affected this movement was that the main goal of Rousseau’s civil religion was to create a society in which humans have “a single will which is concerned with their common preservation and general well-being.”⁴² The mechanism to

³¹ Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (Duke University Press, 1995); Katie Oxx, *The Nativist Movement in America: Religious Conflict in the 19th Century* (Routledge, 2013).

³² James W. Fraser, *Between Church and State: Religion and Public Education in a Multicultural America* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2000); Steven K. Green, *The Second Disestablishment: Church and State in Nineteenth Century America*, pg. 250–271.

³³ Fraser, *Between Church and State*; Michaels, *Our America*.

³⁴ Steven K. Green, *The Second Disestablishment: Church and State in Nineteenth Century America*, pg. 252.

³⁵ Fraser, *Between Church and State*; Susanna Mancini, “Power of Symbols and Symbols as Power: Secularism and Religion as Guarantors of Cultural Convergence, The,” *Cardozo Law Review* 30 (2009 2008): 2629.

³⁶ Mancini, “Power of Symbols and Symbols as Power”; Steven K. Green, *The Second Disestablishment: Church and State in Nineteenth Century America*; Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

³⁷ Steven K. Green, *The Second Disestablishment: Church and State in Nineteenth Century America*, 253.

³⁸ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (Rutgers University Press, 2002); Oxx, *The Nativist Movement in America*.

³⁹ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*.

⁴⁰ Oxx, *The Nativist Movement in America*, pg. 76–77.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 21–22.

⁴² “Rousseau”; Rousseau, *The Social Contract*; Lutz, “The Relative Influence of European Writers on Late Eighteenth-Century American Political Thought.”

achieve this ideal, Rousseau proposed, was to ascribe to his doctrines within civil religion—however, what is important for us to understand is that the ideals are to be left without explanation or commentary. They are not to be systematized.⁴³ How this finds itself in the nativist movement is that the American political ideology, at least in the beginning, seemed to be largely in line with the Protestant way of thinking.⁴⁴ A clear example of this thinking is seen in examining a speech given by President Grant in 1875, where he “equated the school question with the preservation of the republic before a group of Civil War veterans”⁴⁵—however, Catholics were not in favor of this thinking, as they argued that “Grant’s speech was fulminated by his zeal against the Catholic Church.”⁴⁶ However, this approach was soon argued against by James G. Blaine, a representative of Maine in the U.S. Senate from 1863 to 1876, who proposed a Constitutional Amendment in which stated the following: “No state shall make any law respecting an establishment of religion...for the support of the public schools...nor shall any money so raised ever be divided between religious sects or denominations.”⁴⁷

Thus, we easily see an early attempt at religious reconciliation in American government. However, attitudes toward this reconciliation varied. Despite varying attitudes, many saw Blaine’s amendment as purely political, not necessarily a true attempt to resolve the issue.⁴⁸ Furthermore, columnist Samuel Spear suggested that “public school is the common property of the whole people”⁴⁹, and that the “only solution was a purely secular system of education.”⁵⁰ Nativism, wrapped in anti-Catholicism, and the way in which public schools should be run all manifested themselves as the culmination of indifference between American politics, civil religion, and Christianity.⁵¹ Underneath all of this is the fact that the society was failing to live up to Rousseau’s fifth tenant of civil religion, religious toleration. Protestants and Catholics were showing, through their hatred toward one another, an inability to live up the ideals that Rousseau defined. Even though the nativist movement is the third watershed movement, we see as a result of these issues, there is an even larger movement in which American political thought and religion become intertwined, which is the fourth movement we will discuss, abolitionism, slavery, and the Civil War.

These three issues could each be discussed as separate moments in the history of civil religion, American politics, and Christianity; however, these three issues go hand-in-hand with one another with regard to the overall impact in which they shape political thought. What is important to note is these issues, abolitionism, slavery, and the Civil War, are largely religious at

⁴³ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*; Thomas C. Grey, “Origins of the Unwritten Constitution: Fundamental Law in American Revolutionary Thought,” *Stanford Law Review* 30, no. 5 (1978): 843–93, doi:10.2307/1228166; Kronman, “Contract Law and the State of Nature.”

⁴⁴ Steven K. Green, *The Second Disestablishment: Church and State in Nineteenth Century America*, 293.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pg. 292.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pg. 295.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 295–296.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 297.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 290–297; Oxx, *The Nativist Movement in America*, pg. 21–22. pg. 76–77.

their core.⁵² Christians who were pro-slavery were mainly located in the Southern part of the United States; whereas, Christians who were anti-slavery were located in the North.⁵³ However, issues relating to slavery began to become overlaid with religious undertones; most notably when, denominations began using the Bible to argue *both* in favor and against the same institution (i.e. slavery). For example, Thomas Dew argued in 1852 that slavery was allowed, in which he said “there is no rule of conscience or revealed law of God which can condemn us”.⁵⁴ He went on stating, “servants are even commanded in Scripture to be faithful and obedient to unkind masters.”⁵⁵ An example of anti-slavery arguments using the Bible would be freedman Fredrick Douglas, a convert to Methodism, who began preaching against slavery.⁵⁶ A key figure during this time would be William Lloyd Garrison who once stated that the Constitution was a “covenant with death, an agreement with hell.”⁵⁷

Furthermore, it is important to examine some of the issues that civil religion was facing, since slavery is now entering the equation. Civil religion had been able to adapt during the Protestant and Catholic debate; however, we can begin to see a clear problem of Rousseau’s ideology when we examine it more closely with the issue of slavery. For example, if Christians in the South were arguing that slavery is pro-Christian, and those from the North were arguing that slavery is anti-Christian, each group could argue that the other’s religion does not fall in line with Rousseau’s ideal of “civil”; that is, being for the betterment of society.⁵⁸ If someone’s religion was viewed as false or immoral, could they still do as Rousseau wanted and create a great, and virtuous society? In addition to the doctrinal disagreements between pro-slavery Christians and anti-slavery Christians, civil religion itself faced a big problem when confronted with this issue. How could a subjective worldview, such as civil religion, be harmonious with the institution of slavery defended by a religious group that supposedly held to objective truth? Furthermore, if Rousseau believed in a deity that rewarded societies for their behaviors, how would this deity reward a society that treated its slaves harshly? Finally, how could the beliefs of civil religion, as a whole, be harmonious with slavery? Does Rousseau’s civil religion stand up to this test?

It is important to note that the Civil War, its outcome, and Lincoln’s role therein was religious in nature. For example, Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address is seen as the moment where he calls the nation out on its sin of slavery.⁵⁹ Although Lincoln struggled with religion throughout

⁵² Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*; Betty Wood, *The Origins of American Slavery: Freedom and Bondage in the English Colonies* (Macmillan, 1998).

⁵³ Wood, *The Origins of American Slavery*; Allen C. Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002).

⁵⁴ “Thomas R. Dew Defends Slavery (1852),” accessed March 16, 2016, http://www.norton.com/college/history/archive/resources/documents/ch15_03.htm.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (Random House Publishing Group, 2007).

⁵⁷ James B. Stewart, “The Aims and Impact of Garrisonian Abolitionism, 1840-1860,” *Civil War History* 15, no. 3 (1969): 197–209, doi:10.1353/cwh.1969.0072.

⁵⁸ Jon Logan Horton, “Book Review 3: Robert Bellah’s Civil Religion in America,” April 2016, 3–4. Unpublished Work.

⁵⁹ Bellah, *The Broken Covenant*, pg. 52–53.

most of his life, during this Address he was able to explicitly say that slavery and Christianity were incompatible where he says, “woe unto the world because of offences.”⁶⁰ Furthermore, one must also see the new American myths that were being, due to this War, seen through a pluralistic civil religion lens during this era. For example, many preachers and pastors began using the War as a symbolic means in their churches; one example being Thomas Weld who used the abolitionist cause to convert many skeptics.⁶¹

Prior to the Civil War, one aspect of American mythology was based on Calvinistic Protestant theology; that is, the idea of America being a city on a hill, a beacon to the world. If there would be any damage to that mythology, certainly the Civil War and the issues regarding slavery would damage the American identity.⁶² This brings us to our final watershed moment, the beginning of pluralism in American society and the challenges faced by the original American (Protestant) myth. Shortly after the War, there was a new myth, that one could argue, defined American society. This idea was that through the bloodshed of War and death of Abraham Lincoln there was a renewed nation, more specifically, new ideas surrounding freedom.⁶³ Furthermore, this ideology is clearly seen in the infamous song “The Battle Hymn of the Republic”, which both symbolically and lyrically conveys the struggle with religious identity which Americans were facing. For example, the lines “I have seen him in the watchfires of a hundred camps”⁶⁴ along with, “His day is marching on...He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat”⁶⁵, convey a strict combination of religious and government identities.⁶⁶ The struggles that American society began to face after the War was a struggle that affected both its religious identity and its governmental identity. How would the renewed nation handle slavery being illegal? How would they treat incoming Catholics? These are all questions that American society had to face after the War.

It is important to note that religious pluralism can also be defined as multiculturalism in this context—primarily because the way in which we are to understand this specific conflict is related to the different cultures that are coming to America. These cultures, with their own customs

⁶⁰ “Abraham Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address,” accessed January 14, 2017, <http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/inaug2.htm>; Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln*.

⁶¹ Bellah, *The Broken Covenant*, pg. 51–52.

⁶² Allitt, *Major Problems in American Religious History*; Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*.

⁶³ Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America*; “Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne de Science Politique - *The Myth of American Individualism: The Protestant Origins of American Political Thought* Barry Alan Shain Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, Pp. Xix, 394 - Cambridge Journals Online,” accessed April 18, 2016,

<http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?jsessionid=BD37364814A22B8CB29AB8AB85B700FD.journals?fromPage=online&aid=6274008>; Thomas Banchoff, *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁶⁴ “Independence Day - Battle Hymn Of The Republic Lyrics | LyricsMode.com,” accessed April 18, 2016, http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/i/independence_day/battle_hymn_of_the_republic.html#!

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Annie J. Randall and Associate Professor of Musicology Annie J. Randall, *Music, Power, and Politics* (Routledge, 2004), chap. 1.

and habits, were different from their fellow Americans, who had been here since the 1700s.⁶⁷ One of the biggest changes to American culture during this time (the latter part of the nineteenth century) was the large amount of Irish immigrants who began to make their way overseas. The way that Irish immigrants caused societal issues is clearly seen in the New York Orange Riots in 1870 and 1871.⁶⁸ These riots were originally supposed to be a parade that was celebrated by Irish Protestants, celebrating the victory of the Battle of the Boyne of William III, and there ended up being a row by both Protestants and Catholics that culminated in the infamous riots, leading the parade to be banned by police commissioner James Kelso which also led to the downfall of boss William Tweed, and the deaths of over 50 people.⁶⁹ Although this moment may be argued as strictly Protestant against Catholic, it is much deeper than simply a Protestant and Catholic divide. While influenced by that mindset, it pitted Irish against Irish. As stated earlier, this religious moment caused a political outcome; that is, William Tweed ultimately lost his sphere of influence, as this incident showed a lack of power.⁷⁰ Thus, we can see religious pluralism, even between the same ethnic group, causing political issues in American society.

It is important to note, not all religious pluralism made for negative outcomes, such as riots or city bosses losing power. In addition to different Christian groups and the challenges they were facing, such as church and state battles, there began to be a growth of different Jewish sects in America during the nineteenth century. For example, Reform Judaism began gaining ground in the 1870s when Isaac Meyer Wise founded a rabbinical seminary, Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio.⁷¹ The founding of this seminary caused a host of people to be trained in Reform Jewish thought, which places high importance on personal autonomy and free will, ideals that are in direct contrast to the ideal of predetermination, an ideal that was influenced by Christian teaching, which sovereignly declared America a city on a hill for all nations.⁷² As stated earlier, Protestant Christianity was facing many issues in the nineteenth century. With regard to religious pluralism, this manifested itself not only with other religions coming into America (such as Reformed Judaism, which began in Germany⁷³), but primarily with the in-battles it faced with Catholicism.⁷⁴ It would be quite reasonable for one to make the argument that the biggest challenge to the American myth of being a “city on a hill,” being able to share the gospel and become a beacon for the world, was not necessarily Judaism or any other religion rather Christianity itself. Protestants were extremely focused on having the largest sphere of political influence, especially in Washington, D.C.⁷⁵

⁶⁷ Banchoff, *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism*; Oxx, *The Nativist Movement in America*.

⁶⁸ Michael Allen Gordon, *The Orange Riots: Irish Political Violence in New York City, 1870 and 1871* (Cornell University Press, 1993).

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.; Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America*.

⁷¹ Stephen Steinberg, “Reform Judaism: The Origin and Evolution of a ‘Church Movement,’” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 5, no. 1 (1965): 117–29, doi:10.2307/1384260.

⁷² Ibid.; Banchoff, *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism*.

⁷³ Steinberg, “Reform Judaism.”

⁷⁴ Oxx, *The Nativist Movement in America*.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pg. 84–110.

Catholics wanted to put a stone in the Washington monument, that was ultimately dubbed the “Pope’s Stone”, and Protestants were vehemently against this idea.⁷⁶ Protestants across the aisle argued that having a Roman influence in Washington was “a catalyst widening the chasm between the perception of accepted political ideals and an imported ‘foreign’ theology”.⁷⁷ What this means is that Protestants were scared of outside Roman influence in Washington—not seeing that wanting to insert Protestant influence was just as biased, perhaps even more, than the perceived Roman influence they were afraid that was going to happen. Eventually the stone was destroyed on March 6th, 1854, after many Protestant petitions and protests in the nation’s capital.

This shows us a strange relationship between government and religion. Protestants have wanted to have an impact on government since the founding of Massachusetts Bay, arguing that any other outside influence is wrong while at the same time missing the clear fact that they themselves are asserting outside influence on a (secular) government.⁷⁸ This double standard is what made this time frame (1760s-1890s) such an interesting era to study, regarding religious history. Civil religion and the language the Founders used with regard to this construct was purposefully left vague with the intention that each individual living in the newfound Republic could be included.⁷⁹ Civil religion, at first, leaves no room for the non-religious; however, it has evolved in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to include the non-religious or spiritual, now displayed as what could be called moralistic nationalism.⁸⁰ One of the main problems that Rousseau had with his doctrine of civil religion was that it made people choose which idea they would be more accountable to: deity or state.⁸¹ This is clearly seen in that the state of Massachusetts waited until 1833 to do away with religious taxes, and as late as 1920 for oath requirement for public office.⁸²

The term civil religion is becoming more malleable, as shown clearly through the works of modern scholars such as Robert Bellah and Bart Ehrman; the former produced the work *Habits of the Heart* which focuses on religion’s connection to society, and the latter produced the work *Misquoting Jesus* which focuses on textual criticism in the New Testament.⁸³ One of the main problems that civil religion caused for Christianity in America—with respect to the moral issues surrounding the Civil War—was the wedge it drove in Christianity, specifically between Protestants and Catholics. This wedge manifested itself in incidents such as the Nativist Movement, which culminated in Protestant Christians, who as Rousseau argued were occupied

⁷⁶ Ibid., pg. 84–85.

⁷⁷ Ibid., pg. 90.

⁷⁸ Santiago, “From ‘Civil Religion’ to Nationalism as the Religion of Modern Times.”

⁷⁹ Jonathan Fox, “World Separation of Religion and State Into the 21st Century,” *Comparative Political Studies* 39, no. 5 (June 1, 2006): 537–69, doi:10.1177/0010414005276310.

⁸⁰ Santiago, “From ‘Civil Religion’ to Nationalism as the Religion of Modern Times.”

⁸¹ “Rousseau”; Santiago, “From ‘Civil Religion’ to Nationalism as the Religion of Modern Times.”

⁸² J. Clifford Wallace, “Framers’ Establishment Clause: How High the Wall?,” *The BYU L. Rev.*, 2001.

⁸³ Fox, “World Separation of Religion and State Into the 21st Century”; Santiago, “From ‘Civil Religion’ to Nationalism as the Religion of Modern Times”; Wald and Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics in the United States*.

“solely with heavenly things”⁸⁴, forming a political party (the Know-Nothings), to insert their influence on earthly matters. The reason why a subjective ideology, such as civil religion, could affect such a large religious group, such as Christianity, goes back to the idea of why America was founded, the myth of America. Protestant American Christians have long believed that it was their duty to usher in the new Israel on Earth, and it would be located in the New World. What Rousseau was showing in his work *Social Contract* was that the virtuous society was such not because of one particular Christian worldview but because of a common standard and experience shared by the people; it may have looked somewhat like Christianity, but it was not necessarily itself Christian.⁸⁵ Early American Christians mistakenly thought that the public piety being shown by the founders was Christianity; while it has been shown throughout much scholarship, many of the founders were largely deists or non-religious.⁸⁶ The language they used seemed familiar because it was wrapped in the language of morality that Christians know all too well; nevertheless, this civil religion was not meant to be a new form of Christianity itself, rather a shared common goal, in both practice and principle.⁸⁷

Indeed, many Christian denominations were shaped by the cause of civil religion so much that even in the modern era American Christians began to have a desire to elect Presidents, such as Ronald Reagan, who promised to get amendments passed that would shape the way society acted and behaved.⁸⁸ While this may have been just lip-service to get elected, it is important to see that despite this, the American government is deeply involved with what her people care about, and it has been shown throughout the decades that America is indeed a nation influenced by religion.⁸⁹ Therefore, we see through the founding of America all the way to the beginning of the twentieth century, especially into the twenty-first century, that the language of civil religion, and its ability to create an American identity founded upon religiosity, as well as a standard for right and wrong, was purposefully vague—so that Americans could have a shared experience and a shared goal of creating a virtuous society. The original intent was that the interpretation of Rousseau’s tenets of civil religion would be left up to each individual to decide, yet we have seen through many watershed moments in American society that the subjectivity of this language was challenged. By examining the First Amendment of the Constitution the language clearly calls for a separation of church and state, yet this ideal was contested heavily by Protestants throughout the Second Great Awakening.⁹⁰ After examining these two cases, the next two movements were the nativist movement in America, specifically anti-Catholicism, and how civil religion impacted American public education. The last two watershed moments were the Civil War and the beginnings of multiculturalism and religious pluralism in America. The former was influenced

⁸⁴ “Rousseau.”

⁸⁵ Ritter, “Civil Religion.”

⁸⁶ Alf J. Mapp, *The Faiths of Our Fathers: What America’s Founders Really Believed* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005); David L. Holmes, *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁸⁷ Ritter, “Civil Religion.”

⁸⁸ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton University Press, 2015).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 187–217.

⁹⁰ Mathews, “The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830.”

heavily by religious undertones; while, the latter was more of a result of immigration, a movement that ultimately challenged the old American myth of America being a Protestant city on a hill. What was advocated for by civil religion was not a strict theocracy rather a shared United States in which many beliefs and customs are welcomed.⁹¹ Thus, civil religion faced challenges on each end of the spectrum, inter-denominational (Protestant/Catholic) as well as ethnic-denominational (Irish Protestant/Irish Catholic). The ability for civil religion to adapt to each challenge and revise itself throughout the decades show that morality, however one defines it, will most likely be a part of American government for many years to come. Finally, with the growth of nationalism, pluralism, and modernism, it is likely that civil religion will soon include a host of new religious and non-religious identities.⁹²

⁹¹ Arthur Meier Schlesinger, *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1998).

⁹² Michaels, *Our America*; Qiong Li and Marilynn B. Brewer, "What Does It Mean to Be an American? Patriotism, Nationalism, and American Identity After 9/11," *Political Psychology* 25, no. 5 (October 1, 2004): 727–39, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9221.2004.00395.x.