

God, Land, Blood, and Destiny: The Bundling Power of Religious Semantics

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Abstract

This content analysis of historical texts documents the rhetorical strategies early American writers used to represent the United States as a sacred space and the American people as the inheritors of a racial "manifest destiny." Americans saw the historical expansion of the United States as a gradual and inevitable extension of sacred space. Inside the worldly borders of God's country, religion informed and invested all aspects of American life, both sacred and profane. Christianity, democracy, capitalism, race, and geography were all bundled together within an overarching religious narrative.

Geographers of culture and religion have used concepts such as worldview, ideology, and civil religion to theorize conditions under which religious discourse includes reference to space and nation. Extending this work with constructs borrowed from Niklas Luhmann and Karl Mannheim, this paper draws a critical distinction between worldview and ideology and argues that manifest destiny represents an ideology that helps observers rationalize selective operations in otherwise very different contexts (economic, political, legal, and spatial) by referencing the same religious themes and programs within communication. Thus, manifest destiny demonstrates society's ability to use religion as an ideology that organizes alternatives and reduces the complexity of a worldview.

Key words: sociology of religion – religious semantic – sacred place – the USA – religion as ideology

Introduction

This paper describes how sacred and profane themes were bundled together to produce the dominant self-description of American society prior to the Twentieth Century. Like England and France before it, the United States was represented in discourse as a sacred land, inhabited by a chosen people carrying out a divine mission in the world. American writers found it easy to blend their sacred and profane concerns; merging themes of blood, space, nation, and property within an overarching religious narrative. White Protestant Americans worked hard to construct a self-description that made it plausible that virtually every location and every aspect of social life, so long as it was situated on American soil, would have spiritual significance. Inside God's country, it appears that there could be no profane place or illegitimate activity.

This interpretation of historical texts documents the rhetorical strategies early American writers used to represent the United States as a sacred space and the American people as the inheritors of a racial "manifest destiny." As Zierhofer argues, space is "a contingent frame of reference" constructed within discourse and used by individuals, organizations, and states to co-ordinate, locate, and make sense of their activities. Zierhofer concludes that the "analysis of spaces is at the same time an analysis of social conditions and their power-relations—and vice versa" (2005: 33). This paper shows how the discourse of privileged American authors produced and informed contingent spatial distinctions; distinctions which in turn framed and informed political, religious, and economic programs. This paper also reviews various attempts by geographers of culture and religion to use constructs such as worldview, ideology, and civil religion to theorize social conditions in which religious discourse makes reference to space and land. This paper suggests that early Americans conditioned one another to view their geographic location as a religious theme. For more than two hundred years, the self-description of mainstream America has included a rarely opposed effort to unify spiritual and material matters of space. The documentary evidence makes it difficult to pinpoint the difference between religious, spatial, political, and other semantic themes, even with the increasing functional differentiation that characterizes modern society (Lippuner 2007). This difficulty appears to point to a basic quality of religious semantics: the most mundane and worldly subjects can easily be pulled beneath a sacred canopy. In agreement with a number of other scholars (Bell 1996; Smith 2003; Nice 2006), this paper underscores the value of investigating how the construction of national identity and homeland is shaped by flexible, shifting conceptions of the sacred.

God's Country: Worldview, Ideology, or Civil Religion?

With mixed results, geographers of culture and religion have theorized conditions under which religious discourse includes references to space and territory with the help of concepts such as worldview, ideology, and civil religion. Rinschede, for instance, pinpoints similarities and differences between religious worldviews and political ideologies. He defines "religion" as a system of orientation or worldview which human beings produce and use to solve existential problems and find spiritual and psychological harmony with the universe (1999: 10). He goes on to suggest that, on the one hand, religions are worldviews or systems of orientation concerned with revelations and contacts between heaven and earth. On the other hand, worldviews concerned with social and political phenomena—the secular realm—are classified by Rinschede as "ideologies" (1999: 235). Ideologies can replace religious worldviews, but "do not want to be religions." Rinschede provides a list of examples of ideologies, including: nationalism, fascism, racism, communism, conservatism, and occultism.

Blurring Rinschede's distinction between the spiritual and secular realms, it appears that religion frequently functions as an ideology. As social programs that have appeared in communication, both Zionism and manifest destiny would be difficult to describe as exclusively religious or ideological. A number of geographers of religion

have provided empirical evidence that religious beliefs can be simultaneously political and economic in nature (Park 1994; Stump 2000; Snell and Ell 2000; Shilony 1998). In their practical implications, the religious elements of a group's worldview may be just as worldly and profane as its political, territorial, or economic ideologies.

Drawing an alternative analytical distinction between worldview and ideology may help geographers of religion focus attention on the function of religion as a specialized social system (Luhmann 1995). Religion offers society strategies for observing the world so that the distinction between the sacred and the profane has a chance of reappearing in every context, no matter what the theme or problem (Luhmann 2002). Without culturing or marking the sacred preference, a worldview offers many alternative choices concerning politics, economics, land, food, dress, language, sex, leisure, art and many other quandaries. The world presents observers with countless alternatives; one may compare and contrast one's own way of life with other ways of living that are visible in the world. As Mannheim argues, a documentary interpretation of a society's worldview "must cover the total range of cultural manifestations of an epoch" (1952: 62). Elaborating his point, Mannheim writes that "the Totality of *Weltanschauung* (that which is 'documented') is located beyond the level of any of the cultural spheres taken in isolation" (1952: 74). Religion reduces uncertainty for observers whose view of the world includes a surplus of options; providing believers with reasons to select the sacred alternative over the profane. When religion functions in this manner, organizing variety, it appears as an ideology that reduces complexity in the world. Religion provides observers with a source of transcendent reasons to decide economic, political, aesthetic, medical, familial, and other immanent decisions. Luhmann points out that an ideology makes itself known by presenting a well articulated justification or rationalization for selecting one possibility along with an artificial excision of others (2005: 75). Thus, an observer's *worldview* includes alternatives that are artificially excluded from consideration by an *ideology* that classifies them as irrational or unjustifiable. Manifest destiny steers selectivity in various functional fields and dimensions of meaning (spatial, social, political, legal) by justifying its preferred alternatives with religious themes, identities, and programs.

Several prominent geographers of religion and culture have noted that the religious, political, economic, and territorial beliefs of contemporary Americans can be combined under the rubric "civil religion." Hammond suggests, for instance, that civil religion refers to "any set of beliefs and rituals, related to the past, present, and/or future of a people ('nation') which are understood in some transcendental fashion" (1976: 171). Sopher asserts that the "unifying American faith is a faith in the American Way of Life and is built on the idealized concept of the new order of things that was and is available in the New World" (1967: 112). Sopher relates a poignant formulation found in Jan Romain's study of nationalism in Asia: "There is in nationalism a religious element or, better, nationalism is in a sense a religion in itself." In an increasingly pluralistic and secular United States, civil religion appears to homogenize competing worldviews and promotes a common faith in the nation. Zelinsky writes:

There are hints of a novel mode of religion in the way in which imported creeds, including Roman Catholicism and Judaism along with the various brands of

Protestantism, have become increasingly Americanized, so that they now resemble one another much more than they do the same religions in the eastern Hemisphere... Thus it can be said, without serious exaggeration, that Americanism has, in the most fundamental sense, become the true religion of Americans. The cult, which goes far beyond normal patriotism, is equipped with a full panoply of sacred writings, saints, rituals, and holy places (1992: 95).

The "true religion of Americanism" informs or conditions virtually all aspects of social life, and enables religion to take the form of an ideology that programs solutions to otherwise non-religious problems. The American Way of Life appears as a contingency when it can be compared and contrasted with Other Ways of Life that are equally visible in the world. When functioning as an ideology, religion organizes the variety of contingent alternatives and indicates preferences. For participants in society who condition themselves with religion, such cultured preferences help establish understanding and mutual expectations within the ebb and flow of communication.

For example, Brouwer, Gifford, and Rose observe that since the time of the Puritans, "the United States could not have projected its faith to a large part of the world without a conviction that other peoples ought to be guided by American principles, both civil and religious" (1996: 14).

In 1692, the Puritan preacher Cotton Mather declared that "The New Englanders are a People of God Settled in those which were once the Devil's territories... a People here accomplishing the promise of old made unto our Blessed Jesus, that He should have the Utmost parts of the Earth for His possession" (Brouwer, Gifford, and Rose 1996: 15). In a manner similar to the Puritans, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons), a truly American religion, asserted that they were God's chosen people, persecuted by gentiles, and divinely called upon to build a theocratic New Jerusalem in Salt Lake City, Utah (Jackson, Rinschede, and Knapp. 1990: 27). According to Stump, Christian fundamentalists continue to "seek political influence in the United States to instill the certainty of biblical values into the nation's institutions and public life" (2000: 222). The wild Indians, the undisciplined Blacks, the unsightly Suffragettes, the Godless communists, and numerous other partners all make an appearance in the American worldview. However, faithful Americans are cultured to see the Hand of God pointing to the sacred alternative—no matter what kind of decision is at hand. Before believers may inform themselves in this manner, communication must establish and convey the direction of God's finger. Referring to the power of political discourse to frame conditions for other institutions, Zierhofer observes that "states not only regulate the classifications of activities and things, but also have to locate them physically, in order to control them as concrete individual bodies and their interactions" (2005: 34). In the doctrine of manifest destiny, a transcendent force locates its home within the immanent boundaries of the United States, from which it reaches outward to regulate the world. In the contemporary era, the state determines the direction and the power of God's hand. For instance, in his State of the Union Address given in 2004, President George W. Bush concludes:

My fellow citizens, we now move forward, with confidence and faith. Our nation is strong and steadfast. The cause we serve is right, because it is the cause of all mankind. The momentum of freedom in our world is unmistakable—and it is not carried forward by our power alone. We can trust in that greater power who guides the unfolding of the years. And in all that is to come, we can know that His purposes are just and true.

It seems that the purposes of God and mankind are as true as America's purposes because they are the same. From Plymouth Rock to Alcatraz and from Afghanistan to North Korea, God and mankind use the voice and the power of the United States to identify and select the sacred alternative in every distinction. The American worldview includes the awareness that the Taliban, for instance, also claim that their cause is the same as that of God and mankind. "The true religion of Americanism," however, serves as an ideology that organizes the variety of a worldview. This ideology remains effective today because it easily establishes a connection to the long established rhetoric of manifest destiny, the subject of this paper.

Examining historical documents helps us understand how a flexible semantic assembly known as manifest destiny was produced and how this discourse identified certain alternatives as sacred preferences. Ideology helps members of a group orient themselves in relation to other groups, places, and alternative ways of acting in the world. Ideological resources can be used offensively to promote a preferred alternative by ridiculing or even destroying the communication produced by other groups. For example, in 1880, one American missionary argued that Christians in less "civilized" parts of the world may not yet be able to grasp a mature and correct version of the religion. However, until they become adequately civilized, primitive people ought to be encouraged to accept whatever limited version of Christianity they may be able to comprehend:

"Some races are bright and speculative, others dull and practical; some are in the caves of superstition, others on the heights of philosophy; all are in the childhood of religion... An inferior type of Christianity may have adaptations to particular nations because of its inferiority and admixture with error. Yet upon the possibility of overcoming these objections depends the future success of missions" (Economic Defects in Christian Missions 1880: 106).

In a text written in 1885, a White clergyman demonstrates an ideological attack against what he saw as a degenerate form of Christianity practiced among emancipated Blacks:

Utterly ignorant men, gifted with a fatal fluency of speech, unable often to read the Bible in English, much less in its original tongues, (are now) the blind guides of blind followers... The orgies of their so-called worship are such as to cause any Christian man to blush for the caricature of our holy religion therein portrayed...

Left to themselves, under leaders of their own race, they have in almost every case made grievous failure, have made loud boasting of an uplifting which was just high enough to display their grotesque ugliness... Their religion is a superstition, their sacraments are fetiches, their worship is a wild frenzy, and their morality is a shame (Dudley 1885: 272–279).

During the tense period of labor unrest during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, mainstream religious Americans had no sympathy for left-wing complaints against increasing income inequality. For instance, the well-read Protestant magazine, *The Congregationalist*, proposed a sure solution to the problem of striking workers: "A Gatling gun or two, swiftly brought into position and well served, offers, on the whole, the merciful as well as effectual remedy" (Brouwer, Gifford, Rose 1996: 22).

A worldview is embedded in the mean facts of life, shaped by the material conditions affecting a people. When Europeans settled in America, their global outlook was altered by the territorial features of the New World. The "liquid assets" of two great oceans physically separated them from their homeland. The social problems and wars of Europe were far away; Americans could afford to save money on national defense and concentrate on building communities and raising children. With their European weapons and diseases, White Americans conquered indigenous peoples, who were then compelled to help the colonials survive by sacrificing their established coastal villages, fields, and gardens. The former Europeans enjoyed natural harbors, fertile land, abundant fish, woods, and other natural resources. Referring to their common geographic origin and newly established homeland, European Americans were able to build a plausible sense of social solidarity on the belief that they inherently belonged together and shared the same cultural preferences (Redepenning 2006). Writing in 1882, Edward Eggeleston emphasizes the homogenous culture of Americans in an article called "the Beginning of a Nation:"

Under every guise of sect and opinion there was present the wonder-loving, credulous, and aggressive Englishman of that age of seething religious and intellectual reaction. The mutually repellent Churchmen, Puritans, Papists, and Quakers, who spread themselves into separate communities along the wilderness coast of North America in the seventeenth century, had really more in common than they had of difference (1882: 64).

Survival in the wilderness of America required an adventurous, tough, and determined spirit. In short, the material and social conditions of life in early America encouraged the growth of a worldview characterized by religious certainty, nationalism, acquisitiveness, industry, and rugged individualism. Emerging on the frontier, the religion of Americanism developed into an enduring semantic assembly known as manifest destiny.

Manifest Destiny: Religious, Political, and Economic Implications

By combining related popular beliefs long in the making, the worldview of "manifest destiny" was most clearly articulated by the American philosopher, John Fiske. In an article entitled "Manifest Destiny," published in 1885, Fiske writes:

The work that the English race began when it colonized North America is destined to go on until every land on the earth's surface that is not already the seat of an old civilization shall become English in its language, in its religion, in its political

habits and traditions, and to a predominant extent in the blood of its people... I believe that the time will come when such a state of things will exist upon the earth, when it will be possible to speak of the United States as stretching from pole to pole... Indeed, only when such a state of things has begun to be realized can civilization, as sharply demarcated from barbarism, be said to have fairly begun. Only then can the world be said to have become truly Christian (1888: 558).

For Fiske, the challenge of carving out a place to exist in the fresh wilderness of the New World, the healthy air of the frontier, a unique political lifestyle, and, last but not least, "fortunate crosses of blood," had combined to produce a superior new race. This new race of White Americans was destined by God to spread Christianity, democracy, and capitalism throughout the world. An earlier, more poetic, formation of this worldview was expressed in 1846 by William Gilpin, the governor of the Colorado Territory, in a report to the United States Senate:

The destiny of the American people is to subdue the continent.

Unite the world in one social family.

Divine Task! Immortal mission!

America leads the host of nations as they ascend to this order of civilization... the industrial conquering of the world (Brower, Gifford, and Rose 1996: 15).

The English provided significant elements of what was to become the dominant American worldview. The British valued their God, their blood, their freedom, their Isles, and their power to conquer other people and acquire their wealth. Isolated on its Island fortress, the English race had spawned a "truly divine civilization." In 1882, Charles Dudley Warner asserted that England's superior status as a nation was due to the racial qualities of her people:

It is a mixed race, but with certain dominant qualities, which we call, loosely, Teutonic; certainly the most aggressive, tough, and vigorous people the world had seen... Here we have the two necessary traits in the character of a great people: the love and the habit of civil liberty; and religious conviction and independence... Christianity stood for England and English honor and civilization (1882: 135).

Americans believed that they had gained all of the positive cultural strengths of the British, without inheriting any of the negative ones. Writing in 1886, John Johnston exclaimed, "White (Americans) are Anglo-Saxons, and in one sense that race dominates all others with which it comes in contact—red, black, or white. By virtue of its superior energy and force of character they remand the other people to a secondary and subordinate position" (1886: 166). Despite their superior racial stock and noble civilization, the English, as far as Americans were concerned, were unable to accept the great responsibility of fulfilling a divine manifest destiny. The Puritans migrated to the "New English Canaan," the land of milk and honey, because they were convinced that the fight for purity had already failed in England (Drinnon 1980: 32). The Massachusetts Bay Colony safely removed Puritans from a decadent civilization and provided opportunities to build a perfect society, make money, acquire land, and convert Indians. According to Preston, early American Protestants:

Appropriated the paradigmatic structures of early Judaism... A journey that embodied the sacred movement of an oppressed people who swelled into an unknown territory, cut off from earlier bonds of comfort and kinship, torn out like pages of history to stand alone before the lonely chasm of the untamed. The New Jerusalem was neither a shrine nor an icon; rather it was an idea, an atmosphere, a "place set apart" for those who dared to take the risk (1990: 15).

Americans appropriated the landscape of the New World as their spiritual birthright. As Davis suggests, "The land that had given birth to the Book and the land that was its fulfillment merged in an associational equation of biblical incident and national aspiration. The actual landscape of Palestine and Syria was invoked as a validation, not only of the authenticity of the Bible, but also of the notion of America as heir to the sacred topography" (1996: 3).

During the War for Independence, Americans had become convinced that they belonged to a new race, a race created in order to put into practice the traditional Anglo-Saxon religious, political, and economic ideals that had lost currency in Britain. In his famous pamphlet, *Common Sense*, distributed in 1776, Thomas Paine wrote that freedom "hath been given her warning to depart from England" (1934: 40). America would be the new "asylum for mankind." In 1823, former President Thomas Jefferson stated that "America—North and South—has a set of interests distinct from those of Europe, and particularly her own. She should therefore have a social system of her own, separate and apart from that of Europe. While the last is laboring to become the domicile of despotism, our endeavor should be to make our hemisphere that of freedom" (Bailey 1974: 224). For Ralph Waldo Emerson, the various nationalities in America would "construct a new race, a new religion, a new state, a new literature," which would be as vigorous "as the new Europe which came out of the smelting-pot of the Dark Ages" (Gleason 1992: 6). In Charles Dudley Warner's opinion, America was uniquely qualified to produce an even stronger race than the "smelting-pots" of the past:

The mingling of the races, traditions, religions, varied civilizations, which we see here, is not new in the world... but it is unique in this, that the field of operation is fresh, that the meeting elements represent the youth and adventure of many people, the restless spirit of aspiration, of dissatisfaction with the present, of willingness to cut loose from the past; and the moving energy of the whole is the old Teutonic passion for acquisition and achievement (Warner 1880: 551).

The first obstacle to trip up the "moving energy" of the new American race was the presence of Native Americans. Until they could be successfully removed, assimilated, or exterminated, Native Americans presented a challenge to the worldview of Americans. The sexually repressed culture of the Puritans was embarrassed and harassed by the apparently wild, savage, libidinal energy of Indians. In 1679, Increase Mather warned that "People are ready to run wild in the woods again and to be as Heathenish as ever, if you do not prevent it" (Drinnon 1980: xv). Puritans considered constant industry to be part of their religious duty and they could not understand the "lazy" primitive communism of Indians. It is significant that the Puritan worldview

included possibilities: one could decide to live as an Indian or as a saint. To encourage their brethren to make the only sacred choice, the Puritans spun an ideology that cast the Native Americans in the role of devils, sent by God to improve the moral discipline of Christians (Eggeleston 1882: 63; Svaldi 1989; Takaki 1993). As an illustration, after the Narragansett Indians mauled a colonial militia in 1675, Captain Wait Winthrop wrote the following poem explaining why God had allowed His people to be beaten:

O New-England, I understand, with thee God is offended:
And therefore He doth humble thee, till thou thy ways hast mended.

Repent therefore, and do no more, advance thy self so High,
But humbled be, and thou shalt see these Indians soon will dy.

A Swarm of Flies, they may arise, a Nation to Annoy,
Yea Rats and Mice, or Swarms of Lice a Nation may destroy.

Do not thou boast, it is God's Host, and He before doth go,
To humble thee and make thee see, that He His Works will show.

And Now I shall my Neighbors all give one word of Advice,
in Love and Care do you prepare for War, if you be wise.

Get Ammunition with Expedition your Selves for to defend,
And Pray to God that He His Rod will please for to suspend.
(Drinnon 1980: 64)

As a consequence of their choosing to live as Christians, the American colonialists considered themselves to be autonomous subjects. Even as killers and natives, the Native Americans did not have an independent identity—they were merely tools of the White man's God. At the end of the nineteenth century, after the Native Americans had been effectively reduced to passive dependency on the U.S. government, Americans stopped shooting and began to systematically "teach civilization." In 1891, Thomas Jefferson Morgan, a Baptist minister serving as Commissioner of Indian Affairs, wrote:

The end at which we aim is that the American Indians shall become as speedily as possible Indian-Americans; that the savage shall become a citizen; that the nomad shall cease to wander, and become a resident in a fixed habitation... that the Indians shall gather at their firesides to talk of the memory of their days in school, and assemble in their places of worship to thank the Great Father above for the blessings of a Christian civilization vouchsafed to them in common with us all (Bailey 1973: 559).

African-Americans posed a more enduring challenge to the dominant American worldview. During the colonial era, poor blacks joined poor whites to form "the giddy masses" that demanded a fair share of the Promised Land (Takaki 1993). Later, during the time of slavery, the specter of a violent revolt made it difficult for the master race

to ever completely relax. A paternalistic discourse developed that helped Whites feel that they were doing a good deed by owning Blacks, and encouraged Blacks to accept their humble position. White Americans believed that they were inherently qualified to be free citizens. Blacks, however, were considered to be natural slaves who would only suffer under the burden of liberty. Indeed, as the slaves of White people, the physical and mental health of Blacks was thought to improve. In 1851, this point was made clear in an article published in the *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* by Dr. Samuel Cartwright:

According to unalterable physiological laws, negroes, as a general rule, to which there are few exceptions, can only have their intellectual faculties awakened in a sufficient degree to receive moral culture, and to profit by religious or other instruction, when under the compulsory authority of the White man...

The Black blood distributed to the brain chains the mind to ignorance, superstition and barbarism, and bolts the door against civilization, moral culture, and religious truth. The compulsory power of the White man, by making the slothful negro take active exercise, puts into active play the lungs, through whose agency the vitalized blood is sent to the brain to give liberty to the mind, and to open the door to intellectual improvement (Gilman 1985: 138).

Scientific justifications for using Blacks as slaves were supplemented by religious rhetoric. In 1856, a Baptist minister in Virginia exclaimed, "Jesus Christ recognized this institution (slavery) as one that was lawful among men... He has introduced no new moral principle which can work its destruction" (Hill and Cheadle 1996: 4).

After emancipation, the presence of free blacks was considered to be "the greatest social problem before the American people today" (Cable 1885: 410). White Americans were convinced that free Blacks were dangerous and hopelessly attracted to a life of criminal vice. If they could no longer be kept under the overseer's whip, then Blacks must receive the Gospel. T.U Dudley, the Episcopal Bishop of Kentucky, declared:

How shall the lower race be lifted up to higher stages of human development, for only so can the rights of the superior race be made secure for the present and for the future...? I answer, by the personal endeavors of the individuals of the higher race; by their personal contact with these, their ignorant and untaught neighbors, exhibiting before their wondering eyes in daily life the principles of truth and justice, purity and charity, honesty and courage... The separation of the negro race from the white means for the negro continued and increasing degradation and decay. His hope, his salvation, must come from association with that people among whom he dwells, but from whose natural guidance and care he has been separated largely by the machinations of unscrupulous demagogues (Dudley 1885: 275-278).

Until the end of the Civil War, White people in America had a relatively easy time developing the theme of themselves as God's chosen people. People in America who did not share that assumption were not powerful enough to challenge it. In 1880, the editor of the monthly journal *National Repository* commented:

Originally our race stock was exclusively Caucasian, for though both the American Indian race and the African were found upon our territory, yet neither of these entered into the body politic or was a real factor in the social structure. So, too, we were a specifically an English-speaking people and a Protestant nation as to all our mental habits and ideas of personal liberty both of thought and action; yet full of religious reverence, Sabbath keeping, Bible reading, and law abiding. (The American Nation of the Future 1880: 189-191)

The second half of the nineteenth century brought profound social changes that threatened many Whites. Not only were Blacks emancipated, but they were also given the right to vote alongside White men. Native Americans were allowed to wander about outside of their reservations. After the German and Irish immigrants who came to the United States between 1820 and 1880, a second wave of less assimilable immigrants began to pour into the land. Many more "Romanists" arrived from Southern Europe, Jews came from Eastern Europe, and idol-worshipping Asians entered from China and Japan. White Americans were beginning to feel ill at ease!

In 1882, Henry Cabot Lodge expressed the concerns of mainstream White America in an article entitled "The Census and Immigration:"

The question of foreign immigration has of late engaged the most serious attention of the country, and in a constantly increasing degree. The race changes which have begun during the last decade among the immigrants to this country, the growth of the total immigration, and the effects of it upon our rates of wages and the quality of our citizenship, have excited much apprehension and aroused a very deep interest (Lodge 1882: 737).

The "vast masses of alien elements in the social and political body" significantly altered the appearance of the nation. White Americans searched for ways to protect their civilization from the polyglot, polytheistic other.

To maintain their cultural hegemony in the face of opposition, White Americans increasingly turned to religious semantics. In 1880, one writer urged his readers to put their faith in the transforming power of the Gospel:

Can the ascendancy of our American republic and Christian thought be asserted, maintained, and perpetuated among such tremendous disadvantages? ...The hope of the American republic, and of the civilization, in which above all else we glory, will be found to abide in the practical effectiveness of its Christian element. Only let these strangers be brought under the power of the Gospel, and we may safely trust them with our civilization (The American Nation of the Future 1880: 191).

The God of Whites, of course, was already the God of all other people—even if others did not yet know this fact. No matter how many people came into the country, God was animating each one. The primary goal, then, was to haul the masses out of the cave of spiritual ignorance. Lyman Abbott, writing in 1890, had no doubt that his Christianity could solve all of the nation's political and economic problems, including what to do about the Native Americans and the emancipated Blacks. Abbott reasoned.

The Indian and the Negro questions are both phases of one and the same question: what duties, if any, do a superior race owe to an inferior and subject race, living in the same territory, under the same government, parts of the same nation? The question cannot be answered by individual philanthropy or by missionary societies; the question is asked of the nation, and only the nation can answer it. If the law "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" is a religious law, if the question "Who is my neighbor?" is a religious question, then the Indian and the Negro problems are religious problems (1890: 276).

By the nineteenth century, White Americans shared a hope that Blacks, Native Americans, and the masses of new immigrants could safely be converted to Christianity, thereby also becoming Anglo-Saxon, democratic, and capitalist (or at least passive, patriotic, and dedicated laborers). According to Sollors, many Whites believed that Christianity had the power to transcend racial descent. In an article that appeared in 1833 in the *American Ladies Magazine*, this belief is evident:

The efforts to obtain personal liberty, and the influence of the Christian religion have been the chief means of perfecting the faculties of the white man.

Let him then, as far as possible, plant the seeds of freedom and Christianity in the hearts of every people; and then the brown, the red, the black, and the tawny man will assimilate with each other, and with the more favored white race, till they learn to feel as well as to acknowledge, that "God hath made of one blood all nations of men" (Sollors 1986: 62).

Reverend Josiah Strong, General Secretary of the Evangelical Alliance for the United States, published a book in 1893 hailing the "Coming Kingdom." Concerning the great marvel of the Anglo-Saxon race, he wrote:

The Anglo-Saxon is the great colonizing race of the ages; and in fulfillment of its mission this race is carrying its civilization, like a ring of Saturn—a girdle of light—around the globe...

When such religion and such culture are thus united in every member of the human family the race will have been perfected, and there will then be a perfect organization of society as well as perfect individuality; for when men are brought into perfect harmony with God they will be in perfect harmony with each other.

North America, the future home of this great race, is twice as large as all Europe and is capable of sustaining the present population of the globe. Such a country, with its resources fully developed; such numbers, homogenous in their civilization; such a race, thrice fitted to prepare the way for the full coming of the kingdom, must, under God, control the world's future (Strong 1893: 69–75).

Controlling the world's future was, by the end of the nineteenth century, an integral part of the American mission. With their increasing national wealth and military power, Americans could afford to engage in pious imperialism. Challenges to their ambitions could be aggressively combated with both ideology and guns. In 1898, for instance, President William McKinley told a group of fellow Methodists that, after he had spent sleepless nights down on his knees in prayer, God had revealed to him exactly what must be done to the recently conquered Philippines:

There was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them and by God's grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellow men, for whom Christ also died.

And then I went to bed and went to sleep, and slept soundly, and the next morning I sent for the chief engineer of the War Department (our map-maker), and I told him to put the Philippines on the map of the United States... (Bailey 1973: 607).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed what he believed to be the country's spiritual duty: "making the world free for democracy." Wilson asserted, "America was born a Christian nation. America was born to exemplify that devotion to the elements of righteousness which are derived from the revelations of Holy Scripture" (Brouwer, Gifford, Rose 1996: 15). With a self-description that entailed global aspirations, Americans could proudly sing out the final verse of their National Anthem, written in 1814:

O thus be it ever when free-men shall stand
Between their lov'd home and the war's desolation;
Blest with vict'ry and peace, may the heav'n-rescued land
Praise the Pow'r that hath made and preserv'd us a nation!
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto: "In God is our trust!"
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!

Plainly stamped on every dollar and coin, Americans connect their economic operations with their trust in God. It is a Christian's duty to seek personal wealth and support the capitalist economy. Any alternative choice would be profane. According to Brouwer, Gifford, and Rose, American Christians embraced capitalism as the natural extension of their religious beliefs, serving to "help some of the faithful realize the generosity of God right here on earth" (1996: 227). Reverend Russel H. Conwell, who founded Temple University in Philadelphia, delivered a single lecture more than six thousand times on the duty of Christians to pursue riches. The famously successful homily, entitled "Acres of Diamonds," contained the following words:

You have no right to be poor. It is your duty to be rich... Money is power and it ought to be in the hands of good men. It would be in the hands of good men if we comply with the Scripture teachings, where God promises prosperity to the righteous man...

Young man! You may never have the opportunity to charge at the head of your nation's troops on some Santiago's heights. Young Woman! You may never be called to go out in the seas like Grace Darling to save suffering humanity. But every one of you can earn money honestly, and with that money you can fight the battles of peace... I say to you that you ought to be rich (Bailey 1973: 547).

In his study of the small industrial community of Rockdale, Pennsylvania, in the years before and during the Civil War, Wallace emphasized the elective affinity between Christian evangelicalism and capitalism. He concluded:

It was in Rockdale, and in dozens of other industrial communities like Rockdale, that an American world view developed which pervades the present—or did so until recently—with a sense of superior Christian virtue, a sense of global mission, a sense of responsibility and capability of bringing enlightenment to a dark and superstitious world, for overthrowing ancient and new tyrannies, and for making backward infidels into Christian men of enterprise. (1978: 474)

Conclusion: The Bundling Power of Manifest Destiny

A plethora of historical documents indicates that manifest destiny was a widely established rhetorical device. The appeal of manifest destiny as a semantic assembly is related to its ability to consolidate very different problems regarding the selectivity of meaning in society. This paper concludes with an elaboration of this bundling power. On the one hand, Americans referenced manifest destiny to describe, identify, evaluate, and rationalize their deeds, regardless of what they did—whether preaching the Gospel, working slaves, building factories, invading the Philippines, or removing Indians. As a technique for ordering meaning and structuring society, the functional value of religion lies in its ability to lend its own special distinction to all types of actions—whether they are political, economic, legal, military, aesthetic, sexual, or other. The righteous American allows religion to discipline every activity he pursues: nothing is profane. On the other hand, manifest destiny bundles notions of a chosen people occupying a chosen place—the appointed race is enacting a chosen destiny at a chosen time in history. Americans, as it were, have no choice but to steer themselves with the decisions of their God.

With their doctrine of manifest destiny, Americans reproduced a form of discourse common in Europe in the early modern era. As John Aylmer, Bishop of London, claimed in 1559, “God is English.” Nonetheless, based on his interpretation of early modern national identity in France, England, and Italy, Nice asserts that it is not enough to recognize that many nations claimed that they were God’s elect. The fundamental point, he argues, is that “we must first come to terms with the fluidity of its geographical form in order to appreciate the functionality and specificity of its content... God was not simply English or French. Rather, He was Lord of a unique, historically articulated, sacred space, which could legitimise numerous theological, cultural or political interests” (2004: 1017–18). Americans saw the historical expansion of the United States as a gradual and inevitable extension of sacred space. Inside the worldly borders of God’s country, religion informed and invested all aspects of American life, both sacred and profane. Christianity, democracy, capitalism, race, and geography were all bundled together in a religious discourse. In manifest destiny we find the aspiration of a people for “transcendent, absolute dominance” in the spheres of religion, law, politics, morality, and philosophy (see Plessner 1982: 641). Regardless of which nation claims it, the self-description of divine election is linked to the ability of religion to turn every aspect of the social world into a sacred matter.

The doctrine of manifest destiny also bundles selections made within different dimensions of meaning. According to Luhmann, communication actualizes meaning within three dimensions of difference: the social, the temporal, and the factual (1995:

75). Meaning, in Luhmann’s view, is the difference between the actual and the potential (1995: 65). Manifest destiny actualizes a combination of choices, each of which could have been made differently. Socially, the doctrine separated White Americans from people of all other races and allotted different roles to each. The doctrine eventually evolved to separate Americans of all races from the rest of mankind. God’s chosen people were responsible for teaching and preaching and disciplining others, who were in turn expected to learn, accept, and practice submission. Americans described themselves as dissatisfied with the present, ready to cut loose from the past, and prepared to control the world’s future. America’s manifest destiny signaled the end of history because it was the perfect culmination of every previous great civilization. In the factual dimension, manifest destiny was a program that conditioned an entire American Way of Life. As described in the preceding paragraphs, the divine mission turned economic, political, familial, legal, educational and virtually all other substantive matters into religious concerns. Whatever the issue, there was an ideologically preferred American choice and then there were the other choices. In addition to these three dimensions of meaning, this paper suggests that manifest destiny also determined meaning within the dimension of space. As Kramer observes (2002: 1322):

Like Anglo-Saxons, Americans had a special mission in the world, to transform and redeem other nations, especially through the example of their republican institutions. American destiny, like Anglo-Saxon history, was unfolding westward in space. Those defined as outside the sacred realm of Anglo-Saxon dominion or American republican virtue were equally subject to just war.

When President McKinley asked the chief engineer of the War Department to “put the Philippines on the map of the United States,” his intention was to include that territory in the New Jerusalem. The doctrine of manifest destiny indicated the United States as a Holy Land, set apart from all other places. Every expansion of its territorial boundaries extended the sacred and narrowed the profane.

The semantic assembly of manifest destiny combined a bundle of different divine decisions. Though God could have picked another people, he selected Americans to do his will. Though he could have chosen any other place in the world, he wanted his kingdom established in North America. He could have acted at a different time in history, but he determined that America’s Millennium would be his own. The worldview of Americans included an awareness of other nations, other eras, other places, and other ways of life. However, the ideology of manifest destiny programmed America’s choices, allowing religious semantics to inform and justify every other aspect of society.

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Bůh, území, krev a osud: svazující síly religiální sémantiky

Studie předkládá analýzu historických textů raných amerických spisovatelů, kteří poukazují na USA jako na sakrální místo a američtí obyvatelé jsou pak symbolickými dědici osudu religiálního národa. Američané viděli v historické expanzi Spojených států amerických postupně a nevyhnutelně (osudové) rozšíření sakrálního prostoru. Uvnitř světových hranic Boží země náboženství pak ovlivňovalo všechny aspekty amerického způsobu života, a to jak sakrální, tak i profánní stránky. Křesťanství, demokracie, kapitalismus, rasa a geografie pak byly sloučeny dohromady s vše překrývajícím náboženským vyprávěním (zkušeností).

Kulturní a religiální geografové používali tento koncept jako světový názor, ideologii a světské náboženství, aby teoreticky vysvětlili podmínky náboženského diskurzu včetně odkazu na prostor a národ. Článek mj. navazuje také na práce Niklase Luhmanna a Karla Mannheima a poukazuje na kritické rozlišení mezi světovým názorem a ideologií a pomáhá také objevovat racionální selektivní pracovní postupy ve velmi diferencovaných kontextech (ekonomický, politický, územní atd.) s odkazem na religiální témata a programy zahrnující komunikaci. Konečně zjevný osud demonstruje schopnost společnosti používat náboženství jako ideologii, která organizuje alternativy a redukuje komplexitu světového názoru.