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# BULLETIN

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thority. He openly rejects the much beloved doctrine of eternal security. He provides a very radical analysis of the pastoral needs of new converts. He shows a remarkable openness to the Enlightenment. He cares passionately for the writings of the early Fathers of the church. He is ecumenical in outlook. He has a very pronounced love for the eucharist. He is utterly determined that everyone think and let think. Compared to the Wesleyan paradigm of the tradition, the modern evangelical experiment offers a very different articulation of the evangelical heritage. Like its fundamentalist parent, it has reduced the high peaks of classical Christian doctrine to a narrow range of concerns. It has failed to convince its own adherents that the issue of authority can be solved by invoking Warfield's doctrine of inspiration. It has only reluctantly, if at all, come to terms with the insights of the Enlightenment. It has very little sense of a catholic spirit. It has added precious little to the church's liturgical life. It is conspicuously lacking in any deep love and understanding of the diverse riches of the Christian past.

No doubt the contrasts could be drawn very differently than I have drawn them here. The point, however, is that contrasts must be drawn. One cannot work honestly and intensively with the theological proposals of Wesley without noticing how he differs quite radically from the editions of evangelicalism currently available. This in itself has radical consequences for evangelicals today.

It means that we must provide a much richer analysis of the internal, theological contents of the heritage. To follow the normal course and offer a list of doctrinal propositions as the essence of the heritage is totally inadequate. Such an approach is not just superficial, it is downright misleading. What we have to do is develop a complex historical narrative which brings out the inescapably contested character of the tradition. To be sure there are elements in common. Evangelicals are committed to a set of specific theological proposals. But they have differed quite radically across the generations on how best to express and defend these. Once one looks carefully at, say, Calvin, Luther, and Wesley, one soon sees that they are locked in mortal combat in a fascinating contest to capture the riches of the Christian gospel. Thus the contrasts across the generations call us to a radical revision of evangelical self-understanding.

They also call us to alter the present climate of debate. Rather than go for the quick kill by verbally excommunicating each other from the tradition, evangelicals should joyously enter into a serious contest to work out the riches of the heritage in optimum fashion. This will not be easy. It will involve eschewing the temptation to regress into fundamentalism. It will mean facing up to the serious inadequacy of the neo-evangelical experiment. Above all, it will require a full acknowledgement of the fallible and experimental

character of the evangelical position. Whatever it costs, evangelicals must abandon the spirit of hostility and suspicion so generously fueled by modern fundamentalism and provoke one another to out-think both their friends and their opponents in a spirit of mutual love and friendly rivalry. Celebrating the contribution of Wesley to the tradition can provide the catalyst for such a healthy development.

It can also spur us all on to the theological renewal of the tradition. Following the low road of historical study of a Wesley (or a Calvin, or a Luther, or a Warfield) has its limits. Remembering Wesley's achievement can, of course, do much for us. It can establish the contested character of the heritage and highlight afresh the great riches of the past. It can chasten our theological reflection and enliven our theological judgement. It can relieve us of the guilt and burden of the recent past and breathe new life into weary hearts and minds. It can even call into question the theological adequacy of the present phase of the evangelical tradition. It cannot, however, conclusively demolish or conclusively establish the theological legitimacy of any version of the heritage. To do that we must return to the high road of theology proper.

It is to this task that a fresh awareness of Wesley ultimately points. As things stand, his position threatens and calls into question much that currently passes for evangelicalism. Those who share this assessment must attempt to show that this is not idle talk by articulating a theology that outwits and outshines the present paradigm. Those who reject it must back up their opposing claims by providing better proposals than those enunciated by Wesley and his present admirers. Either way we are summoned to optimum theological performance. Either way life shall not be boring. Either way we can hope and pray that God will in this process redeem the current evangelical experiment.

<sup>1</sup> This is a small sample of a host of theologians who could be mentioned.

<sup>2</sup> Barr's recent book *Escaping from Fundamentalism* (London: SCM, 1984) shows no improvement on his earlier *Fundamentalism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978) in this respect.

<sup>3</sup> Most evangelicals have missed Barr's deep concern to encourage the development of a responsible evangelical tradition.

<sup>4</sup> Other criticisms have focused on failure to pursue critical study of the Bible, failure to develop adequate liturgical practices, failure to be suitably ecumenical, and so on.

<sup>5</sup> Nowhere is this more obvious than in the debate launched by Jack Rogers and Donald McKim in *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979).

<sup>6</sup> *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, 1984).

<sup>7</sup> The best place to begin the study of Wesley is with Wesley's own writings. For a useful selection consult Albert Outler, *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

<sup>8</sup> The full text of Wesley's "Predestination calmly considered" can be found in *John Wesley*, ed. Albert Outler.

<sup>9</sup> A useful descriptive survey of Wesleyan theology is provided by Thomas A. Langford, *Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983). For a fascinating analysis of the "apostasy" of the Wesleyan tradition from its Wesleyan origins see Robert E. Chiles, *Theological Transition in American Methodism: 1790-1935* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1965).

## Religion and the American Dream: A Study in Confusion and Tension

by Robert D. Linder

"The American Dream" is an illusive concept.<sup>1</sup> Roughly speaking, it has something to do with freedom and equality of opportunity. As a matter of fact, in the political realm, it involves the shared dream of a free and equal society. The fact that the reality does not fit the dream is probably well known, for no society can be both free and equal at the same time. Even in a relatively open and mobile nation like America, there are still relatively few at the top of the heap, many more in the middle, and some at or near the bottom. Nevertheless, in the United States, even those who have the most reason to deny its reality still cling to its promise, if not for themselves, at least for their children. In any case, it can be said of the American Dream, in the words of sociologist W. Lloyd Warner, that "... though some of it is false, by virtue of our firm belief

in it, we have made some of it true."<sup>2</sup> What is true in the case of the American Dream and society-at-large also seems to be true in the realm of religion and the Dream.<sup>3</sup>

Puritan John Winthrop's oft-cited and well-known 1630 metaphor of "A City upon a Hill" and sometime Baptist and Seeker Roger Williams' less known but equally hallowed vision of a country in which, as he observed in 1644, "God requireth not an uniformity of Religion to be enacted and enforced in any civil state . . ." provide the background for understanding the historic tension between two aspects of the American Dream in religion. Over the years, the Puritan sense of cosmic mission as God's New Israel eventually became part of America's national identity and the Radical stand for religious freedom developed into the American ideal of religious and cultural pluralism. And so the two dreams of Americans for a religiously harmonious nation and a religiously free nation have existed side-by-side down to the present-day—sometimes in relative peace but often in considerable tension.<sup>4</sup>

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## The First American Dream and Religion: Puritan vs. Radical

The Puritans who gave the country its rich imagery of America as a City on a Hill and as a second Israel lived with a great deal of tension themselves. They were, by self-definition, elect spirits, segregated from the mass of humankind by an experience of conversion, fired by the sense that God was using them to revolutionize human history, and committed to the execution of his will. As such, they constituted a crusading force of immense energy. However, in reality, it was an energy which was often incapable of united action because the saints formed different conceptions of what the divine will entailed for themselves, their churches, and the unregenerate world at-large. But, still, they were certain of their mission in the New World—to be an example of how a covenanted community of heartfelt believers could function. Thus, in New England the relation of church and state was to be a partnership in unison, for church and state alike were to be dominated by the saints.<sup>5</sup>

This arrangement worked fairly well for the first American Puritans, but in the second and third generations the tension began to mount between the concept of a New Israel composed of elect saints on the one hand, and the Puritan conviction that true Christians were those who had experienced a genuine conversion to Christ on the other. Everything in the New Israel depended on the saints. They were the church and they ruled the state. But what if the second generation did not respond to the call for conversion and the supply of saints ran out? The answer was eventually to create a device usually called the halfway covenant, whereby those of the second generation who did not experience conversion in the Puritan mold could be admitted to church membership after making a profession of communal obedience and thereby have their children baptized in order to place them under the covenant. The Puritans found how difficult it was to make certain that the second and third generations were soundly converted and thus qualified to keep the City on the Hill operating properly according to the ordinances of God.

In any case, the Puritans maintained their sense of destiny and purpose by means of this patch-work arrangement. However, the concept of New England as God's New Israel was given new impetus during the First Great Awakening in the first half of the seventeenth century. American theologian and Congregationalist minister Jonathan Edwards, for one, saw the hand of God at work in the awakening, in both a theological and social sense. Edwards believed that there would be a golden age for the church on earth achieved through the faithful preaching of the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. The world thus would be led by the American example into the establishment of the millennium. In this, the New Englanders were surely God's chosen people, his New Israel.<sup>6</sup>

As most people know, the millennium did not come in Edwards' day or even immediately thereafter. Instead the First Great Awakening died out and the original theistically-oriented chosen nation theme was metamorphosed into a civil millennialism. This occurred in the period between the end of the awakening in the 1740s and the outbreak of the American Revolution in 1775. It was in this era that the transferral of the central concepts of seventeenth-century Puritan ideology to all America, including the New Israel motif, took place. Disappointed that the great revival did not result in the dawning of the millennium, many colonial preachers turned their apocalyptic expectations elsewhere. In short, when the First Awakening tailed off, its evangelical spokesmen had to reinterpret the millennial hope it had spawned. In the process, the clergy, in a subtle but profound shift in religious values, redefined the ultimate goal of apocalyptic hope. The old expectation of the conversion of all nations to Christianity became diluted with, and often subordinated to, the commitment to America as the new seat of liberty. First France and then England became the archenemies of liberty, both civil and religious. In his insightful study of this development, historian Nathan Hatch concludes:

The civil millennialism of the Revolutionary era, expressed by the rationalists as well as pietists, grew out of the politicizing of Puritan millennial history in the two decades before the Stamp Act crisis. . . . Civil millennialism advanced freedom as the cause of God, defined the primary enemy as the antichrist of civil oppression rather than that of formal

religion, traced the myths of its past through political developments rather than through the vital religion of the forefathers, and turned its vision toward the privileges of Britons rather than to heritage exclusive to New England.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the first Great Awakening was not only a significant religious event, but also a popular movement with wide-ranging political and ideological implications that laid the groundwork for an emotional and future-oriented American civil religion. The revolutionary generation began to build an American nation based upon religious foundations of evangelical revivalism. The latter-day New England Puritans were joined by many Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Dutch Reformed of equally evangelical persuasion in seeing themselves as jointly commissioned to awaken and guide the nation into the coming period of millennial fulfillment.

But in the process, where the churches moved out, the nation moved in. Gradually, the nation emerged in the thinking of most Americans as the primary agent of God's meaningful activity in history. They began to bestow on their new nation a catholicity of destiny similar to that which theology usually attributes to the universal church. Thus, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution became the covenants that bound together the people of the nation and secured to them God's blessing, protection, and call to historic mission. Most important, the United States itself became the covenanted community and God's New Israel, destined to spread real freedom and true religion to the rest of the world.<sup>8</sup>

In the nineteenth century, this transmutation of the millennial ideal resulted in what became known as "Manifest Destiny." Coined by journalist John L. Sullivan in 1845. Manifest Destiny came to mean for countless Americans that Almighty God had "destined" them to spread over the entire North American continent. And as they did, they would take with them their uplifting and ennobling political and religious institutions.<sup>9</sup>

But there was another religious dream abroad in the land which did not rest upon the model of a City on a Hill or God's New Israel. This was the belief in religious liberty which had grown out of the Protestant left, generally known as the Radical Reformation. This view originally stood alongside of and in many cases opposed to the idea that New England was God's New Israel. The classic spokesperson for this second concept was Roger Williams, founder of the Rhode Island colony—the first real haven for religious dissidents on American soil.

As already mentioned, Williams rejected the Puritan notion of a religiously covenanted community which could exercise political power. He valued religious liberty and religious individualism more than religious uniformity and religious communitarianism. In fact, he stoutly rejected the Puritan teaching that New England was God's New Israel and flatly stated that:

The State of the Land of Israel, the Kings and people thereof in Peace and War, is proven figurative and ceremonial, and no pattern nor president for any Kingdome or civill state in the world to follow.<sup>10</sup>

In sum, Williams boldly asserted his basic premises that civil magistrates are to rule only in civil and never in religious matters, and that persecution for religion had no sanction in the teachings of Jesus, thus undercutting the whole ideological foundation for the Puritan hope in creating a Christian state that would be a City on a Hill.

Quaker William Penn was also in this radical tradition. In both Baptist Rhode Island and Quaker Pennsylvania, religious liberty resulted in religious pluralism. This was all right with Williams and Penn, for both believed that this was the biblical way. But how could God's New Israel survive such a cacophony of spiritual voices? How could the religious mosaic which soon emerged in the new nation be reconciled with the view that America was God's chosen nation? How could any semblance of religious unity be achieved if religious liberty prevailed? In short, how could this religious smorgasbord ever be regarded as a covenanted community?

The answer lay in the willingness of Enlightenment figures like Thomas Jefferson to reach out to the New Israel exponents on the right and the religious liberty champions on the left in order to create an American civil religion. Jefferson, the great champion of

religious liberty and political individualism, also embraced the imagery of the United States as a second Israel. In his second inaugural address on March 4, 1805, Jefferson told the American people that during his second term as their national leader he would need:

... the favor of that Being in whose hands we are, who led our fathers, as Israel of old, from their native land and planted them in a country flowing with all the necessaries and comforts of life; who has covered our infancy with His providence and our riper years with His wisdom and power, and to whose goodness I ask you to join in supplications with me that He will so enlighten the minds of your servants, guide their councils, and prosper their measures that whatsoever they do shall result in your good, and shall secure to you the peace, friendship, and approbation of all nations.<sup>11</sup>

Thus Jefferson articulated the belief held by most Americans of that day that the United States and not just New England was a City on a Hill.

### The American Amalgam: Civil Religion

Exactly what was the civil religion which was able to subsume, for a time at least, these two divergent strands of the American Dream? Briefly stated, civil religion (some call it public religion) is that use of consensus religious sentiments, concepts and symbols by the state—either directly or indirectly—for its own purposes. Those purposes may be noble or debased, depending on the kind of civil religion (priestly or prophetic) and the historical context. Civil religion involves the mixing of traditional religion with national life until it is impossible to distinguish between the two, and usually leads to a blurring of religion and patriotism and of religious values with national values. In America, it became a rather elaborate matrix of beliefs and practices born of the nation's historic experience and constituting the only real religion of millions of its citizens.<sup>12</sup>

The first American civil religion was supported by both the nation's intellectuals—mostly children of the Enlightenment—and the country's Christians—mostly Bible-believing evangelicals. The intellectuals like Jefferson supported it because it was general enough to include the vast majority of Americans and because it provided the moral glue for the body politic created by the social contract. The evangelicals supported it because it appeared to be compatible (perhaps even identical) with biblical Christianity. In any case, from this confluence of the Enlightenment and biblical Christianity, American civil religion emerged to promote both the concept of religious liberty and the notion that America was God's New Israel!<sup>13</sup>

Under the aegis of American civil religion, the idea of the City on a Hill and God's New Israel was advanced to that of the "redeemer nation" with a manifest destiny. In other words, gradually, the old Puritan notion was infused with secular as well as religious meaning, and joined with political as well as religious goals. This was accomplished in the course of American expansion and by means of political rhetoric and McGuffey's Reader.<sup>14</sup>

The result of these developments is perhaps best illustrated by the story of President William McKinley's decision to annex the Philippines following the Spanish-American War in 1898. In November of the following year, McKinley, himself a devout Methodist layman, revealed to a group of visiting clergymen just how he came to sign the bill of annexation following a dreadful period of soul-searching and prayer:

I walked the floor of the White House night after night until midnight; and I . . . went down on my knees and prayed to Almighty God for light and guidance. . . . And one night late it came to me this way—(1) That we should not give them back to Spain—that would be cowardly and dishonorable;

(2) that we could not turn them over to France or Germany—our commercial rivals in the Orient—that would be bad business and discreditable;

(3) that we could not leave them to themselves—they were unfit for self-government—and they would soon have anarchy and misrule worse than Spain's was; and (4) that 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. . . . And then I went to bed, and went to sleep and slept soundly. . . .<sup>15</sup>

In short, McKinley said that destiny and duty made it inevitable that the Americans should bring civilization and light—democratic civilization and biblical light—to the poor Filipinos! Manifest destiny had led God's New Israel down the primrose path of imperialism!

The concept that the United States is God's New Israel and a chosen nation is hardly dead. In his 1980 acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention in Kansas City, presidential nominee Ronald Reagan declared:

Can we doubt that only a Divine Providence placed this land, this island of freedom, here as a refuge for all those people in the world who yearn to breathe free? Jews and Christians enduring persecution behind the Iron Curtain; the boat people of Southeast Asia, Cuba and of Haiti; the victims of drought and famine in Africa, the freedom fighters in Afghanistan. . . . God Bless America!<sup>16</sup>

In many ways, Reagan's words in that instance extended the concept from America as a City on a Hill to America as a Cosmic Hotel, from the nation as a Model of Merit to the nation as a Magnet to the Masses.

President Reagan has used the City on a Hill/Manifest Destiny motif with telling effect on many occasions since taking office in January, 1981. For example, in September, 1982, he received roaring approval from a large crowd at Kansas State University when he asserted: "But be proud of the red, white, and blue, and believe in her mission. . . . America remains mankind's best hope. The eyes of mankind are on us . . . remember that we are one Nation under God, believing in liberty and justice for all."<sup>17</sup> In March, 1983, he brought cheering evangelicals to their feet in Orlando, Florida, when he proclaimed to the annual convention of the National Association of Evangelicals: "America is great because America is good" and reiterated that this nation was "the last best hope of man."<sup>18</sup> The idea that America is God's chosen nation, in a religious as well as in a political sense, is alive and well and living in Washington, D.C.!

While the former Puritan concept of a City on a Hill and God's New Israel evolved over the years from an evangelical, communitarian application to a religious, national one, there has been a parallel development from religious liberty to cultural pluralism. Originally, religious liberty meant that the various denominations were free to spread the Gospel as they understood it, without intrusion by either the government or a state church. In this context, an evangelical Protestant consensus emerged which made the United States in the nineteenth century into what historian William G. McLoughlin called "a unified, pietistic-perfectionist nation" and "the most religious people in the world."<sup>19</sup> However, that consensus began to crack near the end of the century as new immigrants from non-Protestant churches or no churches at all flowed into the country and as the secularizing forces associated with Darwinism, urbanization, and industrialization made their presence felt in American society. And, as the country became more diverse, that diversity was protected—some would even say encouraged—by the nation's commitment to religious liberty. Thus, slowly but surely, religious freedom was translated into cultural pluralism.

However, by the post-World War II period, this cultural pluralism was beginning to strain the very bonds of national unity. It was a time of increasing tension and confusion. Looking back on the period 1945-1960, the late Paul Goodman lamented:

Our case is astounding. For the first time in recorded history, the mention of country, community, place has lost its power to animate. Nobody but a scoundrel even tries it. Our rejection of false patriotism is, of course, itself a badge of honor. But the positive loss is tragic and I cannot resign myself to it. A man has only one life and if during it he has no great environment, no community, he has been irreparably robbed of a human right.<sup>20</sup>

Goodman's analysis was not only a modern jeremiad, however; it was also a plea for the emergence of a modern unifying concept

which would serve to hold the republic together. The destruction of the old evangelical Protestant consensus and with it the original American civil religion, and the emergence of cultural pluralism based on the American doctrine of religious liberty—and now reinforced by the melting pot myth—all spelled out the need for a new civil religion based on the new facts of American life. Ironically enough, during the very period when Goodman's observations most closely applied, a rejuvenated civil faith was emerging. This new civil religion took shape during the Eisenhower presidency and it was as amiable and ambiguous as Ike. It was now a civil religion which had been enlarged to include not only the three major faiths of the land—Protestant, Catholic, Jew—but virtually anyone who acknowledged a Supreme Being. The national mood of the 1950s

from traditions which accept the doctrine of religious liberty, but the movement has wholeheartedly embraced that part of American civil religion which emphasizes America's national mission as God's New Israel. How can a nation that is so culturally diverse speak in terms of a national mission? Unfortunately, the New Religious Right does not seem to acknowledge the reality of that cultural diversity but prefers to think of America as it was throughout most of the nineteenth century—a religiously homogeneous nation.

Moreover, the New Religious Right's millennial vision for America seems inconsistent and confused. Belief in America as a City on a Hill and as God's New Israel requires a postmillennial eschatology—the view that the Kingdom of God is extended through Christian preaching and teaching as a result of which the world will be

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*There are many similarities between the adherents of the Religious Right and the Puritans. Both seem to be movements composed of self-confessed godly people determined to change the moral climate of their day.*

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was congenial to an outpouring of religiosity, and examples of it abounded: national days of prayer, the addition of "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag in 1954, the authorization to place "in God we trust" on all currency and coins and the adoption of the same phrase as the national motto in 1956 are a few examples.

Interestingly enough, hard on the heels of the new upsurge of civil religion in the 1950s came a time of great political turmoil and widespread religious renewal in the 1960s. It was in this context that the New Religious Right emerged in the 1970s—galvanized by its hostility to theological and political liberalism alike. In many ways, this New Religious Right resembled the old Puritanism as it began to interact with the American civil religion. Its first order of business was to purify the church and state, to restore old values and old ideals, and, if possible, to put an end to the confusion and tension of the age.

#### **The American Civil Religion in the Hands of the New Religious Right: the Confusion and Tension Heightened**

The leaders of the New Religious Right of the 1970s found a civil religion which invested the civil officers of the country with a certain religious mystique; one which linked the social order to a higher and truer realm; one which provided religious motivation and sanction for civil virtue; one which, in short, served the functions of an established religion—and they liked it! It was a public religion which gave the majority of Americans an over-arching common spiritual heritage in which the entire nation supposedly shared. Because it did not appear to contradict their understanding of the American past nor their commitment to Bible Christianity, and because they did not have a profound understanding of civil religion or American history, and, further, because civil religion seemed suited to their goal of restoring America's spiritual and political vigor, New Religious Right leaders embraced the American civil religion as they found it. They did not seem to be aware of or understand one perplexing feature of the American public faith, pointed out by historian Sidney E. Mead and others—namely, that it included a central doctrine of separation of church and state. This concept is, of course, a legacy of the historic American emphasis on religious liberty. As such, it greatly complicates the operation of civil religion in America and provides the public faith with a substantial element of self-contradiction. In any case, the New Religious Right hardly noticed this in the beginning and is often perplexed by those who refuse to go along with such parts of its program as prayer in the public schools—a perfectly logical civil religion activity—because of the principle of religious liberty and its corollary separation of church and state.<sup>21</sup>

But this last point illustrates the fact that the appearance of the New Religious Right in the 1970s has exacerbated the old tensions associated with the two religious components of the American Dream. Most of the adherents of the New Religious Right come

Christianized and will enjoy a long period of peace and righteousness called the millennium. During the nineteenth century, post-millennial views of the destiny of America played a vital role in justifying national expansion. Although there were other explanations for the nation's growth, the idea of a Christian republic marching toward a golden age appealed to many people. Millennial nationalism was attractive because it harmonized the republic with religious values. Thus, America became the hope of the nations—destined to uphold Christian and democratic principles which eventually would bring spiritual and political freedom to the world.

This is exactly what the leaders of the New Religious Right, men like TV evangelist Jerry Falwell and best-selling author Tim LaHaye, believe. Falwell declares that the various activities of the Founding Fathers indicate that they "were putting together God's country, God's republic, and for that reason God has blessed her for two glorious centuries."<sup>22</sup> He has written approvingly: "Any diligent student of American history finds that our great nation was founded by godly men upon godly principles to be a Christian nation . . . Our Founding Fathers firmly believed that America had a special destiny in the world."<sup>23</sup> LaHaye proclaims that: "America is the human hope of the world, and Jesus Christ is the hope of America."<sup>24</sup>

The only problem with all of this is that Falwell, LaHaye and many other leaders of the New Religious Right are also premillennialists—adherents of that view of the future which claims that Jesus' return will be followed by a period of peace and righteousness before the last judgment, during which Christ will reign as king in person or through a select group of people. This kingdom will not be established by the conversion of individuals over a long period of time, but suddenly and by overwhelming power. Evil will be held in check during the millennial kingdom by Christ, who will rule with a rod of iron. Further, premillennialists believe that this kingdom will be preceded by a period of steady decline and by certain signs such as great tribulation, apostacy, wars, famines, earthquakes, and the appearance of the antichrist.

By way of contrast, nineteenth-century premillennialists, who then constituted only a minority of American Christians, did not believe that their nation was a recipient of God's special favor but was rather just another Gentile world power. In short, they did not support the view that the United States was God's New Israel. Moreover, premillennialists today still maintain a rather gloomy scenario of the future, including the concept of a time of great decline immediately preceding the second coming of Christ.<sup>25</sup>

There has always been inconsistency on the part of premillennialists with regard to the interpretation of world events and their desire to be patriotic Americans. This is particularly marked in the New Religious Right.<sup>26</sup> Individuals like Falwell and LaHaye have felt called to enter the social and political arena, but they do not have a consistent eschatological base for such activities. In essence,

they want to support a certain type of postmillennial vision for America while maintaining a premillennial eschatology.

In fact, much of the New Religious Right's program seems to be contradictory and inconsistent. Perhaps this is because of its confused eschatology. A further problem with its millennialism is its encouragement of the new American civil religion with its emphasis on the chosen theme while ignoring the enormous cultural pluralism present in the United States today. There seems to be something bizarre about attempts to advocate any scheme to spread American political, cultural, and religious values to the world when nobody in this country seems certain what those values are anymore. Moreover, much that is proposed by the New Religious Right appears to contradict the historic American Dream of religious liberty—especially in terms of its drive to introduce state prayers into public schools, its advocacy of tax credits for those who send their children to parochial schools, and its insistence upon a large standing, professional army.<sup>27</sup>

### Conclusions

There are many similarities between the adherents of the New Religious Right and the Puritans of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Both seem to be movements composed of self-confessed godly people determined to change the moral and religious climate of their day. There also appear to be many of the same tensions in the two respective movements—especially the desire, on the one hand, for heartfelt religion to prevail and the wish, on the other, to impose a certain level of morality on society in general. There is, if you will, a perplexing contradiction in the movement which makes it want to create some kind of national religion (or quasi-state church) of “true believers.” As the Puritans discovered, it is impossible to combine the two elements in any meaningful way because true faith cannot be forced, especially in the context of religious freedom. It appears historically impossible to achieve the Puritan goals of an elect society composed entirely of genuine believers while at the same time allowing any sort of religious freedom which, in turn, makes the conversion experience meaningful. That was the Puritan dilemma and it may well be the dilemma of the New Religious Right as well.

What happened to the Puritans when they tried to impose their values—no matter how high-minded and uplifting to mankind they may have been—on a larger society? They met first with frustration, then with disillusionment, and finally with the prospect of either acquiescing to a new regime or going into exile. After three generations of attempting to bring godly government to England and after fighting and winning a civil war, Oxford don and Puritan divine Dr. John Owen in 1652 could only survey the Cromwellian regime and lament:

Now, those that ponder these things, their spirits are grieved in the midst of their bodies;—the visions of their heads trouble them. They looked for other things from them that professed Christ; but the summer is ended, and the harvest is past, and we are not refreshed.<sup>28</sup>

In the end, what will happen to the New Religious Right if and when its participation in politics comes to naught? What will come of its vision and participation in the American Dream? If the concept of a New Israel and a covenanted community could not be implemented and maintained in a country like seventeenth-century England or a place like colonial New England with their culturally and religiously homogeneous populations, how can anyone expect such an idea to be successfully realized in an increasingly pluralistic society like the United States in the 1980s?

The New Religious Right, like the Puritan movement of old, may have to learn the hard way that the best that Christians can hope for in a largely unconverted world is genuine religious freedom in which to practice the Faith and preach the Gospel. That

part of the American Dream is still meaningful, precious, and possible. The live question of this generation is: can it be preserved? Adherents of the New Religious Right are trying to save the American Dream. But how ironic it would be if, in the process, they destroyed it!

- <sup>1</sup> This is a revision of a lecture originally presented at a Conference on the American Dream, the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, KS, April 21, 1983.
- <sup>2</sup> W. Lloyd Warner, *Social Class in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), pp. v–vi.
- <sup>3</sup> Christopher F. Mooney, *Religion and the American Dream: The Search for Freedom Under God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977). This collection of essays focuses on the “power and force of religion in civil affairs” and notes many of the contradictions and tensions in this aspect of the American Dream.
- <sup>4</sup> John Winthrop, *Papers*, A. B. Forbes, ed. (5 vols., Boston: The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1929–1947), 2:295; and Roger Williams, *The Bloody Tenet of Persecution for Cause of Conscience* (London: n.p., 1644). Introduction. Also see Anson Phelps Stokes, *Church and State in the United States* (New York: Harper and Row, 1950); Leo Pfeffer, *Church, State, and Freedom* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1953); Loren Baritz, *City on a Hill: A History of Ideas and Myths in America* (New York: John Wiley, 1964); Ernest L. Tuveson, *Redemptor Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); Conrad Cherry, ed., *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971); and John F. Wilson, *Public Religion in American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979).
- <sup>5</sup> Alan Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England* (Chicago: University Press, 1955), pp. 19–38.
- <sup>6</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Apocalyptic Writings*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).
- <sup>7</sup> Nathan O. Hatch, “The Origins of Civil Millennialism in America: New England Clergymen. War with France and the Revolution.” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 31 (July 1974): 429. Also see Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Millennial Thought in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); and John F. Berens, *Providence and Patriotism in Early America, 1640–1815* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1978), pp. 51–80.
- <sup>8</sup> John E. Smylie, “National Ethos and the Church.” *Theology Today*, 20 (Oct. 1963): 314; and Berens, *Providence and Patriotism in Early America* pp. 81–111.
- <sup>9</sup> Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History* (New York: Knopf, 1963), pp. 31–32.
- <sup>10</sup> Williams, *The Bloody Tenet of Persecution*, Introduction.
- <sup>11</sup> *Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1974), p. 21.
- <sup>12</sup> The basis for this definition of civil religion is found in the following: Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America.” *Daedalus*, No. 96 (Winter 1967): 1–21; D. Elton Trueblood, *The Future of the Christian* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 83–102; and Will Herberg, “American Civil Religion: What It Is and Whence It Comes.” in *American Civil Religion*, ed. Russell E. Richey and Donald G. Jones (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), pp. 76–88. For an evaluation of civil religion from two different but complementary points of view, see Wilson, *Public Religion in American Culture*; and Robert D. Linder and Richard V. Pierard, *Twilight of the Saints: Biblical Christianity and Civil Religion in America* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978).
- <sup>13</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, ed. G.D.H. Cole (New York: Dutton, 1950) p. 139; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Oeuvres Completes, Du Contrat Social*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (4 vols., Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 3: 368–375, 468; Ralph H. Gabriel, *The Course of American Democratic Thought*, 2nd ed. (New York: Ronald Press, 1956), pp. 14–25, 23–28; Sidney E. Mead, *The Nation With the Soul of a Church* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), pp. 56–57; and Seymour M. Lipset, *The First New Nation* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), pp. 61–98.
- <sup>14</sup> Robert W. Lynn, “Civil Catechetics in Mid-Victorian America: Some Notes About American Civil Religion, Past and Present.” *Religious Education*, No. 48 (Jan.–Feb. 1973): 5–27.
- <sup>15</sup> *The Christian Advocate*, Jan. 22, 1903, pp. 1–2. Also see Charles S. Olcott, *The Life of William McKinley* (2 vols., New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1916), 2: 109–111.
- <sup>16</sup> Ronald W. Reagan, “Acceptance Address: Republican National Convention Presidential Nomination.” *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 46, no. 21 (Aug. 15, 1980): 646.
- <sup>17</sup> Ronald W. Reagan, “Believe in Her Mission,” Landon Lecture at Kansas State University on Sept. 9, 1982, published in full in *The Manhattan Mercury*, Sept. 9, 1982, p. B2.
- <sup>18</sup> Text of the Remarks of President Ronald W. Reagan to the Forty-First Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals, March 8, 1983, Sheraton Twin Towers Hotel, Orlando, Florida, released by the Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, p. 1. See the report of the speech in *The New York Times*, March 9, 1983, pp. 1–11.
- <sup>19</sup> William G. McLoughlin, ed., *The American Evangelicals, 1800–1900* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 1.
- <sup>20</sup> Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd* (New York: Random House, 1960), p. 97.
- <sup>21</sup> Mead, *The Nation With the Soul of a Church*, pp. 78–113; and Alfred Balitzer, “Some Thoughts about Civil Religion.” *Journal of Church and State*, 16 (Winter 1974): 36–37.
- <sup>22</sup> Jerry Falwell, *America Can Be Saved* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1979), p. 23.
- <sup>23</sup> Jerry Falwell, *Listen America!* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), p. 29.
- <sup>24</sup> Tim LaHaye, *The Bible's Influence on American History* (San Diego: Master Books, 1976), p. 59.
- <sup>25</sup> For a discussion of this view, see Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millennialism, 1800–1930*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); and Robert G. Clouse, ed., *The Meaning of the Millennium* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), pp. 17–40.
- <sup>26</sup> For a first-rate examination of this particular problem, see Robert G. Clouse, “The New Christian Right, America, and the Kingdom of God,” *Christian Scholar's Review*, 12, No. 1 (1983): 3–16.
- <sup>27</sup> For a discussion of the tensions created by this last point, see Robert D. Linder, “Militarism in Nazi Thought and in the American New Religious Right,” *Journal of Church and State*, 24 (Spring 1982): 263–279, esp. p. 276, n. 38.
- <sup>28</sup> John Owen, “Christ's Kingdom and the Magistrate's Power,” sermon published in *The Works of John Owen* (24 vols., Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1850–1853), 8: 381. For the scriptural basis for Owen's allusion, see Jeremiah 8:20.