**Religion and Nationalism in the United States**

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Toward the end of his 2013 speech before the United Nations General Assembly, President Obama intoned: “Some may disagree, but I believe that America is exceptional” (Obama 2013). To American ears such a statement is uncontroversial; American politicians have often contended that our nation is different and that our distinctiveness is tied to a divine purpose, or some sacred mission. It is not surprising that presidents would seek to legitimate their actions by sanctifying them. What is more difficult to explain is why Americans, most of whom have been and are religious, accept that trope at face value.

The fusion of religious and national loyalties in the United States is so natural that it is sometimes hard to recall that such an arrangement is not taken for granted elsewhere in the world, nor that such a link is ideologically predetermined. Countries as diverse as Israel, Pakistan, and China, to name a few, have witnessed tension between the claims of the state and those of religion. For many of the citizens of those states, religious assertions are understood as distinct from, and at times in competition with, national ones. Moreover, there is nothing inherent in any of the great religious traditions that encodes a close bond between national and religious loyalties; there are, in fact, resources in each that would challenge such a claim. Yet, history, politics, and public opinion surveys continually note the close link between nationalism and religion in the United States. The question is, why?

We argue that a key factor in determining the relationship between religion and nationalism within a nation state is the role and status of religion at the point of state formation. Specifically, we are interested in three interrelated aspects of religion as a new state forms: the role of religion in the ideology of the emerging political elite, the constitutional status of religion in the new order, and the country’s demographic make-up at the point of state formation. In the United States, each worked to advance a civil religious nationalism, as opposed to a nationalism linked to a particular tradition or to a secular vision.

Religious elites in the United States largely supported the political break from England, and even provided spiritual rationale for political independence. In contrast with a country like France, there was no significant anti-clerical component to the American Revolution. Since it was not a danger to the emerging state, religion could be infused in the national ethos and secular nationalism never found a voice in the new American Republic.

The constitutional order created, however, did not establish a particular religion (at least at the national level), and the formal ties between religion and the state were few. For both prudential and ideological reasons, most framers opposed official ties between church and state, but they fully supported the idea that religious values and practices would aid the new nation. This encouraged the development of nationalism based on widely shared cultural values that linked the cause of the nation and the cause of religion together. In the United States, religious persons trained themselves to see their spiritual mission in nationalistic terms, but they did so without the complications inherent in a constitutional system that formalized those connections. Freed from that constraint, and the political conflicts inherent in it, religion could work its magic at a cultural level to become what de Tocqueville famously described as “the first” of America’s political institutions.

Finally, while a large percentage of Americans were Christians at the founding, they were divided into multiple denominations, a trend that would only exacerbate as the decades progressed. The multiplicity of sects, along with a political culture that encouraged the formation of many more, meant that religious leaders sought points of cultural and moral agreement with their religious counterparts. As a consequence, a non-sectarian nationalism formed that proved to be relatively open to religious newcomers.

Once solidified, these political structures and cultural patterns created a path dependent process that shaped future understandings of religion and nationalism in the United States, even in the face of profound social and political changes. A remarkable aspect of that story is the degree to which religious interpretations of the country’s mission – along with implicit or explicit assertions about which religious groups could or could not be good citizens – have expanded over time. The result has been that new religious groups have been enfolded into the canopy of the country’s sacred mission. But much of this process was unplanned. At different moments in American history, religious majorities have questioned the patriotic bona fides of Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Jews, Mormons, and Muslims, not to mention African-Americans and Native Americans. Religious majorities periodically sought to use the political process to institutionalize their particular values, and they questioned whether religious outsiders could be socialized into American values. However, constitutional norms limited the opportunities for political mischief by the religious majority, while the rhetoric of religious liberty proved to be a cudgel that could be used by religious minorities to stake their claim as both religious and American.

The purpose of this chapter is to outline relations between religion and nationalism in the United States. We offer an historical overview of this process and an analysis of contemporary public opinion data on questions related to their interaction on the most salient nationalistic project of the United States over the past decade: the War in Iraq. We contend that patterns established at the time of state formation continue to be of crucial importance to contemporary understandings of religion and nationalism.

**Religious Elites and Nationalism at the Founding**

In a sermon from 1785, Samuel Wales, a Congregational Minister and Professor of Divinity at Yale, spoke for most Americans when said: “true patriotism is a branch of that extensive benevolence which is highly recommended by our holy religion” (Wales, 1785: 850). For Wales, religious faith and national commitments reinforced each other. In theory and often in practice, American nationalism is premised on the conception that membership in the political community follows from the acceptance of certain fundamental values and institutions. This civic notion of nationalism excludes prescriptive criteria to define what it is to be an American. Such a conception, however, has to acknowledge that religion, which can be a very prescriptive category, was important at the nation’s founding and remains important today. How, then, did a liberal, ideas-based conception of nationalism take hold in a nation filled with religious persons of particular persuasions?

The answer to that question at the founding was that civic norms and religious values reinforced each other, and they did so under the common banner of civic republicanism. As Mark Noll argues, there was at the founding a widespread assumption “that republican principles expressed Christian values and hence could be defended with Christian fervor” (Noll 1992: 116). The republican idea of the corrupting influence of unchecked powers mirrored complaints against the national church coming first from the Puritans and later from the fast growing dissenting sects, republican notions of natural rights found parallels in the Protestant commitment to religious liberty, and both traditions emphasized the importance of freedom, individual choice, and civic virtue (Noll 2002: chapter four; Witte and Nichols 2011:33-36). In a 1780 sermon, Congregational minister Samuel Cooper suggested that the free republic which America had recently established matched that which God had created with the Israelites: “The form of government originally established in the Hebrew nation by a charter from heaven, was that of a free republic . . . Even the law of Moses, though framed by God himself, was not imposed upon the people against their will; it was laid open before the whole congregation of Israel; they freely adopted it, and it became their law, not only by divine appointment, but by their own voluntary and express consent” (1780: 634). While this might be a creative interpretation of God’s covenant with the Israelites, it nonetheless demonstrates how religious elites effortlessly understood political values in religious terms.

The language of and commitment to religious and political liberty similarly made its way into religious rhetoric. In his 1784 Thanksgiving sermon, Presbyterian minister George Duffield linked republican and Christian values when he affirmed about America: “Here has our God erected a banner of civil and religious liberty” (Duffield, 1784: 783). In the minds of religious leaders, political and religious liberty were theological requirements as much as they were a political necessity. As Congregational minister Samuel Cooper contended, “a Constitution that respects civil and religious liberty in general ought to be regarded as a solemn recognition from the Supreme Ruler himself of the rights of human nature” (Cooper 1780:636). Time and again, these religious leaders bonded the cause of nation and religion together, and in so doing they established a pattern that generations of religionists would largely follow. Far from challenging each other, patriotism and religious faith were knit from the same cloth.

The orthodox Christian view that God works through history provided another way for religious leaders to offer a spiritual interpretation for the nation’s founding and destiny. In his 1784 Constitution Day sermon Congregational Minister Samuel McClintock asserted that “the divine hand hath been signally displayed in the events and occurrences which led to it [the revolution]” (McClintock, 1784: 798). In a similar vein, Samuel Wales reasoned that “a proper view of all of our various blessings will lead us to conclude that we are indeed the most highly favored people under heaven. God hath not dealt so with any other nation” (1785: 840). Given such claims, it is hardly surprising that there was little space between civic and religious notions of what it meant to be an American. There were some loyalists, particularly among the Anglican clergy, and a small number of pacifists who questioned both the revolution and God’s purposes for the new nation (Noll 1992:122). That the American Revolution, in contrast with its French counterpart, was not anti-clerical, anti-church, or anti-religious weakened the claims of the religious naysayers, however. By the time the revolution had been won, dissenting religious voices had largely been drowned out.

The practical effect for most churches in the early years of the Republic was that they preached a seamless message of national and religious purpose. Typical of this attitude was a Pastoral Letter from the Presbyterian Synod of the Carolinas (1790) that urged members of its churches to “revere the government under which you live . . . teach your children the constitution of your country; inform them that we, and they with us, were in the design of our enemies, Pharaoh’s bond-men, and that the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.” The Congregational Minister John Lathrop (1799) echoed this sentiment in his Fast Day Sermon when he noted: “as we are bound by the law of God, to love our neighbors as ourselves, so we are bound to love our country.” It was thus largely taken for granted by most American Christians that good citizenship was a religious virtue.

Religious and political elites further reinforced the symbiotic relationship between spiritual and national commitments when they linked national prosperity with virtue. In a Thanksgiving Day Address, Lathrop also confirmed that “political liberty depends on national virtue” (Lathrop 1787:878). This perspective was largely shared by the Founders, even those with less than orthodox Christian views. John Adams expressed such a perspective in an 1811 letter to his friend Benjamin Rush: “religion and virtue are the only foundations, not only of republicanism and of all free government” (Adams 1856). Article 3 of the 1787 Northwest Ordinance made a similar point in justifying the creation of schools in the Northwest Territories: “Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged” (Northwest Ordinance 1787).

**Religious Demographics and Emergent Nationalism**

Social conditions in the United States also encouraged the formation of this type of religious nationalism. The United States was, by the standards of the time, religiously pluralistic. According to one estimate (Finke and Stark 1989). Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Baptists, and Episcopalians were nearly equally represented among the religious population, with between fifteen and twenty percent each of all religious adherents. There were also a smaller number of Methodists and Roman Catholics, and an even smaller number of Quakers and Jews. While some political and religious voices supported a nationally established church, America’s religious diversity made such an arrangement politically impractical, and for many others it was also philosophically unappealing. The nationalism that emerged would therefore be shorn of religiously prescriptive ties, a marked contrast with those countries that had an established church with its implicit understanding that membership in a particular tradition was a prerequisite for genuine nationalism.

Moreover, Christian leaders promoted points of cultural and political agreement among their co-religionists. In a sermon preached before a convention of the Episcopal Church, William Smith (1784: 826) urged his listeners to focus on the “evangelic grace of [Christian] charity” which united fellow believers rather than “in all the doubtful questions over which Protestant churches have been puzzling themselves.” He further noted that what the country most needed was “the pious assistance and united support of all her true sons, and of the friends of Christianity in general (1784:829).” While acknowledging a “diversity of sentiment” among religionists in America, the Congregationalist minister Samuel Cooper similarly recommended a “happy union of all denominations in support of our government” (Cooper 1780:656). Founders such as Washington and Adams made similar claims. In his Farewell Address, Washington reminded Americans that the patriotism that united them should be stronger than the religion that might divide them: “The name of American, which belongs to you in your national capacity, must always exalt the just pride of patriotism more than any appellation derived from local discriminations. With slight shades of difference, you have the same religion, manners, habits, and political principles” (Washington 1796). Seen in the right way, Washington suggests, all religions are essentially the same, and they preach from the same prayer book of patriotism.

Even those who had a more overtly Christian view remained ecumenical in their perspective. One of the most controversial sermons of the early 19th Century was Ezra Stiles Ely’s “The Duty of Christian Freemen to Elect Christian Rulers.” In that sermon, Ely urged his readers to “promote Christianity by electing and supporting as public officers the friends of our blessed Savior” (Ely 1827:552). Ely’s target was the incumbent President and likely Unitarian, John Quincy Adams (Kabala 2013:45). By Ely’s light a Unitarian could not be a true friend of Christianity, and in his mind it was the duty of faithful Christians to reject suspect Unitarians as political leaders. Nonetheless, Ely managed to include in his politically acceptable camp “all who profess to be Christians of any denomination” (Ely 1827:556). Restrictive he might have been, in short, but Ely’s nationalist vision nonetheless embraced nearly all of the Protestant denominations of his day.

While the Framers tied notions of civic virtue to religion, it was a generalized religion, not religion in its particularistic forms that the framers had in mind (Monsma 2012: 45-58). The rather indiscriminate nature of this fusion encouraged religionists of varying denominations to define themselves into the national ethos rather than out of it. The result was the development of a civil religion where faith and patriotism were two sides of the same coin. As Hugh Heclo notes (2007:32), Americans were constructing a “public religion, speaking of God in a way that unified rather than divided.” It was a public religion where denominations dropped their doctrinal distinctions and absolutist claims. Only in this way could Christianity, which had historically been the locus for so much religious and political conflict, be “made safe for democracy” (Heclo 2007:64).

**Religion in the Constitution**

The status of religion in the new state reinforced this notion of civil religious nationalism. Religion is hardly mentioned in the Constitution that was ratified in 1789. Article 6 forbids religious tests for holding public office, and in gesture to Quakers and others who believed that the Bible forbade the swearing of oaths, the Constitution allows those taking the oath of office to “affirm” rather than “swear” their allegiance (Gaustad and Smidt 2002:126). Other than that, religion is not cited in the Constitution. Nor is there any evidence that religion was a topic at all among the delegates at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia that drafted the Constitution (Larson and Winship 2005). The First Amendment, which was added shortly thereafter, famously forbids Congress from making a law “respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” While the Constitution disestablished religion at the national level, a few states maintained established religions after the ratification of the Constitution, others restricted elected offices to Protestants, some maintained tax support for ministers, and many applied the concept of religious liberty selectively (Hatch 1992:144; Gaustad and Schmidt 2002:131). Over time, however, such overt religiously discriminatory policies dissipated, religious tests for public office at the state level were largely abandoned, tax support for ministers disappeared, and by 1833 all states had dropped their religious establishments.

The First Amendment was both a practical response to demographic reality and a principled commitment to religious liberty. As we noted above, given the nation’s pluralism an established church was impractical, and the framers well understood how politically explosive any movement in that direction would have been. Moreover, a growing number of religious and political thinkers advocated the spiritual virtues of both religious liberty and of church-state separation. Many American Protestants had chafed at the powers accorded the established Church of England, and from the more secular side thinkers like Jefferson and Madison famously defended disestablishment and religious liberty in their debates on Virginia’s “Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom” (Sikkenga 2010).

The First Amendment was not, however, an attack on religion; nor was it meant to denude the role that most religious and political leaders assumed that Protestant Christianity would play in the new nation (Neuhaus 1984). Over the next several decades, in fact, Protestant values deeply shaped public policy on such matters as Sunday closing laws, the promotion of education, and public morals, to name a few. A religious establishment was neither plausible nor attractive to most, but unity under a common Christian morality was. This allowed for the creation of what James Kabala (2013: 2) describes as a “quasi-official non-sectarian Protestant Christianity.” This unofficial religion both shaped public policy and almost merged religious and national values into a new civil religion.

None of this is to minimize the very real points of political conflict that developed among religious groups in America. The dominant religious traditions at the founding (Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians) faced intense competition from religious upstarts like the Methodists, Disciples of Christ, and various Baptist groups (Hatch 1989). To stem the tide, the majority traditions often turned to the state to try to restrict their religious competition (Finke and Stark 2005). Had those efforts prevailed, a more restrictive understanding of religious nationalism might have developed. Over time, intense political persecution would no doubt have soured the Baptists and the Methodists on the political project and led them to reject a necessary connection between their religious and patriotic commitments. But in the end, the state proved unwilling or unable fully to suppress the religious newcomers, and in short order they became the new dominant traditions and civil religion as the basis for religious nationalism survived.

**Immigration and the Challenge to Religious-National Consensus**

An even more compelling challenge to this religious nationalism came from the immigration of large numbers of Roman Catholics and Jews in the 19th Century (Smith 1997: 349-357). America’s religious nationalism was relatively open at the founding, but it was implicitly Protestant. Given the religious make-up at the time this was hardly surprising. While there were a small number of Roman Catholics and Jews at the time of the Constitution’s ratification, the country was overwhelmingly Protestant, albeit of various denominations. How would the Protestant majority see new religious groups fitting into America’s religious nationalism, and how would religious groups outside of this Protestant consensus experience this civil-religious discourse?

Some religious and political leaders responded by asserting the Protestant character of the nation’s religious mission. Immigrant Catholics and Jews, along with the homegrown Mormon movement, could not be good citizens or patriots, some claimed, because their religion inculcated in them values inconsistent with republican government. Republicanism required everything that Protestantism provided: educated citizens committed to liberty, self-government, and church-state separation. By contrast, these other religions promised citizens with little education, mixed loyalties, and no firm commitment to or familiarity with republican principles. Because of their large numbers, Roman Catholics bore the brunt of this charge. An editorial from an Amherst New Hampshire newspaper, *The* *Farmers’ Cabinet*, expressed precisely this fear: “Romanism sends into every city, town, and village, its forked-tongued priests; it commands its devotees to make a reservation in all its oaths of allegiance, in favor of the Holy Mother Church, it nurtures treason under the guise of religion” (*Farmers’ Cabinet* 1853). In a similar vein the *New Englander and Yale Review* reported that “It [Roman Catholicism] is associated with the most arbitrary principles of government, and with sweeping and bloody persecutions. Their ecclesiastical system owns for its head a foreign potentate” (New Englander and Yale Review 1844).

One of the most popular and representative nativist works of the 19th Century, the Reverend Josiah Strong’s *Our Country,* was published by a bastion of American Protestantism, the American Home Missionary Society. In that work, Strong argued that the main perils facing the country’s future were immigration, Mormonism, and Romanism. What particularly concerned Strong about the latter was its purported rejection of what he called the “foundation stone(s) of our free institutions”: liberty of conscience, religious liberty, free speech and church-state separation (Strong 1885: 48). All of this led Strong to conclude that there were “irreconcilable differences between papal principles and the fundamental principles of free institutions” (Strong 1885:53). The Right Reverend William Goswell Doane, Episcopal Bishop of Albany, worried about American Catholic political loyalties: “And if the question ever came, which God forbid, between their yielding obedience to the American republican principles, or obedience to the Roman authority, large numbers of them would be almost compelled to surrender political loyalty to what they thought the higher law” (Doane 1894:38).

American Jews also bore the brunt of these accusations. Suspicion of Jewish loyalties was a common anti-Semitic trope, but it was relatively muted in the United States when Jews were small in number. The immigration of a larger numbers of Jews in the 19th Century, however, brought the assertion of the supposed divided loyalties of the Jews more to the forefront. Debate about the “Jewish Question” led Goldwin Smith, himself an immigrant from England, Professor of history at both Oxford and Cornell Universities, to argue – in the pages of the prestigious *North American Review* – that “it is impossible that a man should be heartily loyal to two nationalities at once; and so long as a trace of Jewish nationality remains the Jew cannot be a thorough American. (Smith 1891:142). For Smith and many other anti-Semites, Jews were a “parasitic race. . . [that] retains a marked and repellent nationalism of their own” (Smith 1891:137).

In hindsight, it is easy to dismiss these overwrought nativist claims, but from their standpoint there was some degree of plausibility to them. Protestants had married republican and religious claims. In that union, religious liberty, opposition to established churches, and the sovereignty of the people were both civic and religious values. There was, to be sure, nothing inherent in interpreting the faith in that way, and in many ways these Protestants were abandoning their Calvinist heritage with its emphasis on the sovereignty of God, rather than the sovereignty of the individual (Noll 1992:355). Nonetheless, in making the connections between religious and republican values these Protestants knit together a nationalism that required adherence to particular political principles; religious traditions that did not naturally embrace them would have their patriotic bona fides questioned. Moreover, implied in this critique was an assumption that the distinct religious practices of these newer communities made them resistant to assimilation.

This assertion put religious immigrants in an impossible bind. They could question republican values in light of their religious commitments and thereby reinforce claims that they were insufficiently patriotic, or they could embrace those political norms at the risk of losing the distinctiveness of their religious tradition. At the elite level, some highlighted the tension. The Syllabus of Errors issued by Pope Pius IX in 1864 catalogued a series of propositions the church had condemned throughout the 19th Century. Among the doctrines proscribed by the church were the separation of church and state, religious liberty, and freedom of conscience. As John Noonon notes, “what is incontestable is that in absolute terms, without qualification as to context, the pope pronounced freedom of conscience and freedom of religion to be pernicious errors” (Noonan 2005: 149). Conservative views in the American church had a strong voice at the end of the 19th Century. One way that this expressed itself was in terms of sympathy for “Romanist” versus “Americanist” values. Thomas Scott Preston, vicar general for Archbishop Corrigan of New York, contended in a letter that “here in New York we are loyal Catholics. We are devoted to the Holy See, we do not believe in the great folly and absurdity of Americanizing the Catholic church. We propose to Catholicize America” (Quoted in Byrne 1995:313).

A similar concern was expressed in portions of the American Jewish community. Arthur Ruppin, an early Zionist thinker, lamented that the typical Jewish immigrant to the United States “submits himself absolutely to the influence of American culture, which in a few decades, or at least in one or two generations, lures him away from Judaism, or at any rate weakens its hold that a formal profession is all that remains” (Ruppin 1913:12). In a 1917 sermon titled “Crisis”, Reformed Rabbi James G. Heller similarly noted that “assimilation and intermarriage, alienation and indifference, have grown with alarming rapidity in exactly those countries where freedom has come to the Jew” (Heller 1917). Orthodox Jewish leaders were even more insistent that American Jews had lost their way in embracing American values (Cohen 2008: 112-117). In expressing these concerns Catholics and Jews did not see themselves as undermining American nationalism, instead they were implicitly questioning the compatibility of their faith with some of the political values and social norms of America’s civil religion.

The response among nativist Protestants was predictably negative (Highman 1988). The civil religion they had formed married religious and political values, and to question that union was to undermine American nationalism. No doubt a public opinion survey taken toward the end of the 19th Century would have found that the majority Protestants were more “patriotic” than their religious counterparts, both because nativist arguments no doubt alienated some immigrants and because these religious newcomers had yet fully to marry the principles of their faith to the national project. Had nativist arguments prevailed, the link between religion and nationalism in the United States would have been undermined, at least for the large number of new religious groups. But, they did not win out in the end, and the assumption that America’s civil religion was Protestant gradually disappeared.

The primary reason that nativist arguments failed was because most Catholic and Jewish religious leaders rejected the claim that there was anything intrinsic in their faith that qualified their patriotism, and they embraced many of the republican values that Protestants claimed they could not naturally support. In response to the charge that Catholics rejected church-state separation, for example, John England, the First Catholic Bishop of Charleston asserted that “the decision upon the question of the expediency as to the form of government for temporal or civil concerns is one to be settled by society and not by the church” (England 1837). In terms of the claim that Roman Catholics owed their ultimate allegiance to the pope, a letter from the *Catholic Telegraph* signed simply by “a Catholic” stated that “it must be apparent that any idea of the Roman Catholics being in any way under the influence of any foreign ecclesiastical power, or indeed of any church authority, in the exercise of their civil rights, is a serious mistake” (*Catholic Telegraph* 1842). John Ireland, Archbishop of Saint Paul, stated: “there is no conflict between the Catholic Church and America. The Church is the mother of my faith, America is my country, the protectress of my liberty and of my fortunes on earth. . . When I assert as I now solemnly do that the principles of the Church are in thorough harmony with the interests of the Republic, I know in the depths of my soul that I speak the truth” (Ireland 1896:10). Orestes Brownson, a prominent transcendentalist and Catholic convert, even suggested that Roman Catholicism provided a firmer foundation for the preservation of Republican values than did Protestantism: “the Roman Catholic religion is necessary to sustain popular liberty, because popular liberty can be sustained only by a religion free from popular control, above the people” (Brownson 1852:381). Finally, while there were clear divisions among the American church hierarchy, few of them embraced the papal condemnations in the Syllabus of Errors, and many of them worked to reassure Americans of their loyalty to American political principles (McGreevey 2003: 118-120). In doing so, they were setting a trajectory by which the church would eventually embrace those values, though it would take nearly a century for that position to be fully incorporated by the Church.

The response of American Jewish leaders was overwhelmingly to fuse religious and national sentiment. A study of 19th Century rabbis in the United States (Cohen 2008) demonstrates that Jewish clergy promoted American values and worked to show the compatibility of Americanism and Jewish identity. Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, a Jewish immigrant and one of the founders of Reformed Judaism, understood his religious reform efforts as part of a larger project to Americanize Jews (Gaustad and Smidt 2002:214). At a conference of reformed leaders that he chaired in 1885, Wise helped to adopt the Pittsburgh Platform that articulated the principles of Reformed Judaism. One of the planks of that platform stated “we consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community” (Pittsburgh Platform 1885). The implication was that Jews were no more a separate nation than any other religious community in the United States. In answer to his own rhetorical question “does the Jewish religion forbid patriotic sentiments and actions,” Rabbi Isaac Schwab defied “any one to prove it from the Bible or the Talmud” (Schwab 1878:4)

Nativism also failed because it made interlocking claims that were not easily reconciled. On the one hand, nativists asserted that Catholics and others posed a danger to American values, at the same time that they affirmed the value of religious liberty which presumably guaranteed Catholics and others the right to practice their faith. This inconsistency offered an avenue for new religionists to challenge nativists on their own grounds. An editorial from the *Catholic Telegraph* intoned that “every enlightened patriot and every sincere admirer of that best of earthly blessings, the undisturbed and secured possession of civil and religious liberty, must behold with deep regret and melancholy foreboding for our country . . . the spirit of sectarian prejudice” (Catholic Telegraph 1835). The same Thomas Scott Preston who had defended “Romanist” values later noted that “the Constitution of the United States guarantees to every citizen the perfect freedom of religion; and that great charter must fail and pass away err any State can frame laws which abridge or take away that freedom” (Preston 1870:8). The suggestion in both cases is that nativists are the enemies of religious liberty (and by implication of American values) because of their zeal to deny that right to Roman Catholics.

In his aptly titled work from 1878, “Can Jews Be Patriots,” Rabbi Isaac Schwab (1878:14) similarly argued that “the foreigner having settled in that land and interwoven his interests with those of the native citizens, will just as heartily be devoted to it as they, provided we have equal rights and liberties untainted by sectarian prejudice.” It is the sectarianism of the nativists, Schwab suggests, that threatens religious liberty, though he also implies that the denial of that right to Jews might understandably qualify their commitment to the new land. The point is that religious outsiders consistently used the power of religious liberty rhetoric to assert their right to be understood as fully American.

A more restricted view of nationalism also failed because America’s civil religion had always been interdenominational, relatively inclusive, and malleable. As we noted above, neither doctrine nor denomination had been particularly important to the religious and political founders, and the civic ideas they promoted were ones religious groups not part of the original compact would eventually embrace. Echoing Heclo’s argument noted above, religion was made safe for American democracy by denuding it of its distinctive features. The result was that immigrant religious groups that might have questioned the compatibility of national and religious norms eventually abandoned any notions that their religious identity necessarily trumped or challenged their national one. What began as a nonsectarian Protestant nationalism, in short, transitioned over time to include Catholics and Jews who supported American values (Chapp 2012: 18-32). Civil religion maintained its key role in American nationalism, even as the religious groups to which it appealed expanded.

It would take some time for this process fully to develop, and there would be bumps along the road, but by the middle decades of the 20th Century the notion that America’s civil religion was the purview of Protestantism alone had been rejected. Symptomatic of this new understanding was President Eisenhower’s famous quip that “our government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don't care what it is.” Eisenhower was not so much advocating a superficial religion, as he was suggesting the religion was part of the American creed and that the myriad faiths in America could embrace and contribute to it.

**Public Opinion and Nationalism**

We have argued that civil religion emerged in the United States for historical reasons and that it encouraged religious believers to marry their religious and national commitments. The data for this claim, however, have come primarily from religious and political elites. Elite cues are important, of course, but if our argument is sound we should be able to show a similar set of attitudes among the mass public. We next turn our attention to an empirical analysis of how the general public fuses nationalist and religious values. While a number of scholars have noted the importance of civil religion in American politics (Bellah 1967, Chapp 2002, Müller-Fahrenholz 2007, Murphy 2009), there have been very few empirical analyses of religion and American national identity.

Two exceptions to this lacuna in the literature are works by Shelton (2010) and Wright and Citrin (2009), both of which make use of the same database that we are going to analyze for our research: the General Social Survey/International Social Survey’s “National Identity” module. Based on his analysis, Shelton concludes that most racial, religious, and ethnic groups show pride in American culture. His definition of support for American culture, however, is very broad and includes attitudes toward American political and economic institutions, cultural and athletic achievements, the nation’s ethnic characteristics, and its civic characteristics. As we note below, it is these latter that we are interested in (civil characteristics) as we think they best capture views of nationalism. Wright and Citrin, on the other hand, expand their analysis to multiple surveys. One of their conclusions is that “Christian” definitions of nationalism are more prevalent in the United States than in other advanced democracies.

Using data from the 2003/2004 National Identity Survey we created a nationalism scale consisting of six items (α = .653). The questions asked the respondents about how close one feels to America, how proud one is to be American, and whether the American way of life should be adopted by other countries. The final three questions gauged how much respondents agreed with statements on whether they would rather be a citizen of America than any other country, whether there were some things about America that made them feel ashamed, and if they are often less proud of America than they would like to be. When all the items were added together, they formed a scale ranging from 7 to 28.

TABLE #1 (SEE APPENDIX)

As Table 1 confirms, Americans are highly nationalistic. While religious groups do differ a little on nationalism, religious people in general rank higher on this scale than do the non-religious. Despite historical conflicts and contemporary disagreements among Mainline Protestants, Evangelical Protestants, and Roman Catholics, they all exhibit nearly indistinguishable levels of (high) nationalism. Although Mormons and Jews have at least in the past experienced religious prejudice at the hands of American nationalists, today they actually top the chart in identifying with this nation. This result confirms our argument earlier in this paper that America’s civil religion has gradually expanded to incorporate formerly excluded religious groups. Those with no religious identification, on the other hand, have lower nationalism scores, perhaps suggesting secular Americans still feel excluded from the traditional American narrative of civil religion.

As we noted in the previous section, America’s civic nationalism has proved to be malleable over time. While they certainly have faced discrimination at the hands of the religious majority, religious outsiders have by and large embraced national values and become part of the religious mainstream. A slight exception were the periodic efforts by some religious elites (particularly Catholic and Jewish) to raise questions about the compatibility of Americanism (variously understood) and faith. Table 1 suggests that those elite questions have fallen on deaf ears at the mass level.

TABLE #2 (SEE APPENDIX)

To explore further the roots of the fusion of religion and nationalism, we performed a multivariate regression interpreting this nationalism scale. Overall, the results of Table 2 suggest that religious people—regardless of tradition—are more nationalistic than secular respondents after one controls for other socio-economic variables (e.g., ethnicity, income, education, age, gender, etc.). This effect holds for the long-standing, dominant Mainline and Evangelical Protestants but also for more recent arrivals or religious minorities such as Catholics, Jews, and Mormons. In fact those groups smallest in number and that have faced the most persistent exclusion in American society, Jews and Mormons, rank highest in nationalism. This finding further confirms our argument in that nationalism seems to be understood in religious terms in the United States but that this religiously tinged “patriotism” is not exclusive to a particular spiritual tradition. Although this paper is not focusing on the other, demographic determinants of national feeling, the coefficients in Table 2 confirms the previous literature’s conclusions about the effects of education, income, age, gender, region, ethnicity, and urbanicity on nationalism. Table 2 also includes a variable for religious attendance, but it failed to reach statistical significance when interviewees of all religious backgrounds were mixed together.

TABLE #3 (SEE ATTACHMENT)

To unpack the true influence of religiosity on nationalism, Table 3 performs a parallel regression for each of the major religious groups for which we have a sufficient number of respondents (i.e., Catholics, Mainline Protestants, and Evangelical Protestants). As the estimate for religious attendance indicates in the third column of coefficients, religious practice only matters among Evangelicals. To unpack this result further, we also divided this group up by ethnicity and found that this effect only held for whites. In predominantly Anglo evangelical congregations, parishioners are likely hearing cues from the pulpit and over church dinners reinforcing the nexus of nationalism and religious identity. Other religious Americans, in contrast, seem not to be getting the same messages during services or social hours. Rather, the link between national and religious identities appears to originate in the act of identifying with a spiritual tradition. By accepting the dominant norm of being religious in the United States one also embraces the national ethos of a strong psychological link to the state.

**Support for Iraq War**

In addition to measuring abstract nationalism in the United States, we wished to look at a more concrete, applied version. We therefore settled on attitudes toward the Iraq War, perhaps the most important nationalism project of the past three decades. In general, foreign policy attitudes are less stable and informed than are opinions on domestic policy (Holsti 1996). There is, nonetheless, a rally-round-the-flag effect when America goes to war (Mueller 1994:70). The data on religious attitudes toward foreign policy and war is quite limited. Wald and Calhoun Brown (2007:199-201) find little difference among religious groups on most foreign policy questions. However, they discover some divergence on support for the War in Iraq, with Mormons, Evangelical Protestants, and Hispanic Protestants the most supportive, and Muslims, Black Protestants, and Jews the least supportive. The question that we used asked respondents whether they believed the Iraq War was “worth the cost.” This survey was conducted in the fall of 2004, a year and a half after the war had begun and late enough for opposition to the action to grow.

TABLE #4 (SEE APPENDIX)

As Table 4 notes, by this point only 40 percent of all respondents still supported the American intervention. For the most part, however, religious respondents were more likely to endorse the effort. Once again, the historically dominant Protestants remained enthusiastic, as did Roman Catholics. As with our general measures of nationalism, Mormons were the most positive group about this enterprise. However, Jews were less supportive than the average respondent.

As we found for general measures of nationalism in Table 2, evangelical Protestants were significantly more likely to support the war in Iraq. However, this relationship did not hold for any of the other religious traditions. More frequent religious practice, on the other hand, seems to have boosted enthusiasm for the conflict. Although we do not include a separate table for the effects of religiosity among separate religious traditions (cf. Table 3), the results for war-related attitudes are similar to those for generic nationalism. Highly practicing white evangelicals, for example, appear more supportive of U.S. intervention in Iraq (b = .186, p = .091), as do very devout Catholics (b = .171, p = .072). Among mainline Protestants and African-American evangelicals, in contrast, the effect of religious attendance did not achieve statistical significance.

Table #5 (SEE APPENDIX)

Overall, identifying as a religious person seems make one more nationalistic and, for most traditions, more likely to agree with a major nationalistic enterprise: for the U.S. case, the Iraq War. Within a particular religious grouping, frequent interaction with other members of one’s faith often also appears to drive both nationalism and militarism.

**Conclusion**

Our empirical findings reinforce our arguments about the power of civil religion in the United States, both within the culture at large and in the pews. Americans almost naturally link their nationalistic ideology with their religious point of view. It would seem that it has always been this way; the relative power of religious traditions wax and wane, new groups emerge and old ones decline, yet the connecting thread between various religions and the American nation remains strong. From the standpoint of civic peace and political legitimacy, this civil religion has proved enduring and strong. Yet this political victory has arguably come at the expense of the theological claims of religious traditions which hold that national loyalties can come into conflict with the transnational claims of the faith.

*Table 1* Nationalism by Religious Tradition

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*Tradition Mean*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Mainline Protestant 21.38

Evangelical Protestant 21.35

Roman Catholic 21.29

Other Christian 20.90

Mormon 22.30

Jewish 21.60

Non-Judeo-Christian 19.45

Not Religious 19.30

All Respondents 20.96

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*Source:* 2004 International Social Survey Programme, National Identity I, United States subsample.

*Table 2* Religious and Other Determinants of Nationalism

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*Variable Coefficient Standard Error*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Jewish 2.668\* .716

Mainline 2.083\* .403

Evangelical 2.190\* .364

Catholic 2.058\* .366

Mormon 3.064\* .785

Other Christian 1.138 .618

Non-Judeo-Christian -.002 .561

Religious Attendance .047 .050

Education -.546\* .092

Income 5.875\* .000

Woman -.575\* .204

Age .024\* .007

Asian .347 .596

Latino .923 .673

Native American -1.763 1.138

African American -1.196\* .341

Urbanicity -.249\* .073

Immigrant Origin .150 .371

West .334 .300

South .664\* .235

Constant 19.981\* .524

N 1017

R2 .164

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\*Denotes an effect that is significantly different from 0 at the 5% level for OLS model.

*Source:* 2004 International Social Survey Programme, National Identity I, United States subsample.

*Notes:* All regressors are dummy variables except for Religious Attendance (range = 1 to 8), Income (500 to 165000), Age (18 to 88), Education (1 to 5), and Urbanicity (1 to 7).

*Table 4* Support for Iraq War by Religious Tradition

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*Tradition Mean*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Mainline Protestant .406

Evangelical Protestant .441

Roman Catholic .414

Other Christian .234

Mormon .514

Jewish .300

Non-Judeo-Christian .144

Not Religious .357

All Respondents .400

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*Source:* 2004 American National Election Study, Time Series version

*Table 5* Religious and Other Determinants of Support for Iraq War

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*Variable Coefficient Standard Error*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Jewish -.337 .476

Mainline .297 .253

Evangelical .517\* .228

Catholic .196 .227

Mormon .593 .507

Other Christian -.303 .590

Non-Judeo-Christian -.668 1.055

Religious Attendance .161\* .051

Education -.008 .004

Income .037\* .013

Woman -.184 .142

Age -.008 .004

Asian -1.054 .563

Latino -.420 .303

Native American .378 .536

African American -1.657\* .253

Urbanicity -.037 .065

Immigrant Origin .124 .221

West -.074 .197

South .585\* .171

Constant -.457\* .388

N 999

Nagelkerke R2 .137

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\*Denotes an effect that is significantly different from 0 at the 5% level for dichotomous Logit model.

*Source:* 2004 American National Election Study, Time Series version.

*Notes:* All regressors are dummy variables except for Religious Attendance (range = 1 to 5), Income (0 to 23), Age (18 to 90), Education (0 to 7), and Urbanicity (1 to 5).

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