Divine Entanglements:
Religious Claims-making and American Democracy

by

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"We're dealing with the important things here.
Our faith, our health. Who we are and how we live."

— Don DeLillo,
*Valparaiso*

For Betty,
with all my love
for everything and always.

critic, psychiatrist, and primary caregiver to our furry curmudgeon of a cat—can never be

fully cataloged nor properly repaid, though I certainly hope to try.

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**ABSTRACT**


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This dissertation offers a theoretical account of Protestant Christianity in American democratic politics that attends to the habits of mind and body religious traditions generate. Challenging contemporary political theory's predominant focus on the epistemological, normative, and cognitive dimensions of religious doctrine and belief, I investigate how the performative repertoires or *cultus* supplied by evangelical strains of Christianity combine sensibility and practice to constitute political subjects. I develop this alternative account through an engagement with recent work in post-secularist religious studies and the politics of aesthetic experience. This dissertation furthers these scholarly discussions through the theorization of how the practice of religious claims-making both draws from and fuels an American democratic imaginary in which entanglements with the divine and the sacred are part and parcel of self-governance. My study of the entanglements between Christianity and American democracy as lived experiences of collective and agonistic world-making

illuminates the irreducible affective and aesthetic dimensions of political life and the cultural bases necessary to sustain a democratic order.

Each chapter focuses on different case studies in order to interrogate the interplay of Christian traditions and American democracy. Chapter One studies evangelical abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison to argue for a re-conceptualization of American civil religion from a relatively static body of consensual beliefs and values to a poetic mode of claims-making that facilitates the re-fashioning of democratic ideals and identities rather. Chapter Two examines John Brown and Operation Rescue founder Randall Terry as examples of religious zealotry, specifically attending to how their fanaticism relates to American democratic structures of feeling. Chapter Three expands and refines the concept of the *cultus* through an analysis of the Social Gospel and how its body of aesthetic forms conditions a conversion of thought, feeling, and imagination foundational for a politics of social justice. Chapter Four considers the performances of George W. Bush, Jerry Falwell and Jeremiah Wright after the September 11, 2001 attacks to explore the role of Christian forms and rhetoric in the politics of public mourning and the process of political reconstitution following collective traumas.

INTRODUCTION:

# "THE FIRST OF THEIR POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS": THEORIZING RELIGIOUS CLAIMS-MAKING IN AMERICAN POLITICAL CULTURE

> "Religion, which, among Americans, never mixes directly in the government of society, should therefore be considered as the first of their political institutions; for if it does not give them the taste for freedom, it singularly facilitates their use of it."
>
> — Alexis de Tocqueville,
> *Democracy in America*[1]

> "Religion is more complicated than it sometimes seems."
> — Nicholas D. Kristof,
> *New York Times*, October 9, 2010[2]

## § 1. Overtures

In narrating his initial impressions of the United States of the mid-nineteenth century, Alexis de Tocqueville remarked that he was taken aback by one aspect in particular: the intensity and ubiquity of religion. He recounts this first encounter in *Democracy in America*, writing,

> On my arrival in the United States the religious aspect of the country was the first thing that struck my attention; and the longer I stayed there, the more I perceived the great political consequences resulting from this new state of things. In France I had almost always seen the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom marching in opposite directions. But in America I found they were intimately united and that they reigned in common over the same country.[3]

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[1] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, translated and edited by Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 280.
[2] Nicholas D. Kristof, "Test Your Savvy on Religion," *New York Times*, October 9, 2010, online at: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/10/opinion/10kristof.html (accessed May 14, 2012).
[3] Tocqueville, 319-20.

As he describes it, Tocqueville's sense of wonder and admiration is inspired both by the peculiar depth and character of American religion. Religion seems to thread throughout the entire fabric of the public sphere, becoming entangled in a unique and striking way with the political ideas and identities of its citizens. By religion, of course, Tocqueville specifically means strains of Christianity. These Christian traditions, Tocqueville observes, not only act on Americans as private moral actors but they also inform and shape the social mores—and so too, the political forms—in the United States. The "religious aspect" of the American polity differs strikingly from that of the confessional nation-states of Europe, wherein religion was conjoined with the "powers of the earth" and lost its social potency with the diminishment of those regimes. The sway religion holds in America, Tocqueville suggests, is less a matter of institutional authority than it is a constitutive force or facilitating condition within the nation's political culture.

Above and beyond the pervasiveness of American Christianity, Tocqueville asserts the novel—and seemingly counterintuitive—possibility that religion can facilitate a democratic practice of political freedom. Responding to European thinkers who seek to instill democratic orders and "sincerely desire to prepare men to be free" but also unreflectively "attack religious opinions," Tocqueville contends that the American case demonstrates how religious traditions need not thwart the practice of democracy.[4] Indeed, throughout *Democracy in America* Tocqueville characterizes religion as "the first of [America's] political institutions" that aids the development of a free and democratic polity while providing the ground for American political thought, practice, and identity.[5] Whatever its secular sound and fury, Tocqueville implies, American politics operates within (and because of) a grammar drawn from

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[4] Ibid., 307. For an extended analysis of this point, see Hillel Fradkin, "Does Democracy Need Religion?," in *World Religions and Democracy*, edited by Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner, and Philip J. Costopoulos (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005), 245-52.
[5] Ibid., 280.

the Christian religious tradition. Another foreign observer of nineteenth century America, Bohemian publicist Francis Grund, describes the social-political landscape in terms remarkably similar to Tocqueville's: "The religious habits of the Americans form not only the basis of their private and public morals, but have become so interwoven with their whole course of legislation, that it would be impossible to change them, without affecting the very essence of their government."[6]

If we grant Tocqueville's and Grund's claims that religious traditions are interwoven with American politics, what is the exact nature and character of these entanglements? Moreover, how might these religious traditions be, as Tocqueville and Grund suggest, felicitous to a democratic social and cultural order? In *Divine Entanglements: Religious Claims-making and American Democracy*, I propose a richer approach to making sense of religion and politics' curious intertwining in the United States than is presently featured in political science scholarship. Specifically, I advance an analysis oriented towards the play of lived evangelical Christian traditions in the historical practice of American democracy. These religious traditions enable and nourish a contestatory politics, on the one hand, through their capacity to generate and reform habits of mind and body and, on the other, by endowing social actors with the commitments and performative materials that facilitate citizen participation.

Such a re-thinking of religion and democratic politics is particularly necessary because the closing decades of the twentieth century and opening decade of the twenty-first

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[6] Francis Grund, *Impressions of the Americans*, Vol. 1, quoted in James E. Wood, Jr., "Public Religion Vis-à-vis the Prophetic Role of Religion," in *The Power of Religious Publics: Staking Claims in American Society*, edited by William H Swatos, Jr., and James K. Wellman, Jr. (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1999), 37. Grund goes on in this passage to emphasize the determinative role of social mores and culture in the maintenance of political regimes, remarking, "It is to the manners and habits of a nation we must look for the continuance of their government." Tocqueville's and Grund's characterizations of religion in American resonates with Eldon Eisenach's recent claim that religion is "so pervasive, so deeply embedded in our culture and practices that to be distinctly American is to be distinctly religious, even those who proclaim to hold only 'secular' values." Eldon J. Eisenach, "Religion, Politics, and American Identity After September 11: Reflections on Recent Scholarship," in *Religion, Politics, and American Identity*, edited by David S. Gutterman and Andrew R. Murphy (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), 273.

have featured the vigorous re-assertion—or at least revived publicity and recognition—of religions the world over. To only refer to the most dramatic instances of this resurgence, consider the increased political pull of the Religious Right in the United States, the public role of political Islam in the Middle East and elsewhere, heated debates regarding the demands of *laïcité* in France, and dramatic acts of religiously-inflected violence such as the attacks of September 11, 2001 and the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013. Though they have appeared in varying configurations across time and space, "public religions" (to use sociologist José Casanova's term) have mobilized considerable political power and seized the attention of an academy that had long since presumed religion to be on the wane—either collapsing under the weight of an ever-more rationalized modernity or, at the least, retreating from the public sphere into the confines of private life.[7] With the apparent empirical and analytical insufficiencies of these variations on the secularization thesis, scholars have confronted what is called, by turns, the fact of "desecularization," "the resurgence of religion," and the "return of the religious," where religious traditions are powerful forces within contemporary societies and thus due appropriate consideration as objects of study.[8]

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[7] See José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994); and José Casanova, "Public Religions Revisited," in *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, edited by Hent de Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 101-119.

[8] As early as the 1980s Mary Douglas pointed to the lack of global decline in religion saying, "Events have taken religious studies by surprise" and that the inclinations of scholars "glued to those conditions of modern life identified by Weber as antipathetic to religion" misled them. Mary Douglas, "The Effects of Modernization on Religious Change," in *Religion and America: Spirituality in a Secular Age*, edited by Mary Douglas and Steven M. Tipton (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 25-43. See also Peter Berger, "The Desecularization of the World: a Global Overview," in *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, edited by Peter Berger (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 1-18; and Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case: Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002).

Given its intellectual roots, the tendency of social science to have presumed the end or decline of religion in the modern world is perhaps understandable. In its sociological formations, the "decline of religion" version of the secularization thesis developed mainly in response to evidence drawn from modern Europe (and thus taking these dynamics as the norm). Well before these empirical claims came into ascendance, a number of normative theorists, including Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, and Friedrich Nietzsche, argued for the social and moral good of shedding religious belief.

The empirically supported core of the secularization thesis, to be clear, describes the differentiation and relative autonomy of secular spheres and religious institutions (i.e. social or functional differentiation). In most recent accounts the conception of secularization as a process of functional differentiation of social institutions

Yet in a real sense the current moment is not one of religious revival or resurgence—as if to say religion had vanished and now abruptly returned—but rather a challenge to the predominant set of epistemological assumptions that define the conceptual categories of 'religion' and 'politics' and how they relate to one another. Faced with the persistence of religion as a social and political force, Jürgen Habermas christened the turn of the twenty-first century a 'post-secular' moment and rallied social scientists behind the banner of taking religion seriously.[9] As Birgit Meyer describes, the intellectual project involved in taking religion seriously demands scrutinizing its formation and conceptualization as an object of scholarly study and governmental regulation. This approach, Meyer explains, is not post-secular (at least in the sense Habermas uses the term) but rather post-secular*ist*:

> post-secularist in the sense that, rather than inscribe into our theoretical frameworks the opposition between secular and religious that has entered our modern social imaginaries, we need to take this opposition as the object of study…[a]nd investigate the question of religion with open minds. We need to develop alternative theoretical frameworks that do not approach contemporary religion as an anachronism we expect to vanish or to become politically irrelevant with modernization, but instead seek to grasp its appeal, persistence, and power.[10]

and subsystems has been decoupled from problematic and contested claims about the decline, marginalization or privatization of religion (and the related anticipation of a disenchantment of the world with the modern development and dissemination of reason).

Per philosopher Charles Taylor's definition, secularism involves a transformation of the ecology of faith in modern societies. That is, belief in God no longer figures as an axiomatic article of faith and instead becomes one optional way of being that can be voluntarily selected by each individual. See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007). For various responses to Taylor's theory, see *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, edited by Michael Warner, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, and Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); and *Rethinking Secularism*, edited by Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[9] See Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008); Jürgen Habermas, "Notes on the Post-Secular Society," *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25:4 (2008): 17-29; and Jürgen Habermas, *An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010). Cf. Hans Joas, "Post-Secular Religion? On Jürgen Habermas," in *Do We Need Religion?: On the Experience of Self-Transcendence*, translated by Alex Skinner (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2008), 106-107. In a move that anticipates the post-secularist approach I discuss later in this paragraph, Joas argues against Habermas's claims regarding an empirical change, writing that it is "not that the secular state is overcome, but just a secularistic self-understanding."

[10] Birgit Meyer, "Religious Sensations: Why Media, Aesthetics, and Power Matter in the Study of Contemporary Religion," in *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, edited by Hent de Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 705. A similar approach informs the work of international relations scholar Elizabeth Shakman Hurd. See, e.g., Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, "Theorizing Religious Resurgence," *International Politics* 44 (2007): 647-665; and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, "Secularism and International Relations Theory," in *Religion and International Relations Theory*, edited by Jack Snyder (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 60-90. Both Meyer and Hurd draw

The post-secularist project, of which this dissertation is a part, is simultaneously critical and constructive. It is necessary, on the one hand, to illuminate the limitations, biases, and faulty assumptions built into the predominant frameworks for understanding religion and its relationship to politics. On the other hand, deconstructing these existing accounts invites the articulation of new ways of making sense of religion as it operates in the contemporary social and political world.

A post-secularist approach entails a profound reconsideration of how religion is figured (or has failed to be figured) in scholarly work within political science and political theory. A growing chorus of critics has made the case that, despite the resurgence in the publicity of religions around the world and the broad upsurge of academic discussion centered on religion, political science lags behind other disciplines in attending to religion in its theory and research. Claiming that political science's relationship with religion is one of "genuine neglect," Daniel Philpott writes that "religion's place in political science scholarship is vastly underproportioned to its place in headlines around the globe, and to scholarship in political economy, security studies, international institutions, and the like."[11] Kenneth D. Wald and Clyde Wilcox caustically echo Philpott's sentiment: "Apart from economics and geography, it is hard to find a social science that has given less attention to religion than political science."[12] One recent empirical analysis of articles in political science publications over the last

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extensively on Talal Asad's anthropological examinations of the concepts of 'religion' and 'secularism.' These thinkers, along with other scholars in the field of religious studies, are intellectual touchstones for the more elaborate discussion of the concept of 'religion' in Sections Two and Three of this chapter.

[11] Daniel Philpott, "Has the Study of Global Politics Found Religion?," *Annual Review of Political Science* 12 (2009), 184.

[12] Kenneth D. Wald and Clyde Wilcox, "Getting Religion: Has Political Science Rediscovered the Faith Factor?," *American Political Science Review* 100:4 (2006): 523. Similar assessments of political science's lack of engagement with religion can be found in Eva Bellin, "Faith in Politics: New Trends in the Study of Religion and Politics," *World Politics* 60:2 (2008): 315-47; *Rediscovering the Religious Factor in American Politics*, edited by David C., Leege and Lyman A. Kellstedt (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993); Kenneth D. Ward, Adam L. Silverman, and Kevin Fridy, "Making Sense of Religion in Public Life." *Annual Review of Political Science* 8 (2005): 121–43; and Miroljub Jevtic, "Political Science and Religion," *Politics and Religion* 1:1 (2007): 59-69.

decade suggests that the discipline as a whole has so far failed to significantly engage the subject of religion, particularly in comparison to the efforts of other social scientific fields such as sociology.[13]

In order to redress the disciplinary neglect of religion and the problematic conceptions of 'religion' that undergird much of the extant discussion in political theory, this dissertation re-configures the perennial theoretical puzzle of Christianity's place in American democratic politics by turning to the level of practice and bringing into view religion's poetic and performative dimensions. If religious traditions, as I argue (following Tocqueville), are part and parcel of American political culture, how do traditions of evangelical Christianity relate to the practice and possibilities of democracy in the United States? How might we theorize and assess the political bearing of religion given a more robust conception of religion, both in terms of its constituent elements and its place in American culture? Finally, in light of this theoretical framework, how might materials drawn from evangelical Christianity and other religious traditions be understood to enrich, enable, constrain, and challenge the always precarious and risky conditions necessary for democratic claims making, contestation, and governance?

In this introductory chapter, I develop and argue several key claims establishing the theoretical and interpretive groundwork for the chapters that follow. To put it differently, I establish here the urgency of my project, the insufficiency of the reflexive treatment of relig-

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[13] Steven Kettel, "Has Political Science Ignored Religion?," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 45:1 (2012): 93-100. It is particularly noteworthy that political theory as a subfield of political science reproduced the discipline-wide tendency to marginalize religion and, in fact, lagged behind the subfields of political behavior, political institutions, and comparative politics in terms of its proportional consideration of the intersection of religion and politics (95-96). Of course, Kettel's analysis is methodologically limited in so far as it only surveys articles featured in the twenty top political science periodicals, and thus it does not consider book-length publications, lower-tier journals, or conference papers and presentations. Further, the study of religion in American politics and political theory has intensified, expanded, and deepened since the re-emergence of evangelical Protestants in the 1980s. One concrete manifestation of this increased attention is the landmark formation of the Religion and Politics Section of the American Political Science Association.

ion within political theory, and what I take to be a more promising analytical lens for such inquiry. I first argue that the theoretical framework structuring scholarship on religion is both a historically contingent political construct and conceptually impoverished and thus incapable of fully uncovering the significance of religion in American public life. I then identify how the hegemonic conceptual notion of religion as private belief informs and directs the major debates on the subject within political philosophy. Next, I articulate a political theory of religion that de-centers propositional beliefs in order to attend seriously to the practical and performative dimensions of Christian religious traditions. With this theoretical foundation established, I develop an account of how my re-conceptualization of religion illuminates the political potentials and powers of religious claims-making in a democratic society such as the United States. The chapter concludes with an account of the project's methodology and a roadmap detailing the theoretical movements and contributions of subsequent chapters.

### § 2. Get Behind Me, Lactantius!
### (Or: A Brief Critical History of 'Religion' in Western Christendom)

Most considerations of religion in political science and political theory treat it as a self-evident, fixed, ahistorical, and universal category. One recent text examining the role of religion in American public life, for instance, offers a perfunctory statement that religion consists of "beliefs in supernatural powers, forces, and beings."[14] Although remarkably threadbare in its description, this formulation is representative of the conception of 'religion' implicit in much of the scholarship in political science. Even as they frequently dodge the question of explicitly defining 'religion,' these texts often rely on a notion of it as involving systems of propositional beliefs regarding the sacred or the supernatural that are privately

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[14] Jon Butler, Grant Wacker, and Randall Balmer, *Religion in American Life: A Short History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), ix.

held by individuals and sustained by institutions such as churches. This rough definition captures the hegemonic idea of religion both in political science and, more generally, the American academy. It also, I argue, proscribes an overly narrow conception of religion that occludes theoretical consideration of politically significant dimensions of religious tradition. In this section I mean to develop a political theory of 'religion,' or a way of thinking about how historical exercises of power have constructed the concepts of 'religion,' 'politics,' and 'secular' (and the concomitant relationships between them) so as to pre-structure and delimit our theoretical imagination. By demonstrating the political origins of the common sense understandings of these terms, I open up a space for putting into question their analytical sufficiency and, ultimately, assembling an alternative theoretical understanding of the relationship between religious traditions and political practice in the United States.

The definitional problems associated with 'religion,' of course, are hardly news to the field of religious studies. As religious studies scholars have repeatedly pointed out, the hegemonic conception of 'religion' found in both popular and academic discourse is an artifact of the unique political and intellectual history of the West.[15] The common sense notions of 'religion' at work in the West (including discussions within political theory) are the product of a series of political projects, dating back to the ascendency of Christianity in the Hellenistic period. In this section I highlight two illuminating moments in the historical shift

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[15] To name but a few in this burgeoning literature that were especially helpful in my own thinking: William E. Arnal and Russell T. McCutcheon, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Political Nature of "Religion"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Willem B. Drees, "'Religion in Public Debates: Who Defines, for What Purposes?," in *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, edited by Hent de Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 464-72; Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology*, translated by William Sayers (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2003); Timothy Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity: A Critical History of Religion and Related Categories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005); Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993); Russell T. McCuthcheon, "The Category of 'Religion' in Recent Publications: A Critical Survey," *Numen* 42:3 (1995): 284-309; and Russell McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse of Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

towards an interior, intellectual, and private account of religion: the early Christian reclamation of the concept of *religio* and the Protestant Reformation.[16]

The modern English word 'religion' can be traced back etymologically to the Latin term *religio*. In the dialogue *De Natura Deorum* (*On the Nature of the Gods*), Cicero provides a gloss on this concept through the voice of the Stoic Balbus, who links the term to *relegere*, which refers to the action of retracing or re-reading.[17] As Richard King explains,

> This understanding of the term seems to have gained provenance in the 'pagan' Roman Empire and made *religio* virtually synonymous with *traditio*. As such it represented the teachings of one's ancestors and was essentially not open to question. Primarily, *religio* involved performing ancient ritual practices and paying homage to the gods.[18]

The close association of *religio* and *traditio*, the latter a Latin term meaning the transmission or the giving over of something for safekeeping (and obviously, the root of the English word 'tradition'), is particularly striking in that it frames modes of worship as inheritances passed down through time in a given civic community. Tellingly, Cicero's character of Balbus associates *religio* with a litany of other terms, remarking,

> Those on the other hand who carefully reviewed and so to speak retraced all the lore of ritual were called 'religious' from *relegare* (to retrace or re-read), like 'elegant' from *eligere* (to select), 'diligent' from *diligere* (to care for), 'intelligent' from *intellegere* (to understand); for all these words contain the same sense of 'picking out' (*legere*) that is present in 'religious.'[19]

Thus, to be religious in the Ciceronian sense entails a certain measure of deliberately selecting and taking up—picking out—materials from the forms of worshipful life of a commu-

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[16] "Power," Michael Foucault wrote, "is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms." Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1978), 86. Another way to pitch the purpose of this section, then, is to reveal the tactical manufacture of a certain ideational framework concerning religion and, through this effort, tear away the mask of power that narrows and directs how political theory understands the social and political place of religion.

[17] Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* II.72, translated by H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933), 193. For further analysis of Cicero's treatment of religion, see S.N. Balagangadhara, *'The Heathen in His Blindness': Asia, West and the Dynamic of Religion* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 241.

[18] Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'the Mystic East,'* (London: Routledge, 1999), 35. See also Hurd, "Secularism and International Relations Theory," 72.

[19] Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* II.72, 193.

nity's forbearers. As much as it involves the enactment of inherited modes of worship, the Ciceronian sense of *religio* contains an implicit pluralistic ethos; if religion is simply a lineage particular to a given community or city, then there is no necessary presumption that this inheritance possesses any universal truth or value over and against other forms of worship.

The Christian writings of the third and fourth centuries performed a gradual displacement of the Ciceronian sense of the term. Given its stress on a lineage going back in time, the Ciceronian notion of religion posed a thorny problem for the then nascent community of Christians. Unlike Roman paganism or Judaism, Christianity could not claim to possess a long history or roots in antiquity, and so Christians were charged with the "greatest impiety" of turning from ancestral rites because of the "meddlesome…[l]ove of innovation."[20] In order to establish their status as a legitimate religious community, early Christians made a concerted effort to severe the conceptual link between *religio* and *traditio*. According to the early Christian author (and advisor to the Roman Emperor Constantine I) Lactantius, *religio* is defined as "worship of the true; superstition of the false. And it is important, really, why you worship, not how you worship, or what you pray for… [T]hey are superstitious who worship many and false gods; but we, who supplicate the one true God, are religious."[21] Departing sharply from the earlier Ciceronian meaning, *religio* shifts from a system of worship-in-action that is handed down generation-to-generation to a set of beliefs possessing an absolute and universal truth. Practical forms of worship, Lactantius argues, are ultimately of a secondary importance to the beliefs and theological apparatus that motivate and inspire

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[20] Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, 4.1, translated by Gifford, 141-142, quoted in Balagangadhara, 48.

[21] Lactantius, *Institutiones Divinae* IV.28, translated by Sister Mary Francis McDonald (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1964), 318-20; quoted in Balagangadhara, 242. Lactantius' account should perhaps be best understood as a lagging indicator, reflecting and articulating something that is already present in the world, so that the text itself is "an imaginative attempt to codify and legitimate Christian usage and practice with an authority based upon supposedly ancient etymological origins" (King, 37). Earlier Christian writers, including Minucius Felix and Tertullian, had already begun infusing *religio* with a "certain boundary-marking force" by establishing a hierarchical distinction between superstition and true religion (i.e. Christianity). See Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 28-29.

that worship. Practice becomes, accordingly, the mere epiphenomenal expression of prior, interior beliefs, and thus is diminished in importance.[22] The problem with pagans, so Lactantius's logic goes, is that they are "superstitious" (as opposed to strictly and properly religious) since they possess false beliefs that result in wrong practices of worship. To hold "true" beliefs—and beliefs, furthermore, that claim universal truth—becomes the measure of religion, and these true beliefs were unquestionably those of the Christian faith.[23]

The conceptual tradition set down by Lactantius gradually became hegemonic throughout Western Christendom. His understanding of *religio* (and so too, religion) appears in the work of, among others, St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Grotius, and Vico. The framework informed not only formal Christian thought but, gradually, secular reflections on the subject of religion in the West. Indeed, contemporary conceptions of religion continue to operate in the shadow of Lactantius. One effect of this discursive shift is the common emphasis on propositional beliefs regarding the sacred and transcendent as the *sine qua non* of religion. Reflecting on the subtle skewing of discourse on religion in the West, King writes:

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[22] Balagangadhara, 55.

[23] In addition to rejecting Cicero's emphasis on inherited forms and practices, Lactantius also took issue with his etymology of the term itself. Rather than tracing it back to *relegere* as Cicero did, Lactantius claims that *religio* derives from *re-ligare* (to bind together). The religious believer and the religious community, thus, "are bound and tied to God by this chain of piety"

This image of bondage establishes religion as a matter of hierarchical authority and obligation, situating the individual believer as the subordinate of a single God. The believer must accordingly coordinate her actions in line with this foundational relationship. The vertical relationship of divinity and believer produces a horizontal relationship that unites a cohort of believers. The bonds of this community return again to the question of belief, in that the uniting force at work is a shared set of ideas about the order of the world and the normative demands such an order places on individuals. Instead of the Ciceronian emphasis on a nation or community with a shared history of worship practices, Lactantius renders the roots and essence of religion to be the personal adherence to "true" doctrines of faith that bring together believer, believing community (or church), and God.

By way of contrast, Cicero does not map the distinction between religion and superstition onto a true-false binary; he instead defines superstition not by its theological content but its practical excesses and violation of moderation. Critically, he writes that the superstitious are those who "[spend] days in prayer and sacrifice in order that one's children outlive their parents" (II.72). Cicero's notion of 'superstition,' therefore, has more in common with Lucretius's dismissive treatment of *religio*, which is described in *On the Nature of Things* as "excessive concern about the gods." Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, 6.58-64.

Lactantius, IV.28. Jacques Derrida discusses the competing etymological claims regarding '*religio*' in "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," in *Acts of Religion*, edited by Gil Anidjar (London: Routledge, 2001), 40-101.

> Modern discussions of the meaning and denotation of the term *religio* tend to follow Lactantius' etymology, thereby constructing a Christianized model of religion that strongly emphasizes *theistic belief* (whether mono-, poly-, heno- or pan-theistic in nature), exclusivity and a fundamental dualism between the human world and the transcendent world of the divine to which one 'binds' (*religare*) oneself. Even when Lactantius is not appealed to directly, 'religion' in a Christian (and post-Christian) context now becomes a matter of adherence to particular doctrines or beliefs rather than allegiance to ancient ritual practices.[24]

The transformation wrought by Lactantius and other early Christian thinkers established a conceptual equivalence between religion and theological belief. As King indicates, this new conceptualization focused on the question of articles of faith and displaced a central concern for inherited communal practices of worship. In so doing, religious scholar Malcolm Ruel claims, the discourse of religion incorporated a number of implicit assumptions. Among these "shadow fallacies," as Ruel refers to them, are the presumptions that "belief is central to all religions in the same way as it is to Christianity," "the belief of a person or a people forms the ground of his or their behaviour and can be cited therefore as a sufficient explanation for it," and "belief is fundamentally an interior state, a psychological condition."[25]

A further development in this discourse of religion occurred with the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the most basic sense, the Protestant Reformation carried forward the centrality of belief but invested this idea with an emphasis on an internal and personal relationship to the divine.[26] Even as Protestant sects

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[24] King, 37.

[25] Malcolm Ruel, *Belief, Ritual and the Securing of Life: Reflexive Essays on a Bantu Religion* (Boston: Brill, 1997), 57-59.

[26] Referred to, by turns, as the *sui generis*, intellectualist, and private affair tradition of religion, these understandings set religion apart from the rest of society and involved with "interior, personal, and utterly unique states and dispositions." McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion,* 55. See also the introduction to *The Invention of Religion: Rethinking Belief in Politics and History*, edited by Derek R. Peterson and Darren R. Walhof (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

Belief, Donald S. Lopez, Jr. states, exists as "the pivot around which Christians have told their history," and the hegemonic status of Christianity during the formulation of the concept of 'religion' imprinted this sensibility on the term itself. Other religions, of course, have made universalist claims to truth, but Christianity had the unique advantage of being allied with the dominant political and intellectual powers during the spread of European imperialism, thus making it possible to transport its intellectual framework to all corners of the globe (if not the universe), making belief the measure of what religion is understood to be. Lopez, "Belief," 21.

broke with the theological regime and institutional authority of the Catholic Church, they retained its grammar of salvation wherein a person's soul was saved by assenting to a set of true beliefs. "Following the Reformation," Peter Harrison writes, "the fragmentation of Christendom led to a change from an institutionally based understanding of exclusive salvation to a propositionally based understanding."[27] The mobilizing sensibility behind the reformers' break with the Church sprang from disagreements regarding the Catholic establishment's misinterpretation of the Christian scripture which, in turn, gave rise to putatively impious practices. A correction in underlying beliefs and doctrines, this logic went, would necessarily result in different practices and institutional structures that properly embody and carry out God's will. The importance of personal beliefs becomes clear in articulations of Christian and religious freedom. Martin Luther and John Calvin, for instance, both formulated Christian freedom as, first and foremost, the freedom of interior belief or conscience. The rightful jurisdiction of political authorities, both Luther and Calvin insist, extends no further than that which is visible; the individual soul and conscience—the domain of deciding on and holding propositional beliefs regarding God, eternal life, and the order of the cosmos—remain solely under the control of the particular individual.[28] Religious liberty, by these accounts, is singularly defined by the freedom of conscience—the freedom, in other words, for each individual to believe as she wants.

As I make clear in the next section, the Protestant Christian conceptualization of religion is apparent in the discussions and debates regarding religion in both modern and con-

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Of course, it would be a mistake to take "belief" as itself an ahistorical term with a static meaning even within the Christian use of the concept. For a genealogical examination of the concept as it operates in the Christian tradition, see, e.g., Malcolm Ruel, "Christians as Believers," in *Religious Organization and Religious Experience*, edited by John Davis (London: Academic Press, 1982), 9-31.

[27] Peter Harrison, *"Religion" and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 63.

[28] See Martin Luther, "On Secular Authority: how far dos the Obedience owed to it extend?," especially Part II, and John Calvin, "On Civil Government," Book IV, Chapter 20, in *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority*, edited and translated by Harro Höpfl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

temporary political theory. Before traversing that disciplinary terrain, however, it is helpful to zoom out from my admittedly partial exercise in conceptual archeology to consider the effects of the Protestant understanding of religion. The private-intellectualist framework retreats from the Ciceronian emphasis on both the activity or practice of worship and the inherent civic or political dimensions of religious traditions. The Protestant Christian conception of religion as personal beliefs relating to the transcendent, sacred, or divine abstracts faith from institutional or communal context (religion as *sui generis*) and attenuates its relationship to practical or aesthetic forms (religion as principally disembodied or spiritual). One key limitation is that religion *qua* belief, as much as it is understood to be essentially interior and personal, has come to be understood as outside politics and, indeed, as a quintessential component of the private sphere. In the next section, I continue to develop my critique of the inherited conception of religion as a- or anti-political by surveying how it has been aided by western political philosophy and continues to direct discussions in the field of political theory on the subject of religion.

### § 3. Religion, Politics, and Political Theory

The Protestant Christian understanding of religion established the terms of intellectual engagement for modern and contemporary political theory. The history of political philosophy in the wake of the Reformation can be (and has been) construed as the on-going attempt to resolve the socio-political issues associated with conflicting systems of religious beliefs.[29] The putative political problem of religion—in other words: the difficulties associated with heterogeneous religious traditions existing within a singular political community— has formed a major point of departure for political thought over the past three centuries. The mission for political thinkers became resolving one central question, namely: How can

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[29] See, e.g. Mark Lilla, *Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West* (New York: Vintage, 2008); and William E. Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity* (New York: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1988).

believers within different and contradictory religious traditions live together in a harmonious and just fashion? Or to adopt the language of John Rawls: given that the "political culture of democratic society" (and of modern societies more generally) is characterized by the "fact of reasonable pluralism" by which there is a "diversity of reasonable comprehensive religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines," how can there exist a political arrangement whose basic structure is legitimate and acceptable to all reasonable citizens?[30]

The position that eventually came to dominate and structure academic, popular, and governmental responses to this question was provided by modern liberalism. Building upon the Protestant Christian notion of religion as personal belief, liberal philosophers such as John Locke and Immanuel Kant constructed a partitioned model of society. Within this framework, religious belief is restricted to the private (and depoliticized) sphere of human activity so that it exists apart from and opposed to the domains of public deliberation and the state. Liberalism renders religion pre-political: a matter of private choice and personal belief that can remain removed from public life.[31]

Consider Locke's now-classic text, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689). Motivated by an interest in fostering social stability and harmony under conditions of religious pluralism (or more specifically, Christian sectarianism), Locke formulated a normative theory of institutional differentiation.[32] According to Locke's model, the civil government was charged with the oversight of so-called civil interests, including the protection of life, health, liberty,

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[30] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, expanded edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 36.

[31] See Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, edited by Robert Tucker (New York: Norton & Company, 1978), 26-46. Marx, of course, draws his sense of the American regime on the subject of religion from the writings of Tocqueville.

[32] Locke is quite explicit about the narrowness of his conception of religious pluralism and toleration. He makes this clear at the outset of his *Letter*, where he describes his project as only involving "the mutual Toleration of Christians in their different Professions of Religion." John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, edited by James H. Tully (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1983), 23. For another critique of Locke's framework, this one reflecting on how it conceals the circulation of power from ostensibly private (religious) forces to the public (state), see Craig Martin, *Masking Hegemony: A Genealogy of Liberalism, Religion and the Private Sphere* (London: Equinox, 2010).

and property, while the church retained authority regarding the salvation of souls. One key strut of this differentiation in institutional functions is a conception of religion as internal and sincere belief. Bringing this conceptualization together with a claim regarding the impossibility of compelling true belief through external coercion and violence (that is, the tools of the state), Locke argues that the persuasive capacities of the church are functionally better suited to cultivating and sustaining faith. The carving out of mutually exclusive spheres of institutional jurisdiction, Locke maintains, allows for a civil community free from the religious strife of the early modern nation-states in Europe. The state would no longer enjoy the prerogative to police the religious beliefs of its citizens and, on the other hand, various religious sects would no longer vie violently to seize the reins of political power. As a result of these "twin tolerations" (to use Alfred Stepan's phrase),[33] collectivities could potentially avoid the bloody cycle of oppression and resistance that typified the European wars of religion.

Underlying Locke's argument, of course, is the diminution of religious practice and the elevation of interior belief as the untrammeled core of religion. "All the Life and Power of true Religion," Locke writes, "consists in the inward and full perswasion [sic] of the mind; and Faith is not Faith without believing."[34] According to Locke, the salvation of souls—which, again, is designated as the raison d'être of religion—depends on the act of genuinely believing certain articles of knowledge to be true. In his parsing of religion, Locke breaks apart what he terms the "speculative" and "practical" dimensions of faith. Speculative articles of faith are those aspects that are "required only to be believed" and thus "terminate simply in the Understanding."[35] These are, in other words, the purely interior and epistemic

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[33] Alfred Stepan, "Religion, Democracy, and the 'Twin Tolerations,'" *Journal of Democracy* 11:4 (2000): 37-57.
[34] Locke, 26.
[35] Ibid., 46.

components of religion; they remain entirely in the minds of believers and consist of propositional beliefs and knowledge relevant to the care and protection of each individual's soul. Practical articles of faith, by contrast, entail not just belief but deeds. Belief must be translated into action, such as the performance of certain speech acts, rituals, behaviors, or material practices that are necessary for the achievement of salvation. Because this latter category could affect the interests of others and thus have social consequences, the government can legitimately restrict and regulate them if they violate the dictates of common, public reason. It is with a mind towards practical effects, for instance, that Locke condones the exclusion of Catholics (whose obligations to the political authority of the state are threatened by their allegiance to the pope) and atheists (who lack the firm religious and moral framework Locke understands as necessary for fulfilling promises and obeying the law).

Implicit within Locke's theory, I suggest, is a diminishment of religion's practical and embodied aspects. This is apparent, first, in Locke's account of religion, which renders practices and performance as secondary emanations or expressions of the prior and primary core of religion: belief. Second, while Locke does not thoroughly dismiss the performative dimension of religion, he nonetheless stipulates, as Derek Peterson and Darren Walhof write, "that such practices were acceptable only to the extent that they were irrelevant to social and political realities."[36] The proper and unencumbered realm of faith becomes that of the individual's internal conscience, wherein a believer can relate directly and privately with the divine as she understands it. Locke's theory possesses a recognizably Protestant Christian account

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[36] Derek R. Peterson and Darren R. Walhof, "Rethinking Religion," in *The Invention of Religion: Rethinking Belief in Politics and History*, edited by Derek R. Peterson and Darren R. Walhof (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 4. For an alternative (and more elaborate) interpretation of Locke's take on religion and religious toleration, see John Marshall, *John Locke: Resistance, Religion and Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

of religion that forms the basis for both conceptualizing religion more generally and mapping out the contours of social space that define the private and public spheres.

The private-intellectualist framework affirmed in Locke's *Letter* continues to provide the set of assumptions and terms of engagement for political thought. This framework is readily apparent in the two fields of philosophical discourse currently most directly engaged with the issue of religion: the theorization of public reason and the study of political theology. Although contributions to these on-going debates disagree on the merits of liberalism as a normative project, they all operate within the conceptual framework fashioned by modern liberalism regarding the nature of religion.

The debate over public reason continues the thematic concern established in the seventeenth century regarding the normative legitimacy of religion in the public sphere and political discourse. The major figures in this dialogue, including John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas, are invested in constructing the appropriate parameters and protocols for justifying collective arrangements. In other words, what reasons and lines of reasoning can legitimately enter the public sphere and determine the collective's operative rules and structures?[37] Entries in this discussion tend to consider religious traditions only so far as they offer premises, justifications, and logics for public argumentation. John Rawls, for instance, treats religious traditions as a particular class of "comprehensive doctrines," or sets of values and truth

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[37] Given the impressive number of contributions to this debate and the correspondingly modest space here, I cannot possibly capture it fully. In addition to those works featured in the main body of my discussion, see also the following: Robert Audi, *Religious Commitment and Secular Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Christopher J. Eberle, *Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Troy Dostert, *Beyond Political Liberalism: Toward a Post-Secular Ethics of Public Life* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006); Bryan T. McGraw, *Faith in Politics: Religion and Liberal Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Richard Rorty, "Religion in the Public Sphere: A Reconsideration," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 31(1) (2003): 141-149; Richard Rorty, "Religion as Conversation Stopper," *Common Knowledge* 3:1 (Spring 1994): 1-6; Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Why We Should Reject What Liberalism Tells Us about Speaking and Acting for Religious Reasons," in *Religion and Contemporary Liberalism,* edited by Paul J. Weithman, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press,1997), 162-181; and Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Audi on Religion, Politics, and Liberal Democracy," in *Religion in the Public Square*, edited by Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997).

claims that justify particular organizations of personal behavior and social arrangements. So understood, religions pose a deliberative difficulty given their exclusionary nature—that is, religious reasons are only compelling to those who already accept the starting premises of that faith. These exclusionary premises can include, for instance, beliefs in a divine entity or God and a corresponding way to act and think in accordance with the will of that divinity. This logic holds that if reasons given in the public sphere must be broadly inclusive so that all those affected by the decision might reasonably accept it, then religious traditions must be excluded from public argumentation or, alternatively, either paired with or replaced by reasons that could persuade those outside the tradition.

The conceptualization of religion as justificatory system appears even in arguments in favor of allowing religion conditional admittance to the public square. Habermas, for instance, recently reappraised the place of religion in modern society. In his 'post-secular' work, Habermas recognizes the continued motivational power of religious materials. Habermas argues religion provides a powerful means of mobilizing constituencies towards political action, which is especially valuable in a moment when the mechanisms of the state and economy are increasingly removed from democratic criticism and control. The religion he invokes, however, is cast in strict cognitivist and intellectualist terms. Put differently, Habermas understands religious traditions to have a public value in so far as they are bodies of moral ideas and ethical knowledge claims. To wit:

> Religious traditions have a special power to articulate moral intuitions, especially with regard to vulnerable forms of communal life. In corresponding political debates, this potential makes religious speech into *a serious vehicle for possible truth contents*, which can then be translated from the vocabulary of a particular religious community into a generally accessible language.[38]

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[38] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 131. Emphasis added. In making this qualified allowance for religious reasons, Habermas follows the later Rawls. In his late philosophy, Rawls introduced his "proviso" by which principles from religious comprehensive doctrines could legitimately enter into public discourse if "in due course proper political reasons—and not reasons given solely by comprehensive doctrines—are presented

Even while acknowledging its political salience and potential, Habermas diminishes religion to the status of a vehicle for generalizable (secular) insights. By this account, religious traditions consist of doctrines containing and producing "possible truth contents" that can—indeed, must—be translated into a secular form in order to gain currency in the public sphere.[39] The premise that such a translation of contents can occur without losing precisely the meanings and motivations in question is problematic. He writes elsewhere:

> At best, philosophy circumscribes the opaque core of religious experience when it reflects on the specific character of religious language and on the intrinsic meaning of faith. This core remains as profoundly alien to discursive thought as the hermetic core of aesthetic experience, which likewise can be at best circumscribed, but not penetrated, by philosophical reflection.[40]

The difficulty Habermas describes with respect to the philosophical engagement with religion illuminates the limits of his logic of translation and the underlying conception of religion's political power. Certainly, "truth contents" can be shorn from a religious tradition for the purposes of persuading a generalized, secular audience, but the fuller political significance of religion exceeds these translatable moral propositions. As Habermas recognizes, the web of practices, sensibilities, and conceptions of the world that mobilize religious subjects to political action—those elements constituting what he refers to as "the opaque core of religious experience"—cannot be accurately captured in philosophical discourse.

Political theology, the second of the two philosophical discussions that engage religion and politics, echoes Habermas's sense that there is something of value in religious tradi-

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that are sufficient to support whatever the comprehensive doctrines are said to support." John Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," in *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 129-180.

[39] Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 51-52. Cf. Michelle Dillon, "Jürgen Habermas and the Post-Secular Appropriation of Religion: A Sociological Critique," in *The Post-Secular in Question: Religion in Contemporary Society*, edited by Philip S. Gorski, David Kyuman Kim, John Torpey, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 249-78; and Friedo Reiken, "Postmetaphysical Reason and Religion," in *An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age,* 51-58.

[40] Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere: Cognitive Presuppositions for the Public Use of Reason by Religious and Secular Citizens," in *Between Naturalism and Religion* (London: Polity Press, 2008), 143.

tions. Contributors to the field of political theology take as a starting point the proposition

that the legacy of religion, to quote Slavoj Žižek, "is much too precious to be left to the fun-

damentalist freaks."[41] By contrast to normative work on public reason and religion in de-

mocratic deliberation, works examining or articulating political theology recognize religion as

a social force that not only must be reckoned with but moreover should be utilized as a

powerful resource for philosophical reflection. As reflected in the terminology of political

*theology*, participants in this scholarly field take up religion as an intellectual resource that can

be recruited for producing analytical and normative theories. Among the cohort of contribu-

tors to political theology are a number of overtly atheistic thinkers such as Žižek, Alain

Badiou, Giorgio Agamben, and Jacques Derrida.[42] The turn to religion in these works is a

tactical one. Inasmuch as they are dissatisfied with western modernity—and, most typically,

liberal capitalism—these thinkers find ready resources for resistance in that which the struc-

tures of modernity have actively suppressed and displaced: religion. Ola Sigurdson captures

this impetus clearly, writing, "If religion has been the 'other' of modernity, it is not surprising

that philosophers of very different stripes—post-secular secular philosophers or post-

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[41] Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute: Or Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London: Verso, 2008), 2.
[42] See Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, translated by Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, translated by Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul,* translated by Dana Hollander (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); and Bonnie Honig, *Emergency Politics: Paradox, Law, Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). In addition, there have been a number of anthologies focusing particularly on political theology, including Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh, *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003); Creston Davis, John Milbank, and Slavoj Zizek, *Theology and the Political: The New Debate* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); and Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan, *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-secular World* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006).

The current wave of scholarship on political theology owes much to the work of German legal theorist Carl Schmitt. Besides popularizing the term in his work, *Political Theology* (1922), Schmitt argued that all modern concepts of political theory and legal philosophy could be traced back etymologically to theological discourse. One implication of Schmitt's claim is that the continued use of this conceptual framework demands an attendant theological foundation. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, translated by George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

religious secular philosophers—have taken up reading religious texts as a way of trying to find alternatives to a certain version of modernity."[43]

Despite operating with otherwise disparate investments and commitments, both of these discursive fields—that is, public reason and political theology—share a certain reduction and reification of religion into a system of personal beliefs and theological doctrines. The reification of religion performed in both of these discussions results in an abstraction from the play of religious traditions in concrete political activity. Because they focus on religion as an intellectual or ideological edifice these theories elide crucial dimensions of power, sensibility, and performance that mark the lived experience of religious and political life. A richer conceptualization of religion that attends to the level of practice, I suggest, can facilitate a richer account of its relationship to American democratic culture and the effects on political subjects. I begin to develop such a conceptualization in the next section.

### § 4. Towards a Political Theory of Religion

At the outset of his classic sociological investigation into religious phenomena, Émile Durkheim writes, "[W]e must first define what is properly understood as a religion. If we do not, we run the risk of either calling a system of ideas and practices that are in no way religious, or of passing by religious phenomena without detecting their true nature."[44] Of course, the act of definition is an act of construction rather than an act of discovery. This is particularly true in the instance of religion, which Jonathan Z. Smith argues in an especially polemical passage:

> "Religion" is not a native term; it is a term created by scholars for their intellectual purposes and therefore it is theirs to define. It is a second-order, generic concept that plays the same role in establishing a disciplinary horizon that a concept such as "lan-

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[43] Ola Sigurdson, "Beyond Secularism?: Towards a Post-secular Political Theology," *Modern Theology* 26:2 (2010): 184.

[44] Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, translated by Karen E. Fields (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 21.

guage" plays in linguistics or "culture" plays in anthropology. There can be no disciplined study of religion without such a horizon.[45]

The lingering question is the makeup of that horizon. If the common sense notion of religion is historically contingent and analytically deficient, how might it be revised or redefined—and ultimately re-imagined—in order to provide political theorists with the requisite conceptual tools to better grasp the play of religious claims in American democracy?

In this section I develop a contingent foundation upon which to build an understanding of American religion—specifically evangelical Christianity—as it bears on democratic practice. I fashion my conceptualization of religious traditions and my theorization of religion in democracy by engaging, on the one hand, recent contributions from the field of religious studies and, on the other, the theory of hegemony and common sense provided by Antonio Gramsci.

One uniting insight between recent work in religious studies and Gramscian theory is a concern with practice and the lived dimensions of power. The methodological focus on lived religion can be traced back intellectually to earlier inquiries into "popular religion" or "folk religion" and how religious traditions are enacted outside the imposed authority of the institutional church. While abandoning the high-low opposition that tends to mark these previous modes of study, the study of lived religion and the materiality of religion continues the interest in religion as it is performed and transformed by religious practitioners. We make a foundational mistake, so these theorists claim, in following the hegemonic equation of religion as interior belief and theology.[46] A more grounded conceptualization recognizes that

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[45] Jonathan Z. Smith, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 193-94. For a partial critique of Smith (primarily pointing out that 'religion' exists as a "folk category" prior to attempts at scholarly formulation), see Arnal and McCutcheon, chapter 6.

[46] As William Robertson Smith observes, "Our modern habit is to look at religion from the side of belief rather than that of practice… Thus the study of religion has been mainly the study of Christian beliefs, and instruction in religion has habitually begun with creed, religious duties being presented to the learner as flowing from the dogmatic truths he is taught to accept." William Robertson Smith, "The Study of the Religion of the Semites,"

religion is something that people do—a way of being in the world that is performed and felt. It must be approached in terms of lived (and living) traditions that operate in time and manifest both at the level of formal ideas and more diffuse practices, sensibilities, and dispositions. As Robert Orsi states, "Religion comes into being in an ongoing, dynamic relationship with the realities of everyday life."[47] Religion here carves out a space of idiomatic innovation and possibility as well as a limit on what can be desired, imagined, and done. In this way, Orsi says, lived religion exists as a site of "relative cultural freedom" that can foster "dissent, subversion, and resistance" as well as "[sustain] structures and patterns of alienation and domination."[48]

Gramsci, a Marxist political theorist and activist, offers a similar sense of religion as a historical complex that unites habits of mind and body and has the dual potential to either shore up or transform existing relations of power.[49] For Gramsci, religion is defined as "a unity of faith between a conception of the world and a corresponding norm of conduct."[50] Put differently, religious faith can be said to be a *praxis*, an ethical practice or habit that emanates out from a particular way of seeing and interpreting the world. This unity of perception and action is elaborated further in Gramsci's consideration of so-called "popular religion." Popular religion, Gramsci explains, involves "the entire system of beliefs, superstitions, opinions, ways of seeing things and of acting, which are collectively bundled together under the

in *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion: Aims, Methods and Theories of Research*, edited by Jacques Waardenburg (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), 155.

[47] Robert Orsi, "Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion," in *Lived Religion in America: Towards a History of Practice*, edited by David D. Hall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 7.

[48] Ibid., 15. For a more elaborate theoretical articulation of Orsi's point regarding the enabling and constraining effects of religious action, see Manuel A. Vasquez, *More Than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[49] For alternative uses of Gramscian theories in conceptualizing religion, see Dwight B. Billings, "Religion as Opposition: A Gramscian Analysis," *American Journal of Sociology* 96:1 (1990): 1-31; Rhys H. Williams, "Religion as Political Resource: Culture or Ideology," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 35:4 (1996): 368-78; and John Fulton, "Religion and Politics in Gramsci: An Introduction," *Sociological Analysis* 48:3 (1987): 197-216.

[50] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, translated by Quintin Hoare and Goeffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 326.

name of 'folklore.'"[51] As much as it provides the interpretive and performative materials for practitioners to make sense of the world and be active in it, popular religion informs what Gramsci refers to as "common sense": the naturalized and taken-for-granted assumptions that are seeded throughout a society and provide the conditions for consenting to particular forms of political rule. The formation of these conditions for rule in the ideas, habits, and relations of a people is what Gramsci refers to as hegemony, which allows power to be exercised through modes of consent rather than naked coercion. Though common sense and popular religion are not manifestations of a robust ideology or intellectual order—Gramsci remarks that they "cannot be reduced to unity and coherence"—they nonetheless are both composed of notions and dispositions that are the building blocks for meaningful thought and appropriate, legible action in a given community.

Gramsci's theory provides a fruitful contextualization of religion in a system of power that can be fleshed out further by turning to scholarship in religious studies. One of the more sophisticated articulations of religion as a system of symbolic meaning appears in the cultural anthropological work of Clifford Geertz. In his classic formulation, religion is a cultural system that involves:

> (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.[52]

Geertz's definition points to the multiple levels upon which religious traditions work on their subjects. Echoing Gramsci's location of power in the diffuse system of common sense and culture, Geertz identifies religion as a "cultural system," an order that creates meaning in the world. Yet, significantly, this system does not operate only on the level of cognition or

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[51] Ibid., 323.
[52] Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," *The Interpretations of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 90.

intellect—that is, knowledge of the world—but also on dispositions, the sets of "tendencies, capacities, propensities, skills, habits, liabilities, pronenesses" that are sedimented into a religious practitioner.[53] Thus, religious traditions are technologies that involve not only convictions (or conceptions of the world that produce meaning) but also ways of feeling and responding to the world.

Gramsci and Geertz both indicate that religion entails an aesthetic dimension. I use the term aesthetics here in line with its etymological roots in the ancient Greek term *aisthesis*, which refers to the capacity to perceive, sense, and feel. To say, then, that religions possess an aesthetic aspect is to bring attention to the visceral or sensual levels that subtend the ideological formulations found in a religion's creed.[54] The content of religious creeds and experiences should not be summarily discounted or ignored. The crucial task is to locate religious beliefs and claims about the world as nested within a larger web of action and feeling.[55] Cultural theorist Raymond Williams captures this aesthetic dimension well in his term "the structures of feelings." He writes that a structure of feeling is "concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt, and the relations between these and formal or systematic beliefs are in practice variable… We are talking here [not of] feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought."[56] Religious traditions cultivate particular structures of feelings, thus shaping how religious subjects perceive the social and natural world, judge practices and arrangements, and act out commitments in meaningful and intelligible ways.

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[53] Ibid., 95.

[54] See, e.g., William E. Connolly, *Why I Am Not A Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

[55] There is a distinction between de-centering religious belief—demoting it from its status of definitional primacy—and rejecting it completely as a relevant aspect of religious traditions. Cf. Terry F. Godlove Jr., "Saving belief: on the new materialism in religious studies," in *Radical Interpretation in Religion*, edited by Nancy K. Frankenberry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 10-24.

[56] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132. Quoted in Vasquez, 250. See also Talal Asad, "Thinking About Religion, Belief, and Politics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, edited by Robert A. Orsi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 51.

Although Geertz's now classic account of religion foregrounds this aesthetic dimension, it neglects any consideration of the play of power or the place of practice. These two points form the crux of Talal Asad's critique of Geertz's theory of religion. According to Asad, Geertz neglects "the sense in which power constructs religious ideology, establishes the preconditions for distinctive kinds of religious personality, authorises specifiable religious practices and utterances, produces religiously defined knowledge."[57] Religions, in other words, are the sedimented effects of past exercises of power—they are, in Gramsci's terms, artifacts of hegemony that help produce subjects invested with certain modes of interpreting, speaking, and acting. Yet as Gramsci insists, recognizing religions as disciplining apparatuses and modes of power need not foreclose the possibility that they might be used for the purposes of resistance and opposition.

This potential is found not only in the discourses and ideas of a religion but also, to move to Asad's other point, its body of practices. Purposefully rejecting the Protestant Christian definitional concern with interiority, Asad stresses the importance of practice, embodiment, and performance to historical religious orders.[58] In other words, religions—even forms of Protestantism that ideologically stress the primacy of internal belief—encompass and entail ways of doing things and producing meaning through and with activity. While Asad's interests in an analytical incorporation of practice lie primarily with the training and disciplining of the religious body, I mean to highlight the *poetic* and innovative capacities for religious activity. By referring to religious action (and later forms of religious claims-making) as poetic I again mean to capture a sense of the ancient Greek origins of the term, which can

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[57] Talal Asad, "Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz," *Man* 18:2 (1983): 237.

[58] See Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1993). For an alternative account of religion as centrally concerned with practice, see Martin Riesebrodt, *The Promise of Salvation: A Theory of Religion*, translated by Steven Rendall (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).

be traced back to *poiesis* ("to make"). Religious practice creates meaning and, in so doing, exists as action that transforms and (re)makes the world. Of course, religious performance often emanates from and cites conventions and schemas within an established ritual or liturgical order, yet the iterability (repetition that opens possibility for novelty and difference), portability (enactment in new contexts and circumstances), and plasticity (capacity for variation) of these practices means that practitioners can remake them.

The conventions—the performative forms, rhetorics, and materialities—of religious traditions provide a rich body of resources for political action. This performative repertoire constitutes what I term a *cultus*. Although I give a fuller articulation of the cultus in Chapter Three, it is helpful to provide an outline of the concept here. According to Charles Clayton Morrison, the concept of the cultus captures "the total cultural expression of a religion as an organic historical phenomenon" and involves "the expression of certain specific aspirations, beliefs, emotions, in a body of recognized conventions, habits and organizations."[59] Although Morrison's interests stress the institutionalized liturgical manifestations of the Protestant cultus, I mean it to capture the full repertoire of a religious tradition's expressive styles, ritual practices, and aesthetic forms. Inasmuch as religious traditions offer extensive bodies of languages and practices that have arisen over time and retain the power to shape meanings, cultivate dispositions, and direct feelings and energies, they exist, in philosopher Hent de Vries words, as "an immensely extended, diversified, and deep-seated *archive of the past*…whose resources we have barely begun to fathom, to realize, let alone to exhaust" and that "consists in more than theorems, theologemes, dogmas, and concepts."[60] De Vries' notion of the archive captures the depths and density of religious traditions and their "seman-

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[59] Charles Clayton Morrison, *The Social Gospel and the Christian Cultus* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1933), 28, 30.
[60] Hent de Vries, "Why Still 'Religion'?" in *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, edited by Hent de Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 69, 76.

tic, figurative, argumentative, rhetorical, visual, visceral, affective, and effective dimensions" that must be recovered as valuable levels of analysis.[61] Whereas de Vries' explicit concern for the archive springs from his belief that it can provide valuable materials for the production of philosophical and theoretical insights, my conceptualization of the cultus is motivated by an interest in how these materials and dimensions are taken up, performed, and circulated in the practice of democratic politics.

Taken altogether, these considerations necessitate the subtle terminological and conceptual shift from speaking of 'religion' as an abstract, ahistorical, and reified concept to instead thinking of 'religious traditions.'[62] While scholars such as Habermas have used these terms synonymously, the concept of 'religious traditions' recognizes and foregrounds the dynamic and manifold character of religions as objects in history. Although he does not use the language of 'tradition,' the recent work of Bruce Lincoln clarifies the multiple components and dimensions of religious orders. According to Lincoln, religion necessarily entails and involves four particular elements or domains:

> A *discourse* whose concerns transcend the human, temporal, and contingent, and that claims for itself a similarly transcendent status…
> A *set of practices* whose goal is to produce a proper world and/or proper human subjects, as defined by a religious discourse to which these practices are connected…
> A *community* whose members construct their identity with reference to a religious discourse and its attendant practices…
> An *institution* that regulates religious discourse, practices, and community, reproducing them over time and modifying them as necessary, while asserting their eternal validity and transcendent value…[63]

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[61] Ibid., 70.

[62] A facially similar framework, it must be said, appears in the work of Wilfred Cantwell Smith. Smith offers a distinction between what he refers to 'cumulative traditions' and 'faith.' While I devote more significant space to Smith's conceptual apparatus in Chapter Three, I will clarify here that I depart from Smith in his characterization of faith as preceded (and motivating) religious traditions. See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

[63] Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking About Religion After September 11* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 5-7. Emphasis added.

  In his analysis of American political culture as being comprised of multiple traditions, Rogers Smith offers a similar definition of 'tradition,' explaining:

  A tradition here is comprised by (1) a worldview or ideology that defines basic political and economic institutions, the persons eligible to participate in them, and the roles or rights to which they are entitled and

These components are not static. As traditions are passed down through history and taken up by different actors in different circumstances, gradual and potentially sudden transformations take place.[64] With this in mind, as well as my theoretical re-orientation to the practical and felt dimensions of religious traditions (and the concomitant de-centering of belief and doctrines), I want to return to the particular context of the United States and repose the theoretical question of religion's relationship to American democracy.

### § 5. Claiming Religion in America

At the beginning of this chapter I discussed how Tocqueville and Grund described the power and ubiquity of religion (particularly the constellation of religious traditions broadly referred to as Judeo-Christianity) in the United States. Subsequent observers of American society have repeatedly echoed Tocqueville's claim regarding the interweaving of religion, politics, and social mores in the United States. In answering the question "What is America?," for instance, English writer G.K. Chesterton succinctly described America as "the nation with the soul of a church."[65] According to Chesterton, the civil society and governmental regime of the United States are peculiar by virtue of their grounding in a theologically-inflected creed. The principles that make up this creed—such as commitments to

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(2) institutions and practices embodying and reproducing those precepts. Hence traditions are not *merely* sets of ideas.
Rogers S. Smith, "Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America," *The American Political Science Review* 87:3 (1993): 563 f4.
    Interestingly, the account of the "faces" of religion provided by political scientists Kenneth D. Wald and Allison Calhoun-Brown echoes Lincoln's breakdown with the exception of practices, which Wald and Calhoun-Brown do not include in their list of "qualities that encourage and facilitate political involvement by religious groups." Kenneth D. Wald and Allison Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics in the United States*, sixth edition (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011), 25.
[64] Comprehending religion as existing as lived traditions located in human history, Lincoln writes, thus means that we must "insist on discussing the temporal, contextual, situated, interested, human, and material dimensions of those discourses, practices, and institutions that characteristically represent themselves as eternal, transcendent, spiritual, and divine." Bruce Lincoln, "Theses on Method," in *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion*, edited by Russell T. McCutcheon (London and New York: Cassell, 1999), 395. See also Angela Zito, "Culture," in *Key Words in Religion, Media and Culture*, edited by David Morgan (New York: Routledge, 2008), 73.
[65] G.K. Chesterton, *What I Saw in America* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1922), 12. See also Sidney E. Mead, *The Nation with the Soul of a Church* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975).

equality and justice—manifest in popular political discourse and foundational documents such as the Declaration of Independence, which often trace their legitimacy back to a divine authority. A similar, albeit more expansive, position is expressed by Justice David Brewer. Writing for a unanimous Supreme Court in an 1892 decision, Justice Brewer declared that if one analyzed "American life as expressed by its laws, its business, its customs and its society, we find everywhere a clear recognition of the same truth...that this is a Christian nation."[66] Chesterton and Brewer gesture at two distinct levels upon which Christianity shapes American democracy. While Chesterton points to the hegemonic status of a Christian-inflected creed—a common ideology replete with certain beliefs and values—that provides a language of legitimation and critique, Brewer's opinion bespeaks a more diffuse and expansive contouring of social mores that resonates with the perspectives of Tocqueville and Grund. According to the school of thought reflected in Brewer's statement, Christianity structures not only overt commitments but also the web of taken-for-granted habits, attitudes, and manners in the United States.

To be sure, the United States that Tocqueville encountered was in the midst of the Second Great Awakening and was thus a society in spiritual and evangelical *extremis*. Yet almost two centuries after Tocqueville recorded his wonderment at the vibrant religious life of the fledgling republic, religion continues to figure substantially in the debates and discourse

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[66] *Church of the Holy Trinity v. United States,* 143 U.S. 457 at 471. There are, it should be said, at least two ways to read Brewer's statement. Interpreted as narrowly descriptive, Brewer points to the numerous facets of social, economic, political, and moral life in the United States that bear the residual stamp of a dominant Christian constituency during the founding and early development of the country. An alternative reading along the lines of what Philip Gorski calls "religious nationalism" understands America to be a Christian nation in an aspirational or normative sense. Such a perspective understands the United States to be more than a nation historically populated by a Christian majority and that, in fact, it *should* be Christian in its laws, practices, and ethos. Far from diminishing over the course of the twentieth century, both valences of Brewer's sentiment that America is a Christian nation continue to haunt political discourse and struggles over what the polity has been and must be in the future. See Philip S. Gorski, "Barack Obama and Civil Religion," *Political Power and Social Theory* 22 (2011): 177-211.

of American politics.[67] Despite constitutional prohibitions on religious tests for public service, the religious commitments of political officers—to name but a few: the Catholic background of John F. Kennedy, the evangelical redemption narrative of George W. Bush, and the purported Islamic leanings of Barack Obama—are the subjects of animated public controversy. Social, economic, and environmental disagreements are animated by and articulated through arguably religious notions such as sanctity, sacredness, charity, and stewardship. Religious rhetoric inflects policy questions regarding both foreign and domestic issues, including abortion, homosexuality, euthanasia, democratization, war, and torture. A steady stream of conservative commentators voice anxiety over declines in public morality and losses of liberty instigated by the abandonment of a religious (more often than not, Christian) presence in the classroom, legislature, and public sphere more generally. Extending attention to the broader history of the United States—to the primordial Puritan settlements, the roiling evangelical energies of the Great Awakenings during the nineteenth century, and the dramatic confrontations between the hegemonic constellation of Protestant denominations and growing Judaic, Catholic, and Islamic constituencies—only strengthens the sense that religion is and has been a vital element in American political culture.

Empirical evidence supplied by surveys and demographic studies consistently paints the United States as a country marked by acute religiosity. "Any discussion of religion in America," write Robert Putnam and David Campbell, "must begin with the incontrovertible fact that Americans are a highly religious people. One can quibble over just how religion, and religiosity, should be gauged, but, by any standard, the United States (as a whole) is a

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[67] Some scholars have staked out the bold claim that contemporary manifestations of religious traditions in American politics are more intense and widespread than those present in the wake of the Second Great Awakening. Indeed, Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore claim "that religion is far more evident in public life today than it was at any time during the nineteenth century." Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore, *The Godless Constitution: The Case Against Religious Correctness* (New York: Norton, 1996), 173.

religious nation."[68] In terms of polities with members belonging to an organized religion, practicing religious behaviors, and holding religious beliefs, the United States ranks remarkably high, particularly in comparison with other industrialized constitutional democracies. According to a 2001 survey performed by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, almost two-thirds of Americans (64 percent) described religion as very important, 43 percent said they attend religious services at least weekly, and 90 percent claimed to pray at least once a week.[69] The 2006 Faith Matters survey similarly highlights, on the one hand, the magnitude of religious feeling in the United States—with only five out of the 3,108 people surveyed labeling themselves as non-believers—and, on the other hand, the rich (and growing) diversity of religious affiliations and traditions within the country.[70] Even as more recent surveys have found an increasing demographic that claims no particular religious affiliation—the so-called "nones" or "unchurched"—the majority of this group continue to profess a belief in God and identify themselves as either religious or spiritual even as they reject institutionalized religious authorities.[71]

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[68] Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 7.

[69] The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, "Faith-Based Funding Backed, but Church-State Doubts Abound," April 10, 2001, http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=15 (accessed May 1, 2012).

[70] The results of this survey are analyzed extensively in Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*. Similar survey results regarding American religiosity can be found in Baylor Religion Survey, "American Piety in the 21st Century: New Insights to the Depth and Complexity of Religion in the U.S.," (Waco, TX: Baylor Institute for Studies in Religion, 2006).

[71] The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, "'Nones' on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation," October 9, 2012, http://www.pewforum.org/Unaffiliated/nones-on-the-rise.aspx#growth (accessed January 15, 2013); and, Gallup, "In U.S., Rise in Religious 'Nones' Slows in 2012," January 10, 2013, http://www.gallup.com/poll/159785/rise-religious-nones-slows-2012.aspx#1 (accessed January 15, 2013). Only a small sliver (approximately 6%) of the individuals in this group identified themselves as either agnostic or atheist. The overwhelming majority of those claiming no affiliation attribute their distance from organized religion to the corruption or domineering authority of religious institutions and the doctrinal emphasis on rules and laws. In their simultaneous pushing away from specific institutional affiliations and loosely drawing thematic, doctrinal, or practical elements from existing religious traditions, these "nones" echo what sociologists Robert Bellah and Richard Madsen labeled "Sheilaism." See Robert Bellah and Richard Madsen, *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

Although my canvas of history, the terrain of political discourse, and contemporary demographics in the United States can only be suggestive, it demonstrates that Christian religious traditions are embedded in American political culture. Given that the United States has never been secular—with secular here understood as free of religious discourse and practices in the public sphere—then there are two immediate implications for trying to make interpretive sense of religious claims-making in the United States. First, we should abandon the common counterfactual starting point found in the public reason literature that presupposes religion to be outside the public sphere and politics.[72] Such a presupposition not only flies in the face of the social and political history of the United States but also relies on, as I discussed earlier, a problematic conception of religion as presumptively interior and capable of being fully privatized. Second, the juridical language of the separation of church and state is analytically insufficient. While religious institutions may be conceptually and functionally distinct from those of the state in the United States, this formal separation does not stop the play of religious traditions within the space of democratic culture and political contestation.[73]

Following the theoretical lead of Gramsci and other thinkers, both in political theory and American political development, I propose a shift from the singular concentration on the level of state institutions to a broader analysis of culture as not only the site of democratic practice but also, even more generally, a place of power, structure, and change.[74] Gram-

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[72] For a slightly more developed articulation of this "operative assumption," see Judith Butler, "Is Judaism Zionism?," in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, edited by Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 71.

[73] Furthermore, scholars have questioned both the historical validity and pragmatic viability of separating church and state (at least as it is articulated in the First Amendment of the Constitution). See, e.g., David Sehat, *The Myth of American Religious Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Steven K. Green, *The Second Disestablishment: Church and State in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

[74] For similar criticisms of traditional approaches to APD, see Nancy D. Wadsworth, "Reconciling Fractures: The Intersection of Race and Religion in United States Political Development," in *Race and American Political Development*, edited by Joseph Lowndes, Julie Novkov, and Dorian T. Warren (New York: Routledge, 2008), 312-336; and Joseph Lowndes and Victoria Hattam, "The Ground Beneath Our Feet: Language, Culture and

sci expresses a similar perspective in his rejection of the liberal notion of an insulated state that transcends civil society and political culture. He writes, "'State' should be understood not only [as] the apparatus of government, but also [as] the 'private' apparatus of 'hegemony' or civil society."[75] I understand culture as constituted not simply by "a network of meaning"—as Geertz, among others, claims in his theorization of religion—but rather a matrix of relationships between meaning, discourse, materiality, practices, and institutions.[76] The corollaries of this conception of culture are that, on the one hand, politics and political institutions are embedded in—and in significant ways shaped by—a cultural matrix and that, on the other hand, culture is irreducibly political. Anne Norton writes: "In this reading culture appears, as it has in recent American political history, as the theater of the agon, the site of those necessarily participatory public contests that constitute politics. Culture is a fight."[77] Thus, to speak, as some social observers continue to do, of a culture war in America is redundant—culture is always already a struggle.

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Political Change," in *Formative Acts: Reckoning with Agency in American Politics,* edited by Stephen Skowronek and Matthew Glassman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 199-219.

    Other thinkers have pointed to the dynamism of American political culture and how it is formed by "multiple traditions" or its discursive landscape features a "varied topography." Rogers M. Smith, "Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America," *The American Political Science Review* 87: 3 (1993): 549-566; and Mark S. Cladis, "Painting Landscapes of Religion in America: Four Models of Religion in Democracy," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76:4 (2008): 874-904. Smith does make a passing comment that religious elements are intertwined with all political traditions (564) but stresses throughout his piece how they appear in inegalitarian claims. A critical rejoinder to Smith's framework (and specifically its characterization of religion) appears in Jacqueline Steven's response in Stevens and Smith, "Beyond Tocqueville, Please!," *American Political Science Review* 89:4 (1995): 987-995. As Stevens writes, "The inclusion of beliefs in inherent religious superiority as doctrines of ascriptive inequality baffles me, since Smith is surely aware of the Christian abolitionists in the United States and England who used religion against ascriptive inegalitariaism … not to mention the suffragists who did the same… It is true that many Protestants thought themselves superior, but the relation between this and ascriptive inegalitarianism is not as straightforward as Smith implies" (994f1).

[75] Gramsci, 261. For an earlier articulation of this insight regarding the interrelation of the state and civil society, see Marx, "On the Jewish Question."

[76] Anne Norton, *95 Theses on Politics, Culture, and Method* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 1.

[77] Ibid., 11. From this insight, Norton goes on to claim that the idea of 'political culture' is redundant and, further, is deceptive in as much it implies that there is culture free of politics and politics free of culture. "I have learned to argue instead," she states, "for understanding the political as an aspect of culture, and culture as the field in which politics is conceived and enacted" (12).

Another way of putting this is to say that a democratic regime, such as that of the United States, necessarily exceeds its institutional structures and formalized articulations. While majoritarian and representative institutions may be necessary or pragmatic conditions for a democratic order, they are not, in and of themselves, sufficient. An additional necessary condition for democracy is a social order marked by vibrant citizen participation and broad political activity. The rule (*kratos*) of the people (*demos*), I suggest, springs from the interactions and public performances of members of a polity. A similar perspective manifests in Michaele Ferguson's account of democracy as activity, which centers on the "exercise of political freedom in acts of self-government" and the "never-ending, ongoing process of shaping the world we inhabit with plural others."[78] The vision of a democracy as a project and process of collective world building undertaken by equal citizens involves more than the liberal-deliberative account would suggest or allow. The notion of democracy as constituted solely by processes of reason giving and oriented towards consensus occludes the embodied dimensions of disagreement and the irreducibility of difference and power. In recognizing these aspects, my account of democracy bears the influence of agonistic theories that emphasize the inevitability of conflict and resistance given the permanent condition of social power differentials.

Given all this, the religious traditions that inform American culture and that facilitate citizens in their active efforts to shape the world must be understood as part and parcel of a practice of democratic politics. The political work of transforming social arrangements and institutions, Gramsci contends, must begin with rudiments drawn from that society's political culture and mores. As he explains, "The starting point [for counter-hegemonic efforts] must always be that common sense which is the spontaneous philosophy of the multitude

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[78] Michaele L. Ferguson, *Sharing Democracy* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2012), 12, 138.

and which has to be made ideologically coherent."[79] Any effort at political transformation requires, Gramsci claims, "an intellectual and moral reform." Such a reform must begin with the web of discourses, habits, and sensibilities—in a phrase: the social mores—of the political community.[80] As discussed earlier, Christianity provides structures of feeling and action for the American practice of democracy. In this way, Christian traditions not only invigorate the public engagement and exercise of political freedom on which American democracy depends but also equip religious subjects with techniques of citizenship that can be taken up, inhabited, and performed in the on-going struggle to remake the American political order.

## § 6. The Map and the Territory

Given this dissertation's explicit concern with moving beyond abstract and reified conceptions of religion, the chapters that follow depart from the common disciplinary practice within political theory of developing arguments through close readings of canonical works in western political thought. The methodological approach taken here instead directs analytical attention to specific episodes and social actors in the history of American politics. My analysis re-orients theoretical concern towards democratic practices and the concrete, "on the ground" activity of claims-making that constitutes religious and political struggle.

The cases I have chosen span the broad swath of American history, from the antebellum period struggle over the institution of chattel slavery to the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. These case studies facilitate analysis of the historical-empirical interplay of American religion and politics from

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[79] Gramsci, 421.

[80] For the political significance of social mores—or what he refers to as *les moeurs* ("morals/manners")—see the theoretical work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, most especially "Letter to M. D'Alembert." Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Theatre*, translated by Allan Bloom (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960).

distinct perspectives in order to further develop the conceptual framework established in this introductory chapter.

I begin in Chapter One by engaging one of the major theoretical frameworks for conceptualizing public religion in America: civil religion. An interest in civil religion as a belief system shared by all members of a political community recurs in canonical works of normative political philosophy. Thinkers as varied as Plato, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Rousseau all ruminated on the creation of a programmatic imposition of religious beliefs and practices. Over the last half-century, however, social scientists have followed the lead of sociologist Robert Bellah in applying the term as an empirical description of the United States. Unlike previous philosophical articulations, Bellah defines civil religion in a Durkheimian manner as a set of organic beliefs and rituals that sacralize consensual values and the community. By reading the works of Tocqueville and Walt Whitman alongside the theory of Gramsci, I construct an alternative conception of civil religion as a poetic practice that informs the meaning of political values and can be marshaled to contest the terms of political standing. I pair my conceptual articulation with an examination of abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, which allows me to illuminate how civil religious performances are exercises in world- and meaning-making shot through with dimensions of power.

My discussion of Garrison's inflammatory public persona calls to mind the fraught subject of religious fanaticism, which I turn to directly in Chapter Two. Implicit within the anxieties surrounding fanaticism is the association of public religions with problematic enthusiasms, passions, and potential violence. At face value the figure of the fanatic is a pathological manifestation—a troubling, potentially anti-democratic force. Rather than categorically redeeming or condemning the religious fanatic, I use militant abolitionist John Brown and Operation Rescue founder Randall Terry to build an account of how the practice of fa-

naticism manifests in democratic regimes. Specifically, I develop an understanding of religious zealotry as the excessive and exacting enactment of faith, wherein the performance of a conspicuous religio-ethical practice challenges the prevailing set of sensibilities and institutions in a community. Through my readings of Brown and Terry, I construct an account of how their particular Christian traditions endowed them not only with personal motivations but also the idioms and performative resources through which they confronted what they perceived to be the unjust and unmarked remainders of previous political settlements.

Chapter Three moves from individual religious figures to the level of religious publics as well as from critical disruption to mobilizing and sustaining a political bloc. Drawing on religious aesthetics scholarship and the historical case of the Social Gospel, I develop an account of religious publics as communities constituted through aesthetic forms and practices. The facilitating condition of a religious public, I argue, is a cultus, a term that captures the aesthetic and practical materials of a religious tradition. The cultus gives form and force to religious faith as a way of being and acting in the world. As a part of developing this concept and theorizing its political implications, I develop and sharpen my critique of the conception of religion as a state of holding particular beliefs. According to my analysis, the Social Gospel's repertoire of practices and texts brought into being a network of religio-political subjects equipped with commitments and dispositions that countered those of the dominant American traditions of liberal capitalism and evangelical Protestantism. Put in different terms, I read the Social Gospel as advancing what can be conceptualized as a counter-cultus, which challenges the dominant Christian liturgy of the time and cultivates subjectivities that have the capacities and dispositions to rework the social-structural order.

The final content chapter draws together the conceptual threads developed in previous chapters in an analysis of the religious politics of mourning. As recent theoretical contri-

butions have elaborated, moments of public mourning are crucial points in which collective memory, belonging, and value are unsettled and negotiated. Yet even as public mourning has been recognized as a moment in which the political community can be reformed and reconstituted—even if that formation relies on the reproduction of established modes and manners—there has been a curious neglect of how religion is implicated in the management of memory and the process of mourning. Yet, as Peter van der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann write, "Religion gives meaning both to violence and to the suffering incurred by it."[81] As I argue, the cultus of religious traditions encompass both a *praxis* and *poetics* of mourning that enable actions in light of existing conceptions of the cosmos and the (re)making of meanings and subjectivities through ritual enactments. The substance of the chapter's analysis turns to three figures—George W. Bush, Jerry Falwell, and Jeremiah Wright—who differently drew on the materials of the Christian tradition in order to alter the meanings of foundational political principles and frame the place of the United States in the world after the attacks of September 11, 2001.

I close the dissertation with a short concluding section in which I return to the project's overarching objective of theorizing religious claims-making as a democratic practice in the United States. I also use this closing section to highlight areas of my project for future development, expansion, and elaboration.

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[81] Peter van der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann, "Introduction," in *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia,* edited by Peter van der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 11.

# CHAPTER ONE:

## "A SUBLIME AND SERIOUS RELIGIOUS DEMOCRACY": WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON AND THE CIVIL RELIGIOUS POETICS OF ANTEBELLUM ABOLITIONISM

> "[The] separation of church and state has not denied the political realm a religious dimension… This public religious dimension is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals that I am calling the American civil religion."
>
> — Robert Bellah,
> "Civil Religion in America"[1]

> "Religion is sociologically interesting not because, as vulgar positivism would have it, it describes the social order (which, insofar as it does, it does not only very obliquely but very incompletely), but because, like environment, political wealth, jural obligation, personal affection, and a sense of beauty, it shapes it."
>
> — Clifford Geertz,
> "Religion as a Cultural System"[2]

One of the fundamental insights provided by Alexis de Tocqueville (and discussed in the introductory chapter) is that while religion in the United States may be formally separated from the state it nonetheless remains a vibrant and crucial part of American public life. Indeed, according to Tocqueville, the Christian religious tradition thoroughly penetrates and informs American political culture and the vernacular political discourse. Two centuries after the publication of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1840), analytical and interpretive scholarship still struggles with how to schematize the exact workings and nature of the relationship between religion (Christianity) and politics (liberal democracy) in the United States. This

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[1] Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96 (1967), 3.
[2] Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic, 1973), 119.

on-going effort produced a number of models and concepts claiming to provide greater precision and accuracy in understanding the political work of American religion. Most notable among these is the idea of 'American civil religion,' which persists as a ready analytical framework long after its initial popularization by sociologist Robert Bellah in the late 1960s.[3] The conceptual lineage of 'civil religion,' of course, stretches back much farther, with the idea appearing either implicitly or explicitly in numerous works of normative political philosophy both ancient and modern.[4] In repurposing the term for his interpretative project, Bellah proffered a broad definition of civil religion as "that religious dimension, found I think in the life of every people, through which it interprets its historical experience in the light of transcendent reality."[5] American civil religion as a conceptual category indexes the diffuse "collection of beliefs, symbols, and rituals with respect to sacred things" that is distinct from organized religious denominations (churches) and the institutions of government

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[3] The thematic elements that Bellah captures by his term, it should be noted, were far from novel or off the radar of the academic milieu in which he worked. Numerous similar concepts were introduced both before and after Bellah offered the language of "American civil religion." To name but a few: "common religion" (Robin Williams), "common faith" (John Dewey), "the religion of the Republic" (Sidney Mead), and "American creed" (Seymour Lipset). I single out Bellah for my present discussion because his concept of American civil religion has become the iconic articulation of the imbrication of politics and religion in the United States.

[4] The term 'civil religion' first appears in the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, which I will discuss in more detail further on in the chapter. The Roman philosopher Marcus Terentius Varro offers a similar concept in his language of civil theology (*theologica civilis*). Though Varro's writings have been lost, St. Augustine provides a gloss on Varro's theological typology in Book VI, Chapter 5 of *The City of God*. Per Varro's formulation, civil theology is the theology of the city—"that which the citizens in the towns, and especially the priests, ought to know and put into practice"—and codifies the official gods and modes of worship for a given community. It is distinguished from mythical theology (theology of the theater) and natural theology (theology of the philosophers). St. Augustine, *The City of God*, translated by Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin, 2003), 235-36.

Civil theology and civil religion, at least as Rousseau articulates the concept, are not identical. The pagan civil theology described by Varro and criticized as corrupt by Augustine are what Rousseau refers to as "the religion of the citizen." The crucial distinction Rousseau makes between this and civil religion properly understood is the explicit parochialism of civil theology, which narrowly sacralizes the city, as compared to the universalistic dimension attributed to civil religion.

For secondary studies of civil religion as it manifests elsewhere in western political philosophy, see e.g., Ronald Beiner, *Civil Religion: A Dialogue in the History of Political Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and *Civil Religion in Political Thought: Its Perennial Questions and Enduring Relevance in North America*, edited by Ronald Weed and John von Heyking (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press, 2010).

[5] Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), 3.

(the state).[6] It is a "national faith" that not only reinforces communal solidarity and cohesion but also possesses the capacity to engender and undermine the legitimacy of social structures and policies.

Despite several decades of criticism, elaboration, and appropriation, Bellah's formulation continues to serve as the preeminent point of departure for analyses of religion in American politics.[7] The definition Bellah provides for the concept rests on a problematic account of religion drawn from Durkheim that stresses its consensual and integrative function. Looking beyond Bellah's model, an alternative paradigm of civil religion appears in the works of, among others, Niccolò Machiavelli and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The formulation articulated by Machiavelli and Rousseau stresses civil religion's disciplining (or policing) potential and its utility for political elites and regime maintenance to undertake projects of domination. The Machiavellian-Rousseauian tradition, however, neglects to consider the protean character of civil religion by which it can be taken up by multiple social actors either to sustain or challenge relations of power. Both schools of thought thus provide overly narrow analytical frameworks that fail to attend to the dynamic and contestatory qualities of religio-political discourse in a democratic society such as the United States.

This chapter addresses a foundational conceptual question, namely, what is American civil religion and how does it bear on the practice of democracy? Given that civil religion

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[6] Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," 8.

[7] While an exhaustive list of such analyses would be unnecessary and belabored, here is a partial list of entries in the extensive literature building on, responding to, or revising Bellah's notion of civil religion: Philip S. Gorski, "Barack Obama and Civil Religion," *Political Power and Social Theory* 22 (2011): 177-211; Gail Gehrig, "The American Civil Religion Debate: A Source for Theory Construction," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 20 (1981): 51-63; Russell E. Richey and Donald G. Jones, *American Civil Religion* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1990); the entries in *Varieties of Civil Religion*, edited by Robert N. Bellah and Phillip E. Hammond (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980); Richard V. Pierard and Robert D. Linder, *Civil Religion and the Presidency* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1988); Rhys H. Williams and Susan M. Alexander, "Religious Rhetoric in American Populism: Civil Religion as Movement Ideology," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 33 (1994): 1-15; and David Morgan, "Seeing Nationhood: Images of American Identity," in *Powers: Religion as a Social and Spiritual Force*, edited by Meerten B. Ter Borg and Jan Willem Van Henten (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 81-102. Additionally, a number of entries on the Social Science Research Council's blog *The Immanent Frame* (online at: http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/) have revisited the concept of civil religion.

is a second-order concept constructed by scholars to make sense of the world, we might more properly pose this question slightly differently: how should American civil religion be understood in order to more fully and richly grasp the play of religious rhetoric and performance in the democratic political culture of the United States? Rather than discard the term altogether, I propose that a conceptual re-orientation is in order. I argue that American civil religion would be more richly conceptualized in terms of aesthetics and the sensuous dimensions of public life.[8] Instead of speaking of American civil religion as a set or settled object composed of shared beliefs, I develop an account of a *civil religious poetics*, which involves the innovative combination of materials from political and religious traditions in the process of collective world making.

To flesh out this framework, I look to the antebellum period and the abolitionist activity of William Lloyd Garrison. The case of Garrison is useful for my purposes both in how he performed a civil religious poetics and how he conceptualized its political work and effects. Garrison stands as simultaneously exemplary and exceptional—exemplary in the sense that he uses modes of religious performance and voice that were widespread among anti-slavery activists, and exceptional in his radical positions relative to both mainstream American society and even the bulk of the anti-slavery movement. At the outset of his tenure as publisher and writer for *The Liberator*, Garrison famously proclaimed "I am in earnest—I will not equivocate—I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch—AND I WILL

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[8] To head off any potential confusion at the pass, I do not mean aesthetics as narrowly relating to art and the apprehension of the beautiful. As I hope will become clear in my usage of the term, my definition hues closer to the original Greek term, *aisthesis*, which refers to "things perceptible by the senses, as distinct from things which were immaterial or which could only be thought." Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 27. Understood as involving modes and regimes of sensuous knowledge, aesthetics eschews the hierarchical mind-body dualism that separates out bodily sensation from the processes of rational thought. An aesthetics orientation refuses the abstraction of intellectual processes (ideology, ideas, beliefs, etc.) from the regimes and modes of perception (sensing, feeling, hearing, seeing). The limits and capacities of our political thinking, in other words, are conditioned on our sensuous engagement with the world.

BE HEARD." As a part of these efforts to be heard and persuade his fellow citizens, Garrison models a certain way of claiming—of contesting the meaning of American political traditions—that I call a civil religious poetics. Exploring Garrison's performance grounds the chapter's theoretical examination of civil religious poetics as a means of reforming political culture and reshaping the sensibilities of citizens. At the same time, my analysis facilitates a more nuanced interpretation of Garrison's abolitionist activities and challenges the long-standing critique made by both his contemporaries and subsequent commentators that he was overly moralistic and anti-political.

I begin by critically engaging the two established schools of thought regarding the concept of 'civil religion'—the Durkhiemian and Machiavellian models—and develop an alternative understanding of the term as entailing a poetical practice by bringing together the works of Tocqueville, Walt Whitman, and Antonio Gramsci. After establishing my theoretical framework regarding American civil religion, I provide a brief historical sketch of the antebellum debate over the status of slavery and its religious dimensions in order to situate Garrison's position and emphasize its radical quality. Then I proceed to analyze the rhetorical practices of Garrison, illuminating how he used religious modes of performance and voice to rework established political ideas and challenge the existing terms of political standing and sensibility. I close by considering how Garrison articulates a conception of democratic political activity as directed towards unsettling and re-constructing the terms of political discourse and subjectivity that must necessarily precede social-structural transformation.

## § 1. A Lyrical Civil Religion

Within the now extensive scholarly literature on civil religion, two general conceptual models appear: the first model, which is informed by the sociological theory of Émile Durkheim, understands civil religion as a social consensus that rises organically and sacralizes

common values. The second or Machiavellian model casts civil religion as an ideological device for the manipulation and control of subjects by the state or political elites. In the scholarship that flowed in the wake of Bellah's early work, the Durkheimian model became the norm though a few scholars continued to use the Machiavellian conception of civil religion as a means of political control.[9] Both of these models, I argue, fail to accurately capture the dynamics of religious forms and discourse as they operate in American political culture.

The Durkheimian tradition that includes Bellah's theorization of American civil religion contends that religion is necessarily social. According to this normative functionalist account, religion is a universal, natural, and consensual phenomenon by which a society comes into being and sustains itself as a unified, harmonious unit. Although Durkheim never explicitly uses the language of 'civil religion' in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), the concept is implicit within his social theory of religion, which posits that the religious and civil communities are "coterminous" and co-constitutive. Any fully functioning and stable society, Durkheim claims, requires a shared body of ideas, behaviors, and symbols that express and reflect commonly held values. As he writes, there "can be no society which does not feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiments and collective ideas which make its unity and its personality."[10] These shared ideas and values arise out of instances of social gathering, most particularly moments of religious worship, that inspire the intense state of fellow feeling and inter-connection that Durkheim refers to as collective effervescence. Religious orders sacralize the community and render its essential unity and values transcendent. In addition to operating as coordinating devices that organize a community members' ideas and behavior (and provide "moral unity"), religions also pro-

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[9] For a contemporary formulation that fits squarely within the Machiavellian paradigm, see Sheldon S. Wolin, "America's Civil Religion," *Democracy* 2 (April 1983): 7-17.

[10] Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, translated by Karen E. Fields (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 474-75.

vide occasions such as rites and ceremonies that bring members together to reaffirm these common sentiments, solidify social bonds, and celebrate the collective. Put differently, religion according to Durkheim forms the connective tissue that holds a civil society and moral community together.

A Durkheimian sensibility informs Bellah's conception of American civil religion.[11] Bellah defines civil religion as "a collection of beliefs, symbols, and rituals with respect to sacred things and institutionalized in a collectivity."[12] Though Bellah claims that this collection of beliefs has an integrity and coherence that allows it to be categorized as a religion, it is distinct from what José Casanova calls a "public religion." For whereas a public religion is a sectarian religious tradition that enters into the public sphere replete with its idiosyncratic or particularistic rhetorics, logics, and references, American civil religion is a diffuse body of ideas and practices abstracted from any particular theological tradition. It is a *civil* religion in that the materials recycled from a generic Christianity are combined with elements from republican and liberal discourse to form a way of understanding the United States within a transcendent order. By offering a theologically thin variation of Christianity, American civil religion resonates with the personal faith of Christian citizens regardless of denominational differences.[13] American civil religion represents a generalized consensus composed of "certain common elements of religious orientation that the great majority of Americans share."[14]

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[11] The middleman in this intellectual lineage is Talcott Parsons, who introduced Durkheim's functionalist sociology to American scholars and served as Bellah's mentor. Almost two decades after its publication, Bellah admitted that Parsons originally intended to write the *Daedalus* piece on American civil religion until he decided to hand it off to Bellah. Robert N. Bellah, "Comment," *Sociological Analysis* 50 (1989): 147.

[12] Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," 10. As a part of an effort to endow Bellah's language with greater theoretical precision, John A. Coleman provides a helpful elaboration on this definition, writing that civil religion is "the set of beliefs, rites, and symbols which relates a man's role as citizen and his society's place in space, time, and history to the conditions of ultimate existence and meaning." John A. Coleman, "Civil Religion," *Sociological Analysis* 31 (1970), 70.

[13] Catherine Albanese, "Dominant and Public Center: Reflections on the One Religion of the United States," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 81:1 (1992): 14–29; and Phillip E. Hammond and Robert Bellah, *Varieties of Civil Religion* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1980).

[14] Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," 3.

These components include notions of national chosenness and a foundational covenant between the American people and God that places a special burden on the United States to redeem the world. Bellah constructs his account through an examination of the speeches and writings of political officials. Though Bellah acknowledges that such public actors may only be performing a "semblance of piety" for instrumental purposes, he claims that their words are still revealing, inasmuch as they express common notions that inform American political culture and are broadly shared by the national audience.

As articulated in these accounts, civil religions (and religions more generally) are organic and seemingly spontaneous social phenomena. According to the Durkheimian tradition, civil religion "well[s] up naturally from the bottom, from the very depths of the social experience itself."[15] The rituals and ideas of a civil religion, then, are the natural (and apparently unintentional) expression of a nascent consensus. Religious traditions, it is true, produce social subjects by equipping them with the values and habits of the community, but the Durkheimian account of religious subjectification proceeds without agentic will or influence. By defining religion as a naturally occurring device—a process that springs from the very logic of social life—the model advocated by Durkheim and Bellah fails to consider civil religion's implication in relations of power and forecloses questions regarding the formation and contestation of civil religion. This absence is most pronounced in Durkheim's description of religion, which depicts religious phenomena as entirely abstracted from any economy of power within society. Even in Bellah's framework, which rests squarely on analyses of the utterances of political actors, the play of power and persuasion are marginalized. Thus, statements of political actors are interpreted as manifestations or reflections of a preexisting symbolic order rather than attempts at persuasion, manipulation, or innovation.

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[15] N.J. Demerath and Rhys H. Williams, "Civil Religion in an Uncivil Society," *Annals of the American Academy* 480 (1985): 156.

Although equally interested in the functionality of religious traditions, the Machiavel-lian model couples this concern with a stress on the political utility and instrumentality of civil religion. That is, thinkers in this tradition are principally interested in how religion serves as a tool for elites to manipulate, discipline, and police subjects and thus maintain the order of political rule.[16] While this idea manifests in a passing manner in *The Prince* (1532) where Machiavelli instructs political leaders to appear (though not necessary be) religious, it appears in a far more developed fashion in *Discourses on Livy* (1531). In *Discourses*, Machiavelli discusses at length the utility of the Roman civil religion devised and implemented by Numa Pompilius. The Roman civil religion, Machiavelli claims, "served to command armies, to animate the plebs, to keep men good, to bring shame to the wicked."[17] Machiavelli stresses that the relative truth-value of a religion—that is, whether or not it accurately describes the cosmos and offers the proper path to salvation—is of secondary concern. What is most pressing is the political utility of a religion. With this in mind, Machiavelli argues that the Roman civil religion furnished by Numa is a particular achievement in terms of manufactur-ing compliant subjects who are respectful of the laws, dedicated to their social commitments, and eager to battle for the city's survival and greatness. The famous lawgivers of antiquity such as Lycurgus and Solon, Machiavelli observes, all similarly resorted to civil religion as a means of establishing and shoring up their social orders, allowing these elites to "easily im-press any new form on [the people]."[18] The qualities necessary for a stable republic, including legitimacy of the state, a disciplined citizenry, and respect for laws, are imposed— "impress[ed]"—on subjects through the instrument of civil religion.

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[16] Paul Christopher Johnson tracks a similar notion of civil religion's tactical potential in his conceptualization of "instrumental civil religion." See Paul Christopher Johnson, "Savage Civil Religion," *Numen* 52:3 (2004): 289-324.

[17] Niccolo Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, translated by Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 34-35.

[18] Ibid., 35.

An analogous formulation appears in the republican theory of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Credited with coining the concept of 'civil religion,' Rousseau introduces the subject in Chapter Eight of the fourth volume of *The Social Contract* (1762). Civil religion figures into Rousseau's discussion (with an acknowledged debt to Machiavelli and Hobbes) as a means of fostering political bonds and nourishing citizens' love of duty. "[N]o State," Rousseau boldly claims, "has ever been founded without religion serving as its base."[19] Canvassing what he sees as the three known varieties of religion, however, Rousseau finds each and every one wanting with respect to the crucial criterion of social unity: "the religion of the citizen" strengthens the pull of civil obligation but is prone to empty ceremony and intolerant chauvinism; "the religion of the priest," as exemplified by Catholicism, actively subverts the allegiance of subjects to the polity; and "the religion of man"—Christianity in its purest, most deinstitutionalized form—engenders political quietude, other-worldliness, and dependency.[20] Faced with these shortcomings Rousseau articulates a fourth approach, which he calls a "purely civil profession of faith." Such a civil profession (or civil religion) preserves a space for individuals to possess their own personal religion but dictates "a few, simple, and exactly worded" pieces of dogma that all citizens must hold and that are meant to provide social stability and institutional legitimacy. These prescribed "sentiments of sociability" include the existence of a divinity and an afterlife, the punishment of transgressions, the sanctity of the social contract and laws, and a proscription against intolerance.[21] By embedding these qualities within a transcendent framing, Rousseau overlays civic duties with a moral resonance and a divine sanction to the acts of the state.

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[19] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On The Social Contract*, translated by Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 99.
[20] It should be said that Rousseau's treatment of civil religion in *The Social Contract* is hardly exhaustive of his thoughts on religion and religious experience. Indeed, in a section of *Emile* entitled "Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar," Rousseau articulates a deistic spirituality that stands apart from any civic purpose.
[21] Ibid., 102.

As opposed to the Durkheimian model, the Machiavellian tradition foregrounds power and domination. The objective of civil religion according to Machiavelli and Rousseau resembles that posited by Durkheim, namely, the production of social subjects and the re-production of the social order. The Machiavellian model differs crucially in its second premise: civil religion, as all religion, is an artifact created by humanity and should be deliberately crafted as an instrument in light of some given ends. Even as they locate civil religion within a matrix of power relations, the account of power informing Rousseau's and Machiavelli's theories is unidirectional and top-down. The lawgiver and the state impose civil religious beliefs and practices on a given populace to pacify it and endow the activities of the political elites with greater legitimacy. To use Rousseau's language, civil religion serves as a device for manufacturing "good citizen[s]" and "faithful subject[s]."[22] The exclusive attention to official civil religion—that is, the religious order formally proclaimed and authorized by state institutions—brings about a reduced consideration of how civil religion can operate as a resource for resistance to the existing social order. The collection of symbols and meanings composing a civil religion, however, cannot be thoroughly shielded from contestation and re-appropriation. Every discourse, as Michel Foucault observes, can be made to support projects quite different from (and even directly opposed to) those of its originators:

> [W]e must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies…and with the shift and reutilizations of identical formula for contrary objectives that it also includes.[23]

When paired with the inevitability of resistance to any arrangement of power, Foucault's point regarding the portability of discourse suggests that civil religion cannot be adequately

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22 Ibid., 102.
23 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 100.

theorized singularly as an instrument of domination. Given the Machiavellian model's narrow focus on civil religion as an instrument of the state and a means of subject production, this framework on its own cannot provide the analytical tools necessary for grappling with civil religious discourse when it is engaged in a project of resistance and unsettling the social order.

Rather than adopting either of these reified and partial models of civil religion, I advance a conception of civil religion as identifying a genre of claims making that plays on conventional religious forms, images, and rhetorics in order to reform a given polity's self-understanding and social mores.[24] In other words, I take civil religion to be a conceptual category rather than a particular historical or empirical category, a capacious genre or form rather than a single set system of belief or practice. As a way of articulating and developing my alternative framework, I turn to two eloquent observers of religion as it figures into American political culture: Walt Whitman and Alexis de Tocqueville.

Writing in the aftermath of the Civil War, Walt Whitman foresaw the coming ascension of a new, religious stage of American democracy in his essay "Democratic Vistas" (1871). This stage would build upon the two previous movements within American development that had established, respectively, the "political foundation of rights" (democratic institutional structures) and "material prosperity" (economic and industrial development). Alongside these legal-political and economic moments, Whitman anticipated a cultural and literary transformation that would empower and unite the citizenry of the country:

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[24] Cf. Marcela Cristi, *From Civil to Political Religion: The Intersection of Culture, Religion and Politics* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001). Though Cristi provides a critique of the existing discourse on civil religion that resonates with my own, the solution that she offers to distinguish civil religion as "culture" and civil religion as "ideology" is unsatisfying. In consigning consensus theories of civil religion to the realm of culture, Cristi implicitly casts culture as removed from the play of power, which is ascribed primarily to the ideological apparatus of the state. My analysis shares Cristi's interest in attending to civil religion as it is implicated in power relations but proceeds from an understanding that power in modern societies, especially modern democratic societies, cannot be adequately mapped onto a state-civil society binary.

I, now, for one, promulge, announcing a native expression-spirit, getting into form, adult, and through mentality, for these States, self-contain'd, different from others, more expansive, more rich and free, to be evidenced by original authors and poets to come, by American personalities, plenty of them, male and female, traversing the States, none excepted — and by native superber tableaux and growths of language, songs, operas, orations, lectures, architecture — and by a sublime and serious Religious Democracy sternly taking command, dissolving the old, sloughing off surfaces, and from its own interior and vital principles, reconstructing, democratizing society.[25]

As Whitman describes it, religion forms an integral element in the rich social and cultural fabric of American democracy that at once shapes political aspirations and identity and provides the assortment of cultural practices and productions necessary for their expression.

To be clear, the religion Whitman refers to is not the hierarchical and submissive strain of Christianity he sees at work in much of human history. He instead anticipates a mature ("adult") religious formation that actively engages subjects in constructing meaning and making sense of man's (and the nation's) place in the cosmos. Religion takes on shades of another artistic medium or genre, a mode of expression and world making that "authors and poets to come" can use to reconstruct and democratize the country. This commanding "Religious Democracy," Whitman insists, would reinforce the agentic powers and creative capacities of members while also providing an articulation of communal togetherness and the cosmological connection linking the society together.

Like literature and poetry generally, Whitman's characterization of religion is deeply tied to the aesthetic constitution of democracy.[26] He offers a vision of democracy constituted

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[25] Walt Whitman, "Democratic Vistas," in *Prose Works, 1892*, vol. 2, edited by Floyd Stoval (New York: New York University Press, 1964), 410.

[26] "The central problem, as Whitman understood it, was the democracy had not yet found its aesthetic expression, and so there was a tragic disconnection between formal democratic institutions and a culture still invested in forms of feudal hierarchy." Jason Frank, "Promiscuous Citizenship," *The Political Companion to Walt Whitman*, edited by John E. Seery (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 162. See also Jason Frank, *Constituent Moments: Enacting the People in Postrevolutionary America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 185; and Stephen John Mack, *The Pragmatic Whitman: Reimagining American Democracy* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002), 135-159.

For various attempts to theorize the aesthetic dimensions of politics generally and democratic politics more specifically, see F.R. Ankersmit, *Aesthetic Politics: Political Philosophy beyond Fact and Value* (Palo Alto: Stan-

through aesthetic practices that train conscious and unconscious beliefs and produce a society's system of meaning. According to Whitman, democracy "is only of use there that it may pass on and come to its flower and fruits in manners, in the highest forms of interaction between men, and their beliefs."[27] Above and beyond its institutional architecture, a democratic order entails a robust political culture that unites members as active participants and fellow citizens in the always-incomplete process of collective self-determination and expression. The array of cultural and aesthetic productions within a society—with poetry, of course, the privileged and paradigmatic practice for Whitman—draws from these conditions of life (social manners, intersubjective relations, ideas, etc.) but also works to give shape to this way of life. Because of this formative power, Whitman endows aesthetic practices with a generative or transformative potential that at once arises from and is productive of the people. In his preface to the 1872 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman explicitly joined the aesthetic, political, and religious dimensions, writing that religion "must enter into the Poems of the Nation. It must make the union."[28] By highlighting religion as one form of poetry, Whitman links it to this aesthetic dimension of democracy and frames it as a register of voice and performance open to human creativity and remaking. In other words, religion is a vernacular poetic, a form of speech and action that rises from the languages and traditions of the society but that can be taken up and reformed by agents in order to transform that society. As he writes in "Democratic Vistas," Whitman envisions religion—or rather, the sense-making potential

ford University, 1996); Davide Panagia, *The Poetics of Political Thinking* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Davide Panagia, *The Political Life of Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Jacques Rancière, "Jacques Rancière: Literature, Politics, Aesthetics: Approaches to Democratic Disagreement," *SubStance* 92 (2000): 3-24; and Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics," *Theory and Event* 5:3 (2001).

[27] "Democratic Vistas," 389. George Kateb glosses Whitman as calling for a democratic "stylization of life" complete with "a distinctive set of appearances, habits, rituals, dress, ceremonies, folk traditions and historical memories." George Kateb, *The Inner Ocean: Individualism and Democratic Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 240; quoted in Jason Frank, "Aesthetic Democracy: Walt Whitman and the Poetry of the People," *The Review of Politics* 69 (2007): 411.

[28] Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass: Comprehensive Reader's Edition*, edited by Harold W. Blodgett and Scully Bradley (New York: New York University Press, 1965), 745.

within the poetry of religion—as "dissolving the old, sloughing off surfaces, and from its own interior and vital principles, reconstructing, democratizing society."

Although writing earlier than Whitman and experiencing American society as an outsider looking in, Tocqueville echoes Whitman's emphasis on the political significance of religion and, in fact, positions it as the foundation for democratic political life in the United States. One of the major reasons for Tocqueville's stress on religion in democracy is precisely its capacity to save democracy from itself. Throughout his analysis of the United States, Tocqueville remains ambivalent about democracy, recognizing it as an achievement in terms of its conditions of freedom and equality but also as sowing the seeds of its own dissolution. Among these excesses, Tocqueville singles out for special concern the regime's tendency towards materialism, the tyranny of the majority, and social isolationism. According to Tocqueville, religious traditions such as Christianity offer a felicitous supplement and check on these destructive democratic tendencies by compelling citizens to get outside of themselves:

> The greatest advantage of religions is to inspire entirely opposite instincts. There is no religion that does not place the object of the desires of men above and beyond the good things of the earth, and that does not naturally elevate his soul toward realms very superior to those of the senses. Nor is there any religion that does not impose on each man some duties toward the human species or in common with it, and that does not in this way drag him, from time to time, out of contemplation of himself.[29]

By drawing attention to a transcendent realm, eternal life, and the duties that flow from this cosmological order, religion functions to rein in the destabilizing effects of individual self-interest and materialism. At moments Tocqueville seems to echo the Machiavellian tradition by foregrounding the political utility of civil religion. For instance, Tocqueville writes,

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[29] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, translated and edited by Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 745-46. For an elaborate discussion of Tocqueville's position regarding religion as a tool for curtailing democratic excesses, see Patrick J. Deneen, *Democratic Faith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

"[W]hat is most important for [society] is not that all citizens should profess the true religion but that they should profess religion."[30] Yet even as he identifies the value (or utility) of religious traditions to democracy, Tocqueville actively resists instituting religion in the governmental apparatus.

Though Tocqueville locates religion solely within the domain of political culture, he nonetheless claims that it provides the scaffolding for American democracy and indirectly shapes the civic constitution of the nation-state. In a manner similar to Whitman, Tocqueville conceptualizes democracy as, first and foremost, a social and cultural order. The Christian religion, Tocqueville claims, suffuses the field of political discourse in the United States and serves as the ground upon which democratic processes take place.[31] While he acknowledges that religious and political institutions are formally distinct and separate in America, religious traditions such as Christianity nonetheless provide the framework for political life. According to Tocqueville,

> It is religion that gave birth to the Anglo-American societies: one must never forget this; in the United States religion is therefore intermingled with all national habits and all the sentiments to which a native country gives birth… Christianity has therefore preserved a great empire over the American mind.[32]

Tocqueville sets up religion as a subtle yet powerful grammar for American political thought and practice. This imperial vision of Christianity as an "involuntary agreement" holding a "quiet sway" throughout the entire nation positions it as at once the root and limit of political meanings and possibilities. Importantly, the "great empire" of Christianity over political ideas emanates from its embeddedness in social mores, the web of "national habits" and "sentiments" that compose American culture.

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[30] Ibid., 290.
[31] Ibid., 280.
[32] Ibid., 405-6.

I seek to unite these insights from Whitman and Tocqueville into an analytical framework that will facilitate a richer interpretation of American civil religion. While differing in significant ways in their normative assessments of Christianity, they together illuminate religion as both an organizing tradition within America's democratic political culture and a poetic vernacular voice marked by plasticity and creativity.[33] This starting point, I argue, provides a fruitful foundation for conceptualizing the character of civil religion as it works within the political culture of the United States. According to Tocqueville, religious traditions infuse the American citizenry and inflect ostensibly secular political traditions and commitments in the United States. Whitman provides a corrective supplement to Tocqueville's account by bringing to the fore the plasticity and transformative capacities of religious registers. Working with these religious materials enables social actors to be authors— that is, performers with putative authority—who can poetically reform the moral, intellectual, and sensuous dimensions of public life.

As with the broader theoretical framework of the dissertation, my interpretation of the poetics of civil religion bears the strong influence of Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony. Within Gramsci's framework, hegemony constitutes the "common sense" of a society that facilitates consent and enables particular forms of political rule.[34] A common sense

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[33] To briefly gesture at the normative divide between Whitman and Tocqueville on this matter, both thinkers perceived Christianity to be a limiting force on democratic agency, but Whitman saw this as a problem in as much as it thwarted the creative powers of citizens while Tocqueville valued it for curbing the destructive excesses of the masses. For an elaborate account of the differences in Tocqueville and Whitman with respect to their views on religion, see Peter Augustine Lawler, "Whitman as a Political Thinker," *A Political Companion to Walt Whitman,* edited by John E. Seery (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 245-71.

[34] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks,* translated and edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International, 1971). This framework was further developed in the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985). Benedetto Fontana provides a concise description of this dynamic, writing, "hegemony describes the ways and methods by which consent is generated and organized, which, in turn, is directly related to the mechanisms and processes by which knowledge and beliefs are first, produced, and second, disseminated. Here the crux is the formation of a 'conception of the world' and its dissemination throughout the people. A conception of the world (an 'ideology' or a system of beliefs) is always opposed to differing conceptions of the world, so they are constantly in conflict, in a 'battle' against each other. The hegemonic conception is one that has become the 'common sense' of the people."

involves the widely held and taken for granted body of assumptions, perceptions, and behaviors that allow a particular social and political arrangement appear natural or legitimate. Hegemony operates principally through civil society and culture, allowing the operation of power to be seeded (and naturalized) in customs, habit, and lived practice and thus rendered invisible. In contrast to the crude conceptualization of ideology as systems of ideas, Gramsci argues that domination involves "the unconscious, inarticulate dimensions of social experience" and what could be called, following Raymond Williams, a "structure of feeling."[35] Put differently, we might say that a common sense encompasses a common *sensibility*, which Williams defines as "the formation of a particular mind: a whole activity, a whole way of perceiving and responding, not to be reduced to either 'thought' or 'feeling.'"[36] The active formation and cultivation of ways of thinking, sensing, and feeling (understood as co-constitutive rather than disjunctive) falls into the category of what I have been calling the aesthetic.

The poetics of civil religion, I suggest, is a crucial mode through which a hegemonic order can be formed or contested in the United States. Every hegemonic formation—that is, the permutation of sense and sensibility that facilitates a system of political rule—remains always a fragile political achievement open to challenge and dissolution. A struggle to transform the arrangements in a society never occurs simply on the order of institutional structures. According to Gramsci, political struggles necessarily involve what he calls a war of position that actively combats and resists the cultural foundations of domination, the "realm of

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Benedetto Fontana, "The Democratic Philosopher: Rhetoric as Hegemony in Gramsci," *Italian Culture* 23 (2005), 98.

[35] Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (New York: Verso, 1991), 115. See also J.A. Buttigieg, "Gramsci on Civil Society," *Boundary 2*, 22:3 (1995): 1-32.

[36] Williams, 238.

values and customs, speech habits and ritual practices" that undergird the existing order.[37]

Civil religion enables such counter-hegemonic projects by being, on the one hand, an established and powerful modality in the dense network of American political culture and, on the other hand, a mode of speech and performance that is protean and open to creative re-appropriation. In what follows, a poetics of civil religion highlights the potential for actors to remake and revise an inherited language linking religion and politics as well as the way in which these innovations construct meaning, cultivate ways of sensing, and order relations that open or foreclose potential social arrangements. Approaching it as an aesthetic practice, American civil religion is analogous to Nietzsche's depiction of truth:

> What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people.[38]

Bellah and the scholarship that appropriated his theoretical framework focus on the final movement of this process, the ossification of a system of beliefs and symbols so that they "seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people." What falls out of this account—and what I want to bring into focus—is the active creation and revision of the images and rhetorics that become sedimented (or alternatively, fossilized) into the reified structure Bellah calls American civil religion. How, the operative question becomes, has "the mobile army" of religious materials been "poetically and rhetorically" taken up and reconfigured so as to affect the dominant common sense and institutional arrangement of the United States?

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[37] Eagleton, 114.

[38] Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, edited by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1954), 42. Quoted in Nancy K. Frankenberry, "Religion as a 'mobile army of metaphors,'" in *Radical Interpretation in Religion*, edited by Nancy K. Frankenberry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 171. Nietzsche, it must be said, harshly denounces truth, describing it as "worn out and without sensuous power." Truth in the modern age amounts to "coins which have lost their pictures." This is not the case with American civil religion, which retains much of its image and sensuous pull.

I move in the next three sections to an extended examination of William Lloyd Garrison. This historical excursion provides a concrete grounding for my theoretical account as well as an occasion to more fully illuminate the dynamics of civil religious poetics in action by exploring how Garrison mobilizes Christian rhetorics and ritualistic forms in order to generate and sustain a critical claim against slavery and the socio-political structures that enable it.

## § 2. Situating Garrison's Poetic Practice

Throughout the antebellum period, Garrison and his fellow abolitionists stood simultaneously inside and outside American political culture. In one sense they existed at the margins of society by advocating a political position that was frequently derided as dangerous, radical, and fanatical. To help overcome such resistance and advance their political project, Christian abolitionists like Garrison mobilized and reinterpreted religious resources immanent within American political culture and infused in the citizenry.

By the time Garrison published the first issue of his abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator,* in January 1831, anti-slavery societies and movements had long occupied a marginal position in American politics.[39] Debates over the practice of slavery began in the late seventeenth century when Quakers, who earlier opposed the institution in Great Britain, brought their arguments to the New World. This early opposition to slavery, though, remained largely a feature of religious groups such as the Quakers and Methodists and ultimately a minority position; at the same time, other religious sects such as the Catholic, Anglican, Lu-

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[39] "Anti-slavery" and "abolitionist," I should clarify, are not equivalent concepts. "Anti-slavery" is a broad term that refers to individuals and organizations who opposed the enslavement or ownership of humans as property during the period in which the national government formally sanctioned slavery (1776-1865). "Abolitionism" refers to a historically specific group of actors and organizations that appeared first in the early 1830s and who shared a thorough-going commitment to racial equality and the immediate emancipation of all slaves.

theran, and Presbyterian churches sanctioned black slavery.[40] After a brief increase in egalitarian fervor and criticism of slavery following the American Revolution, religious institutions including the Methodist Episcopal Church refused to take a critical stance on the issue and the Quakers gradually became less active in antagonistic anti-slavery efforts due to their pacifistic beliefs.[41]

While almost completely absent in the South, anti-slavery activists and organizations in the North persisted not only as a minority of the population but also a particularly controversial and derided one. Beyond its central commitment to ending slavery and establishing social and political equality, the abolitionist movement was also associated with English sensibilities and the political activity of women. All of these elements helped paint abolitionists as threatening to the status quo and the current distribution of racialized and gendered roles and privileges.[42] Expressions of anti-abolitionism came from many directions. Southerners such as Governor George McDuffie of South Carolina labeled abolitionists "enemies of the human race" who should be sentenced to "death without benefit of clergy," while fellow South Carolinian statesman James Henry Hammond urged that "these men must be silenced in but one way—*Terror—Death*."[43] President Andrew Jackson urged "severe penalties" for those who circulated "incendiary material"—namely, anti-slavery publications and literature—that could possibly incite resistance and insurrection among the slave population.[44]

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[40] David Brion Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 127-31; and Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 1-15.

[41] John R. McKivigan, *The War Against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830-1865* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), chap. 1; and James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), chap. 1.

[42] Abolitionists were also typically involved in temperance movements; additionally (and less controversially), anti-Catholicism frequently appeared within anti-slavery literature. See James A. Morone, *Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History* (New Haven: Yale University, 2003), chap. 7.

[43] Cited in Garrison and Garrison, 2:62. See also Elizabeth Merritt, "James Henry Hammond, 1807-1864," in *Johns Hopkins University Studies* 41 (1923), 32.

[44] Cited in Morone, 186.

These anxieties also manifested in systemic social discrimination against abolitionists, mob actions, race riots that targeted anti-slavery presses and meetings, law suits, the tampering with and censorship of mail, and the introduction of a gag rule in the United States Congress that prevented the hearing of anti-slavery petitions. Garrison was personally threatened on multiple occasions, including one instance on August 21, 1835 in which he was chased down by a mob of several thousand Bostonians until he was hauled by rope out of a second-story window onto the street where he narrowly avoided being lynched.[45]

Abolition, in short, was widely perceived to be an extremist and potentially danger-ous project, and those who advocated such a stance were the subject of both formal and in-formal practices of discrimination and intimidation. The majority of the nation continued to recognize the legitimacy of slavery in the South, with prominent figures in mainstream poli-tics going only so far as to oppose the expansion of slavery into the new territories in order to leave those areas open for free (white) labor. The greater part of the Republican Party prior to the Civil War understood the principal flaw of slavery to be its socio-economic con-sequences for whites. According to this strain of economic criticism, slavery stymied regional progress through a lack of incentives and social mobility, threw the majority of white labor-ers into poverty, and produced a society marked by "sluggish inactivity."[46] Only a small group of radical Republicans, including Charles Sumner, Henry Wilson, and John Andrew, consistently sought to challenge slavery as a moral wrong (and these figures all credited their position to abolitionist publications such as Garrison's *Liberator*).[47] Even in free states such as Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, and Oregon, the absence of slavery was frequently cou-

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[45] When he was finally released by the mob, Garrison was charged with disturbing the peace and placed in jail for his own protection. It was witnessing this incident that inspired the future Garrisonian abolitionist Wendell Phillips to join the anti-slavery cause. See James Brewer Stewart, *Wendell Phillips: Liberty's Hero* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 42-43.

[46] Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), 50.

[47] Ibid., 109-111.

pled with statutes that excluded any blacks from entering or residing in the state. Thus, while

in the South blacks were consigned to subhuman status and suited only for the position of

slaves, northern sentiments hardly granted freedmen equal status or consideration.[48] When

they were not excluded from residing in a territory, blacks were denied equal political mem-

bership. This widely held and practiced principle of exclusion was made federal law in Chief

Justice Roger B. Taney's majority opinion in the 1857 *Dred Scott* decision, which ruled that all

persons of African descent, whether free or slave, could not obtain full U.S. citizenship.[49]

The exclusionary sentiment found another, subtler formulation in the efforts of or-

ganizations such as the American Colonization Society that mobilized financial and political

support necessary to transport freed slaves to Africa. While certainly some members of the

society urged the emancipation of slaves and the return of them to their native land, the or-

ganization as whole was not opposed to slavery. Indeed, the shipping of former slaves off

the American continent was intended to prevent a population of free blacks from accumulat-

ing in the United States and destabilizing the systems of racial hierarchy throughout the

country. Though earlier in his activist career Garrison agreed with the society's mission and

saw its efforts as aiming to benevolently resolve racial conflict, he later repudiated it, saying,

"*They [the Society members] have an antipathy against the blacks*. They do not wish to admit them to

an equality. They can tolerate them only as servants and slaves, but never as brethren and

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[48] Garrison recognized well the resistance to racial equality throughout the North, as he makes clear in the first issue of the *Liberator* (January 1, 1831), where he wrote, "[E]very place that I visited gave fresh evidence to the fact, that a greater revolution in public sentiment was to be effected in the free states—and particularly in New-England—than at the south. I found contempt more bitter, opposition more active, detraction more relentless, prejudice more stubborn, and apathy more frozen, than among slave owners themselves."

[49] As infamous as it stands now in the public imagination, there is evidence that Taney's decision accurately reflected both the preferences of the dominant national coalition before the Civil War and the racial sensibili-ties of mainstream society both in the North and South. According to Rogers Smith, "A national poll would have shown that a majority of [white males] approved of the *Dred Scott* decision and its racist vision of Ameri-can citizenship." Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 271. For a similar historical account, see Mark A. Graber, *Dred Scott and the Problem of Constitutional Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 46-76.

friends. They can love and benefit them four thousand miles off, but not at home."[50] As Garrison came to realize, the American Colonization Society and other like-minded organizations were not manifestations of a Christian commitment to racial equality and justice but rather another variation of racial animus and caste.

Garrison and his fellow abolitionists resisted both these formal institutional expressions of white supremacy and their underlying logic of a hierarchy of persons. Garrisonian abolitionists advocated a radical egalitarianism, claiming that not only should slavery be immediately abolished—with no compensation to the former slaveholders—but also the freedmen and freedwomen should be granted equal social and political status to whites. Garrison repeatedly characterizes slavery as the most extreme and revealing instantiation of a system of racial prejudice—what Garrison refers to as, by turns, "colorphobia" or "complexional caste"—that is pervasive, albeit in varying degrees of institutionalization, throughout American society.[51] Accordingly, the abolition of slavery represented only the first step in a broader program of eliminating racial hierarchy. This racial component was coupled with a concern for gender equality as well; Garrison was outspoken throughout his career on the need to extend equal status and rights to women. Garrison pointedly opposed any claim to natural inequality that would justify or legitimate any social and political hierarchy. "*I deny the postulate,*" he states in an 1830 address, "*that God has made, by an irreversible decree, or any inherent qualities, one portion of the human race superior to another.*"[52] By this logic, all inequality is contingent and a product of social relations rather than the necessary and essential will of God and nature. Packed into Garrison's argument is a critical edge by which every form of political

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[50] William Lloyd Garrison, The *Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, six volumes, edited by Walter M. Meriill and Louis Ruchames (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), Vol. 1:124. Emphasis in original.
[51] *The Liberator*, June 11, 1847.
[52] William Lloyd Garrison, "Henry Clay's Colonization Address," in *Against Slavery: An Abolitionist Reader*, edited by Mason Lowance (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 109. Emphasis in original.

rule and human governance—how powers and positions are distributed within a commu-

nity—is robbed of any resort to natural or divine legitimacy that would otherwise insulate it

from political contestation.[53]

Garrison's public denunciations of not only slavery but also inequality more generally

set him apart from the main body of anti-slavery activists. His call for equality extended be-

yond a claim for civil equality—that is, the ownership of one's body and labor—into more

radical demands for national belonging and social equality across racial and gender lines.[54] In

his 1829 "Address to the American Colonization Society," which featured many of the the-

matic elements that he would sustain and develop over the course of his life, Garrison ar-

gues,

> education and freedom will elevate our colored population to a rank with the
> white—*making them useful, intelligent and peaceable citizens…* A very large proportion of
> our colored population were born on our soil, and are *therefore entitled to all the privileges
> of American citizens.* This is their country by birth, not by adoption. Their children
> possess the same inherent and unalienable rights as ours, and it is a crime of the
> blackest dye to load them with fetters.[55]

The language of black citizenship clarifies and enhances Garrison's comments at the outset

of *The Liberator* where he calls for the "immediate enfranchisement of our slave popula-

tion."[56] While the language of "enfranchisement" can be read narrowly as simply the end of

formal slavery and the recognition of freedmen's right to contract and sell their own labor,

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[53] See Lewis Perry, *Radical Abolitionism: Anarchy and the Government of God in Antislavery Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973).

[54] For accounts of the "hierarchy of rights" that framed late 19th century political and legal thought and achieved hegemonic status during Reconstruction, see Harold M. Hyman and William M. Wiecek, *Equal Justice Under Law: Constitutional Development 1835-1875* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 396, 398; and Pamela Brandwein, *Rethinking the Judicial Settlement of Reconstruction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), chap. 3. As Leon F. Litwack writes, Garrisonians "supported Negro attempts to secure equal political and legal rights with whites and to break down the segregation barrier in public places." See Leon F. Litwack, "The Abolitionist Dilemma: The Antislavery Movement and Northern Negros," *New England Quarterly* 34 (1961), 72.

[55] Phillips and Garrison, *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879: The Story of His Life Told by His Children*, Vol. 1 (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1885), 127-37, emphasis added. These themes reappear consistently throughout Garrison's writings. See, for instance, his response in *The Liberator* to the *Dred Scott* decision (March 12, 1858), in which he decried "all unjust and oppressive enactments, with reference to complexional distinctions" and urged the securing of all "rights of citizenship" to every person born in the country.

[56] *The Liberator*, January 1, 1831.

Garrison's comments before the Colonization Society make clear that this civil freedom is paired with the endowing of former slaves and their children with formal political membership on terms equal to white citizens.[57] The Garrison-penned "Declaration of Sentiments" of the American Anti-Slavery Society repeats the call for all persons, regardless of race, "to be admitted forthwith to the enjoyment of the same privileges, and the exercise of the same prerogatives, as others."[58] The extension of political standing directly counters the sentiment expressed in the *Dred Scott* decision that blacks cannot possibly become citizens. Indeed, Garrison recognizes blacks as constituent members of the American nation: "Why, their country is ours. They were born here. They are bone of our bone, and blood of our blood."[59] The question of belonging and membership is a simple one for Garrison; all those born in the United States, regardless of their race or any other qualities, are due recognition as equal subjects as well as full standing to make claims on the polity.

At the same time, he also recognizes the standing—and concomitant claim on political power and authority—of women. "The natural rights of one human being are those of every other," Garrison argued before the 1853 National Women's Rights Convention, "in all cases equally sacred and inalienable." He further clarifies the political privileges of women by saying they have the right to "the elective franchise—and to a voice in the administration of justice and the passage of laws for the general welfare."[60] Here Garrison highlights not only the practical terms in which he conceptualizes gender equality but also the foundational role he assigns public opinion in democratic politics. As much as elections are a means of channeling and determining public opinion, it is necessary to secure voting rights—"the elective

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[57] I am grateful to the members of the H-Law listserv for clarifying the meaning of "enfranchisement" and "franchise" in the mid- to late nineteenth century.

[58] "Declaration of the National Anti-Slavery Convention," in *William Lloyd Garrison and the Fight Against Slavery*, 92.

[59] *The Liberator*, February 20, 1852.

[60] Garrison, *Letters*, Vol. IV, 259-60.

franchise"—for all members of the political community. He remarks on this in a letter, writing, "As the right to private judgment in matters of religious faith is fundamental in Protestantism, so is impartial and universal suffrage essential to the maintenance of a people's government."[61] I will expand on Garrison's position with respect to democracy and public opinion, as well as the seeming contradiction between this value and his resistance to electoral politics later in Section Three.

Although he advocated extending full political standing to women and freed slaves, Garrison curiously hesitated to make voting rights an essential component of abolition or what it meant to end slavery. This reluctance became especially clear following the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, when Garrison moved to put an end to *The Liberator* and the American Anti-Slavery Society. While he successfully brought *The Liberator* to a close, Garrison's position that the Society's mandate was fulfilled ultimately failed to convince his fellow members.[62] Yet even if Garrison believed the shared purpose of these enterprises—namely, "the extermination of chattel slavery"—to be formally complete, he was also aware of the continued need to combat inequality. He writes, "Though the chains of the captive have been broken, he is yet to be vindicated in regard to the full possession of equal civil and political rights."[63] This sentiment is repeated in his correspondence of the period, where he elaborates on the principle behind his declaration that abolition is accomplished. In an 1864 letter to Francis William Newman, Garrison writes, "The abolition of slavery is first in order, and of paramount importance, before we begin to determine the exact political status of those set free. The elective franchise is a conventional, not a natural right; yet, the more it is

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[61] Garrison, *Letters,* Vol. IV, 280.
[62] One of those who opposed Garrison's view that anti-slavery had accomplished its goal was Frederick Douglass, who famous remarked, "Slavery is not abolished until the black man has the ballot." "Speech to the American Anti-Slavery Society," in *African American Political Thought*, Vol. 1, edited by Marcus D. Pohlmann (New York: Routledge, 2003), 87.
[63] *The Liberator,* December 29, 1865.

enjoyed in any community, as a general statement, the better for public safety and adminis-trative justice."[64] Garrison defines abolition as a question of self-ownership and a natural or God-given right that is conceptually and normatively distinct from a conventional right such as voting that is created and bestowed by a political community. Yet, as he hints at in the epistolary passage above, Garrison recognizes that even if abolition has been a formal suc-cess there is still much to be done. Writing in the final issue of *The Liberator*, he states, "I nei-ther counsel others to turn away from the field of conflict, under the delusion that no more remains to be done, nor contemplate such a course in my own case."[65]

At least part of Garrison's hesitation can be attributed to his understanding of the mechanics of political transformation. For Garrison, transformation of social mores must necessarily precede structural or institutional change. Absent an alteration in the web of sen-timents, habits, and ideas, individuals or groups invested in the existing system of social mo-res will oppose and undermine new laws and institutions. Later in his 1864 letter to New-man, Garrison explicitly opposes the imposition of black suffrage through presidential fiat since he (quite perceptively) foresees prejudiced Southern whites using their political and financial resources to exclude blacks from the polls. "In other words," he writes, "universal suffrage will be hard to win and to hold, without a general preparation of feeling and senti-ment."[66] What must be changed is not (or not merely) governmental institutions and laws but the network of sensibilities and feelings that undergirds them and influences their practi-cal realization. Therefore, while Garrison conceptualized abolition's end in the self-ownership and citizenship of blacks, this did not mean that he saw this as the horizon of re-

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[64] Garrison, *Letters*, Vol. V, 228.
[65] *The Liberator,* December 29, 1865.
[66] Garrison, *Letters*, Vol. V, 228.

form—rather, it was a necessary first condition that must be secured before the struggle for a robust political equality could be pursued.

Despite his refusal to build voting rights into the definition of abolition, Garrison was anomalous, even among critics of slavery, in his expansive embrace of social equality and inclusion. He championed the end of school segregation in Massachusetts and was one of two white speakers at a celebratory dinner held by black leaders in Boston when the practice terminated in 1855 (the other speaker being fellow Garrisonian Wendell Phillips). Yet this conception of equality found perhaps its most radical manifestation in Garrison's persistent advocacy of interracial marriage. As early as February 5, 1830, Garrison wrote in the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, saying, "The time is to come when all the nations of the earth will intermarry, and all distinctions of color cease to divide mankind."[67] Later, when he began publishing *The Liberator*, Garrison continued this line of argumentation, calling for the "obliteration" of a Massachusetts law preventing interracial marriage, calling it "an invasion of one of the inalienable rights of every man, namely, 'the pursuit of happiness'—disgraceful to the State—inconsistent with every principle of justice—and utterly absurd and preposterous."[68] Similar articles appeared in the publication until 1843 when the state repealed the law.

By arguing against naturalized hierarchies and for a profound transformation of society, the Garrisonians broke from the national consensus and were remarkably radical within the context of the broad and diverse abolitionist movement. The Garrisonian understanding of racial equality was particularly unpopular throughout the antebellum period (and would remain so well in to the twentieth century). Throughout the North racial prejudice and the belief in a social, political, and biological inequality between the races founded on a natural

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[67] Quoted in Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 82.
[68] *The Liberator*, January 8, 1831.

ordering remained an article of nation-wide common sense.[69] Faced with a field of political

discourse and organized political interests hostile to his abolitionist project, Garrison con-

structed a forceful public performance by bringing together two popular traditions in the

nineteenth-century American public sphere: democratic republicanism and evangelical Chris-

tianity. In the next section I turn more directly and closely to the workings—the *how*—of

Garrisonian civil religious rhetoric.

### § 3. "An Old and Well-Known Phrase"

On the afternoon of July 4, 1854, the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society gathered at

Harmony Grove, on the banks of Farm Pond in Framingham, Massachusetts for a day of

picnicking and lectures. Over the course of the day a parade of speakers, including Henry

David Thoreau, Lucy Stone, and Sojourner Truth, took the stage before the assembly of six

hundred abolitionists and offered speeches on the political injustice, social ill, and moral sin

of chattel slavery. It was early in the day when Garrison moved to the speaker's platform.

Two months before, at a meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society, Garrison pro-

claimed that he "had no Constitution, no Union, no country, no Bible, no God, aside from

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[69] Even Abraham Lincoln, who would later become a figurehead for the cause of the rights and liberties of
African Americans after the Civil War, expressed the sentiment that there existed a fundamental distinction and
inequality between the races. As he argued in September 1858 during his fourth debate with Stephen Douglas
for the Illinois Senate seat:

> I will say then that I am not, nor ever have been in favor of bringing about in any way the social and
> political equality of the white and black races—that I am not nor ever have been in favor of making
> voters or jurors of negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people;
> and I will say in addition to this that there is a physical difference between the white and black races
> which I believe will for ever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equal-
> ity. And inasmuch as they cannot so live, while they do remain together there must be the position of
> superior and inferior, and I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position as-
> signed to the white race. I say upon this occasion I do not perceive that because the white man is to
> have the superior position the negro should be denied everything.

Here, Lincoln certainly breaks with the notion that blacks are essentially and exclusively fit for slavery but, at
the same time, resists the alternative position that they are due equal status and privileges with whites. Rather,
he too claims that there is a natural hierarchy—a vertical ordering of social and political positions that maps
onto distinct body types and racial groups. The nuances and development of Lincoln's position on slavery are
thoroughly examined in Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York: W.W. Nor-
ton & Company, 2010).

THE SLAVE."[70] Now on the annual celebration of the birth of his disavowed country and the writing of the Declaration of Independence—the one national document that he revered and cited with approval, frequently in tandem with the Bible—Garrison walked out on a platform that was draped in black. In the days prior to the Fourth of July meeting, a fugitive slave, Anthony Burns, had been forcefully returned from Massachusetts to Richmond and Congress passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which opened the western territories to the institution of slavery. At the back of the raised platform hung the state insignia of Virginia marked with victory ribbons alongside the seal of Massachusetts with the phrase "Redeem Massachusetts" scrawled across it. Above the rostrum flew two white flags labeled "Kansas" and "Nebraska"; a portrait of Garrison stood defiantly between the two flags. And behind these was the flag of the United States, hung ignominiously upside down with a black crepe border.

After a solemn account of the continued contamination of the national soul by the evil of slavery and the confounding blindness that prevented Americans from recognizing all human beings as deserving the equal liberty promised in the Declaration, Garrison proceeded to read from the Bible. When he finished, he closed the book and lit a candle. Now, he said, he would "proceed to perform an action which would be testimony of his own soul, to all present, of the estimation in which he held the proslavery laws and deeds of the nation."[71] With that, he produced a copy of the Fugitive Slave Law and put it to the candle flame. As the documents burned he instructed the audience to respond in the style of evangelical revivalists and say "Amen," ritualistically mirroring the form of Deuteronomy 27:15-

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[70] *The Liberator*, May 19, 1854.

[71] This account of the events of July 4, 1854, including quotes from Garrison's address, draws from material in: Wendell Phillips Garrison and Francis Jackson Garrison, *William Lloyd Garrison 1805-1879: The Story of His Life Told By His Children* Vol. 3 (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 412-414; *The Liberator*, July 7 & 14, 1854; Henry David Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusets," in *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau: Reform Papers*, edited by Wendell Glick (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 91-109; and Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 443-445.

26.[72] This action was repeated for the judicial decision ordering Burns to be returned to Virginia and the charges against those who stormed the courthouse in an attempt to free Burns. When the fire consumed these papers, he then pulled out and held above his head a copy of the American Constitution. This, Garrison told the audience as he moved it into the flame, was "a covenant with death, an agreement with hell.... So perish all compromises with tyranny! And let all the people say, Amen!" The paper curled and blackened and crumbled into ash, which Garrison promptly ground beneath his foot as the audience gave a final "Amen" before erupting into a roar of applause and a few scattered hisses.

The episode at Harmony Grove exemplifies several aspects of Garrison and his fiery brand of religious rhetoric that deserve further analytical parsing. Substantially, there are his commitment to the principles of the Founding as articulated in the Declaration of Independence and his vilification of the Constitution and the federal government's continued complicity in the enterprise of southern slavery.[73] The theatrical act of physically demolishing the Constitution dramatizes Garrison's repudiation of half-measure compromises and the possibility of retaining a political unity in face of the continued existence of slavery. Such an immoderation was a staple of his public persona. He proclaimed his rejection of moderation

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[72] King James Version: "Cursed be the man that maketh any graven or molten image, an abomination unto the Lord, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and putteth it in a secret place. And all the people shall answer and say, Amen. Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that lieth with his father's wife; because he uncovereth his father's skirt. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that lieth with any manner of beast. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that lieth with his sister, the daughter of his father, or the daughter of his mother. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that lieth with his mother in law. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that smiteth his neighbour secretly. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that taketh reward to slay an innocent person. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen."

[73] In recognizing Garrison's fervent celebration of the nation's founding values as manifest in the Declaration of Independence, my account differs markedly from Andrew Murphy's characterization of Garrison as thoroughly rejecting American ideals. Cf. Andrew Murphy, *Prodigal Nation: Moral Decline and Divine Punishment From New England to 9/11* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

in the inaugural issue of *The Liberator*, writing, "I am aware, that many object to the severity of my language; but is there not cause for severity? I *will be* harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice. On this subject, I do not wish to think, or speak, or write, with moderation. No! no!"[74] Garrison's pronounced hostility towards moderation is rooted in the urgency and significance of the problem posed by slavery. This attitude stands in sharp contrast to the previous tone of anti-slavery advocates, who sought a gradual dissolution of the practice through methods of deliberation and compromise. Garrison frames slavery as a fundamental wrong that is grievous in itself and must be corrected immediately if the political community is not to suffer the punishment meted out by both God and those who are currently enslaved. Considering these two dimensions of slavery (the intensity of the harm and the corresponding intensity of the impending judgment), Garrison rejects the path of compromise or moderation and instead takes up the language of confrontational prophecy in order to catalyze the process of redemption he sees as necessary to save the nation.

Most accounts of Garrison's speech foreground these aspects—especially his provocative burning of the Constitution—but neglect consideration of his use of religious rhetoric and ritual.[75] The Christian religion not only manifests in the content of his speech—the reading from scripture, the language of damnation and redemption, the locating of God as the source of human equality—but also the form of his performance. Through the citation and performative mimesis of Deuteronomy and the hailing of the audience into a joint rejection of the nation's foundational political text, Garrison staged his political protest with and

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[74] *The Liberator*, January 1, 1831.
[75] Bellah's book-length treatment of American civil religion provides only a passing, page-long treatment of Garrison, with the Constitution burning receiving a fleeting mention absent any analysis. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant,* 50-51.

and through recognizably religious forms.[76] The gestures and choreography of his performance tap into established evangelical rituals of call and response popularized most recently during the Second Great Awakening. In the biography of him written by his two children, for instance, Garrison is described as "using an old and well-known phrase" and enacting a "Lutheran incendiarism" that gestures at the iconic image of Martin Luther burning canon law and the papal order excommunicating him for heresy.[77] This Christian theatricality resonates with and accentuates the event's carefully arranged iconography, which casts Massachusetts and the Union as a whole as complicit in the practices of slavery. The force of the performance draws on this chain of associations—the effervescent energies of the Great Awakening and the reformative zeal of Luther—and overlays a call for political reconstitution (the preservation of society through directed transformation) with the moral gravity and pull of Christian redemption (the salvation of the nation from the sin of slavery).

The day itself is also significant. The Fourth of July occupied a privileged place in the anti-slavery campaign. Two years prior to Garrison's fiery performance at Harmony Grove, Frederick Douglass performed his famous speech "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?," which vigorously condemned the hypocritical inconsistency in a nation celebrating principles of justice, liberty, and independence while simultaneously casting an entire population into slavery. So too the day recurs throughout the work and life of Garrison. On July 4, 1829, for instance, he spoke before the American Colonization Society (in a speech that contained the germs of why he broke with the group) and celebrated the principles underlying the holiday:

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[76] For an inversion of this relation consider the case of Rev. Terry Jones, who in 2012 publicly burned a copy of the Koran. In the Jones case, the repudiation of a religious faith (Islam) came in legalistic, even juridical, forms, as the holy book was tried and found guilty in a mock trial with Jones playing the part of ostensibly impartial judge and ordering the "execution" of the text. In this instance, a religious order was repudiated through the mode of law, where in the Garrison case a juridico-political order was criticized through the use of religious modes.

[77] Garrison and Garrison, 412.

Fifty-three years ago, the Fourth of July was a proud day for our country. It clearly and accurately defined the rights of man; it made no vulgar alterations in the established usages of society; it presented a revelation adapted to the common sense of mankind; it vindicated the omnipotence of public opinion over the machinery of kingly government; it shook, as with the voice of a great earthquake, thrones which were seemingly propped up with Atlantean pillars; it gave an impulse to the heart of the world, which yet thrills to its extremities…[78]

The Fourth of July as a civic holiday celebrates a moment of divine "revelation" that is articulated through the Declaration of Independence.[79] What is striking, though, is the upshot of this revelation, which is not the omnipotence of God but rather "the omnipotence of public opinion" over and against monarchical forms of power.

Strikingly, Garrison invokes the "omnipotence" and ultimate authority of public opinion rather than its infallibility. Indeed, he goes on, both in this same address and his abolitionist career, to emphasize that it is fallible and that the unthinking political attitudes of citizens and the institutionalized evil of slavery undermine the promise of the country's founding principles.[80] In an 1854 speech repudiating the principle of compromising with slavery, Garrison explains,

My crime is that I will not go with the multitude to do evil. My singularity is that when I say that freedom is of God and slavery is of the devil, I mean just what I say. My fanaticism is that I insist on the American people abolishing slavery or ceasing to prate of the rights of man.[81]

[78] "Address to the American Colonization Society," in *William Lloyd Garrison and the Fight Against Slavery: Selections from The Liberator*, edited by William E. Cain (Boston: Bedford Books, 1995), 61.

[79] The phrase "civic holiday" reflects this sensibility through its fusion of the political (civic) and the religious (holy-day).

[80] In the second issue of *The Liberator*, for instance, Garrison offers a piece simply entitled "Truisms," which consists of a litany of 'common sense' positions that would seem to legitimize the practice of racial hierarchy and slavery. As Garrison formulates them, however, these tenets of the pro-slavery argument reveal their internal tensions, if not outright absurdities. Of these twenty-four 'truisms,' the first is particularly illuminative: "All men are born equal, and entitled to protection, excepting those whose skins are black and hair woolly; or, to prevent mistake, excepting Africans, and their descendants" (*The Liberator*, January 8, 1831). Within this statement Garrison flags the contradiction of American slavery through its exceptionality; that is, how, in a political community founded upon a universal claim of equality and liberty, there exists a population in a state of exception and thus consigned to conditions of exclusion, domination, and inequality. Against this move to 'except' blacks, Garrison provides a radically inclusive account of political standing—by which I mean the recognition of another as possessing the status of a rights bearer, member of the community, and an equal.

[81] Garrison, "No Compromise with Slavery," in *Against Slavery: An Abolitionist Reader*, edited by Mason Lowance (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 125-30.

When read in conjunction with his sacralization of public opinion as not simply an omnipo-

tent force but also a divinely-inspired "revelation," Garrison's denunciation of the multitude

as either morally blind or corrupt is striking. Garrison erects a bifurcated system of authority

in which the people as a whole are all-powerful within the political realm but prone to moral

corruption. On the other hand, while the divine does not possess any political power, it

nonetheless is morally infallible. With this division of moral and political labor in place, Gar-

rison can celebrate the power of public opinion and ally himself with God (and divinely or-

dained principles of freedom) in a denunciation of the public as evil and sinful.

Here and elsewhere Garrison invokes the Declaration and the founding principles it

embodies as critical leverage against slavery and the myriad inequalities that radiate out from

it. Garrison positions himself as performing exactly this type of critique by innocently hold-

ing up America's founding values and using these as the measure of its current practices. In

one public statement, for instance, Garrison states:

> Before God, I must say, that such a glaring contradiction as exists between our creed
> and practice the annals of six thousand years cannot parallel. In view of it, I am
> ashamed of my country. I am sick of our unmeaning declamation in praise of liberty
> and equality; of our hypocritical cant about the inalienable rights of man.[82]

Despite his claims at simply mirroring foundational American values to create productive

dissonance, Garrison is, in a real sense, generating this tension by poetically re-imagining

these commitments. While Garrison certainly evokes the Declaration against the Constitu-

tion and the principles of equality against hierarchy, he at the same time performs a selective

revision of these foundational commitments. As Garrison construes it, the Declaration of

Independence "presented a revelation adapted to the common sense of mankind" by defin-

ing the liberties and powers of each person as ordained by God and recognized by the politi-

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[82] "Address to the American Colonization Society," 65.

cal community. In this way, the Declaration becomes an instantiation—a political revela-

tion—of a divine principle of equality. Equality and freedom are not only core political

commitments of republicanism but also are inflected with a divine authority and imperative.

The language of a divine precept being "adapted" so as to be legible and, even more, obvi-

ous (self-evident) to a mortal audience is telling. Elsewhere Garrison characterized the Dec-

laration as "sublime" in so far as it articulated the principle of equality, which was "a noble

sentiment, written by the finger of God in legible characters upon the heart of man."[83]

This notion, as well as Garrison's framing of slavery as a sin against the will and or-

der of God, taps into a tradition of natural law that elevates certain moral dictates or princi-

ples derived through reason or revelation as above human institutions and thus capable of

being used to assess the legitimacy of laws and practices. This discourse of natural law—and

slavery's break with its tenets—appears clearly in his "Declaration of the National Anti-

Slavery Convention":

> That all those laws, which are now in force, admitting the right of slavery, are therefore
> before God utterly null and void; being an audacious usurpation of the Divine preroga-
> tive, a daring infringement on the law of nature, a base overthrow of the very founda-
> tions of the social compact, a complete extinction of all the relations, endearments and
> obligations of mankind, and a presumptuous transgression of all the holy command-
> ments—and that therefore they ought to be instantly abrogated.[84]

Garrison draws from the natural law tradition within American political thought but devel-

ops it into a broader vision of the guilt of the nation and its need for redemption. By institu-

tionalizing and sustaining slavery, America violates the laws of nature and, in so doing, sins

against the order of God. Importantly, Garrison attributes culpability for the sin of slavery

beyond the confines of the South and actual slaveholders, and extends it to include those in

the North: "So long as we continue one body—a union—a nation—the compact involves us

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[83] Cited in Mayer, 198.
[84] December 14, 1833, 198.

in the guilt and danger of slavery… We are guilty—all guilty—horribly guilty."[85] This shared

guilt and responsibility is the framework for the majority of Garrison's rhetorical efforts, and

ultimately the public recognition of this guilt is his most immediate goal. He seeks to compel

a collective realization, to startle those in the North who currently disavow their share in the

maintenance of slavery into seeing their complicity.

Such a realization is catalyzed through Garrison's prophetic performance and his

rhetorical appropriation of the evangelical tradition of the jeremiad. The genre of the jere-

miad identifies the moral corruption of society and the sources of this decline, and highlights

the necessity of remedying this situation by invoking the prospective punishment that will be

reaped if this corruption is not given due attention and correction. As George Shulman ex-

plains, "By a *jeremiad* prophets narrate conduct as a decline from origins, to address a com-

munity about its constitutive commitments and current difficulties, to make its future con-

tingent on a 'decision' about its conduct… [P]rophets identify the fateful choices that form,

endanger, and redeem their community."[86] The task of the prophet consists in forcing a col-

lective decision on fundamental moral matters that at once constitute and threaten the moral

and social existence of a given group. Garrison appropriates the jeremiad to give form to the

national sin of slavery and the resulting punishment that awaits not just the southern slave-

owners but also the whole of the United States. Through this illumination, Garrison con-

structs a tension between putative commitments and public opinion and practices with the

aim of unsettling and transforming that opinion—compelling citizens to ruminate upon the

issue and exercise judgment.

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[85] *The Liberator*, January 7, 1832.

[86] George Shulman, *American Prophecy: Race and Redemption in American Political Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 8. See also Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978); David S. Gutterman, *Prophetic Politics: Christian Social Movements and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); and Andrew R. Murphy, *Prodigal Nation: Moral Decline and Divine Punishment from New England to 9/11* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

The tactical use of the jeremiad form appears in the first issue of *The Liberator*, in which Garrison published his poem "Universal Emancipation." In the poem he paints a horrific portrait of what will befall the country if the slaves are not liberated immediately through peaceful means:

> Wo if it [liberation] come with storm, and blood, and fire,
>     When midnight darkness veils the earth and sky!
> Wo to the innocent babe—the guilty sire—
>     Mother and daughter—friends of kindred tie!
>     *Stranger and citizen alike shall die!*
> Red-handed Slaughter his revenge shall feed,
>     And Havoc yell his ominous death-cry,
> And wild Despair in vain for mercy plead—
> While Hell itself shall shrink, and sicken at the deed![87]

Garrison poetically conflates God's vengeance (the punishing elements and natural phenomena) and the slaves' bloody revenge upon not just those who owned them but also all those implicated in allowing for the domination to continue, including ostensibly innocent women and children. The motif of a looming punishment reappears most dramatically after the attempted slave insurrection led by Nat Turner, when Garrison calls the rebellion's bloodshed "but the prelude to a deluge from the gathering clouds." The emancipatory violence undertaken by Turner and his followers previewed the more devastating vengeance to be meted out eventually by God if the corruptive element of slavery was not eliminated. Only through such a dramatic social change could the nation be redeemed: "We shall cry, in trumpet tones, night and day,—Wo to this guilty land, unless she speedily repent of her evil doings! The blood of millions of her sons cries aloud for redress! IMMEDIATE EMANCIPATION can alone save her from the vengeance of Heaven, and cancel the debt of ages!"[88] According to Garrison, the only way to avoid an apocalyptic judgment is through a process of redemption.

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[87] *The Liberator*, January 1, 1831.
[88] *The Liberator*, September 3, 1831.

That is, the political community must become aware of the sin of slavery and immediately act to purge itself of relations of inequality and domination.

Through these simultaneous temporal gestures backward to the Founding and into the future of the seemingly inevitable apocalypse, Garrison brings about an unsettling and potentially transformative sense of untimeliness. Robert Fanuzzi points to "Garrison's intention in conjuring the ghosts of Jefferson and Paine" in order to disrupt the antebellum public and "precipitate the awareness of a historical crisis among his contemporaries."[89] Through the conjuration of the country's revolutionary past, Garrison demonstrates the incompleteness and lingering on of this past—that, indeed, the revolutionary moment and its principles have not passed away or been realized in the existing social arrangement but continue to haunt the present and demand a re-constitution of the political community. What Fanuzzi neglects, however, is the rhetorical fusion Garrison performs between the political past (the Revolution) and the looming—though not immutable—apocalyptic future (the judgment).[90] By entwining these discourses, Garrison invests the revolutionary principle of equality with a renewed urgency and significance. The principle of equality exists not just as a political declaration and a formative commitment of the civic community but also a manifestation of a transcendental order. This fusion invests the revolutionary past with a messianic promise that falls upon the present to bring into being with a national cataclysm as the price of failure. Antebellum America takes on a heightened, messianic significance; it must redeem the past and prevent the devastating judgment that looms if the social order is not fundamentally transformed so as to bring it into alignment with the principle of equality.

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[89] Robert Fanuzzi, *Abolition's Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), xvii.

[90] The vision of apocalypse Garrison invokes is noteworthy precisely for this potential to be avoided and contingent upon the decisions and action of citizens. Other religious conceptions of the apocalypse—such as that in the Christian Book of Revelations—foreclose the possibility of alteration; that is, they are preordained and unavoidable. The former operates to catalyze instances of judgment and action, while the latter closes down this space of decision and action.

Garrison's framing fundamentally revises the traditional conception of America's cosmic role and the place of the Constitution in this narrative. Whereas the Constitution was previously understood as a sacred compact—a divine covenant—that gives institutional form and integrity to the United States as a sanctified city on the hill and chosen people, Garrison positions it as the corruption of the political community. [91] The Constitution becomes the source of an evil and injustice that permeates the nation. According to Robert Abzug, Garrison

> re-created the evangelical drama of American society's sin, declension, and possibility for renewal, and he reset its terms. The troublesome black population, slave and free...here shared the rights of all Americans and were the most aggrieved citizens in the land. The evangelical church...in this version was as lost in darkness on slavery as any group of Americans. The Constitution and American unity, which in the evangelical drama constituted a divine presence to be protected and nurtured, in Garrison's view hypocritically shackled the slave ever tighter. [92]

Far from being a "sacred" covenant, Garrison's vision of the Constitution portrays it as "the most bloody and heaven-daring arrangement ever made by men for the continuance and protection of a system of the most atrocious villainy ever exhibited on earth." [93] For Garrison the Constitution is the enabling condition of the nation's sin inasmuch as it provides the institutional order necessary for the flourishing of the slave system. [94] If a renewal of the politi-

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[91] The elevation and sacralization of the United States Constitution, of course, can be seen in numerous instances of contemporary political discourse. For general analyses of the Constitution as a sacred symbol or object, see Max Lerner, "Constitution and Court as Symbols," *Yale Law Review* 46 (1937): 1290; Sanford Levinson, "'The Constitution' in American Civil Religion," *The Supreme Court Review* (1979): 123-151; and Sanford Levinson, *Constitutional Faith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

[92] Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 144.

[93] *The Liberator*, December 29, 1832.

[94] These constitutional provisions included the fugitive slave clause that bound the North to return escaped slaves (Article VI, Section 2); the three-fifths clause that provided representative benefits to the South based on their slave population and thus allowed them to exert disproportionate control over the federal government both in the legislature and, through the electoral college, the presidency (Article I, Section 2); and the commitment for the federal government (with resources drawn from the North as well as the South) to aid in putting down slave insurrections (Article I, Section 8; Article IV, Section 4). In this way the Constitution supplies the political and institutional framework necessary for the continued existence of domination and dehumanization. Further, Article V required three-fourths of the states to amend the Constitution, which gave the slaveholding states an effective veto over any constitutional change.

cal community is to be achieved and the sin of slavery successfully purged, the nation must be fundamentally re-constituted. Such a re-constitution could be achieved through, on the one hand, significantly altering the present document through a new constitutional convention or amendments (which was unlikely given the power of the slaveholding bloc of states) or, on the other, secession and the separation of the free states in the Union from the slave states. In any scenario, though, the Constitution must be fundamentally altered in order to end slavery.[95]

## § 4. The Politics of Garrison's Civil Religious Poetics

In his respected biography of Garrison, John Thomas presents Garrison as eschewing democratic politics because of his rejection of both candidates in the 1836 presidential election: "Faced with a decision that involved choosing the lesser of two evils—a cardinal rule in democratic politics—Garrison refused to take the step which he believed an aban-

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[95] Garrison's repeated proclamations that the Constitution was essentially and inexorably a pro-slavery document marked him as extreme, even within the field of anti-slavery activists. This position—along with other personal and professional issues—ultimately played a significant role in the break between Garrison and fellow abolitionist Frederick Douglass. While the two men had worked together for years—on lecture tours and in their printing works, with Garrison contributing a preface to Douglass's first book and Douglass writing pieces for *The Liberator*—Douglass steadily grew apart from Garrison in terms of his view of the Constitution. This ideological disagreement bubbled over when Douglass began to directly question and oppose Garrison's constitutional stance in his editorials for his papers *The North Star* and *Frederick Douglass's Paper*. This schism came to a head the 1851 annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society, where Douglass staked out a firm claim that the Constitution "might be consistent in its details with the noble purpose avowed in its preamble." If the Constitution was not essentially pro-slavery, it followed that a dissolution or breaking up of the Union was not necessary to bring about the end of slavery. Indeed, Douglass and others found in the preamble of the Constitution powerful commitments and values to freedom and equality that challenged the practice of slavery. Douglass thus reformulated the Garrisonian motto of "No union with slaveholders" to "No union with slaveholding," emphasizing that the institution of slavery could be uprooted only through more direct means than moral suasion—namely, voting, holding office, and organizing political parties—and without secession of the free states from the Union. In the face of what he saw as "roguery" from the correct path towards the end of slavery, Garrison and his followers effectively deemed Douglass a heretic. Whereas Douglass embraced a pragmatic approach of reform within the existing institutional framework, Garrison "revolted at halfness," to use a phrase of Douglass's, and held fast to a position that only revolutionary steps could abolish slavery (even as he repeatedly voiced the need to remain non-violent).

See Tyrone Tillery, "The Inevitability of the Douglass-Garrison Conflict," *Phylon* 37:2 (1976), 145; and Benjamin Quarles, "The Breach between Douglass and Garrison," *The Journal of Negro History* 23:2 (1938): 144-154. As Quarles makes clear, the schism between Douglass and Garrison was over-determined though the disagreement over the nature of the Constitution is what ultimately brought about the final break. Their doctrinal rupture was preceded by a number of issues, both personal and professional, that also served to distance the formerly close friends and allies.

donment of principle. In thus committing his followers to a boycott of elections he was in effect challenging the democratic process."[96] Thomas is far from alone in this characterization of Garrison as working outside the "democratic process" and replacing politics with morality—Garrison was frequently tarred with the label of apolitical or anti-political given his emphasis on moral suasion and his rejection of party politics, voting, and the Constitution.[97] Yet Thomas and others move too quickly from Garrison's avoidance of institutional politics to the conclusion that he challenges democracy or is acting apolitically. Such a position rests on the problematic premise that the field of democratic politics is exhausted by electoral or partisan politics. As a method for the "reeducation of the moral sentiments," moral suasion aims at transforming public opinion rather than challenging laws directly or building formal political parties.[98]

By relying upon the rhetorical touchstone of the Declaration of Independence as well as a dramatically fanatical tone and religious language and forms, Garrison's performances sought to unsettle and startle its audience into re-examining their commitments, practices, and sensibilities. In order to break through the obfuscating moderation of deliberate political language, Garrison indulged, as fellow radical abolitionist Wendell Phillips explains, "in fierce denunciations, instead of appealing to [the audience's] reason and common sense

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[96] John L. Thomas, *The Liberator: William Lloyd Garrison* (Boston: 1963), 220-21. For a different response to this position, see Eileen Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism: Garrison and his Critics on Strategy and Tactics, 1834-1950* (New York: Vintage, 1969), 276.

[97] As mentioned, Frederick Douglass broke with Garrison over his constitutional stance and refusal to engage in institutional politics. Linda Zerilli contrasts the "deeply political" methods of Douglass with what she calls the "wholly moral" program of Garrison. Linda M.G. Zerilli, "Value Pluralism and the Problem of Judgment: Farewell to Public Reason," *Political Theory* 10 (2011): 1-26.

The historian Gilbert Hobbs Barnes is also critical of Garrison's methods in *The Antislavery Impulse 1830-1844* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1964). In his otherwise impressive *The Metaphysical Club*, Louis Menand talks of the "antipolitics" of abolitionists like Garrison. Gilbert Hobbes Barnes, *The Metaphysical Club* (London: Falmingo, 2002), 20.

[98] Elizabeth B. Clark, "Religion and Rights Consciousness in the Antebellum Woman's Rights Movement," in *At the Boundaries of Law: Feminism and Legal Theory*, edited by Martha Albertson Fineman and Nancy Sweet Thomadsen (Routledge: New York), 190.

by plain statement and fair argument."[99] What Phillips points to is a purposefully non-deliberative practice of political discourse. Such non-deliberative and impassioned forms of claims making were far from rare in the rather raucous and frequently riotous public sphere of the antebellum period.[100] Rather than partake in dispassionate deliberation, Garrison and other abolitionists operated in diverse registers of public engagement meant to reconfigure the dense network of ideas and sensibilities in their audience. In their justifications for an inflammatory and provocative mode of engagement, Phillips and Garrison consistently invoked "the enormity" of the crime in question that "has grown monstrous" and threatens to destroy the entire political community.[101]

The monstrosity and enormity of slavery, though, is not simply a matter of the intensity of its violence and its transgression of the divine principle of freedom. The true horror of slavery stems from its subtle but pervasive corruption of social mores throughout the nation. According to Garrison, slavery is more than a socio-economic institution or a particular distribution of roles and powers; as much as it entailed a denial of liberty and equality, slavery constituted a national sin and evil, but this sinful institution was bound up in a particular configuration of citizens' sensibilities. He explains this operation, writing, "The wrong assailed has grown to a colossal size: its existence not only implies, but demonstrates, universal corruption. *It has become organic—a part of the habits and customs of the times.* It is incorporated into the State; it is nourished by the Church. Its support is the test of loyalty, patriotism, piety."[102] The modes and manners of the citizenry—its "habits and customs"—bear the influ-

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99 Wendell Phillips, "Philosophy of the Abolition Movement," in *Against Slavery: An Abolitionist Reader*, edited by Mason Lowance (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 246.

100 See Kimberly K. Smith, *The Dominion of Voice: Riot, Reason, and Romance in Antebellum Politics* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1999).

101 See ibid., 246; Garrison, *Letters*, Vol. I, 229-30, 439; and *The Liberator*, April 26, 1839.

102 *The Liberator*, December 21, 1855. Emphasis added.

ence of this corruptive social institution.[103] The American experience with slavery, Garrison argues, has cultivated a particular configuration of these sensibilities that occludes moral recognition of blacks and critical evaluation of slavery and inequality.[104] In order to get his project of sweeping social, political, and religious reform off the ground, Garrison works to confront and alter these established sensibilities. If the common sense of society is shaped and influenced by the institution of slavery, any effort to abolish slavery must inevitably challenge common sense or work to reconfigure these elements in order to cultivate an infrasensible environment hospitable to reform. Such a reformation requires, first of all, a certain form of infidelity and an uncompromising resistance to the established terms and modes of political deliberation that have been influenced by the extant system of power relations. That is, it must break from existing practices and frameworks of thought and speech and seem, by the light of the extant common sense, as "fanatical, insane, destructive, treasonable, infidel."[105]

The principle of public engagement Garrison articulates and enacts through his repudiation of "fair argument" is explicitly agonistic. Garrison explains this logic in a letter to William Ladd, founder of the American Peace Society, which he reprinted in the pages of *The Liberator*:

> You do not understand the philosophy of reform. If you would make progress, you must create opposition; if you would promote peace on earth, array the father against

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[103] The "organic" character of American slavery Garrison points to resonates with William Connolly's notion of the infrasensible dimensions of political life. This dimension encompasses the intuitional and visceral level of social existence. See William E. Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

[104] Throughout his anthropological studies of religion and secularism, Talal Asad urges a similar attention to the cultivation and effects of the architectures of sense and sensibility. See, e.g., "Thinking About Religious Beliefs and Politics," in *Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, edited by Robert Orsi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011): "Of course, attitudes and sensibilities are deliberately cultivated in the body by institutions and social movements. But whether deliberately cultivated or unintended, the senses (whose *sense* we usually take for granted) are central to the public life in which people participate, to the ways they promote, submit to, resist, or remain indifferent to the forces of political life"

[105] *The Liberator*, December 21, 1855. I explore the subject of fanaticism in much more thorough detail in Chapter Two.

the son, and the mother against the daughter; if you would save your reputation, lose it. It is a gospel paradox, but nevertheless true—the more peaceable a man becomes, after the pattern of Christ, the more he is inclined to make a disturbance, to be aggressive, to 'turn the world upside down.'[106]

The "gospel paradox" that Garrison describes brings together, on the one hand, a commitment to non-resistance and peaceful engagement and, on the other, forceful language that seeks purposefully to disrupt the existing social order. This philosophy of reform thus orients political performance towards cultivating antagonisms that can then be mobilized for political change. The fracturing of the community into adversarial divisions puts into question its common sense and that which was formerly taken for granted. The social world, per Garrison, needs to be turned "upside down" so that the subterranean network of assumptions and feelings comes to light and becomes the site of struggle.

For Garrison, then, the reformation of social mores must occur outside the existing institutional framework of politics. It is because of this stance and his injunction against forming a political party, holding office, or even voting that he is often presented as completely (and problematically) removed from the political world. Yet Garrison carefully pitches this mode of engagement as not anti- or a-political but rather political in a particular sense:

> Once more, I beg not to be misapprehended. I have always expected, I still expect, to see abolition at the ballot-box, renovating the political action of the country—dispelling the sorcery influences of party—breaking asunder the fetters of political servitude—stirring up the torpid consciences of voters—substituting anti-slavery for pro-slavery representatives in every legislative assembly—modifying and rescinding all laws which sanction slavery. *But this political reformation is to be effected solely by a change in the moral vision of the people—not by attempting to prove that it is the duty of every abolitionist to be a voter, but that it is the duty of every voter to be an abolitionist.*[107]

The preliminary step towards any political change, Garrison makes clear, is to alter "the moral vision of the people" and bring into view the profound wrong constituted by slavery

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[106] *The Liberator*, November 23, 1838.
[107] *The Liberator*, June 28, 1839. Emphasis added.

and their own complicity in this practice.[108] Garrison's arsenal of moral suasion, including his emphatic language, uncompromising stance and prophetic rhetoric, are the means he considers necessary to achieve this readjustment of moral vision or sensibility.

When successful, the effect of Garrison's performance was akin to a conversion and indeed, was interpreted as such by those who experienced it.[109] Unitarian minister Samuel J. May attended a lecture performed by Garrison on October 15, 1830 and likened the experience to a religious revelation. In his memoirs, May later described Garrison as "a prophet," saying, "He only had his eyes so anointed that he could see that outrages perpetuated upon Africans were wrongs done to our common humanity; he only, I believe, had his ears so completely unstopped of 'prejudice against color' that the cries of enslaved black men and black women sounded to him as if they came from brothers and sisters."[110] In this autobiographical account May narrates a fundamental change in sensibility—a road to Damascus moment. Garrison's performance opens the spectators' eyes and ears to the long ignored or unrecognized presence of African Americans and the wrong that is their exclusion and enslavement.

At the same time Garrison weaves his public persona and performance from religious materials drawn from the Christian tradition, he actively works to undermine and destabilize the existing terms of political and religious authority. Indeed, a subversive indeterminacy threads throughout his claims and undergirds his position both on the social order and religious interpretation. In his criticism of slavery and institutional politics, Garrison combines an absolute equality of persons with a presumption of power's corruptive nature. As

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[108] Garrison, *Letters* 2: 481.

[109] Consider, e.g., this hyperbolic passage from Phillips: "We never argue! These men, then, were converted by simple denunciation! They were all converted by the 'hot,' 'reckless,' 'ranting,' 'bigoted,' 'fanatic' Garrison, who never troubled himself about facts, nor stopped to argue with an opponent, but straightway knocked him down" (249).

[110] Samuel J. May, *Some Recollections of Our Antislavery Conflict* (Boston, 1869), 19. Quoted in Abzug, 153.

discussed above, Garrison develops a cosmological account of human equality that finds voice—or revelation—not just in the Christian tradition but also the Declaration of Independence. This founding notion of equality is coupled with a profound skepticism towards claims of authority. Like other of his contemporary evangelicals who came of age during the Second Great Awakening, Garrison's notion of authority was informed by a Protestant ethos that was "suspicious of power and its potential for corruption in human hands, where it could so easily work against God's designs."[111] On the one hand, the principle of equality reveals the contingency of elaborate hierarchies in all political regimes, social orders, and religious authority; in the absence of any ordering principle within society, claims of authority can only be conventional and thus contestable and transformable. On the other, if power is known to tend towards corruption, members of communities—whether religious or political—must exercise constant vigilance and judgment over those endowed with authority.

Garrison assumes a similarly skeptical approach in his relationship to religious interpretation and theological texts. Even as he imbues his rhetorical and performative presentation with religious idioms, Garrison remained, on the one hand, acutely aloof and critical of religious institutions and, on the other, dismissive of a passive acceptance of the biblical text. He presents both the church and the scripture as human artifacts that, while standing as mediators between believer and divinity, are subject to the corruptive and fallible character of humanity. According to Garrison, there is neither an ultimate interpreter nor an unproblematic or transparent scripture; this rejects both the Catholic notion of an authoritative mediating institution (the church) and the Lutheran privileging of a specific and authoritative text (the Bible). As he wrote in the context of defending women's rights, "The Bible has never yet settled any question. It has filled the world with theological discussions, growing out of

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[111] Clark, 189.

the various interpretations given to the book. The human soul is greater than any book. If there is truth in the Bible, we take it; if error, we discard it."[112] Given Garrison's frequent use of biblical examples, his personal religious conviction, and his more general reliance on religion for argumentative resources, this selective treatment of the religious text—seemingly taking what is useful for his agenda and discarding what is not—is curious. At first glance it also seems particularly at odds with his rhetorical use of the Declaration of Independence, which Garrison extols as revelatory and a profound (and accurate) expression of God's principle of equality. Yet here again—as with his radically egalitarian claim that there is no natural or divine legitimation for social inequality—Garrison reveals an anarchistic edge to his principle of equality.

The biblical text and religious institutions are, as any and all human enterprise, flawed and, as such, they—like the social order or political regime—can fall short of the divine principle of equality. In a largely positive review of a collection of Tom Paine's theological thought, Garrison explains:

> To say that everything contained within the lids of the bible is divinely inspired, and to insist upon the dogma as fundamentally important, is to give utterance to a bold fiction, and to require the suspension of the reasoning faculties. To say that everything in the bible is to be believed, simply because it is found in that volume, is equally absurd and pernicious… To discard a portion of scripture is not necessarily to reject the truth, but may be the highest evidence that one can give of his love to truth.[113]

If humans are flawed and corrupt and the biblical text is an artifact of human production—even if these humans are merely functioning as mediators to the divine—this necessarily opens it to skepticism and the prospect that the text deviates from the divine will. In this way Garrison grounds a principle of textual infidelity upon a claim of religious and epistemic fidelity. Put differently, to conform to the demands of their faith (properly understood),

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[112] *The Liberator*, January 12, 1855.
[113] *The Liberator,* November 21, 1845.

Christians must be willing to depart from the strict letter of the Bible. The discovery of God's will demands a reader to not passively consume the Bible wholly and literally—or passively defer to the interpretive claims of institutions and authorities—but scrutinize it in light of foundational religious principles and exercise judgment.

The intervention Garrison makes in this textual or interpretive struggle allows him to undermine an overtly biblical—that is, text-based—defense of slavery and shore up a more elusive Christianity located in the realm of sensibility. There is an undisputable tactical element here since pro-slavery advocates who advanced religious arguments primarily did so through a literalist exegetical approach to scripture.[114] "It is to be examined with same freedom as any other book, and taken precisely for what it is worth," Garrison writes. "To know what it teaches, men must not stultify themselves, nor be made irrational by a blind homage. Their reason must be absolute in judgment, and act freely, or they cannot know the truth."[115] Rather than simply dismiss the entire text (as Paine does), Garrison offers the position that it is only when these texts (the Bible, the Declaration of Independence) and institutions (the church, the state) are judged according to reason to align with the transcendent order and recognize all persons as equal, rights bearing members that they are due respect and author-

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[114] These defenders of slavery rattled off a sizable body of biblical passages demonstrating the divine sanction of slavery, including the story of Canaan (Genesis 9:25-27), Abraham's ownership of slaves (Genesis 17.12), and enslavement of Israel's enemies (Deuteronomy 20:10-11). Similarly, in the New Testament, defenders of slavery highlighted Paul's approving stance on the subject of servants and obedience. Besides pointing to these particular passages, pro-slavery advocates argued that despite living within the Roman Empire and thus being familiar with the formal practice of slavery Jesus Christ never said anything against the practice of slaveholding. These sections of scriptures were fused with a racial theory identifying blacks as naturally and divinely fit for servitude. From this, pro-slavery advocates argued for the moral and religious legitimacy of slavery, with more moderate supporters only going so far as to claim the institution morally neutral. Even in this latter case, slaveholding could be moral as long as the master behaved in appropriate ways—with these behaviors, of course, described in scripture.

An impressive secondary literature has developed over the biblical defenses of slavery in the antebellum period. See, e.g., Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); McKivigan, *The War Against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830-1865*; and Eugene D. Genovese, *"Slavery Ordained of God": The Southern Slaveholders' View of Biblical History and Modern Politics* (Gettysburg: Gettysburg College, 1985).

[115] Ibid.

ity. Garrison stops short, however, of completely dissolving the authoritative power of the scriptural text. True, Garrison argues that the Bible should not be thought to be the literal and unadorned word of God as pro-slavery advocated and many orthodox Christians insisted. [116] Likewise, he refuses to countenance the possibility of a theodicy that eliminates politics in the name of scriptural authority and the privileging of certain scriptural interpreters. Nonetheless the Bible and the Declaration of Independence were pivotal texts for Garrison. They are both, as he says, revelations of a divine will and as such are touchstones that must be recognized and given due place in the moral community of the United States. The way Garrison evokes the texts and the constellation of images and references orbiting around them, however, reveals that their centrality is paired with a resistance to interpretive closure. Divine truth must always be translated—"adapted"—to speak to the common sense of mankind while also transforming it.

## Conclusion

Over the course of this chapter I have developed an account of the poetics of American civil religion. As opposed to existing approaches that conceptualize civil religion as a static body of beliefs and practices springing either from the nature of society or the will of political elites, my framework centers on acts of citizen claims making. Bringing into view the capaciousness of civil religious rhetoric and the potential for instances of innovative poetic practice within it, relocates authority from an abstract social entity or established elites to citizen subjects. One upshot of the openness of this modality of political presentation is that,

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[116] For staking out this claim Garrisons were widely charged as infidels and irreligious. Consider this typical passage, written by George Fitzhugh: "Liberty, infidelity, and abolition, are three words conveying but one idea. Infidels who dispute the authority of God will not respect or obey the government of man. Abolitionists, who make war upon slavery, instituted by God and approved by Holy Writ, are in a fair way to denounce the Bible that stands in the way of the attainment of their purpose." See *Sociology for the South: Or the Failure of Free Society* (Richmond: A. Morris, 1854); the rhetorical charge of infidelity against abolitionists is also discussed in Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 53-77.

properly speaking, there is no single civil religion or structural form of civil religion in America. What is present in the United States, by contrast, is a poetic politics embedded in a religiously infused citizenry.

If we follow Whitman in seeing religion as a poetic form—one open to creative reworking that in turn can be used to creatively revise a polity's conception of the world and way of life—then American civil religion becomes one key vector by which social actors can attempt to transform the constitution of the political community. Here of course I speak not of the formalized constitutional order of the United States but rather the social mores and common sense of the American people that, in turn, can offer or withhold consent to the organization and operation of the state. A civil religious poetics, then, not only operates, as Garrison demonstrates, to provide novel shades of moral meaning to political ideas but also cultivate new sensibilities (and thus create the conditions that facilitate alternative social arrangements).

## CHAPTER TWO:

## "THEIR BLOOD CRIES OUT":
## RELIGIOUS ZEALOTRY AND THE FANATICAL MODES OF
## DEMOCRATIC DISSENT IN AMERICA

> "And what is a *fanatic* but a *madman*?"
>
> — Thomas Hobbes,
> "An Answer to a Book
> Published by Dr. Bramhall"[1]

> "It was the wild-eyed prophesies of John Brown, his will-
> ingness to spill blood and not just words on behalf of his
> visions, that helped force the issue of a nation half slave
> and half free."
>
> — Barack Obama,
> *The Audacity of Hope*[2]

William Lloyd Garrison and his followers were frequently tarred with the pejorative label of fanatics. One representative polemic against Garrison's brand of abolitionism proclaimed, "Fanaticism, perhaps, never assumed a more dangerous form than that it now presents in the United States. It is waging a direct, inveterate warfare against the Constitution and the Union… Its principles have a direct tendency to civil and servile war—to rapine, murder, and pollution."[3] The danger of abolitionist fanaticism, the article explains, is two-fold. At least by the lights of pro-slavery advocates, Garrison's anti-constitutionalism and principle of racial equality seem posed to bring about an anarchic interracial society that will give license to the violent passions they ascribe to persons of color. In addition to the danger posed by the substance of Garrison's principles, the article also recoils from the fanatical

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[1] Thomas Hobbes, *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, Vol. 4, edited by Sir William Molesworth (London: John Bohn, 1840), 328.

[2] Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (New York: Vintage, 2006), 116.

[3] "The Conspiracy of Fanaticism," *The United States Magazine, and Democratic Review* (May 1850), 26.

form of his political action, which explicitly threads together political polemic and religious materials and possesses a recalcitrant tone that seems to herald a violent confrontation over the question of slavery. For their part, Garrisonians proudly affirmed the title of fanatic, thus avowing their status as steadfast critics who would vigorously resist and decry practices of inequality and domination regardless of the national consensus. Yet for all his intellectual flirtations with violence, Garrison patently refused to justify or practice physical violence. John Brown, by contrast, joined his resistance to slavery and his religious rhetoric with a willingness to resort to militant and aggressive action. Because of his use of physical violence, Brown dramatizes in a more powerful and visceral fashion than Garrison the fraught twining together of religion and aggressive political action that marks the figure of the religious fanatic in the popular imaginary. For this reason Brown offers a compelling invitation to reflect on the place of religious zealotry in the democratic culture of the United States.[4]

John Steuart Curry's famous mural "Tragic Prelude" vividly captures Brown's discomfiting entanglement of Christianity, violence, and politics. The painting depicts Brown posed within the war-torn Midwestern landscape as the vibrant manifestation of Niccolò Machiavelli's militarized Moses, one epitomizing the notion that "all the armed prophets

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[4] While I return to this question further on in the chapter, I want to be clear from the beginning that violence is neither a definitional nor necessary feature of a fanatic. Fanaticism may or may not involve recourse to violence. In this respect it differs conceptually from terrorism, which is the tactical use of violence with a purpose to create fear in a particular population. As the article attacking Garrisonian fanaticism demonstrates, there is a frequent connection made between fanaticism and violence that can be traced back to the anticipation that enthusiasm, passion, and certainty causes or at least tends towards violent action when met with external resistance or opposition. The move to violence, however, is not an essential part of fanaticism or religious fanaticism.

For diverse approaches to the relationship between religion and violence, see *From Jeremiad to Jihad: Religion, Violence, & America*, edited by John D. Carlson and Jonathan H. Ebel (Berkley: University of California Press, 2012); *The Blackwell Companion to Religion and Violence*, first edition, edited by Andrew R. Murphy (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, Third Edition (Berkley: University of California Press, 2003); and Hent de Vries, *Religion and Violence: Philosophical Perspectives from Kant and Derrida* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2002). While these works interrogate this connection with due nuance and consideration, others adopt analytical frameworks that are reductive and flat-footed to the point of articulating patently absurd assertions such as "the purpose of religion is to organize killing energy." Carolyn Marvin and David W. Engle, *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 10.

conquered and the unarmed ones were ruined."[5] With a Bible in one bloodied hand and a

Sharpe rifle in the other, Curry's rendering of Brown connects the man's profound Calvinist

faith and his abolitionist violence, implicitly staging the former as legitimizing the latter. The

body of Brown—his arms outstretched as if crucified—stands centered, forming the nexus

point between the dead soldiers at his feet, the warring Unionists and Confederates on either

side, and a roaring conflagration of flame and wind behind. Simultaneously awesome and

horrifying, the painting gestures at how Brown tracks at once the hopes and anxieties of the

democratic imagination, enacting an egalitarian, racially inclusive community but through

troubling and fanatical means.

In this chapter I open up a space for rethinking religious fanaticism and argue that

the dominant understandings of religious zealotry are incomplete, both in their conception

of fanaticism and its place in a democratic society. Rather than adopt the position that fa-

naticism cannot be accommodated within the framework of democratic politics, I seek to

analyze how the enactment of religious fanaticism relates to matters of citizenship, participa-

tion, and political action in a democratic order such as the United States. I argue that relig-

ious fanaticism must be approached as, first and foremost, a story of politics, and that the

complex figure of the fanatic reveals the limits and risks inherent to democratic politics. I am

not interested here in normatively redeeming religious fanatics and rendering them somehow

more pleasant.[6] The upshot of the chapter is not that we should suspend criticism of relig-

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[5] Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Second Edition, translated by Harvey C. Mansfield (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 24.

[6] For normative philosophical and theological reflections on the ethics of fanaticism, see *Incredible Forgiveness: Christian Ethics between Fanaticism and Reconciliation,* edited by Didier Pollefeyt (Lueven-Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2004).

ious fanatics; instead, I want to facilitate a more productive practice of critique grounded in a richer understanding of how religious fanaticism works politically and aesthetically. [7]

Over the course of the chapter I develop an understanding of religious zealotry as the excessive and exacting enactment of faith. A religious fanatic undertakes a public performance that is simultaneously a conspicuous religio-ethical practice and a radical political action. My framework focuses on how the religious fanatic is a figure of righteous *uncommon sense*; that is, a person who dramatically acts and talks in ways outside the domain of acceptability carved out by social hegemony and who constructs both his public identity and his spectacular deviation from social norms with and through inherited religious materials. Religious traditions offer not only sets of justificatory arguments and personal motivational energies for fanatics but also the rhetorical idioms and performative resources through which they can stage confrontations with a community's social mores.

I proceed by first surveying how religious fanaticism has been pathologized in political theory and made to mark the constitutive outside of acceptable political and psychological practice. I then build from the innovative work of Joel Olson and other theorists in order to move beyond the terms of the liberal-deliberative paradigm. After establishing this conceptual ground, I delve into the particular cases of Brown and Randall Terry, founder of the anti-abortion organization Operation Rescue, in order to illuminate how their public performances leveraged strains of Christian religious traditions in order to unsettle what they saw as unjust systems of exclusions and violence.[8] Drawing on my interpretations of Brown

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[7] In this respect my understanding of critique tracks that of Saba Mahmood. "Critique," Mahmood writes, "is most powerful when it leaves open the possibility that we might be remade in the process of engaging another's worldview, that we might come to learn things that we did not already know before we undertook the engagement. This requires that we occasionally turn the critical gaze upon ourselves, to leave open the possibility that we may be remade through an encounter with the other." Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 36-37.

[8] Throughout this discussion, I use the terminology of "anti-abortion" to refer to the ideological position of Terry and Operation Rescue. Given the fraught and polemical nature of labels in the abortion discussion—i.e.,

and Terry, I close by returning to the conceptual task of theorizing religious fanaticism as a manner of public performance. I articulate an account of religious zealotry that distinguishes it from religious fundamentalism and locates its generative power in its apparent excesses, which possess the potential to disrupt hegemonic modes of thinking, feeling, and acting.

## § 1. Fanaticism as Political Pathology

Before delving into the specific examples of Brown and Terry, it is necessary to first survey the conceptual terrain and the operative conceptions of religious fanaticism within political and theoretical discourse. While space constraints prevent a full and careful review of these discursive formations, my account highlights how fanaticism has historically been either explicitly or implicitly de-politicized and pathologized.

Especially in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks, scholars and social observers have frequently lumped together religious zealotry with fundamentalism, strong religion, and terrorism and juxtaposed this constellation of concepts to liberal democracy. Indeed, as philosopher Yolande Jansen suggests, much of the persistent liberal-secularist handwringing over religion in the public sphere can be seen as springing from anxieties not over religion in a general sense but rather religious fanaticism.[9] Consider, for instance, the theoretical framework of the 'clash of the civilizations,' a phrase coined by Bernard Lewis and popularized by Samuel Huntington. According to Lewis and Huntington, the salient conflicts in the contemporary world no longer track national or political divides but rather civilizations and cul-

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prolife, prochoice, pro-death, anti-choice, etc.—I believe this to be the most precise and dispassionate language for the present discussion. Also, it should be said that by bringing together the abolitionism of Brown and the anti-abortion campaign of Terry I am not establishing an equivalence or unproblematic parallelism to these two movements (even as members of the anti-abortion movement construct themselves as modern day analogues to nineteenth century abolitionists).

[9] Yolande Jansen, "Postsecularism, piety and fanaticism: Reflections on Jürgen Habermas' and Saba Mahmood's critiques of secularism," *Philosophy Social Criticism* 37:9 (2011): 977-998.

tures, with the major clash occurring between the modern West and Islam.[10] Other observ-

ers, however, have seized upon this framing and expanded it so as to characterize an existen-

tial battle between secular democracy and "strong religion."[11] Writing in the *Nation*, Ellen

Willis argues, "[T]he 'clash of civilizations' thesis [is] half right. There is a clash, but it is not

between East and West. The struggle of democratic secularism, religious tolerance, individ-

ual freedom and feminism against authoritarian patriarchal religion, culture and morality is

going on all around the world."[12] The implication (and, at times, explicit argument) of these

related positions is that strong religion—as exemplified in contemporary discussions typically

by Islamic fundamentalism and elements of the Christian Right—is atavistic, intolerant, to-

talitarian, and anti-democratic.

The paired concepts of fanaticism and zealotry recur throughout the canonical works

of western political thought. Like specters, they are the uncivil excesses that haunt a norma-

tive tradition that has sought to exorcise them in order to produce a rational and relatively

peaceful civil order.[13] Fanaticism and its associated concepts mark, by turns, the social dan-

ger of passion, a psychological pathology, and a political disease. Such a conception mirrors

the conventional usage of the term in Christian theological discourse, where it referred pejo-

ratively to heterodox religious formations and ostensibly deviant forms of faith that threat-

ened established religious institutions and traditions. In order to begin to understand these

concepts, consider these entries in the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

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[10] See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 95-101.

[11] I take the language of "strong religion" from George A. Almond, R. Scott Appleby, and Emmanuel Sivan, *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms Around the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

[12] Ellen Willis, "Bringing the Holy War Home: There is a Link Between Our Own Cultural Conflicts and the Logic of Jihad," *Nation*, 17 December 2001, 15. Barbara Ehrenreich offers a similar binary between punitive religious fundamentalisms and "liberatory" culture in "Christian Wahhabists," *Progressive* 66 (January 2002): 12-13.

[13] For a superb account of the interrelationship of the concepts of civil society and fanaticism—particularly how they have been consistently imagined in opposition to one another—see Dominique Colas, *Civil Society and Fanaticism: Conjoined Histories*, translated by Amy Jacobs (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

*Fanatic*: (1) A mad person. In later use: a religious maniac. *Obs*.; (2) A fanatic person; a visionary; an unreasoning enthusiast. Applied in the latter half of the 17th c to Non-conformists as a hostile epithet… Of persons, their actions, attributes, etc.: Characterized, influenced, or prompted by excessive and mistaken enthusiasm, *esp*. in religious matters.

*Zealot*: (1) Member of a Jewish sect which aimed at a Jewish theocracy over the earth and fiercely resisted the Romans till the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. (2) One who is zealous or full of zeal; one who pursues his object with passionate ardor; usually in disparaging sense, one who is carried away by excess zeal; an immoderate partisan, a fanatical enthusiast…[14]

Though of course reflecting certain subtle shifts in meaning over time, these definitions point to fanaticism and zealotry—two terms that I will use interchangeably—as sharing a core concern regarding the overwhelming power of passion or enthusiasm that hinders proper reasoning and results in immoderate or unorthodox behavior. At least in their etymological roots, the uncanny passion or certainty indicated by these concepts is traced back to a religious source, though contemporary usage has now broadened the terms to the point where even overtly secular pursuits and commitments can give rise to behavior labeled as zealotry and fanaticism—see, for example, environmentalism and the Philadelphia Eagles.

Within the western philosophical tradition, there has been a longstanding effort to contain, if not eliminate, the formation of these immoderate passions.[15] While a full historical

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[14] "Fanatic" and "Zealot," *Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com (accessed on November 9, 2012). Consider also: "*Fanaticism*: (1) The condition of being, or supposing oneself to be, possessed. *Obs*. (2) The tendency to indulge in wild and extravagant notions, *esp*. in religious matters; excessive enthusiasm, frenzy… eagerness or enthusiasm in any pursuit."

[15] While the roots of the philosophical campaign to police the public domain and human mind to prevent fanatical influence can be traced back to Plato's diminishment of the appetitive and passionate elements in the *Republic*, the struggle reached its apotheosis during the European Enlightenment. In his magisterial work *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), Charles Taylor points to the constellation of terms that emerged during the eighteenth century and constituted the Enlightenment discussion on religion and politics:

> Three kinds of dangerous religion were categorized as "superstition", "fanaticism", and "enthusiasm". The first designated the enchanted dimension of religion, the rites and cults and practices which partook of magic in their understanding… 'Fanaticism' designated the kind of religious certainty that seemed to the agent concerned to licence going well beyond, and even committing gross violations against the order of mutual benefit. While 'enthusiasm' meant the certainty that one heard the voice of God, and could act on it, without having to rely on external authority, ecclesiastical or civil. (239)

Curiously, David Hume stands apart from this tradition of simply rejecting all variants of "dangerous religion" in so far as he recognizes some felicitous political role for enthusiasm. While judging enthusiasm to be a cor-

survey of this effort is beyond the scope of this chapter, a brief consideration of Thomas

Hobbes clarifies one dominant understanding of the issue, even if his programmatic remedy

is idiosyncratic. In his response to a rather harsh review of *Leviathan*, Hobbes paused to clar-

ify his conception of divine inspiration or revelation. All theological notions of divine inspi-

ration, he explains, should be understood not literally but rather metaphorically, as God's

guidance of human reason towards truth. With an account of revelation as operating through

the normal processes of cognitive reasoning, Hobbes dismisses the legitimacy of all claims to

a privileged or unique insight into the divine intelligence. Indeed, he explains, "the pretence

or arrogating to one's-self Divine inspiration, is argument enough to show a man is *mad*, is

my opinion." The purported revelatory powers of fanatics—the specialized insight they pro-

fess to have into God's will—are ultimately manifestations of a personal psychological dis-

order. As Hobbes pointedly asks, "And what is a *fanatic* but a *madman*?" More worrying for

Hobbes, however, is how this personal madness spills out and destabilizes the political

community. Reflecting on the recently concluded English Civil War, Hobbes writes,

> whereas [Dr. Bramhall] says, I make the pretence of *inspiration* to be pernicious to
> peace; I answer, that I think his Lordship was of my opinion; for he called those

ruption of proper religion, Hume nonetheless conceptualizes it as proceeding along a developmental arc from
an initial violent intensity that can cause "the most cruel disorders" to a cool moderation. Unlike the particu-
larly Catholic trait of superstition, which arises from weakness and ignorance and primes individuals to submit
to priestly authority, enthusiasm stems from a forceful, even hyperactive imagination. As a result, "enthusiasm,
being the infirmity of bold and ambitious tempers, is naturally accompanied with the spirit of liberty; as super-
stition, on the contrary, renders men tame and abject, and fits them for slavery." Hume here recognizes, on the
one hand, the risks involved in enthusiasm and, on the other hand, the political virtues immanent within it.

The counter-Enlightenment, of course, adopted this same language of fanaticism in their repudiation of
the *philosophes*. In this polemical use of the term, the translation of philosophical frameworks into the world—as
exemplified most profoundly in the public imagination by the French Revolution—became the essence of fa-
naticism. Surveying the sanguinary expanse of the Revolution, Madame de Genlis asked, "Is this horrible fa-
naticism not a thousand times more dangerous than that inspired by religion?" The haughty exemplar of this
repackaging of 'fanaticism' against the forced realization of secular abstract principles in the real world, of
course, is Edmund Burke. Railing against the excesses of the Jacobins, Burke developed his critique of philoso-
phers as dangerous in their destruction of customs and established modes of social relations in the pursuit of
abstractions. In his usual caustic fashion, Burke writes, "These philosophers are fanaticks; independent of any
interest, which if it operated alone would make them much more tractable, they are carried with such headlong
rage towards every desperate trial, that they would sacrifice the whole human race to the slightest of their ex-
periments." Demonstrating the portability of the term, Burke here casts the secular "metaphysicians" as fanat-
ics partly because of their rejection of the political place of religion.

men, which in the late civil war pretended the spirit, and new light, and to be the only faithful *men, fanatics;* for he called them in his book, and did call them in his lifetime, *fanatics…* And what can be more pernicious to peace, than the revelations that were by these *fanatics* pretended?[16]

For Hobbes, a fanatic is one with a disordered mind who, because of this condition, inevitably disorders the public sphere, often with violent and catastrophic results. Oliver Cromwell and his followers exemplify this tendency, with their fanatical commitments to puritan religiosity and republicanism resulting in political tumult and war.[17] Here we have the threads of the philosophical discussion coming together and fanaticism identified as both a psychological and political pathology.[18] Beyond the specific historical concerns motivating his position, Hobbes's thought serves as a representative index of the long-standing philosophical position regarding fanaticism and its associated terms. That is, he expresses anxieties and hesitations with respect to fanatics, painting them as psychologically deranged, socially disruptive, and potentially violent. Because of these essential qualities, fanaticism must be policed, contained, and ideally eliminated in the interest of a peaceful, stable political order. As envisioned in *Leviathan*, Hobbes presents the absolute sovereign's powers to determine a community's epistemic field—assigning, for example, the meaning of language and the proper doctrinal contents of religion—as a means for disciplining perspectival differences as well as fanatical excesses.

Although abandoning Hobbes' absolutist prescriptions, contemporary democratic theory continues to operate, by and large, within the set of assumptions and investments provided by modern liberalism when it comes to religious fanaticism. With only rare excep-

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[16] Hobbes, 328.

[17] In many ways Cromwell exists as the paradigmatic religious and political fanatic in the American political imagination; both Terry and Brown interpret themselves—and are interpreted by others in turn—with reference to Cromwell.

[18] Joel Olson offers an extended sketch of what he terms "the pejorative tradition" running throughout the canonical mainstays of western political thought in "The Freshness of Fanaticism" (2007). In his account of philosophical repudiation of fanaticism, Olson describes how this tradition of political thought presents fanaticism as facilitating oppression and terrorism and undermining liberal values such as reason and tolerance.

tions, for example, religious fanaticism has been associated with an anti-democratic ethos that counters the foundational requirements of deliberative engagement.[19] If democracy is conceptualized as a dialogical process of reason giving and critical-rational discourse between equally positioned and reasonable interlocutors, fanatical modes of engagement and citizens with deep, uncompromising religious convictions undermine discursive exchange. Democratic theorists Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, for example, envision ideal deliberative citizens as rational skeptics who "recognize that they may be wrong, and that their opponents may be right" and act in the public sphere with due humility and generosity.[20] Gutmann and Thompson, of course, are not alone in this normative position. The call for "reasonable" citizens capable of bracketing their personal (and exclusionary) faith from their public contributions, advance claims through the use of broadly accessible reasons and reasoning, and exercise a reflexive self-awareness and self-constraint manifest also in John Rawls's theory of political liberalism and Jürgen Habermas' normative account of deliberative democracy. Religious fanatics—who are seen as using their passionate, unreflective, and particularistic beliefs as the grounds for their public claims—violate the principles of public

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[19] For examples of more contemporary indictments of religious fanaticism, see, e.g., William H. Simon, "The Three Limitations of Deliberative Democracy: Identity Politics, Bad Faith, and Indeterminacy," in *Deliberative Politics: Essays on "Democracy and Disagreement,"* edited by Stephen Macedo (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Jason C. Bivins, *The Fracture of the Good Order: Christian Antiliberalism and the Challenge to American Politics* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

[20] Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 41-44. Ideal deliberative actors should remain open-minded about the provisional truth of their own positions and beliefs and engage in reasonable, respectful deliberation in order to revise their positions and come to a consensual (and ideally more accurate or truthful) conception of the state of the world and the common good. In sum, the deliberative process requires (a) citizens who recognize the contingency and uncertainty of their own positions, (b) acting in accordance with an ethos of reciprocal respect, openness, and engagement, and (c) a shared language and criteria for reason and judgment.

Gutmann and Thompson's subsequent work similarly valorizes the principle of compromise and deliberative generosity as a political practice, citizen ethos, and habit of mind. See, e.g., *The Spirit of Compromise: Why Governing Demands It and Campaigning Undermines It* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

engagement offered by the camp of liberal-deliberative theorists and thus, seemingly, should be excluded from democratic politics.[21]

A number of subsequent theoretical works reverse the logic of such liberal-deliberative moves to depoliticize religion and bracket passion, arguing that these techniques inspire rather than diminish fanaticism. Writing in this vein, Michael Sandel claims, "A politics that brackets morality and religion too completely soon generates its own disenchantment. Where political discourse lacks moral resonance, the yearning for a public life of larger meaning finds undesirable expression… Fundamentalists rush in where liberals fear to tread."[22] In short, if liberals abstain from engaging religious traditions and questions of meaning, they forfeit these resources and dimensions of public life to those without such compunctions and with potentially anti-liberal and anti-democratic purposes. Bryan Garsten voices a similar view when he points to the frustration and alienation produced by the liberal framework for public reason that in turn results in "responses to modernity that are as dogmatic and dangerous as the religious fanaticism that liberalism was meant to contain" and "forms of opinion more dogmatic and less prone to deliberative engagement than those they initially sought to displace."[23] In light of these inadvertent encouragements of strong religion, both Sandel and Garsten argue for a position of engagement and openness, rather than containment, with respect to religious discourse as an antidote to fundamentalism and fanaticism.

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[21] For a discussion of how various flavors of liberalism all advocate a domestication of the passions and political and religious convictions, see Michael Walzer, "Passion and Politics," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 28:6 (2002): 617-33.

[22] Michael J. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1996), 322.

[23] Bryan Garsten, *Saving Persuasion: A Defense of Rhetoric and Judgment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 17, 185. While I do not reject the upshot of these positions—that religious opinions and traditions should not be avoided in a robust democratic politics but rather acknowledged and engaged—I offer in this chapter an alternative understanding of the role of religious zealotry in American democratic politics that does not ground such practices on the formal regulation of religious language in the public sphere. Indeed, given that the United States has never exercised such exclusions or regulation, liberal disengagement with religion can hardly explain the fanatical practices of Brown, Terry, and others throughout American history.

Sandel's and Garsten's calls for a broad field of engagement tracks the position of agonistic theorists of democracy. This school of thought follows Bonnie Honig's critique of "virtue" theories of politics that attempt to "remove politics from the reach of democratic contest" by elevating consensus and displacing substantial disagreements and decisions to administrative and judicial venues.[24] By contrast to such philosophical evasions and attempts to narrow political disagreements, agonistic theories recognize fundamental conflicts and the play of power as unavoidable aspects of social life. Yet even as these theoretical frameworks broaden the legitimate field of political engagement beyond the frameworks offered by liberal-deliberative theorists, agonistic thinkers continue to stress the tempering of political action and contestation in ways that prevent fanaticism. The theory of "radical democracy" articulated by Chantal Mouffe, for instance, explicitly demands the domestication of contestation so that antagonistic conflicts between enemies (with the attendant threat of existential negation and the possibility of violence) become agonistic struggles. Agonistic relations exist between adversaries who operate in a "common symbolic space" that enables them to disagree while retaining a sense of mutual respect and avoiding the possibility of violent confrontation.[25] The agonistic pluralism of William Connolly similarly calls for the cultivation of a "bicameral orientation" and "ethos of generosity" that prevent the certainty and potential resentment ascribed to religious fanatics. As Connolly argues, "[F]orbearance and modesty are presumptive virtues in pluralist politics."[26] The tendency of faith to work against these virtues and lead some persons to "punish, correct, exclude, or terrorize" those of different orientations constitutes what Connolly calls "the problem of evil."[27] Overcoming evil, Con-

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[24] Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 4.
[25] Chantal Mouffe, *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt* (New York: Verso, 1999), 5. See also Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2005); and Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London: Verso, 1993).
[26] William E. Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 9.
[27] William E. Connolly, *Pluralism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 19

nolly argues, demands the education of sensibilities and creeds within and across faith communities so as to cultivate the capacities for tolerance and critical self-intervention.

Recent innovative theoretical work, however, enables a rapprochement—or at least re-engagement—of democratic theory and religious fanaticism. First, scholarship investigating the role of sentiments and the passions in political life challenges the premise that fanatics are uniquely irrational or "madmen" as Hobbes claims. Second, a new wave of theorists has seized upon fanaticism as a tactical modality of public action within democratic politics. These two threads of scholarship, I argue, help clear the table for the re-imagining of religious zealotry outside the narrow confines set by the modern liberal framework.

Against liberal notions of passion as conceptually outside and opposed to reason and agency, Cheryl Hall argues that passion and enthusiasm inevitably entwine human reason and provide the necessary commitment for political activity. Drawing on advances in cognitive theory, Hall illuminates how reason is constantly involved in the process of passionate commitment (conceptualization, interpretation, evaluation, and formulation of purposive behavior). That is, built into passionate commitments are cognitive processes of interpreting a concept, judging it to be valuable, and forming intentions to pursue this goal. On the other hand, rational judgment inevitably involves some form of emotional investment. As Hall remarks, "Just as a *passion* for an object implies a *reason* for valuing that thing, a *reason* for choosing one thing over another implies at least some *passion* for the choice taken. In this way, reason and passion are inextricable."[28] From this basis, Hall pushes against the equivalence of fanaticism with irrationality, insanity and agentic passivity: "Even those who have

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[28] Cheryl Hall, *The Trouble With Passion: Political Theory Beyond The Reign of Reason* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 17. For a similar claim that the passions are part and parcel of democratic politics, albeit with a distinctly different normative stance, see Sharon R. Krause, *Civil Passions: Moral Sentiment and Democratic Deliberation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008). Michael Frazer's recovery of what he calls the sentimentalist stream of Enlightenment era moral and political thought also works in this same vein by challenging purely rationalist accounts of political reflection. Michael Frazer, *The Enlightenment of Sympathy: Justice and the Moral Sentiments in the Eighteenth Century and Today* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

been called fanatics are thinking: the problem is not that their reason has been overtaken by their passion; the problem is that they are thinking and feeling very differently about the world than those who charge them with fanaticism."[29] In other words, fanatics are not so much unthinking as thinking and sensing in heterodox or novel ways; they are working and acting within frameworks apart and aside from those in mainstream liberal society.

Besides insisting that fanaticism cannot be properly defined in terms of enthusiasm and the intensity of passionate beliefs, Hall's analysis reveals how the concept of the fanatic hangs instead on the conspicuous transgression of a community's common sense. That is to say, fanatics are those who publically refuse to act in accordance with the body of taken-for-granted ideas, discourses, and modes of acting in the world that facilitate particular arrangements of power. Therefore, the concept of the fanatic is necessarily, on the one hand, *historical* in the sense that it will vary qualitatively according to shifts in norms across time and place and, on the other, *intersubjective* since it hinges on public performance and reception rather than interior beliefs or psychology.

If fanaticism does not consist of a particular psychological makeup or ideological commitment, Joel Olson's work provides a foundation for re-thinking it as a mode of political action. In a recent series of articles, Olson develops a formulation of fanaticism as a particular political technique or approach that is compatible with an agonistic conception of democratic struggle. Using fanaticism synonymously with extremism and zealotry, Olson defines it as "*the political mobilization of the refusal to compromise*" in order to structure an issue in oppositional terms and establish adversarial and mutually exclusive "ethico-political frameworks."[30] The "ethico-political framework," as Olson refers to it, determines the field for

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[29] Ibid., 20.
[30] Joel Olson, "Friends and Enemies, Slaves and Masters: Fanaticism, Wendell Phillips, and the Limits of Democratic Theory" *The Journal of Politics* 71:1 (2009), 83.

political disagreements as much as it encompasses "the principles, rules, values, and norms that structure how members of a polity express and resolve differences with each other."[31] To use Gramscian language, the framework is the hegemonic common sense that governs acceptability with respect to the taken for granted and acceptable protocols, grounds, and modes of claims making in a community. Zealotry explicitly challenges the ethico-political framework by making it an explicit point of division and contestation. Olson explains:

> Zealotry is an activity practiced not so much by disturbed temperaments as by collectives working to transform relations of power by creating an "us" in struggle against a "them," and by pressuring those in between to choose sides. Accordingly, zealotry is *political activity, driven by an ardent devotion to a cause, which seeks to draw clear lines along a friends/enemies dichotomy in order to mobilize friends and moderates in the service of that cause.*[32]

Fanaticism, per Olson's conceptualization, is not an ideology (a substantial set of beliefs or ideas) but rather a mode of political action—a distinct approach to politics—that entails a refusal to compromise, negotiate, or generally engage in deliberation. According to the logic of fanaticism, working within the established framework of political discourse and deliberating with opponents equates with a foundational capitulation and a betrayal of one's commitments and cause. Fanaticism agitates conflict and creates tension with a mind towards defeating opponents rather than coming to terms with them or accepting the operative terms of political disagreement.

Although attempting to upend the traditional understanding of the term, Olson's conception of fanaticism as a strategy for contentious politics echoes other recent theoretical contributions. A similar definition, for example, underlies Alberto Toscano's survey of the term in western philosophy. Fanaticism, Toscano explains, refers to "a refusal of compro-

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[31] Olson, "Friends and Enemies," 84.
[32] Joel Olson, "The Freshness of Fanaticism: The Abolitionist Defense of Zealotry," *Perspectives on Politics* 5:4 (2007), 688; see also "Radically Democratic Extremism: An Interview with Joel Olson," *Revolution by the Book: The AK Press Blog*, http://www.revolutionbythebook.akpress.org/radically-democratic-extremism-an-interview-with-joel-olson/, accessed December 1, 2011.

mise and a seemingly boundless drive to the universal."[33] According to Toscano, fanaticism

is an ambivalent political force that possesses the potential not only for violence and intimi-

dation but also for an emancipatory politics inasmuch as it brings together conviction-in-

practice and unconditional demands that can mobilize constituencies and, with an appropri-

ate strategy, achieve revolutionary institutional change. In that same vein, Suzanne Dovi ar-

ticulates what she calls a "division of moral labor." As a part of her account, Dovi argues

that both moral pragmatists who are willing to compromise their commitments and moral

absolutists who refuse to compromise play crucial political roles, and a vibrant democracy

requires the presence of both types of political actors.[34] Specifically, moral absolutists serve

two primary functions:

> First, they serve as moral exemplars who, by living out their commitments to moral principles, strengthen other citizens' commitment to their moral beliefs. Second, absolutists can provide political cover that improves the negotiating positions of those who compromise their moral integrity for desirable political ends.[35]

Both Toscano and Dovi are careful to stress the risks immanent to fanatical action—as in,

for instance, cases where actors refuse or resist values central to democratic institutions and

shared public life—but such worries frequently hinge on the content of these claims rather

than the fanatical form itself.

While taking these attempts to de-pathologize and politicize fanaticism as a point of

departure, it is necessary to think about, on the one hand, the specificity of *religious* fanaticism

and, on the other, how this particular mode of political claims making works within the

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[33] Alberto Toscano, *Fanaticism: On the Uses of an Idea* (London: Verso, 2010), xii.

[34] Dovi's theoretical framework dovetails with the more consequentialist-tactical argument for extremism offered by Lewis Killian. According to Killian, these practices of extremism and the refusal to compromise can achieve certain tactical ends, including "(1) increase the bargaining power of moderate leaders; (2) provide a corrective to illusions of progress by (3) identifying unresolved issues and defining new ones; (4) radicalize a growing segment of the movement membership and increase the polarization between the movement and its opposition; (5) focus the attention of the opposition and the bystander public on new issues; and (6) evoke extreme repressive measures from the opposition." Lewis Killian, "The Significance of Extremism in the Black Revolution," *Social Problems* 20 (Summer 1972), 41.

[35] Dovi, 132.

American social order. Over the next two sections I examine John Brown and Randall Terry in order to flesh out and develop a conception of religious fanaticism as a mode of political action and address. My analysis attends particularly to how these radically divergent figures make use of specific religious repertoires in their confrontations with what they take to be social and moral injustices concealed by the dominant ethico-aesthetic regime.

## § 2. The Penitent Violence of John Brown

As evening fell on October 16, 1859, John Brown and his company of eighteen armed men made their way across the waters of the Potomac River into the hamlet of Harpers Ferry. In seizing the West Virginia town and the federal arsenal within, the band hoped to begin a guerilla war sprawling down the length of the Appalachian Mountains, liberating slaves and bringing the battle against the institution of chattel slavery into the very heart of the South. The national politics of slavery, by contrast, was characterized by an ethos of evasion. When the institutions of the federal government addressed the subject of slavery, such as in the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, or the *Dred Scott v. Sanford* decision (1857), they struggled not to resolve the issue but push it off the political agenda and maintain the precarious balance between regional interests. At that point in his career as an abolitionist warrior, Brown had already gained notoriety for his participation in the Free State campaign in "Bloody" Kansas where he led a violent raid on a settlement at Pottawatomie Creek that ended in the gruesome killings and mutilations of five proslavery settlers. Rather than acting as a catalyst for a cascading slave insurrection, however, the raid on Harpers Ferry ultimately came to be the end of Brown's war on the South's "peculiar institution." By delaying too long in the town, Brown gave enough time for a cadre of soldiers and militiamen under the command of Robert E. Lee to surround the town and decimate Brown's raiders. Before Brown surrendered, ten of his men, including two of his sons, were

dead. The John Brown of Harpers Ferry is a familiar image in American history but its singular power draws attention away from his broader practice of religious fanaticism from which it emanated.

To fully understand Brown's brand of political action, it is necessary to trace the roots of Harpers Ferry back to Brown's formative experiences with Puritan Christianity and his lifelong identification with the oppressed. His brand of antinomianism, which justifies the breaking of human law in the name of God and the divine law, combines the punitive theology of Jonathan Edwards and the warrior ethic of Cromwell.[36] In contrast to the more liberal evangelical revivals of the Second Great Awakening, which cast the divine as loving and forgiving, Brown's rhetoric featured a God who was distinctly Old Testament in demeanor and remarkable for His severity and wrathfulness. Brown, in turn, practiced this severity in both his personal and political life. By numerous accounts, Brown was highly critical of his neighbors and frequently pointed out their slightest immoral behavior. Brown rejected the perfectionist notions of William Lloyd Garrison and his disciples. Men, according to Brown, were inescapably frail and prone to corruption; mere words, furthermore, were simply insufficient to prevent or correct such a state. According to Brown, the greatest manifestation of the inborn tendency to wickedness was the institution of chattel slavery, which not only enabled a regime of personal violence and immorality but also systematically violated the divine principle of equality. The notion of divine equality emanates from Brown's doctrinal notion of "sacred self-sovereignty," which located God not in an otherworldly realm but rather within every person.[37] This diffusion of the divine essence throughout all human-

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[36] See David S. Reynolds, *John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 19; and F.B. Sanborn, *The Life and Letters of John Brown, Liberator of Kansas, and Martyr of Virginia* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 247.

[37] John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 16.

ity not only grounds the full equality and right to self-determination of every human being but also binds persons together as constituent parts of a universal whole.

Brown's efforts to confront the denial of this universal equality by slavery entailed a performance that brought together piety and penitence. Historian Stephen Oates succinctly portrays this Puritan sensibility, writing, "And if imperfect human beings expected merciful God to grant them salvation they must strive both to 'show piety' and 'do good,' constantly struggling to overcome the inherent wickedness in themselves as well as to combat Satan's treacheries from without."[38] By at once aspiring to "show piety" and "do good," Brown joined the performance of religious obligations (the required actions that adhere to a religious practitioner) and social and moral duties (what is owed to one's fellow persons). One domestic episode related by Brown's son, John Brown, Jr., captures the interwoven logic of atonement, faithfulness, and solidarity that threads throughout Brown's public actions. In this narrative Brown presented his son with a list of the boy's sins and infractions—a moral ledger of remarkable precision and detail—and a calculation of the number of lashes demanded by each violation. After going over this list, Brown proceeded to thrash his son until he suddenly stopped, removed his own shirt, and commanded his son to lash him. Brown took the remainder of the lashes due himself, repeatedly demanding for his son to whip him harder. Reflecting on the episode later, Brown, Jr. came to understand his father as providing "a practical illustration of the Doctrine of Atonement," wherein the blood of the innocent is shed for the salvation of the guilty.[39] The sacrifice of the innocent in order to bring about the salvation and redemption of others manifests not only in his personal relations but also, as I will describe shortly, in his view of the political community.

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[38] Stephen B. Oates, *To Purge This Land With Blood: A Biography of John Brown* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 31. See also Mark S. Weiner, *Black Trails: Citizenship from the Beginnings of Slavery to the End of Caste* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 165.

[39] Quoted in Sanborn, 22, 92-93.

Brown's public enactment of penitence and faith-in-action springs from a foundation of deep recognition and identification. Per Brown's model, identifying with the oppressed and recognizing one's self in their plight necessarily demands positive action to change these conditions. The public presence Brown constructed through his speeches, letters, and actions can be read as a principled effort to propel white Americans to identify with blacks and acknowledge the unjust system of social relations in the country. One of the primary ways in which he tried to provoke this identification was through publically narrating his own path to racial egalitarianism. As Brown presents it, his identification with the oppressed seized him at an early age. Writing to Henry Stearns, the son of a business associate, Brown recounted an episode during the War of 1812 when he stayed in the house of a "very gentlemanly landlord" who owned "a slave boy near [Brown's] age very active, inteligent, & good feeling; & to whom [Brown] was under considerable obligation for numerous acts of kindness." While the landlord fawned over the young Brown, he brutalized the slave:

> the *negro boy* (who was fully if not more than [Brown's] equal) was badly clothed, poorly fed; & *lodged in cold weather* & beaten before [Brown's] eyes with Iron Shovels or any other thing that came first to hand. This brought [Brown] to reflect on the wretched, hopeless condition, of *Fatherless* & *Motherless* slave *children*: for such children have neither Fathers or Mothers to protect, & provide for them. [Brown] sometimes would raise the question: *is God their Father*?

The moment of connection Brown narrates originates in a mutuality of care and the recognition of commonality. Brown admits that he is not only in the boy's debt "for numerous acts of kindness" but also that they are both the works of the same creator or father. They are, in other words, of the same family, and there is no obvious principle by which one should suffer deprivation, dehumanization, and violence and not the other. This episode, Brown ex-

plains, made his younger self "a most *determined Abolitionist*: & led him to declare or *Swear: Eternal war* with slavery."[40]

Brown positioned an empathetic awareness and capacity—as exemplified by the Christian Golden Rule articulated in Luke 6:31 and Hebrews 13:3—at the core of religious and political being. Brown mobilized accounts of the pain and suffering of blacks and their allies—such as the story of the slave boy—in order to inspire sympathy and, through this process of identification, catalyze a process of personal reflection and communal reformation.[41] In his letters and his speeches, he continually returned to Hebrews 13:3, which implores, "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them."[42] One upshot of these biblical passages is that civil bonds are simultaneously affective and aesthetic. Accordingly, the juridical statuses and relations constitutive of a civil community are only the formalized manifestations of a more fundamental set of relationships. That is, members of a society are embedded in a dense web of sensations and perceptions that orients them as fellow subjects. Building from his reading of Hebrew 13:3, Brown conceptualized a righteous, penitent polity as one organized so as to affectively unite citizens and implicate each individual in the suffering of any other. The suffering of one member necessarily flowed throughout the entire social network. As Louis Bennett Jr. explains, Brown practiced this empathetic citizenship to the point of feeling solidarity with the oppressed and becoming, in his case, effectively black:

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[40] Louis Ruchames, *A John Brown Reader: The Story of John Brown in His Own Words in the Words of Those Who Knew Him and in the Poetry and Prose of the Literary Heritage* (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1959), 38.

[41] See Franny Nudelman, "'The Blood of Millions': John Brown's Body, Public Violence, and Political Community," in *The Afterlife of John Brown*, edited by Andrew Taylor and Eldrid Herrington (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 29.

[42] Consider this exchange from the interview following Brown's arrest in Harpers Ferry:

    *Bystander*: Upon what principle to you justify your acts?

    *Brown*: Upon the Golden Rule. I pity the poor in bondage that have none to help them: that is why I am here; not to gratify any personal animosity, revenge, or vindictive spirit. It is my sympathy with the oppressed and the wronged, that they are as good as you and as precious in the sight of God… I want you to understand that I respect the rights of the poorest and weakest of colored people, oppressed by the slave system, just as much as I do those of the most wealthy and powerful. (Ruchames, 121-22)

There was in John Brown a complete identification with the oppressed. It was his child that a slaveowner was selling; his sister who was being whipped in the field; his wife who was being raped in the gin house. It was not happening to Negroes; it was happening to him. Thus it was said that he could not bear to hear the word slave spoken. At the sound of the word, his body vibrated like the strings of a sensitive violin. John Brown *was* a Negro, and it was in this aspect that he suffered.[43]

Bennett's metaphor of a violin string vibrating in resonance with another captures in a striking manner Brown's model of penitent-empathetic citizenship where members are attuned to one another's needs, interests, and rights in an embodied (and morally demanding) sense.

The motif of suffering-in-solidarity manifests in Brown's recurring invocation of blood. Blood in this instance indexes a logic of equivalence and unity, with a common blood coursing through the bodies of every human and thus confounding racial and political distinctions. Brown's blood and those of the slaves are presented as one and the same, so that the shedding of one implicates and pains the other. According to Brown, this principle implies not only the equality of all but also, as I will describe, the duty of the innocent to identify with the oppressed and work (and sacrifice) to eradicate relations of oppression. The most dramatic and violent episodes in Brown's public life enacted this imperative to rescue. In Franny Nudelman's felicitous phrase, the paramilitary action at Harpers Ferry was an instance of "sympathy put into practice."[44] In light of his skepticism of the efficacy of rhetorical pleas and moral suasion (which I will elaborate on in a moment), Brown took these empathetic actions in order to fulfill his right and duty to interfere and, thus, not only save individual slaves but also sway his fellow citizens to realize the horror of slavery.[45]

Brown's enactment of empathy manifested both in spectacular moments, such as Harpers Ferry, and in the quotidian commitments and practices of daily life. Brown lived his

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[43] Quoted in Reynolds, 504. Stauffer discusses a similar imperative among Brown and his political allies, including Gerrit Smith and Frederick Douglass, to rid the "heart of whites" of their racial superiority and status and become capable of identifying with blacks. See also Olson, "The Politics of Protestant Violence."

[44] Nudelman, 30.

[45] For an elaborate discussion of Brown's presentation of his actions in Harpers Ferry and elsewhere as interference rather than insurrection, see Turner, 459.

principle of racial equality, residing beside and working with former slaves and bringing visiting blacks to sit with his family in their pew at church. He befriended a number of black figures in the New England abolitionist movement, becoming particularly close with Frederick Douglass. When antislavery author Richard Henry Dana Jr. stumbled upon Brown's farm in 1849, he was welcomed into the household but later published an essay in which he wrote disapprovingly of Brown eating at the same table as blacks and addressing them with titles of respect such as "Mrs." and "Mr."[46] As evidenced by Dana's baffled and rather frosty response, Brown's practice of interracial camaraderie and egalitarianism was extraordinary, even for those who were politically anti-slavery. Unlike Dana and any number of other anti-slavery activists, Brown's egalitarianism was not simply an intellectual proposition or an abstract aspiration. Rather, Brown evinced a lived empathy that put Christian and republican principles into practice.

Brown's identification with the oppressed manifested publically (and somewhat bizarrely) in "Sambo's Mistakes." An essay that appeared serially in an antislavery newspaper from January 1847 to June 1848, "Sambo's Mistake" featured Brown taking on the persona of a black man reflecting back on the errors of his life and offering advice to younger African Americans. Among his numerous points of advice, Brown presses the need to cultivate knowledge of "sacred & profane history" and to not be consumed by the desire to please and submit to whites. Rather, he advises a policy of "nobly resisting [whites'] brutal aggressions from principle & taking my place as a man & assuming the responsibilities of a man a citizen, a husband, a father, a brother, a neighbour, a friend as God requires of everyone."[47] Additionally, Brown advises his readers to ignore ideological and religious differences and

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[46] Richard Henry Dana Jr., "How We Met John Brown," *Atlantic Monthly* 28 (July 1871), 6-7. See also Oates, 68-69.

[47] Ruchames, 63.

form anti-slavery coalitions and alliances. These latter points reflect Brown's own developing tolerance for other religious views and a willingness to work with believers of different faiths, and they suggest a change from his earlier habits of being too critical of the faults and differences of others.[48] While remarkably pedantic in its tone, Brown's essay is illuminative not only in the content of the advice and its strategy of standing together but also in its authorial enactment of solidarity through Brown's ready assumption of black identity and embrace of his "colored brethren."

The notion of solidarity-in-practice appears in a more rigorous and formalized manner in Brown's "Word of Advice to the United States League of Gileadites," which he wrote in January 15, 1851 in order to mobilize a mutual support group of freedmen. In this document, Brown advises members of the organization to join together if a single member is arrested under the auspices of the Fugitive Slave Law and work in concert to free the prisoner. Together these members should perform a "rescue" by intervening to free the captured man quickly and, if need be, violently. Do not delay, Brown suggests, for "*you will lose all your resolution if you do*" and "*make clean work of your enemies*"; afterwards, if pursued, "*go into the houses of your most prominent and influential white friends with your wives*" in order to compel them to work in solidarity with you.[49] Here again, Brown advocates the necessity of violence and identification—citizens must realize the shared precariousness of their liberty and security and recognize this same vulnerability in others, and then act in light of this fact.[50]

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[48] See Oates, 59-60.

[49] Ruchames, 76.

[50] Brown, it should be said, was not alone in advocating the duty to rescue. Fellow abolitionist Lysander Spooner echoed this imperative to identify and intervene, albeit without providing the license for violence and murder advocated by Brown. According to Spooner, it is the "duty of bystanders to go to his or her rescue, by force, if need, be [when] a human being is set upon by a robber, ravisher, murderer, or tyrant of any kind." Lysander Spooner, "A Plan for the Abolition of Slavery," in *Antislavery Political Writings, 1833-1860: A Reader,* edited by C. Bradley Thompson (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 261.

Besides marking this dimension of human commonality and the standing possibility of identification, Brown's invocation of blood also underscores his stress on violent confrontation as a potential tactic for political transformation. In his last written words, which he gave to a jailer as he was being led to the gallows, Brown explained, "I, John Brown, am now quite *certain* that the crimes of this *guilty land*: *will* never be purged *away*; but with Blood. I had *as I now think*: *vainly* flattered myself that without *verry much* bloodshed; it might be done."[51] Brown's words are prophetic in two senses: first, inasmuch as they both identify the guilt of the political community in the hopes of inspiring a change in practices and, second, by their anticipation of the devastating losses of the Civil War. In both senses, he identifies the necessity of violence and suffering in the process of eliminating slavery. As Brown understood it, the deep roots of slavery in the social mores and institutions of the nation would inevitably thwart any attempt at peaceable reform or transformation. Akin to Garrison, Brown perceives the modes and manners of American society to be bound up with slavery, so that the ideas, feelings, and imaginations of citizens are shaped by the system of racial privilege and exclusion at work in slavery. Because of these diffuse but potent effects of slavery, Brown foresees institutional politics and the mechanisms of law as functionally constrained in their potential to bring slavery to an end. Overthrowing the institution of slavery, this logic holds, entails reconfiguring the subterranean order of investments and sentiments that are slavery's necessary conditions, and such a reconfiguration will ultimately demand the shedding of the blood of the guilty and the innocent.

The confrontation of a polity's common sense with and through the dramatic use of force manifests in two distinct forms during Brown's abolitionist career. In the first mode Brown acts as the righteous perpetrator of violence (the forceful subject) and, in the second,

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[51] Ibid., 159.

he is the martyred victim of violence (the object of force). I analyze each of these forms in turn, beginning with his active use of violence.

Consider Brown's December 1858 raid into Missouri, where he freed eleven slaves and killed a slaveholder who attempted to prevent the band from liberating his slaves. Writing a letter to the editor of the *New York Tribune*, Brown explained his violence as, on the one hand, retaliation for a massacre of free-state settlers a year earlier and, on the other, necessary since the murdered master "fought against liberation." Reflecting on the death, Brown writes, "Eleven persons are forcibly restored to their 'natural and inalienable rights,' with but one man killed… All proslavery, conservative Free-State, and doughface men, and Administration tools, are filled with holy horror."[52] In his statement Brown poses two distinguishable understandings of his resort to violence. First, Brown ascribes his violent actions as in keeping with a religio-ethical practice. The violence thus works as a practical intervention against the evil of slavery, both in the sense of a retribution for earlier suffering inflicted by proslavery forces and a necessary act to rescue particular slaves from a resisting slave-master. The second understanding casts Brown's actions in an overtly political-aesthetic light. The violence, by this light, operates as a spectacle—an event that inspires "holy horror"—and draws the aesthetic attention of the public not only to the violence itself but also the larger, structural violence that it counters. In this way it disrupts the usual practices of disavowal and denial that conceal slavery from the consciousness of most citizens. Thoreau's reflection on the Harpers Ferry incident reflects this second understanding: "I say again that it affects me as a sublime spectacle. If he had had any journal advocating '*his cause*,' any organ as the

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[52] Ibid., 115.

phrase is, monotonously and wearisomely playing the same old tune, and then passing round the hat, it would have been fatal to his efficiency."[53]

Thoreau's implicit condemnation of mere rhetoric echoes Brown's own sensibilities. Indeed, Brown's turn to violent action springs in no small part from his skepticism regarding the Garrisonian reliance on moral suasion and the efficacy of public discourse. Writing to Frederick Douglass, Brown states,

> I am too destitute of words to express the tithe of what I feel, and utterly incapable of doing the subject any possible degree of justice, in my own estimation. My only encouragement to begin, was the earnest wish that if I might express, so that it may be understood to all, an important fact, that you or some friend of God and the right, will take it up and clothe it in the suitable language to be noticed and felt.[54]

No doubt Brown overstates his lack of rhetorical abilities—after all, his charismatic powers of persuasion were frequently remarked upon—but he nonetheless outlines a profound disjunction between the injustice of slavery and the communicative capacities of language. It is possible to read Brown here as expressing a profoundly anti-democratic sentiment that forecloses the potential for deliberation and replaces it with the play of sheer force.[55] Yet in a more precise sense Brown is gesturing at an expressive deficit within both his own linguistic capacities and, implicitly, the larger field of dominant discourse. Specifically, Brown's words

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[53] Henry David Thoreau, "A Plea for Captain John Brown" in *Reform Papers*, edited by Wendell Glick (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 132.

Jack Turner builds from Thoreau's reflections to construct an account of Brown as involved in "a politics of performing conscience." As he explains, "The aim of the performance is to provoke one's neighbors into a process of individual self-reform that will make them capable of properly vigilant democratic citizenship and conscientious political agitation." Such a performance inspires a state of "aesthetic awe," which

> is the sense of having one's imagination captured by a story, spectacle, or scene notwithstanding one's negative or positive judgment of its moral nature. Aesthetic awe is the state of having one's attention held by an object. The moral and political value of Brown's act derived not simply from its aim of liberating the slaves, which it ultimately failed to achieve, but additionally from the spectacular way it demonstrated conscientious moral commitment. The act's aesthetic quality enabled it to hold the attention of the public even in the face of reflexive condemnation by political authority and majority opinion.

In other words, the dramatic staging of these prophetic enactments—the theatricality and spectacular qualities of the interventions—attracts, perhaps even startles, the public imagination and casts the dilemma as a democratic morality tale. Jack Turner, "Performing Conscience: Thoreau, Political Action, and the Plea for John Brown," *Political Theory* 33 (2005), 453, 465.

[54] Ibid., 85.

[55] See Balfour, 50.

claim the existence of a lack of sensuous veracity to language; discourse, in other words, falls short in tracking and engendering the profound feelings Brown associates with slavery. How might the myriad evils of slavery be rendered so that "it may be understood to all" not just in a manner of intellectual recognition ("noticed") but also an aesthetic realization with visceral pull ("felt")? The answer Brown provides is that the injustice must not only be announced and proclaimed but also challenged in practice so that a principled critique catches hold too in the sensual imagination of an audience.[56]

After the failure of his efforts at liberation, Brown quickly and purposefully took up the mantle of the martyr. Throughout his life, Brown possessed a keen ability to manufacture a particular public image, so that, as Lewis Hyde remarks, the "people who know him ended up speaking of him in the terms he himself had invented."[57] The image of Brown projected in his trial speeches and jailhouse letters was a compelling combination of Christ and Jefferson, concocted through an alchemy of religious language, acceptance of fate, and a consummate commitment to equality. The assumption of this role and the attendant framing of his death as the dramatization of the injustice of slavery defines Brown's epistolary persona following the failed siege on Harpers Ferry. Writing a letter from his jail cell on November 1, 1959, Brown states,

> You know that Christ once armed Peter. So in my case, I think he put a sword in my hand, and there it continued, so long as he saw best, and then kindly took it from me…I wish you could know with what cheerfulness I am now wielding the 'Sword of the Spirit' on the right hand and on the left. I bless God that it proves 'mighty to the pulling down of strongholds.'[58]

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[56] Christianity's union of action, word, and feeling is one of the major virtues Brown finds in the religion. In his letter to his family (November 30, 1859) Brown speaks of this unique power: "I must *yet* insert a reason for my firm belief in the Divine inspiration of the Bible: notwithstanding I am (perhaps naturally) skeptical. (certainly not, *credulous*.) I wish you all to consider it *most thoroughly*; when you read that blessed book; & see whether you *can not* discover such evidence yourselves. It is the purity of *heart, feeling, or motive*: as well as *word, & action* which is every where insisted on; that distinguish it from *all other teachings*; that *commends it to my conscience*: whether *my* heart be 'willing, & obedient' *or not*" (Ruchames, 157).

[57] Hyde, 137.

[58] Ibid., 129.

In this passage Brown narrates the transition from armed confrontation to martyrdom. Similar language appears throughout the letter exchanges of the period, with Brown saying, "To me it is given in behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to *suffer* for his sake."[59] Indeed, Brown frames his execution as a greater contribution to the end of slavery than his earlier attempts at liberation, writing, "I also humbly trust that my death will not be in vain. God can make it to be a thousand times more valuable to his own cause than all the miserable service (at best) that I have rendered it during my life."[60] The scaffold is the stage upon which Brown performs his empathetic sacrifice. In so doing, Brown becomes the embodiment of righteous resistance—wielding, as he says, the "Sword of the Spirit"—against an unjust order.

In his conjuring of a Manichean world divided between the forces of good (freedom) and evil (slavery), Brown creates himself as at once a warrior struggling against evil, a prophet calling for communal judgment, and a martyr willing to shed his righteous blood for the cause of redeeming the nation. Brown speaks to the common aim of all three of these roles—that is, the concomitant moral and political alteration of the United States—in one of his final letters. Brown writes, "I go joyfully in behalf of Millions that 'have no rights' that this 'great, & glorious'; '*this Christian* Republic,' 'is bound to respect.' Strange *change in morals political*, as well as *Christian*, since 1776. I look forward to *other changes* to take place in '*Gods good time*,' fully believeing [sic] that 'the fashion of this world passeth away.'"[61] Brown understood himself to be crucially involved the transformation of American social mores—or, as he says, the change of "*morals political*" in "*this Christian* Republic." Yet, as his words and ac-

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[59] Ibid., 146.
[60] Ibid., 143.
[61] Ruchames, 139.

tions make clear, such a transformation of sedimented habits and sensibilities relies on radical—fanatical—forms of political engagement.

In order to further develop my account of religious fanaticism, I move next to the case of Operation Rescue founder Randall Terry (and with him, the violent anti-abortion activism performed by Paul Hill). As with Brown, Terry's Christian religion is not simply the justificatory discourse for these actions but supplies the terms of intelligibility for his anti-abortion interventions and him as a public figure. His political legibility is enabled and constituted through Christian language and ritual.

## § 3. Rescue as Prophetic Action

Randall Terry's antiabortion project at first appears analogous to Brown's abolitionism. They are, after all, both calling for the inclusion of a particular group within the body of protected persons in the American community. So too, the direct objects of Brown's and Terry's criticism—slavery and abortion, respectively—are understood as the most overt manifestations of systemic injustices. Yet whereas Brown can be read as using Christian materials to challenge a system of racial subordination, Terry's project takes Christianity not only as a means of claims making but also the aim of its efforts. Akin to other members of his cohort of Christian public actors, including Jerry Falwell and Joseph Scheidler, Terry perceived the Christian faith to be in a state of decline and losing its social prominence and hegemony in the United States. Challenging abortion, then, figures as only one flashpoint in a larger attempt at Christian retrenchment that involves, among other elements, re-establishing traditional gender roles, policing sexual morality, curtailing the welfare state, and pruning away economic regulation.[62] As I will develop in my analysis, rescues are instances of "pro-

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[62] Kristin Luker argues that anti-abortion activists after *Roe v. Wade* are actually interested in preserving traditional gender roles and especially the meaning of motherhood. See Kristin Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), especially chapter 8. In a similar vein, Blanchard

phetic action" (to use a phrase of Terry's) calling Christian citizens not only to end the practice of abortion but also to re-assert Christian sensibilities on the culture and institutions of American democracy.

The practice of antiabortion rescues predates Operation Rescue. In the wake of the Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade*,[63] a nationwide wave of anti-abortion activity and mobilization sprang into being. This first wave of organized anti-abortion activists were veterans of the antiwar movement who brought together the political approaches of Thoreau, Gandhi, and King with the Catholic understanding of the sanctity of life. The father of the anti-abortion concept of rescue, John O'Keefe, took up the tools of civil disobedience that had been used in the civil rights movement and the campaign against the Vietnam War—including sit-ins, arrests, and building takeovers—in order to cure what he perceived to be the blindness of Americans who did not see abortion as the killing of unborn children.[64] As O'Keefe conceptualized them, rescues served a dual purpose by bringing public attention to the issue of abortion and actually saving individual lives by interfering in the routine operation of abortion clinics. The practice of civil disobedience and the attendant sufferings of demonstrators showed "a solidarity with the child" and catalyzed a process of personal and political redemption. As O'Keefe described in a pamphlet entitled *A Peaceful Presence*: "It is not enough to change people's minds; we are engaged in a struggle to change people's hearts. We are engaged in a process of metanoia—conversion, repentance."[65]

Though O'Keefe's incarnation of the rescue movement eventually petered out when it was unable to win substantial support from either conservative Christians or the Left, his

argues that Operation Rescue is not motivated chiefly by "concern for the human status of the fetus" but rather a "cultural fundamentalism" that seeks to reassert traditional practices and morality against cultural change (40-47). I adopt a similar perspective in this section and the next.

[63] 410 U.S. 113 (1973).

[64] James Risen and Judy L. Thomas, *Wrath of Angels: The American Abortion War* (New York: BasicBooks, 1998), 58.

[65] Quoted in ibid., 66.

conceptualization of rescues as simultaneously ethical interventions and political actions prefigures Terry's mobilization of Operation Rescue. Building on O'Keefe's notion of rescue, Terry began Operation Rescue in 1986 with a mind towards politicizing evangelical Protestants.[66] The name and mantra of the organization reflected a militarized take on Proverbs 24:11, which states: "Rescue those who are unjustly sentenced to death; don't stand back and let them die." Equipped with an ethos of refusing to let innocents die, Terry advocated a number of aggressive and confrontational methods, including curbside counseling, picketing, sit-ins, and blockades of clinics. As Philip Lawler, a sympathetic historian of the Rescue movement, reports, Terry "constantly sought more direct, aggressive approaches to stop killing."[67] The principal method of Operation Rescue involved the blockading of abortion clinics and the aggressive confrontation, if not outright intimidation, of clinic employees and potential clients. As understood by O'Keefe, such action achieves two related ends: it physically intervenes in the act of abortion and creates a symbolic protest that captures public attention and has the potential to catalyze a moral conversion. While Terry recognizes these

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[66] Beginning in November 1987 with the blockade of the Cherry Hill Women's Center in Cherry Hill, New Jersey by 400 demonstrators, Operation Rescue held major actions—what Terry, following O'Keefe, called rescues—in New Jersey, New York, Georgia, Kansas, and other locations across the country. According to the National Abortion Federation, over 600 blockades occurred between 1977 and 1993, with the majority of these the result of Terry's Operation Rescue. Over the course of its seven-year existence, Operation Rescue resulted in the arrest of approximately 70,000 people. The organization eventually collapsed due to a number of factors, including internecine battles for organizational control, sizable court-imposed costs, Terry's organizational mismanagement (partly resulting from his serving a prison sentence for rescue-related charges), and the passage of the Federal Freedom of Clinics Entrance Act (FACE), which vastly increased the fines levied for blocking abortion clinics. The demise of Operation Rescue brought about, on the one hand, the birth of a number of regional rescue movements and, on the other hand, an increase in violent anti-abortion activity, including the murder of seven clinic employees from 1993 to 1998.

National Abortion Federation, "NAF Violence and Disruption Statistics," *National Abortion Federation*, http://www.prochoice.org/pubs_research/publications/downloads/about_abortion/violence_statistics.pdf, accessed on November 1, 2011.

While Operation Rescue frequently earned criticism from women's rights groups and the American Civil Liberties Union for its use of intimidation and coercive methods, its collapse closed a primary outlet for non-violent—though still aggressive—political expression and activity on the question of abortion. See Christopher P. Keleher, "Double Standards: The Suppression of Abortion Protestors' Free Speech Rights," *DePaul Law Review* 51 (Spring 2002), 844-46; "Note: Safety Valve Closed: The Removal of Non-violent Outlets for Dissent and the On-Set of Abortion Related Violence," *Harvard Law Review* 113 (March 2000), 1209-20.

[67] Philip F. Lawler, *Operation Rescue: A Challenge to the Nation's Conscience* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1992), 23.

dual purposes, he insists on the primacy of the practical intervention over and above the political effects:

> When they block entry to an abortion mill, pro-life activists are *not* trying to make a political point; they are *not* asking for government action; they are *not* seeking publicity for their cause. A successful Rescue might bring about all those effects, but they are secondary to the real Rescue mission. The goal of a Rescue is to stop abortions—not by influencing legislation, or swaying the courts, but by preventing the *particular* killings that were scheduled on that *specific* day at that *specific* facility.[68]

Terry's diminishment of the political dimensions of rescue activities is complicated by the movement's explicit concern with provoking self-reflection and a transformation in citizen commitments. As Lawler claims in his history of the organization: "Rescuers prick the nation's conscience, nudging politicians and nonpoliticians alike to reexamine their moral precepts."[69] In Lawler and O'Keefe's understanding, the spectacle of Christian citizens engaging in pious action and practicing their faith places an implicit demand on spectators to reexamine and inhabit their own moral principles.

The notion that the practice of rescues hails fellow Christians to act in accordance with their faith appears elsewhere in Terry's formulization of the mission of Operation Rescue. Indeed, the first of his three goals for the movement centers on inspiring Christian piety and penitence. According to Terry, Christian Americans and others of good faith must repent for having failed to act to prevent abortion. Out of a desire to avoid conflict or preserve their public reputations, he claims, Christians have eschewed political activity and thus allowed unjust conditions to persist throughout the country. Repentance, as Terry explains it, involves recognizing this complicity. He writes, "We have to acknowledge before God that *we* are part of the problem, and that we all share in the guilt of this innocent blood."[70] Terry here charts a trajectory of ethical development, with the recognition of guilt and desire for

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[68] Ibid., 60.

[69] Ibid., 75, 136.

[70] Randall A. Terry, *Operation Rescue* (Binghamton, New York: Whitaker House, 1988), 183.

atonement as the first steps in the formation of an uncompromising Christian ethos that works on, rather than within, the existing social order. Moderation in the face of evil becomes a sin that must be repudiated in both word and deed. Terry takes the profound stakes involved in this issue—stakes that he frames in provocative terms of genocide, holocaust, and murder—as reason to not shy from "say[ing] confrontational things, and perhaps do[ing] radical deeds."[71] Rather than embrace the moderation of other Christian social critics, Terry speaks boldly and aggressively. As he explains, "Language is often used to lull us into sleep when we should be alert and watchful. If by language I can, in turn, awaken people to the atrocities occurring daily in our country and sharpen the issues enough to spur people to action, then I will have accomplished one of my major goals."[72] Terry understands partisan and institutional politics as similarly dulling the critical edge and reformative potential of Christian subjects. In response to acts of compromise by more moderate Christian organizations, Terry spoke out against "selling out the law of heaven" in a *Washington Post* editorial. He writes, "[N]ow certain 'Christian leaders' are 'inspiring' droves of Christians to the 'big tent' of the Republican Party—a happy tent housing child-killers and sodomites…We will not auction away the eternal, flawless law of heaven for temporary, flawed political gains."[73]

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[71] Ibid., 15. Terry and Operation Rescue leaders self-consciously presented themselves as a contemporary parallel to the abolitionist movement. The 1991 "Summer of Mercy" campaign in Wichita was one such instance where anti-abortion activists constructed an analogy between their own efforts and the Bleeding Kansas of the antebellum period. As Lawler writes, "The furies unleashed in Kansas illustrated what the Civil War proved: that an issue such as slavery, which involves irreconcilable moral differences, could not be settled peacefully within the American constitutional tradition. Over a century later, during the summer of 1991, Kansas again became the testing ground for a moral dispute which has resisted all efforts at compromise." See Lawler, 29, 138.

[72] Randall A. Terry, *Accessories to Murder: The Enemies, Allies, and Accomplices to the Death of our Culture* (Brentwood, Tennessee: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1990), xi.

[73] Randall A. Terry, "Selling Out the Law of Heaven," *Washington Post,* 18 September 1994.

The leaders of Operation Save America, an organization spawned in the aftermath of Operation Rescue's demise, similarly rejected compromise and pragmatism as "the primary reason that we still have abortion in our land today. It has caused us to believe that we can legislate this evil out of our culture slowly but surely by education, sound reasoning, and political maneuvering… The battle for the lives of children will never be won by educating and seeking common ground with those who refuse to see the truth."

Operation Save America, "Incrementalism—A Lie from the Pit of Hell!," *Operation Rescue*, www.operationsaveamerica.org/news/news/2001-04.thml, accessed on November 4, 2011.

The rejection of compromise and the inculcation of a penitent-pious Christian subjectivity are the starting points for what Terry sees not only as the end of abortion but also a fundamental cultural reformation. In response to the *Nation*'s characterization of the abortion controversy as a "civil war," Terry eagerly agreed, saying, "It is a battle of ideologies, a battle for influence, a battle of allegiances, a battle for cultural dominance. There will only be one winner."[74] Against what he paints a secular humanist attempt to pry apart the realm of religious faith and political culture, Terry advocates for a return to a Christian hegemony. Terry subscribes to the principles of Christian Reconstructionism, which seeks to establish a God-centered government with laws derived from the text of the Bible.[75] Terry claims that elements of the Christian religion must necessarily infuse how political life is thought, practiced, and criticized in the United States. Explaining his position, he writes,

> Let me say it clearly: We want a Christian nation… By 'Christian nation,' I don't mean that everyone is forced to be a Christian or forced to go to church or to believe in God. People are free to be Buddhists or atheists. What I mean by a Christian nation is a nation whose laws are self-consciously built on the laws and principles of the Bible.[76]

According to Terry's framing, the liberal tradition in America as articulated in the Declaration of Independence is fundamentally Christian in its premises and sensibilities. Specifically, he argues that the Declaration acknowledges God to be the source of all inalienable rights and that "the authority of God and His Law" is the only basis upon which a people can challenge political authority.[77] Indeed, Terry traces back all civil government to God. Rather than

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[74] Quoted in Lawler, 55, 14.

[75] Blanchard, 49-50, 67; Risen and Thomas, 299. This foundational location of the Bible and the attendant commitment to a biblical literalism, however, does not shut down a space for contestation. Rather, as the critical response by many religious figures to Operation Rescue demonstrates, an interpretive or textual politics persists and thrives. See Risen and Thomas, 279-281; Terry, *Accessories to Murder*, 185-203.

[76] Randall A. Terry, *Why Does a Nice Guy Like Me Keep Getting Thrown in Jail?* (Windsor, New York: Huntington House Publishers, 1993), 75,

[77] Ibid., 7. This point is echoed throughout his work. He writes elsewhere: "The American Revolution was not a debate about Romans 13 nor a civics lesson on freedom. It was a war for freedom dedicated to the proposi-

being a human construct or the product of a social contract, government is a concept and structure given to humanity by God.[78] As such, divine law necessarily trumps civil law and establishes the criteria and limits of legitimate governmental action.

The second objective of Operation Rescue entails forging a performative fidelity among Christian citizens that erases the disjuncture between Christian ideals and political practices. According to Terry, "I saw that if we believed abortion was murder, then we needed to act like it was murder. The logical response when you or I see someone being killed is to do what we can to physically intervene and save them."[79] The gap that exists between rhetoric and action must be eliminated, and Christians must enact—not merely profess—their beliefs. Specifically, Christian Americans need to "declare war" on abortion and act accordingly in order to bring the entire nation into the conflict and resolve the issue.[80] A recurring motif in Terry's rhetorical mobilization is the profound disjunction between the words and deeds of opponents to abortion. "[O]ur actions betray our words," he argues. "Christians and non-Christians alike who are adamantly against abortion refer to abortion as

tion that all men are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; it was a war founded on a belief in Higher Law." Terry, *Why Does a Nice Guy Like Me Keep Getting Thrown in Jail?*, 28.

In *Killing for Life,* Carol Mason distinguishes between two anti-abortion schemas: pro-life politics and right-to-life politics. Right-to-life politics use liberal principles of human rights that grant an individual fetus the right to live, to grow, and to be born. As Mason explains, "The right-to-life position is a fundamentally liberal construction because it assumes…that the Constitution grants rights equally among citizens, who are 'created equal' and created *as* equals—as *political* equals." The pro-life position, on the other hand, casts all persons, included the collective unborn, as created equal (by God) while not requiring a fully egalitarian society. Mason argues that while the former is "based on a civil or human rights rationale," the conservative pro-life approach "rejects liberal ideas of human rights and equality." The thought and practice of Terry and Operation Rescue fail to fall within either of these two broad categories since they unite a concern for the individual fetus and the collective unborn. Terry consistently struggles to demonstrate the humanity of fetuses, both through his rhetorical evocations the human features of the unborn and his presentation of images of aborted fetuses, which tracks Mason's characterization of the right-to-life position. While distancing himself from the aim of a fully egalitarian society, Terry nonetheless emphasizes the political and civil equality of the unborn and that they have an equal claim in collective decision-making and on the protections of the political community. Carol Mason, *Killing for Life: The Apocalyptic Narrative of Pro-Life Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 16-17, 19, 24.

[78] Ibid., 25-26.

[79] Ibid., 22.

[80] Ibid., 183.

murder, *but we do not act like it's murder.* Our cries of 'murder!' go unheard because our actions are so far removed from our rhetoric."[81]

The moral gravity of abortion, Terry claims, is belied by its operation in the world of abstractions. The fetus exists as a figure of speech—an entity alive in discourse alone—and as such does not seize upon the moral sensibilities. In order to ground these ethical claims, then, Terry argues for the public practice of fetal personhood. Operating in the wake of *Roe*, wherein state protection hinged on the status of personhood, Terry sought to establish the fetus as a living being—a person—from conception and thus with natural and human rights that must be recognized and protected.[82] As Terry writes, "Child-killing could never survive the bright light of truth; the vast majority of our nation's people would reject it out of hand and demand its immediate end."[83] In order to make citizens recognize the humanness of the unborn and, concomitantly, the status of abortion as murder, Operation Rescue's actions aimed to make present and visible the fetus. According to Terry, the invisbility of the unborn and their absence as a party or object in political discussions enables a willed disavowal of

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[81] Ibid., 194.

[82] At its foundation, Terry's struggle involves the long contested meaning of the fetus and the unborn in America. Particularly since the late nineteenth century, the question of when a fetus achieves the status of "humanness" has been a point of heated medical, theological, philosophical, and political debate. The paired Supreme Court rulings in *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* both hinged state protection and interest on a determination of viability. In its decision in *Roe,* the Supreme Court held that, at least during the first three months of a pregnancy when the fetus was not viable, women possessed a constitutional right to an abortion and that a fetus was not a "person" protected by the Fourteenth Amendment. In its argument, however, the Court majority acknowledged that if the fetus was recognized as a "person" then the regulation and limitation of abortion by the state would be perfectly legitimate.

My account of the politics of fetal meaning throughout American history is, of course, only cursory; for a fuller treatment, see Sara Dubow, *Ourselves Unborn: A History of the Fetus in Modern America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

The Catholic Church, for instance, has long advanced the position that "ensoulment"—God's endowing of the body with a soul—as occurring at conception. Medical authorities at the end of the nineteenth century recognized human life as beginning with the "quickening," when the fetus began to move in the fourth or fifth month of the pregnancy. The advent of new technologies such as ultrasound and shifts in popular understandings have resulted in numerous competing conceptions of when the status of "personhood" is achieved, including conception, viability of the fetus, first breath, and some marker in the parent-child relationship such as naming. See Dallas A. Blanchard, *The Anti-Abortion Movement and the Rise of the Religious Right: From Polite to Fiery Protest* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994), 16-21; Risen and Thomas, 16-19.

[83] Terry, *Accessories to Murder*, 91.

their existence.[84] He argues, "Because the tiny victims are concealed within the wombs of their mothers, people never hear their silent screams and rarely see their brutalized remains."[85] In order to make present the fetus, Operation Rescue participants held placards with images of aborted fetuses outside clinics and Terry held press conferences in which he presented "Baby Roe," the remains of an aborted fetus, to members of the media.

What is necessary, Terry claims, is for those who believe abortion is the killing of humans to act as such. As performed by Operation Rescue, this entails physical interventions and making every effort to intercede on behalf of the putative human victim. Anti-abortion activists must act as if they are preventing murder—they must, through their actions, demonstrate and enact the personhood of the unborn. These two tactics—making present the fetal body and the enactment of the fetal person—continued to define Terry's strategy even after he left Operation Rescue. Writing in the wake of the 2009 assassination of George Tiller, a physician in Wichita, Kansas who provided late-term abortions, Terry stated:

> Our rhetoric must bear witness to the truth: abortion is murder. Our actions must be equal to this crime: we must continue with vigorous (yet peaceful) actions such as have been used by every social revolution since America's birth… We must continue to show the victims' bodies that we have pulled out of dumpsters; we must not retreat a single inch from showing the decapitated heads of little boys and girls, the arms and legs that were suctioned or carved out of their mothers wombs; we must paint the picture of sewers and landfills being used as unholy graves for these holy victims.[86]

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[84] He frequently comments on the purposeful absence of the unborn—what he terms "avoiding the victim" (*Accessories to Murder*, 202)—in the presentation of the abortion controversy by major media groups. "They don't want the public to see who is being aborted (murdered). As long as they can reduce the child to dehumanized words and hence images (fetus, uterine contents), they can hide the reality" (*Accessories to Murder*, 110).

[85] Terry, *Operation Rescue*, 141.

[86] "Dr. Tiller's Death: Randall Terry Releases Video for Pro-Life Leaders Concerning Dr. Tiller's Killing," *Christian News Wire*, available at: http://www.christiannewswire.com/news/7392310537.html May 31, 2009 (accessed 3 July 2013).

At its extreme, Terry's call for action in line with the conception of abortion as murder has found expression in the bombing of clinics and the killing of doctors who perform abortions (which I will briefly discuss at the end of this section).[87]

The final goal of Operation Rescue involves political agitation. Besides the proximate goal of intervening to save the lives of specific fetuses, rescues would also "produce the social tension necessary to bring about political change."[88] Terry traces the politically productive or generative quality of tension and unsettling of the established social relations throughout American history, with particular attention to the civil rights movement and the theologically grounded philosophy of Martin Luther King Jr. In light of these examples, Terry argues, that it is necessary to bring about an atmosphere of crisis and dis-ease in order to bring due attention and consideration to a social injustice that the majority refuses to acknowledge. "Civil tension and unrest force the authorities to face a controversial issue. This is part of the very core of the American process of self-government."[89] While undoubtedly elevating God as the source of government and political legitimacy, Terry hesitates to defer political judgment entirely to the divine. Indeed, to claim, as some believers might, that civil leaders are only answerable and accountable to God is profoundly problematic for Terry. He explains:

> This is dangerously out of balance. It denies the Biblical principle of representative government. The American people elected officials in our country. It is heartily agreed that elected officials are answerable to God, but they are also answerable to us. Why? Because God has given us a constitutional republic in which to live. The Constitution is the "ruler." It is the law of the land under God's law. Romans 13:1

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[87] For broader accounts of anti-abortion violence, see Dallas A. Blanchard and Terry J. Prewitt, *Religious Violence and Abortion: The Gideon Project* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 1993); Jerry Reiter, *Live from the Gates of Hell: An Insider's Look at the Anti-abortion Underground* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2000); Stephen Singular, *The Wichita Divide: The Murder of Dr. George Tiller and the Battle over Abortion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2011); Patricia Baird-Windle and Eleanor J. Bader, *Targets of Hatred: Anti-Abortion Terrorism* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

[88] Terry, *Operation Rescue*, 27.

[89] Randall A. Terry, *A Humble Plea to Bishops, Clergy, and Laymen: Ending the Abortion Holocaust* (Washington, D.C.: Insurrecta Nex, 2008), 47. See also, Terry, *Operation Rescue*, 195.

should encourage us to be political activists because the higher power God has established in America is a Constitution under which we are part of the government.[90]

Thus, while Terry invokes higher law—specifically, a divine and biblical law—that serves as the foundation and measure of man's law, it is political actors and citizens who must carry out this criticism and perform judgment. With respect to the issue of abortion, Operation Rescue catalyzes a process of political judgment in which citizens are charged with measuring existing practices against their religious and political commitments. As Lawler argues, "Who can say when a cause justifies defiance of the law? Who decides when the time for compromise has ended and the time for battle has begun? The answer to all those questions lie in the hearts of ordinary citizens. If Operation Rescue can pierce through the armor of complacency and convention, pricking the conscience of the American people, then the movement's success is assured."[91]

So understood, rescues are instances of "prophetic action" that not only proclaim an injustice demanding judgment but also propel attention through performance.[92] The national guilt—a blood guilt—of abortion taints every American, Christian or not, and can only be dissolved through the recognition of the personhood of the unborn and a corresponding change in social policy.[93] Looking to divine punishments of whole tribes and cities in the Old Testament, Terry claims that a similar generalized culpability awaits the United States:

> We must not be deceived, and we must not compromise. Abortion is nothing less than murdering babies. Because nearly five thousand children *per day* are being killed in America, our country is bearing the guilt of innocent babies… Besides the guilt borne by those who shed blood, a bloodguiltiness is imputed to entire nations where innocent blood is shed *and unavenged.*[94]

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[90] Terry, *Accessories to Murder,* 189.

[91] Lawler, 136.

[92] Terry repeatedly makes the distinction between mere preaching and "prophetic action," and chastises most contemporary Christians for believing the former effective enough to forgo the latter. See, e.g., Terry, *Why Does A Nice Guy…,* 24, 61.

[93] See Lawler, 66.

[94] Terry, *Operation Rescue*, 142. See also Randall A. Terry, *The Judgment of God* (Windsor, New York: The Reformer Library, 1995), 126.

As with Brown, Terry returns again and again to the language of blood. Terry firmly believes that divine judgment is coming and will inevitably arrive regardless of what the nation does in the future. What remains to be decided, however, is the severity and duration of this judgment, which, he claims, "will, in part, be determined by our prayers, repentance, and ensuring actions."[95] In this way he relocates the act of judgment from God to members of the political community—citizens will be the ones who either acknowledge or continue to deny the injustice in which they are complicit.

Despite their uncompromising language and aggressive techniques, Terry and Operation Rescue never engaged directly in violent action such as clinic bombings or murder. In a *Washington Post* article, Terry explained he advocated against violent action not because of any ethical or normative consideration but rather because it was strategically ineffective. He remarked, "I believe in the use of force…I think to destroy abortion facilities at this time is counterproductive because the American public has an adverse reaction to what it sees as violence."[96] Yet even as Terry hesitates from using violence out of tactical considerations, other antiabortion activists, similarly invoking Christian religious elements, have made use of violence against medical professionals and facilities providing abortions. Before returning to the larger theoretical question of religious fanaticism, then, I turn briefly to one such performer of anti-abortion violence: Paul Hill.

The logic of intervening in order to prevent a potential crime—in this case, murder—manifests in the use of the "necessity defense" by anti-abortion activists who either destroy clinic equipment or use violence against those who participate in abortion proce-

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[95] Terry, *Accessories to Murder*, 251. Hill would later seize upon this notion of "blood guiltiness," writing in a letter, "Our tiny planet is saturated with the blood of the innocent. The blood guilt that hangs over our head is unspeakably staggering. Yet few seem to notice and fewer still take a stand." Quoted in Risen and Thomas, 362.

[96] Quoted in Howard Kurtz, "Operation Rescue: Aggressively Anti-abortion," *Washington Post*, 6 March 1989, A3.

dures.[97] While largely unsuccessful as a legal defense, this position is articulated in the "Defensive Action Statement," which was first composed in 1993 by antiabortion activist Paul Hill in response to the murder of Dr. David Gunn by Michael Griffin and periodically re-released with subsequent killings of abortion providers:

> We, the undersigned, declare the justice of taking all godly action necessary to defend innocent human life including the use of force. We proclaim that whatever force is legitimate to defend the life of a born child is legitimate to defend the life of an unborn child. We assert that if Michael Griffin did in fact kill David Gunn, his use of lethal force was justifiable provided it was carried out for the purpose of defending the lives of unborn children. Therefore, he ought to be acquitted of the charges against him.[98]

Twenty-eight other individuals signed Hill's document. The logic of the "Defensive Action Statement" traces Terry's logic to its extreme consequence. That is, if the unborn are for all moral purposes persons and it is necessary, both religiously and politically, to act as such, then there attaches to every citizen a duty to intervene and even to kill to save that life.

A year after he circulated the "Defensive Action Statement," Hill killed Dr. John Britton and his bodyguard, James Barrett, in Pensacola, Florida. Though he was barred from entering an affirmative defense in his trial, Hill circulated a similarly minded manifesto on the website of Army of God, a Christian anti-abortion organization that explicitly sanctions the use of violence. Hill's manifesto, *Mix My Blood with the Blood of the Unborn*, tracks the familiar logic of Terry's call to rescue. Hill writes:

> Abortion remains legal, in part, because Christians and pro-life advocates have not harnessed the horse to the cart. The moral obligation to defend the unborn with the means necessary should be the force that pulls the pro-life movement along. This compelling duty should provide both the logical ground and the moral impetus for all anti-abortion activities, including direct intervention, as well as educational and legislative efforts.[99]

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[97] See Lawler, 116.

[98] Paul J. Hill, "Defensive Action Statement," *Army of God*, accessed June 12, 2013, http://www.armyofgod.com/defense.html.

[99] Paul J. Hill, "Mix My Blood with the Blood of the Unborn," *Army of God*, accessed June 14, 2013, http://www.armyofgod.com/PHillBookForward.html.

A robust Christianity, Hill claims, demands more than mere professions of faith; faith must

be manifest in and through action. Faith is something that must be inhabited and performed,

or else it is nothing. The Christian faith invoked by Hill centers on the "Moral Law" of God,

which enjoins all practitioners to protect the innocent. This divine command—or "moral

impetus"—is absolute and inviolable, regardless of any countervailing laws established by the

state or the common sense and consensus of the community. Strains of Christianity that ac-

commodate state law and do not demand positive action to protect the unborn, Hill claims,

are "corrupt…tasteless and lukewarm—fit for nothing but to be spewed out and washed

down the drain."[100]

By contrast, the "strength and beauty" of Christianity, properly understood, is found

in its resolute performance—its uncompromised enactment—both in the bearing witness to

truth (and sin) and the willing violation of unjust laws. Hill describes the potential political

power of his zealotry as follows:

> I realized that many important things would be accomplished by my shooting an-
> other abortionist in Pensacola. This would put the pro-life rhetoric about defending
> born and unborn children equally into practice. It would bear witness to the full hu-
> manity of the unborn as few things could. It would also open people's eyes to the
> enormous consequences of abortion—not only for the unborn, but also for the gov-
> ernment that had sanctioned it, and those required to resist it. This would convict
> millions of their past neglect, and also spur many to future obedience. It would also
> help people to decide whether to join the battle on the side of those defending abor-
> tionists, or the side of those defending the unborn.[101]

In this short passage Hill makes his case for both the ethical and political value of engaging

in violent action. Though much of his manifesto details the biblical foundation for claiming

abortion as murder, disobeying unjust laws, and killing in the name of protecting the inno-

cence, Hill here explicates the intertwining of his religio-ethical practice with a political pur-

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[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.

pose and dovetails with the arguments of Terry. Specifically, Hill stresses the imperative to translate the principles of Christian piety into practice. The logic of such a practice is simultaneously ethical and political. For not only does it satisfy the religious commitments of the individual actor but, in its realization of piety, the performance engenders among fellow Christian subjects a moral perception of the unborn that is otherwise impossible. Hill readily recognizes that some will view his actions as repugnant, yet he reads such a recoiling as generative in so far as it organizes the field of social conflict in a way that polarizes the issue and compels an acute struggle over abortion.

While differing in their approaches, both Terry and Hill offer an account of uncompromising public action emanating from a religious duty. The performance realizes the motivating religious commitment and, importantly, radiates outward to call forth or activate the faith of those bearing witness and fracture the social field along an oppositional logic.

## § 4. Reimagining Religious Zealotry in America

I take Brown and Terry (as well as anti-abortion activists such as Hill who turned to violence in the wake of Operation Rescue) as performing what I refer to as religious fanaticism. Having examined the actions and words of Brown and Terry, I want to return, equipped with these interpretations, to the conceptualization of religious fanaticism and the theorization of its place in a democratic order. To re-establish the standing questions: What is religious zealotry? What work is religion doing here? And how can these practices of religious fanaticism be understood as relating to democracy as a social and cultural order?

It is necessary to first recognize the significant differences between Brown and Terry. As I have mentioned, Brown's fanatical efforts were directed at ushering in an unprecedented interracial community, while Terry twined his religious zealotry to a project of Christian reclamation over and against what he perceives to be the undermining effects of secular

modernity. Between the two religious actors there is not only a sharp distinction in their projects but also, undergirding that, a shift in the social place and power of Christianity. Brown's abolitionist efforts were embedded in a public sphere stamped by the potent evangelical Christian sensibilities of the Second Great Awakening.[102] By contrast, it is precisely a sense of the retreat of Protestant Christianity from socio-political life—and the concomitant loss of a common Christian sensibility—that motivates Terry's anti-abortion activities.

In parsing this difference between Brown and Terry it is helpful to introduce a distinction between two concepts that are frequently lumped together under the broad umbrella of so-called "strong religion": religious fundamentalist and religious fanaticism.[103] Per religious studies scholar Martin Riesebrodt's formulation, fundamentalism can be understood as a reactionary social-political movement motivated by a sense of crisis regarding "society's desertion of eternally valid, divinely revealed, and textually literal received principles of order, which had once been realized in an ideal community—the 'Golden Age' of original Christian, Islamic, or other communities."[104] Religious fundamentalism, per Riesebrodt's defini-

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[102] Cf. John D. Carlson and Joanthan H. Ebel, "John Brown, Jeremiad, and Jihad," in *From Jeremiad to Jihad: Religion, Violence, & America*, edited by John D. Carlson and Jonathan H. Ebel (Berkley: University of California Press, 2012). Specifically, Carlson and Ebel describe John Brown as challenging "the premises of secular or religiously minimalist societies" (7). To make such a characterization, however, requires a necessary abstraction of Brown from his evangelical—or, to use Bruce Lincoln's terminology—religiously maximalist historical moment. Understood within the context of his place and time, Brown can be more clearly seen to not as drawing on a common reservoir of references, rhetorics, and practices rather than challenging any operative secular premise of the public sphere.

    To be clear, Lincoln advances a distinction between two ideal types: maximalists hold "the conviction that religion ought to permeate all aspects of social, indeed of human existence" while minimalists "restrict religion to an important set of (chiefly metaphysical) concerns, protect its privileges against state intrusion, but restrict its activities and influence to this specialized sphere." Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking About Religion after September 11* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 5.

[103] Habermas, for instance, implicitly runs the concepts together in discussing terrorism in the twenty-first century. He says, "No doubt today's Islamic fundamentalism is also a cover for political motifs. Indeed, we should not overlook the political motifs we encounter in forms of religious fanaticism." Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 33.

[104] See Martin Riesebrodt, *Pious Passion: The Emergence of Modern Fundamentalism in the United States and Iran*, translated by Don Reneau (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 16. See also Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God,* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001); and Bruce B. Lawrence, *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt against the Modern Age* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1995). Cf. Mark Juergensmeyer, *The*

tion, describes a particular conservative or reactionary program aimed at preserving and expanding traditional forms of religion—frequently literalist in their biblical hermeneutics and patriarchal in power structure—against processes of social transformation and the increasing marginalization of a formerly hegemonic mode of social arrangements. Put more concisely, fundamentalism is a religio-political project that brings together elements of anti-modernism and religious nationalism.

To return to the cases at hand: the aims of Terry, as well his fellow Christian Reconstructionists, are overtly fundamentalist. They explicitly seek a restoration of the hegemonic status of Christianity and the defeat of the forces—feminism, secular humanism, multiculturalism, etc.—that they identify as complicit in the overthrow of the nation's traditional sacred canopy. Brown, by contrast, is not oriented towards any sort of religious restoration. Indeed, his actions agitate for a radical innovation, namely, the end of slavery and institution of racial equality. Yet if Terry is a fundamentalist and Brown is not—if they are, in other words, distinct in terms of the context and content of their claims—what then unites them as religious fanatics?

Religious fanaticism consists of a particular mode of political resistance with and through religious materials. More precisely put, the concept of religious zealotry refers to *an excessive and exacting enactment of faith*—a way of being pious and penitent in the public sphere that purposefully eschews and subverts the operative norms of political discourse. Such enactments of faith are excessive in that they exceed what is considered acceptable and proper in a given place and time; they dramatically violate operative standards of public action. They are exacting (or demanding) not only in the sense of requiring effort and sacrifice by the per-

*New Cold War?: Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State, Comparative Studies in Religion and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God : The Global Rise of Religious Violence,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); and Kenneth D. Wald, *Religion and Politics in the United States,* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 297.

former but also in that they capture and challenge the attention of its audience. This duality tracks zealotry's simultaneous status as, first, a religio-ethical practice undertaken by the actor for the purposes of fulfilling certain religious commitments and, second, an aesthetic-political action intended to engender a transformation in one's fellow citizens and, ultimately, the social-structural level of American society.

As evidenced by Brown and Terry, their religious traditions endowed them with what can be thought of as *an uncommon sense*. Following Gramsci's understanding, common sense is the subterranean foundation—the taken-for-granted arrangement of assumptions, habits, and sensibilities—for the play of interests, claims, and disagreements in a given society. Such an arrangement organizes and delimits politics by pre-determining who and what can speak (and be spoken about), the acceptability of premises and logics, and the appropriate modes and manners of interaction. In their distinctive ways, Brown and Terry both break with the operative common senses of their times, both in terms of their values and the manner in which they claim these values in the public square. Furthermore, the disjuncture between each man and his society traces back to a religious source. Brown and Terry position themselves as agents of higher law derived from the Christian tradition, whether it is the divine principle of equality or the biblical duty of protecting the innocent, against a putatively unjust arrangement of social institutions and practices. These articles of faith are the propositional manifestations of a broader and deeper conception of the world structured by Christian meanings and commitments.

Brown and Terry both understand ethical comportment and practice as dependent upon a proper aesthetic orientation. Aesthetics, as established in previous chapters, marks the sensuous perception, experience, and interpretation of the world. The implicit premise of Brown's and Terry's fanatical performances is that the configuration of what is sensed and

felt conditions the moral imagination and the gravity of ethical commitments. Their indict-ments of hegemonic political discourse and the formal institutions of governance both cen-ter on what they identify as a moral and aesthetic paucity. According to Brown and Terry, slavery and abortion exist as recognized sites of contestation and disagreement but only at a level of bloodless abstraction. This process of abstraction manifests most strikingly in the rendering of these questions into judicial questions, but Brown and Terry are equally dismis-sive of political discourse and party politics more generally insofar as such institutions are seen as compromised and removed from the moral-aesthetic dimension involved. The sen-suous subjects that each man understands to be at the heart of these debates—the slave and the unborn—are put under aesthetic erasure. As a consequence, the process of identification and empathy that they perceive to be the starting point for social change is circumvented.

With a mind towards reorienting the sensuous attentions of their audience and, in so doing, cultivating the conditions for structural transformation, Brown and Terry perform conspicuous enactments of their faith. Faith, they insist, must be inhabited and performed to not only be real for the practitioner but also place a real pull on those who claim to believe yet do not act as such. Brown and Terry begin from the premises that blacks and the un-born, respectively, are human beings due not only sensuous recognition but also political standing and moral consideration.[105] Through their performances, they each stage a dramatic public conflict between two ways of political life—distinct ways of thinking, acting, and liv-ing together in the world—compelling their audience to align themselves in response to their

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[105] "Authority," Shulman argues, "names not a truth we must justify but a commitment we must own and en-act. For it is only by living out a god or first principle, a truth or table of values, that we 'test' its authority, both its capacity to elicit the assent of others and its generativity in life." Shulman, *American Prophecy*, 245. See also George Shulman, "Thinking Authority Democratically: Prophetic Practices, White Supremacy, and Democratic Politics," *Political Theory* 36 (2008): 708-734. Linda Zerilli's recent work has also examined the possibility of, as she says, "speaking truth politically" (as opposed to philosophically). Her conclusion is appropriately ambiva-lent: "Democratic politics *can* be endangered by comprehensive truth claims, but also enabled—there is no guarantee, one way or the other." Linda M.G. Zerilli, "Value Pluralism and the Problem of Judgment: Farewell to Public Reason," *Political Theory* 40:1 (2012), 15.

proffered values. Following W.E.B. DuBois, it might be said that Brown (as well as Terry) "did not use argument. He was himself an argument."[106] They declare in their words and deeds, as Kimberley Curtis puts it, "Here *I* am in relation to our world. I offer you an invitation, a solicitation. Join me. I provoke you. I demand of you that you countenance me as I see our world. Respond."[107]

Understood in this way, religious zealotry is an ever-present possibility and cannot be excised from the practice of American democratic politics. A democratic order necessarily rests on a foundation of past settlements regarding, among other questions, institutional structures, the process of disagreement, makeup of the demos, and so on. As Bonnie Honig and other theorists have point out, any distribution of power or system of legal order inevitably engenders a set of remainders, those resistances and exclusions that are typically unacknowledged, depoliticized, privatized, and naturalized.[108] That which exceeds (or falls out of) the established modes of disagreement and conflict will necessarily invite excessive acts in order to compel its recognition as a fully rendered object of contestation. When coupled with, on the one hand, the culture of engaged citizenship and participation that a democratic order encourages and demands and, on the other, the fact that the United States is, as Walt Whitman says, a "religious Democracy" where Christianity (and increasingly other religious

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[106] W.E.B. DuBois, *John Brown: A Biography,* 173. This squares with Jane Addams' hagiographical portrait of Leo Tolstoy and how he inspired others through his "sermon of the deed." Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1912), 157. Echoes of this position can also be found in Simon Critchley's reading of Oscar Wilde's notion of Jesus Christ as an "artistic exemplar." According to Wilde, Christ is simultaneously artist and work of art who transfigures and gives outward form to inward suffering. Quoting Wilde: "[Christ] is just like a work of art. He does not really teach one anything, but by being brought into his presence one becomes something." Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012), 6.

[107] Kimberley F. Curtis, *Our Sense of the Real: Aesthetic Experience and Arendtian Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 120. See also Kimberley F. Curtis, "Aesthetic Foundations of Democratic Politics in the Work of Hannah Arendt," in *Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics*, edited by Craig Calhoun and John McGowan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 27-52.

[108] Honig, especially Chapter Five.

traditions) are part and parcel of how citizens make meaning and claims, religious fanaticism remains a ready prospect.

## Conclusion

Speaking of John Brown shortly after his execution, abolitionist Wendell Phillips remarked, "Wait awhile, and you'll all agree with me. What is fanaticism today is the fashionable creed tomorrow, and trite as the multiplication table a week after."[109] Writing a half century after Brown's failed raid on Harpers Ferry, DuBois came to the same conclusion, writing, "Today at last we know: John Brown was right."[110] Yet even if the moral claim of racial equality staked out by Brown has since been vindicated, his religious fanaticism remains a point of contention, particularly when it is brought into the company of other so-called religious zealots. For instance, historian David Blight inquires, "Can John Brown remain an authentic American hero in an age of Timothy McVeigh, Usama bin Laden, and the bombers of abortion clinics?"[111]

By bringing together Brown and Terry (as well as Hill), I have pursued an altogether different question from the explicitly normative evaluative one posed by Blight. Mine is not a project of categorically redeeming fanatics or sifting out "good" fanatics from "bad" (whatever those adjectives would mean in this context). Instead, this chapter has articulated religious fanaticism as a mode of claims making that is capable of being used for multiple political projects. Brown and Terry model both the productive and troubling dimensions of religious fanaticism. As a mode of political contestation, these religious fanatics seek to unsettle the terms of speech, thought, and practice. Through these excessive enactments of faith,

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[109] Phillips, 287.
[110] W.E.B. DuBois, *John Brown* (New York: International, 1987).
[111] David W. Blight, "John Brown: Triumphant Failure," *American Prospect*, November 20, 2002. Accessed at: http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=john_brown_triumphant_failure. Quoted in *From Jeremiad to Jihad*, 22.

Brown and Terry understood themselves to be disrupting the existing economy of sentiments and perceptions in American society and, in turn, creating the conditions for moral and political reformation.

There are real dangers and risks to the practice of fanaticism that should never fall out of view. There is a troubling tension between religious fanaticism and what some may identify as the deliberative or intersubjective norms required for democratic life, and I do not want to dismiss or resolve this tension. Indeed, it is this very tension—the dramatic confrontation with and unsettling of the existing grammar of feeling, thought, and practice—that zealots leverage in order to draw attention to what they see as the limits and partialities of how we think, speak, and live in a democratic community.

CHAPTER THREE:

"THE TONGUES OF FIRE":
RELIGIOUS FAITH, AESTHETIC PRACTICES, AND THE CONSTRUCTION
OF THE SOCIAL GOSPEL COUNTER-CULTUS

> "The tongues of fire will descend on twentieth century
> men and give them great faith, joy and boldness, and then
> we shall hear the new evangel, and it will be the Old Gospel."
>
> — Walter Rauschenbusch,
> "The New Evangelism"[1]

> "Democracy like any other of the living faiths of men, is so
> essentially mystical that it continually demands new formulation."
>
> — Jane Addams,
> *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets*[2]

In the generations since its dissipation as an active religious force, the Social Gospel

has been primarily understood through the critical-analytical lens provided by one man:

Christian theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. Although he came of age during the ascendency of

the Social Gospel, Niebuhr eventually became one of the movement's most forceful critics,

charging that the effort suffered from an essential optimism in human nature and social pro-

gress that, in turn, dulled its capacity for political action. Proponents of social change, Nie-

buhr insists, must be willing to get their hands dirty if they seek to affect reform and trans-

formation. The problem with contributors to the Social Gospel, then, was that they failed to

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[1] Walter Rauschenbusch, "The New Evangelism," *The Independent* 56 (May 12, 1904): 1058.
[2] Jane Addams, *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1920), 146

recognize that the "establishment of justice always involves a certain degree of pressure, of claims and counterclaims, of pushing and shoving."[3] Writing elsewhere, Niebuhr states,

> [The Social Gospel] was wrong in the optimism which assumed that the law of love needed only to be stated persuasively to overcome the selfishness of the human heart. The unhappy consequences of that optimism was to discourage interest in the necessary mechanisms of social justice at the precise moment in history when the development of a technical civilization required more than ever that social ideals be implemented with economic and political techniques, designed to correct the injustices and brutalities which flow inevitably from an unrestrained and undisciplined exercise of economic power.[4]

Niebuhr opposes the Social Gospel to his own theological approach, which he calls "Christian realism" and which emphasizes the persistence of sin and the necessity of coercive force for establishing social justice. "The law of love," which Niebuhr takes to be the central ideological strut of the Social Gospel, can compel at the level of the individual but such an approach to social-structural dilemmas betrays an impoverished understanding of both Christian theology and political struggle.

There is merit to Niebuhr's agonistic characterization of political action and transformation. Challenges to the established system of social arrangements must inevitably confront the countervailing force of the beneficiaries and stakeholders in that social order; there will necessarily be struggle and conflict in multiple venues, including that of organized politics, law, and culture, with any attempt at social or political change. Resisting the dismissive force of Niebuhr's critique, however, Cornel West argues for a more pragmatic and worldly interpretation of the Social Gospel, writing that Walter Rauschenbusch, one of its principal intellectual forces, "believed that the riches of the Christian tradition can be brought to bear on the social misery, spiritual vacuity, and political hypocrisy of our day—and that our very

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[3] Reinhold Niebuhr, "When Will Christians Stop Fooling Themselves?," in *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr*, edited by D.B. Robertson (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 41.

[4] Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1935), 171. See also Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Scribner's, 1932).

future depends on this precious yet fallible effort."[5] Even if we recognize the public sphere as a place of "claims and counterclaims, of pushing and shoving," West suggests, the Social Gospel demonstrates that religious traditions have a value and place in the skirmishes that make up democratic life.

But what are these "riches of the Christian tradition," and what do they ultimately contribute to collective efforts like the Social Gospel? How are religious traditions such as American Christianity involved in the profound changes of thought, feeling, and imagination necessary for the transformation of politics and political identifies? Moreover, given this dissertation's overarching concern for the lived experience of religion, what roles do religious aesthetics and practices play in the mobilizing communities of conviction and action such as the Social Gospel?

In order to address these questions and conceptualize the relationship of politics, aesthetics, and faith, this chapter examines the Social Gospel public of the 1890s and early 1900s and the political work done by its repertoire of aesthetics and practices.[6] Such an

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[5] Cornel West, "Can These Dry Bones Live?," in *Christianity and the Social Crisis in the 21st Century*, edited by Paul Rauschenbusch (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2007), [page number]. It must be said that Niebuhr's characterization of the Social Gospel as politically naïve requires some selective reading of Rauschenbusch and his cohort of thinkers and activists. In *Christianizing the Social Order*, for instance, Rauschenbusch is clear that "intellectual persuasion and moral conviction…would never by themselves overcome the resistance of selfishness and conservatism" (368). Elsewhere in that same text he writes, "Moral suasion is strangely feeble where the sources of a man's income are concerned" (31).

[6] A preliminary note on terminology is in order.

First, as established in previous chapters, I use the term aesthetics along the meaning of the ancient Greek concept of *aisthesis*. Put differently, I mean to capture the intermeshing of sensation and perception with ways of processing and making sense and meaning of the world.

Throughout this chapter I use the terms the "Social Gospel" and the "Social Gospel public" interchangeably. I specifically avoid the language of the "Social Gospel Movement" since it connotes a quality of coordination and organized collective action that is not in evidence in this particular case (as I discuss in Section 1 of this chapter). Even as it is frequently referred to in the singular as *a* movement or *a* coordinated coalition, the Social Gospel more precisely consisted of a variegated array of actors and organizations with disparate prescriptive programs that ranged from progressive reform of social structures to conservative systems of private charity. Given this fact, it may be more appropriate to speak of the Social Gospel as a religious public rather than a movement or coalition in as much as this phrasing better captures the diffuse and heterogeneous mix of groups and individuals that have particular intellectual, theological, and practical affinities. I discuss the concept of publics and religious publics at length in Section Four of the chapter.

analysis not only challenges Niebuhr's disparaging characterization of the Social Gospel as socially utopian and politically misguided but also facilitates a richer understanding of the mutual cultivation of religious faith and a religious public. Rather than holding to the precept that "the law of love needed only to be stated persuasively" in order to engender social transformation, the Social Gospel demonstrates an understanding that "the necessary mechanisms of social justice" involve the cultivation and configuration of faith and/as action. I argue that the Social Gospel crafted religious subjectivities disposed towards worldly activity and social justices with and through its body of aesthetic formations. These aesthetic formations, as well as the public activity of Social Gospel figures in the Progressive Party, labor unions, and settlement movement, composed a counter-public that attempted to dislodge the liberal-individualist hegemony ascendant at the turn of the century. In developing this argument I elaborate on two key conceptualizations introduced in earlier chapters: first, the repertoire of pious forms and actions within a religious tradition, which I refer to as a cultus, and second, religious faith as the union of an orientation to the world and an attendant comportment or mode of action.

My analysis proceeds by interweaving a theoretical account of religious aesthetics with a historically grounded analysis of the Social Gospel. I begin by first providing a short historical and ideological sketch of the Social Gospel. Besides fleshing out the context and content of this particular religious public through the works of theologian Walter Rauschenbusch, I use this sketch as a springboard to revisit and refine my account of religious faith and aesthetics. Rather than assuming an "expressive" account of religious aesthetics, wherein

The Social Gospel offers a fruitful site for such an analysis because of its decentralized architecture; given its formal detachment from the extant structures of religious authority and institutions, the Social Gospel operates as an insurgent religious public primarily constituted in and through a diffuse circulation of media and mediating practices. Though the Social Gospel reached its zenith at the turn of the twentieth century—and thus well before the ascendency of so-called new media—I take it up as a revealing (and curiously neglected, at least in the field of political theory) case study that can provide conceptual tools adaptable to the study of other religious publics.

liturgical practices and forms are imagined as passive vehicles for some preexisting religious content, I present an account of how religious traditions are dynamic technologies that help give shape to emergent political subjects and communities. Through a critical engagement with Charles Clayton Morrison, I develop a theoretical account of the cultus and briefly survey materials within the counter-cultus of the Social Gospel. I close my discussion by drawing out how this cultic configuration contributes to the formation of the Social Gospel counter-public through its cultivation of a disposition towards practical, public action such as that exemplified by the socio-political activity of Hull House co-founder Jane Addams.

### § 1. A Practical Guide to
### Immanentizing the Eschaton

The closing decades of the nineteenth century were, as historian Arthur Schlesinger, Sr. described, "a critical period in American religion."[7] During this time period, strains of Christianity in the United States confronted the myriad problems associated with the emergence of modernity, most especially the acute social dislocations and perturbations caused by the advancing forces of industrialization and urbanization. These economic and sociological developments, which had begun in earnest in the 1850's, ushered in a new constellation of conflicts and dilemmas, including a precipitous increase in class antagonism and poverty. Walter Rauschenbusch, a Baptist minister and perhaps the best-known theologian affiliated with the Social Gospel, described these issues as follows:

> We have the incredible paradox of modern life. The instrument by which all humanity could rise from want and fear of want actually submerged a large part of the people in perpetual want and fear. When wealth was multiplying beyond all human precedent, an immense body of pauperism with all its allied misery was growing up

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[7] Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr., *A Critical Period in American Religion 1875-1900* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967). Fellow historian Richard Hofstatder echoes this characterization of the monumental character of the period, calling it "a phase in the history of the Protestant conscience, a latter-day Protestant revival." Richard Hofstatder, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Knopf, 1955), 152. For a general account of how Protestant institutions responded to the particular shocks and pressures of this time period, see Henry F. May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949).

and becoming chronic… [W]hile the nation was attaining unparalleled wealth and power, many of its people were horribly destitute and degraded.[8]

With the rise of corporations, the capitalist class (especially the so-called "robber barons"), and organized labor unions, a number of Protestants including Rauschenbusch came to feel that Christian institutions had lost traction with the this-worldly issues of the day and risked alienating the sizable bulk of working class parishioners.[9] The sting of the resulting critique was remarkably broad, finding fault with the institutional order of American society. While the structures of capitalism were identified as exploitative, dehumanizing, and impoverishing, the various levels of government were seen as morally compromised by the pull of self-interest and capital. Given the apparent complicity of religious authorities with an unjust economic order and a system of government that was only nominally democratic, contributors to the Social Gospel argued for the need to re-make and revivify the Christian tradition.

Although they were united by a shared sense of catastrophe, the particular manner by which members of the Social Gospel conceptualized the present crisis and the solutions they proposed varied sharply. The heterogeneity of these networks and the lack of any centralized institution or coordinating authority allowed for a spectrum of political stances ranging from a revival of Victorian social values to more radical arguments for Christian-socialist remedies.[10] As numerous scholars have argued, American Christianity's confrontation with the transformative effects of modernity at this time set the stage for the division of American Christianity into overtly liberal-progressive and conservative-fundamentalist partisan camps that persist into the twenty-first century. This historical moment figures prominently

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[8] Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: Macmillan, 1907), 217-18.

[9] See Robert T. Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities*, second edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Charles A. Briggs, "The Alienation of Church and People," *Forum* XVI (1893): 366-78; Arthur T. Pierson, "Christian Cooperation and the Social Mission of the Church," *Missionary Review of the World* XVII (1894): 163-65; James O. Fagan, "The Cheapening of Religion," *The Atlantic* CVI (1910): 455.

[10] Ronald C. White, Jr. and C. Howard Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976), xviii; and C. Howard Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), 319.

in the historical narrative of American religious and partisan development referred to as "the two-party thesis." As popularized by historian Martin E. Marty, this theory posits a vision of "two-party Protestantism" that features a split between a public or progressive Protestantism, which is oriented towards social reform, and a private or pietistic Protestantism that is more concerned with individual salvation. [11] The majority of the members of the Social Gospel, however, were moderately progressive in their political agenda, arguing that structural reforms rather than fundamental revolutionary transformations were necessary to alleviate the conditions wrought by industrial capitalism while accommodating the continued existence of the capitalist system into the foreseeable future. Thus, the most common suggestions for practical transformation included extending the efforts of the church and the state to provide welfare services for the poor and destitute, regulating labor conditions and curbing the excesses and vicissitudes of industrial capitalism, reorienting religious institutions and theology to the felt needs and anxieties of parishioners, and the regulation, even criminalization, of morally problematic or repellant practices such as prostitution, child labor, and alcoholism. [12]

Of course, since the Social Gospel is, as H. Richard Niebuhr (Reinhold's brother) says, a "multifarious thing," my aim here are not to attempt any comprehensive account of it. [13] Rather I want to use the theological writings of Rauschenbusch (as well as other affili-

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[11] Martin E. Marty, *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977). See also Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) for a similar historical account. For attempts to locate this shift into realignment theories of American political development, see Richard J. Jensen, *The Winning of the Midwest: Social and Political Conflict, 1888-1896* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); and Paul Kleppner, *Who Voted? The Dynamics of Electoral Turnouts, 1870-1980* (New York: Praeger, 1982).

[12] Robin W. Lovin, *Religion and American Public Life: Interpretations and Explorations* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 7-28; and James A. Morone, *Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 348.

[13] F. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937), 183. He elaborates this further in another work, writing, "There is a vast difference between the social gospels, let us say, of Rauschenbusch and Peabody, an even greater difference between Shailer Mathews and Harry Ward." H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Social Gospel and the Mind of Jesus," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 16 (1988): 115.

ated thinkers) in order to highlight one—arguably, the—dominant ideological thread in the broader fabric of the Social Gospel. From that account of Rauschenbusch's progressive formulation of social Christianity, begin to develop a theoretical framework that attends to the constitutive aesthetic dimensions of the Social Gospel and religious publics in general.

According to Rauschenbusch, the variegated activities and efforts of the Social Gospel—which included activity in the settlement movement, charitable service, and advocacy for social justice—were directed towards what he refers to as the Christianization of the social order. In his articulation of this objective, Rauschenbusch was at pains to clarify that it does not involve "putting the name of Christ into the Constitution of the United States" or "making Christian belief and worship a compulsory duty of citizenship."[14] It is not, in short, a matter of establishing a Christian theocracy in the United States wherein the institutions of church and state are fused together. Shailer Mathews, another prominent figure in the Social Gospel, characterized this mission to Christianize American society as "the application of the teaching of Jesus and the total message of the Christian salvation to society, the economic life, and social institutions such as the state [and] the family, as well as individuals."[15] The moral principles extolled and performed by Jesus Christ thus stand not only as the aspirational measure of individual behavior but also social, political, and economic arrangements.

The Christocentric account offered by proponents of the Social Gospel such as Rauschenbusch and Mathews accomplishes this shift in focus from the individual to the level of social structures by de-centering the figure of Christ as a martyr suffering for salvation and instead emphasizing that of the social reformer and political revolutionary. The Christ of the Social Gospel is remarkable in that he sought to dismantle existing systems of

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[14] Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2010), 124.
[15] Shailer Mathews, "Social Gospel," in *A Dictionary of Religion and Ethics*, edited by Shailer Mathews and G.B. Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1921), 416-17; quoted in Edwards and Gifford, "Introduction," 2.

power and erect in their place "a new spirit plus new forms and customs and institutions." Rauschenbusch depicts Christ in terms strikingly similar to that of Gramsci's organic intellectual disrupting the hegemonic order. Rauschenbusch writes, "Such a reversal of values presupposes sweeping changes in the general conceptions and judgments prevalent in human society, and necessarily also in the social and political institutions in which these conceptions and judgments find their embodiment."[16] To act as Christ would—that is, to be a Christian in a fully realized sense—demands more than a modulation of individual morality and behavior; the Christian subject must necessarily be socially engaged and politically active, for it is only through collective action that the community can be remade and rendered just.

The Christianization of the polity would simultaneously achieve the end of social salvation, the elimination of structural sin, and the materialization of the Kingdom of God. As distinct from the conventional imagining of the Kingdom of God as located in an otherworldly or transcendent realm, Rauschenbusch re-defines the Kingdom of God as a mode of social being that is at least partially realizable on earth. While this is unusual in itself, the Social Gospel's Kingdom is curious in two other respects. In the first place it is not, properly speaking, a Kingdom; for while the Christian God figures as a nominal monarch, the Kingdom is radically democratized. Indeed, Rauschenbusch declares, "We must democratize the conception of God" so that the Christian imaginary is not captured by the framework of "despotic governments."[17] The first duty of Christian subjects is not to "bow to the royal will" but exercise an ethic of care and recognition that embraces all one's fellow beings. According to Rauschenbusch, democracy must be the measure and model for all institutions,

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[16] Walter Rauschenbusch, "The Righteousness of the Kingdom," in White and Hopkins, 41.

[17] Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), 48. Shailer Mathews speaks similarly of the need for a "religion for democracy" that democratizes God. He writes, "Our inherited orthodoxy, shaped up as it was under the influence of political practices and theories of empire and monarchy is already with difficulty appreciated and understood by men…of democratic ideals." Quoted in Susan Curtis, *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1991), 131.

including those in the domains of the economy and religion. Second, and related to this first aspect, unlike the messianic narrative that casts the coming of the Kingdom as a matter of "divine catastrophe" that involves the abrupt and direct intercession of God into the temporal world, Rauschenbusch's vision of the Kingdom is resolutely organic and the product of collective action. It arises not from the singular will of a divine sovereign but must be the product of a joint effort of humanity and God. In developing this notion, Rauschenbusch relies on his account of Jesus Christ as political actor:

> While [Jews under Roman rule] were waiting for the Messianic cataclysm that would bring the kingdom of God ready-made from heaven, [Jesus] saw it growing up among them. He took his illustrations of its coming from organic life. It was like the seed scattered by the peasant, growing slowly and silently, night and day, by its own germinating force and the food furnished by the earth… He was seeking to displace the crude and misleading catastrophic conceptions by a saner theory about the coming of the kingdom.[18]

The "saner theory" of the Kingdom of God that Rauschenbusch draws from his reading of Christ moves from the model of the eschaton, or final movement of human history, as an exogenous action done *to* society to an endogenous process that arises—percolates—out of political action and democratic struggle *within* society. It is not so much a matter of an immanentizing rupture that brings about the eschaton, as the messianic imagination would have it, but an asymptotic progression that builds gradually towards a goal that it can perpetually move closer to yet never reach. The Kingdom of God on earth is always a Kingdom to come, since human structures and actions will always fall short of the aspirational ideal of justice and equality. "We ask for no Utopian delusion," Rauschenbusch writes. "We know well that there is no perfection for man in this life: there is only growth toward perfection."[19]

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[18] Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis,* 59.

[19] Ibid., 420. Earlier in this same text, Rauschenbusch again rejects the viability of the full actualization of the Kingdom of Heaven on the mortal or profane plane of existence, stating, "Even a Christian social order cannot mean perfection. As long as men are flesh and blood the world can be neither sinless nor painless" (126).

The Social Gospel's emphasis on the inherent communal or collective nature of salvation bears, at least at first glance, a resemblance to the prophetic models of judgment discussed in prior chapters. As discussed in another chapters, the political performances of the Christian abolitionists William Lloyd Garrison and John Brown as well as that of late-twentieth century anti-abortion activist Randall Terry all relied on a motif of collective guilt. According to the narrative logic of the jeremiad, a society that countenanced or condoned injustice, whether it was slavery or abortion, was subject to the judgment of God for those sins unless it worked to redeem itself through the negation of those immoral institutions and practices. The model offered by the Social Gospel tracks a similar logic of generalized responsibility so that society rather than the individual becomes the level of critique and transformation. Rauschenbusch explains, "The kingdom of God is still a collective conception, involving the whole social life of man. It is not a matter of saving human atoms, but of saving the social organism. It is not a matter of getting individuals to heaven, but of transforming the life on earth into the harmony of heaven."[20]

Yet while this concern for the social order echoes the prophetic rhetoric of the previous generation of evangelical abolitionists (and also similarly breaks from the dominant Protestant stress on individual salvation), the Social Gospel shifts emotional registers from one of fear to one of hope. The potentiality posed by the Social Gospel is not the one evoked by Garrison—and two hundred years before him, John Winthrop—of a vengeful God judging American society and punishing it for its errancy if it does not act to redeem itself. The rhetoric of sinfulness, it should be said, persists. "The great sin of men," Rauschenbusch argues, "is to resist the reformation of predatory society."[21] Indeed, structural evil and corporate sin figure prominently in the discourse of the Social Gospel, yet the

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[20] Ibid., 65.
[21] Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 184.

language of collective sin is not paired with a narrative of a fall and a potential divine judgment. Rather than the fear of any imminent punishment, Rauschenbusch invokes a hopeful repentance that, through collective efforts, can be the handmaiden of social salvation.

So far I have followed more or less the traditional account of the Social Gospel, which presents it as, first and foremost, an historical flashpoint in the development of liberal-progressive theology in the United States.[22] In approaching and defining the Social Gospel as an ideological or theological movement, however, we risk the exclusion of salient aspects and elements that are not captured by these categories. One obvious consequence of such a narrow sense of the Social Gospel, for example, is the occlusion of the contributions of racial minorities and women who were active in efforts associated with the broader sociopolitical project but not involved in the production of theological knowledge.[23] The neglect of these actors and activities is especially ironic since Rauschenbusch and other advocates for the Social Gospel argued that, as Susan Lindley states, "practice and experience precede and are more consequential than theory."[24] The privileging of practical action resounds throughout Rauschenbusch's work, even as he is most remembered for his campaign to codify the Social Gospel in theological discourse. He consistently presents the role of himself and other theologians as trying to give intellectual systematicity to something already present and active in the social world. "We have a social gospel," he writes at the outset of *A Theology for the Social Gospel.* "We need a systematic theology large enough to match it and vital enough

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[22] This is reflected, for example, in the title of Gary Dorrien's three-volume history of the period, *The Making of Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

[23] There have been recent efforts at correcting these oversights. See, e.g., *Gender and the Social Gospel,* edited by Wendy K. Deichmann Edwards and Carolyn De Swarte Gifford (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Ralph E. Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform, 1885-1912* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991); and Gary Scott Smith, *The Search for Social Salvation: Social Christianity and America, 1880-1925* (New York: Lexington Books, 2000).

[24] Susan Lindley, "'Neglected Voices' and *Praxis* in the Social Gospel," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 18:1 (1990): 75. White and Hopkins strike a similar note in their remarking that the Social Gospel "coalesced more around action than belief" (xvi).

to back it."[25] Yet even as he musters a case for the importance of—indeed, the "need" for—constructing a theological articulation and complement for the Social Gospel, Rauschenbusch also speaks dismissively of this enterprise, describing theology as "the esoteric thought of the Church" that perpetually risks "senility."[26]

The implication of Rauschenbusch's presentation of theology is that the Christian tradition, properly understood, is a living faith, a *praxis*, that operates not singularly through ideology but also, dialectically, through the performances of Christian subjects. For its part, theology marks the attempt to give intellectual coherence to the meanings and practices at any given historical moment within a specific tradition. The task of a religious public such as the Social Gospel, then, is to reconfigure the body of accepted discourses and practices, so as to maintain some connection with the existing tradition while also remaking it. "That is in fact," according to Rauschenbusch, "the process with every great, creative religious mind: the connection with the past is maintained and the old terms are used, but they are set in new connections and filled with new qualities."[27] The Social Gospel and other attempts at re-creating a tradition are thus *practical* efforts at threading together innovation and continuity. Furthermore, understanding religion as a matter of worldly activity, members of the Social Gospel actively worked to cultivate Christian subjects oriented towards performing their faith in the public sphere.

To take up Rauschenbusch's invitation to think more expansively and inclusively about what constitutes the Social Gospel entails considering not just these theological-

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[25] Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 1. Rauschenbusch's account of theology as necessary but also derivative tracks a distinction that can be made between first-and-second-order religious languages. Philosopher of religion John Hick explains these different categories as follows: "First-order religious language, as we find in prayer and prophecy and proclamation, in the confession of sin and the spontaneous utterances of love and joy, and awe in the presence of the Lord, is the expression of faith. The language of theology, on the other hand, is a second-order language which treats the first-order expressions of faith as data to be interpreted in systematic theories." John Hick, "Foreword," in *The Meaning and End of Religion*, xi.

[26] Ibid., 15, 12.

[27] Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 57.

ideological formulations. Analysis must attend to the practical dimensions of religious faith and the aesthetic formations that cultivate these performative capacities, including the body of novels, sermons, periodicals, hymnals, prayer books, essays, and pamphlets that make up the Social Gospel public. Historians Ronald White and C. Howard Hopkins evoke the scope and intensity of this public of letters, images, and music, writing:

> The ideas and hopes [of the Social Gospel] thus generated were portrayed in fiction; at least one such tract in which religiously-motivated reform was depicted, borne on a slender plot with a sentimental romance, rivaled the Bible itself in popularity. Dozens of magazines, Sunday School lessons, home missionary courses, and Christian socialist papers all sought to reach the church-going public. Denominational presses published their own materials while church federations emphasized the values of co-operation. The more sensitive religious leaders realized that the social gospel would lack emotional drive until it became an accepted part of the Christian cultus, so men like Walter Rauschenbusch and Frank Mason North wrote prayers and composed new hymns often set to old tunes.[28]

In opening up the category of the Social Gospel and recognizing contributions and components that fall outside the typical theological account, however, there is an attendant need to re-think what political work is being done by these works and practices. Together with Rauschenbusch's foregrounding of the social practices of Christianity, White and Hopkins's gestures towards the cultural and practical infrastructure of the Social Gospel offer the foundation for constructing a more nuanced account of the political mechanics of the Social Gospel. In the next section I provide a theoretical articulation of the relationship between aesthetics and religious faith that I will then use as an analytical lens for the specific case of the Social Gospel in Section Three.

## § 2. The Aesthetics of Faith

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[28] White and Hopkins, 130. See also Curtis, 4-5. In a statement reflecting their central concern with gender, but that nevertheless resonates with the expansive view articulated by White and Hopkins, Edwards and Gifford write, "The definition [of the Social Gospel] should be informed not only by theological treatises, sermons, and philosophical monologues, but also by minutes of meetings and other publications produced by women's home missionary, temperance, and other organizations; women's periodicals; journals; novels; poetry; and letters" (14).

Faith is ubiquitous throughout human societies. Although this is most certainly true, the language of 'faith,' at least inasmuch as it indexes a common sense understanding of religion as a matter of holding certain beliefs, risks returning any theoretical project to the narrow Protestant Christian conception of religion discussed in the Introduction. As mentioned in earlier chapters, I understand religious faith to be an orientation or sense of the world that is constructed with and through practice. Recall that Antonio Gramsci defines religion as "a unity of faith between a conception of the world and a corresponding norm of conduct."[29] Built into the conception of religion is the notion that faith is enacted, and religious subjectivities fashioned, principally through the inherited forms and idioms that make up religious traditions. In this light, religious traditions necessarily involve technologies and techniques of mediation that are used to engender relationships with the sacred or divine and that, in turn, shape the minds and bodies of religious subjects.

As analyzed in the Introduction, the prevailing understanding of religion in the West is marked by a recognizably Protestant Christian stress on the *unmediated* nature of the relationship between individual believer and divinity in which the religious experience is principally a matter of dematerialized spirituality and interior belief.[30] Such a sensibility manifests

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[29] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, translated by Quintin Hoare and Goeffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 326.

[30] The field of religious studies scholarship has been host to a remarkable surge of interest regarding the intersection of religion and media over the past two decades. Motivated in large part by the increasing incorporation of new media and mass media forms into the practice of religious worship, work in this subfield has precipitated a transformation in how these two concepts are seen as relating to one another. In the traditional (and still quite common place) understandings of the terms, religion and media are figured as operating in incongruous and oppositional ontological realms. So imagined, media consists of materiality, technology, and instrumentality, whereas religion is correspondingly conceived as involving systems of abstract beliefs regarding the sacred and the transcendental. The two concepts seemingly work at cross-purposes: media commodifies, cheapens, and disenchants through a process of publicizing and disseminating to a broad, often open-ended audience while religion proffers the resources for a supposedly authentic personal experience and knowledge of the cosmological order. Further, media, particularly mass media, appears in this narrative as the avatar of the modern public sphere that aided in the ostensible privatization of religion. One consequence of this line of thinking is that the mediatization of religion—that is, the increasing reliance on popular media forms such as television, advertisements, and the Internet as a means and logic of religious communication—is frequently interpreted as a process of profanation and secularization. To intertwine religion and aesthetics/media, it would seem, entails an inevitable vitiation of religion and religious traditions.

in the work of comparative religious scholar Wilfred Cantwell Smith, who attempts to avoid

essentialist definitions of 'religion' but nonetheless articulates a conception of religious faith

as a prior inner state that "must eventuate in faith-inspired practice."[31] The theory of religion

that Smith develops in *The Meaning and End of Religion* abandons the ambition of articulating a

unitary concept of 'religion' built around some universal essence. Instead, Smith distills a

model that involves two interrelated concepts: religious faith and religious traditions (what

Smith refers to as "cumulative traditions" since they are the cumulative results of the sedi-

mentation and alteration that occurs throughout history). The first of these concepts, faith, is

inexorably personal and interior; it is "an inner religious experience or involvement of a par-

ticular person; the impingement on him of the transcendent, putative or real."[32] Religious

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For illustrative examples of such scholarship, see, e.g., *Religion and Media*, edited by Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); *Key Words in Religion, Media and Culture*, edited by David Morgan (New York: Routledge, 2008); *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture*, edited by Stewart M. Hoover and Knut Lundby (London: Sage Publications, Inc., 1997); *Practicing Religion in the Age of Media: Explorations in Media, Religion, and Culture*, edited by Stewart M. Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); and *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere*, edited by Brigit Meyer and Annelies Moors (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006). Even as this coterie of anthologies might suggest an explosion of scholarship investigating religion and media, there continue to be suggestions that the religion-media nexus remains significantly understudied. See Daniel A. Stout and Judith M. Buddenbaum, "Genealogy of an Emerging Field: Foundations for the Study of Media and Religion," *Journal of Media and Religion* 1:1 (2002): 5-12; Judith M. Buddenbaum and Daniel A. Stout, "Religion and Mass Media Use: A Review of the Mass Communication and Sociology Literature," in *Religion and Mass Media: Audiences and Adaptations*, edited by Daniel A. Stout and Judith M. Buddenbaum (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996): 12-34.

For genealogical accounts of the move to a spiritualized rather than materialized conception of religion, see Matthew Engelke, "Material Religion," in *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, edited by Robert Orsi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 209-29; Peter J. Pels, "The Modern Fear of Matter: Reflections on the Protestantism of Victorian Science," *Material Religion* 4.3 (2008): 264-83; and Webb Keane, *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter (*Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

[31] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 179.

[32] Smith, 156. Smith's logical and analytical prioritization of faith is far from idiosyncratic in scholarship on religion. A similar individualistic conception of religion informs the philosophical work of William James, who defines religion as meaning "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they consider divine." William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Penguin, 1982), Lecture 2.

Max Weber's sociological investigations of religion offer yet another analytical framework that de-emphasizes the mediatic and aesthetic dimensions of religious traditions. In "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions," Weber establishes an evolutionary trajectory from earlier, "lower" religious traditions in which outward forms were foregrounded to more recent religious formations that center on salvation and rational ethics. Writing on his normatively charged evolution of religiosity, Weber states, "All sublimated religions of salvation have focused on the meaning alone, not upon form, of the things and actions relevant for salvation. Salvation religions have devalued form as contingent, as something creaturely and distracting from meaning" (341). When salvation religions do make use of mediating forms and aesthetic media, Weber argues, they

traditions, by contrast, are the products of human creativity and struggle that provide an ideological or symbolic apparatus for giving outward form and expression to this personal experience. Traditions are assemblages that change over time but retain a functional utility in that they are "device[s] by which the human mind may rewardingly and without distortion introduce intelligibility into the vast flux of human history or any given part of it."[33] Smith's model posits a necessary gap or disjunction between inner belief (inside) and external expression (outside), with the interior dimension of faith operating as the driving engine of religious formations. Following the familiar Protestant-liberal demarcation between public expression and private belief, Smith characterizes religious traditions as the mere outward and "always imperfect" expression—"a channel, and at worst a substitute"[34]—for the transcendent and internal stuff of religious faith. Smith repeatedly characterizes religious traditions as a coterie of epiphenomenal "expressions" dependent on a prior religious faith for their existence and persistence over time. The materials of religious traditions are nothing more than the media through which internal faith becomes actualized and manifested publically.

Yet, contra Smith, religious traditions can be conceptualized as not singularly expressive of faith but also as formative of that faith and the subjectivity of the religious practitioner. This complication of Smith's inner belief/outer expression model forms the crux of Talal Asad's critique of *The Meaning and End of Religion*. Asad writes, "[T]he man or woman of faith is not a split subject (as Smith has it) living, on the one hand, in a pressured, imperfect, particularized world and, on the other hand, always linked through his or her faith to another

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are typically employed for the purposes of "emotional propaganda" (343). Max Weber, "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, edited by H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge, 1970). Cf. Birgit Meyer, "Aesthetics of Persuasion: Global Christianity and Pentecostalism's Sensational Forms," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109:4 (2010): 744-46; and Bernice Martin, "The Aesthetics of Latin American Pentecostalism: The Sociology of Religion and the Problem of Taste," in *Materializing Religion: Expression, Performance, and Ritual*, edited by Elizabeth Arweck and William Keenan (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 141.

[33] Ibid., 169.
[34] Ibid., 129.

world transcending this. Faith is inseparable from the particularities that inhabit it."[35] Rather than a compartmentalized model of subjectivity that positions traditional practices as exterior to and derivative of faith, Asad suggests a holistic model, wherein faith and practice are interdependent and co-productive. If an integrated subject is the point of departure, the conceptual relationship between faith (that is, the sense of experiencing the transcendent and the feelings, desires, and attitudes that spring from that experience) and tradition becomes dialectical rather than unilateral. Faith can no longer exist as a logically or phenomenologically pre-given element or essence that results ("eventuates") in the creation, adoption, or revision of an expressive tradition. Instead of this unidirectional relation, Asad advances a possibility that the forms and practices that make up a religious tradition can "constitute the preconditions of faith among humans" and can have the capacity to "fashion faith."[36]

Asad's inversion of Smith's conceptual ordering echoes Pascal's axiom on the mechanics of faith: "[W]e must kneel, pray with the lips, &c., in order that proud man, who would not submit himself to God, may be now subject to the creature."[37] While of course differing in many significant respects, Asad and Pascal overlap in identifying religious subjectivity as conditioned on practice and form. Such a dynamic is most pronounced perhaps in the phenomenon of conversion, wherein an addressee of religious rhetoric and participant in liturgical practices experiences a fundamental re-orientation of her sense of the world and

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[35] Talal Asad, "Reading a Modern Classic: W.C. Smith's 'The Meaning and End of Religion,'" in *Religion and Media*, edited by Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 139.

[36] Ibid., 140.

[37] Blaise Pascal, *Thoughts*, translated by W.F. Trotter (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909-14), Section IV: Of the Mean of Belief, § 250. Louis Althusser's gloss on this passage is even more on point: "Pascal says more or less: 'Kneel down, move your lips in prayer, and you will believe.'" Althusser invokes Pascal as a means of articulating how ideology infuses and informs practice, endowing ideology with a material existence that, by being performed, continually instantiates individuals as subjects. See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*, translated by Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 127-188.

imagined her place in it. The process of conversion dramatically illuminates how, through an encounter with religious traditions, faith can be created, remade, and potentially lost.

A religious tradition, per Asad's reformulation, is an existential complex in as much it gives possibility and form to religious (or numinous) experience. In a remarkable passage that prefigures much of Asad's criticism, Smith remarks that "even so careful a thinker as Aquinas would at different times apply [*religio*] to at least three different things: the outward expression of faith; the inner motivation towards worshipping God, and that worship itself; and…the bond that unites the soul with God."[38] What Smith writes off as an instance of intellectual carelessness, however, Asad characterizes as the manifold nature and effects of religious practice—what fellow religious scholar R.R. Marett calls "the organic complex of thought, emotion, and behaviour" that makes up "religion as a whole."[39] Indeed, Asad takes issue with Smith's general avoidance and slighting of practices and aesthetic forms as constitutive components of religious traditions:

> [Smith's conception of] tradition is thought of as a cognitive framework, not as a practical mode of living, not as techniques for teaching body and mind to cultivate specific virtues and abilities that have been authorized, passed on, and reformulated down the generations. Concrete traditions are not thought of as sound and visual imagery, as language uttered and inscribed (on paper, wood, stone, or film), or recorded in electronic media. They are not thought of as ways in which the body learns to paint and see, to sing and hear, to dance and observe… Yet such matters cannot be separated from the force and function of religious traditions—and thus of religious experiences.[40]

With such an expanded sense of what is entailed by a religious tradition, it is possible to conceptualize these traditions as technologies of the self, that is, an assemblage of discourses and practices capable of being used to shape the mind and body of a religious practitioner. All of these components provide the foundation and framework for knowing and sensing

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[38] Smith, 32.

[39] R.R. Marett, *Threshold of Religion* (London: Methuen & Co., 1914), x. Quoted in Meyer, "Religious Sensations," 708.

[40] Asad, 141.

the sacred—for, in a phrase, possessing a religious experience and inhabiting religious faith. The particular configurations of social structures, corporeal techniques, aesthetic forms, creeds, and ritual practices that constitute historical religions make faith possible as a dimension of life.

Liturgical forms and aesthetic practices are encompassed by religious traditions and enable subjects to locate themselves in an order of the world, fashion their identity, and interact in a meaningful manner with elements in the temporal and transcendent worlds.[41] Given its radical remove from the temporal (or profane) world, the transcendent or sacred can only be made present through some manner of mediation. In order to think, speak, or act upon the sacred, a religious practitioner must use media or mediating practices, including "written texts, ritual gestures, images and icons, architecture, music, incense, special garments, saintly relics and other objects of veneration, markings upon flesh, wagging tongues and other body parts."[42] Religious experience, per Asad's reformulation, is not just facilitated or expressed by these forms but ultimately constituted and realized through a repertoire of mediating practices, and these practices of mediation entail materiality, embodiment, and aesthetics. To speak of "mediated religion," then, is redundant, for religion cannot exist nor should be analyzed "outside the forms and practices of mediation that define it."[43] Such a conclusion echoes the chapter's epigraph from Hent de Vries in which he stresses that atten-

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[41] This move to expand the notion of media/mediation resonates with Roy Rappaport's broad reading of 'communication' with respect to ritual. On this point he writes, "[T]o say that ritual is a mode of communication is surely not to say that it is interchangeable with other modes of communication nor, necessarily, to denigrate its uniqueness. It is, rather, to accept an expanded notion of communication, one that includes the achievement of effects through the transmission of information rather than through the application of matter and energy. Communication, this is to say, not only includes 'saying,' but certain sorts of 'doing' as well." Roy Rappaport, "The Obvious Aspects of Ritual," in *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1979), 179.
[42] Jeremy Stolow, "Religion and/as Media," *Theory, Culture & Society* 22 (2005): 125.
[43] Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors, "Introduction," in *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere*, 7.

tion must be paid to the processes of mediation "without and outside of which no religion would be able to manifest itself in the first place."

But if religious traditions provide the terms of intelligibility for addressing and interacting with the sacred and fellow religious practitioners, how are these conventions established and maintained? The work of cultural anthropologist Birgit Meyer is particularly insightful here. Meyer examines how particular religious forms induce and generate experiences of the sacred and transcendental. These "sensational forms," as Meyer calls them, are "relatively fixed, authorized modes of invoking and organizing access to the transcendental, thereby creating and sustaining links between believers in the context of particular religious regimes."[44] Sensational forms are the principal means by which religious subjects encounter and experience the transcendental. Crucially, the forms themselves function as vanishing mediators, for in closing the distance between divine and practitioner or between fellow practitioners, they become invisible to members of the religious tradition. If fully accepted and performed properly, these encounters can then activate an array of emotions, such as awe, fear, or terror associated with the sacred.

To be effective, however, religious mediations must be recognized and taken up by practitioners as legitimate modes of addressing and relating to the sacred and to an audience of their fellows. As discussed in earlier chapters, the traditions that give shape to communities of religious practitioners are the fruit of historic relations of power and struggles for authority. "Aesthetics," Meyer points out, "is not outside of power structures but enmeshed with them."[45] The apparatus of religious traditions, including formalized institutions, discourses, and practices, is a condensation of power that works to shape and discipline sub-

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[44] Meyer & Verrips, "Aesthetics," 27. See also Meyer, "Religious Sensation."
[45] Meyer, "Aesthetics of Persuasion," 754. For a more developed account of the link between aesthetics and politics, see Jacques Ranciere, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible,* translated by Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2006).

jects in particular ways. There is, as it were, a politics of social-aesthetic formations within each tradition that involves struggles and settlements over the proper forms of religious address and performance. The order of sensational forms within a given tradition exists as a hegemonic structure that is iteratively performed and cited in religious practice, becoming and forming the taken-for-granted modes of interacting with the divine and keeping faith. As Raymond Williams explains of Gramscian hegemony, "It does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not all its own."[46]

What is at stake in this contest over religious mediating practices is not just the forms themselves but also the formation and disciplining of religious subjects that is made possible through and with those forms.[47] The receivers of media and the practitioners of mediating activities are not simply passive objects or blank slates. The addressees of religious media (who may well also be practitioners of religious mediations) are always-already subjects. As Meyers states, "Most of the people addressed by sensational forms are already constituted as particular religious subjects with certain desires and doubts."[48] Given this pre-constituted state, addressees of such forms bear with them the traces and effects of the religious regimes

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[46] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 113.

[47] Modes and practices of worship, William Connolly argues, "do not simply represent beliefs or desires already there; they also educate the senses in specific ways; they accentuate some modes of conduct as they damper others; and they help to compose embodied public virtues." William E. Connolly, "Some Theses on Secularism," *Cultural Anthropology* 26:4 (2011): 649.

As scholarship in media studies has argued, the political significance of media is not exhausted by its ideological contents. That is, the generativity of media and media practices is not a product simply of their didactic role in sharing information but also their demiurgic potential to alter the desires, sensibilities, and dispositions of consumers. Media scholar Marshall McLuhan captures this notion in his pithy axiom "The medium is the message." Beyond the substance of any communication, McLuhan claims, a mediating form affects receivers by shaping their capacities to perceive and understand the world: "The effects of media do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance." Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Corte Madera, CA: Gingko, 1994), 31. Cf. Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). My argument here follows Goody in holding that, while modes of mediation can have implications and effects on the content being communicated, the meaning of a message cannot be reduced to the medium.

[48] Meyer, "Aesthetics of Persuasion," 756,

with which they were interpellated. To be effective—that is, to be received as authentic or felicitous modalities of relating to the transcendent and, thus, hail them into a new orientation to the world—novel formations must build from this established foundation of sensibilities and ideologies. The success of these attempts to cultivate a particular configuration of subjectivities is ultimately contingent and will depend on the vicissitudes of reception and uptake that are beyond the unilateral control of the media producers.

With this understanding of the formative role of religious aesthetics in the configurations of faith, I move to the specific case of the Social Gospel in order to, first, articulate my conceptualization of a cultus and, second, attend to how the components of the Social Gospel cultus nourished and facilitated a mode of Christian subjectivity attuned to structural injustice and prone towards empathetic activity.

### § 3. "The Equipment of the Soldiers of the Kingdom of Heaven"

For the sake of conceptual clarity and simplicity, I refer to a religious public's body of religious expressive styles, liturgical practices, and aesthetic forms as a *cultus*. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term 'cultus' refers to "an organized system of religious worship or ceremonial."[49] Religion scholar Catherine Albanese provides a fruitful elaboration of this concept by locating it within her anatomy of religious systems:

> First, religion is expressed in *creeds*, or explanations about the meaning of human life. Such creeds take various forms, from highly developed theologies and sacred stories of origin to informal oral traditions and opinions that surface in casual conversation. Second, religion is expressed in *codes*, which are rules that govern everyday behavior. These may take the form of moral and ethical systems, but they may also be the customs that have become acceptable in a society. Third, religion is expressed in *cultuses*, which are rituals to act out the understandings expressed in creeds and codes. Such cultuses are not to be confused with small and intense religious groups sometimes pejoratively called cults (a term this text does not use). Rather, ritual cultuses, with their formal and repeated character, reinforce creeds and codes in complete religious

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[49] "Cultus," in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/45754?redirectedFrom=cultus& (March 1, 2013).

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systems. Finally, religion is expressed in *communities*, groups of people either formally or informally bound together by the creed, code, and cultus they share.[50]

At the risk of oversimplification, Albanese breaks down religious traditions into dimensions of ideology (creed or beliefs), ethics and customs (codes), practical forms of worship (cultus), and a church or grouping (community). Albanese's characterization of the cultus in her typology resonates with anthropologist Roy Rappaport's conceptualization of what he terms a "liturgical order."[51] That is, the cultus includes the totality of external religious practice, which can potentially involve ritual behaviors; ceremonies and sacraments; the creation of or coming into relation with images, icons, and religious objects; listening to sermons; recitation of prayer; performance or consumption of religious music; the reading of scripture and religious texts; sacrifices and votive offerings; and devotional attendance at or visitation of sites of religious import. In emphasizing the formalized qualities of a cultus, though, Albanese's framework should not be understood as delimiting the concept to official institutions or denominational orders. A cultus is not necessarily coterminous with an organized sect such as a church; a cultus, for example, could be shared only by a particular subgroup within a larger denomination or it could include members of multiple denominations (with the latter being the case with the Social Gospel).

Christian socialist Charles Clayton Morrison, who was by turns one of Reinhold Niebuhr's benefactors and antagonists, offers a conceptualization of cultus that provides a productive starting point for thinking about religious aesthetic formations outside institu-

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[50] Catherine Albanese, *America: Religion and Religions* (Independence, KY: Cengage Learning, 2012), 8-9. Emphasis in original.

[51] See Roy Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Rappaport, *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion*. Besides this nominal difference in terminology, though, my account differs from Rappaport's in emphasizing the demiurgic capacities of the cultus—that is, the potential for cultivating particular subjectivities. Rappaport is similarly skeptical regarding the analytical utility of 'belief' and construes rituals as a special class of performative acts that produce commitments, trust, and moral obligations. According to Rappaport, the social efficacy of rituals in that they are publicly visible acceptances of a certain moral state of affairs, whether it is a body of religious obligations or the conditions associated with marriage.

tionalized and authorized systems (even though, as I will discuss, his historical-empirical account of the Social Gospel is ultimately insufficient).[52] According to Morrison, the concept of the cultus captures "the total cultural expression of a religion as an organic historical phenomenon" and involves "the expression of certain specific aspirations, beliefs, emotions, in a body of recognized conventions, habits and organizations."[53] The expansiveness of Morrison's notion of a cultus as a "total cultural expression of a religion" opens up the possibility for considering the myriad manners in which a religious tradition is performed and made public. This capacious reading allows for an analytical consideration of aesthetic formations, cultural products, and expressive idioms that are not (yet) formally produced or authorized by recognized religious institutions but nonetheless emanate from and speak to particular traditions and communities.[54] On the other hand, a broader reading of cultus also facilitates analysis of constituencies nominally within an existing religious tradition who develop alternative modes of discourse and practice. Such aspirational or counter-hegemonic efforts feature a set of novel aesthetic forms that are competing for recognition by religious subjects so

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[52] For a historical account of the relationship between Niebuhr and Morrison, see Elesha J. Coffman, *The Christian Century and the Rise of Mainline Protestantism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[53] Charles Clayton Morrison, *The Social Gospel and the Christian Cultus* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1933), 28, 30. I must note the recurrence in Albanese and Morrison of the expressive model of religious practice found in W.C. Smith's theory of religion. For Albanese, the practical forms included in the cultus work to "act out" and "reinforce" ideology and custom, while Morrison also characterizes religious forms as "the expression" of seemingly pre-existing ideas, feelings, and sensibilities. As discussed in the previous section, religious media and mediating practices exceed mere expression. Beyond what I have already said, though, it is worth remembering that the Latin origins of the term cultus extend beyond the meaning of devotion. The practice of devotion in this original formulation of the concept is accompanied by a simultaneous sense of tending, caring, and cultivating. My conceptualization of religious practices and mediation in Section Two echoes this sensibility that devotional performance always involves the construction not only of the relationship between religious subject and divinity but also, in an important sense, the religious subject herself.

[54] Contemporary evangelical media, including the best-selling *Left Behind* series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins (which has inspired not only reading groups but also films and video games), is one visible instance of non-authorized "cultural expressions" reinforcing and contributing to an existing constituency. See, e.g., Amy Johnson Frykholm, *Rapture Culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). It is worth noting that contemporary conservative Christians in the United States figure prominently in the larger scholarship regarding religion and media. See also Heather Hendershot, *Shaking the World for Jesus: Media and Conservative Evangelical Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004); and *Media, Culture, and the Religious Right*, edited by Linda Kintz and Julia Lesage (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

as to either transform the existing order or develop a new tradition. This is the case, I mean to claim, with the Social Gospel public.

Members of the Social Gospel criticized prevailing strains of Protestantism for, on the one hand, providing an ideological reinforcement for liberal capitalism by virtue of the emphasis on individual and otherworldly salvation and, on the other, refusing institutional support to those rendered destitute by existing social structures. Yet the Social Gospel broke from mainstream Protestantism in the United States and offered not only a new ideological formation—a fundamental revision in the imagination of the Christian tradition and the political community—but also liturgical and aesthetic aspects that challenged those authorized by Protestant denominations in the United States. It involved, in a word, a counter-cultus, or a competing set of ways to inhabit and perform religious subjectivity. Rauschenbusch and other Social Gospel members explicitly acknowledged the insurgent nature of their efforts. "The social gospel," Rauschenbusch writes, "does not need the aid of church authority to get hold of our hearts. It gets hold in spite of such authority when necessary."[55] Given its remove from the institutional authority within Protestant sects, the Social Gospel articulated, distributed, and embodied these modes of discourse and practice in and through texts and other media. As much as it projected itself as a continuation of the Christian tradition (and also as much as it sought to hail pre-constituted Christian subjects), these liturgical formations often involved appropriating existing aesthetic forms and reconfiguring them so as to cultivate a new array of ethico-political dispositions, sensibilities, and ideologies. In this way, the traditional forms of Christian worship, including prayers, rituals, sermons, and hymnals, were revised and combined with more popular media forms in the thriving print culture of the time, including newspapers, novels, and pamphlets.

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[55] Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 13.

Morrison's work brings attention to a useful conceptual distinction in the roles religious traditions can play with respect to political mobilization. Specifically, Morrison writes that prophecy is only one face of religious traditions in the public sphere, and one that is, in the final analysis, insufficient by itself:

> It has been assumed that all we need is prophets, more prophets, great prophets, and Christianity will be able to meet the social crisis with power. This is our fallacy, and it is the explanation of the arrest of the social gospel. So far as the functioning of religion in the present social crisis is concerned, the prophet has taken religion as far as he can. He has compelled us to see that the systems of our society are confronting a momentous crisis, and that Christianity has a primary responsibility for the outcome. Thereby, the prophet has created a crisis within Christianity itself.[56]

According to Morrison, prophetic modes of address, such as the jeremiad, are well suited to the purpose of precipitating a sense of catastrophe within a Christian audience. I attended to this dynamic in my previous analyses of William Lloyd Garrison, John Brown, and Randall Terry, who all relied extensively upon this general mode of claims making in order to create a productive dissonance and disquiet. While Morrison recognizes the power of prophecy, both in its biblical and contemporary American formations, he clarifies its social and political limitations. Most crucially, he argues that prophetic address is ill suited to the task of providing religious forms to direct and organize the resulting affective intensities associated with this perception of crisis over an extended period of time. A long-lasting and substantial transformation of the political or religious community requires the evolution of ephemeral prophetic impulses into a more robust fixture of habit and commitment.

What is needed is what Morrison refers to as the office of the priest. The task of the priest, in effect, is to recruit and sustain these fugitive energies so as to sediment them into the values and identity of religious subjects. To be clear, the priest need not possess any status or position within an established ecclesiastical order or religious authority. The defin-

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[56] Morrison, 42.

ing quality of the priest as a religious figure is the act of providing structures and forms that are taken up by a religious community and that discipline social feelings towards certain ends. The priest, Morrison says, is the

> *creative artist whose function is to give form to the cultus...* He is seeking for ceremonial forms and rituals, for dramatic actions and modes of speech, for institutional structures, by which the living aspirations, convictions and emotions of his religion may be given objective communal expression.[57]

As much as the cultus is what provides a religious public with a meaningful identity and the priest constructs the cultus, the priest can be seen as the architect or author of a religious public.

Morrison's contention that the social efficacy of a religious tradition is bound up with its cultus, which in turn is constructed through effort and struggle, resonates with this chapter's argument regarding the significance of religious aesthetics—in short, a cultus—to the mobilization and maintenance of religious faith. Having developed this theoretical account of the mutual implication of religious mediatic forms and religious publics, I want to return more concretely to the aesthetic formations of the Social Gospel. In returning to the historical details of the Social Gospel, however, my analysis breaks from that offered by Morrison. According to Morrison, "the arrest of the social gospel," or the failure of the religious project to embed itself completely in the institutionalized models of Protestant Christianity, can be traced back to a lack of an operational cultus. On this score Morrison's argument founders on empirical grounds, as I will demonstrate further through a brief survey of the Social Gospel cultus.[58] While a comprehensive mapping of the Social Gospel counter-

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[57] Ibid., 48, 50, emphasis added. Similar arguments appear in Arthur Cushman McGiffert, "Walter Rauschenbusch: Twenty Years Later," *Christendom* 3 (1938), 99; and F. Ernest Johnson, *The Social Gospel Re-examined* (New York: Harpers, 1940), 73.

[58] By virtue of his concern for the effects of the Social Gospel within the Christian religious tradition, Morrison neglects to consider how the movement affected the wider field of political discourse in the United States. As historians have pointed out, however, there is a recognizable infiltration of Social Gospel principles into hegemonic discourse after its eclipse as a movement. On this widespread influence, see, e.g., William G.

cultus is not feasible here, a brief survey is suggestive of the contours of the larger field and

how these works were pitched at cultivating a Christian subjectivity hospitable to the over-

arching religio-political project. I concentrate my survey on select formations in two liturgi-

cal genres: prayers and hymns.

Among its many innovations, the Social Gospel public featured new forms of prayer.

Specifically, contributions in the genre worked to shift both the practice and content of

prayer from a model overwhelmingly concerned with the individual to one centered on soci-

ety. "[T]he highest form of prayer," fellow Social Gospel contributor Washington Gladden

writes, "is not secret prayer, but social prayer."[59] Prayer, Gladden means, should be social

not only in its content but also in its performance. The predominant mode of prayer in the

Protestant repertoire at the turn of the century was formalistically and thematically individu-

alist. Within this paradigm, prayer is animated by and directed towards personal salvation.

The text of these prayers typically involves the speaker seeking God's guidance in how to

comport herself as an individual so as to gain divine blessing and entry into the heavenly

kingdom of God. According to Rauschenbusch's understanding, the prevailing form of

prayer consoles Christians into a this-worldly quietism by directing their attentions to the

afterlife while simultaneously reinforcing the individualist ethos that undergirds the capitalist

order and obscures (or at best, skews) consideration of social-structural issues.[60] Both of

these aspects drain the willingness and energy of Protestants from any effort to transform

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McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); and Morone, *Hellfire Nation*. Yet even within the narrow confines of Protestant religious institutions, Morrison's dismissal of the Social Gospel is suspect. On the specific institutional effects of the Social Gospel within Protestant Christianity in the United States, see Donald K. Gorrell, *The Age of Social Responsibility: The Social Gospel in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1988). For a more pointed refutation of Morrison's argument, see Horton Davies, "The Expression of the Social Gospel in Worship," *Studia Liturgica* 2 (1963): 174-92.

[59] Washington Gladden, *The Church and Modern Life* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1908), 72.

[60] Rauschenbusch credits "religious individualism" with the intellectual move to blame particular elites or persons with social problems rather than the structure of society itself. He writes, "We have always been told that if only all individuals were regenerated and lived right, all social questions would be solved." Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 359.

the social order. By contrast, collections of Social Gospel prayers, including Rauschenbusch's *For God and the People: Prayers for the Social Awakening* (1909) and Francis G. Peabody's *Prayers for Various Occasions and Needs* (1930), re-oriented attention to Christians' this-worldly lives and obligations.[61] For the purposes of this chapter's analysis, I concentrate my analytical attention on Rauschenbusch's collection.

*For God and the People* features both original prayers and an opening essay that argues for a revised, social reading of "The Lord's Prayer." In the preface to this text, Rauschenbusch makes a case for the use of prayer as an aesthetic form that can aid in the creation of "a new type of Christian man" with "new religious emotions" despite its seemingly "cling[ing] to the antique for the sake of dignity."[62] Given Rauschenbusch's framing of the objective of the Social Gospel as a regeneration of what it means to be a Christian subject, the repetitive act of reading and speaking prayer appears as a crucial tool for this process. For Rauschenbusch, the performance of "The Lord's Prayer" and other similarly attuned prayers is best understood to be a means by which a certain ethos ("social spirit") and set of virtues can be deposited in a Christian subject's character. These qualities, in turn, enable practices of self-scrutiny, pious behavior, and public action. In this same preface Rauschenbusch also invokes the duality of religious creativity discussed in Section One. That is, attempts at tactically transforming a cultus and its constituent forms entail simultaneous gestures backward to the accumulated aesthetic archive of the religious tradition and forward to the perceived needs and projects of the moment. The combination of the old and the new— infusing new meanings and aspects into accepted forms—performs transformation through

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[61] Francis Greenwood Peabody, *Prayers for Various Occasions and Needs* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1930). Though published well after the eclipse of the Social Gospel, Peabody's prayer book had been in active use in Harvard University voluntary worship services that he oversaw for the twenty years before it appeared in publication. See Davies, 183.

[62] Walter Rauschenbusch, *For God and the People: Prayers for the Social Awakening* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1909), 10.

preservation, drawing on the accrued authority of inherited forms in order to cultivate new religious subjectivities.

When traditional forms such as prayer are effectively reworked, Rauschenbusch claims, they can prepare the tempers of religious subjects so that they enter into political struggles with a "unity of thought and aim and feeling." According to Rauschenbusch, such a mobilizing potential lies latent but purposefully suppressed in "The Lord's Prayer." He explains: "The Lord's Prayer is a part of the heritage of social Christianity, which has been appropriated by men who have had little sympathy with its social spirit. It belongs to the equipment of the soldiers of the kingdom of God."[63] In order to recover the prayer's squandered potential, Rauschenbusch performs a close reading of its text. Rauschenbusch specifically excavates how "The Lord's Prayer," which he refers to as the "great charter of all social prayers," repudiates social isolation and "compels us to stand together."[64] Towards the end of the essay, Rauschenbusch writes,

> This prayer will not permit us to ask for God's forgiveness without making us affirm that we have forgiven our brothers and are on a basis of brotherly love with all men. "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." We shall have to be socially right if we want to be religiously right.[65]

In this reading, "The Lord's Prayer" stands as an indictment of the atomistic imagining of salvation nurtured by the mainstream Protestant cultus. There can be no personal salvation without a concomitant effort at social salvation. Over the course of his introductory essay, Rauschenbusch illuminates similar locations in the prayer that articulate and inculcate a Christian practice of civic virtue that must be enacted as part of fulfilling one's duty and obligation to God.

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[63] Ibid., 17.
[64] Ibid., 20.
[65] Ibid., 21.

Following the line of analysis established by Rauschenbusch regarding the constituting power of prayer, the original prayers that Rauschenbusch composed for inclusion in his collection can be understood as the scaffolding for the formation of a socially oriented Christian subject. The language of Rauschenbusch's prayers enlists the ethical sensibilities of the reader-reciter and works to evoke a particular body of responses, especially humility, repentance, regret, hope, and empathy, that will facilitate a socially consciousness public actor. An active notion of civic virtue and solidarity courses through these pieces, manifesting in, according to Horton Davies, "[the prayers'] vividness of empathy, their challenging directness, the particularity of their concern, and the wide charity and inclusiveness."[66] As Rauschenbusch describes at the outset of the collection, "We are one with our fellow-men in all our needs. We are one in our sin and our salvation."[67] The recognition of human (and more particularly, American) commonality forms the starting point for the text's evocation of the spiritual and political bonds that unite all members of society. In light of this fundamental insight, it is far from surprising that well over half the collection's contents are in sections titled "For Social Groups and Classes" and "The Progress of Humanity." Included in the latter of these two sections is the prayer "For the Kingdom of God," which reads in part:

> Make us determined to live by truth and not by lies, to found our common life on the eternal foundations of righteousness and love, and no longer to prop the tottering house of wrong by legalized cruelty and force. Help us to make the welfare of all the supreme law of the land, that so our commonwealth may be built strong and secure on the love of all its citizens… Show thy erring children at last the way from the City of Destruction to the City of Love, and fulfill the longings of the prophets of humanity. Our Master, once more we make thy faith our prayer: "Thy kingdom come! Thy will be done on earth!"[68]

Here, as well as throughout the entire collection, Rauschenbusch avoids framing his prayers as supplications for divine intervention or litanies of theological doctrines. Following his

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[66] Davies, 184.

[67] Rauschenbusch, *For God and the People,* 17-18.

[68] Ibid., 107-108.

conception of prayer as enabling new formations of Christian agency, these pieces provide the outlines of Christian subjectivity as a particular social role that calls forth certain actions and performances.

In this passage Rauschenbusch invokes a practice of penitent citizenship that demands a critical social awareness, an ethos of solidarity, and a readiness for political action in the face of arrangements that transgress the demands of Christian love and generosity. Beyond evoking what it means to be a proper Christian subject, the prayers also act as performative fortifications that equip the audience with a motivating relationship to the divine. The figure of God invoked in these prayers acts on the world in a mediated fashion rather than via direct action. It is only through human activity that the aspiration of a righteous order can be (always incompletely) achieved, so the power of the divine, such as it is, consists principally in fashioning and sustaining the faith motivating human action. In a more practical sense, though, faith as an orientation and attitude is the condition and object of these prayers. That is, the prayers are premised on a nascent Christian faith in their addressees yet, at the same time, work to reshape—convert—this attitude.

A similar phenomenon can be seen in the devotional music of the Social Gospel. Working in parallel with the new crop of social prayers, contributors to the Social Gospel produced and disseminated "hymns of social aspiration."[69] The development of a Social Gospel hymnody was a concerted enterprise, propelled by Rauschenbusch and others who were dissatisfied with the existing corpus of liturgical music in the Protestant Christian tradition. Echoing his dissatisfaction with the state of Protestant prayer, Rauschenbusch writes, "The hymns are mainly individualistic, with the idea of coming to God, of recognizing one's

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[69] Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 2.

own guilt; they call us from personal sins to a personal cross."[70] With a mind towards distributing hymns infused with a concern for the earthly community, organizations such as the Brotherhood of the Kingdom actively worked to encourage, assemble, and disseminate a Social Gospel musical repertoire. One of the Brotherhood's members, Mornay Williams, compiled forty-four hymns in his collection *Hymns of the Kingdom of God*. This volume joined other publications, including Henry Sloane Coffin and Ambrose White Vernon's *Hymns of the Kingdom of God* and Mabel Mussey's *Social Hymns of Brotherhood and Aspiration*, in attempting to bring together religious songs infused with themes of solidarity and acting in and on temporal society. According to Davies, "These hymns of the social gospel are motivated by a demand that all the energy of Christians be devoted to establishing a brotherhood on earth, with the help of humanity's Elder Brother, the Master Carpenter of the human race."[71]

Consider Mussey's 1914 collection *Social Hymns of Brotherhood and Aspiration*, which Jon Michael Spencer identifies as "the paradigm" of Social Gospel hymnals.[72] The text includes 111 pieces with music, many of which first appeared in the Social Gospel periodical *The Survey*. Endorsements of Mussey's collection from established figures in the community stressed the utility of hymns within the larger campaign to remake American public life. Henry Atkinson, Secretary of the Social Service Commission of the Congregational Church, remarked that the Social Gospel "needs just such an expression as these hymns give it. When the churches begin to sing the social faith, things will be accomplished." Social Gospel contributor Josiah Strong wrote, "[*Social Hymns*] will serve not only to express, but to cultivate both the deepest religious feelings and the noblest social aspiration."[73] Strong's effective

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[70] Walter Rauschenbusch, "Comments," untitled manuscript, 3, Walter Rauschenbusch papers, American Baptist Society, Colgate Rochester Divinity School, Rochester, New York; quoted in Jon Michael Spencer, *Protest & Praise: Sacred Music of Black Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 62.
[71] Davies, 188.
[72] Spencer, 76.
[73] Quoted in Spencer, 77.

elaboration on Atkinson's framing is noteworthy. Besides clarifying how, in Atkinson's phrase, "things will be accomplished" with these hymns, Strong's comments resonate with the larger argument of this chapter regarding the constructive, as opposed to merely expressive, power of aesthetic forms.

Chief among the qualities cultivated by these hymns is a religious devotion to the national community. In a preface explaining the methodology of selection for the hymnbook, Mussey articulates an ecumenical sensibility aimed at cutting across denominational divides: "The editor's first object was to find hymns that could be sung by all people in all places… Many hymns, therefore, were chosen which Jew and Gentile, Protestant and Catholic may sing with equal fervor."[74] Mussey's intentional eschewal of religious parochialism effectively diminishes the priority of denominational identity and instead foregrounds a commitment to a generic divinity as refracted through the nation and polity. The political community rather than particularized religious groups or church becomes the imaginary object and stage of faith-in-action. When churches are invoked at all in these hymns they are imagined, first and foremost, as entities in dire need of renewal. More strikingly, though, formal religious institutions and authorities are significant and worthy of devotional concern only so far as they are the means and vehicles for a national transformation. This dynamic is reflected in the thematic arrangement of the collection, with hymns categorized into groupings such as "Liberty and Justice," "Brotherhood," "Labor and Conflict," and "Patriotism." Hymns in these sections, as well as several elsewhere in the collection, enfold religious devotion and political belonging in such a way that civic service and political solidarity become religious virtues recognized and encouraged by the divine.

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[74] Mabel Hay Borrows Mussey, *Social Hymns of Brotherhood and Aspiration* (New York: The A.S. Barnes Company, 1914), iv.

The twining together of Christianity as a social role and political action comes into focus in a number of the iconic hymns contained in *Social Hymns*. These classic songs include, for instance, William De Witt Hyde's "Creation's Lord, We Give Thee Thanks" (1903). The hymn opens with the following verse:

> Creation's Lord, we give Thee thanks
>     That this Thy world is incomplete;
> That battle calls our marshaled ranks;
>     That work awaits our hands and feet…[75]

Hyde's hymn exudes a joyful hopefulness in the struggle for social transformation. The song celebrates both the opportunity to Christianize the social order and the often-trying effort entailed in bringing it into existence. There is a profound pleasure, the hymn states, in working to complete that which God has left purposefully unfinished, namely, the overcoming of social cruelties and inequities. This satisfaction accompanies and mirrors an implicit premise of Christian indebtedness. Christians, Hyde's lyrics state, are simultaneously "friends who share the Maker's plan" and "sons who know the Father's will." As both the creations and peers of the divine, Christians are implicated as primary actors in the drama of transforming the social world so as to embody fundamental virtues and values. Yet again, as with Rauschenbusch, Hyde foregrounds the impracticality of this goal. Per the fourth verse of the hymn:

> What though the Kingdom long delay,
>     And still with haughty foes must cope?
> It gives us that for which to pray,
>     A field for toil and faith and hope.[76]

The object of prayer and devotion, Hyde implies, exceeds the arrival of the Kingdom, which is later described as a goal that "may ever shine afar." What faith requires and calls forth is a field for struggle—a social space in which Christian subjects can enact their commitments

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[75] William De Witt Hyde, "Creation's Lord, We Give Thee Thanks," in Mussey, 33.

[76] Ibid., 33.

and potentially bring the polity into closer alignment with what they understand to be the principles of their religious tradition. Seen in this way, the hymn imparts an ethos of joyful resistance that hails subjects into political action while staving off the frustration, resentment, and attrition that can result from failures to change existing structures.

The Social Gospel hymnody, of course, was not monolithic with respect to its tones, themes, or values. To suggest some of this internal diversity, it is helpful to compare Hyde's piece with the earliest recognized hymn of the Social Gospel, Washington Gladden's "O Master, Let Me Walk with Thee" (1879), which is also included in Mussey's *Social Hymns* compilation. The hymn foregrounds the value of performing for others—walking "in lowly paths of service"—and radiates a resilient optimism regarding the future of human society ("In hope that sends a shining ray/Far down the future's broadening way").[77] The theme and message of the piece is ultimately one of endurance, with the prayer as a plea to God for aid in bearing the stresses of physically demanding labor and persevering until the arrival of a more righteous social order. The third stanza of the hymn is particularly striking in this respect:

> Teach me Thy patience; still with Thee
> In closer, dearer company,
> In work that keeps faith sweet and strong,
> In trust that triumphs over wrong…[78]

The God imagined by Gladden (and who appears as the diegetic addressee of the hymn's invocations) is similar to that of Rauschenbusch's prayers in that the hymn does not presume the divine can directly intercede so as to act in the temporal world. The hymn's speaker calls upon God less to change the world for the better and more to act on the personality and character of the speaker so that she can more ably face the world as it is. But this ostensibly

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[77] Washington Gladden, "O Master, Let Me Walk with Thee," in Mussey, 56.
[78] Ibid., 56.

familiar feature also marks a crucial break with Rauschenbusch's prayerbook and other hymns of the Social Gospel. Unlike those other texts, Gladden's hymn principally works to nurture qualities of patience and trust so as to bear the wrongs of American society, whereas what is necessary, Rauschenbusch remarks, is "a religion of action which will annihilate the wrong."[79] Faith should not be reflexively placed in an abstract truth to win out on its own; rather, faith must be cultivated and shaped so that it becomes the engine for social action.

In the section that follows, I bring my theoretical framework regarding the aesthetic aspects of religious traditions into dialogue with the literature on the public sphere and publics in order to address the union of cultus and conduct that defines a religious public. This theoretical discussion then facilitates a turn to the social and political activity of religious subjects shaped by the Social Gospel cultus as exemplified by Jane Addams.

### § 4. Public Religion & Religious Publics

Because of its capacity to help shape subjectivities (the dispositions, sensibilities, and desires of religious subjects), religious aesthetics are implicated in the activation and mobilization of persons as public and political subjects. "After all," Jeremy Stolow inquires, "where does religious mediation happen if not on the terrain of sociability among friends and strangers, patrons and clients, leaders and followers, insiders and outsiders, that we think of as a public sphere?"[80] An analysis of the power of public religions in a democratic society logically entails attending to the power of religious publics, since it is principally through the mobilization of citizens' collective action that religious traditions affect changes in governmental structures and social arrangements. This begs the question, though, of what exactly distinguishes and constitutes a *religious* public. In approaching this seemingly simple question,

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[79] Rauschenbusch, "Comments," *MS*, 3; quoted in Spencer, 72.
[80] Stolow, 133-34.

it is helpful to begin with some quick ground clearing regarding the concepts of the 'public sphere,' the 'public,' and 'publics' as they figure into a discussion of modern politics.

Contemporary debates regarding the 'public' can be traced back to Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. In an account that brings together empirical-historical and normative-philosophical registers, Habermas depicts the civic culture of eighteenth-century Europe as a discursive space distinct from the domains of the state, the economy, and the family. [81] Though Habermas's historical narrative emphasizes how this social space was short-lived, it nonetheless was crucial in so far as it was the site of rational-critical debate regarding the common good, critical evaluation of the state, and the emergence of a politically active bourgeoisie. According to Habermas, these dynamics ultimately fostered the liberal democratic conditions that checked and resisted the established monarchical regime. That is, Habermas illuminates the interstitial space that exists between and beside the apparatus of the state and the domain of the economy and that forms the stage for social interaction and critical political activity.

Subsequent work drawing on Habermas's framework has emphasized the multiplicity of publics and counter-publics constituting the public sphere. The theoretical elaborations offered by Michael Warner and Charles Hirschkind are particularly helpful for the present

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[81] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society,* translated by Thomas Burger (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991), 67, 163. The text first appeared in German in 1962; it was translated into English in 1989.

It bears mentioning that religion figures into Habermas's consideration only so far as its purported privatization during the eighteenth century aided the emergence of the modern bourgeois public sphere, which privileged critical reason and allowed individuals to appear before one another as equal interlocutors and participants in deliberative exchange. Squaring with the then-ascendant theory of secularization, Habermas's vision of the modern public sphere founds itself on a transformation in the status of religion from that of a governing, structuring discourse to a matter of privately held opinion.

In his introduction to a collection of critical readings of Habermas, for instance, Craig Calhoun refers to Habermas's "neglect of religion" and the "antireligious assumptions" of his theoretical work. Craig Calhoun, "Introduction," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, edited by Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992), 35-36. Quoted in Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan Vanantwerpen, "Introduction: The Power of the Religion in the Public Sphere," in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, edited by Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan Vanantwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 3.

analysis in illuminating the interlacing of aesthetics and practices that broadly defines publics.[82]

According to Warner, a public comes into being in and through a circulation of words and bodies, and thus it is potentially open-ended in its audience. He explains:

> By this I mean not just that it is self-organizing, a kind of entity created by its own discourse, nor even that this space of circulation is taken to be a social entity, but that in order for this to happen all discourse or performance addressed to a public must characterize the world in which it attempts to circulate, and it must attempt to realize that world through address.[83]

The claims at play in a counterpublic, Warner argues, are not the expressions of preformed identities or instances of purely representational discourse. Appearing in public involves a performative dimension, a "poetic world making," wherein discourse and action are put to the task of creating the (presented) self and the world. What distinguishes a counterpublic for Warner, then, is not principally the content of the claims being produced. Counterpublics are never just constituencies of "subalterns with a reform program."[84] The essential quality of a counterpublic is that it is "structured by different dispositions or protocols from those that obtain elsewhere in the culture, making different assumptions about what can be said or what goes without saying." He goes on, saying, "The conflict extends not just to ideas or policy questions, but to the speech genres and modes of address that constitute the public."[85] In other words, cleavages between publics (and counterpublics) track divergent imaginaries

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[82] See also Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 61. See also Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990); Geoff Eley, "Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, edited by Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992); and Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, translated by Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel, and Assenka Oksiloff (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
[83] Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14:1 (2002), 81.
[84] Ibid., 119.
[85] Ibid., 119.

of the public and the people—the framework of associational life and the ways in which that association is inhabited and practiced—within a national public sphere.

The anthropological examination of cassette sermons in Egypt undertaken by Hirschkind provides a complementary elaboration of the concept of counterpublics. The liberal-deliberative conception of a public that can be traced back to Habermas, Hirschkind argues, remains blind to the material conditions of discursive production and "the pragmatics of its speech forms." By this latter category, Hirschkind means "the genres, stylistic elements, citational resources, gestural codes, and so on that make a discourse intelligible to specific people inhabiting certain conditions of knowledge and learning."[86] While a public can be embodied in certain institutional and material forms, it is not reducible to these instantiations. What defines a public is a particular way of imagining community and the assortment of discourses and practices that enable and make up that imaginary. For Hirschkind, a counterpublic is "a domain of discourse and practice that stands in a disjunctive relationship to the public sphere of the nation and its media instruments."[87] A counterpublic brings together an alternative basis for social relations and a new practice of community; they feature a mutual implication of content and form. Emergent within a counterpublic is a new notion of the public and, with this, a revision of the subject as a member belonging to and participating in that public.

Lets gather up the threads of this discussion so far. Religious publics, as with publics more generally, are not defined or given shape by some common body of propositional beliefs or policy preferences held by their members (as is in the case of the common sense notion of faith-based groups). Similarly, while they can produce or be involved in the produc-

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[86] Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 106.
[87] Ibid., 117.

tion of formalized codes and institutions, these elements are not necessary conditions. What distinguishes a religious public from other publics—as well as from other religious publics—is its forms of address, its modes activity, and its corresponding conception of the public. More specifically, a religious public draws its pragmatic forms—its aesthetic, discursive, and performative elements—from a religious tradition, even as it may simultaneously revise and rework that which it cites and enacts. The performance of these religious idioms and motivations, in turn, sets the religious public against a cultural horizon dominated by a different body of discursive forms, dispositions, and habits.

As discussed in Section Three, the primary purpose of the aesthetic formations of the Social Gospel was to reorient Christian subjects—to reconfigure, in other words, the sense and practice of Christian faith so as to infuse it with a sense of social consciousness and solidarity as well as a tendency towards positive action that would trouble and disrupt the prevailing forms of Protestantism as well as existing liberal-capitalism. Willis D. Weatherford, a student secretary of the YMCA, spoke at the 1914 Southern Sociological Congress and characterized the larger Social Gospel effort as directed at precisely this re-imagining of the Christian faith:

> We are fast getting away from religion as creed or as a mechanical system. We are coming to feel more and more that religion is life and life is relationship. To be religious is to be rightly related to all persons, God and men. Or to put it differently, to be religious is to be a friendly son of God and a brotherly friend of men. Life and religion are not therefore simply orthodoxy… [N]o! life and religion are right relationship toward all persons.[88]

Weatherford construes the Social Gospel as primarily an effort at re-orientation. Not only is the Social Gospel itself an exercise in re-configuring the Christian tradition but also the Christian faith, indeed all religious faith, is conceptualized as an orientation, and being rightly aligned and related with the world and other beings. The most popular Social Gospel journal

[88] Willis D. Weatherford, "Religion, the Common Basis for Cooperation," in White and Hopkins, 94.

in the final decade of the nineteenth century, *The Kingdom*, articulated its mission statement in strikingly similar terms. According to that publication, its motivating interest in "applied Christianity" meant that the journal "will aim to cultivate in its readers a proper temper of mind regarding all questions of social reform rather than to insist upon a particular method as being the only and infallible course to be taken."[89] The task, in other words, is to cultivate in the audience a particular set of attitudes and dispositions—a state of being prone to a certain interpretation and bearing in the world—as opposed to imparting specific policy preferences.

All structural transformation, this logic holds, must find its foundation in a change in a subject's sensibilities, commitments, and desires. In this respect, the Social Gospel can be seen as in line with my account of Garrison and the moral suasion efforts of evangelical abolitionists during the antebellum period (see Chapter One). Rauschenbusch explicitly identifies this aim, stating, "The social gospel seeks to bring men under repentance for their collective sins and to create a more sensitive and more modern conscience."[90] He describes the objective of fashioning "a regenerated personality" at length in *Christianity and the Social Crisis*:

> Such a [regenerated] man will in some measure incarnate the principles of a higher social order in his attitude to all questions and in all his relations to men, and will be a well-spring of regenerating influences… [I]f any new principle is to gain power in human history, it must take shape and life in individuals who have faith in it. The men of faith are the living spirits, the channels by which new truth and power from God enter humanity.[91]

Similar articulations of the movement's purpose crop up in the work of other Social Gospel thinkers. Fellow theological figurehead Washington Gladden, for instance, describes the efforts of the Social Gospel as a conversion process by which an individual is hailed into the "law of love" and transforms his perception so that he "comprehends his social relations

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[89] *The Kingdom*, unsigned editorial, 9 (April 30, 1897), 877; in White and Hopkins, 150.
[90] Ibid., 5.
[91] Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 352.

and strives to fulfill them."[92] The production of this "consciousness of solidarity" (to use another phrase of Rauschenbusch's) would enable Christian subjects to recognize the myriad sufferings, injustices, inequalities, and exclusions that occur as a result of structural and institutional arrangements rather than their individual behavior or direct action.[93] This ethos of social responsibility and solidarity would, in turn, activate these subjects to political action and call into being a constituency that would work through (and on) the system of governmental institutions in order to develop a just social order.

This mode of being in public is exemplified by the activity of Jane Addams. A co-founder of Hull House in Chicago and one of the most vigorous proponents of the settlement movement in the United States, Addams fought for the extension of social resources, educational opportunities, and legal protections to members of the working class, particularly immigrants, women, and children. As articulated in its mission statement, Hull House was founded "to provide a center for a higher civic and social life, to institute and maintain educational and philanthropic enterprises, and to investigate and improve the conditions in the industrial districts of Chicago." In addition to her anti-poverty work with the settlement movement, Addams was a member of the Progressive Party and an active advocate for female suffrage and peace. Although intended to distill the meaning and motivation of her efforts with Hull House, her essay "The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements" evinces the formative role she assigns religious traditions as a part of efforts to socialize democracy in the United States.

While Addams repeatedly rejected the formal doctrines and institutions of organized religion, including those of Christianity, she nonetheless traces her social activity and efforts

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[92] Washington Gladden, *Social Salvation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1902), 10. Fellow Social Gospel proponent Shailer Mathews describes a similar process in what he refers to as the construction of "the vicarious life." Shailer Mathews, "The Message of Jesus to Our Modern Life," *The Biblical World* 44:3 (1914): 225-28.
[93] Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, 9.

at political transformation to a religious source. Specifically, Addams articulates a religious faith with a distinctive horizontal orientation—one that finds its fulfillment in the connections between persons rather than between individual religious subjects and God. In a manner that resonates with the Weatherford's stress on Christianity as a matter of right relations and action throughout society, Addams finds in religion the materials necessary to cultivate a powerful sense of human interdependence and solidarity as well as an attendant ethical practice of mutual care.[94] Addams also echoes the sensibility that Christianity is principally a *praxis,* writing:

> Christianity has to be revealed and embodied in the line of social progress is a corollary to the simple proposition, that man's action is found in his social relationships in the way in which he connects with his fellows; that his motives for action are the zeal and affection with which he regards his fellows."[95]

The fulfillment of Christianity, then, is not in the achievement of individual salvation—an end that can easily be folded into a capitalist-liberal imaginary—but rather in a conviction that alters and improves the conditions of general well-being in a community. A religious subjectivity, in turn, must be oriented outwards and actualized in the transformation of social institutions.

Addams attributes the burgeoning impulse to engage in social activity such as the settlement movement and YMCA campaign to the Social Gospel, which she refers to as "a certain renaissance going forward in Christianity."[96] In her essay Addams describes at length how Christians shaped by the Social Gospel avoid the traditional Protestant concern with internal or spiritual salvation of the individual and embrace the notion that "action is the only medium man has for receiving and appropriating truth." She explains:

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[94] See Eleanor J. Stebner, "The Theology of Jane Addams: Religion 'Seeking Its Own Adjustment'," in *Feminist Interpretations of Jane Addams*, edited by Maurice Hamington (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State Press, 2010), 203.
[95] Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House* (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 85
[96] Ibid., 84

> [Young persons influenced by the Social Gospel] resent the assumption that Christianity is a set of ideas which belong to the religious consciousness, whatever that may be. They insist that it cannot be proclaimed and instituted apart from the social life of the community and that it must seek a simple and natural expression in the social organism itself. The Settlement movement is only one manifestation of that wider humanitarian movement…[97]

Along with her refusal of an immaterial Christianity that is located entirely in a propositional edifice, Addams highlights the need for a foundational social transformation. The activity of Hull House and other similar projects, Addams insists, are not instances of philanthropy or charity. As Addams understands it, charity only serves to address the symptoms of a much deeper social maladjustment; in order to correct such a problem, an equally foundational reconstruction of society is required. Reflecting on this cultivation of a new form of public life, Addams writes, "[The Settlement movement] aims, in a measure, to develop whatever of social life its neighborhood may afford, to focus and give form to that life, to bring to bear upon it the results of cultivation and training."[98]

Through her practice of socially-engaged Christianity and pious citizenship Addams models a new way of speaking and acting in public. Indeed, she enacts a novel formation of what the American public should be that challenges the existing array of Protestant-capitalistic habits and dispositions. Her social activity, I mean to say, is an exercise in world making that accompanies the liturgical formations offered by the Social Gospel in the widespread inculcation of democratic and Christian capacities.

## Conclusion

In an article focused on the question of "why such movements [as the Social Gospel] need religion at all," Christopher Lasch concludes that, while religion does not provide any unique moral insights unavailable in non-religious sources, it is valuable in as much as it sup-

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[97] Ibid., 85.
[98] Ibid., 85.

plies, on the one hand, a stave against resentment and, on the other, a sense of hopefulness not in social progress itself but rather being in general. Underlying both of these contributions, he says, is "a grateful disposition that enables opressed [sic] groups to claim their rights without at the same time claiming the right to revenge."[99] Yet this begs the further question of how religion in particular was able (or at least better able than any ostensibly secular tradition) to provide such a "disposition." While Lasch locates the origins of this disposition in Christian beliefs and theological doctrines—most specifically the belief in a just cosmological order of being—this chapter argues that the mobilization and modulation of religious subjects is not simply a matter of ideology. Against Lasch's stress on the Social Gospel as ideology and Niebuhr's conception of the Social Gospel as anti-political utopianism, my account of the Social Gospel points to the aesthetic and performative dimensions that suffuse religious traditions and condition the mobilization of pious citizens who strive in public for the transformation of the social order. Social Christianity, in this way, supplies the *motivations for* and *devices of* claiming and counterclaiming that enable political subjectivities.

It is fitting, I think, to a return to the words of Rauschenbusch that served as the epigraph to this chapter. In a 1904 article on what he calls "The New Evangelicalism," Rauschenbusch depicts the Social Gospel not as a radical break with the Christian tradition but rather as the return of that tradition's original essence. He writes, "The tongues of fire will descend on twentieth century men and give them great faith, joy and boldness, and then we shall hear the new evangel, and it will be the Old Gospel." Given the essay's location within a context of theological struggle, Rauschenbusch's assertion of the Social Gospel's lineage, if not seamless continuity within the Christian tradition, is a canny tactic as in a campaign to endow the movement with legitimacy. The image of tongues of fire, of course, fig-

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[99] Christopher Lasch, "Religious Contributions to Social Movements: Walter Rauschenbusch, the Social Gospel, and Its Critics," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 18:1 (1990): 7, 21.

ures prominently in the Christian tradition, where it serves as the earthly manifestation of the Holy Spirit and the symbolic representation of religious enlightenment. Yet, the image of "tongues of fire" is open to another figurative, if less spiritual, reading as an agitating communication. The image of the Pentecostal scene evoked by Rauschenbusch, after all, entails the mobilizing and activation of Christ's disciples by the Holy Spirit—the divine avatar and vanguard of faith in Christian theology—as a unified social force for the spread of the good news to human society. The tongue of fire hails them into a new way of inhabiting faith and performing it in the world. So too, the tongues of fire of the Social Gospel—its styles of expressivity and manners of aesthetic mediation—brought it and its constituent subjects into being as an alternative way of enacting both Christianity and American democracy.

CHAPTER FOUR:

**"JERUSALEM'S FALL":**
**THE POLITICS OF RELIGIOUS MOURNING AND**
**AMERICAN REFORMATION AFTER SEPTEMBER 11, 2001**

> "It is in some sort of ceremonial form—even if that form be hardly more than the recitation of a myth, the consultation of an oracle, or the decoration of a grave—that the moods and motivations which sacred symbols induce in men and the general conceptions of the order of existence which they formulate for men meet and reinforce one another."
>
> — Clifford Geertz,
> "Religion As a Cultural System"[1]

> "God can take what you do to try to hurt somebody to help a nation come to grips with truth, to help a nation come to grips with mis-education and to help a nation come to grips with things that we don't like to talk about."
> — Rev. Jeremiah Wright[2]

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 constituted a "disjunctive event" in which hegemonic conceptions of the world, as well as the corresponding understanding of the American polity, were dramatically de-stabilized.[3] Such moments of destabilization, rupture, and crisis create the conditions in which existing ways of thinking and acting—in other words, the lived order of power and common sense—can be altered and transformed. In

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[1] Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," *The Interpretations of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 112.

[2] Jeremiah Wright, interview by Bill Moyers, in *Bill Moyers Journal: Jeremiah Wright Guest*, April 25, 2008, http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/04252008/profile.html (accessed May 4, 2012).

[3] See, e.g., Eldon J. Eisenach, "Religion, Politics, and American Identity After September 11: Reflections on Recent Scholarship," in *Religion, Politics, and American Identity: New Directions, New Controversies*, edited by David S. Gutterman and Andrew R. Murphy (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), 276. In that same collection, see also Melissa M. Wilcox, "Discourse Bless America: Rebuilding the National Mythos after September 11," in *Religion, Politics, and American Identity: New Directions, New Controversies*, 25-48.

deed, George Sabine claims that major shifts in western political thought are "secreted in the interstices of political and social crisis. They are produced, not indeed by the crisis as such, but by its reaction on minds that have the sensitivity and the intellectual penetration to be aware of crisis."[4] Despite their momentary potential for transformation, disturbances in established routines and social mores frequently become captured by the system of extant discourses and practices. As William H. Sewell, Jr. describes, "most ruptures are neutralized and reabsorbed into the preexisting structures in one way or another—they may, for example, be forcefully repressed, pointedly ignored, or explained away as exceptions."[5]

In this chapter I interrogate the liminal moment following September 11 and how the shared loss of the attacks was given force and form, as well as shape and meaning, through religious rituals of mourning drawn from the Christian cultus. Given that religious traditions are among the most powerful "pre-existing structures" within American political culture and that they directly bear on the subjects of suffering and mortality, this chapter in-

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[4] George Sabine, "What is Political Theory?," *The Journal of Politics* 1:1 (1939): 3. I cannot help but think here also of Rahm Emanuel. While serving as White House Chief of Staff during the first term of the Obama Administration, Emanuel famously quipped, "You never want a serious crisis to go to waste," implying that emergencies are opportunities for transforming state policy.

The figure that leaps immediately to mind here is Thomas Hobbes, who developed much of his philosophical work in response to the bloody tumult of the English Civil War. More recently, Judith Butler has similarly been inspired by a context of violence and the fact of bodily vulnerability to think about what politics and political community should (and can) mean. She, of course, arrives at far different conclusions than Hobbes. See Judith Butler, "Violence, Mourning, Politics," *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 4:1 (2003): 9-37; and Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso, 2009). See also, e.g., Bonnie Honig, "Antigone's Laments, Creon's Grief: Mourning, Membership, and the Politics of Exception," *Political Theory* 37:5 (2009): 5-43; Simon Stow, "Pericles at Gettysburg and Ground Zero: Tragedy, Patriotism, and Public Mourning," *American Political Science Review* 101:2 (2007): 195-208; and the varied entries in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, edited by David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkley: University of California Press, 2003).

As John Seery and others have argued, the inexorable facts of death and vulnerability offer a unique and powerful opportunity to engage in critical reflection and examination. Given a human condition marked by finitude and bodily insecurity, political theorists have frequently taken mortality as the philosophical inspiration and ontological ground for their thought; one only has to think of Hobbes, who epitomizes a philosophical concern—indeed, near obsession—with death (and, more exactly, violent, premature death), going so far as to position it as both the primary motivation for entering political life and the horizon of political obligation. See John Seery, *Political Theory for Mortals: Shades of Justice, Images of Death* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); Ruth Miller, *Law in Crisis: The Ecstatic Subject of Natural Disaster* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); and Jacqueline Stevens, *States Without Nations: Citizenship for Mortals* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

[5] William H. Sewell Jr., *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 227.

vestigates how the materials of these traditions become mobilized in public mourning to create meanings and reform a wounded community. How do political actors make use of the Christian cultus in order to enable or foreclose political possibilities in the wake of September 11?[6] Furthermore, how does the practice of different rituals and rhetorics of religious mourning work to establish structures of feeling that undergird particular modes of democratic citizenship and national identity?

I argue that religious traditions, including formations of American Christianity, supply both a *praxis* and *poetics* of mourning. That is, they encompass manners of enacting grief in light of inherited conceptions of the cosmos and sacred (*praxis*) as well as modes of (re)producing meanings that render loss intelligible and endurable (*poetics*). When confronted by disjunctive events such as September 11, mourning rituals drawn from religious traditions can be used by members of the polity to register the event, locate it in a certain ordering of the world, and make it meaningful and thus make suffering sufferable. Even as it is an exercise in recovery and repair, instances of religious mourning are also occasions for agonistic political reformation. Figures at multiple levels of American public life take up diverse religious forms and practices—including biblical narratives, sermons, lamentations, jeremiads, and funeral rituals—during moments of mourning and misfortune in a struggle to provide not only meaning to the experience of loss but also, through this, cultivate and sustain divergent religio-political imaginaries. Key to this process is religious faith's intertwining of the ideological and the affective—or, as religious studies scholar Clifford Geertz expresses in the

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[6] While I focus my analytical attentions on the aftermath of September 11, I should be clear that I see religious mourning as an integral component in American public mourning generally. More recently one only has to think of the memorial services and public rituals in the wake of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Newtown, Connecticut or the Boston Marathon bombing. For one treatment of the religious dimensions to mourning in the case of the Boston Marathon bombing, see Peter Berger, "Religion and Other Curiosities," *The American Interest,* http://blogs.the-american-interest.com/berger/2013/04/24/religion-and-the-boston-marathon/ (accessed May 2, 2013).

epigraph to this chapter, its linking of "conceptions of the order of existence" and "moods and motivations."

I begin my analysis of public mourning and religious traditions by turning to George W. Bush's address on the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance after the September 11 attacks. Though curiously neglected by scholarship discussing Bush's mode of presidential discourse, this address provides insight not only into how Bush began to construct his post-September 11 rhetorical presence with and through religious materials but also into how to conceptualize a polity in mourning. From this foundation I then engage the established literature on the politics of mourning and develop a theoretical account of the *religious* politics of mourning as it figures into the reformation of a democratic community. I flesh out my theoretical account through close readings of the performances of Reverends Jerry Falwell and Jeremiah Wright after September 11. I draw on these cases in order to, on the one hand, suggest (without exhaustively canvassing) the repertoire of grief in American Christianity and, on the other, bring into focus two distinct models of religious mourning and how they work to cultivate penitent citizen-subjects disposed to particular political activity.[7]

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**§ 1. Divining the Kinship of Grief**
**(Or: On Bush at the Cathedral)**

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Substantial scholarly attention has focused on the content and style of Bush's post-September 11 rhetoric, including his controversial use of evocative Evangelical Christian language and metaphors.[8] The growing number of such analyses is, of course, understand-

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[7] I should clarify that both Falwell and Wright are elite religious figures occupying established offices in particular religious publics, namely, the conservative evangelical/fundamentalist Christian and progressive evangelical/African American Christian publics. I do not take them as either broadly representative of the Christian tradition or as illuminative of the quotidian practices of lived religion in the United States. Rather, I find them illustrative of two primary modes through which Christian mourning can proceed and therefore can cultivate or reaffirm forms of Christian subjectivity and democratic citizenship.

[8] See, e.g., Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11 (*Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003); Rogers M. Smith, "Religious Rhetoric and the Ethics of Public Discourse: The Case of George W. Bush," *Political Theory* 36 (2008): 272-300; Denise M. Bostdorff, "George W. Bush's Post-September

able given the institutionally-privileged rhetorical position of the president in the contempo-

rary political landscape of the United States and the role presidential discourse can play in

the reorientation of citizens and, thus, in American political development. As Jeffrey Tulis

states:

> Rhetorical power is a very special case of executive power because simultaneously it
> is the means by which an executive can defend the use of force and other executive
> powers and it is a power itself. Rhetorical power is thus not only a form of 'commu-
> nication,' it is also a way of constituting the people to whom it is addressed by
> furnishing them with the very equipment they need to assess its use—the metaphors,
> categories, and concepts of political discourse.[9]

Tulis's assessment of the rhetorical resources of the executive resembles the characterization

common to entries in the literature on American civil religion, which paint the president as a

"pontifex maximus," the "principal prophet, high priest, first preacher, and chief pastor of

the American nation."[10] Analyses in this vein examine how Bush leveraged the rhetorical

authority of his office to frame the events of September 11 within a melodramatic,

Manichean narrative with the United States as the crisply defined victim-hero and terrorists,

as well as any who would materially aid them, as villains. Bush reinforced this binary with

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11 Rhetoric of Covenant Renewal: Upholding the Faith of the Greatest Generation," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*
89:4 (2003): 293-319; and Caryn D. Riswold, "A Religious Response Veiled in a Presidential Address: A Theo-
logical Study of Bush's Speech on 20 September 2001," *Political Theology* 5:1 (2004): 39-46. Much of this
literature has been sharply critical of Bush's rhetorical efforts. To take one of these critiques as an exemplum,
consider the argument made by Rogers Smith, who claims that Bush's use of religious rhetoric (and particularly
his providentialist language) following September 11 runs afoul of democratic conditions in so far as it denies
the democratic authorship of policies, announces positions with religiously-inflected certainty, and shuts down
the possibility of dissent. Like any other actor using religious idioms, however, Bush's rhetorical authority is
ultimately dependent on his audience recognizing and assenting to his bid for divine authority. To claim knowl-
edge of God's will in no way evades the process of democratic judgment but rather invites it; such a statement
necessarily places the question before the audience in order for them to either affirm or rebuff the speaker's
claim.

[9] Jeffrey K. Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 203; see also Karlyn
Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Deeds Done in Words: Presidential Rhetoric and the Genres of Governance*
(Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990); and Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make: Leader-
ship from John Adams to Bill Clinton* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1997).

[10] Richard V. Pierard and Robert D. Linder, *Civil Religion and the Presidency* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Academie
Books, 1988), 25. As discussed in chapter one, Robert Bellah developed his notion of American civil religion
primarily through a reading of presidential inaugural addresses. See also Roderick P. Hart's characterization of
"official" civic piety and civil religious discourse as located most significantly in the executive in Hart and John
L. Pauley II, *The Political Pulpit Revisited* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2005).

religious resonances that cast the United States as not only an agent of righteous retribution but also the vanguard of liberal-democratic values.[11]

Yet to point to the president's commanding rhetorical powers does not mean that the office enjoys a monopoly on the rhetorical and political space within American culture or that it is paradigmatic of how religious resources are marshaled during moments of public mourning. Analyses of the presidential use of religious rhetorical and performative idioms, such as those in the civil religion literature or the critical readings of Bush's post-September 11 language, problematically bracket the larger political field and the competing narratives, actors, and meaning-making practices within it. As a result of this singular focus, political theorists risk constructing an account of public mourning that fails to adequately attend to the vital dimensions of religious practice and struggle in such moments. The product of this neglect is a flat rendering of religion as an instrument for control and domination, with powerful figures like Bush wielding providentialist language and evangelical registers of voice to de-authorize the people, ground an anti-political claim of certainty, and liquidate the space for dissent. Largely because of this focus on the presidency, such analyses re-articulate the Machiavellian civil religion position that the political use of religious registers of action and voice, especially in the wake of collective trauma, is principally a manipulative, authoritarian and, ultimately, counter-democratic tactic (see Chapter One).[12]

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[11] As a part of a larger project interested in melodrama as a genre of political rhetoric and thought, Elisabeth Anker argues that not just the Bush Administration but also the national news media advanced a melodramatic presentation. See Anker, "Villains, Victims and Heroes: Melodrama, Media, and September 11," *Journal of Communication* 55:1 (2005): 22-37.

[12] One of the more theoretically nuanced and promising entries in this literature is Paul Christopher Johnson, "Savage Civil Religion," *Numen* 52 (2005). Johnson's analysis of the civil religious responses to the attacks on the World Trade Towers stands out by introducing a welcome measure of nuance and distinguishing between what he calls "organic civil religion" and "instrumental civil religion." The former marks the relatively spontaneous practices of group mourning that occurred most dramatically in the ad hoc memorials of bric-a-brac—clothing, balloons, stuffed animals, and candles—surrounding Ground Zero. Instrumental civil religion, by contrast, consists of a calculated attempt by political elites to channel such potent and open-ended feeling and sentiment towards particular policies through speeches and ceremonies. It is, Johnson writes in a Machiavellian turn of phrase, a "process of symbolic hijacking." Johnson's phrasing here echoes the position of Sheldon

With a mind to bridging from these analytical treatments of Bush's evangelical discourse to a more nuanced account of the religious politics of mourning, I begin with a reading of Bush's National Day of Prayer and Remembrance address, which was given three days after the events of September 11. This address offers an illuminating point of entry into this chapter's discussion not only because it sets the ground for Bush's later rhetorical constructions, which more subtly incorporate religious materials, but also because his vivid depiction of the figure of the polity-in-mourning—what Bush refers to as the "kinship of grief"—serves as a foundation for thinking more rigorously through the religious politics of mourning. After examining Bush's speech, I briefly consider Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address" as an alternative mode of presidential mourning that also incorporates Christian tropes but ultimately breaks from the model of Bush by imparting an ethos of atonement as the proper response to shared loss.

At the most basic level, Bush's address works to hail citizens into a specific relationship with the divine and the nation-state. The theme of religio-political orientation is established in the speech's opening lines. Standing before the cathedral's marble altar, Bush declares, "We are here in the middle hour of our grief. So many have suffered so great a loss, and today we express our nation's sorrow. We come before God to pray for the missing and the dead, and for those who love them."[13] In these first sentences Bush establishes a triangu-

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Wolin who is similarly wary of the capacity of religion to be used for the purposes of the powerful. Writing during the ascendency of Christian Conservatism, Wolin narrowly defines civil religion as "the incorporation of religious practice into the system of governance and control." See Sheldon Wolin, "America's Civil Religion," *Democracy* 2 (1983): 7-17. As much as Johnson's analysis offers a more complex account of the post-September 11 dynamics of religion and politics—particularly in pointing towards the diffuse but pronounced emotional intensities flowing throughout the citizenry and finding expression in material practices—it ultimately repeats the orthodox concern with presidential rhetoric and the resulting conception of religious language (at least in its overt manifestations) as a means for political elites to exercise social control.

[13] George W. Bush, "President's Remarks at National Day of Prayer and Remembrance," *The White House*, September 14, 2001, http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010914-2.html (accessed May 7, 2012). All future quotes from the address are taken from this transcript.

lar relationship between the American political community ("we"), public loss, and the religious that he will return to and elaborate over the course of the address. Speaking simultaneously to the audience in the cathedral—a collection of politicians and members of the military and police—and a national audience made virtually present through the medium of television, Bush positions a generalized and homogenous "we" both temporally and spatially. According to Bush, the national "we" exists temporally in the midst of a shared mourning, suspended between injury and resolution, and spatially—or perhaps more precisely, cosmologically—in the presence of fellow citizens and the divine. To mourn publicly, he implies, involves a process of not only turning to one's peers—joining together with one's fellow citizens and sufferers—but also turning to a higher, transcendent power through the use of religious rituals and practices. By supplying the means of expression and communication, the materials of religion becomes the mediating term in this network of relations that unites God, nation, and individual.

Moving swiftly to the source of the nation's common mourning, Bush recalls the human losses of September 11, including those who perished in the buildings, those who resisted in the airplanes, and the rescuers who responded to the attacks. In conjuring the innocence and courage of those killed in the attacks, though, Bush opens the theodicean question of *why*—why these people were killed, and why a just God would allow such violent

Bush's use of religious materials tracks what historian Martin Marty calls the "priestly" tradition. Through this mode of address, Bush "comforts the afflicted" and affirms the virtue of the nation's political and social institutions. Martin E. Marty, *Religion and Republic: The American Circumstance* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 82.

In interviews after he left Bush administration, Michael Gerson, speechwriter for President Bush and the likely composer of his address during the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance, makes explicit this goal of giving consolation, saying that religious language was used in presidential speeches during the Bush Administration in order to offer "comfort in grief and mourning." In such circumstances, Gerson claims, "a president generally can't say that death is final, and separation is endless, and the universe is an echoing, empty void. A president offers hope—the hope of reunions and a love stronger than death, and justice beyond our understanding." Michael Gerson, "Religion, Rhetoric, and the Presidency: Remarks of Michael Gerson, Speechwriter and Policy Advisor to President George W. Bush," *Ethics and Public Policy Center,* online at http://www.eppc.org/publications/pubID.2237/pub_detail.asp, December 6, 2004, 2, accessed February 10, 2012.

and catastrophic acts to occur.[14] To the latter question, Bush invokes the inscrutability of the

Judeo-Christian God:

> God's signs are not always the ones we look for. We learn in tragedy that his purposes are not always our own. Yet the prayers of private suffering, whether in our homes or in this great cathedral, are known and heard, and understood. There are prayers that help us last through the day, or endure the night. There are prayers of friends and strangers that give us strength for the journey. And there are prayers that yield our will to a will greater than our own. This world He created is of moral design. Grief and tragedy and hatred are only for a time. Goodness, remembrance, and love have no end. And the Lord of life holds all who die, and all who mourn.

Bush's account of the divine meaning of the attacks identifies and attempts to dissolve a

problematic dissonance: the order of the world is figured as just and moral due to the be-

nevolent will of God, and yet the human experience of the universe—especially in light of

the present tragedy—is one of profound and seemingly arbitrary pain and suffering. The key

to resolving this apparent contradiction, Bush suggests, is to first recognize the limits and

fallibility of human awareness. God's plan can confound human expectations and senses of

justice but this fact alone does not point toward an immoral or chaotic universe; instead,

given the presupposition of a moral order to the world, the capacities of human intelligence

and mastery must be called into question. At the same time, Bush stresses the inexorable in-

tersubjective quality of suffering and mourning with private prayer implicated in a complex

web of relations between visible and invisible others. Bush elevates religious spaces (such as

the National Cathedral) and religious forms, including shared memorial services, lamenta-

tions and private prayer, as privileged means by which both individual and community

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[14] Of course, Bush is not the first person to reflect on these questions and dilemmas. The numerous theological and philosophical works categorized as theodicies engage the overarching question of how to reconcile the existence of evil, deprivation, and suffering in a world created by a benevolent and just divinity who is both omniscient and omnipotent. Why, put simply, do good people suffer, evil people prosper, and God does nothing? The term, which compounds the Greek works for "God" and "justice," was coined in 1710 by G.W. Leibniz in *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Men, and the Origin of Evil*, translated by E.M. Huggard, edited by Austin Farrer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952). On the category of theodicy more generally, see William Fulton, "Theodicy," *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics,* Vol. 12, edited by James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), 289.

reckon with loss, thus making it manageable and meaningful without ever fully understanding it. In this way, these modes of action and speech help reproduce a unified political collectivity still reeling from a traumatic dispossession by staging its lingering connections to those who have been lost while replenishing the social bonds amongst those who remain.

Yet, as Bush departs from his attempt to locate a divine reason for the event and continues to develop this image of American society, these post-September 11 social bonds are ultimately revealed to be, in Wendy Brown's phrase, wounded (and wounding) attachments.[15] The connections of grief, Bush begins, cut across the divides of religious difference and partisanship that typically fracture the social field:

> In these acts, and in many others, Americans showed a deep commitment to one another, and an abiding love for our country. Today, we feel what Franklin Roosevelt called the warm courage of national unity. This is a unity of every faith, and every background. It has joined together political parties in both houses of Congress. It is evident in services of prayer and candlelight vigils, and American flags, which are displayed in pride, and waved in defiance. Our unity is a kinship of grief, and a steadfast resolve to prevail against our enemies. And this unity against terror is now extending across the world.

While shared communal losses inevitably involve personal dimensions, Bush presents public mourning as a crucial moment for the emergence and (re)assertion of the unity and integrity of the political collective. The rituals of public mourning operate as the expression and re-enactment of foundational political identifications. They give form and force to what Bush, in a striking phrase, calls "a kinship of grief."[16] Bush does not merely describe the American community but also reconstitutes the people in relation to their injury. He calls forth a configuration of "the people" as the object and audience of his address with the ultimate aim of

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[15] See Wendy Brown, *States of Injury* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

[16] Bush's notion of a "kinship of grief" echoes Mark Seltzer's prescient characterization of America in the late 1990s as being marked by a "sociality of the wound" with its self-representations consisting of "a culture of suffering, states of injury, and wounded attachments." See Seltzer, *Serial Killers: Life and Death in America's Wound Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 278, 254. Lauren Berlant has similarly argued that American citizenship and senses of belonging have historically been constructed through affective regimes of suffering and grief. See Berlant, "Poor Eliza," *American Literature* 70 (1998): 635-68.

determining how the intense emotional energies and deep sense of fellow feeling—akin in many ways to the state of collective effervescence described by Émile Durkheim[17]—activated by the communal trauma should be directed. The solidarity of Bush's "kinship of grief," however, is forged not only from the identification of members with one another as they recognize their common injury but also against those who authored that injury and who must be opposed, punished, and violently dispatched. The alliances of mourning, as Bush invokes them, are ultimately predicated on the designation of a common enemy.

Bush's performance initiates the process in which he ascribes the political meaning of the September 11 attacks and establishes the narrative elements that would reappear throughout the duration of his administration. "Just three days removed from these events," Bush says, "Americans do not yet have the distance of history. But our responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil." By way of two sentences, Bush asserts that the country lacks both sufficient factual data and the cool rationality required to make intellectual sense of the events of September 11, but it is still possible to construct the meaning of the event and, from that, the proper response of the political community. According to Bush, the mission of the United States entails the preservation and dissemination of liberal democracy and its bundle of individual liberties, as well as the destruction of those who attacked America and, concomitantly, its political, economic, and religious traditions. In a September 20 address before a joint session of Congress, Bush clarifies the nature of this struggle, saying, "The course of this conflict is not known yet its outcome is certain. Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them."[18] The commitment to justice and liberal rights

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[17] See Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, translated by Karen E. Fields (New York: The Free Press, 1995).

[18] For an extensive discussion of the rhetorical binaries and dualisms used by Bush, see Lincoln, 19-32.

joins the United States and God, so that America becomes an avatar of the divine interest in disseminating liberal-democracy. As Bush states in a January 28, 2003 speech, "the liberty we prize is not America's gift to the world; it is God's gift to humanity."

Although taking a novel form, Bush's invocation of a uniquely American historical obligation resonates with a number of sedimented rhetorical constructions in the country's political culture, including the Puritan notion of an errand in the wilderness, the expansionary impulse of Manifest Destiny, and the Cold War imperative to combat anti-religious communism. At their core these images of America cast it as the instrument of God with a divinely ordained duty in and to the world to spread, respectively, the Protestant Christian religion, the virtuous institutions of liberal government, and the system of capitalism. Bush echoes these earlier formulations while imagining a national past that sustains the image of the American people as pacific and innocent. Indeed, he stresses the victimhood of the country while staving off any sense of responsibility or resignation. "This nation is peaceful, but fierce when stirred to anger," he states in his National Day of Mourning address, casting peace as the default state and preference of the country while simultaneously positioning retributive violence as the necessary and legitimate course of action.[19] A week later, during his September 20 speech before Congress, Bush would return to the theme of American moral and political goodness, saying, "Americans are asking, why do they hate us? They hate what we see right here in this chamber—a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms—our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other." The attacks on the United

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[19] This mobilizing trope of the pacific American nation reappears frequently in Bush's public addresses. See, for example, his October 7, 2001 "Address to the Nation": "We're a peaceful nation. Yet, as we have learned, so suddenly and so tragically, there can be no peace in a world of sudden terror. In the face of today's new threat, the only way to pursue peace is to pursue those who threaten it." Mark Brandon illuminates how this particular national ethos, which frames the United States as essentially peaceful and only warlike when injured, recurs in American politics during times of war; see Brandon, "War and the Constitutional Order," in *The Constitution in Wartime: Beyond Alarmism and Complacency*, edited by Mark Tushnet (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

States are thus presented as the fruits of ideological resentment and the hostility of a closed, heteronomous culture, rather than the result of America's past policies and actions on the international stage.

It is illuminating to briefly compare Bush's address on the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance to Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address," which was also occasioned by a moment of dramatic loss. In a similar fashion to Bush, Lincoln insists on speaking in a first person plural, evoking a national "we" that has suffered loss and remains in a state of struggle. Lincoln asserts in his opening sentence that the origins of this nation are not found in the Constitution—the document that begins "We the people of the United States"—but rather the Declaration of Independence. By elevating the Declaration as the foundational articulation of the American community, Lincoln privileges its explicit commitments to freedom and equality over and above the compromised technical-legal language of the Constitution. In a telling shift, however, Lincoln characterizes the principle of equality as a "proposition"—by definition a point introduced for consideration and acceptance as a course of action—rather than, as Thomas Jefferson writes in the Declaration, as among those "truths" held "to be self-evident." Lincoln transforms the status of equality from a taken-for-granted premise of government to an aspiration that must be enacted and fought for by the nation's citizenry in the "testing" of the Civil War. Lincoln therefore alters the mission of the Union from simply reinstating the antebellum legal-institutional order to one of struggling to preserve and better actualize the nation's constitutive commitments.

The concise address Lincoln offers at Gettysburg performs this re-orientation of national purpose through a particular configuration of what Bush calls the kinship of grief. The reformation of social bonds and collective understandings plays off of the underlying purpose of the day's event, namely, the sanctification of the dead. Lincoln states:

> [W]e can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground…
> It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that
> from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they
> gave the last full measure of devotion…that this nation, under God, shall have a new
> birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people,
> shall not perish from the earth.

Over the course of the last paragraph of his speech, Lincoln subtly alters the object of action. Whereas he begins with the prospect of the assembled audience sanctifying Soldiers' National Cemetery, he concludes this is not possible for the blood of Union soldiers has already consecrated it. What is necessary, he claims, is for the audience not to dedicate the grounds of the cemetery but rather dedicate themselves to the lingering struggle. Furthermore, Lincoln inflects the political and military struggle of the moment with religious meaning. In rejecting the notion that the living may dedicate the ground of Gettysburg, Lincoln evokes a chain of equivalences between dedication, consecration (to set apart as sacred), and hallowing (to make holy or sacred). When Lincoln performs his rhetorical turn wherein the audience becomes simultaneously the subject and object of the dedication, the residue of this discursive chain and its attendant gesture towards the transcendent remain so that the struggle for equality becomes invested with a holy or sacred significance.[20]

While Lincoln's sacralization of the nation in mourning and the principle of equality resonates with Bush's performance at the National Cathedral, the two presidents' invocations of God and the resulting relationship between the divine and the polity diverge. Bush, it should be remembered, situates the United States as an avatar of the divine, combating the forces of heteronomy and evil and disseminating the righteous good of freedom. Lincoln's address ascribes no such partiality to the divine. Indeed, the one overt reference to God in

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[20] The liturgical sensibility that infuses Lincoln's address manifests in the responses of the audience. According to one reporter's account, the end of Lincoln's address inspired one openly weeping captain to exclaim, "God Almighty bless Abraham Lincoln," while other members of the audience responded to the speech by saying "Amen." See Gabor Boritt, *The Gettysburg Gospel: The Lincoln Speech that Nobody Knows* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 118.

the address is strikingly ambivalent. In presenting the United States as "this nation, under God," Lincoln establishes the divine as a consistent presence that stands in judgment of the United States. The figure of God as judge becomes even more pronounced when this address is read in conjunction with Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, in which he offers the possibility that the Civil War is a process of divinely ordained attrition through which the United States atones for its practice of slavery. Given over two years after the address at Gettysburg, Lincoln's Second Inaugural speech recognizes the competing claims by both North and South on and in the name of the Christian God. Following this identification of the common religious roots and assertions of the two regions, Lincoln states:

> The Almighty has His own purposes. "Woe unto the world because of offenses; for it must needs be that offenses come, but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh." If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

The Second Inaugural departs from Bush's rhetorical construction—and supplements Lincoln's own words at Gettysburg—by instilling atonement as an ethos of grief and political reformation. If the Gettysburg Address consecrates and sacralizes the American people as stewards of a divine principle of equality, the Second Inaugural overlays that mission and the losses of the war with a sense of historical culpability and an imperative to repent the sins of failing to practice the divine duty of equality.

The invocation of honored dead and the presence of the divine in the performances of both Lincoln and Bush serve the purposes of inculcating an imperative to act as a com-

munity. Put differently, Lincoln and Bush can be understood as cultivating the conditions for certain modes of collective action. Lincoln's simultaneous gesture to sacralize equality and cast the war in terms of attrition and atonement recruits subjects into a campaign to fulfill the refurbished promise of the Declaration of Independence. By contrast, Bush works to establish finite attachments of belonging and delimited mutuality—sufferer to sufferer—that bind the nation together in an aggressive response to a shared state of injury. While still far from specific institutional transformations, Bush's performance of public mourning contributes to the formation of an aesthetic and discursive environment that closes the possibility to certain political developments (such as self-critique) while increasing the likelihood of others (a bellicose and expansionary foreign policy).

In order to get beyond the presidential politics of religious mourning, I use the next section to develop a theoretical account of, first, the politics of public mourning and, second, the crucial place occupied by religious traditions in this process of responding to loss and reforming political society.

### § 2. The Religious Politics of Mourning and Political Reformation

In response to the events of September 11, theorists have increasingly turned their attentions to the dynamics of public mourning. These scholarly works and reflections provide a foundation for understanding the political entanglements and significance of public mourning. As I go onto discuss, it is necessary think beyond these works insofar as they do not attend to the religious dimensions of public mourning in the United States.

The attendant practices and rituals of mourning supply meaning to loss. If, on a personal level, death often inspires an experience of disorientation—a lack of direction,

understanding, and purpose[21]—mourning practices provide a framework for confronting this shock and disorientation while constructing a narrative that ascribes meaning to the event of death and offers a bearing for future action.[22] A similar dynamic occurs in instances of communal loss. Traumatic events such as experiences of public violence and mass death, Jenny Edkins explains, disrupt the status quo and open the social field to transformation: "Something happens that doesn't fit, that is unexpected—or that happens in an unexpected way. It doesn't fit the story we already have, but demands that we invent a new account, one that will produce a place for what has happened and make it meaningful."[23]

Simon Stow, Judith Butler, and Heather Pool, among others, highlight the political dimension of public mourning. Analyzing the modes of mourning in Thucydides' rendering of Pericles's funeral oration and Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address," Stow writes: "Public ceremonies and the stories told there shape policy… [T]he public stories told about the dead affected the politics of the living."[24] According to Stow, the rhetorical performances of Pericles and Lincoln both featured *epainesis* (praise for the fallen) and *parainesis* (advice for the living), but to different political effects. By taking into consideration these divergent effects, Stow identifies two broad types of public mourning practices. The first of these, romantic public mourning, is pointedly uncritical and oriented towards a goal of reconciliation and consensus. As reflected in Pericles' celebration of an idealized Athenian democracy in his

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[21] Butler grippingly depicts this experience as follows: "There is losing, as we know, but there is also the transformative effect of loss, and this latter cannot be charted or planned. One can try to choose it, but it may be that this experience of transformation deconstitutes choice at some level… I think one is hit by waves, and that one starts out the day with an aim, a project, a plan, and finds oneself foiled. One finds oneself fallen. One is exhausted but does not know why. Something is larger than one's own deliberate plan, one's own project, one's own knowing and choosing" ("Violence, Mourning, Politics," 11).

[22] See Geoffrey Gorer, *Death, Grief, and Mourning* (New York: Arno Press, 1977). Understood in this way, it could be said that mourning practices and rituals exist more (if not solely) for the sake of the living—those, in other words, who encounter death and must carry on in its wake—than for the good of the dead.

[23] Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), xiv. A similar conception of collective trauma as a symbolic and psychological rupture in need of meaning appears in E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

[24] Stow, "Pericles at Gettysburg and Ground Zero," 206.

funeral oration, the romantic type suppresses the divisions and inequities within the social field and reaffirms the polity's established identity. By contrast, tragic (or Dionysian) mourning engages in critical self-reflection and confronts the community with challenging choices in the hope of transforming its political values and practices.[25] Rather than supplying comfort to citizens, the tragic model generates ambivalence and sensitivity to the immutable tensions and partialities of democratic life.

Stow's analysis echoes the recent theoretical work of Judith Butler, particularly with respect to her critique of modes of mourning that propagate exclusionary and violent conceptualizations of the nation-state. As Butler writes, "Whereas some forms of public mourning are protracted and ritualized, stoking nationalist fervor, reiterating the conditions of loss and victimization that come to justify a more or less permanent war, not all forms of mourning lead to that conclusion."[26] The manner by which a community processes a shared loss or trauma, including the rituals, practices and discourses involved, profoundly affects the way the community acts and understands itself. Moreover, the social practices of grief enact and engender conceptions of what lives are worth valuing, what actions are appropriate or necessary in valuing those lives, and how communities should manage the fact of injury and vulnerability. Butler's normative impulse is to recognize and nurture those mourning practices that facilitate the sense of human interdependence and thus mitigate the use of violence as a reaction to loss. Furthermore, Butler's work identifies mourning rituals as em-

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[25] Ibid., 195-96; Simon Stow, "Agonistic Homegoing: Frederick Douglass, Joseph Lowery, and the Democratic Value of African American Public Mourning," *American Political Science Review* 104:4 (2010): 682-83. Stow's reading of Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address" casts it as an example of Dionysian mourning that challenges the "current practices" of the United States ("Pericles at Gettysburg," 203).

It also bears mentioning that Stow's typology of romantic and tragic mourning resembles the typology of civil religion constructed by historian Martin E. Marty. In his analysis of public religion in America, Marty identifies two modes of religion: the priestly and the prophetic. Marty explains these concepts as follows: "The priestly will normally be celebratory, affirmative, culture-building. The prophetic will tend to be dialectical about civil religion, but with a predisposition toward the judgmental…one comforts the afflicted; the other afflicts the comfortable." See Marty, 82-83.

[26] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004), xix.

bedded in a social field of power that sets the contours of what (and whom) can be grieved and how.

At the same time as they reflect the existing network of power, these sites also open up the space for reconfiguring the shape of power relations in a society. The theoretical work of Heather Pool underlines the transformative capacity of public mourning. In her analysis of the aftermath of traumatic losses in American history, such as the murder of Emmett Till and the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire, Pool depicts mourning as an instance in which social and political standing is at once manifested and thrown open to change. Quoting Rogers Smith, she describes public mourning as a crucible in "which conceptions of political membership, allegiance, and identity are formed and transformed."[27] Public mourning serves as a focusing event, which directs citizen attention to particular issues and imbues these questions with heightened urgency and significance. In the case of the Triangle Fire, for example, individuals who already enjoyed the status of full citizens were captivated by the horrific spectacle of the 146 workers who died as a result of the factory owners locking the exits, preventing escape from the fire. As a result of the publicity surrounding the event, activist groups began pushing for reforms in industrial safety policies, leveraging the event for legal transformation. In addition to changes in policy, Pool points to how the fire altered the public perception of recent immigrants, such as those who perished in the blaze, so that they were now considered "insiders" belonging within the American people and capable of making claims for state protections and consideration. Pool is careful to specify that while these moments are ripe with potential—specifically, the possibility of including new groups within

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[27] Rogers Smith, "Identities, Interests, and the Future of Political Science," *Perspectives on Politics* 2 (June 2004): 301, quoted in Heather Pool, "The Politics of Mourning: The Triangle Fire and Political Belonging," *Polity* 14:2 (2012): 186. See also Heather Pool, "Mourning Emmett Till," *Law, Culture and the Humanities* (2012): 1-31.

the civil body and further empowering those who are already nominally within "the people"—this potential can be squandered, suppressed, and resisted.

It is not incidental or mere hyperbole, then, that historian Nicole Loraux describes the ritual of Athenian funeral orations as "inventing" that city-state or that Garry Wills speaks of Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address" as the speech that "remade" America.[28] These theoretical and historical accounts of public mourning reveal that such moments exist as key sites for what I call *political reformation*. By this term I mean the process of reconstructing the dominant political culture, social mores, and social imaginary of a political community in the wake of a broadly felt misfortune or loss. While not immediately institutional in their effects, political reformations can establish the conditions that facilitate consent to be either granted or withheld to certain exercises of power or acts of the state.[29] Using the Gramscian conceptual framework established in the introductory chapter, political reformations involve a reconfiguration of the hegemonic common sense within a community—that is, the taken-for-granted ideas, ways of life, and modes of speech and practice.

The language of reformation is purposefully ambivalent since the process of responding to crisis and recovering from public loss is open to the possibility of either a restoration of the polity's former state or the development of new structures and mores. Indeed, in reflecting on the vicissitudes of crises, Gramsci emphasizes the strong likelihood of an existing historical bloc—the entrenched ruling parties or interests in a political community—retaining its place of power:

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[28] See Nicole Loraux, *The Invention of Athens: The Funeral Oration in the Classical City*, translated by Alan Sheridan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986); and Garry Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words that Remade America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006).

[29] While using different descriptive terminology, both Linda Zerilli (who talks of "predicative moments of politics") and Jason Frank (who prefers the phrase "constituent moments") have recently investigated these moments. See Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 171; and Frank, *Constituent Moments: Enacting the People in Postrevolutionary America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 8.

> The traditional ruling class, which has numerous trained cadres, changes men and programmes and, with greater speed than is achieved by the subordinate classes, re-absorbs the control that was slipping from its grasp. Perhaps it may take sacrifices, and expose itself to an uncertain future by demagogic promises; but it retains power, reinforces it for the time being, and uses it to crush its adversary and disperse his leading cadres.[30]

Even in the re-imposition of the pre-existing order of power, however, there is an attendant demand for calibration and modulation of social mores in light of loss—a preservation of political rule, in other words, through the transformation, however subtle, of the habits of mind and body that inform a community's foundational commitments, values, and identity.

Public mourning is also marked by both overt and subtle dynamics of contestation. In a word, public mourning is agonistic, with a multiplicity of interpretations and meanings of the event vying for a hold on the imaginaries of political subjects. Because of the irreducible dimensions of difference and division that mark the uneven terrain of American political culture, the responses to collective losses or traumas are never univocal or monotonic; rather, they are a multitude, with each response inflected by the particular interests, values, and traditions of the speaker and her primary audience. Each of these claims—as they should be understood since they are *attempts* to inscribe meaning to the event and so guide the polity in its self-understanding—is directed at becoming a 'political truth,' that is, an opinion that is acknowledged and assented to by the majority and thus becomes hegemonic. To become hegemonic these claims must first hail a constituency that takes them up as the proper or natural way to feel, think, and act politically in the wake of the disruptive event.

Yet even as scholars have begun to examine instances of public mourning as crucial junctures for democratic politics, this burgeoning body of theoretical work has so far failed to engage directly and systematically with how religious traditions are critically bound up

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[30] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, translated by Quintin Hoare and Goeffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 210-11.

with these moments. This neglect is particularly curious given, on the one hand, the frequent connection made by scholars between religion and issues of existential security and mortality and, on the other, the political power and potency of the Christian tradition over the history of the American republic.

Death and crisis forms are, of course, key concerns of American Christianity as well as other religious traditions.[31] Indeed, religious scholar Martin Riesebrodt recently claimed that the management of misfortune through the appeal to super-human forces is the definitional core of religion. Accordingly, the liturgical components of a religious tradition's cultus, including rituals, prayers, hymns, psalms, incantations and so on, are what Riesebrodt calls "interventionist practices" oriented towards hailing superhuman beings such as gods for the purposes of "warding off misfortune, coping with crises, and laying the foundation for salvation."[32] In these passages Riesebrodt highlights the role of what Durkheim calls 'piacular' rites and practices in religious traditions. As Durkheim explains, "Any misfortune, anything that is a bad omen, anything that inspires feelings of anguish or fear necessitates a *piaculum* and is consequently called *piacular*. Therefore, the word seems appropriate to designate rites that are celebrated in worry or sadness."[33] Piacular rites are rituals and practices of repentance and rededication where subjects are re-oriented to their identity as members belonging to a collective and the social bonds that may have been frayed through strife and stress are reformed.

Speaking broadly, religious traditions provide ways of inhabiting grief, approaching mortality, and encountering suffering. In his classic article on religion as a cultural and sym-

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[31] As Stanley Hauerwas and Roman Coles write, "Christianity, at least Christianity not determined by Constantinian or capitalist desires, is training for a dying that is good. Such good dying is named in the gospel as trial, cross, and resurrection." Stanley Hauerwas and Roman Coles, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations Between a Radical Democrat and a Christian* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2008), 3.

[32] Martin Riesebrodt, *The Promise of Salvation: A Theory of Religion*, translated by Steven Rendall (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), xii.

[33] Durkheim, 290.

bolic system, cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz argues that religions engage "the prob-

lem of suffering" not by diminishing it or offering a path that avoids pain and loss but rather

by making it intelligible and therefore bearable. According to Geertz, religious traditions of-

fer materials that can be used "to cope with [the problem of suffering] by placing it in a

meaningful context, providing a mode of action through which it can be expressed, being

expressed understood, and being understood, endured."[34] To render Geertz's description

into a language he himself does not use, we can say that religion offers a *praxis of grief*. Relig-

ious traditions contain rituals, rhetorics, and gestures that are rooted in conceptions of the

world and that, when enacted, place suffering and loss within that established framework.

Religious language, practices, and rituals offer not only key ways of expressing or represent-

ing these feelings but also, importantly, of shaping, educating, and composing them. Put

differently, the materials within the cultus also facilitate a *poetics of grief* in that they engender

novel meanings and ways of sensing the world.

In addition to the symbolic meanings they express and produce, religious rituals also

foster arrays of sensibilities and disposition within subjects. Geertz captures this level of ac-

tivity in speaking of the "moods and motivations" that religious forms induce and sustain in

practitioners. Although they differ sharply in many other regards, Geertz's position here

resonates with that of fellow religious scholar Talal Asad, who advances the notion of relig-

ion as performative, that is, as a matter of embodiment and enactment rather than simply a

matter of creeds composed of propositional beliefs.[35] According to Geertz, the materials of

religious traditions induce

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[34] Geertz, 105. To be clear, by referencing Geertz I do not mean to completely ally myself with his conception of religion (which I engage critically in the introductory chapter); rather, his statements should be understood as reflecting a broader camp of scholarship that identifies suffering, death, and existential security as key concerns for religious traditions.
[35] See Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

in the worshipper a certain distinctive set of dispositions (tendencies, capacities, propensities, skills, habits, liabilities, pronenesses) which lend a chronic character to the flow of his activity and the quality of his experience. A disposition describes not an activity or an occurrence but a probability of an activity being performed or an occurrence occurring in certain circumstances.[36]

The liturgical apparatus of a tradition shapes the character and temperament of religious subjects, disposing them towards certain activities and sensibilities and against others. Given the diverse repertoire of performative materials within each religious tradition—and Christianity's heterogeneous mix of sub-traditions—social actors involved in practices of mourning can cultivate a number of different dispositions within their audience.

Although Geertz recognizes the constructive capacities of religious traditions and how they can be put to the task of shaping subjectivities, his analysis does not consider the ways in which these traditions are implicated in fields of power and politics. In this respect political theorist William Connolly offers a helpful supplement to Geertz's account of religious rituals with his concept of micropolitics. Micropolitics, Connolly explains:

embodies a very important modality through which private–public lines are crossed on a regular basis and pluralist virtues are cultivated, neutralized, or demeaned… Micropolitics consists of multimodal practices, deploying mixtures of image, rhythm, words, gesture, and touch to help code the visceral registers of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Micropolitics thus finds ample expression in churches, families, universities, corporations, unions, film, the new media, and especially the resonances back and forth between all of these venues. It helps to code the visceral register of intersubjective life.[37]

As Connolly makes explicit, liturgies and rituals are key sites of micropolitical activity that "code the visceral register of intersubjective life"—or, as Geertz says, induce the simultaneous formation (or consolidation) of "moods and motivations" and "general conceptions of order." Echoing the positions of Geertz and Asad, Connolly insists that religious traditions encompass both creeds and what he refers to as a vertical dimension, which involves enact-

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[36] Geertz, 95.
[37] Ibid., 649-50.

ments that express and condition "embodied feelings, habits of judgment, an patterns of conduct below direct intellectual control."[38] As discussed earlier in the dissertation, Gramsci's notion of common sense captures not only the accepted and appropriate ways of thinking and acting but also the aesthetic dimensions of public being that concern how subjects sense, perceive, and feel. In this respect it tracks Connolly's concept of the infrasensible or visceral level of social life, which operates below human consciousness and features not ideas but rather "thought-imbued feelings."[39] This "fugitive circuit," as Connolly describes the visceral-ideological connection, manifests in the play of rituals and technical practices of religious traditions, which "do not simply represent beliefs or desires already there; they also educate the senses in specific ways; they accentuate some modes of conduct as they dampen others; and they help to compose embodied public virtues."[40]

To better perceive how processes of religious mourning "educate" and "compose" subjectivities and can thus contribute to particular political projects, it is necessary to attend not just to presidential invocations of religious themes and language but also to how these modes of voice and practice work at the micropolitical level within particular religious networks and publics. In the next sections I explore two of these sites and examine how they feature conflicting mourning practices and bids for political action in the wake of September 11. Moving beyond a singular focus on Bush, I interrogate two illustrative and divergent "religious virtuosos" (to use Riesebrodt's phrase): Revs. Jerry Falwell and Jeremiah Wright. By means of distinct modes of Christian mourning and providing the traumatic loss with mean-

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[38] William E. Connolly, *Pluralism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 25; see also Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, especially Chapter 1.

[39] William E. Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 13. To be clear, the visceral—and the affective depths that it indexes—is a perennial dimension of public life; during moments of intense stress and anxiety, however, this dimension takes on a substantially heightened political power and significance.

[40] William E. Connolly, "Some Theses on Secularism," *Cultural Anthropology* 26:4 (2011): 649.

ing, Falwell (along with Pat Robertson) and Wright mobilize their constituencies towards sharply different models of penitent citizenship and pious action.

## § 3. Robertson, Falwell,
## and the Antechamber to Terror

On September 13, 2001, Reverend Pat Robertson, host of the *700 Club*, invited Reverend Jerry Falwell onto the program to reflect on the recent attacks. As the figureheads of the modern wave of conservative Christian religiosity in America, Robertson and Falwell both made careers of calling for the intertwining of economic liberty, traditional familial and societal arrangements, and the governmental enactment of scriptural doctrines. Through the medium of television and the adoption of business-style advertising and distribution techniques, the two men popularized a particular configuration of Christianity complete with a distinct repertoire of scriptural touchstones, rhetorical styles, and embodied practices. Since its first airing in 1966, Robertson's the *700 Club* has fostered and sustained a committed Christian viewership, drawing in an average audience of one million viewers for its daily showings on the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN).[41] Through his founding of the Moral Majority and Liberty Baptist College (later rechristened Liberty University), Falwell helped catalyze the dramatic mobilization of fundamentalist Christians as a major political bloc within the Republican coalition in the late 1970s and 1980s.[42] Yet despite their similarly conservative political bearing, Robertson and Falwell's public responses to September 11 differed strikingly from Bush in terms of content and form.

From the outset of the *700 Club* segment with Falwell, Robertson established a prophetic register of voice by reviewing the putative sins of the country, including greed,

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[41] "About The 700 Club," *The 700 Club*, http://www.cbn.com/700club/ShowInfo/About/about700club.aspx (accessed May 25, 2012).
[42] See Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Matthew Avery Sutton, *Jerry Falwell and the Rise of the Religious Right: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Bedford, 2012).

materialism, hedonistic sexuality, and secular humanism. After cataloging these various transgressions, Robertson declared,

> We have insulted God at the highest levels of our government. And, then we say 'why does this happen?' Well, why it's happening is that God Almighty is lifting his protection from us. And once that protection is gone, we all are vulnerable because we're a free society, and we're vulnerable… All over the Arab world, there is venom being poured into people's ears and minds against America. And, the only thing that's going to sustain us is the umbrella power of the Almighty God.[43]

The relationship Robertson posits between the sins he identifies and the events of September 11 is not directly causal in the sense that the terrorist attacks are God's punishment on a wayward nation, as if to say God directed or ordained the plane hijackers. Instead, according to Robertson, the errant policies, practices, and lifestyles in the United States drive God away, thus attenuating the protection God has historically offered the country. This alienation of God, in turn, creates the necessary, though not sufficient, conditions for the country to be injured and its citizens murdered. When he enters the conversation Falwell immediately advances a similar prophetic perspective on the attacks, arguing that September 11 was only a preview of the shape of things to come "if in fact God continues to lift the curtain and allow the enemies of America to give us probably what we deserve."[44]

As discussed in Chapters One and Two, prophetic modes of speech such as the jeremiad do not necessarily involve making predictions about the future but rather, per Martin Buber's formulation, setting an "audience, to whom the words are addressed, before the choice and decision…The future is not already fixed in this present hour; it is dependent on the real decision…in which man takes part in this hour."[45] A prophet poses critical collective

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[43] Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, "Transcript of Pat Robertson's Interview with Jerry Falwell Broadcast on the 700 Club, September 13, 2001," in Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 104.

[44] Ibid., 106.

[45] Martin Buber, *The Prophetic Faith* (New York: Harper and Row, 1949), 2-3, quoted in George Shulman, *American Prophecy: Race and Redemption in American Political Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 4.

decisions to an audience with the hope that the community will accept the proffered truth and act differently on the basis of this new sense of reality. As Falwell boldly puts it in an earlier work, "We the American people have to make a choice today. Will it be revival or ruin? There can be no other way… Abraham Lincoln declared, 'If destruction be our lot, we ourselves will be its author and its finisher.'"[46] Thus, Falwell and Robertson are prophets by bearing witness to what they perceive as the truth of American decadence and sinfulness. Working in this register, they identify the cause of the attacks and project diverging future paths based on how the community decides to respond to the present crisis. In one possible future, America works to purge its sins and God restores protection; alternatively, the country does nothing and, as Robertson describes it, the events of September 11 become but "the antechamber to terror," with further, even more devastating, destruction inflicted on the United States. By bearing witness in this fashion, the two men seek to engender, on the one hand, a sense of existential vulnerability and separation from God and, on the other, the imperative to rectify these conditions through certain programmatic actions.[47]

Over the course of his evangelical career, Falwell regularly adopted the form of the jeremiad in his sermons and rhetorical performances. Through this particular mode of prophetic address, Falwell offered a diagnosis of the ills of American society, including such recurring conservative bêtes noires as feminism, secular humanism, and the larger societal trend of diminishing male authority.[48] By calling out these ideologies and realities as destructive of the moral fabric of the United States, Falwell also issued a call to action, hailing a constituency of concerned Christian citizens into being for the purposes of taking collective

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[46] Jerry Falwell, *Listen, America!* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1980), 24.
[47] Susan Friend Harding captures this process particularly well when she writes, "Witnessing aims to separate novice listeners from their prior, given reality, to constitute a new, previously unperceived or indistinct reality, and to impress that reality upon them, make it felt, heard, seen, known, undeniably real." Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 37.
[48] See ibid., especially chapter six.

action and resisting these social forces. Falwell's call, it must be said, resembled in many ways his prophetic performances prior to the attacks, with the same jeremiad structure and the same principal villains (the federal judiciary and progressive groups who uproot and displace religious traditions). Even as it was an exercise in repetition, however, Falwell's narrative located the events of the attack within an extant conception of the social and political world with an attendant understanding of the event's meaning and import. Whereas Falwell and Robertson had long positioned divine punishment as looming in ethereal depths of a possible future, September 11 advanced the plot in their jeremiad by marking, in their framing, an initial materialization of God's anger over America's sinful practices. The affective intensities unsettled and activated by the event, thus, were encoded (or rather, re-encoded) so that elemental questions of public morality were endowed with existential significance.

As with experiences of dark times generally, moments of public loss give rise to intense demands for meaning that narrative and ritual can provide.[49] Narrative, as Claude Bremond points out, is a particular mode of constructing and articulating history. Specifically, it consists of "a discourse which integrates a sequence of events of human interest into the unity of a single plot."[50] Instead of a simple chronological account of events, such representations of history impart a structure and forge meaning through the careful selection of

[49] Hannah Arendt highlights the particular salience of narrative in "dark times" marked by human suffering and anxiety by quoting Isak Dinesen: "'All sorrows may be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them.' The story reveals the meaning of what otherwise would remain an unbearable sequence of sheer happenings." Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1968), 104. In an examination of how Arendt places storytelling and narrative as the constitutive medium and material of politics, Annabel Herzog echoes the particular need for such practices during anxious periods, writing, "Political by nature, stories have a political role: to illuminate dark times." Herzog, "The Poetical Nature of Political Disclosure: Hannah Arendt's Storytelling," *Clio* 30 (2001): 189. For an extended examination of the jeremiad narrative from an Arendtian perspective, see David S. Gutterman, "Stories of Sinfulness: Narrative Identity in America," in *Religion, Politics, and American Identity: New Directions, New Controversies*, edited by David S. Gutterman and Andrew R. Murphy (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), 73-94; as well as David S. Gutterman, *Prophetic Politics: Christian Social Movements and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).
[50] Claude Bremond, "The Logic of Narrative Possibilities," in *Narratology: An Introduction*, edited by Susana Onega and Jose Angel Garcia Landa (London: Longman, 1996), 63.

what details are included and stressed (and, concomitantly, what is excluded and deempha-sized). The narrative Falwell fashions with Robertson on the *700 Club* threads together invocations of scriptural language in order to construct the logic of its plot. The biblical bed-rock of Falwell's prophetic performance is 2 Chronicles 7:14, a passage that reappears throughout Falwell's decades-long career as well as the Christian conservative movement that he nurtured. He invokes the passage, for instance, in his 1980 political and spiritual manifesto, *Listen, America!*, presenting it as follows: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."[51] Along with this passage, Falwell also implicitly (and explicitly in his eventual, ostensible apology, which I discuss below) relies on Proverbs 14:34, which reads in the King James Version: "Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people." Falwell para-phrases this passage, saying, "Living by God's principles promotes a nation to greatness; violating those principles brings a nation to shame."[52] From these biblical passages, Falwell constructs an account by which the political fate of a community is bound up with and de-termined by its moral constitution. While God rewards a righteous people, the unrighteous and sinful people are either denied the auspices of God's protection or made the object of God's wrath.

In translating these passages to the current moment, Falwell articulates a principle of shared responsibility where the fate of the whole is contingent upon the actions of all its constitutive parts. The notion of shared responsibility, of course, appears in earlier prophetic rhetoric and performance in the United States, including that of William Lloyd Garrison, as

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[51] Quoted in Falwell, *Listen, America!*, 19.
[52] Jerry Falwell, "Why I Said What I Said," *Jerry Falwell Ministries*, 17 September 2001, online at http://denbeste.nu/external/Falwell.html (accessed May 4 2012).

discussed in chapter one. Echoing Garrison, Falwell characterizes the precarious health and security of the polity as dependent on the moral righteousness of the community's social arrangements, political actions, and governmental policies. In order to retain its chosen status, American society must constantly demonstrate that it is morally deserving of such a station. The fragile covenantal ties Falwell rhetorically conjures up between the United States and the Christian God require constant vigilance and, in the event of any deviation, forceful condemnation and repentance. From this principle, Falwell extends responsibility for the September 11 attacks beyond the actual perpetrators and to those parties he sees as creating the immoral conditions that alienated and angered God. He vigorously proclaims this shared culpability, saying,

> And, I know I'll hear from them for this. But, throwing God out successfully with the help of the federal court system, throwing God out of the public square, out of the schools. The abortionists have got to bear some burden for this because God will not be mocked. And when we destroy 40 million little innocent babies, we make God mad. I really believe that the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, People For the American Way, all of them who have tried to secularize America. I point the finger in their face and say: "You helped this happen."

The indictment of the current state of American public life (and the associated explanation of September 11) allows Robertson and Falwell to formulate an agonistic frontier, wherein an "us" and a "them" are offered in order to mobilize a political constituency. The location of the line separating friend and enemy within the polity distinguishes them from Bush's rhetorical framing of the event, which reifies the political community as a homogenous whole directed against an external other (namely, terrorists and all those who would aid and support them). Robertson and Falwell foreground the cleavages and divisions that traverse the political field and exist in tension with the claims to the unity and integrity of "we the people." To use Stow's typology of public mourning practices, Robertson and Falwell enact, at

least in part, a tragic mode of public mourning. Rather than adopting a narrative of unity that suppresses conflict and overtly encourages national chauvinism, they act in accordance with the recognition that "conflict and disagreement…are central to democratic politics."[53] Yet, importantly, they deviate from Stow's agonist paradigm by framing the condition of difference as something that can and must be overcome. Far from evincing respect or generosity towards their political adversaries (as variants of normative agonistic thought call for), Robertson and Falwell demonize and vilify the array of actors they see as challenging the social agenda of Christian conservatism. Progressives become effective traitors and threats to the survival of the country.

The explicit aim of Falwell and Robertson's prophetic denunciations is a nationwide Christian revival, wherein the American social order is Christianized (or, by their lights, re-Christianized). Such a course of action would restore the foundational place of the Bible to American values and the authority of religious officers in matters of public life. Packed into the call to revival is an imperative to return. On the one hand, individual citizens should come back to the church and reaffirm their personal commitment to Christianity and, on the other hand, the general public should take steps to once again harmonize the organization of society and the state with biblical dictates. As Falwell remarks, "When the nation is on its knees, the only normal and natural and spiritual thing to do is what we ought to be doing all the time—calling upon God." According to Falwell, moments of mourning are extraordinary times that propel persons toward religious traditions and, in so doing, model what should be ordinary and normal practice. The foxhole tendency to turn to God during times of strife and threat should be the consistent practice of all Americans, making the bible the touchstone for all decisions, both personal and collective. Indeed, Falwell attempts to extend and

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[53] Stow, "Agonistic Homegoing," 682.

deepen the sense of existential precariousness incited by the September 11 attacks by invoking the ever-present threat of God further retracting his grace from the United States.

In order to mobilize citizen assent and energy for this revival, Robertson and Falwell craft a narrative that sutures together religious forms and American political history. Here, the history of the United States is grafted onto the familiar plot of the Garden of Eden, with the projection of the Founding as a prelapsarian America populated by steady Christian men who erected the governmental framework necessary for economic and political freedom. As with the story of Eden, however, the country fell from its idyllic origins with the erosion of the Christian hegemony and the gathering power of self-interest and the activist state. Through this default on its covenantal duties to protect liberty and uphold Christian morality, the United States thus set the conditions that led to its own injury. The religiously inflected narrative Falwell and Robertson offer operates to simultaneously make sense of the trauma of September 11 and establish a program for how the community should understand itself and go forward. The narrative harnesses the desire to vanquish vulnerability and sublimates the associated will to revenge into a fantasy of recovery and return where security is accomplished not just through punitive international action but also internal transformation and purification. Robertson and Falwell's narrative is also remarkable insofar as it figuratively white washes the past in order to present the early republic as the halcyon days of robust liberty and rigorous morality; gone under the narrative erasure are the systems of exclusion, domination, and oppression experienced by, among others, blacks, women, immigrants, homosexuals, immigrants, and non-Protestants. The determinative (and ultimately normative) experience of American history becomes that of socio-economically well-positioned Christian white men, and so it is no accident that the decline of American righteousness in the

conservative jeremiad tracks the historical emergence and political mobilization of formerly marginalized groups.

The response to Robertson and Falwell's comments was immediate, unified, and unwaveringly disapproving. Some, like Lorri Jean of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, criticized the exchange for reproducing the same hateful and fanatical mentalities that inspired those individuals who took part in the attacks.[54] Both Falwell and Robertson and Islamic fundamentalists, she argues, display shades of theocracy in their statements, with a corresponding hostility to anyone who rejects their particular faith or acts in opposition to its dictates. White House spokesman Ken Lisaius immediately set about distancing the Bush Administration from Falwell, saying, "The president believes that terrorists are responsible for these acts. He does not share those views [of Falwell and Robertson], and believes that those remarks are inappropriate." Typical of the broad swath of critics are the sentiments of Americans United Executive Director Barry W. Lynn, who rejected the perspective of Falwell and Robertson, stating, "I call on all Americans to reject their divisive comments and continue to nurture a spirit of unity."[55] Whether overt or not, the critiques of the segment relied on a notion that cultivating internal divisions was inappropriate during a time of mourning (and eventually, during time of war).[56] The implication is that such moments de-

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[54] "Falwell Apologizes to Gays, Feminists, Lesbians," *CNN,* September 14, 2001, available online at: www.cnn.com/2001/US/09/14/Falwell.apology.index.html (accessed May 14, 2012).

[55] Steve Benen, "Backlash to Bigotry," *Americans United*, October 2001, available online at: http://www.au.org/church-state/october-2001-church-state/featured/backlash-to-bigotry (accessed May 4, 2012).

[56] Cf. Ted G. Jelen, "Political Esperanto: Rhetorical Resources and Limitations of The Christian Right in the United States," *Sociology of Religion* 66:3 (2005): 303-21. My analysis differs from Jelen's in two principal ways. First, he attributes the limitation of Falwell's mode of speech to the "pervasive individualist political culture" of the United States and the resulting resistance to notions of collective responsibility; such an interpretation, however, ignores the substance of the criticism launched at Falwell's comments (which presented him as a threat to collective unity, not individualism) as well as the other political traditions, including republicanism, that make up American political culture and elevate community as a primary good. Second, Jelen conceptualizes liberal individualism as a transcendent and trans-historical ideal, whereas I approach it as a historically variable and contingent principle whose meaning is shaped and determined by particular material and ideological conditions; the idea of 'individualism' does not stand apart from (and against) hegemonic religious traditions

mand national solidarity, and that internecine skirmishes among fellow Americans, such as that pitched by Falwell and Robertson, are not only inappropriate but also illegitimate.

In response to the widespread criticism, Falwell issued a statement entitled "Why I Said What I Said." As the name implies, the document offered more apologia than apology, with Falwell adamantly refusing to retract his statements on the *700 Club*. What he offers instead is a sense of regret over the tactical presentation and form of his prophetic rhetoric:

> My statements on the "700 Club" on Thursday, September 14th, were called divisive by some whom I mentioned by name. I had no intention of being divisive. I was sharing my burden for revival in America on a Christian TV program, intending to speak to a Christian audience from a theological perspective about the need for national repentance. In retrospect, I should have mentioned the national sins without mentioning the organizations and persons by name.[57]

Apart from his misstep of identifying particular groups and individuals he deems responsible for the fallen state of American society, Falwell chalks his frosty reception up to an error in timing and audience rather than the substance and style of what he said. "My mistake on the '700 Club,'" he explains, "was doing this at the time I did it, on television, where secular media and audience were also listening." Repeatedly he invokes his expectation of addressing a singularly Christian audience with a common body of idioms and scriptural interpretations, explaining his harsh tone by saying, "I was asking on a Christian audience on a Christian TV program to claim II Chronicles 7:14 and repent." After making this argument, Falwell immediately transitions into another recital of the nation's collective sins, including abortion and the secularization of the public sphere, this time without identifying those guilty of these acts. However, the statement performs a critical shift in the valence and register of this indictment of the United States, with Falwell extending responsibility not to discrete groups

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but rather obtains its meaning through and with, among other things, religious discourses and practices. See Karen Orren's contributions to Karen Orren and Rogers Smith, "Structure, Sequence, and Subordination in American Political Culture: What's Tradition Got to Do With It?," *Journal of Policy History* 8:4 (1996): 470-84.

[57] Falwell, "Why I Said What I Said."

but rather the American people as a whole: "We have expelled God from the public square and the public schools. We have normalized an immoral lifestyle God has condemned."

Over the course of his post-September 11 appearances, Falwell blurs the line between agonism and antagonism, that is, between respectful disagreement and existential conflict.[58] Indeed, numerous scholars have criticized Falwell and Robertson precisely for their tendency to demonize their opponents.[59] Putting to one side these normative judgments, though, it is clear that Falwell's practice of demonization reflects his investiture of political contestation with existential stakes that diminish the possibility of moderation and accommodation and, instead, frame politics as a confrontation between moral absolutes. As evinced by his actions after September 11, Falwell's actions are not geared towards conversion or consensus—in other words, reaching across denominational and ideological divisions to reach agreement—but rather to the reaffirmation and intensification of a model of penitent subjectivity. According to Falwell, the proper and necessary ethos of American

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[58] See Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005); and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985). Agonistic relations, as Mouffe describes them, entail the assertion of difference and disagreement but with a shared background of norms and values uniting opponents and diminishing the need to resort to violence. Antagonistic relations, however, involve the ascription of an existential threat demands the use of violence. In their rhetorical presentation, however, Falwell and Robertson reveal these positions to be points along a continuum—in other words: a matter of degrees—rather than a conceptual binary tracing a difference in kind.

[59] In George Shulman's analysis, for instance, Falwell's performance exemplifies the political risks of prophetic address. Falwell's invocation of "a *theodicy* of divine justice," Shulman writes, threatens to collapse politics into moral absolutes and divine commands and direct the community towards the retrieval of idealized origins and the exclusion/elimination of the corrupting influences of heterodox ideologies and actors (14). See also Anthony E. Cook, "Encountering the Other: Evangelicalism and Terrorism in a Post 911 World," *Journal of Law and Religion* 20:1 (2004-2005): 1-30.

According to Andrew Murphy and Jennifer Miller, the incident on the *700 Club* demonstrates "the ways in which religious rhetoric and language continue to be deployed in the service of reinforcing social control, attacking politically salient cultural differences, and (at times, literally) demonizing political dissent." Andrew R. Murphy and Jennifer Miller, "The Enduring Power of the American Jeremiad," in *Religion, Politics, and American Identity: New Directions, New Controversies*, edited by David S. Gutterman and Andrew R. Murphy (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), 51.

With respect to their call for the mutual imbrication of society and religion, Bruce Lincoln characterizes Falwell and Robertson as Christian analogues to the Islamic fundamentalists who orchestrated the September 11 attacks. Both groups, Lincoln argues, are alike in seeking to maximize the role of religion in the public sphere and the state. He writes, "Less militant than al Qaeda, perhaps (given that the violence they employ in pursuit of their goals is rhetorical and not physical), the televangelists' religious ideal is equally maximalist, if Christian rather than Muslim" (50).

citizenship is repentance and atonement. To be a properly constituted Christian American entails not only recognizing the immortality of certain acts of government but also feeling the weight of the nation's sins and understand misfortunes as expressions of divine judgment. This particular aesthetic configuration of religious faith disposes Christian subjects to political action in the struggle to bring government and society into alignment with biblical strictures. Importantly, this formation of religious faith also foregrounds the ever present tension in the practice of democratic politics between political commitment and the recognition and respect of difference.

To further develop a framework that accommodates the diversity of political claims possible with and through religious rituals of mourning, I turn next to the case of Rev. Jeremiah Wright. In addition to my interest in treating Christianity as pluralistic, I examine the distinct repertoire Wright brings to bear on the events of September 11 and how these religious materials figure into the micropolitics of his performance.

### § 4. Jeremiah Wright
### and the American Babylon

Rev. Wright assumed his position as pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ (UCC) on the South Side of Chicago in 1972. Over the course of his 36-year career at Trinity UCC, Wright oversaw the expansion of the church's congregation from an initial 87 members to over 6,000 at the time of his retirement.[60] Along with this substantial growth in membership, Wright brought an interest in social justice and political activism to his ministry. Wright's active political stance reflected the tradition of Black Theology of Liberation, which was formally articulated by black ministers in the late 1960s and depicted the mission of Christ as entailing the critique and transformation of oppressive social and political struc-

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[60] "About Us: Pastor Emeritus Rev. Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr.," *Trinity United Church of Christ*, available online at: http://www.trinitychicago.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=23 (accessed May 20, 2012).

tures.[61] This strain of theological thought construes Christianity as a faith fundamentally allied with the poor and powerless against those forces that would deny or abridge freedom, equality, and justice. As practiced in a country historically marked by institutionalized racial hierarchies and entrenched structural and ideological barriers to racial equality, American appropriations of liberation theology have primarily been performed by and centered on African Americans, who are figured as modern analogues to the captive Israelites of the Old Testament.

It was in his role as pastor for Trinity UCC that Wright first encountered Barack Obama, then working as a community organizer on the South Side of Chicago and soliciting the support of local churches and ministers. After meeting Wright and informally attending services at Trinity, Obama eventually joined the church and was baptized by Wright. Wright officiated at Obama's marriage to Michelle Robinson, baptized the couple's two daughters, and provided the title for Obama's second book, *The Audacity of Hope*. This relationship rapidly deteriorated in 2008, when then Senator Obama campaigned for the Democratic presidential nomination. During the Democratic primary, inflammatory excerpts from Wright's sermons appeared on websites such as YouTube. Political opponents and members of the news media widely (and repeatedly) criticized Wright's harsh language. The most repeated of these criticisms included that Wright's comments were "divisive," "crazy," "un-American," "bigoted," "racist," "destructive," "backward thinking," "rant and rave," and the

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[61] James Cone is often credited with formally founding this intellectual and religious movement in his texts *Black Theology & Black Power* (1969) and *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970), though many of the tradition's core principles and beliefs can be traced back to the eighteenth century. See Sarah Posner, "Wright's theology not 'new or radical,'" *Salon*, May 3, 2008, online at: http://www.salon.com/2008/05/03/black_church/ (accessed June 6, 2012). In this article, Posner quotes Jonathan L. Walton as stating: "James Cone believed that the New Testament revealed Jesus as one who identified with those suffering under oppression, the socially marginalized and the cultural outcasts. And since the socially constructed categories of race in America (i.e., whiteness and blackness) had come to culturally signify dominance (whiteness) and oppression (blackness), from a theological perspective, Cone argued that Jesus reveals himself as black in order to disrupt and dismantle white oppression."

"politics of the past."[62] Besides tarring Obama with charges of associating with militant radicals, the publicity surrounding the controversy also served to, at least temporarily, racialize Obama by tying him to Wright's brand of black liberation theology and the tradition of the black church.[63] Buffeted by critical voices, Obama ultimately disavowed Wright and the substance of his sermons.

For my analysis here, I focus my attention on the sermons that galvanized Wright's public excoriation in 2008. Close readings of these two sermons—"The Day of Jerusalem's Fall" (September 16, 2001) and "Confusing God and Government" (April 13, 2003)—reveals them to, again, involve the religious coming-to-terms with the traumatic dispossession felt on September 11 but through different modes and with a different political project than those of Falwell and Robertson. As I will describe, Wright cultivates an ethos of critical atonement through the practice of prophetic declarations and biblical narrative.

In a way similar to Falwell and Robertson, Wright takes scripture as the structuring foundation for his performance. Yet rather than adopt the literalist biblical hermeneutics practiced by those self-avowed Christian fundamentalists (who figure the text as a body of direct, divine commands), Wright approaches scripture as an archive of metaphors and analogies. By invoking and exploring these resonant metaphors and analogies, he invites the audience to re-think the contemporary moment and its critical dilemmas. In his September

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[62] Edward Herman and David Peterson, "Jeremiah Wright in the Propaganda System," *Monthly Review*, September 2008, available online at http://monthlyreview.org/080901herman-peterson.php (accessed June 5, 2012). Herman and Peterson also note that the debacle over Wright's sermons was the most reported news story in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* for the first 125 days of 2008. See also Tamelyn N. Tucker-Worgs, *The Black Megachurch: Theology, Gender, and the Politics of Public Engagement* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011), 184.

[63] As has been pointed out in other studies of the election, Obama adopted a strategy of "deracialization" in order to help neutralize the reluctance and hostility of white voters to a black political candidate. See Tucker-Worgs, chapter 6; Joseph McCormick and Charles Jones, "The Conceptualization of Deracialization," in *Dilemmas of Black Politics*, edited by Georgia Persons (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 66-84; Carol K. Sigelman, Lee Sigelman, Barbara J. Walkosz, and Michael Nitz, "Black Candidates, White Voters: Understanding Racial Bias in Political Perceptions," *American Journal of Political Science* 39:1 (1995): 243-65; and Clarence E. Walker and Gregory D. Smithers, *The Preacher and the Politician: Jeremiah Wright, Barack Obama, and Race in America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009).

16 sermon, performed on the Sunday immediately following the attacks, Wright uses Psalm 137 as the thematic basis for his oration. The psalm depicts the pained yearning and seething rage of the exiled Jewish people after the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem and the subsequent displacement of the Jews from their homeland. With their poetic expression of the simultaneous undoing of a community and its reformation-in-exile through shared sorrow, the first six verses of Psalm 137 have long captivated the imagination of dislocated peoples and inspired numerous anthems and hymns. Since the days of chattel slavery African American religious figures have mobilized the image of a people by turns diasporic and in bondage that runs throughout the Old Testament to rhetorically frame the plight of African Americans, who were similarly forcibly torn from the home of their ancestors and subjected to conditions of cruelty and servitude.[64] Because of this conventional place in the black Christian idiom, Wright confidently opens his sermon by stating that his audience is familiar with these first lines of Psalm 137.

Far less well-known and less thought about, he asserts, are the lines immediately after those initial six verses. Wright insists it is to the psalm's latter verses that the congregation must turn in this current moment of loss and pain. In the King James Version, verses 7-9 are rendered as follows:

> Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom
> in the day of Jerusalem;
> who said, Rase *it*, rase *it*,
> *even* to the foundation thereof.
> O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed;
> happy *shall he be*, that rewardeth thee as thou has served us.
> Happy *shall he be*, that taketh and dasheth

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[64] The Old Testament narrative of Exodus in particular has, as Michael Walzer describes, been a source of "an idea of great presence and power in Western political thought, the idea of deliverance from suffering and oppression: this-worldly redemption, liberation, revolution." Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985). For African Americans suffering under systems of slavery, segregation, and racial prejudice, the Exodus storyline provided a narrative structure and language crucial for the imagination and formation of black solidarity, identity, and nationalism in the United States. See Eddie S. Glaude, *Exodus!: Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

<div style="text-align: center">thy little ones against the stones.</div>

These lines track a sharp and troubling shift from the earlier invocations of loss and lamentation. Here the emotional valence transforms to one of vengeful and violent desire against the Babylonians who have scourged the homeland of the Israelites. The wounded attachment to Jerusalem putrefies, giving rise to graphically violent fantasies that involve not only the physical leveling of Babylon but also the brutal murder of its children. Given the rawness of these emotions and the bloody intensity of the resulting demands on God, Wright admits that these are difficult lines to parse with a congregation, particularly in the wake of the September 11 attacks. "I was licensed to preach in May of 1959," he says. "I was ordained in January of 1967, and I became a pastor in March of 1972, but in all of my years of preaching, I have never preached a sermon which dealt with these difficult verses, these last three verses in Psalm 137. These verses are brutally honest and express what the people of faith really feel after a day of devastation and senseless death."[65] Though difficult to work through, Wright insists that unpacking Psalm 137 will allow the audience to make sense—or at least a better, more nuanced sense—of their current condition and the decisions before them. Wright captures this aspect when he speaks of how this scriptural passage can be used in order to "sort out what it is we are really feeling" at the moment.[66] As we will see, Wright's sermon is not directed at being narrowly therapeutic in the sense of alleviating and minimizing the emotional intensities aroused by the events of September 11; instead, his sermon performance works on these intensities, disciplining and directing them so that they do not

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[65] Jeremiah Wright, "The Day of Jerusalem's Fall," in *9.11.01: African American Leaders Respond to an American Tragedy* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2001), 82. He claims later in this sermon, "One of the reasons Psalm 137 is rarely read in its entirety is because it spotlights the insanity of the cycle of violence and the cycle of hatred" (86).

[66] Ibid., 83.

give rise to an escalation of violence. Put another way, Wright's performance simultaneously acts as an expression and cultivation of the powerful emotions inspired by the event.

After establishing the scriptural focus of his sermon, Wright develops the resonances between the experiences of the fifth century BCE Jewish people and those of Americans in September 2001. To do so, Wright directs the audience to 2 Kings 25, which depicts the appalling cruelty involved in the Babylonian conquest. Both soldiers and civilians were slaughtered. Houses burned to the ground. The walls and towers of the city—the symbols of its military strength and economic power—destroyed. And the people who believed themselves and their city to be God's chosen were figuratively torn asunder. By recounting the horrors of Jerusalem's fall, Wright makes the sorrow, loss, and anxiety felt by the Israelites painfully vivid; the constructed proximity of these affective intensities grounds the sense of similarity to the audience's experience of the recent terrorist attacks. For this reason, he places special emphasize on the destruction of the towers of Jerusalem: "The symbol of power was gone. The substance of their military and monetary power was gone. The towers of Jerusalem were gone."[67] The metaphoric relation plays on two levels by capturing the factual and symbolic parallels of the two events—namely, the loss of towers overlaid with social and economic import—as well as the emotional resonances of these events.

The experience of such profound loss, Wright narrates, easily shifts to desire for recompense and retribution. By acting on these desires, however, the victims of loss can catalyze a cycle of violence, wherein "violence begets violence. Hatred begets hatred, and terrorism begets terrorism."[68] If acted upon the bloody fantasies captured in the closing lines of Psalm 137 become but the prelude to further injury. Yet if America is similar to the exiles of Jerusalem by being enmeshed in a cycle of violence, Wright clarifies that the September

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[67] Ibid., 84.
[68] Ibid., 87.

11 attacks were not the beginning of such a cycle. Indeed, adopting a prophetic register of voice, he declares that the attacks were, if anything, a judgment on and product of America's past injustices. Far from the fragile city on a hill invoked by Falwell, Wright summons an image of the United States as always-already fallen; thus, while using similar prophetic registers of voice and narrative, Wright deviates from Falwell in not holding out a idyllic but gone away America as his goal.[69] Rather, Wright construes American history as a parade of transgressions violating the basic principles of political and spiritual justice. Taking the critical statements made by Ambassador Edward Peck on Fox News about American foreign policy as a point of departure, Wright leaps into a condemnation of the societal sins and violent actions of the United States, which is worth quoting at length:

> We took this country by terror, away from the Sioux, the Apache, the Comanche, and the Navaho. Terrorism. We took Africans from their country to build our way of ease and kept them enslaved and living in fear. Terrorism. We bombed Grenada, killed innocent civilians, babies, non-military personnel. We bombed the black civilian community of Panama with stealth bombers, and killed unarmed teenagers and toddlers, pregnant mothers, and hard-working fathers. We bombed Khadafi's home and killed his child. "Blessed are they who bash your children's heads against the rock." We bombed Iraq, we killed unarmed civilians trying to make a living. We bombed a plant in Sudan as payback for an attack on our embassy, killed hundreds of hard-working people, mothers and fathers who left home to go out that day, not knowing they'd never get back. We bombed Hiroshima. We bombed Nagasaki—and we "nuked" far more than the thousand who died in New York and the Pentagon, and we never batted an eye. Kids playing in the playground, mothers picking up children after school—civilians not soldiers—people just trying to make it day by day. We have supported state terrorism against the Palestinians and black South Africans, and now we are indignant because the stuff we have done overseas is now brought right back into our own front yards. "America's chickens are coming home to roost."

The density of allusions in Wright's performance deserves analytical parsing. Wright weaves together his recitation of America's variegated history of cruelty and violence with evoca-

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[69] The rhetorical and performative tradition of black Protestant Christianity in the United States has long featured the jeremiad form and prophetic registers of voice, both of which have been used for the purposes of identifying social injustice and mobilizing political activity. See, e.g., David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004); and David Howard-Pitney, *The African American Jeremiad: Appeals for Justice in America*, revised and expanded edition (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005).

tions of the bloodthirstiness of Psalm 137 and the still controversial words of Malcolm X.[70] What results is a snowballing condemnation of the United States fashioned through repetition, cadence, and allusion that gestures, by turns, to scripture, black nationalism, and the recurrent sins of the American state at home and abroad over the course of its existence. Wright's sermon attempts to implode this fantasy of national innocence and chosenness by confronting the historical amnesia that facilitates its existence. To recall not just the slaughter of the Native Americans—the founding crime and original sin of the nation—but also the sundry transgressions that followed and continue to haunt the collective, it recasts America as a nation from the virtuous injured party to the long standing perpetrator of violence and death. Indeed, Wright presents the country as repeatedly orchestrating terrorism and meting out suffering far in excess of that which it currently endures. Through his proclamation of the violent and unjust aspects of the American past (as well as its present), Wright problematizes the clean line conjured by Bush that separates those cast as good/victim and evil/terrorist in the wake of September 11.

What Wright ultimately calls for in his sermon is an intense, critical process of collective atonement and critical political action. The goal of this invocation is explicitly to "get us to wake up and move away from the dangerous precipice upon which we are now poised."[71]

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[70] To explain briefly: Malcolm X's December 4, 1963 remarks regarding "chickens coming home to roost" came in a post-speech question-and-answer session in which he was asked to speak on the recent assassination of President John F. Kennedy. In an interview with Louis Lomax, Malcolm X explained the comment saying, "I meant that the death of Kennedy was the result of a long line of violent acts, the culmination of hate and suspicion and doubt in this country. You see, Lomax, this country has allowed white people to kill and brutalize those they don't like. The assassination of Kennedy is a result of that way of life and thinking. The chickens came home to roost; that's all there is to it. America—at the death of the President—just reaped what it had been sowing." See Louis Lomax, "A Summing Up: Louis Lomax interview Malcolm X," *Teaching American History* http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=539 (accessed June 14, 2012).

[71] Ibid., 87. It is impossible to avoid detecting similarities between the content and form of Wright's sermons and those of the later, more radical (and less canonized) speeches of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. These parallels appear, for instance, in King's February 4, 1968 sermon identifying the destructive potential in what he calls the "drum major instinct." In that sermon, King states:

> [We] are drifting there because nations are caught up with the drum major instinct. "I must be first."
> "I must be supreme." "Our nation must rule the world." (*Preach it*) And I am sad to say that the nation

This precipice of violent reprisal—or rather, the extension and intensification of the violence already present in American practices of imperialism, militarism, and racism—can only be avoided by critically assessing the state of the United States and how well it and its constituents embody and carry out God's justice. Wright explicitly includes himself in this self-examination, saying it is "time for me to examine my own relationship with God."[72] Simple soul searching as an end in itself, however, is insufficient. The citizenry must not only shake itself from its willed blindness and recognize the truth of its conditions but also act in accordance with this formerly denied knowledge. In conjunction with this invitation to self-examination, Wright announces, "Now is the time for social transformation." He elaborates on this, saying,

> We have got to change the way we have been doing things. We have got to change the way we have been doing things as a society. Social transformation. We have got to change the way we have been doing things as a country. Social transformation. We have got to change the way we have been doing things as an arrogant, racist, military superpower. Social transformation… And let me suggest to you that rather than figure out who we gonna declare war on, maybe we declare war on racism. Maybe we need to declare war on injustice. Maybe we need to declare war on greed.[73]

As Wright makes clear, such political action requires, above all else, the reformation of the commitments, practices, and institutions of the political community rather than the exacting of revenge on an external enemy.

Wright elaborates on these themes of imperialism, militarism, and racial discrimination in his April 13, 2003 sermon, "Confusing God and Government." Inspired in this

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in which we live is the supreme culprit. And I'm going to continue to say it to America, because I love this country too much to see the drift that it has taken. God didn't call America to do what she's doing in the world now. (*Preach it, preach it*) God didn't call America to engage in a senseless, unjust war as the war in Vietnam. And we are criminals in that war. We've committed more war crimes almost than any nation in the world, and I'm going to continue to say it. And we won't stop it because of our pride and our arrogance as a nation.

Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Drum Major Instinct," *Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Global Freedom Struggle*, http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_the_drum_major_instinct (accessed June 13, 2012).

[72] Ibid., 88.

[73] Ibid., 90.

instance by the image of Jesus weeping in Luke 19:37-44, Wright again begins with a familiar image—namely, Christ crying at the news of Lazarus' death—and then moves to the unfamiliar. In this particular passage from the Book of Luke, Wright explains, Christ is depicted weeping but not in the face of a personal loss. Rather, he weeps for the inability of an oppressed and wounded community to think beyond the logic of retribution and the horizon of its injury. Specifically, the people of Jerusalem, which was then under Roman occupation and control, suffer and bear the agonizing burden of foreign oppression. These emotional intensities blind them from perceiving any other course besides countering imperial cruelties and degradations with further violence and bloodshed. In his gospel, Luke narrates the arrival of Jesus at the outskirts of Jerusalem and his immediate, tearful response, where Christ announces, "If you, even you had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes." As Wright states in his gloss on the text, "he cried for his people because they were blinded by their culture, they were blinded by their condition, they were blinded by their circumstance, they were blinded by their oppression, they were blinded by being in a spot where they desired—deeply desired—revenge, and they could not see the things that make for peace."[74]

As in his "The Day of Jerusalem's Fall" sermon, Wright uses the scriptural site to refract the contemporary conditions of the United States and present the current moment in a way that engages the audience's critical imagination and judgment. How, he implicitly asks, can a community, "blinded by the pain of their situation," be compelled, against its willful claims of innocence and necessity, to acknowledge responsibility and seek justice rather than vengeance? The answer he offers involves, on the one hand, using the biblical text as a dis-

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[74] A transcript of Wright's sermon can be found at: "God Damn America," *The Sluggite Zone*, available online at: http://www.sluggy.net/forum/viewtopic.php?p=315691&sid=4b3e97ace4ee8cee02bd6850e52f50b7, March 24, 2008 (accessed May 1, 2012). All references to this sermon are taken from this transcript.

tancing heuristic and, on the other, confronting the community with its problematic elisions and disavowals. In the first place, the biblical account becomes a heuristic to identify and work through a pressing dilemma facing the political community. In this instance, Christ mourns not just the past injuries of the city of Jerusalem but also the resulting closure of any potential for nonviolent action. The figure of Christ before Jerusalem poses, in a novel form, the predicament confronting the United States in the wake of September 11. For those in Roman-occupied Jerusalem (just as for the citizens of the United States), "payback is the only game in town." Yet resorting to compensatory violence only sows the seeds of further bloodshed. According to Wright, "War does not make for peace, war only makes for escalating violence, and a mindset to pay the enemy back by any means necessary." What Wright describes here is a disposition towards retributive violence that springs from the experience of dispossession. Together with the impetus to act in the wake of an injury, such a disposition orients citizen judgment away from critical self-reflection and to militaristic action.

Using biblical analogues as a foundation for thinking and feeling anew about the current moment allows Wright to shift gears and confront the conditions that he claims occlude and distort the process of political judgment. Specifically, the move to violence as the appropriate response to suffering is facilitated by a fundamental confusion and conflation of earthly and divine powers. According to Wright, "Y'all looking to the government for that which only God can give… The people under oppression were confusing God and Government." Wright calls out the American people for endowing the apparatus of the state with a transcendent normative authority, a power to determine the truth and right of any situation without criticism and contestation. This vision of government merges together state power, national covenant, and divine authority, thus leading to the sanctification of the state and the worship of its power. These conditions of state and national idolatry engender

a dynamic of political demonization and the divestment of citizen judgment, wherein the state assumes the untroubled place of God's agent—if not God itself—in order to realize a providential vocation. The myriad cruelties and systems of domination enabling such actions are rendered undetectable beneath these resounding overtures of divine purpose.

Like other American prophetic figures before him including Martin Luther King Jr. and John Brown, Wright vehemently proclaims the partiality of this vision of America and names the sins that covertly undergird its national endeavors. Wright declares:

> And the United States of America government, when it came to treating her citizens of Indian decent fairly, she failed. She put them on reservations. When it came to treating her citizens of Japanese decent fairly, she failed. She put them in internment prison camps. When it came to treating her citizens of African decent fairly, America failed. She put them in chains. The government put them in slave quarters, put them on auction blocks, put them in cotton fields, put them in inferior schools, put them in substandard housing, put them in scientific experiments, put them in the lowest paying jobs, put them outside the equal protection of the law, kept them out of their racist bastions of higher education and locked them into position of hopelessness and helplessness. The government gives them the drugs, builds bigger prisons, passes a three-strike law, and then wants us to sing "God Bless America." No, no, no. Not "God Bless America"; God Damn America! That's in the Bible, for killing innocent people. God Damn America for treating her citizen as less than human. God Damn America as long as she keeps trying to act like she is God and she is supreme!

The latter portion of this section became the incendiary sound byte that received significant publicity during the 2008 controversy over Wright's association with then-candidate Obama. However, an examination of the utterance in its context offers a better sense of its meaning and significance. Speaking in an imperative voice and with a plainly provocative indictment of America, Wright fractures the ready alliance of God and the American government. As captured in the title of his sermon, Wright aims to pull apart God and the state and denounce the rhetorical move made by Bush to sanctify the American government and clothe state policies in the will of the divine.

In a crucial move Wright not only separates the state and God but also differentiates both from the American people. Wright shifts his language in this sermon from that of a

generalized "we," which marks the culpability of the whole political community, to that of a particularized "she," which specifies an abstracted state apparatus as responsible for both past and present sins. Reminiscent of Falwell, Wright identifies an internal enemy to which he relocates the blame and hostility of his audience. The state becomes the locus of attention while the democratic community that ostensibly directs it is rendered invisible in terms of accountability for past injustices. By prying apart state, God, and the people, Wright seeks to induce a realignment of obligation so that Christian citizens elevate their religious sensibilities above the claims of national interest. Thus, the materials of religion can be mobilized to critique and confront government while no individual or government can claim to fully know or embody the will of the divine. Indeed, in Wright's figuration, the divine is a power that perpetually chastens and humbles human claims to power and knowledge. "God," Wright remarks towards the close of his sermon, "has this way of bringing you short when you get too big for your cat-blazing britches." The figure of the divine marks a horizon—a standing limit and challenge to acts of state and the fantasies of a nation.

In summary, Wright attempts to cultivate a sensibility of critical atonement. The practice of pious citizenship, at least as Wright invokes and models it in his performance, entails an awareness of historical culpability and a corresponding ethos of Christian circumspection. By contrast to Bush's sweeping providentialist claims of American chosenness and duty that constitute September 11 as an injury that unifies the nation, Wright seizes upon that injury as a manifestation of national sin and corruption. If citizens seek salvation and security, Wright insists they must orient themselves not in response to the wound itself but the national hubris and past transgressions that made it possible. There are certain resonances between Wright's penitent orientation to loss and those proffered by Lincoln and Falwell. All three men situate misfortune in a larger divine order that not only makes it

meaningful but also traces the cause of that hardship to the actions and arrangements of the nation. The crucial differences between these three models of mourning come in the repertoires involved and, in turn, the precise forms of repentance and penitent subjectivities they work to create.

## Conclusion

All varieties of loss, from the personal to the collective, invite explanation and meaning—an accounting of why it happened and what were the conditions that allowed it to occur. When losses are public and shared these questions become more pronounced. What responsibility, if any, does the collective bear for those who are gone and those who are injured? While questions of responsibility (or causality) can be answered in narrowly non-religious terms,[75] Bush, Falwell, and Wright illuminate how the entanglement of religious traditions and public loss in American political culture yokes together responsibility and redemption. The assignment of responsibility and meaning for the loss begs a second question: is America to be the instrument of redemption, or is it the object to be redeemed? Bush locates responsibility external to the collective and thus casts America as the instrument to redeem the world through the imperial spread of "God's gift" of liberalism. Falwell too positions the nation as God's chosen instrument in the world, but simultaneously establishes it as the object of redemption. Chosenness, by this framing, is not a given status but rather a quality that must be earned through the fulfillment of certain obligations. By avowing the constitutive violence and exclusions of the nation and identifying with those persons outside

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[75] And there certainly were (and continue to be) such accounts, including Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin, 2004); Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Aqaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Vintage, 2007); and *The 9/11 Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004).

of and savaged by the idea of a chosen people, Wright traces the causal thread of September 11 back to the foundational notion of America.

Approaching the micropolitics of mourning clarifies the always-precarious process of constructing the self-understandings and dispositions that shape citizens' political lives. Dispositions, to be clear, involve how people live their faith and commitments, and how these values subtly yet profoundly influence how they think, judge, and interact in political society.[76] The desires that these processes accentuate or diminish—the desire for revenge, justice, or the recovery of what was lost—necessarily set the stage and skew the political possibilities for the collective. At the same time, public mourning entails the reformation of worldviews that have been troubled and unsettled. What remains of this community, and to what do we commit ourselves? What are we as a people now? Where do we go from here? The religious rituals of mourning in the wake of September 11 and other public losses become the scaffolding for such ideological reconstruction, proffering particular ways of construing and understanding both the cosmos and the collective.

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[76] Through a reading of the works of Thomas Jefferson and Phillis Wheatley, Peter Coviello develops an account of how affective rather than rationalist bonds were instrumental in forging a united American republic just prior to (and during) the Revolutionary War. According to Coviello, the geographic and cultural divisions in the American colonies were overcome, at least in part, by "an intensity of bereavement" that was fashioned into a "peculiar kind of mutuality, an attachment to distant others." Coviello, "Agonizing Affection: Affect and Nation in Early America," *Early American Literature* 37:3 (2002): 464.

CONCLUSION:

## "A NECESSARY FORM":
## RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AS DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES
## IN AMERICA

> "There is no well-constituted state in which practices are not to be found which are linked to the form of government and which help to preserve it."
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> — Jean-Jacques Rousseau,
> "The Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Theatre"[1]

> "Which therefore would be the real conception of the world: that logically affirmed as an intellectual choice? or that which emerges from the real activity of each man, which is implicit in his mode of action? And since all action is political, can one not say that the real philosophy of each man is contained in its entirety in his political action?"
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> — Antonio Gramsci,
> "The Study of Philosophy"[2]

## § 1. A Call To Renewal

On June 28, 2006, then Senator Barack Obama spoke before the "Call to Renewal's Building a Covenant for a New America" conference in Washington, D.C. Organized by public theologian Jim Wallis, the founder of *Sojourners* magazine, the event brought together elements of the so-called "religious left," progressive religious groups drawn from various Christian denominations.[3] In his keynote address, Obama focused on what he understood to be the inexorable "connection between religion and politics" in the United States:

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[1] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Letter to D'Alembert on the Theatre," in *Politics and the Arts*, translated by Allan Bloom (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960), 98.

[2] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, translated by Quintin Hoare and Goeffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 326.

[3] There has been much discussion within political science regarding the "God gap" in American partisan politics. Robert Putnam and David Campbell provide a clear articulation of this notion: "The highly religious are

> [W]e first need to understand that Americans are a religious people. 90 percent of us believe in God, 70 percent affiliate themselves with an organized religion, 38 percent call themselves committed Christians, and substantially more people in America believe in angels than they do in evolution. Each day, it seems, thousands of Americans are going about their daily rounds… and they're coming to the realization that something is missing. They are deciding that their work, their possessions, their diversions, their sheer busyness, is not enough. They want a sense of purpose, a narrative arc to their lives.[4]

Religion, Obama claims, persists as a powerful force in the public sphere of United States and individual lives of most Americans because it provides the interpretive and practical tools—the modes and manners of making meaning in the world—that can be put to the task of resolving the fundamental need for purpose and direction.

Given the significance of religious faith in the lives of American citizens, Obama states, the rhetoric of those on the left must reorient itself so that it can speak to the lived faith and experience of these individuals. In pressing the case for a liberal-progressive rapprochement to religion, Obama repudiates the secularist mindset of some elements of the American left. The secularist framework identifies religious beliefs as ideological commit-

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far more likely to be Republicans than Democrats, those who are low on our religiosity scale largely favor Democrats over the GOP, and religiosity has no bearing on partisan independence" Robert D. Putnam and David F. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012), 371. See also Laura R. Olson and John C. Green, "The Religion Gap," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 39 (2006): 455-59; Geoffrey Layman, *The Great Divide: Religious and Cultural Conflict in American Party Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991); and Warren Miller and Merrill Shanks, *The New American Voter* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

There are, however, recent complications to the clean divide between conservative/religious and liberal/non-religious. The 2008 Obama campaign, for instance, demonstrated that Democratic political actors are capable of using religious language and mobilizing religious voters, albeit still to less success than Republicans; see "A Look at Religious Voters in the 2008 Election," *Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life's Faith Angle Conference*, http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1112/religion-vote-2008-election (accessed May 14, 2012). Additionally, scholars have begun questioning the conceptualization of 'religiosity' and, in turn, the methodological tools necessary for assessing the varieties of political and religious self-identification; an early entry in this re-thinking suggests that the "God gap" is an artifact of insufficient scholarship rather than an empirical reality. Stephen T. Mockabee, Kenneth D. Wald, and David C. Leege, "In Search of a Religious Left: Reexamining Religiosity," in *Improving Public Opinion Surveys: Interdisciplinary Innovation and the American National Election Studies*, edited by John H. Aldrich and Kathleen M. McGraw (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[4] Barack Obama, "Transcript: Call to Renewal Address on Faith and Politics," God's Politics, February 21, 2012, http://sojo.net/blogs/2012/02/21/transcript-obamas-2006-sojournerscall-renewal-address-faith-and-politics (accessed on September 3, 2012). The speech is reprinted in Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope* (New York: Crown, 2006).

ments that are properly and exclusively expressed in the private sphere, so that attempts to bring religion into discussions regarding public policy are thus deemed illegitimate. According to Obama,

> [S]ecularists are wrong when they ask believers to leave their religion at the door before entering into the public square. Frederick Douglas, Abraham Lincoln, Williams Jennings Bryant, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King—indeed, the majority of great reformers in American history—were not only motivated by faith, but repeatedly used religious language to argue for their cause. So to say that men and women should not inject their 'personal morality' into public policy debates is a practical absurdity… If we scrub language of all religious content, we forfeit the imagery and terminology through which millions of Americans understand both their personal morality and social justice.[5]

Obama here echoes one of the overarching arguments of my project. That is, religious traditions equip practitioners not just with a set of discrete beliefs but, above and beyond that, an array of sensibilities, affects, and actions that facilitate and shape their engagement with the worlds around them. As I have discussed in earlier chapters, the effects of religious traditions are deep and diffuse, shaping not just a practitioner's beliefs but also her sensibilities, dispositions, and practices. Second, attempting to excise or otherwise refuse to engage religious traditions in the public sphere will only abandon materials that enrich and invigorate exactly the citizen participation and active engagement vital to democracy.

One way of framing the central argument of this dissertation is as a call for renewal. In contradistinction to the spirit of the 2006 conference at which Obama spoke, this is not a narrowly spiritual renewal—a renewal, if you will, of Christianity within American democracy—but rather a renewal of how we as political theorists think about the on-going relationship between religious traditions and democratic practices.[6] Such a call for renewal and re-

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[5] Ibid.

[6] On this theme of theorizing the new I cannot help but think of a passage from the work of Kristen Deede Johnson. She writes:

> political theory is nothing if not an exercise of imagination, offering new or different pictures of collective life in the hopes of remolding, refashioning, or altogether altering contemporary arrangements. Indeed, the

form is implicit within the intellectual project that Birgit Meyer refers to as 'post-secularist.' At its most basic level, the post-secularist project demands that scholars vigorously question the assumptions built into how we conceptualize 'religion' and its relationships with other (ostensibly separate) domains of contemporary social life. The motivating impulse behind my avowedly post-secularist project has been to reconfigure the terms in which political theorists encounter and engage religious traditions. Through such a questioning of inherited frameworks, I have sought to open up a space in which the democratic bearing and possibilities of religious traditions can be more fruitfully thought and discussed.

In this concluding chapter to the current formulation of the project I begin by first recapitulating some of the broader themes and arguments of the dissertation. The second section of the conclusion articulates some of the present project's limits and possible areas for further elaboration, expansion, and development.

## § 2. Religious Practices, Democratic Practices

Religious traditions are part and parcel of American democracy. This is not to say, of course, that every American is a religious practitioner. Yet, as Obama points out, an overwhelming majority of Americans claim to possess religious faith, even if a growing number of them rebuff formal institutions and established faith communities such as churches. One result of such widespread religiosity is that religion, particularly Christianity, has been entangled with American politics in complicated and dynamic ways over the course of the republic. Through a triangulation of Tocqueville, Antonio Gramsci, and recent scholarship in the field of religious studies, I developed an account that de-centered both the singular concern with institutions, which is lodged in the juridical formulation of separation of church and

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success of a political theory could be said to depend upon the extent to which it offers a picture of political society and life that is more attractive and persuasive than that of the status quo.

Kristen Deede Johnson, *Theology, Political Theory, and Pluralism: Beyond Tolerance and Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 22.

state, and the elevation of belief and doctrine implicit within the private-intellectualist approach to religion. Against these conceptualizations, my account attends to the flows of power and practice by which religious traditions compose subjectivities and mobilize political activity and that otherwise escape the narrow institutional and cognitive frameworks.

My interest throughout the project has been on the level of practices, that is, the on-the-ground ways in which the rhetorical and performative materials of religious traditions have been used as the formative elements of citizen claims making. As much as democracy entails a social order that surrounds and informs the formal institutions of governance, I understand religious traditions as offering vital techniques of democratic citizenship and sets of "vernacular rhetorical practices" (to use Gerard Hauser's term).[7] Gramsci similarly frames religious traditions as crucial modes for acting in the world, writing, "Over a certain period of history in certain specific historical conditions religion has been and continues to be a 'necessity', a necessary form taken by the will of the popular masses and a specific way of rationalizing the world and real life, which provided the general framework for real practical activity."[8] Speaking implicitly to Marxists who dismiss religion as an epiphenomenal occurrence that diverts critical energies from challenging extant systems of exploitation and domination, Gramsci recognizes religious traditions as a mode—"a necessary form"—by which individuals interpret events, formulate their identity, and perform action.[9] Therefore, the claims citizens make about their collective lives together and the "will of the popular

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[7] Gerard A. Hauser, *Vernacular Voices: The Rhetoric of Publics and Public Spheres* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1999).

[8] Gramsci, 337.

[9] These modes of inhabiting the world, it bears saying, are not merely domination in another form. As scholarship in the fields of lived religion indicates, performances of religious traditions are complex sites of resistance and discipline. This point is underscored also by work in the religious history of the United States, which has brought attention to the "democratization" of Christianity and the shifting of power from church authority to religious practitioners. See, e.g., Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991). For an alternative account to Hatch's historical analysis of the First Great Awakening, see Amanda Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

masses" that emanates from this interplay of claims occurs through and with the religious traditions within that society.

The statement by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the epigraph to this chapter points to the need to think political regimes in relation to the diffuse sets of mores and practices that condition and enable them. Elsewhere in his letter to D'Alembert concerning the theatre, Rousseau remarks, "a revolution in our practices…will necessarily produce one in our morals."[10] The implicit consequence of such a transformation in the web of practices and the moral order—or the common sense of the community, to use Gramsci's terminology—is that, so too, the political order will change. Rousseau and Gramsci both point to the complex interrelation between the political, moral, and practical orders within a society. This point is echoed in the words and deeds of religious Americans who perceive an inexorable connection between faith, social mores, and politics. As Walter Rauschenbusch writes, "Whoever uncouples the religious and the social life has not understood Jesus. Whoever sets any bounds for the reconstructive power of the religious life over the social relations and institutions of men, to that extent denies the faith of the Master."[11] The argument of this dissertation adopts a different position, namely, that whoever uncouples the religious and the social life has not understood how American democratic politics works. Looking beyond Rauschenbusch's Social Gospel network, American history records the activity of similarly minded actors and movements such as, to name but a handful, evangelical abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison, the populism of William Jennings Bryan, the civil rights mobilization of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and the Christian conservatism of Pat Robertson.

The historical fact of these religious actors is, of course, not news to political science or political theory. Yet political theoretical work that has recognized the democratic value

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[10] Rousseau, 323.
[11] Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: Macmillan, 1907), 48-49.

and potency of the Christian religious tradition has mainly focused on prophetic rhetoric and the narrative form of the jeremiad.[12] Yet in addition to broadening analytical attention to the broader cultus, my argument goes beyond these works in illuminating how political claims-making in the United States has persistently leveraged the imaginative, emotional, and aesthetic repertoire that emerges from Christian practices. The lived experiences of American Christianity and American democracy are entangled so that religious claims-making simultaneously draw from and fuel an American democratic imaginary. The rudiments of pious and penitent practice appear in different configurations in the practices of religious zealotry, religious mourning, and what I have referred to as the poetics of civil religion. The chapters of this dissertation examined each of these aspects in terms of how they worked politically to contest, disrupt, and transform the existing network of ideas, sensations, and practices. While of course the substance of specific claims can be challenged and critiqued, these modes of political claims making and advancing political projects have a hold on religious subjects/citizens and evince how religious traditions facilitate and shape political action in American democracy.

### § 3. Future Movements

My project challenges the preconceived notions of religion operative in the field of political theory by making a crucial analytical shift to the empirical-historical world of political enactments. Adopting the level of lived experience as the place for analyzing religion and politics reflects a broader trend in contemporary political theory that foregrounds the aesthetic dimensions of social and political life. The implications of the analytical shift under-

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[12] See, e.g., Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978); David S. Gutterman, *Prophetic Politics: Christian Social Movements and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Andrew R. Murphy, *Prodigal Nation: Moral Decline and Divine Punishment from New England to 9/11* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); George Shulman, *American Prophecy: Race and Redemption in American Political Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); and Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance!: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*, anniversary edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

taken by this dissertation include a profound change in the theoretical imagining of both the Christian religion and American democracy. With this framework now established, this dissertation provides the foundation for further theoretical elaboration and development. Although the particularities of religio-political configuration of the United States cannot be universalized to other democratic orders, I nonetheless believe that the focus on religious practices in civil society and the political power immanent within those practices is a productive framework that can be the starting point for similar work in different national contexts.

There is also an opportunity for additional theorization in terms of thinking more elaborately on how the subjects of domination and exclusion use religious materials to stake out their claims and achieve political standing. There have, of course, been investigations into the Civil Rights Movement, including the role of the Exodus narrative, prophetic language, and the organizational resources of African-American churches. The framework developed over the course of this dissertation, however, would complement and supplement these works by focusing on how religious practices were negotiated, downplayed, or reconfigured in the struggle to alter and redistribute the terms of power and status in American society. For instance, there is the question of modulating practice in light of considerations of audience and context, and also how black religious figures cultivated particular forms of dissenting subjects through the use of liturgical and performative materials. Yet such a line of inquiry also opens up an investigation of how religious minorities—that is, those who fall outside the common sense boundaries of Judeo-Christianity as it operates in the United States—make themselves at home in the theatre of the public sphere in the United States.

Another way of extending this dissertation's analytical framework is through a consideration of the contemporary conditions of religious and cultural pluralism. The prevailing philosophical approaches to religious pluralism involve devising frameworks for religious

containment, translation, and generosity. While my project does not invalidate the project of

nurturing an ethos of openness and modesty, it more significantly suggests that political

theorists might consider an alternative set of conceptual tools that reside at the level of prac-

tices and arise from an interest in how religious traditions are transformed through moments

of interaction and mutual engagement. James Tully's framing of modernity as marking a

"strange multiplicity" speaks to this dynamic:

> cultures are continuously contested, imagined, and reimagined, transformed and ne-
> gotiated, both by their members and through their interaction with others… Cultural
> diversity is a tangled labyrinth of intertwining cultural differences and similarities, not
> a panopticon of fixed, independent and incommensurable worldviews in which we
> are either prisoners or cosmopolitan spectators in the central tower.[13]

I share Tully's notion that the actual practice of pluralistic politics troubles the tendency to

imagine religious traditions and different cultures as discrete and insular entities. Framing

pluralism as an on the ground phenomenon that involves members of many different com-

munities and traditions coming together invites not a philosophical edict to translate but

rather an analysis of the always-in-motion dynamics of hybridity, solidarity, and encounter.[14]

Only by first understanding these sites and moments of practical action and interaction, I

mean to say, can we as political theorists begin to speak more fully to the future of America

as not just a vigorously religious democracy but also a religiously plural one.

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[13] James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 11. See also *After Pluralism: Reimagining Religious Engagement*, edited by Courtney Bender and Pamela E. Klassen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); and Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[14] Romand Coles uses the language of "ecotones" or special sites of encounter and engagement that occur in the practice of radical democracy. See Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Coles, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations Between a Radical Democrat and a Christian* (Eugene, Oregon: Cadcade Books, 2008).

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