Anthony Squiers

The Politics of the Sacred in America

The Role of Civil Religion in Political Practice

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To my lovely wife, Kana, and the Ikeda family of which I am honored to be a part.

“When I use a word,’ Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.’
‘The question is,’ said Alice, ‘whether you can make words mean so many different things.’

—Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*

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Anthony Squiers

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Chapter 1
The Political Dimensions of the American Civil Religion (ACR): An Introduction

In 1967, Robert N. Bellah's seminal article, "Civil Religion in America" was published in *Daedalus*. This article would dramatically reshape the way people looked at American culture and religion. Its basic thesis was that a "public religious dimension" exists in America which "is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals" (p. 4). According to Bellah, this religious dimension which he referred to as 'civil religion' was distinguishable from the various sectarian religions present in society as well as political ideology. Although Bellah's conceptual framework had its origins in Rousseau's *On the Social Contract* (from where he borrowed the term civil religion) and Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, as well as other students of American religion and culture (Herberg, 1960a, 1960b; Marty, 1959; Mead, 1964; Tocqueville & Reeve, 2000; Warner, 1959), his article served to elevate the concept of an American civil religion in the social scientific argot and sparked a flurry of articles and books which attempted to elaborate on its theoretical framework and explore the empirical validity of his claims. While the first empirical investigation (Thomas & Flippen, 1972) produced equivocal results, subsequent studies overwhelmingly support the notion that doctrinal beliefs of a religious nature are commonly shared and publicly and ritually articulated in American society (Chapp, 2012; Christenson & Wimberley, 1978; Fairbanks, 1982; Hammer, 2010; Hart & Pauley, 2005; Jolicoeur & Knowles, 1978; Meizel, 2006; Toolin, 1983; Whillock, 1994; Wilson, 1980; Wimberley, 1976, 1979; Wimberley & Christenson, 1981; Wimberley, Clelland, Hood, & Lipsey, 1976).

Since Bellah's initial article, American civil religion (ACR) has been an important analytical framework for the sociological study of American culture and religion. It persists largely because of its functionality and utility. According to James Mosely, the concept "can be instructive in showing how civic rhetoric makes use of religious symbols. . .[It] may serve as a case study in the semiotics of political culture (Hammond, Porterfield, Moseley, & Sarna, 1994, p. 18). Similarly, Angrosino (2002) states, "[t]he concept of a civil religion allows us to interpret current behavior. . .in light of historical tradition and values that have historically held meaning in American culture. . .[It] is a useful analytical tool by means of which a number of

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sociopolitical trends can be put into cultural and historical context" (pp. 240–241).[1] Building on the success of the ACR literature, the concept of civil religion has also been applied to many other cultures (Bellah, 1980b; Braswell, 1979; Coleman, 1970; Coleman & Davis, 1978; Hammond, 1980d; Liebman & Don-Yehiya, 1983; Moraska, 1986; Purdy, 1982; Regan, 1976; Reynolds, 1977; Seneviratne, 1984; Turner, 1986; Wierdsma, 1987). The underlying pattern in these studies is that at the core of each society examined lays a unique manifestation of a common phenomenon conditioned by the specific socio-cultural traits and historical experiences of the people.

Christenson and Wimberley (1978) provide a concise synopsis of the theoretical tenets of the ACR developed by Bellah (1967) and others (Bennett, 1975; Cherry, 1970; Stauffer, 1973) saying:

> [American] [c]ivil religion draws upon civil events such as the 4th of July, documents such as the U.S. Constitution, personages such as Jefferson and Lincoln, and common religious beliefs such as the belief that the United States is God's chosen nation; the perception of Divine sanctions and inherent morality in civil laws; and the ascription of sacred connotations to such secular symbols as flags, Presidential inaugurations and national holidays. (p. 77)

From a genealogical standpoint, the philosophical roots of the ACR, in part, can be found in an 'Old Testament' conception of political religiosity, derived from the Jewish conceptualization of God in legal-political terms (Richardson, 1974). This notion has two primary components. First, it presents a "political model of God as king" (Richardson, 1974, p. 172) and legislator which gives primacy to God's law as the ultimate source of authority and subjugates temporal law to it (Albanese, 1982; Bellah, 1967, 1978; Coleman, 1970; Mead, 1974; Niebuhr, 1954; Richardson, 1974). Although the roots of this idea are found in ancient Jewish thought, it can also be found in the political theology of Augustine and Aquinas and in a different form in the thought of Natural Law theorists such as Locke and Rousseau. In American civil religious thought, it is revealed in the rationalization method employed in the Declaration of Independence, among other places. In the Declaration of Independence, revolutionary action, the breach with temporal authority and the creation of an alternative form of government were legitimated through appeal to divine law, or as it is stated in the Declaration of Independence, "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God." These laws stand above temporal law and served as an ultimate source of authority. In brief, the argument of the Declaration was that humans possessed "unalienable Rights" like "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" which were endowed to them by God. It is the purpose of government to ensure these rights and thus be in accord with God's

[1] For a good discussion of the ACR as a valuable conceptual framework in comparison to other frameworks like: Civic Republicanism, Public Theology, Public Religion and Public Philosophy see Gorski (2011b, pp. 250–251). Furthermore, the concept of the ACR is also advantageous because it is sufficiently broad to incorporate other theoretical frameworks which describe elements of a socially shared set of beliefs like American Exceptionalism. For a discussion of this concept's relation to the ACR see Wilsey (2015).

will. George III was understood to have violated these rights and to have transgressed God's law. The King's authority was thus seen as illegitimate.

The second aspect of the legal-political model is the conceiving of human relations with each other and human relations with God in terms of a covenant (Bellah, 1975, 1978; Gorski, 2011a; Niebuhr, 1954). This concept also has Old Testament roots. Adherence to God's law was formalized by an agreement made first between God and Abraham and later elaborated and clarified in the Mosaic covenant. In exchange for piety and fidelity, God promised protection and prosperity to the Jews. This created obligations on the people to their fellow humans and to God. These obligations were codified in the Decalogue.

Although these agreements were undertaken in both instances by an individual (Abraham and Moses) on the temporal side, it was structured in a corporate manner. It was to apply not only to Abraham and Moses but to all the Jews. Thus, an entire community was legally bound by it and the fortunes of all in the community were intrinsically tied to the behavior of each. If individuals broke the covenant, the entire community could be liable (Walzer, 1985). Communal prosperity then could only be ensured through righteous actions of the individuals. Because of this, the Jews developed a highly intricate legal structure designed to ensure the sanctity of the community as a whole, to thus ensure God's grace for all.

As a result of understanding their relations to others and to God in terms of a covenant, there was, for the Jews, an immediate political relevance for religion. Religion ensured the welfare of the political community. Because of this, "Old Testament theology functioned to facilitate. . .a centralized state and national ideology" (Richardson, 1974, p. 173) which ensured coherence, provided moral structure and could punish transgressors all in the name of the public good.

In America, these Old Testament notions of God as sovereign and covenant were central to Puritan theology and political philosophy (Miller, 1953a, 1953b, 1959; Zaret, 1985) Through Puritan influences these notions achieved considerable acceptance and sway in America, helping to shape its socio-political culture (Bailyn, 1967; Craven, 1956; Gorski, 2011a; Guétin 2009; Heimert, 1966; Hughey 1984; Miller, 1961; Morgan, 1967; Niebuhr, 1954; Rossiter, 1956; Wood, 1969). Craven (1956), for example stresses the centrality of the notion of covenant in the thought of influential Massachusetts Bay colonist John Winthrop. According to Craven, the principles set forth by Winthrop and subsequently propagated by the Puritan clergy were instrumental in the social self-understanding and subsequent political organization of pre-revolutionary New Englanders (pp. 17–18).

Hughey (1984) provides a particularly cogent analysis of how the Puritan notion of covenant was secularized (in the form of contractarian theory) and appropriated by Revolution era Americans, arguing:

> The secularization of Puritanism bequeathed an equally significant and enduring legacy to the spirit and structure of the American political order. During the tumultuous years of the middle and late 1700s, when America won its independence and reorganized its governmental structure, values and conceptions whose origins rested in religion were transvalued into political rhetorics, applied to the understanding and management of substantive political problems, and ultimately, invested into the institutional structure and ideological rationale of the American state. (p. 114)

Similarly, Niebuhr (1954) argues that covenant theology provided a familiar pattern by which the unfamiliar events of the revolution could be understood (p. 129). In this way, as Rossiter (1956) puts it, "the Puritan concept of the covenant helped swell the triumph of the social contract" (p. 91).[2] That is, because the notion of covenant and its political implications were so readily available (and accepted) in the eighteenth-century mindsets of nascent Americans, contractarian language seemed quite familiar and thus was fairly easily accepted.[3]

Although variations exist, the basic underlying principle of social contract theory is that humans freely enter into a contract with each other to form a government. This notion is revealed in the Declaration of Independence when it states that "Governments are instituted among Men." Under the terms of this contract individuals exchange the license they would hold in a state of nature (i.e. an apolitical realm) for the security offered to them in a *polis*. In essence, a collective security arrangement is made in the form of a government that creates predictable and stable social conditions. In this way, it is argued everyone benefits and human fulfillment can be met.

Like the Judaic covenants, the social contract implies obligations to others, for example, the protection of private property and a respect for individual security. These obligations bear a striking resemblance to the obligations to others set forth in the Mosaic covenant as enumerated in the Decalogue—"Thou shall not steal" and "Thou shall not kill."

The obligations of the social contract do not only extend to other humans. Like the Judaic covenants, it contains obligations to God. The social contract obligates respect and rights for individuals. But, as we saw above, it is through appeal to divine law where legitimation for these principles is found. In essence, they must be respected because they are the will of God. Fidelity to God and God's laws are taken *a priori* as necessary requirements and require no independent justification. There is an obligation to obey the will of God. In this way, we are again reminded of the Decalogue, specifically its injunction against idolatry—"You shall have no other gods before me." In the social contract, God stands as ultimate sanction and this is directly reflected in the ACR. As Niebuhr (1954) states, in America "[i]t was government of the people, for the people and by the people but always under God" (p. 133). Indeed, this deeply entrenched concept was reaffirmed in 1954, in the midst of the Cold War through a small but exceedingly revealing alteration to the American Pledge of Allegiance. One pledges allegiance to the flag and the republic the flag represents. But, the pledge makes it clear that the nation is subordinate to God—"one nation, under God."

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[2]This is not to imply that covenant and contract are exactly the same, only that the pervasiveness of the former provided easy grounds for the acceptance of the latter. For a discussion of the differences between covenant and contractarian thinking see: Hammon (1903), Niebuhr (1954, p. 134), Tucker (1965), Rothman (1980), Bromley (1988), and Williams (1994).

[3]As Semonche (1998) points out, there were also similarities in Protestant and Enlightenment anti-authoritarianism which helped to solidify an intellectual alliance between adherents of these traditions.

The 'Old Testament' legal-political model just outlined serves as an interpretative basis for conceiving ultimate, transcendent reality and God's relation to man (Richardson, 1974, p. 162). Through it, the *civitas* became the "primary model of ultimate reality" (Richardson, 1974, p. 173) for the Jews. By applying this legal-political framework to their own context, "Americans have developed a unique civil religion through which they express their faith that politics is a matter of ultimate concern" (Richardson, 1974, p. 162). To Americans "political categories have special appropriateness for symbolizing ultimate reality and man's fulfillment" (Richardson, 1974, p. 171). Bennett (1975) also stresses the *civitas* as a source of ultimate reality in the ACR. According to him, in America, a shift occurred in the "locus of spiritualism from religious institutions to the political arena" (p. 86). This "spiritual shift" included "a pervasive belief that ultimate wisdom, guidance, morality, and power reside in the Constitution" (p. 87). Furthermore, Richardson's and Bennett's contentions that the ACR forms a basis for understanding the world is supported by Bellah's (1967, 1974a, 1974b, 1975, 1976a, 1976b, 1976c, 1976d) and Hammond's (1976) formulation of the ACR. In part, they see the ACR functioning as a historical narrative context by which the nation's place in history, its trajectory and moral state of being can be made sense of. According to this view, the ACR allows Americans to interpret the nation's "historical experience in the light of transcendent reality" (Bellah, 1975, p. 3). It is a way of linking "the past, present and/ or future of a people. . .understood in some transcendental fashion" (Hammond, 1976, p. 170). In short, it provides a narrative form that Americans use to think about, understand and talk about their nation, its trajectory and place in the world.

Research Question

As the bibliography to this book indicates, there is a vast literature on the ACR. Theoretically and empirically a substantial portion of this literature is quite robust. This is due, in no small part, to the fact that some of the brightest sociologists of our time have devoted great energies to exploring the topic, including people like Bellah, Philip Hammond, N. J. Demerath, Talcot Parsons and Rhys H. Williams to name just a few. However, as this short list of influential contributors hints at, the ACR has largely been the domain of the sociology of religion or religious studies. Indeed, Bellah (1967) set the tone for this arguing that the ACR "has its own seriousness and integrity and requires the same care in understanding [it] that any other religion does" (p. 40). Following Bellah, a great deal of the work on the ACR attempted to answer the question "In what ways is the ACR religious?" However, at the same time, Bellah and most Researchers taking up the topic have also understood that this phenomenon has very clear political implications. Bellah (1967), for example said, "the separation of church and state has not denied the political realm a religious dimension" (Bellah, 1967, p. 42). Few scholars, however, have addressed the ACR from the perspective of the political. That is, few have asked,

"What are the political dimensions of the ACR?" As Cristi (2001) astutely observes, "civil religion has been too narrowly conceived. Too much emphasis has been placed on the religious and cultural aspect of the concept and its political ramifications have been neglected" (p. 223). Given this, this book takes "*What are the political dimensions of the ACR*?" as its central Research question. This is a particularly useful question to ask because, as this book will show, answering it will also resolve a central contradiction which lurks under the surface of the current literature on the ACR. Specifically, there is an unresolved tension between the core idea put forth in this literature that there exists a socially held set of beliefs about universal and transcendent principles which structure the society's political outlook and the undenied reality of particularistic conflicts and discordance. Indeed, as we will see in the subsequent chapter, this is a tension which the sociology of religion has failed to adequately explain and as we will see later in this chapter, political science in the subfield of American politics has also failed to elucidate. In short, individually neither of these areas of study have understood the ACR in its relation to both the collective and the particular. This book moves past this by showing how the ACR manifests in institutional politics and public political discourse, making them battlegrounds upon which particularistic sentiments and the society's fundamental and defining principles exist coextensively, simultaneously in a dialectical *pas de deux* of harmony and discord. Specifically, we will see that through the socio-cultural norms established by the ACR, institutional politics and public political discourse work in a mutually re-enforcing capacity to mediate the antagonism between the universal and the particular. The theorization of this and the demonstration of its workings through empirical observation stand as what this author sees as this book's principle contribution to the understanding of American culture and politics. What is learned from this book is how the contradiction between the universal and the particular, the collective and the individual are discursively and institutionally negotiated in the United States of America. To the extent that one must assume the maintenance of that society and the social order upon which it rests is predicated on some type of viable coexistence of these two things and adequate social mechanisms to mediate the conflict between them, what is learned from this book is the particularities of how American social cohesion is kept.

Definitions of Politics and the ACR

Before we can begin to address the question above, we must first define the parameters of our investigation. This requires us to operationalize (i.e. create usable definitions for) two things, politics and civil religion.

Defining Politics

In his classic foray into the meaning of politics, political scientist, Harold Lasswell (1936) presented them as social processes through which certain social outcomes are produced. Famously, he claimed that politics are about 'who gets what, why and how.'[4] The 'why' and 'how' have to deal with the social processes themselves while the outcomes he was interested in were distributive—'who' gets 'what.' Like Lasswell, this book sees politics as the social mechanisms, methods, procedures or practices through which social outcomes are produced. It can also accept Lasswell's notion of politics being about distribution, if we understand distribution as applying to both tangible things (like who gets a bridge, a tax rebate or a parking ticket) as well as intangible things (like who gets to be on which piece of land, who has the freedom to do something or who gets the right to vote). This caveat is important because it allows us to account for something this book assumes to be at the heart of politics, alongside the distribution of material things. Specifically, it would allow us to account for the idea of social imposition and regulation of behavior—as an outcome (i.e. as something one gets). In the present work, it is assumed that rule formation and distribution is fundamental to politics. Politics determine what people can, cannot or must do/ have. They specify what people do and do not get and what is and is not permitted in society.[5]

Defining the ACR

Defining civil religion is no easy task. In the existing literature, we find many attempts (some complimentary, some conflicting) at defining and refining the concept (Bellah, 1967, 1974a, 1975, 1986; Bellah & Hammond, 1980; Coleman, 1970; Gorski, 2011a; Herberg, 1973; Lamert, 1975a; Lüchau, 2009; Mead, 1964; Stahl, 1984; West, 1980). All of these commentators seem to agree on some basic elements, however. As we saw above, Bellah's definition of American civil religion

[4]There is a vast literature on the meaning of the word 'politics.' A full accounting of this literature is not necessary for our current endeavor. Instead, we simply require an operational definition—one that defines the term as understood and applied in this book. For an overview of the debate over the meaning of 'politics' see: Alexander (2014), Dunn (2008) and Geuss (2001).

[5]While political acts can be directly distributive, for example if the outcome was a subsidy for corn farmers, or healthcare for the poor, they can also structure other distributions in society. Essentially, social imposition (rules), by telling people what they can and cannot do/ have, sets a broad framework for social interaction, creating the limits and possibilities for it. According to the limits and possibilities of social interaction, distributions occur. These could include, for example distributions of goods, opportunities or obligations. Furthermore, politics are, in themselves, a form of social interaction which is structured by certain impositions. Customs, cultural traits, language and law (particularly constitutions) impose upon the social interaction of politics. These things limit them and set parameters for outcome possibilities.

suggested that civil religions have a ritual aspect, a symbolic aspect, and a belief aspect. Most theoreticians of civil religion concede this point. Beyond that there is also broad agreement on the idea that civil religion is a relationship between religion and the political organization of a society or as Coleman (1970) puts it, "civil religion points to the religious dimension of the polity" (p. 67).

Indeed, a lot of the debate about the definition of civil religion has been around the fact that this relationship manifests differently in different social contexts. In some cases, there is no differentiation between the political and the religious. This would be the case, for example in the aboriginal tribes of Australia which were the subjects of Durkheim's famous study (Durkheim & Fields, 1995). In other cases, the civil religious authority can be the exclusive domain of a particular church as was the case in the Holy Roman Empire before the Protestant reformation where the Church of Rome "surrounded feudal institutions with the halo of divine consecration" (Engels, 1975, p. 16) or the exclusive domain of the state as was the case of the Soviet Union with their secular 'religion' of Soviet Marxism. Still another case would be one where a level of differentiation existed and the civil religion is neither the exclusive domain of a church nor the exclusive domain of the state. In other words, where the civil religion is something outside of the control of both church and state. Bellah (1967), Coleman (1970) and Hart (2000), for example see the American civil religion in these terms. There are arguments for and against the inclusion of all these relationships under the heading of civil religion. However, a broad categorization of the phenomenon is justifiable and civil religion provides a label which is as good as any. But, further typologies are also helpful in order to understand the relationship between religion and the state or the political.

Another area of broad agreement about civil religion that many scholars stress is its narrative quality. It works as a form for the articulation and understanding of ideas. It is used to contextualize symbols and ideas in a discernable way, by holding them together and in relation to each other so that one can make sense of them. In this sense, it functions the same way composition does in music and painting, theory does in science and narrative does in fiction. By providing a recognizable framework for the presentation of objects, civil religion provides a structure by which individuals can communicate ideas with intersubjective validity. In this way, the American civil religion serves as a form by which Americans talk about and subsequently make sense of their nation, its moral state and its place in the world. Or, as we saw above, it provides a form by which the American people are able to interpret their "historical experience in the light of transcendent reality" (Bellah, 1975, p. 3). Similarly, Hammond (1976) asserts that a civil religion is a "set of beliefs and rituals, related to the past, present and/ or future of a people. . .which are understood in some transcendental fashion" (p. 170).

Taking our cue from these points of conceptual overlap which have been largely agreed to in the existing literature: a system of symbols, rituals and beliefs; civil religion as a relationship between religion and the polity; and civil religion as a narrative of the transcendent —we can define civil religion as a constellation of: (1) broadly held, deeply entrenched and often institutionalized beliefs which are intersubjectively shared, expressed and validated by the members of a particular

civitas where the polity serves as an interpretative basis for understanding transcendent[6] meaning and self-understanding for that community; (2) the symbols that represent and invoke those beliefs and (3) the rituals that re-enforce them. The ACR would be the unique manifestation of this phenomenon which is observable in the United States of America.

Given this definition one may rightly question, "What makes this a religion?" This definition (as with much of the civil religion discourse) is largely rooted in the Durkheimian conceptualization of religion. For Durkheim "every group has a religious dimension" (Bellah, 1967, p. 40). This religious dimension acts as a cohesive element that maintains the community. Central to the mechanisms of cohesion are a group of sacred, totemic principles which are socially sedimented and widely shared. These principles are represented in symbolic form (i.e. totems), treated with reverence and used in rituals which extol the totemic principles (Durkheim & Fields, 1995). It is in this sense that one can say that civil religion is a religion. The 'deeply entrenched and often institutionalized beliefs' maintain a special status in society. They are totemic principles. The symbols that represent them and rituals which re-enforce them are also afforded a special status. They are treated with reverence. These beliefs, symbols and rituals stand apart from the common and the ordinary. They are special, exalted. In a word, they are sacred.

What is presented in the chapters that follow is a portrait of the United States as a religious community in this sense. This presentation may conflict with the widely-held belief that the USA is a secular country. If we define secular as free from the control of and officially neutral toward sectarian or denominational religious organizations and creeds, that is, if we define secular according to the way secularity is conceived in American jurisprudence and in the two provisions in the First Amendment of the US Constitution which bar Congress from establishing a national religion and inhibiting the people's ability to exercise the religion of their choosing, the United States is, indeed, a secular state. However, if we define secular as not religious and we define religion as we just have, clearly the United States is not a secular state. This notion is bound to make some uncomfortable because it conflicts with their preconceived notions of what the United States is and what it is all about. Nevertheless, in the pages that follow, overwhelming evidence will be presented which indicate that this is, in fact, the case.

With our parameters set, we can now turn our attention to what we know about the political dimensions of the ACR and to what is still left to be explored.

[6]Here transcendent meaning can be understood as something which is intuited or even intellectualized by the agent to be non-historicized, non-localized and universally applicable.

What We Know About the Political Dimensions of the ACR

Few scholars have studied the political dimensions of the ACR and those who have, have yet to give us a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon. In part, this is due to the way American politics are generally studied. The discipline (especially in the American academy) is usually divided into two branches—voting behavior and institutions. These subfields are currently dominated by the behavioralist school which stresses that the proper way to study politics is to seek out objective, measurable variables (independent variables) which impact the behavior of agents (dependent variables).

Given the shroud of behavioralism, the American civil religion fits uneasily in these subfields. To begin, as we will see, there is little variation in party or candidate articulation of American civil religious rhetoric and there is little variation in the ACR beliefs across the voting population. Since there is little variation, the ACR has little explanatory power as a causal variable influencing voter behavior. Therefore, one does not learn much about voting behavior from using the ACR as a conceptual framework. In turn, those studying voter behavior have little interest in it and where it has been employed problems emerge, as we will see.

The Research done in the institutions subfield largely amounts to descriptive work highlighting the civil religious ceremonial and symbolic role the three branches of American government have. For example, work has been done on the President's role in the ACR and Semonche (1998) has written an impressive history of Constitutional law regarding individual rights cases. In it, he frames the Supreme Court as the keepers of the ACR faith. They are educators, theologians, guardians and guarantors of it. Nevertheless, the institutions subfield of American politics still maintains the same discipline bias as the voter behavior subfield. As is the case there, little variation means that the ACR is not a useful independent variable in explaining the behavior of actors, acting within various institutional settings.

It may be the case that the ACR is not interesting from the behavioralist perspective. But, studying American politics solely from this perspective will not, nor cannot tell us all we want to know about American politics. Furthermore, this approach does little to see and explain politics as an integral part of the culture it exists in and is reproduced by. Because all agents acting within a particular cultural setting are being influenced in some way by this cultural setting, cultural factors cannot explain variation in the behavior of individuals. However, we should be very clear on this point. *This should not be misconstrued to mean that cultural factors have no impact on the behavior of individuals.* It simply means that they cannot explain the variation in the behaviors of individuals. For example, in the subsequent chapters we will see that, in American public political discourse there is widespread and ubiquitous articulation of particular signs (i.e. intersubjectively available, socially shared representations, which have the potential to communicate some meaning from one person to another). There is no significant variation in what signs are articulated nor by whom. The repetition of these signs makes sense when one understands them set against a particular cultural background. That cultural

background is influencing the behavior of nearly everyone within it. In some ways, identifying and explaining common behavior and common beliefs is more interesting and more important than explaining the variation in individual behavior because it gives a more comprehensive picture of the social order and cultural awareness of the people. It speaks to their fabric—their molecular structure. It reveals what Garfinkel (1984) discusses as the basic, everyday, taken-for-granted, underlying assumptions upon which the social order is able to function cohesively.

In short, the dominance of behavioralism urges the study of American politics to focus on the differences in behavior outcomes. While this is important and often interesting; so too is understanding what everyone is doing the same and why.

Although the ACR literature has by and large neglected its political dimensions, political implications have not been completely overlooked. Specifically, four general areas have been lightly touched upon: (1) its relation to US foreign policy; (2) it as a theoretical tradition in political sociology and political philosophy; (3) it as a discursive feature of electoral politics and (4) it as a vehicle which can mediate basic, underlying social tensions. However, the approaches taken in these works have failed to adequately address the contradictory nature of the ACR as a universalizing belief system and the reality of individualistic and partisan i.e. particularistic tendencies in the people who hold those beliefs.

The ACR and US Foreign Policy

To begin, some commentators has shown that the ACR has been an explanatory variable in American foreign policy (Abrams, 2001; Brocker, 2004; Chaplin & Joustra, 2010; Gunn, 2009; Haberski 2012; Hehir, 2004; Inboden, 2008; Jewett, 1973; Jewett & Lawrence, 2003; Tuveson, 1968). Specifically, the argument goes that the ACR shapes a particular way of understanding international affairs and American foreign policy which, in turn, shapes action. Particularly, it is the idea within the American civil religious tradition that the United States has a special redemptive mission in the world. Tuveson (1968), for example, argues that Americans have inherited a theological perspective from their Puritan ancestors which sees the world as essentially morally corrupt and in need of redemption. Furthermore, not only is the world capable of being redeemed, the United States is in a position to facilitate the redemption because of its special relationship with God. In this sense, the Americans see themselves as a 'new Jerusalem' which can bring light to the nations. This can be seen for example, in context to the Cold War. During this period, the world was often presented in dichotomous terms—the world of God and light and the world of evil and darkness. The former was represented by the United States and its divine purpose while the latter was represented by the 'godless' communists. Perhaps the clearest articulation of this idea could be found in Reagan's famous speech to the National Association of Evangelicals on March 8th, 1983 in which he called the Soviet Union an 'evil empire.' This dichotomy helped to establish clear guidelines for Americans to follow. Internationally, they

could either be at the service of righteousness (that is maintain their redemptive mission) or they could be in the service of evil. The importance of the ACR in helping to shape U.S. foreign policy during this period is captured well in Indoben's (2008) remark that for the Americans, "Differences over political structures and economic systems and even national interest, though important in their own right, paled in comparison with the prospect of a world ruled by evil, a world devoid of spiritual values, a world without God" (p. 4).

While these works are correct to point out that civil religious justifications are central to American foreign policy (at least discursively), they fall short of painting a comprehensive picture of the political dimensions of the ACR because they treat the United States as a monolithic entity. They are principally concerned which what the United States does in terms of the exercising of public power directed outwardly and what those in control of that power say about it. This approach overlooks the partisan, particularistic divisions which occur during foreign policy debates and the struggles to obtain control of public power. Therefore, the particular aspect of the universal/ particular contradiction discussed above is negated in these works. The core tension between the idea of universal and transcendent principles and partisan conflicts has been obfuscated.

The ACR in Political Sociology and Political Philosophy

In an extremely ambitious and erudite study, Beiner (2011) has shown that the concept of civil religion is one of the most important and fundamental underlying principles within Western political philosophy. He does this by tracing the concept through the thought of more than twenty of the most influential Western political thinkers. Specifically, he argues that four basic traditions can be teased out of these diverse literatures. The first is to attempt to put religion within the service of the state. This position is represented, for example, in the thought of Machiavelli, Hobbes and Rousseau. The second is the Liberal tradition which attempts to divide church and state providing each is own jurisdiction. The third tradition is one of modern theocracy and the last is the radical removal of religion from socio-political contexts. This position is represented, for example, by Heidegger and Nietzsche.

Beiner's work, suffers to some degree by not engaging the various typologies sociologists have developed (e.g. Bellah & Hammond, 1980; Coleman, 1970; Hammond, 1976, 1980e; Lambert, 1975a; Stahl, 1984; West, 1980) which provide for a more nuanced understanding of civil religion and its various manifestations. Nevertheless, he clearly demonstrates the centrality of civil religion as a subject in Western political philosophy. However, this work is of little help in understanding the mediation of collectivism versus particularistic interests because it is chiefly concerned with normative theories of church-state relations and therefore does not address devices and institutions of this type of mediation.

Cristi (2001) also attempts to understand the political dimensions of civil religion from the perspective of broad traditions. In her analysis, a division in

civil religions can be found between Durkheimian and Rousseauian conceptualizations of the phenomenon. The basic dichotomy she makes is that in the Durkheimian model, civil religion is understood as a sort of spontaneous phenomenon which emerges as a result of public consensus regarding ubiquitously held social values that are reaffirmed through corporate social activities. On the other hand, the Rousseauian model is understood as a deliberately fabricated set of principles which can be employed in effective maintenance of the state. In short, the Rousseauian model is imposed, top down and the Durkheimian is "naturally diffused throughout society" (Cristi, 2001, p. 41). We should note that Hammond (Bellah & Hammond, 1980) makes a similar distinction. However, to Cristi, Rousseau and Durkheim or actually the archetypes they represent, sit on opposite extremes of a spectrum upon which all civil religions could be placed according to the level to which it is imposed on society. The key point for Cristi is that all civil religions have the characteristic of being to some degree imposed by the state. A purely Durkheimian conceptualization would suggest that the civil religion is neutral. It is something that appears organically in society and exists independently of the particular wills of those in the society. The Rousseauian conceptualization, on the other hand, opens the door for the idea that civil religion can be used as a sort of implement for someone or for some group to impose their will on others. Cristi is particularly concerned with the possibility that the state can use civil religion towards its own ends—a point we will explore below.

According to Cristi, the literature on the ACR has almost exclusively viewed civil religion from what she defined as the Durkheimian perspective and due to this, it has largely ignored the idea that it can be administered toward particularistic interests. She is correct that the literature has primarily been focused on the ACR as a religion for everybody (that is, has applied a more Durkheimian approach to the phenomenon) and less on the idea of the ACR as a religion for someone. This is a necessary insight if one seeks to resolve the central contradiction between universal and particular beliefs. However, in her assessment she seems to overlook vital elements of the literature. For example, Bellah (1967, 1974a, 1975, 1978) from the very beginning believed that the ACR could be commandeered for political or personal ends. Additionally, Bennett (1979), Thompson (1971) and Long (1974) have all suggested that the ACR is a factor in racial inequality and its justification and there is a substantial literature that suggests the ACR is a political resource that can be used toward specific political ends (Demerath, 1991, 2002; Demerath & Williams, 1992a, 1992b; Hart & Pauley, 2005; Kniss, 1996; Swartz, 1996; Williams, 1996a, 1996b; Williams & Alexander, 1994; Williams & Demerath, 1991). These works will be explored in-depth in Chap. 2. Furthermore, Gerteis (2011), Chapp (2012) and Williams (2013) have written articles or chapters which, in part, explore the way the ACR is used to create political identities and can lead to the exclusion of politically 'others.' Ironically, although all these works admit to the particular in the universal/ particular contradiction none of these works have adequately clarified their coexistence and relationship, as we will see in the next chapter. Given these works, it is safer to say that the issue has not been thoroughly explored or brought into a comprehensive picture.

As was mentioned above, Cristi is particularly concerned with the possibility that the state can use civil religion towards its own ends by manipulating the public. This is one of the major points of her work and needs to be considered with some scrutiny. There seem to be a few problems with her formulation as applied to the American case. First, we must ask what she means by the state. While she refers to the state often, it is not explicitly defined. She seems to equate the state with those who are in control of the state apparatus. The state and those who are in control of its apparatus are obviously not necessarily the same thing especially when (in democratic countries, for example) those who have control of the apparatus change but the state remains. Furthermore, in places like the United States, control of the state apparatus is diffused and held by multiple individuals and even individuals from different political factions, at the same time. Instances of divided government, the fact of federalism, a system of checks and balances, an independent judiciary, divided legislative powers between the executive and legislative branches, a bicameral legislative branch and a bureaucracy with mixed political allegiances and its own goals, all seem to indicate that the state as some type of monolith with its own goals, values, etc. is not really a viable conceptual framework in the context of the United States. Moreover, Cristi's concern that the state can use civil religion to manipulate the public seems to assume that the state is speaking in a vacuum. Outside the most extreme forms of totalitarian government, the state does not speak in a vacuum and this certainly is not the case in the United States. Political opposition, interest groups, civil society organizations, and individuals of all persuasions all are capable of entering into public political discourse (admittedly to varying degrees and likelihoods of begin heard) including those of a civil religious nature. This is especially true of Liberal democratic countries where things like the freedoms of speech and expression and a free press are protected. This is not to suggest that Cristi is wrong to look at civil religion in non-neutral terms. On the contrary, her instinct to focus on it with the idea that it may not be used in the interests of everybody is completely warranted. However, her conclusion that it is or at least could be non-neutral in the advantage of the state, brings little clarity to its political implications in the United States. This is because (as with the scholarship examining the ACR and foreign policy) this approach fails to comprehend the particular or partisan characteristics of the ACR.

The ACR and Electoral Politics

The most thorough examination of American civil religious elements in electoral politics was conducted by Chapp (2012) who was especially interested in the link between the American civil religious rhetoric and voter behavior. He begins by making a key distinction between three different types of religious rhetoric: culture war, American civil religious and denominational. Culture war religious language emphasizes the differences in policy positions based on one's religious conviction. An example of this would be if a candidate said she or he supported a prohibition on

abortion because of her or his Christian beliefs. The ACR rhetoric is generalized and largely more inclusive. It avoids specific denominational motifs and symbols and uses religious themes in a way that is meant to appeal to the religiosity of the vast majority. An example would be a candidate saying, "God bless the United States." In this example, the religious element is likely to be accepted by all who believe in a god and want that god's blessing on their country. Finally, denominational religious rhetoric references a specific religious tradition. An example of this could be a candidate addressing a Catholic lay organization and saying something like, "I share the values of social justice so prevalent in Catholic social teachings."

According to Chapp, all three of these religious rhetorics can work two ways to impact voter behavior. First, they can provoke an emotion which makes a voter more likely to vote for a specific candidate. Second, the use of the rhetoric could invoke some sense of religious identity in the voter which they feel the candidate shares with them. This invoking of a religious identity makes the voter more likely to vote for the candidate he or she feels shares his or her religious identity. In both instances, Chapp essentially argues that the causal chain is that religious rhetoric affects the evaluation of the candidate which, in turn, affects vote choice.

Using a dataset of campaign speeches from Presidential elections, he finds several points of interest for us, in regards to civil religious rhetoric. First, the substantial majority of religious rhetoric comes in the form of American civil religious rhetoric. When candidates speak religiously, they usually do so in a civil religious way. This finding is intuitive. Since the ACR is theorized to be general and play on the broad religious sensibilities of the American people, it should be more palatable to a larger group of people than the other types of religious speech identified by Chapp. It is, in a sense, an economical language because it can activate the religious sensibilities of many potential voters at the same time without alienating many voters along sectarian lines.

However, while Chapp does find evidence that the ACR is a broad religious tradition with many adherents within the American electorate, he also finds that those without religious identities and those from religious identities outside of mainstream (i.e. Christian) denominations are by and large alienated by the ACR rhetoric and resistant to it. The conclusion is that while the ACR rhetoric appeals to many voters it does not appeal to all.

The second point of interest for us that Chapp finds is that there is "little issue content" or "sophisticated policy-based arguments" (p. 50) in the ACR rhetoric. That is, candidates rarely make policy justifications using the ACR. Instead, he believes that American civil religious rhetoric is designed to forge a link between the candidate and religious symbols which excite the religious sensibilities of voters. Even on the occasions when the candidates he examined framed issues in religious terms he believes that it "was probably more geared toward the assertion of a common [civil religious] identity than with a robust policy justification" (p. 51).

The idea that the ACR rhetoric is largely the application of religious symbols and that this is likely to affect voter evaluations of candidates is entirely justifiable. However, Chapp is too quick to dismiss the link between the ACR discourse and

issue positions and the significance of that link. The study presented in the subsequent chapters dispels Chapp's assertion that American civil religious discourse is not issue centered.[7] As we will see in Chaps. 3, 4 and 5 issue positions are frequently contextualized and connected to American civil religious rhetoric. In fact, when Chapp makes the argument that American civil religious rhetoric has little to do with issues he uses examples where the policy-religious link is quite apparent and close. For example, in one case, he quotes Obama: "I know that if we can just bring our education system into the 21st century. . .our children [will] be able to fulfill their God-given potential [and] America [will remain] a beacon of opportunity and prosperity for all the world" (quoted in Chapp, p. 51). Chapp dismisses the significance of the link between education modernization (an issue position) and the 'city on a hill,' beacon of hope motif (a use of civil religious rhetoric) as being essentially not a justification of the policy stance based on civil religious grounds but as an attempt to invoke a sense of civil religious identity in the voter. It is unclear if Chapp sees these as mutually exclusive propositions. But, certainly they don't have to be. Even if Chapp is correct that the utterance can produce a sense of civil religious identity (an idea this author and the findings presented in this book support), there is no reason to suggest that this omits a semiotic link between the issue position and the American civil religious discourse. Indeed, it seems in this passage, that Obama is quite clearly legitimating his position using American civil religious rhetoric. We can agree with Chapp by saying that Obama's utterance can establish a link between the ACR and himself which is likely to arouse the civil religious sensibilities of his audience and affect their evaluation of him as a candidate and still see how the utterance establishes a link between the issue position and the civil religious symbolism.[8]

Chapp's failure to see the connection between the ACR language in public political discourse and issue positions is exactly where the works discussed above have come up short—the inability to account for the universal and particular dimensions of the ACR. The ACR provides a universal narrative, a point his work supports. But the candidates he studied have partisan objectives and thus must differentiate themselves from their opponents. As we will see in Chaps. 4 through 6, they do this through the discursive intermingling of the universalistic ACR language and the atomizing language of issue positions. In short, Chapp's analysis negates the particularistic element of the ACR in precisely the place where it becomes most apparent.

[7]The discrepancy between the findings of this book and those of Chapp may be a result of the method Chapp used in his analysis of political discourse. He chose to employ an electronic search method which looked for specific terms. This method, though efficient, lacks the subtlety of the human eye and consequently allowed him to overlook the connection of the ACR to issue positions.

[8]However, as we will see in the chapters that follow, issue positions are rarely articulated in terms of specific or detailed policy recommendations, a finding consistent with Chapp's.

The ACR and the Mediation of Social Tensions

Another way scholars have looked at the political implications of the ACR is as a vehicle which is capable of mediating basic, underlying social tensions. Bellah (1978), for example, argues that the ACR serves a legitimating function by mediating the tensions inherent within the American regime between the two major philosophic traditions which underlie it—namely bourgeois Liberalism and republicanism (p. 19). This tension is found, according to Bellah, in the "profoundly antithetical" (p. 19) principles of Liberalism which suggest that society benefits most by the uninhibited pursuit of individual self-interests and the republican notion that republican institutions can only function and survive in an environment where individual virtue is fostered. Bellah conceives this 'republican' virtue as "a willingness of the citizen to sacrifice his [sic] own interest for the common good" (p. 18). To Bellah, "the most wildly utopian idea in the history of political thought is that a good society can result from the actions of citizens motivated by self-interest alone" (p. 22). Maintaining republican institutions according to such a principle is untenable. The ACR, however, introduces the element of virtue required for the maintenance of these institutions. This point is not far from Tocqueville's argument that Christianity as expressed and practiced in the United States buttressed the state and its democratic institutions by instilling the values of good citizenship in its citizenry (Tocqueville & Reeve, 2000), a point Bellah acknowledges (p. 21).

Gorski (2011a) also accepts Bellah's idea of the ACR as mediating Liberal and republican elements of the American philosophical tradition. He argues that the ACR could help affect a balance between "individual autonomy and the common good" (p. 180). But, he also sees the ACR as having the ability to mediate the demands of another set of competing traditions in American society, Liberal secularism which aims at a complete separation of the religious and political realms and religious nationalism which longs for a complete intermingling of the two.

Hart (Hart & Pauley, 2005) also conceives the ACR as a social mediator, mediating church-states relations. In essence, he suggests that the best way to understand the ACR is as a public discourse through which Americans "wage their struggles of church and state on symbolic battlegrounds" (p. 93). For Hart, the ACR "is a kind of rhetorical cognate to religious disestablishment" (p. 31) establishing a *quid pro quo* between church and state where in exchange for recognizing the ultimate civil authority of the state "[t]he church [i.e. sectarian religions] reserved the right to advise, to admonish, and often to advance governmental policies and behaviors, and the state agreed to provide a very public forum for the espousal of mainstream civil-religious viewpoints" (p. 55). In short, the ACR is a sort of contract between church and state that keeps conflict between the two bounded within general limits and gives both entities rhetorical authority. Thus, both sectarian religion and the state are able to argue and do argue from the position of the ACR. Hart sees this as the co-existence of two types of civil religion, official and unofficial. Official civil religion comes from public officials whereas unofficial

civil religion comes from the private sphere, particularly the various sectarian religions in society.

Hart is insistent that "the functions, themes, and characteristics of civil religious discourse can best be explained via the contractual image" (p. 44). This conceptualization of the ACR does provide some insight into it in regards to church-state relations; but, it does not explain how American civil religious discourse can balance the co-existent facts of a religious *civitas* which desires to and is constitutionally guaranteed the right to exercise their faith (which includes exercising it in political ways) and the constitutional prohibition of religious establishment by the state. The problem is that it does little to help understand the way American civil religious discourse is used politically in the sense of contestations for political power. To say that American civil religious discourse can best be understood in these terms is to minimize or even to overlook the importance of the ACR in electoral politics and the politics of policy formation and implementation. This is a hard sell if only because it is so prevalent in these arenas. Many scholars have noted a connection between Presidential politics and the ACR rhetoric. For example, some have revealed a civil religious dimension to Presidential activities (Alley, 1972; Fairbanks, 1981, 1982; Frank, 2011; Gustafson, 1974; Henderson, 1975; Iancu & Balaban, 2013; Novak, 1974; Pierard & Linder, 1988; Toolin, 1983; Wilson, 1979a, 1979b) making the case that the President acts as the "*pontifex maximus*" (Langston, 1993, p. 672) of the American civil religion and "Pastor of the Nation" (Gustafson, 1970, p. 713). Still others have shown the ACR to be an integral part of Presidential campaign rhetoric (Chapp, 2012; Domke & Coe, 2008; Donahue, 1975; Roof, 2009).

In summation, this literature either sees the ACR as mediating the antagonism between government and church (Hart) or mediating antagonisms between conflicting historical belief traditions (Bellah and Gorski). Unlike the works we've examined above, both of these conceptualizations seem to imply the central contradiction between the universal and particular. It is implicit in the individualistic tendencies of Liberal thought and the universalizing ambitions of civic republicanism that Bellah highlights. It is also in the particularistic notions held within Liberal secularism and the totalizing ones of religious nationalism that Gorsky addresses and in the demands of a universalizing national government and the particularistic demands of sectarian religions that Hart discusses.

In all three of these theories, the ACR is conceived of as an ideational mediator. It works as an intellectual tradition which cleaves or at least holds at bay conflicting ideas. This is even the case for Hart even though he specifically discusses material institutions (the state and sectarian churches). The tension, as he characterizes it, is over who should have moral authority in society, sectarian church organizations or the state. The function of the ACR is to act as an ideational mediator, providing a belief structure where both types of entities maintain moral authority in society. Conceiving the ACR solely in terms of an ideational mediator is where these works fall short, however. For example, while Bellah is correct to say that from a theoretical standpoint republican ideals may temper individualistic tendencies they don't negate them in the material world. Particularistic demands still exists

and can be observed in the articulation of partisan sentiments and the practical drive to realize individual interests. Similarly, just because in theory the ACR provides a sharing of moral authority between sectarian churches and the state doesn't mean that sectarian religions abstain from asserting their moral authority over that of the state. Nor, does it stop them from asserting their own particular interests. What keeps these material articulations of particular interests from turning into violent strife or spilling over into the dissolution of the political community? An explanation which only sees the ACR as a mediator of beliefs can't account for this. Something else is at play.

If the ACR does in fact work as a mediator it must also be working as a mediator in the realm of material praxis. Therefore, we must consider the functional aspects of this mediation at the practical level. This means looking past the republican or Liberal ideals within the American intellectual heritage and examining the ACR vis-a-vis the attempted realization of those ideals, specifically democratic institutions and their corollary, open public political discourse. That is, we must look at the ACR in its relation to the grounds of particularistic political contestation, something which has, to date, been overlooked in its study. As we will see, these things are intricately linked to the ACR. The ACR belief structure psychologically orientates people toward these institutional recourses by making them elements of its narrative of the sacred. The belief structure channels particularistic discord through a universalizing narrative into these universalized mechanisms of dispute resolution. At the same time, the praxis within institutional politics and public political discourse provides ritualistic reinforcing of the belief structure. What results is a mutually reinforcing system of belief and praxis. *It is this relationship that is the mediating force between the universal and particular in the United States.*

Filling in the Gaps: The Politics of the Sacred

The approach taken in the following chapters will be to understand American politics as an integral part of a broader cultural tradition—the ACR. As we will see, this tradition has identifiable characteristics which are revealed by patterns in the ways people represent their world and in the basic fact of social psychological accord. In order to understand American politics as an integral part of a broader cultural tradition, we will take a comprehensive sociological examination which presents the ACR in broad theoretical terms yet makes frequent reference to empirical findings, in order to verify the theoretical elements. These empirical findings will be derived from examination of American cultural artifacts (discussed in depth, in Chap. 3) which reveal the identifiable patterns of representation and the social psychological accord found in the cultural tradition from which they emerge.

With this approach, the present study takes seriously Murphy's (2011) call for "renewed attention to both the macro and micro level, for the building of a new literature on the ACR that encompasses both the view from high altitudes and [the]

more localized and contested ground-level picture" (p. 231). It takes it seriously by providing a framework for understanding how these things relate to each other. The 'high altitude' perspective taken in this book is encapsulated in a term found in its title—the politics of the sacred. This can be understood in terms of the attempt to define and dictate what is in accord with the civil religious sacred and what is not. It is a battle to define what can and cannot be and what should and should not be tolerated and accepted in the community, based on its relation to that which is sacred for that community. This can include the acceptance (or not), toleration (or not) and distribution of e.g.: material objects, social relations, policies, the actions of individuals and the government, among other things. The 'contested ground-level picture' will be provided by showing how the politics of the sacred are played out in American institutional politics and public political discourse.

This book is an attempt to understand how the politics of the sacred are contested in the American context and how that mediates the universal and particular in American society. It endeavors to explain what role the sacred plays in political contestation. It is hoped that accomplishing this will, in turn, reveal something about the interplay between cultural beliefs, the social order and political processes in America. If this is accomplished, we will have a fuller picture of the political dimensions of the ACR and a model for synthesizing its 'high altitude' and 'contested ground-level' aspects which could then be applied to future studies of the ACR and likely other civil religious traditions as well.

Overview

Following the precedent of previous scholars, this book understands the ACR as a tradition of cultural self-understanding, a meta-narrative through which many Americans frequently talk about, think about and understand their society and place in the world. As such, it is also a narrative form used to represent these things. As a narrative, it is comprised of a series of signs which are observable in recorded representations (i.e. cultural artifacts). Since signs have an objective dimension—that is, they exist as things capable of being shared (i.e. experienced and communicated corporately) in the *Lebenswelt*[9]—in the present study, we will pay special attention to the use of American civil religious signs. In Chaps. 4 and 5 especially, they will serve as our primary objects of investigation.

First, however, we will need a theoretical framework for this type of investigation. The next chapter presents a simple but robust semiotic and social psychological model for the study of civil religious signs. This model will allow us to account for what is presently missing in the ACR scholarship and the sociology of religion more broadly—the inability to account for the antagonism between the universal

[9]In this study, *Lebenswelt* can be understood as the collectively experienced, material world, as it is, in itself.

and particular. It begins by showing how both the Weberian and Durkheimian models which posit the fragmentation of meaning structures in modern, socially differentiated societies (Weberian) or a common core which acts as a functional equivalent to denominational religion (Durkheimian) are unable to provide an adequate framework for understanding civil religious cultural signs because they negate the universal or the particular character of it, respectively. We will then examine and critique the various attempts to move beyond these two traditions within the sociology of religion, identifying areas where further theoretical development is needed and areas where theoretical appropriation is warranted, in the creation of the new model.

In Chap. 3, we will begin an empirical investigation of the ACR as it is represented in cultural artifacts. In this chapter, a broad empirical study of the ACR is undertaken, as it is revealed in public political discourse, which will serve three purposes. First, it will allow us to test the validity of some of the claims about the content of the ACR found in the extant theoretical literature. Specifically, it will allow us to test whether the beliefs and narrative elements theorized to be part of the ACR tradition are actually represented in the cultural record (at least the key part of the cultural record examined). Although many have made assertions about the nature of the ACR few have actually put those claims to empirical tests. Furthermore, those who have attempted to validate their claims through empirics have tended to rely on anecdotal evidence. Contrary to these studies, the empirical findings presented in this chapter are generalizable of American public political discourse over the last 50 years.

Second, since our model takes cultural signs as the primary object of investigation, a broad examination of the ACR will assist us in identifying its relevant signs through the inspection of its revealed narrative elements. Signs we identify from this examination will then be investigated more closely in the fourth and fifth chapters. This will be a necessary step to demonstrate how the ACR mediates the universal and the particular.

Lastly, a broad empirical investigation will provide us with an opportunity to confirm whether or not the ACR possesses the qualities assumed of it in the theory presented in the second chapter. Specifically, we will be able to establish two things: (1) civil religious signs occupy a central place in public political discourse and (2) that they are widely, culturally available (i.e. frequently articulated and broadly diffused, not esoteric).

The empirical examination presented in Chap. 3 uses an original dataset of political speeches and debates from 1960 to 2012. Content analysis was performed on these cultural artifacts looking for fourteen tenets and symbols which are characteristic of the ACR. With the exception of one, which is an original contribution of this author, these fourteen tenets and symbols have been identified by scholars, in the existing theoretical literature. Statistical and qualitative examples are presented which reveal a strong civil religious character to the cultural artifacts examined. We will also find consistency in the level of articulation of American civil religious language over time, no partisan differences in articulation, no real difference between incumbents and challengers, and no difference between Vice-Presidential and Presidential candidates. In short, we will find universality.

Additionally, we will see that victory speeches typically contain more civil religious elements than concession speeches and that throughout all the data sources some themes and symbols of the ACR are articulated more than others.

In the next two chapters, we will examine two different types of civil religious signifiers which were identified through the investigation conducted in Chap. 3. They are signs of filial piety (Chap. 4) and signs of the American civil religious sacred texts (Chap. 5). These will serve as case studies in the politics of the sacred by showing how, in public political discourse, a contest exists, over what candidates and issue positions can and cannot and should or should not be defined by association with these signs (i.e. by association with the American civil religious sacred).

Specifically, Chap. 4 contains a case study of the civil religious cultural sign, 'The founding fathers.' After first investigating the sign's place in the ACR, the use of the sign is explored in-depth. We will find that these signs are generally contextualized in a patterned way which is comprised of: (1) civil religious signifier(s); (2) candidacy and/or issue signifier(s); and (3) national group unity signifier (s). As we will see, this suggests that uses of the sign are attempts to define one's issue position and/or candidacy in sacred terms. This, in turn, can be seen as an attempt to depoliticize or more specifically to sanctify political positions, that is, to place them outside the bounds of contestable politics by linking them to the American civil religious sacred.

In Chap. 5, we will investigate the use of two more important civil religious signs, those indexing the sacred texts of the ACR—the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. As with the chapter which proceeds it, we will first expound upon the place of these signs as referent objects within the ACR tradition. We will then continue to an empirical investigation of these signs using our dataset. This examination will reveal that these signs are used, in public political discourse, in a very similar manner as those investigated in Chap. 4. Together, the studies conducted in Chaps. 4 and 5 reveal the intermingling of the universal and the particular in public political discourse.

Next, in Chap. 6, we will take a more comprehensive look at the nature of the politics of the sacred as they manifest in the United States. Specifically, we will examine the various means of contestation and the mechanisms available for the resolution of those contests. In this, we will consider the possibilities of resolution through normal social discursive processes, violence and force and institutional politics. In terms of institutional politics, we will pay particular attention to electoral politics and judicial politics (especially the Supreme Court of the United States) seeing both as loci for the contestation and resolution of the politics of the sacred. However, we will find that the degree of finality of the resolutions achieved through these different institutions are substantially dissimilar. In this regard, we will see that institutional factors and cultural tradition bestow upon the Supreme Court great authority and power in resolving the politics of the sacred, leading us to conclude that they are the chief theologians of the ACR and serve as something akin to its council of Ayatollahs. This chapter shows how the universalizing narrative of the ACR channels particularistic discord into these universalized mechanisms of dispute resolution.

The book ends with a discussion on how the dialectic of belief and praxis found at the heart of the ACR mediates the antagonism between the universal and particular.

In brief, this book shows that at the very foundation of the American nation is a religious basis—something we will refer to as 'that which is sacred.' This religious basis is intrinsically linked to political discourse and institutional processes in the United States of America. It is linked to these things as a social narrative form (the American civil religion), the characteristics of which are explored below. This is at once a political and a religious narrative, such that the religion is a political religion and the political dimension of the society is profoundly religious. Politics in the USA (discursively, electorally and institutionally) are often argued through the use of the ACR narrative by positing a relationship between that which is sacred and candidates and issue positions. One's impressions of these relationships then can serve as a basis for choosing between political alternatives. When political discourse is framed in this way, politics become the politics of the sacred. Moreover, politics become the field upon which the nation's civil theological battles are waged and can even be resolved to varying degrees. In essence, political processes serve as mechanisms for resolving disagreement over fundamental, defining questions for the American people. This is a doubled edged sword. In one respect, it provides peaceful means of contestation over difficult to resolve disagreement which often strikes at the heart of what it means to be American and what is right and wrong according to principles which are believed to be absolute, universal and transcendent. However, it also has the tendency to obscure the fact that political decisions are nothing more (nor less) than political decisions and stands as an impediment to compromise.

In coming to these conclusions, the present work endeavors to make two primary contributions to the sociology of religion. First, it provides a distinctive theoretical framework bridging a key divide between the Webanian and Durkheimian schools vis-à-vis religion and society that gives us a way to study the phenomenon defined above as the politics of the sacred. Second, it provides a description of the American politics of the sacred which can act as a starting point for comparative study.

Similarly, this work attempts to make two primary contributions to the field of American studies. First, the theoretical framework employed provides a unique and useful way to understand the American culture through analysis of its cultural artifacts. It is thus a theoretical framework which is open to an empirical robustness. Second, the explanation of the American politics of the sacred presented in it offers a detailed look into the constitutive elements of American society. It reveals what it means to be American at the most basic, foundational level and shows what happens when there is disagreement over what that means and how that disagreement is contested.

Finally, the work hopes to contribute to the field of political science by: (1) offering a methodology by which public political discourse can be analyzed; (2) by presenting an empirical description of the American politics of the sacred and (3) by giving a picture of the ACR in its relation to institutional politics and accounting for its dualistic nature.

Chapter 2
A Theoretical Model for the Study of Civil Religious Signs

Introduction

On October 3, 2013, *Time Magazine* online published an opinion piece by former, Republican House Speaker and Presidential Candidate, Newt Gingrich entitled, "Founding Fathers Liked Shutdowns" (Gingrich, 2013). The basic thesis was that President Obama should be more willing to negotiate with Republicans in the House of Representatives over issues leading to the government shutdown. What is interesting is not the thesis so much as the way the argument unfolds. To support his position, Gingrich posits that shutdowns are legitimate political exercises permitted by the Constitution. He argues that they are indications of how the founding fathers designed the Constitution to divide power among the various branches of government to prevent any one of them from becoming too powerful. The sharing of power, in turn necessitates compromise which Gingrich argues Obama should be doing.

Contrarily, on October 15, 2013, Harvard law professor, Alan Dershowitz, a noted liberal, public intellectual appeared on CNN's Piers Morgan show and criticized his former student, Senator Ted Cruz for his involvement in the government shutdown saying, "He ought to look at the Constitution and look into his heart and ask himself, 'What would Alexander Hamilton have done.'"

At their essence, these lines of argument are quite common. Political positions are frequently buttressed by appeal to the founding fathers or a particular father and the Constitution. But, when used in public political discourse the terms 'founding fathers' or 'Constitution' are something more than the group of historical people or document they point to. 'The founding fathers' and the 'Constitution' are common cultural signs. They are intersubjectively available, socially shared representations, which are capable of communicating some meaning between individuals. The wide scale use of 'the founding fathers' and the 'Constitution' in public political discourse reveals a significant level of consensus regarding their significance, legitimacy and importance in this arena. They are almost exclusively used with

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deference toward them and have a high degree of authority attributed to them. In the fourth and fifth chapters, it will be shown that 'the founding fathers' and the 'Constitution' are cultural signs which have a 'public religious dimension' and a sacred quality which place them within ACR tradition, helping to provide meaning to "the American experience in the light of ultimate and universal reality" (Bellah, 1967, p. 18).

However, as the anecdotes above reveal there is hardly a consensus on the meaning of these signs. Above, we see basically the same signs being used to come to contradictory conclusions. Furthermore, we might say that these 'sacred' signs are frequently used in decidedly 'profane' ways. That is, the use is profane so far as the signs are used to further particularistic or individualistic political ends while the use is sacred in the signs' ubiquitous corporate functionality and ability to transcend the particular, i.e. in its universality.

The fact that the signs exhibit both 'sacred' and 'profane,' characteristics, or categorized differently, universal and particular qualities presents a problem for their study. As we will see below, current sociological theory and as we saw above current American civil religion theory does not account for this dualistic nature. The inability for extant theory to account for this actually highlights a much deeper theoretical impasse within the sociology of religion which has been present since its modern inception. Specifically, it brings to the fore the question of the place of religion in modern societies.

Two camps can be identified which stipulate a place for religion in modern socially differentiated societies. As with so much in sociology, we can broadly classify them into the Weberian and Durkheimian schools. We can refer to these positions as the absent core theory and the functional equivalence theory, respectively. While a complete reconstruction of this debate is beyond the confines of the present endeavor, a brief synopsis should help us define the problem and set out the terms of a resolution which will permit us to understand the place and role of civil religious signs in American society. Furthermore, such a resolution would have implications for understanding civil religious signs in other modern societies characterized by pluralism and high levels of social differentiation.

We will begin by examining the absent core and functional equivalence theories in the first sections. In this examination, it will be posited that neither provides an adequate framework for understanding cultural objects with the qualities like 'the founding fathers' or the 'Constitution' have. Next, we will investigate and critique the various attempts to move beyond these two traditions. In this, we will address the strengths and weaknesses each provides in order to identify areas where further theoretical development is needed and areas where theoretical appropriation is warranted. Finally, a simple but robust model will be presented to adequately understand these civil religious signs. This model appropriates aspects of semiotics and social psychology.

The Absent Core Theory

For Weber, religion or more specifically Christianity and its corresponding belief structure assumed a marginal role in modern society. The advent of Protestantism laid the foundations for secularized state institutions with normative structures based on functional rationality. Losing its central place in public institutions, Christianity only retained a residual role in society and being relegated to personal motivations. However, even its influence there was limited because individual motivations were met by the individual motivations of others in a pluralistic social framework and one's own religious motivations were often necessarily compromised by the competing demands of the various social roles one plays in a highly rationalized, modern social structure and differentiated division of labor (Seidman, 1985). In sum, for Weber, the forces of pluralization lead to a marginal place for religion in modern societies and the secularization of society.

Out of this Weberian tradition, Berger (1990) argues that Christianity in modern society is no longer able to provide the sacred framework for large scale social legitimation, as it once did. The reason for this, as Berger sees it, is that the Christian *nomos* is no longer able to serve as an adequate framework for understanding and making sense of the world because it is unable to satisfactorily answer theodical questions (p. 79). Because of this vulnerability, the Christian cosmology became challenged by the "rational penetration" (p. 112) of science, which in turn has led to the secularization of the social *nomos* which is founded on principles of rationality. Secularization for Berger challenges the plausibility of both state institutions and personal biographies leading to a condition of anomie (124–125) which is mitigated by the relegation of religious meaning structures to "specific enclaves of social life" (p. 134) like the family or other social subgroups. A pluralistic situation emerges where individualized meaning structures compete in a market situation for adherents (p. 137). Furthermore, this competition is not limited to traditional religious structures of meaning like the Christian cosmology. Competition is also to be had with non-religious rivals who are "in the business of defining the world" (p. 137), like ideological movements, the modern values systems of individualism, etc. In sum, Berger posits a localized and fragmented position for religion in modern societies. Society lacks a universal frame of reference ('sacred canopy') by which meaning can be formed. This function is replaced by particular canopies which individuals can choose from in order to understand the world and their self within it. Consequently, "any particular choice is relativized and less than certain. What certainty there is must be dredged up from within the subjective consciousness of the individual, since it can no longer be derived from the external, socially shared and taken-for-granted world" (pp. 152–153).

Similarly, Luckmann (1967) believes that the dominant institutional spheres in modern industrialized societies (the polity and the economy) are guided by principles of functional rationality and institutionally defined goals. Because of this, they can no longer provide the framework to guide general social behavior. Instead,

individuals must construct their own systems of morality and meaning within a system of competing claims to legitimacy from secular agencies and churches. This position is similar to that of Fenn (1972, 1976) who argues the assumption that religion maintains societies may have been adequate for less differentiated societies but that the "conditions of advanced differentiation make it unlikely, if not impossible, for cultural integration to develop around any set of religious symbols" (Fenn, 1972, p. 16). Echoing Bell's (1960) 'end of ideology' thesis he continues saying, "'partial ideologies' may develop around separate sets of interests in advanced societies, but a 'total ideology' cannot now develop" (Fenn, 1972, p. 16).

The dual forces of pluralization and secularization identified by these scholars pose great challenges for the theory of American civil religion. Specifically, they undermine the idea that a coherent system of meaning can be found in modern societies as is thought by proponents of the theory of the American civil religion. As Eister (1957) put it, "the [socially] integrative, supportive functions of religion. . .is difficult to accept. . .as valid or appropriate for the contemporary scene. . .where there is a high degree of specialization and functional autonomy among institutions or where religion itself is organized on a pluralistic or quasi-pluralistic pattern" (p. 388). In modern society, according to Lippmann (1970), "Religion has become. . .[only] one phase in a varied experience" (p. 277).

Functional Equivalence Theory

The Weberian position stands in contradistinction to that of the Durkheimian. For Durkheim (Durkheim & Fields, 1995), every society is founded and maintained on a religiously based set of commonly held moral beliefs and practices. These beliefs and practices provide the necessary cohesion to society and serve as a structure by which meaning is formed by the members of the community.

While Durkheim, like Weber, sees social differentiation as an empirical reality of modern society, for him the various elements comprising this differentiation are not as atomized as the Weberians have presented it. As Seidman (1985) puts it, for Durkheim, the parts are still held together, by an overarching "framework of common sentiments and beliefs centering upon individualism, equality, justice, etc." (p. 115). Durkheim does not see a decline of Christianity in modern European society. Instead, he sees its persistence through a secularized transmutation of its core elements particularly expressed in the ideals of the French Revolution (Seidman, 1985, p. 113). So, while there may be a decline in traditional Christianity in these societies, the society retains a religious element at its core, for Durkheim.

The proponents of the idea of an American civil religion and similar conceptual frameworks have been heavily influenced by Durkheim (e.g. Bellah, 1967, 1975, 1978; Bellah & Hammond, 1980; Cherry, 1969, 1970; Coleman, 1970; Hammond, 1963, 1980c, 1980d, 1980e; Herberg, 1960a, 1960b; Mead, 1974; Parsons, 1967, 1974a, 1974b; Stauffer, 1973; Warner, 1974; etc.). These scholars have presented the ACR as a sort of functional equivalent to Christianity in the American context.

Because of the formal separation of church and state and the reality of religious pluralism and denominationalism in the United States of America, one church is legally prohibited from and practically unable to provide the necessary cohesive function 'the church' did in pre-modern times. Because of this, the ACR emerged, fulfilling necessary social cohesion and legitimating functions.

Perhaps the clearest articulation of the ACR thesis is Bellah's (1967) initial article on the subject. As we saw, in the introduction, its basic premise was that a 'public religious dimension' exists in the United States which was distinct from the various sectarian religious sentiments present in society as well as political ideology. It stands as a common social framework by which Americans conceive of their nation in light of ultimate, transcendent principles and maintains social cohesion.

The Weberian and Durkheimian Traditions and Empirical Assessment

In summation, the Weberians see the untangling of a common meaning structure with the advent of modern societies. The once central, universal, sacred framework provided by religion is no longer tenable in modern, highly differentiated societies. There is no longer a common core of meaning. Meaning instead is fractured and localized. In the context of our investigation, this is a proposition which can be supported by the use of a cultural sign like 'the founding fathers' or the 'Constitution' for diverse political purposes. The fact, for example, that they could be used to justify opposing political stances suggests that they are signs that lack a common meaning core. It suggests that instead meaning is defined differently by the diverse groups and individuals within society. In short, it suggests that meaning is not centrally located but locally located, fractionalized and disparate.

On the other hand, the fact that the signs are used authoritatively and ubiquitously throughout public political discourse seems to indicate that they have wider, more central social implications. If meaning is located locally, why are the signs used by parties on all sides of a political debate? The fact that diverse particular interest groups feel compelled to use them suggest that the Durkheimians are correct that a common framework of social meaning exists.

The Weberian and the Durkheimian traditions, then, leave us at an impasse. Through them we are forced to either ignore the universal or the particular characteristic of these signs. There have, however, been several attempts within the sociology of religion which effectively try to move beyond these two traditions to make sense of civil religion and civil religious signs. Although, as we will see, none of these prove fully adequate for our purposes. However, examining them will help us determine useful and appropriate theoretical elements which we can use in our own efforts at establishing an adequate theoretical framework for studying civil religious cultural signs as well as show us where potential theoretical pitfalls may lie.

Roughly there have been three approaches which in some way address the contradiction between the particular and universal characteristics of American civil religious signs. Although overlap exists between these various models, for the sake of analytical clarity we can separate them into three more or less distinct categories: pluralistic models, the resource model and discursive systems theories.

The Pluralistic Models

The pluralistic models of the ACR suggest that there is not one civil religion but several, often competing civil religions (Demerath & Williams, 1985; Mathisen, 1989a, 1989b; Novak, 1974, 1976; Wilson, 1974; Wuthnow, 1988a). Wilson (1974), for example, argues that there are various versions of the ACR because it is subject to historical change. For Wilson, the ACR is a rather amorphous phenomenon which is undifferentiated from American culture at large. It thus reflects cultural changes and subsequently has different versions in different periods.[1]

By arguing that the ACR is indistinct from American culture is to essentially argue that it is universal to the extent that American culture is universal within the United States. Of course, as an empirical phenomenon, one can question the degree to which culture is shared within a national community especially a heterogeneous one like the American. However, as a methodological assumption it is entirely justifiable. Positing a least some level of cultural overlap permits explanations for how individuals and groups in a community can communicate and understand each other, how they can develop institutions and mechanisms of conflict resolution, where the types of affinity for each other whereby social cohesion can be formed emerges and how they can maintain these things over time.

What Wilson's theory does not do is provide an explanation of how or in what ways culture can be used to express particular political interests. So, Wilson's theory fails on this account. His idea that the ACR has different versions in different epochs could explain the particularistic disagreement about the meaning of American civil religious signs from one period to the next; but, this cannot account for particularistic differences in conceptualization within the same time period. Such an attempt would mean positing competing cultures, while certainly one could entertain this as a possibility, the general cohesiveness, similarities in lifestyles, overlap in belief structures, the existence of widely shared values, etc. in American society make this a difficult position to support.

Similarly, Demerath and Williams (1985) account for the political use of the ACR and its subsequent competing claims by positing a historical change in the ACR itself. Specifically, they assume that sometime in the past the ACR functioned as a "common canopy of values" but later "[c]ivil religious discourse. . .became a

[1]Bellah (1974a, 1974b, 1975) also suggests that the ACR undergoes historical change; however, Bellah's work largely stresses the preservation of core elements of the ACR.

tool for legitimating social movement and interest-group politics" (Demerath & Williams, 1985, p. 154).

There are two problems with their formulation. First, they do not present concrete empirical evidence to suggest that this fundamental change occurred. Instead, they take as an ontological assumption the existence of a period of a sort of pure ACR (that is an un-politicized ACR). This is a weak assumption given what we know about the formation of the ACR. Although the main purpose of Albanese's (1975) work is to construct a historical narrative which accounts for what she envisions as a more or less uniform ACR, her work reveals regional, denominational and even political variations on the common civil religious themes and practices she explored. This suggests that even at its inception the ACR had the dualistic nature for which we are trying to account.

Second, Demerath and Williams (1985) see a fragmentation of the ACR into "different discourses" which "speak past each other" (p. 165) and suggest that the analysis of the ACR "should focus on the contexts and uses of civil-religious language and symbols, noting how specific groups and subcultures use versions of the civil religion to frame, articulate, and legitimate their own particular political and moral visions" (p. 166). While their insight to look past the unifying elements of the ACR was a major theoretical innovation, their suggestion that it no longer exists was the wrong direction to take. What this overlooks is that the competing discourses they perceive are making reference to the same cultural signs and there is, to some degree, agreement between them about the importance of those particular signs. In a sense, diverse parties may be saying different things and coming to different conclusions but they are still speaking the language of the ACR. This is a point which these authors and their associates later recognize and attempt to address by developing a 'resource model' which views religious signs as resources in public political discourse. This model will be discussed in depth below. Although there are problems with viewing the ACR in terms of competing discourses, it is important to point out that the proposition that the ACR can be examined in discursive terms was nevertheless an insightful and helpful theoretical invention, as we will see below.

Whillock (1994) provides another notable pluralistic model. Using Q methodology to sort the subjective responses of individuals surveyed on a variety of civil religions themes, she identified five principle typologies by which respondents could be classified.

The implication of her findings is that there are various schemas by which individuals can make sense of civil religious objects. Schema theory applied in this way has an established place in the social sciences. For example, it has been fruitfully applied to questions of social psychology and political ideology (Conover & Feldman, 1984).

The basic premise of such theories is that schemas are cognitive structures that organize knowledge and are a framework for processing new information and retrieving stored information. Applied to the political context, the idea is that people use heuristic cues when receiving political information. They process objects into their readymade cognitive forms (i.e. schemas). Due to processes of group socialization those within particular groups tend to form schemas which

more or less resemble those of others in the same group and which are to varying degrees dissimilar to those of other groups. Different groups, then, would process objects such as civil religious signs into different schemas. Consequently, various ways of understanding the object and thus different orientations toward the object result. Subsequently, these different orientations result in different political policy preferences and political action.

Schema theories, then, such as the one Whillock presents can account for the politicized nature of civil religious signs. However, they do not account for the socially shared characteristic. Indeed, such theories suggest that cultural signs have limited intersubjective validity throughout the entire society. Shared meaning is restricted to those who share a schema. That is, only for those within a certain schema group can objects have unifying elements. This is because there is more or less agreement on what the object means. What this again misses is that there is widespread consensus on what signs are the ones which reference needs to be made to, in public political discourse. The fact of an overarching social narrative like civil religion suggests more social psychological cohesion than is implied by schema theory. There is something connecting the various schemas.

In sum, Whillock potentially provides a way to understand the political use of American civil religious language. By locating meaning within an individual's psychology, we can understand why there are differences in the 'meaning' of cultural objects. Furthermore, the idea of groups sharing schemas hints at an integrative function for these signs which is applicable, at least, to the group itself. That is, we can see that cultural objects can have an integrative function for those individuals who share schemas. But, this theory does not get us closer to understanding why cultural objects like civil religious ones are nearly universally agreed to be important, regardless of the particular schemas. This is something which an adequate theoretical framework must address.

The Resource Model

Resource models have been used in sociology and political science to understand social movements (Etzioni, 1968; Jenkins, 1983; McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Zald & Berger, 1978). In general, they posit that the ability of a movement to exert political influence is largely a product of the various economic and intellectual resources they are able to utilize. Building on the success of resource models as they applied to social movements and originating in a wider effort to connect the sociologies of religion and culture, sociologists began exploring the applications of this model for religion (Demerath, 1991, 2002; Demerath & Williams, 1992a, 1992b; Kniss, 1996; Swartz, 1996; Williams, 1996a, 1996b; Williams & Alexander, 1994; Williams & Demerath, 1991).

The most innovative element of this work was to posit a wider definition of resources to included cultural objects and symbols. The argument was that cultural signs could be used to rally support for a political position and facilitate and

mobilize social political action, in turn affecting political outcomes. Williams and Demerath (1998) refer to this ability as 'cultural power.' Embedded in this understanding is that religious objects anchor political positions in a legitimate public discourse (Williams & Alexander, 1994). They, in essence, give the interested claims of groups or individuals universal scope by appealing to generally accepted social principles.

Perhaps the most fruitful line of inquiry from this type of approach came from Demerath and Williams (Demerath & Williams, 1992a, 1992b; Williams & Demerath, 1991). This research investigated the local politics of Springfield, Massachusetts with special interest in the role religion played in it. In part, they found that religious symbols could be instrumental in mobilizing political positions in civic matters. They provided a psychological impetus for the movement, a means of self-understanding and a legitimate grounding for their positions.

The application of this model provided Demerath and Williams a means of conceptualizing the role sectarian religion and religious signs play in American politics. However, the applicability of the model to civil religious objects is questionable. Furthermore, its application to cultural signs (including sectarian religious signs) reveals problematic conceptual limitations.

The Applicability of the Resource Model to Civil Religious Objects

The effectiveness of religious motifs and symbols as 'resources' is in no small part due to the ability of a party to speak from a position of religious authority and is conditioned by the particular realm in which that authority exists. For example, a Roman Catholic priest is able to mobilize Catholics on social issues because he is recognized as a religious authority in the sphere of Roman Catholicism. He is recognized as having authority in that sphere and can thus use certain religious objects effectively for political mobilization. While his authority can transcend this particular sphere, it is unlikely to have the same level of impact in other social areas occupied by other types of social groups. For example, a priest could use Jesus as a cultural object to support a particular political position. This appeal would be most effective on Roman Catholics who recognize the priest as having a special authority to talk about Jesus (i.e. to use this cultural sign); but, it could also be effective (although likely to a lesser degree) on other Christians more generally. It would however have little effect on non-Christians. Neither the authority of the speaker nor the object itself penetrate non-Christian social spheres much, if at all.

This presents some problems for the application of the resource model to civil religion. To begin, the ACR lacks the type of institutionalization where authority can easily be identified. There are no easily recognizable spokespersons for the ACR. No one wears official vestments or clerical garb. Thus, it is not possible to

speak from an exclusive position of authority.[2] This is not to suggest that all individuals in society are equally able to speak these signs and also be heard in the public political arena. What it does suggest, however, is that those who have the necessary forms of cultural capital to speak and be heard in the field of public political discourse (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991) can equally make use of them.

Furthermore, unlike sectarian religious signs, American civil religious signs have no special significance to particular sections of society. Broadly speaking, they do not 'belong' or 'speak' to particular social groups but to the society in general. In other words, they are commonly available to everyone (Demerath & Williams, 1985; Williams & Alexander, 1994; Wuthnow, 1988b). There is, in effect, no condition of exclusivity for civil religious signs. This is a point that has not been lost on some who have used the resource model in understanding the relationship between religious signs and politics (Demerath, 1991; Williams & Alexander, 1994). In short, everyone in the public political discourse regardless of the political position they espouse are seen as having equal entitlement (authority) to use them.

This makes it difficult to extend the analogy of resources to civil religious signs. Because they are not exclusive, they bestow no advantage to anyone. The strength of looking at resources when examining social movements is that resources confer advantage. This is not the case when it comes to civil religious signs.

When attempts have been made to apply the resource analogy to civil religious signs, problems become apparent. Williams and Alexander (1994), for example, have inconsistencies in their attempt to apply a resource model in understanding late nineteenth-century American Populism's use of American civil religious motifs precisely because of the ACR's universal accessibility.

In brief, their argument is that American civil religious symbols and themes were resources that the movement used to legitimate itself in public political discourse. They conceive of civil religious motifs and symbols collectively as a type of language that the movement employed toward their political aims. However, their conceptualization of this language is paradoxical. They speak of it as both chosen by the movement and given due to the cultural context of the movement. They speak of it as given in that it stands as a background for social legitimation which is "integral to" the movement's "host culture" and "institutionalized in. . .cultural discourse and practices" (p. 1) and that it is a socially "permeated language" (p. 4). But, they also conceive of it as something chosen by the movement to legitimate itself. They state that this "language legitimated their political and economic challenge in strategic terms, and offered them ideational resources for

[2]The President might be seen as an exception to this. As we saw in Chap. 1, the President is often viewed as the chief priest of the ACR because of the ritual functions of the office. However, in public political discourse the President enjoys no condition of perceived infallibility. Oppositional use of the same language is often employed to challenge the President and these challenges are treated as legitimate. Thus, if the President does have any advantage here, it is unquestionably limited and opposable.

dealing with vexing questions" (p. 4). It was a "language with which to attack the evils of the world and. . .build a better society (p. 3).

This description of the ACR language highlights the dual nature of it we want to account for—its universal and particular qualities. The way they speak of it as given ('integral to;' 'institutionalized') demonstrates its universal aspect, while the fact that they discuss it as something used by a political faction demonstrates the particularistic aspect. But the resource model does not explain how these aspects relate to each other or how they coexist. Furthermore, the paradoxical nature of the description is revealed by posing the question, "If it is given to what extent can it be said to be chosen?" The theoretical way out of this paradox is to posit the existence of alternative, legitimate, culturally given languages. This is certainly a possibility but leads to another theoretical problem. How do we know the resource value of a particular cultural language or sign?

One could attempt to address this question as Kniss (1996) has by arguing the resource value is a function of the salience, at a given time, of the sign or language in question. But this is an inadequate explanation because of the inherent problems in measuring salience. To illustrate, Kniss begins with the assumption of competing cultural languages which served as resources in various internal cultural-political conflicts in Mennonite communities. He then argues that certain languages were effective resources in these conflicts because they were salient. But, he can only determine what was salient through post-hoc rationalization. The languages that worked must have been salient because they were effective and the ones that did not work must not have been salient because they were not effective. Unless we can get a sense of the salience of a language or sign before it is used, reference to salience is nothing more than a reference to the effectiveness of the sign or language and says nothing about resource value. Thus, we learn nothing about the effectiveness of a sign or language in its ability to be transferred into practical action or why one sign or language is able to do this better than others.

In sum, the resource model is unable to provide us with a clear picture of the functioning of signs in public political discourse. Although it does provide us with the key insight that the universal aspect of the sign is linked to legitimacy, the process of particularistic meaning is still unclear. So too is the relation between the particular and universal aspects.

Conceptual Limitations of the Resource Model

The analogy between religious symbols and resources holds up to a certain extent when the symbols are more or less exclusive (i.e. when 'access' to them and 'authority' to use them is limited) but we also saw that the resource model has limited applicability to civil religious symbols precisely because they are ubiquitously available for use in public political discourse. However, deeper considerations will lead us to question the overall value of the resource model applied to the study of any type of cultural sign regardless of its exclusivity. Specifically,

two considerations undermine the logic of the analogy of a cultural sign as a resource.

First, we need to explore the notion of expenditure. The resource model is inexorably linked to this notion. In this model, it is the expenditure of resources that explains the effectiveness of a movement. It is the expenditure of resources that determine the success of the message being implemented into practical action. So, the question becomes how do signs relate to the notion of expenditure? There are no real costs associated with them (with the exception of opportunity costs). They are in a sense free. It does not, for example, cost X units of something to use sign A and cost Y units to use sign B. However, there is some expenditure when a cultural sign is used; but, the expenditure is independent of the sign itself. The expenditure is to be found in the physical act of its use. It is, for example, in the energy of the speaker or the production and distribution costs of its circulation. Expenditure is in the transference of the idea into articulation. When articulated, then, the resource value of a sign is in the human who is able to do this effectively. It is not in the sign itself.

Second, as was mentioned above the applicability of religious symbols requires a certain degree of authority. But, the locus of authority is not in the symbol but in the person or group using it. It is not the symbol itself but who is making use of it that makes it socially useful. In this sense, again we see that the resource is not the symbol but the person who is using it—the person with the authority to use it. Within public political discourse, a sign has no inherent usability but is usable to the extent that the user is qualified to use it.

As these two points illustrate, when we talk about a sign as a resource we must ultimately turn our attention away from the sign itself and focus on the articulator of the sign. Moreover, by focusing exclusively on the speaker we do not get a proper sense of the contexts of linguistic exchange that defines the sphere of public political discourse. The social nature of language is virtually ignored in this model. Reception is taken for granted with no recognition or explanation of why alternative explanations, definitions, conceptualization, etc. of the sign exist. In sum, logical extrapolation of the resource model forces us to refer cultural objects back to the speaker. In this, we lose focus on the signs and the systems of signs which comprise discourse more generally. This is a somewhat ironic condition given the model's description of the ACR as a narrative; but the result nevertheless.

Discursive Systems Theories

The last category we will explore is admittedly less cohesive and less developed than the previous two, consisting of only two (fairly obscure; but, valuable nevertheless) articles. In them we find a good deal of potential to negotiate the particular and universal aspects of American civil religious meaning. First, although he frames the Weberian/Durkheimian debate outlined above in a slightly different manner than we have, Lemert (1975a, 1975b) offers a helpful suggestion in overcoming the impasse between the two traditions. For Lemert, the debate is

essentially a question of where to locate the locus of meaning in modern society. The Durkheimians attempt to locate it in the social structure while the Weberians attempt to locate it within the individual. Neither camp offers a means of reconciling the other position. However, Lemert suggests that semiotics could provide a framework to do so. By looking at the social structure as a series of signs which structure modes of communication we can imagine it functioning as a "definite and finite system" of meaning but one where the individual is able to "innovate within the terms of the structure, just as in speech we retain a high degree of freedom to roam within fixed lexical rules" (Lemert, 1975a, 1975b, p. 105). Although Lemert's article provides only a general sketch and is thus too vague for the purposes of application in an empirical study, his idea to not locate meaning but to see it as a process of interaction between the social structure and the individual provides a means of reconciling the difference between the two aforementioned camps and thus provides us with a means of explaining how the sign 'the founding fathers' or any civil religious sign can be both an overarching, legitimating cultural-religious sign and at the same time a powerful political instrument.

Second, Bennett (1979) envisions the ACR as a collection of myths and rituals around which public political communication takes place. He argues that there is an essential ambiguity in it which provides for "multiply realities" by which different social groups (p. 117) conflict yet it contains enough commonality to provide a means of redressing these differences. Specifically, he posits that the sharing of myths and rituals produces "an unquestionable pattern of social relations and civic obligations" (p. 109) which bounds the public political discourse within a psycholinguistic framework where terms can be reconciled. By understanding the ACR in the context of a system of communication, Bennett, like Lemert, opens the door for a model which recognizes a place for individual cognition within socially defined parameters and thus a particular and a universal element.

From this literature review, we see that in order to effectively understand cultural signs we need a theory that can account for simultaneous agreement and disagreement about the meaning of cultural signs. Pluralistic models were unable to account for the universal nature of cultural signs. Resource models were also inadequate because they similarly were unable to account for the universal element. While they do suggest the important connection between the signs and legitimacy, they do not conceive of the signs as existing in a well worked out system of linguistic exchange. The discursive systems models do this; however, in their current structure they are too vague for application to our purpose, providing us only with a general direction to go. Nevertheless, it is in that direction we will go next to construct an adequate theoretical framework to examine civil religious cultural signs. We will begin by outlining a semiotic model as our base and then incorporate it into a social psychological model.

Semiotics

Barthes offers us a good conceptual framework to begin a discussion on semiotics. To understand Barthesian semiotics we must first define three terms which are integral to his thought: signifiers, signifieds and significations. Signifiers are material substances which exist and are perceived in the *Lebenswelt* (e.g. objects, words, sounds, smells, signs, symbols, etc.). Signifiers can be understood as the thing in itself. Signifieds, however, are not the thing in itself. They are mental representations of the perceived object (Barthes, 1970, p. 42). Finally, significations are essentially the meaning the perceiving agent makes of a signifier through use of the signified. Significations are a product of both the object (as a thing in itself) and the mental representation of that object. That is, signifiers are objective, they have essence and are the raw material, the object of perception; however, in order for them to be understood (i.e. assigned some meaning) they first require the formation of a mental representation of the object, the signified. In sum, for Barthes, there are objects as they exist 'out there' (i.e. outside the mind of the perceiving agent) and there are objects as internalized by the agent (i.e. in the mind of the agent). Objects which exist 'out there' have no meaning independent of the corresponding mental representation produced by the perceiving agent.

But, what does the process of making sense of entail? That is, what happens once a signifier is translated into a signified? How does something that is perceived become something which is meaningful? To begin, "[o]ne of the major contentions of cognitive psychology is that man essentially perceives objects as some sort of 'figures' against some 'ground'" (Zerubavel, 1985, p. 19). For our purposes, it will be posited that this ground is of two types. First, there is the material context of the object (i.e. how the object relates to other objects in the *Lebenswelt*). This is the context of signifiers.

The second type is ideational. It is the context of stored mental objects (i.e. signifieds) which we will refer to as a *Weltanschauung*.

A *Weltanschauung* is a flexible (though generally stable) framework. It is a meta-schema whereby signifieds are stored (sometimes temporarily, sometimes permanently) and relate to each other in a multi-dimensional web of associations. Within the web of associations there are paths connecting the various stored signifieds to each other. We may refer to these channels as *viæ*. Some stored signifieds connect to each other through *directa via*. Others relate through *indirecta viæ*, i.e. through an intermediary or liaison stored signified or a series of intermediary liaisons. Two stored signifieds may relate to each other through several different *viæ*. All stored signifieds have a relation, however removed, however unapparent. However, some signifieds are more directly connected to each other.

Each stored signified has a specific, *though not fixed* relative position to all other stored signifieds. The relative position a stored signified occupies at any given time and the manner in which it connects to other stored signifieds within the *Weltanschauung* forms its definition. In this sense, definitions are entirely

relational. A definition is a function of the relations a signified has to all other signifieds within the *Weltanschauung*.

We can apply this notion to the Barthesian semiotic model as follows: first, material objects or data in general (signifiers) are perceived in some context, i.e. in relation to other, associated signifiers in the *Lebenswelt*. They are heard, read, seen, felt, etc. The act of perception produces mental representations of the objects (signifieds). The signifieds then stand against the *Weltanschauung* and must be fitted within it. This is done by classifying the signifieds, categorizing them, and differentiating them from the stored signifieds within one's universe of stored signifieds. They are fitted according to their degrees of similarity and dissimilarity to existing stored signifieds in the *Weltanschauung*.

Through the course of one's life, one repeatedly encounters the same or similar signifiers. Thus, one often encounters signifiers which already have a corresponding stored signified located somewhere within the *Weltanschauung*. When one encounters a familiar signifier, the corresponding signified can be quickly located, fitted over the existing stored signified (or near in the case of similar signifiers). If one experiences a signifier for the first time the corresponding signified will be fitted according to the degrees of similarity and dissimilarity it has to existing stored signifieds. Additionally, space and time are themselves signifiers which must be translated into signifieds, fitted and connected to the various other signifieds corresponding to the associated signifiers within the particular field of perception one encounters in the *Lebenswelt*.

Because of perceptive and cognitive limitations, one is unable to assimilate all signifiers within a field of perception as signifieds. Perception and cognition happen in abstraction so only the most prominent signifieds corresponding to the most prominent signifiers are assimilated, fitted and subsequently connected in the *Weltanschauung*. Furthermore, not only do we abbreviate the signifiers which are assimilated as signifieds and then fitted and stored as signifieds, we also attempt to connect newly fitted signifieds using existing *viæ*, whenever possible. That is, instead of drawing new connections (forging new *viæ*) between signifieds, we tend to use existing paths. The result is that certain *viæ* are frequently used. Just as one might have a favorite route to take to work, one has favored cognitive paths to take, especially between frequently invoked signifieds. This means we often make sense of signifiers in the same way.

The Dialectics of Cognition

When making sense of a field of perception, connections are made between the relevant newly integrated signifieds which correspond to signifiers within that field. Often these connections are made through the existing *viæ*. However, sometimes they connect through the creation of new *viæ* (e.g. in new direct ways or through new or different liaisons). The way these newly integrated signifieds are connected is a product of the manner in which signifiers relate to each other in the *Lebenswelt*

and how stored signifieds are connected in the *Weltanschauung*. There is a constant negotiation between the two, each influencing the way signifieds are connected. Cognitive economics compels the use of existing connections but phenomenological fidelity does not always let that happen. Phenomenological fidelity compels specific connections but cognitive economics moves the connections in other ways. The process of meaning formation is dialectical. The act of perceiving new signifiers or familiar signifiers in new or different ways changes the mental framework by adding to or creating a reorganization of the web of associations of stored signifieds and at the same time the changing of the mental framework determines the possible meaning of future signifieds. The empirical connection of objects in the *Lebenswelt* impacts the mental association of objects in the *Weltanschauung*, which help determine how those objects are understood. Simultaneously, the arrangement of mental objects in the *Weltanschauung* helps to determine what sense can be made of material objects in the *Lebenswelt*.

In general, however, one's *Weltanschauung* is more or less stable. While small changes occur constantly due to the fitting of new signifieds that correspond to the perception of new signifiers and to experienced signifiers in new or different contexts, the overall structure usually changes very little. Dramatic structural changes occur only when needed. They occur when the current structure is somehow inadequate, unserviceable or un-useful—when something (a signified) does not fit. This can happen when one perceives an unfamiliar signifier or when one perceives a familiar signifier in an unfamiliar context and the corresponding signified cannot be adequately made sense of. In these cases, different frameworks or alterations of the old framework must be developed for meaning to be achieved. An analogy can be drawn between this process and Kuhn's (1996) theory of scientific revolution where scientific paradigms persist until such a time as they are no longer able to account for empirical data and are subsequently replaced by paradigms which are better able to contextualize the empirical data.

Orientating Signifieds

The meaning one derives from a particular signifier or of an entire field of signifiers depends on the mental connections made between the signified which corresponds to that signifier or the signifieds which correspond to the signifiers in that field of perception including all the relative positions and connections those signifieds have to all the other signifieds in the *Weltanschauung*. However, signifieds have varying degrees of determinative impact in shaping that meaning. That is to say, not all signifieds are as influential in forging meaning. Some are more influential than others. Signifieds which have more impact in meaning formation can be referred to as orientating signifieds, because they orientate other signifieds in the process of cognitive meaning formation.

Orientating signifieds can correspond to the primary or central signifier of interest or any other signifiers which relate to it in the *Lebenswelt*. For example,

the signified that would correspond to the signifier 'poisonous snake' would be fitted quite differently if the context one perceives it in is behind glass in a herpetarium or in one's back garden. Or the signified that corresponds to the signifier 'government spending' would likely be orientated differently if the signifier comes in the context of having just run over a pothole or reading an article about the national debt. In both cases, the associated signifiers (e.g. the glass, the garden, the pothole, and the debt) act to orientate the particular meaning of the signifier of primary interest. Similarly, if the signifier is uttered, the person who utters it (spoken or otherwise), where and when it is uttered, etc. are all associated signifiers and can act as orientating signifieds.

Sometimes the orientating signified does not appear immediately available in the *Lebenswelt*. For example, a strongly devout Christian may have the impulse to connect stored signifieds like 'Jesus' or 'sin' or 'biblical teachings' to the signifieds which correspond to the particular signifiers within a particular field of perception even though the signifiers which correspond to these signifieds may not have been uttered or perceived. This is because these signifieds have a special relationship (i.e. connections) to temporal and spatial signifieds. They are connected in such a way as to allow them to transcend immediate spatial and temporal signifieds. They are, in a sense, present and immediate for the perceiver even though they may not be for another observer.

Priming and Framing

In the social sciences, it has long been known that when subjects are introduced to certain signifiers (i.e. primed) their orientation and practical action toward other signifiers can change. This notion is supported in the copious literatures on priming effects and issue framing. In general, framing is the presentation of signifiers in particular sequences or combinations. In other words, framing is the contextualization of signifiers. Priming is the introduction of a specific signifier in a more or less isolated and/or emphasized way so that the specific signified which corresponds to that signifier acts as the orientating signified. Priming is a specific type of framing. Framing and priming influence the types of connections of signifieds by which a perceiver makes sense of the corresponding signifiers. Therefore, by controlling the contextualization (and thus context) of signifiers, one can help determine the meaning of the signifier for a perceiving agent and in turn help to influence the practical action or inaction that agent takes toward the signifier. This notion can be captured in the easily imagined scenario of a politician saying, "I think we can get the public behind the bill, if we frame the issue the right way."

While every communication (spoken or otherwise) is framed (i.e. exists in some context), some communications are framed in conscious, deliberate ways. This is the nature of political discourse. Discursive politics is an attempt at defining. It is the *techne* (*τέχνη)* of consciously and deliberately arranging signifiers in such a way as to influence how other agents make sense of them, helping to determine the

meaning of a signifier or signifiers in order to affect practical action or inaction toward it and other objects in the *Lebenswelt*. Discursive politics are the foundation of all politics.

Intersubjectivity

From individual to individual, there can be great variety between the signifiers one is exposed to and perceives. Furthermore, no two people can experience exactly the same signifiers in exactly the same contexts. While two people may experience the same signifier, they do so while occupying different spaces or at different times—thus in different contexts. These factors, along with individual biological variance in the capacities of the mechanisms of perception (e.g. in the physical structure and make-up of the brain, the eyes, ears, olfactory system, nervous system, etc.) produce the condition that no two *Weltanschauungen* are exactly the same. However, since individuals can and often do experience signifiers in similar contexts and there are of course similarities in individuals' mechanisms of perception, *Weltanschauungen* may be similar to each other. The more similar one's universe of experienced signifiers and the context which they were experienced in to another's, the more closely the *Weltanschauungen* of the two will resemble each other. The *Weltanschauungen* of those within the same social group(s) (be it national, occupational, familial, linguistic, etc.) generally have more similarity than those from different groups because they experience more overlap in perceived signifiers.

It is the degrees of similarity, the points of structural similarities between *Weltanschauungen* which makes intersubjectively valid communication possible. Communication works because there is some level of structural similarity between the *Weltanschauungen* of different agents. That is to say, overall cognitive frameworks and the relative positions and connections of signifieds within those frameworks have degrees of similarity from one person to the next. Communication is possible because the signifieds in my *Weltanschauung* relate to other signifieds in similar ways (although imperfectly) as they do in your *Weltanschauung*. In this way, we make sense of corresponding signifiers in similar ways and can thus coordinate our practical actions. The more points of similarity the more effective communication can be. It is easier to understand one's brother than a lion.

Much of the commonality between cognitive structures from one individual to the next can be attributed to the languages one knows and the rule-like rigidity with which they are practiced in a day-to-day manner. Languages for example come with a preset and usually stable system of differentiation and classification which mandate specific types of relations between signifiers. For example, crimson is a color. It is a shade of red. In the English language, the signifier 'crimson' is (in what may even appear to some as an intrinsic way) linked to the signifiers 'red' and 'color.' Additionally, a language has rule-like structures (i.e. syntax) which call for relatively fixed ways of associating, organizing, relating (i.e. contextualizing)

articulated signifiers. Furthermore, commonality between *Weltanschauungen* is also affected by the particular system of logic employed and seen as legitimate within a group. Logic dictates the permissibility of specific types of relations between signifiers. It lays out what can go with what and under what conditions.

As we saw above, the contexts signifiers are experienced in impact the cognitive structure of individuals. Individuals within the same social groups repeatedly experience signifiers in similar contexts. Those who are exposed to and perceive signifiers in similar contexts will have their individual *Weltanschauung* impacted in similar ways. They will understand, think about and orientate their practical actions in similar ways. In this way, we can speak of a group having a particular worldview in that there is necessarily some similarity (although imperfect) in the individual *Weltanschauung* of individuals in that group. This is a condition which results from the similarities in experiences and reflected in the ability to communicate.

The points of structural similarity between *Weltanschauungen* also make it possible to be able to know the effects of priming and framing with some idea of their viability. In other words, because there is similarity in the cognitive frameworks across individuals it is possible for one to frame things in certain ways and have some idea of how others will understand it.

This Model Applied to Civil Religious Signs

Our discussion on semiotics leads us to the conclusion that meaning and the definitions of objects are idiosyncratic. By themselves material objects have no meaning. They are not defined. Only the mental representations of those objects are. The definition of the mental object (signified) is then assigned to the material object (signifier). But, the process of definition is inescapably dependent (at least in part) on the structure of one's *Weltanschauung* and as we saw no two *Weltanschauungen* are exactly the same. Thus, no two people will assign exactly the same definition to a signifier or field of signifiers. Variation will always exist even though that variation is often small enough that it affects coordinative efforts very little. That is, mutual agreement, intersubjective understanding and validation between two people exists in terms of assigning a definition to a signifier even though they do not and cannot understand that object in precisely the same way.

Now let us turn our attention to civil religious signs. Civil religious signs are a certain type of signifier. As such they are objects with potential meaning. They are also signifiers which have special significance often occupying a central place in public discourse and in the historical narratives of the people belonging to a polis. Furthermore, they are frequently articulated or, we might say, culturally available signifiers.

People within a polis like those within any social group share common experiences and are subject to similar forces and mechanisms of socialization. This includes experiencing civil religious signs in similar ways. They see them presented in the same ways, in the same rituals. They hear them in the same narratives,

witness the same cultural manifestations, etc. As we saw above the similarity in exposure and perception of signifiers in similar contexts helps to forge similar *Weltanschauungen* between different individuals. Within the common cultural setting of a polis, individuals will therefore have similar structures to their individual *Weltanschauungen*. To the extent that continuity exists between the *Weltanschauungen* of individuals within a group there can be said to be a *Volksweltanschauung*. However, this is only an ideal type which points to high degrees of structural similarity between the various *Weltanschauungen* of individuals in a group. An entirely uniform group *Weltanschauung* is an empirical impossibility because of the reasons outlined above. Thus, the signifieds which correspond to civil religious signifiers occupy similar positions and connect to other signifieds in similar ways within the similar *Weltanschauungen* of the individuals comprising a polis; but, there is idiosyncratic variation in where exactly they are located and the various *viæ* connecting them to other signifieds.

However, we can still determine in general terms where they are located and what they connect to. This is, of course, dependent, in part, on the context which the signifiers exist or manifest in the *Lebenswelt* and therefore will vary from sign to sign. But, in general, we can say that they are located and connect in ways which afford them special emotional significance. They are located and connected in ways which the vast majority of objects one experiences throughout one's life do not and cannot aspire to. They are connected to mental objects of significance, importance, reverence, respect, authority, group and individual identity, tradition, legitimacy, admiration, veneration, esteem, approbation, etc. They are connected in ways that set them apart from the common and ordinary. In short, they are located and connected in a way which gives them a sacred quality. Indeed, they are often connected specifically to particular signifieds which corresponds to the signifier 'sacred.'

The connection to other signifieds which create the sacred quality of civil religious objects results from the material contextualization of the signifiers. Civil religious signifiers are often highlighted, emphasized, elevated, placed apart (temporary and spatially), given a central location, handled in a reverential manner, etc. This is clearly illustrated, in their ritual uses—i.e. their use in routinized, coordinated and socially shared, symbolic activities. There is a widely-accepted notion in the social sciences that rituals are connected to enhanced emotionality. Durkheim & Fields (1995), for example argued that rituals produced an excited emotional state in people, something he called, 'effervescence.' Similarly, Geertz (1993) argued that sacred symbols "induce" "moods and motivations" when presented "in ritual [or]. . .some sort of ceremonial form" (p. 112). In brief, the idea that rituals invoke conditioned association between emotional states and abstract symbols is a widely accepted psychological premise (Alcorta & Sosis, 2005). As we saw, in the previous chapter, the notion that the ACR has a ritualistic dimension is a generally accepted principle in its study. For example, Bellah (1967) examined the ritualistic dimensions of Presidential inaugurations. Additionally, Warner (1974) and Cherry (1969), both outlined ritualistic elements to Memorial Day celebrations and Cherry (1969) identified a civil religious ritualistic element in the funeral rites of Robert

Kennedy and by explicit extension those of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., President John F. Kennedy and other national figures. Like Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving and President's Day are also frequently cited as opportunities for ritualistic expression of a civil religious nature which help to facilitate public reaffirmation of American civil religious ideals by providing for corporate activity centered around American civil religious signs.

This is not to suggest that civil religious signs are only encountered in rituals. They are also, at times, contextualized in mundane or even quotidian ways. This may suggest that the emotional potential of the signs is, then limited or somehow compromised. While it is the case that mundane exposure to the sign can reduce the emotional significance of it, mundane contextualization does not eliminate the special emotional significance. What is crucial is that American civil religious signs are sometimes contextualized in American civil religious rituals and that they are the only signs which can be. While civil religious signs can and are contextualized in mundane ways, mundane signs are not contextualized in the way civil religious signs are. For example, one may see the American flag outside of a post office, a fairly mundane context and one may see the flag pinned to the lapel of the President when (s)he is giving the State of the Union address which is a highly ritualistic enterprise with civil religious implications. However, one would not see a Hello Kitty symbol or The Rolling Stone's Sticky Fingers emblem stuck to the lapel of the President in this context. In short, civil religious signs are in a sense uniquely qualified to be framed in civil religious ritual context.

Another place we see that civil religious signifiers are handled in a reverential manner is in the fact that there are often special 'rules' governing the contextualization of the signifier. For example, an American flag cannot touch the ground, it must be illumined if displayed at night, should be folded in a prescribed manner, etc. The string of signifiers, "God bless America" is almost exclusively reserved for the last moments of a political speech. The signifier "the founding fathers" is frequently associated with the signifier 'wisdom' as in "In their wisdom, the founding fathers created a Constitution with a balance of powers." These contextualizations of civil religious signifiers help to forge the structures of individual *Weltanschauungen* in a way which give these signifiers a sacred quality.

Furthermore, we must consider the cultural pervasiveness of these signs. As was mentioned above, and as we will see in the next chapter, they are widely available in social discourse and thus widely culturally shared. Shared experiences in the *Lebenswelt* help to condition individual *Weltanschauungen* in such a way that civil religious signs have a seemingly universal quality. For most, in the polis, the signifieds which correspond to these signifiers are attached to others such as those listed above which produce an appearance of a universal sacredness.

What this all means is that there is structural similarity between the various *Weltanschauungen* within the community. In turn, similarity in *Weltanschauungen* subsequently means similar definitions for signifieds that are in turn assigned to signifiers. This produces some degree of intersubjective agreement about the meaning of civil religious signifiers and thus accounts for the universal quality the Durkheimians argue for when considering civil religious signs. However, we

also noted above that each *Weltanschauung* is unique. Therefore, exact definitions of these signifiers will also vary from individual to individual. Idiosyncratic variation then explains the atomization of meaning highlighted by the Weberians.[3] In sum, meaning is both universal (as a product of social interaction—i.e. social construction) and individual (as a product of idiosyncratic cognitive processes).

Civil Religious Signs as Orientating Signifieds in Public Political Discourse

In our discussion above about orientating signifieds it was posited that certain signifieds have more influence in determining meaning formation. The type of connections that civil religious signifieds maintain (i.e. those which give them special emotional significance and the sacred quality) make them especially likely to act as orientating signifieds.

As we will see in Chaps. 3–5, in public political discourse these signifiers can be and usually are deliberately contextualized with a whole range of normal or common (i.e. profane) signifiers. When civil religious signifiers are contextualized with profane signifiers they can influence the perception of the profane signifiers. This type of contextualization can be seen, then as an effort to have profane signifiers cognitively processed in a certain way as to define them with sacredness. It is an attempt to define the frame of perception in such a way as to put it outside of the profane world of politics and beyond political discussion. We will discuss this in depth, in Chap. 4; however, a brief hypothetical example now will help to illustrate the point.

In the course of a campaign speech, a candidate may make several references to the Constitution in contexts of a discussion regarding abortion. By contextualizing her position with the Constitution, she is attempting to connect her position to the Constitution.[4] If her position is connected to the Constitution (which as we will see in Chap. 5 is sacred in the ACR tradition) then her position is effectively beyond dispute. For all practical purposes, in public political discourse we do not argue

[3]According to this theory, increased social differentiation in modern societies would lead to greater variety between individual *Weltanschauungen*. In this way, the Weberians are correct to suggest that things which accompanied modernity like a more specialized division of labor and religious pluralism disrupt common meaning structures. Each role will maintain, for example a specific language or logic of ordering the world which will influence the individual's *Weltanschauung*. In short, as a whole, individuals are sharing fewer experiences and thus perceiving signifiers and ordering signifieds less similarly. This results in less similar *Weltanschauungen*, across individuals in modern times than in less socially differentiated societies. However, this process is incomplete. It is a partial atomization which produces only degrees of dissimilarity and not a total dissipation of common meaning potential and consequently does not prohibit the existence of some type of intersubjectively available, religious social foundation.

[4]As was argued in the first chapter, she can do this either by linking the civil religious signifier directly to issue signifiers or by linking the civil religious signifiers to herself.

about the status of the Constitution. Its elevated status is taken as a given. This is a sedimented fixture. It is sacred. Of course, not everyone will agree that her position (whatever it might be) has been correctly connected to the Constitution. That is, not everyone will agree with her about the definition of her position. Nevertheless, she and others probably genuinely believe that she has correctly defined it and the Constitution as it relates to that particular position. That *is* what the Constitution means for them and because the Constitution is meant to be a universal sign it is what the Constitution should mean for everyone. Those who disagree have misunderstood the true meaning of the Constitution or they are deliberately trying to subvert it for political purposes. Again, we see the distinction between the sacred and profane. Those who disagree are trying to subvert the Constitution (which is sacred) for a political agenda (profane purpose). This relationship works in the other direction as well. Those who disagree with our candidate's position may just as easily accuse her of trying to profane the Constitution for political purposes.

Now, at this point one may object that this is nothing more than a discussion about legitimacy. One might argue that our candidate, like her opponents, is simply trying to legitimate her position and this whole discussion on semiotics could have been avoided by simply saying that the use of civil religious signs is an attempt to legitimate political positions. While it is certainly the case that their use is an attempt to legitimate, by analyzing them from this semiotic perspective we learn something valuable about the specific type of legitimation that is going on. It is more than mere legitimatizing. It is, in a sense, the ultimate form of legitimatizing. It is an attempt at dogmatizing and consequently depoliticizing. A principle agenda of politics is one of definition. Positions (and candidates) are legitimated through definition. Politics is at its core a matter of this goes with that. As we will see in Chap. 4, in regards to civil religious signs, the 'this' is an issue position or candidacy, the 'that' is something which is insulated from debate, something which lies outside of the field of politics narrowly defined but is nonetheless wholly political. This something which ostensibly lies outside of the political field is the sacred. Bourdieu makes exactly this point when he says, "The 'people' is used these days just as in other times God was used—to settle accounts between clerics" (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991, p. 214). When one tries to connect their position to the signifier 'the people' they are attempting to connect the corresponding signified to that emotionally significant and special brand of signifieds which we have called the sacred. However, while 'the people' may be an American civil religious sign it is not the only sacred object in the American *Volksweltanschauung*. As we will see from the empirical investigation presented in the next three chapters, in the ACR, 'God' is an object to connect a position to. So too are 'the founding fathers,' 'equality,' 'freedom,' 'the Constitution,' 'the Declaration of Independence' and other signs. In short, this would include those signs which can be connected both in the *Weltanschauung* and *Lebenswelt* to what Herberg (1973) referred to as the American way of life—the "structure of ideas, values, and beliefs that constitute a faith common to Americans as Americans, and is genuinely operative in their lives" (p. 227).

Summary

Building on some of the key insights of existing theoretical work (particularly the link between legitimacy and civil religious signs presented in the significant works within the resource model and Whillock's insight to locate meaning within an individual's psychology), this chapter has taken the cue of earlier theorists and developed an approach which views civil religious signs within a discursive system. This understanding allows us to explain the simultaneous agreement and disagreement about civil religious signs which the resource model and pluralistic models have not fully been able to do.

The semiotic and social psychological model just presented allows us to negotiate the divide between the Durkheimian and Weberian traditions outlined in the first sections of this chapter which have proven inadequate for the study of civil religious signs. The new model permits us to move away from the strict dichotomy represented by the positions of these traditions which posit either that meaning in centrally located or individually located by showing how it is actually neither. It is both. In brief, the argument is that there exists structural similarity between the individual *Weltanschauungen* of individuals within social groups which is created by experiencing similar signifiers, in similar contexts, in the *Lebenswelt*. This similarity between *Weltanschauungen* means similar definitions for signifieds which are then assigned to those signifiers, in turn producing a degree of intersubjective agreement about the meaning of civil religious signifiers. This accounts for the universality of meaning which the Durkheimians see. On the other hand, the uniqueness of individual *Weltanschauungen* noted above means that the exact definitions of these signifiers will necessarily vary from individual to individual. This idiosyncratic variation of meaning explains the atomization of meaning for which the Weberians argue. In short, meaning is both universal and individual. It is individual as a product of idiosyncratic cognitive processes and it is universal as a product of shared social experiences. This dualistic nature of meaning characterizes the use of the signs in public political discourse. The ambiguity of meaning allows for certain connections while the universalistic elements permit attempts at sacred legitimation.

With the model specified above we now have an adequate tool through which to examine civil religious signs in American public political discourse. However, it should be noted that given the universality of the process of meaning formation this model can be applied to civil religious signs in any specific cultural or social context. The next step is the practical application of the model. We will start this in Chap. 4. First, however, in the next chapter, we will take a broad look at civil religious discourse to understand its general properties. This is a necessary step that will allow us to test the validity of some of the traditional claims about the content of the ACR and its narrative elements found in the existing theoretical literature. This will also help us identify relevant American civil religious signs to study in-depth in Chaps. 4 and 5 as well as provide us with an opportunity to confirm that the ACR possesses the qualities assumed of it in the theory above. Particularly, we

must establish two things: (1) civil religious signs occupy a central place in public political discourse and (2) that they are widely, culturally available (i.e. frequently articulated and broadly diffused, not esoteric). Demonstrating this will reveal the universal aspect of the ACR and give us confidence in assuming structural similarity between the various *Weltanschauungen* of the American people which in turn makes it possible to use American civil religious signs as orientating signifieds in an attempt to define candidacies or issue positions with sacredness.

Chapter 3
The ACR in Public Political Discourse: 1960–2012

Introduction

In the last chapter, a model was presented which, it was argued, allows us to understand civil religious signs and their use in public political discourse. In Chaps. 4 and 5, we will put that model to use by applying it to specific American civil religious signs. First, however, it will be helpful to undertake a broad examination of the ACR in public political discourse. Doing so will allow us to do three things: verify fundamental assumptions about the ACR; identify relevant American civil religious signs to study in the subsequent chapters; and validate a fundamental assumption of the theory presented in Chap. 2.

Verifying Fundamental Assumptions About the ACR

To being, a broad examination of the ACR will give us the opportunity to verify or reject some of the claims about the ACR upon which this study is anchored. Particularly, in the first chapter, it was asserted that the ACR provides a narrative form that Americans use to think about, understand and talk about their nation. If this is true, then we should see evidence of this in the cultural record. That is, we should see that the nation is actually talked about in this way, in cultural artifacts (i.e. in recorded representations).

Furthermore, in the first chapter, a genealogy of the legal-political model of American self-understanding was presented which outlined a long history and assumed a substantial and widespread cultural sedimentation. If it, indeed, does have a long history and is deeply entrenched in the culture, we should see American civil religious tenets and symbols being consistently articulated over time. In other words, it should be a persistent feature within the cultural record.

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Going along with the idea that the ACR is a widely diffused cultural phenomenon, this self-understanding has also been theorized to transcend particularism and especially political affiliation in the United States. It is assumed to be a generally available and broadly employed narrative form.[1] If the ACR is widely diffused and transcends particularism and party lines, we should find that there is no statistically significant difference in the way that individuals with different party affiliations use American civil religious language. In other words, we should find that it is a universal narrative.

In the first chapter, it was also mentioned that the President has been theorized as the '*pontifex maximus*' of the ACR and thus may seem more likely to reveal American civil religious language. However, if '*pontifex maximus*' is a real function of the presidency and the ACR is as central to the American self-understanding as it has been theorized, we should expect anyone running for President to be equally versed and proficient in it and willing to articulate its discourse. This is especially true of the candidates from the major parties. For the same reason, we should not expect there to be a difference between incumbents and non-incumbents. Similarly, we can predict that Vice-Presidential candidates will also be as likely to reveal American civil religious themes and symbols as Presidential candidates. If these are foundational narrative elements of a people, those aspiring to represent them (especially at such a high level) are likely to be well versed in it and thus articulate it.

However, we may expect that if we examined victory and concession speeches separately from the other political speech acts that form our dataset (discussed below), we will find that the victors articulate more tenets and symbols of the ACR. The reason we should expect this is that it seems more likely that a winning candidate would be inclined to frame her or his victory in a broad historical, social-religious narrative than a losing candidate would be to frame her or his loss in those terms. Such a defeat is difficult enough to deal with. Framing one's own defeat in those terms would be unimaginably difficult to deal with and potentially damaging to her or his future political career. Therefore, we should expect the concession speeches to contain less American civil religious language when compared to the victory speeches.

In addition to the things above, a broad examination will also allow us to gauge what are and are not rhetorical features of the ACR from the host of tenets and symbols theorized to be associated with it. Specifically, we will test whether the beliefs and narrative elements theorized to be part of the ACR tradition, within the corpus of the existing literature, are represented in the cultural record (at least an important part of the cultural record).

[1]Bellah (1967) initially put forth this proposition and Christianson and Wimberley (1978) tested it by examining civil religious attitudes among individuals using two indicators, party identification and self-identified political ideology. They did find some differences in attitudes along these variables. But, these differences were very small and the data is difficult to generalize from because it was conducted in only one state and captures only one moment in time.

Next, since the ACR is supposed to be, in part, a narrative form, we should expect to see that various signs and ideas associated with it are relatively cohesive. That is, we should be able to identify that they somehow 'belong' together. From a mathematical perspective, the relationship of the various parts can be determined by their correlations and the direction of those correlations. If the ACR is a cohesive narrative form, its elements should be strongly, positively correlated with each other.

Finally, one of the biggest problems with using the resource model to understand civil religious signs, it was argued, is that for a sign to act as a type of resource which confers advantage to a particular political actor or group of actors it must have a degree of exclusivity. That is, certain speakers must have more authority to use it. However, it was argued that American civil religious signs have no degree of exclusivity and no one is more or less entitled (i.e. has the authority) to use the signs. If this assumption is valid, and consequently we are warranted in rejecting the application of the resource model to civil religious signs on this account, then we should see that the articulation of American civil religious language is not the exclusive domain of anyone, any political role or any political party. It should be articulated by all in a relatively similar way.

Identifying Relevant Signs

Another reason for undertaking a broad empirical examination is that the model outlined in the last chapter takes cultural signs (i.e. culturally significant signifiers) as the primary object of investigation. The examination below will help us identify relevant signs of the ACR and allow us to compare their use. From the signs identified in the broad empirical study, we will examine some examples, in depth, in the two chapters that follow.

Verifying a Fundamental Assumption of our Semiotic Model

Moreover, the empirical examination below will also allow us to validate a key assumption upon which the theory presented in Chap. 2 rests. Specifically, it was posited that the signifieds which correspond to civil religious signs are likely to serve as orientating signifieds because of the way the civil religious signs are presented in the *Lebenswelt*. Specifically, it was argued that their use as ritual totems gives them an enhanced emotionality which in turn makes their corresponding signifieds more likely to act as orientating signifieds. If the signifieds which correspond to American civil religious signs are to serve as orientating signifieds, in the manner theorized, the signs need to be used as ritual totems. In other words, we need evidence that they are employed in ritualistic activity.

Therefore, data for the empirical examination below is drawn from cultural artifacts emerging from American, political ritual activity.

Data Selection

Many scholars have demonstrated that elections and the events surrounding them have a highly ritualistic and symbolic nature (Edelman, 1964, 1988; McLeod, 1991a, 1991b, 1993a, 1993b, 1999; McLeod & Abe, 1992) and a significant civil religious dimension (Bennett, 1977, 1980, 1983; Chapp, 2012; Domke & Coe, 2008; Hammer, 2010; Hart & Pauley, 2005). Furthermore, we already know that other political rituals have a civil religious dimension. For example, Bellah, in his initial article argued that Presidential inaugurations are important ceremonial events with civil religious implications (Bellah, 1967, p. 4). Following Bellah's lead of analyzing this ceremony in the context of civil religion, others have also found the articulation of civil religious precepts in the inaugural addresses and other ceremonial activities of the President (Fairbanks, 1982; Gustafson, 1970; Henderson, 1975; Toolin, 1983; Wilson, 1979a, 1979b).

In this study, we will not focus specifically on the ritual activities of Presidents (in their capacity as President as opposed to their capacity as candidate), however. These are not particularly useful civil religious events for the collection of the type of data appropriate for broad generalization. This is because the cultural artifacts produced during Presidential rituals represent the articulation of only one person, with a fixed set of demographic characteristics, who is occupying only one socio-political role and represents only one political party, at a given moment. Furthermore, frequent re-elections to second terms for the Presidents result in a rather small sample size. In short, if we only look at Presidential rituals we are left with little to compare. These issues limit one's ability to generalize from Presidential rituals.

Elections rituals, on the other hand, involve more participants, participants from different socio-political roles (e.g. incumbents and challengers, Vice-Presidents and Vice-Presidential challengers, election winners and losers, etc.) and participants from different political parties, at the same time. Examining election rituals, thus, provides for more nuance and generalizability regarding the place of the ACR in public political discourse.

Additionally, the cultural artifacts produced during elections rituals are a good source of data because elections are important, consequential events which capture wide-ranging public attention. They are also held at consistent though somewhat infrequent intervals. Thus, they are likely to serve, in the minds of the people, as convenient historical markers to gauge the nation's place in history, its trajectory and moral state across time. Moreover, the consistent intervals are convenient for analysis over time.

Content analysis was performed on an original dataset derived from three America election rituals: (1) the Democratic and Republican nomination acceptance speeches for the years 1960; 1976–2012; (2) all the Presidential and Vice-Presidential debates from the same time period; and (3) the victory and concession

speeches of major party Presidential candidates for the same period. The data stemming from these different rituals will be explored below.

Outline of Chapter

We will begin by outlining the methodology by which our data was procured and analyzed. Next, we will delineate 14 tenets and symbols theorized to be part of the American civil religious tradition and provide a summary of findings which describe how and the extent to which these tenets and symbols were revealed in the dataset. In brief, we will find ample evidence of these themes and symbols in the cultural record. Qualitative examples are also provided to better help the reader gain a sense of how these tenets and symbols are articulated and exist in the *Lebenswelt*. Next, the stated hypotheses found in the Verifying Fundamental Assumptions about the ACR section above will be tested. As we will see, the tests conducted to gauge the validity of these hypotheses will allow us to accept each of them. The chapter ends with a discussion of the significance of the findings.

Methodology

As was mentioned above, three data sources were selected to represent election rituals. Each source represents a different election-related ritual: (1) Democratic and Republican nomination acceptance speeches; (2) Presidential and Vice-Presidential debates; and (3) victory and concession speeches. Data was analyzed from the years 1960; 1976–2012. The timeframe for this study has been chosen for two reasons. First, it provides a historical perspective whereby any changes or continuity in American civil religious discourse can be assessed and confidence in the temporal generalizability of the findings can be assured. This data spans some of the most important social events of the post-World War II period which might have influenced changes in American civil religious discourse including: the Vietnam War, the two Kennedy and the King assassinations, the Watergate scandal, the end of the Cold War, 9/11 and the election of the first African American President. Second, there is the practical consideration of data availability. While nomination acceptance speeches have a long history, debates and victory and concession speeches as we know them do not. The first debates were the well-known Nixon-Kennedy debates of 1960; but, there was a hiatus in debates for three elections cycles before becoming a permanent ritual fixture. Similarly, the recognizable and now highly ritualized victory and concession speeches really start emerging around the same time as the advent of television coverage of them. Therefore, we have continuous data from 1976 to 2012. We are also able to include data from 1960 because complete data from this year is available.

These rituals have the added advantage of falling roughly at the beginning, middle and end of the Presidential election campaign cycle.[2] Presidential elections have been focused on (instead of midterm elections) because they are more consequential, less frequent, receive more attention, and are national as opposed to regional, in that every voter, in the country, regardless of state or district, ostensibly chooses between the same candidates. Since we are interested in a national phenomenon, these factors make Presidential election rituals the most appropriate source of data for this study.

Speeches and debates primarily from the major party candidates[3] have been examined because these candidates received roughly 98% of the popular vote within the period investigated, according to the Federal Elections Commission.[4] While it should not be suggested that these candidates or their parties perfectly represent the views of the 98% who voted, the fact that in order to win elections the major parties need to speak to such a large percentage of the electorate, means their language should be indicative of a general public discourse. In essence, the structural limitations which make it difficult for third party candidates to compete successfully in American elections make it very easy for one to locate and subsequently examine a dominant social discourse such as the American civil religious narrative in the words of those who represent the two major parties.

Content analysis was performed on these datasets[5] which attempted to determine the presence or absence of several tenets and symbols of the ACR, which are outlined below. If presence was found it was recorded with a 1 for the respective category, each time it was found. At times statements were coded simultaneously in more than one category. Appendix A provides the full definitions for the symbols and tenets used by the coders.

The entire dataset was independently coded by two separate coders, from a team of coders, in order to increase objectivity in the coding. The two independently coded datasets were then compared and a final coded dataset was prepared which

[2]One could, of course, argue that the Presidential election ritual cycle begins much earlier with the primary elections. While primaries are sectarian affairs designed to choose one member of a particular political faction to represent that faction in the general election, a presumptive candidate can emerge months before the convention and thus shift focus from directing their message to base members of their party specifically to the public generally. Nevertheless, the nomination acceptance speech provides a convenient and quasi-official starting point for the general elections rituals. Furthermore, they also correspond to greater public participation in the rituals, in that these events are watched by more of the public. Debates are used here to gauge more or less the middle stages of the ritual season. Although, admittedly, they tend toward the latter half of the middle stages. Lastly, victory and concession speeches mark the end point of this ritual season by commenting directly on the results of the election.

[3]We have also included data from the Anderson and Perot debates to make some analysis about independent candidates.

[4]See: http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/electionresults.shtml.

[5]Content analysis was performed on the entire debate. However, given the infrequency of revealed American civil religious narrative elements by moderators or audience members participating in the debates, only instances of revealed ACR language by the candidates are considered here.

recorded positive results *only in instances where both coders agreed* that a tenet or symbol was present. If only one coder believed that a tenet or symbol was present and the other did not, the result was coded a 0, meaning that it was not recorded as an instance of revealed ACR, in the final coded dataset. The results reported below then reflect a 100% inter-coder agreement. Coding results positive only in cases where the two individual coders agreed that American civil religious elements were revealed set a very high threshold. Although this technique may have resulted in smaller positive results than other accepted analytical techniques, it was felt that this extremely high bar was warranted because of the subjectivity of many of our items. This technique provides us with a high degree of confidence that, indeed, the findings represent what they are claimed to represent.

Tenets and Symbols of the ACR

From the theoretical work on the ACR and the precedent established in extant empirical studies, this author has identified thirteen key components of the ACR. These represent items 2–14 in the list below. Citations for each item can be found below. The first item, filial piety is an original theoretical contribution provided by this author. Although this idea has not been coherently developed previously, within the existing ACR scholarship, there have been several works which are suggestive of the notion as a component of the ACR (Albanese, 1982; Bellah, 1967; Bernstein, 2009; Cherry, 1969; Coleman, 1970; Craven, 1956; Hay, 1969a, 1969c; Werner, 1974). A full theoretical justification for its inclusion is provided in the next chapter. These fourteen items comprised the tenets and symbols searched for while conducting the content analysis of the datasets.[6] They are as follows:

1. **Filial piety**.
2. **Reference to certain sacred texts and symbols of the ACR** (Albanese, 1982; Bellah, 1967; Chapp, 2012; Cherry, 1969; Gorski, 2011a; Smylie, 1963; Werner, 1974).
3. **The sanctity of American institutions** (Bellah, 1978; Chapp, 2012; Cherry, 1969; Coleman, 1970).
4. **The belief in God or a deity** (Bellah, 1967; Cherry, 1969; Coleman, 1970; Hay, 1969c; Herberg, 1973).
5. **The idea that rights are divinely given** (Bellah, 1967, 1978; Cherry, 1969; Gorski, 2011a; Niebuhr, 1954).
6. **The notion that freedom comes from God through government** (Bellah, 1978; Gorski, 2011a; Niebuhr, 1954).

[6]In terms of identifying relevant signs of the ACR, some of these components are expressed as symbols which make highlighting relevant signs rather easy. Others, however, are expressed as broader tenets and required additional analysis to identify the relevant signs associated with them. See below for further discussion.

7. **Governmental authority comes from God or a higher transcendent authority** (Coleman, 1970; Mead, 1974; Richardson, 1974).
8. **The conviction that God can be known through the American experience** (Cherry, 1969; Coleman, 1970; Hay, 1969c; Smylie, 1963).
9. **God is the supreme judge** (Bellah, 1967, 1975; Cherry, 1969; Mead, 1974; Richardson, 1974).
10. **God is sovereign** (Albanese, 1982; Bellah, 1967, 1978; Coleman, 1970; Mead, 1974; Niebuhr, 1954; Richardson, 1974).
11. **America's prosperity results from God's providence** (Gorski, 2011a; Hart & Pauley, 2005; Maclear, 1971).
12. **America is a 'city on a hill' or a beacon of hope and righteousness** (Bellah, 1967, 1978; Cherry, 1969; Coleman, 1970; Maclear, 1971; Tuveson, 1968).
13. **The principle of sacrificial death and rebirth** (Bellah, 1967, 1978; Cherry, 1969; Coleman, 1970; Maclear, 1971; Warner, 1959, 1974).
14. **America serves a higher purpose than self-interests** (Albanese, 1982; Bellah, 1967, 1975; Cherry, 1969; Coleman, 1970; Hay, 1969c; Herberg 1973; Maclear, 1971; Tuveson, 1968).

Content Findings

Table 3.1 summarizes the results of all three sources and tabulates the total articulations of American civil religious language across the entire dataset. As we can see, there were 1166 instances of revealed American civil religious language. For the sake of comparison specifically Christian references were also tabulated from the dataset.[7] Only 40 instances of these were found. Figure 3.1 illustrates this difference. This finding suggests that Bellah (1967) was correct in his assertion that the ACR is a unique religious tradition and not simply a mask for Christianity. While politicians are quite willing to use American civil religious language, in public political discourse, they are reluctant to do so with Christian language.

Of the fourteen tenets of the ACR identified, all fourteen emerge from the datasets. As the table above shows, some tenets emerged more frequently than others. The following summary of some of the most frequently articulated tenets will provide qualitative examples to help the reader gain of sense of how American civil religious principles and symbols have been expressed in the cultural artifacts examined.

[7]For coding purposes, Christian references were defined as identifiable references to Christian symbols or texts.

Table 3.1 Summary results of revealed ACR

ACR item	Debates	Nominations	Victory/ concession	Total
Filial piety	85	95	14	194
Sacred texts and symbols	60	52	3	115
The sanctity of American institutions	21	10	5	36
The belief in God or deity	97	79	44	220
Rights are divinely given	2	4	0	6
Freedom comes from God through government	4	3	1	8
Governmental authority comes from God	0	0	1	1
Knowing God through the American experience	2	2	1	5
God is supreme judge	0	1	0	1
God is sovereign	7	3	0	10
America's prosperity results from God's providence	1	6	3	10
City on a Hill	159	81	19	259
Sacrificial death and rebirth	22	32	4	58
Higher purpose	153	79	11	243
Totals	613	447	106	1166

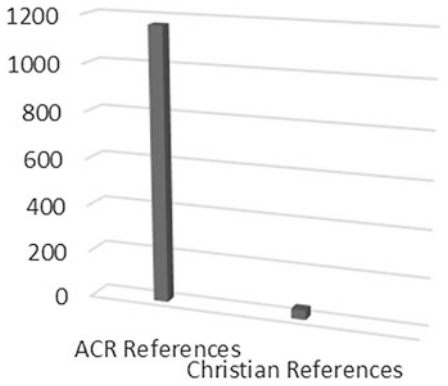

Fig. 3.1 ACR References vs. Christian references

Belief in God

The belief in God or a deity was revealed 44 times in the victory and concession speeches, 97 times in the debates and 79 times in the nomination acceptance speeches. Examples of this expression include: the very common 'God bless America' and various derivatives thereof; Bush's request in his 2000 victory speech

to "pray for this great nation" and give "prayers for leaders from both parties" and Romney's assertion during the first Presidential debate that "[w]e're a nation that believes that we're all children of the same god."

Filial Piety

Filial piety also frequently emerged. It was revealed 194 times (14 times in the Victory and Concession Speeches, 85 times in the debates and 95 in the nomination acceptance speeches. The table in Appendix B provides a breakdown of specific groups and individuals invoked.[8] Not surprisingly Abraham Lincoln was frequently invoked (39 times), as was John F. Kennedy (33 times), Franklin D. Roosevelt (28 times), the founding fathers (29 times) and Harry Truman (19 times). Reagan is also worth mentioning, while his name was only invoked 12 times we must consider that for much of the period studied he would have been a contemporary political figure and thus could not have been an object of filial piety. Given this, it is likely that over time Reagan will play just as prominent a role in American filial piety as those figures just mentioned.

Two results were particularly surprising. Washington and Jefferson were mentioned just five times each. Although they have been theorized as key personages in the ACR (Greenhalgh, 2007; Hay, 1969a, 1969c; Little, 1974; McDonald, 1999), they to do not figure prominently as American civil religious symbols in the datasets examined here. It is likely that they figure prominently, in the ACR, in other ways (for example in the individual belief structures of Americans, or in other cultural artifacts like paintings, sculptures, monuments, coinage and notes, etc.). Certainly, their monuments in Washington, DC and their places in the nation's history suggest greater significance than what was observed in our datasets. But, while more empirical examinations would have to be done to make any firm conclusion, the results reported here show they are not among the most widely used signs of filial piety.

Even less frequently invoked than Washington and Jefferson were people of color and women. Only three people of color were specifically invoked: Martin Luther King, Jr. (seven times), Fanny Lou Hamer and Booker T. Washington (one time each). Hamer and Eleanor Roosevelt (one time) were the only women to be invoked. These findings reveal a clear white, male bias in the filial piety of the ACR.

[8]Note that Appendix B shows the number of times individuals or groups were mentioned. In the dataset, multiple names were often articulated together in the same sentence or in the same context. When coding for the presence of filial piety, instances where a group of names were contextualized together were only positively recorded once even though they may have invoked more than one name. Because of this, the number of times specific names or groups were referenced in relation to filial piety is higher than the number of instances of revealed filial piety.

Some examples of filial piety being expressed include: Carter's statement during his 1976 nomination speech that "We can have an America where freedom, on the one hand, and equality, on the other hand, are mutually supportive and not in conflict, and where the dreams of our nation's first leaders are fully realized in our own day and age."; Palin's (perhaps ineloquent) pronouncement during the 2008 Vice-Presidential debate that the "founding fathers were very wise there in allowing through the Constitution much flexibility there in the Office of the Vice-President"; and Obama's invocation in his 2008 victory speech:

> Let us remember that it was a man from this state who first carried the banner of the Republican Party to the White House—a party founded on the values of self-reliance, individual liberty, and national unity. Those are values we all share, and while the Democratic Party has won a great victory tonight, we do so with a measure of humility and determination to heal the divides that have held back our progress. As Lincoln said to a nation far more divided than ours, "We are not enemies, but friends. . .though passion may have strained[,] it must not break our bonds of affection."

Except for nomination acceptance speeches which frequently make decidedly partisan invocations of filial piety (e.g. things like 'we are the party of Lincoln' or 'we are the party of Kennedy') filial piety tends to be extremely party neutral. Republicans often invoke Democratic figures and vice-versa as Obama did in the example above. This demonstrates that by and large these figures act as American symbols, not partisan symbols and filial piety transcends political ideology as would be predicted given Bellah's (1967) theoretical work.

Sacred Texts and Symbols

The sacred texts and symbols of the ACR were also invoked often in the texts. Appendix C provides a breakdown of sacred texts and symbols by item across our three data sources. The Constitution (including the Bill of Rights) was decisively the most frequently revealed American civil religious text or symbol (64 times across the entire dataset). However, the Declaration of Independence and the Flag also played prominently (15 and 17 times respectively, in the entire dataset).

Some illustrative examples of the treatment of these symbols are: Bush's assertion, in the first 2000 debate, that judges "ought to look at the Constitution as sacred" and Gore's third debate statement: "Nine times I have raised my hand to take an oath to the Constitution, and I have never violated that oath"; and Gore's call, during his concession speech "to honour the new President-elect and do everything possible to help him bring Americans together in fulfillment of the great vision that our Declaration of Independence defines and that our constitution affirms and defends."

City on a Hill/Beacon of Hope

The City on a Hill/ U.S.A. as beacon of hope and righteousness theme was also frequently expressed—19 times in the victory and concession speeches, 159 times in the debates and 81 times in the nomination acceptance speeches. This totaled 259 times and was the most of any of the tenets and symbols examined in this study.

Examples include: Reagan's statement in his 1984 nomination acceptance speech, "Four years ago we raised a banner of bold colors—no pale pastels. We proclaimed a dream of an America that would be 'a shining city on a hill.'"; Romney's declarations, in the third debate of 2012: "what I think our mission has to be in the Middle East and even more broadly, because our purpose is to make sure the world is more—is peaceful. We want a peaceful planet. . .That's our purpose. And the mantle of leadership for the—promoting the principles of peace has fallen to America" and "This nation is the hope of the earth."; and Biden's assertion in the 2008 Vice-Presidential debate that:

> America is a nation of exceptionalism. And we are to be that shining city on a hill, as President Reagan so beautifully said, that we are a beacon of hope and that we are unapologetic here. We are not perfect as a nation. But together, we represent a perfect ideal, and that is democracy and tolerance and freedom and equal rights. Those things that we stand for that can be put to good use as a force for good in this world.

Higher Purpose

Finally, the principle of having a higher purpose above self-interest was revealed 11 times in the victory and concession speeches, 79 times during the nomination acceptance speeches and 156 times during the debates. Examples include: Bush's pronouncement in his 2000 victory speech: "Our nation must rise above a house divided. Americans share hopes and goals and values far more important than any political disagreements. Republicans want the best for our nation. And so do Democrats. Our votes may differ, but not our hopes."; Obama's statement, in the second 2008 debate "we may not always have national security issues at stake, but we have moral issues at stake. If we could have intervened effectively in the Holocaust, who among us would say that we had a moral obligation not to go in?"; and Kerry's (quoting Kennedy's inaugural address) injunction in the third Presidential debate, that "God's work must truly be our own."

In total, the principle of having a higher purpose above self-interest emerged 243 times. This was second only to the city on a hill theme. However, these two items were frequently articulated together. For example, in the first debate of 1960 Kennedy asserted that:

> The kind of country we have here, the kind of society we have, the kind of strength we build in the United States will be the defense of freedom. If we do well here, if we meet our obligations, if we're moving ahead, then I think freedom will be secure around the world. If we fail, then freedom fails.

The higher purpose (promoting freedom) intertwines smoothly with the city on a hill/beacon of hope motif. Similarly, in Ford's nomination acceptance speech he says, "Today America is at peace and seeks peace for all nations." Here again, the higher purpose (seeking peace) seamlessly intertwines with the idea of the United States being the hope of nations. While items 12 and 14 did appear separately, they were more frequency found together. This suggests that the two items may perhaps be better conceived as one theme. Minimally, it is clear that in the American civil religious discourse there is a link between the idea of serving a higher purpose and being a beacon of hope.[9]

Other Items

While all the items which were identified from the existing literature were found, not all were revealed to the same extent. In fact, points 5–11 (Rights are divinely given, Freedom comes from God through government, Governmental authority comes from God, Knowing God through the American experience, God is supreme judge, God is sovereign, America's prosperity results from God's providence) infrequently emerged, at least directly.[10] Why aren't these particular tenets articulated much in the data examined? Several possibilities present themselves.

It is possible that these tenets are: (1) not really part of the ACR, (2) are no longer a part of the ACR, or (3) are an inconsequential aspect of the ACR. If any of these are the case, it would be a major finding. This is because it would undermine what Bellah (1967) and others (e.g. Mead, 1974; Niebuhr, 1954) suggest is the core tenet of the ACR—that the nation and its actions are always subject to the judgment of God. Or if we borrow the language of Christian theology that the nation and its actions are always '*coram Deo*.' These findings do not lend much support to an argument for the centrality of this notion along the ritual dimensions of the ACR studied here.

However, other empirical evidence prevents us from accepting the above enumerated possibilities. To begin, these tenets were revealed, to some extent, in the

[9]This suspicion is supported by an extremely high correlation of 0.8618 between these two variables. See Appendix D.

[10]This finding is consistent with Marty's (1974), assertion that the nation "under God" actually has two formulations—a priestly and a prophetic mode. The priestly mode is "normally. . .celebrative, affirmative [and] culture-building. The prophetic. . .tends to be dialectical about civil religion. . .with a predisposition toward the judgmental" (p. 145). In essence, the former "comforts the afflicted" while the later "afflicts the comfortable" (p. 145). For Marty, the ACR is dominated by the priestly orientation to the notion of "under God." This means that 'God' is used primarily as a unifying group symbol. It does not represent as Mead (1974) put it, the Republic's "ideals and aspirations stand[ing] in [God's] constant judgment over the passing shenanigans of the people, reminding them of the standards by which their current practices and those of their nation are ever being judged and found wanting" (p. 60). Marty argues that the prophetic mode (which aligns well with tenets 5–10) emerges infrequently, primarily only at critical junctions in the nation's history.

data examined. Also, these tenets exist as a central part of the American civil religious tradition, along other observable dimensions. First, they fall along the individual belief dimension. Wimberley, Clelland, Hood, and Lipsey (1976) found several of these tenets (or closely related ones) in the beliefs of their survey respondents.[11] Second, these tenets are also frequently revealed in other types of important civil religious rituals. For example, The Pledge of Allegiance with its assertion of "one nation under God." This ritual suggests as Niebuhr (1954) puts it, in the US "[i]t was government of the people, for the people and by the people but always under God" (p. 133). Third, these tenets are frequently revealed indirectly. As we saw in Chap. 1, the concept of a political order subordinate to a god's sovereignty is central to the Declaration of Independence and we have just seen and will explore more in Chap. 5, this sign was frequently invoked, in the dataset and is clearly part of the ACR tradition. Lastly, as we will see below, there are clear correlations between most of these themes and the more prevalently articulated tenets and symbols of the ACR, suggesting that indeed they are part of the ACR tradition.

So, if we can't reject these items as being part of the ACR, why are they not frequently invoked in these rituals and other are? There could be something about election rituals which makes it rare for these tenets to be articulated in them. That is, the specific characteristics of election-related rituals make them inappropriate for expression here. Alternatively, there could be something about the themes themselves which make them infrequently expressed in the election rituals. Likely, both the characteristics of the rituals studied and the themes themselves contribute. Specifically, the American civil religious indicators which were more frequently revealed have one thing in common. They are all easily expressed in symbolic as opposed to narrative form. That is, they can be presented using just a word or two instead of needing to be developed more conceptually. For example, filial piety can be expressed by using a name like Lincoln or a sign like 'the founding fathers,' the sacred texts and symbols of the ACR are, of course, symbolic, the belief in God or a deity can be and usually was expressed by invoking the word 'God' or similar symbols, higher purpose was expressed by reference to a need to promote 'peace' or 'freedom' and the 'city on a hill' motif could and was expressed by the short arrangement of words 'city on a hill,' as well as through reference to 'hope' and 'leadership.' However, the ideas which were less frequently revealed do not lend themselves so easily to such concise symbolic use. Given the largely economical nature of political rhetoric it is, then not surprising that we see the more symbolic indicators of the ACR revealed more frequently compared to the more narrative indicators. In short, it appears that the infrequent presence of these themes in the datasets examined is, in part due to the economic dictates of public speech. It is uneconomical to develop certain civil religious themes when others can be employed with less expenditure (in the form of time). This is especially true

[11]However, it must be cautioned that their sampling was not very representative of the American population generally (p. 894).

Table 3.2 Frequency of ACR Articulation

	Articulations per 1000 words	Average frequency of articulation
Debates	1.68	4.58 min
Nomination acceptance speeches	4.83	95 s
Victory/Concession speeches	5.3	87 s

when a sign like the Declaration of Independence can be used as a shortcut for the longer narrative themes which are contained in the document itself. In short, this sign acts as representational shorthand for the ideas expressed in the document.

Overall Articulation

The overall articulation of American civil religious language was very high. Table 3.2 provides an illustration of how pervasive the ACR is in these election rituals. If we look at the frequency of articulations per 1000 words we found 1.68 in debates, 4.83 in the nomination acceptance speeches and 5.30 in the victory and concession speeches. If we assume an average speaker uses 130 words per minute this means a tenet or symbol of the ACR is expressed every 4.58 min in the debates and an astonishing every 95 s for the nominations acceptance speeches and every 87 s in the victory and concession speeches.

Overall, debates exhibit much less articulation per minute. The likely reason for this is that the candidates have less opportunity to determine the direction of the statements they make. Debates, unlike the other rituals examined are primarily composed of answering direct questions. The candidate is therefore restricted in some ways regarding the nature of her or his answer. This is particularly true when the question dictates a response about technical issues or specific policy positions. In these instances, it is much harder and less logical to respond with American civil religious language. Nevertheless, debates did contain a substantial amount of civil religious rhetoric.

Hypothesis Testing

In the introduction to this chapter, several hypotheses were presented which would allow us to verify or reject some of the claims about the ACR upon which this study is anchored. We will now turn to testing those hypotheses through an examination of the data.

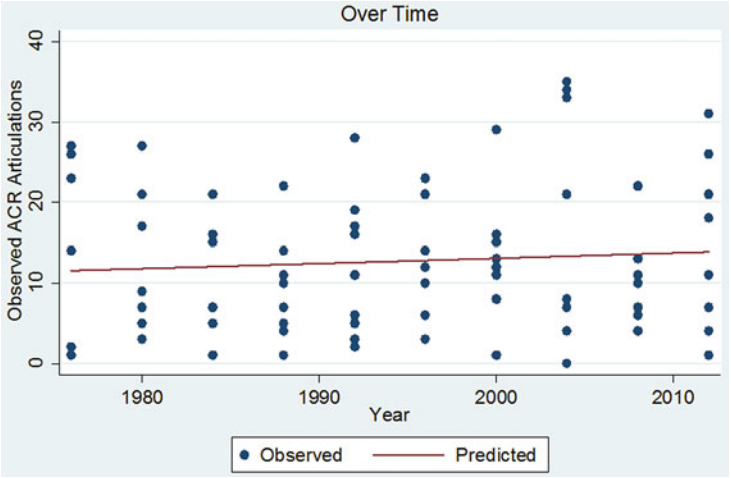

Fig. 3.2 ACR Articulation levels

Ubiquitous Narrative Form

The first hypothesis from the introduction to this chapter was that if the ACR serves as a narrative form that Americans use to think about, understand and talk about their nation, then we should see evidence of this in the cultural record. As we have just seen, the evidence presented above demonstrates ample instances of revealed uses of American civil religious themes and tenets, in political contexts, in the cultural record. We can therefore accept the hypothesis the ACR serves as a narrative form used to discuss politics in America.

Articulation Over Time

The second hypothesis was if the American civil religion has a long history and is deeply entrenched in the culture, we should see American civil religious tenets and symbols being consistently articulated over time. In other words, it should be a persistent feature within the cultural record. Squiers and Arsenault (2016) addressed this hypothesis. Figure 3.2 provides an over-laid scatterplot displaying the change in American civil religious articulations over time, between 1976 and 2012.

Points represent articulations per speech in each of the election years while the line indicates changes in the mean over time. Next these authors conducted a Dickey-Fuller test to examine changes over time. This test showed a stationary

series with consistent mean and variance across elections.[12] We can therefore accept the hypothesis that American civil religious language has been a persistent, deeply entrenched feature of American culture, over time.

Party Difference

Our third hypothesis was that if the ACR is widely diffused and transcends particularism and party lines, we should find that there is no statistically significant difference in the way that individuals with different party affiliations use American civil religious language. This hypothesis was also tested by Squiers and Arsenault (2016) by conducting a two-sample t-test of differences in levels of American civil religious articulation between Democrats and Republicans. First, a robust test for equality of variance between Democrats and Republicans was conducted. Because a p-value of 0.002 indicated a significant difference between sample variances, a two-sample t-test with unequal variances was applied. The authors found that the mean levels of American civil religious articulation between Democrats ($M = 11.71$, $SD = 0.20$) and Republicans ($M = 14.11$, $SD = 1.70$) did not differ significantly, $t\ (75) = -1.15$, $p = 0.25$. This means then that we can accept the hypothesis as presented above. There is no significant difference between Democrats and Republicans in terms of their levels of articulation of American civil religious themes and symbols.

Incumbents vs. Non-incumbents

The next hypothesis presented, in the introduction to this chapter was that if 'pontifex maximus' is a real function of the presidency and the ACR is as central to the American self-understanding as it has been theorized, then anyone running for President would be equally versed and proficient in it and willing to articulate its discourse. Squiers and Arsenault (2016) tested this hypothesis by comparing the mean articulations of revealed American civil religious language throughout the dataset between incumbents and non-incumbents. First, these authors conducted a robust test for equality of variance between incumbent and non-incumbent candidates. A p-value of 0.051 was found indicating no statistically significant differences between sample variances. Therefore, a two-sample t-test with equal variances was used. No significant difference between the mean level of American

[12]To complete the Dickey-Fuller test, mean revealed ACR was calculated for each election. This produced a short time series with an n of 10. The authors took into consideration the limited power of unit root tests with small-n data. Nevertheless, the test statistic for ACR articulations, $Z(t) = -3.016$ is less than a ten percent critical value of -3.240. Subsequently, they could reject the null hypothesis and conclude the time series is stationary.

civil religious articulation of incumbents (M = 13.9, SD = 11.67) and non-incumbent (M = 12.21, SD 8.10) was found, t (32) = −0.49, p = 0.63. We can therefore accept the hypothesis as stated above. There are no significant differences between the way incumbents and non-incumbents use American civil religious language.

Vice-Presidential vs. Presidential Candidates

Our fifth hypothesis was that if the ACR is a foundational narrative of the American people, Vice-Presidential candidates would be as likely to articulate its elements as Presidential candidates. Squiers and Arsenault (2016) also tested this hypothesis by comparing the mean articulation of Vice-Presidential and Presidential candidates during the debates. Only data from the debates were used because it was the only source of data which included Vice-Presidential candidates. The authors coded total American civil religious articulations measures for Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates as the total of American civil religious articulations divided by the total number of debates to establish comparable figures. This calculation did not indicate a clear difference between mean American civil religious articulations between Vice-Presidential and Presidential candidates. The authors then conducted a two-sample t-test of differences in levels of American civil religious articulation between Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates. A robust test for equality of variance between Vice-Presidential candidates and Presidential candidates was conducted. A p-value of 0.616 indicated no statistically significant differences between sample variances. Thus, a two-sample t-test with equal variances was applied. The authors found that the difference in means between Presidential candidates (M = 7.39, SD = 0.70) and Vice-Presidential candidates (M = 6.176, SD 0.93) was not significantly different, t (33) = 1.46, p = 0.30. We can therefore accept the hypothesis presented above. Vice-Presidential candidates are as likely to use the language of the ACR as Presidential candidates.

Victory vs. Concession

The next hypothesis found in the introduction to this chapter was that concession speeches should contain less American civil religious language compared to victory speeches. Squiers and Arsenault (2016) conducted a two-sample t-test examining the victory and concession speeches from the dataset (excluding Gore's 2000 concession speech).[13] First, these authors conducted a robust test for equality of

[13]Gore's 2000 concession speech was a noticeable outlier in the dataset. It contained 16 American civil religious articulations, nine more articulations (229%) than the next highest concession observation, Jimmy Carter's 1980 concession speech. The inclusion of an outlier such as this

variance between victory and concession speeches. A p-value of 0.196 indicated no significant difference between sample variances. Because of this a two-sample t-test with equal variances was applied. They found that concession speeches ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 0.68$) had significantly higher American civil religious articulation levels than victory speeches ($M = 6.40$, SD 0.92), $t(18) = -3.10$, $p = 0.01$. Thus, they found a statistically significant difference between articulations of the ACR in concession and victory speeches. The mean articulation scores for victory speeches are 3.62 points higher than concession speeches. We can therefore accept this hypothesis. Victory speeches are more likely to contain American civil religious language than concession speeches.

Cohesive Narrative Form

The seventh hypothesis found in the introduction to this chapter was if the ACR is a cohesive narrative form, its elements should be strongly, positively correlated with each other. Squiers and Arsenault (2016) generated a correlation matrix which included all 14 tenets and symbols theorized to be part of the ACR discussed above. This can be found in Appendix D. This allowed these authors to examine the relationship each of the 14 variables had with the other 13 variables.

Of the 14 variables, 11 were positively correlated at statistically significant levels with at least two other variables. The mean number of statistically significant correlations for these variables was 4.27.

Only three items had no statistically significant correlation with the other American civil religious variables. They were: The sanctity of American institutions, God is sovereign and America's prosperity results from God's providence. That these variables were not correlated with other items puts their inclusion in the American civil religious narrative into question. However, we did see a fair amount of occurrences of the idea of the sanctity of American institutions being revealed (36 in total). Furthermore, as was discussed above the idea of a sovereign god is contained in the Declaration of Independence which falls within a category that is clearly linked to the ACR tradition.

Additionally, the other items which were revealed less in the dataset often do have positive correlations which were statistically significant. This suggests that these variables do belong to the ACR tradition.

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would artificially inflate the variance, and subsequently decrease the t-statistic. Subsequently this may lead to an incorrect acceptance of the null hypothesis, i.e. accepting that there is no statistically significant difference between concession and victory speeches regarding American civil religious articulations. Furthermore, the unusual circumstances under which this speech was given (see discussion below) makes it unique in comparison to the other concession speeches in the dataset. This provides the authors with additional theoretical grounds for excluding this outliner, in this test. Not only is it quantitatively different it is qualitatively different.

In total the matrix allowed the authors to examine 91 relationships. Of those 91 relationships, a full 26 (28.6%) were statistically significant and all positively correlated. Furthermore, as Appendix D illustrates many of these correlations are very strong.

In sum, these authors found considerable positive correlations between the ACR themes and symbols. Because of this, we can accept the hypothesis as stated. There is considerable cohesion between most of our variables. In other words, these themes and symbols 'belong together.' This lends credence to the idea that the ACR is a cohesive narrative form.

Exclusivity

The final hypothesis from the introduction to this chapter was if American civil religious language is not the exclusive domain of anyone, it should be articulated by all in a relatively similar way. Above we have seen that there are no differences in the ways those of different political parties, incumbents and non-incumbents and Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates make use of the themes and symbols of the ACR. This allows us to accept the hypothesis that the ACR is not the exclusive domain of anyone. It is a universal narrative. Consequently, we are warranted in rejecting the application of the resource model to American civil religious signs.

Discussion

This empirical study of American civil religious language has revealed several things. First, it has allowed us to verify some fundamental assumptions about the ACR. In particular, we found substantial and widespread use of American civil religious tenets and symbols lending credence to the idea that the ACR can be understood as a narrative form used to talk about and understand the American nation. Furthermore, we also found considerable stability in the level of articulation of the language of the ACR over time, no statically significant differences in articulation between parties, no statically significant difference between incumbents and non-incumbents and no statically significant difference between Vice-Presidential and Presidential candidates. These findings show that indeed the ACR is a pervasive, deeply entrenched and widely diffused cultural phenomenon which transcends particularism and political affiliation. In a word, they show its universality.

Moreover, since we have found no statically significant difference in American civil religious articulation between the actors examined, we can conclude that the ACR is a narrative form which lacks exclusivity. All the actors engaging in speech acts, in the data examined, exhibited use of the American civil religious narrative

form. This suggests that no one has any particular authority relative to anyone else to use the narrative. This finding also justifies our rejection of the resource model discussed in the second chapter on grounds of its failed ability to account for instances where there is no identifiable authority to use the sign (i.e. to speak from a position of entitlement).

This conclusion gets complicated by the finding that victory speeches contain significantly more civil religious language than do concession speeches. However, we must note that concession speeches are by no means devoid of American civil religious language. This indicates that the loser still maintains authority (has entitlement) to speak using the ACR contextual framework. The fact of less articulation in concession speeches is better attributed to the idea of one not wanting to frame a political loss in socio-religious, transcendent terms because of the impact that might have on his or her future political career and ego and his or her party's future. While it is easy to imagine one saying *my victory* is a triumph of righteousness and good; it is hard to imagine one saying *my loss* is a result of the triumph of righteousness and good. It is also unlikely that the loser would say, my loss was a result of the triumph of iniquity. This would mean the triumph of iniquity over the sacred ritual of democratic elections and of the sacred principle of popular sovereignty which are both codified in the sacred scriptures. This, in turn, would be inconsistent with the revealed rhetorical civil religious faithfulness of every concession speech giver throughout the electoral season.

Far from not having the authority to speak the American civil religious language, in the concession speech, the election loser actually plays a unique and seemingly very important priestly role. She or he reaffirms the ACR from the perspective of the losing theologian. Through the concession, the loser, in effect, reaffirms that the process and system through which she or he lost are just and righteous and because of this she or he accepts the loss. This is an extremely important teaching in the ACR. The loser provides a periodic reminder to the *civitas* to remain faithful to the sacred scripture and the sacred order it frames. In terms of maintaining the ACR, this is an especially important message to give to those who are on the losing side of the election (i.e. voters and supporters of the losing candidate) who may have powerful emotional responses (e.g. anger, disappointment, disillusionment, etc.). In the concession rite, the losing candidate, still a priest of the ACR, intervenes quickly before these emotions can translate into a crisis of faith which could jeopardize national solidarity. He or she must essentially reiterate, to those on the losing side that what "was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said 'the judgments of the Lord [of the ACR] are true and righteous altogether'" (Lincoln, 1865). Even if one does not like an outcome or agree with it or understand it, one must accept it. One must keep the faith in the ACR.

This point could not be made any clearer than by looking at Gore's 2000 concession speech. To begin, this speech revealed substantially more ACR tenets and symbols than any other concession speech in the dataset. Moreover, it revealed substantially more than any of the victory speeches, which as we saw are typically more American civil religious laden. The historical significance of Gore's speech, obviously, is that it came on the heels of the most closely contested election in

modern American history, it was unprecedentedly protracted 5 weeks by vote recounts and judicial proceedings and ultimately, the outcome was decided by the Supreme Court, another unprecedented fact of the matter. Additionally, we might add that (regardless of the merits) there were also accusations of voter fraud and disenfranchisement. In short, the election left a bad taste in the mouth of many and this had the potential to let doubt creep into the civic faith of many. The election had the potential to produce a widespread crisis of faith. However, this did not happen, in part we might assume because Gore stepped forth in his priestly role to prevent it from happening. He states:

> Almost a century and a half ago, senator Stephen Douglas told Abraham Lincoln, who had just defeated him for the presidency, "Partisan feeling must yield to patriotism. I'm with you, Mr President, and God bless you." Well, in that same spirit, I say to President-elect Bush that what remains of partisan rancour must now be put aside, and may God bless his stewardship of this country. Neither he nor I anticipated this long and difficult road. Certainly neither of us wanted it to happen. Yet it came, and now it has ended, resolved, as it must be resolved, through the honoured institutions of our democracy [sic]." (Gore, 2000, Concession)

This short passage abounds with American civil religious language. There is, for example, filial piety, references to God and the notion that the elections of the nation are sacred. The ACR serves to contextualize the idea that: "I have lost and the other guy has won; but, we cannot let this produce national disunity. We are united by these sacred totems—God unites us, Abraham Lincoln unites us and our democratic institutions unite us." Gore is not alone here. As Corcoran (1994) has illustrated a "call to unite" is a "main element" of concession speeches (p. 115) and as we can see, the totems of the ACR are often invoked in this call for national unity. In sum, the priest performing the Presidential election concession rite of the ACR is tasked with an extremely crucial civil religious vocation—preventing a crisis of faith from overtaking the people and preventing the unraveling of national unity. Although Corcoran (1994) does not examine the issue through the lens of the ACR he makes a similar point in his assertion that "The concession speech is an institutionalized public speech act integral to democratic life and the legitimacy of authority. . .[it is] more conducive to the democratic process than the Presidential coronation" (p. 114).

The second thing the empirical investigation above has revealed is the rhetorical features of the ACR, at least as they manifest in cultural artifacts stemming from the rituals examined. We found considerable evidence that Filial piety, Sacred texts and symbols, The sanctity of American institutions, The belief in God or deity, City on a Hill, Sacrificial death and rebirth and Higher purpose all have a strong presence in the rhetoric of public political discourse. We also found a measurable presence of all the other items and discussed the way some items could be encapsulated in signs like the Declaration of Independence.

Thirdly, this empirical investigation revealed high amounts of positive, strong correlation between the various signs and ideas associated with the ACR. This provides solid evidence that the ACR serves as a cohesive narrative form through which Americans speak about and subsequently understand politics.

The empirical study above has also enabled us to verify a fundamental assumption of the semiotic model presented in the last chapter. In this model, it was assumed that civil religious signs are associated with enhanced emotionality which in turn makes their corresponding signifieds more likely to act as orientating signifieds. Since we know that rituals are associated with heightened emotionality and we have found that American civil religious signs have a prominent place in American election rituals we can be secure in the fairness of this assumption.

Finally, from the empirical investigation above we were able to identify relevant American civil religious signs (e.g. those found in Appendixes B and C) for further investigation. In the next two chapters, we will examine the signs of filial piety referencing the founding fathers and signs of the sacred texts of the ACR (the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence), respectively.

Signs referencing the founding fathers were chosen for two reasons. First, the last chapter began with a discussion of two anecdotes about references to the founding fathers. This observation and a few others like it served as the impetus for writing this book. The study of signs referencing the founding fathers then reflects the personal interest of this author. Second, (and more importantly) as we will see in the review of literature in the next chapter, filial piety in general and the role of the founding fathers as referent objects within the ACR tradition has been severely neglected in the ACR literature, despite the fact that the above findings suggests that they are a central element of the ACR.

To compliment the investigation of signs referencing the founding fathers and in order to have more confidence in the generalizability of the findings, a second group of signs is needed for comparative purposes. For this, signs referencing the sacred texts of the ACR have been chosen. They will be examined together in one section because their status as written documents makes them a logical class. There are two reasons these specific signs have been chosen for further inquiry. The first is the number of times these signs were articulated in the dataset. The Constitution was by far the most frequently articulated American civil religious sign and the Declaration of Independence was also at the top of the most frequently articulated signs. Together they comprised more articulations than all the other items identified under Sacred Texts and Symbols combined. The large sample size gives us additional confidence in the generalizability of the findings. Second, as we will see in Chap. 6, the role of the Constitution (and to a lesser degree, the Declaration of Independence), in public law has special implications for the playing out of the politics of the sacred in the institutional politics of the United States.

By parsing these two types of signs, we will be able to reveal key facets of the contestation of the politics of the sacred revealing, in turn, the details of the particularistic element of the ACR.

Chapter 4
The Apotheosis of the Founding Fathers and Signs of Filial Piety

Introduction

In Chap. 2, a theoretical model was presented to explain the use of civil religious signs in public political discourse. In the last chapter, a broad empirical investigation into American civil religious discourse in election-related rituals was undertaken which demonstrated the widespread use of American civil religious language and verified important assumptions about it. This investigation also helped to identify relevant civil religious signs by investigating the themes and symbols theorized to be components of the ACR tradition. One of the themes explored was filial piety which revealed the sign, 'The Founding Fathers' and associated variations as relevant signs in the American civil religious tradition. This chapter provides a nuanced examination of the use of some signs associated with filial piety, those indexing the founding fathers. This examination will reveal the particularistic characteristics of the ACR.

Although a coherent articulation of filial piety and its associated signs within the ACR literature has yet to be developed, a quick survey of anecdotal evidence will start to suggest that indeed it is an integral part of this faith tradition. To illustrate, during the election night coverage of the 2012 American elections, this researcher alternated viewing between several of the most popular national networks in an effort to see what similarities and differences in coverage and narrative could reveal about American politics and American culture more generally. One of the most striking observations was the ubiquitous repetition of the notion of the acumen and virtue of the American constitutional system. Specifically, this idea was expressed almost identically by several network commenters with reference to the American 'founding fathers' who created the system, in their 'wisdom.' Similarly, we saw anecdotes in the second chapter which suggest that 'The Founding Fathers' are also important in American public political discourse. Indeed, even a casual observer of American politics will be familiar with the notion of the founding father's wisdom and the type of references to the founding fathers as they are expressed in these types of anecdotes.

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To fully explore the role of the founding fathers in the ACR, however, we must first explore what is meant by 'the founding fathers.' When we say 'the founding fathers' we can actually differentiate between at least two things. First, the founding fathers are a group of historical and historic figures. They are real people who existed and lived in the *Lebenwelt*, in the past and had a role in the political and social development of the United States of America.[1] This was an ideologically, politically, religiously, etc., diverse group of people. A group of historic figures is *who* the founding fathers are. But, we can also ask *what* the founding fathers are. 'The Founding Fathers' is something more than a group of historical people. It is a concept or idea. When expressed, 'The Founding Fathers' is a common cultural sign. It is an intersubjectively available, socially shared representation, which has the potential to communicate some meaning from one person to another. In order to differentiate between the group of people and the idea of those people we will use 'The Founding Fathers' exclusively to refer to the cultural sign.

When we examine the existing literature on the ACR we see two ways it has attempted to deal with the founding fathers. First, several scholars have explored the founding fathers as people and attempted to outline their relation to the ACR from a historical perspective. Bellah (1967), for example, suggested that the founding fathers had a role in helping to shape the ACR. Building on this idea, Albanese (1975), does a thorough job demonstrating how the historical figures we call the founding fathers had a significant hand in developing the mythological ethos of the ACR through ritualistic and symbolic interaction necessitated by a need for unity and group identification during the revolutionary period. Furthermore, Lambert (2003, 2011) has also shown that the actions of the founding fathers set the groundwork for an American civil religion.

Undoubtedly, where and in what way the ACR started has great bearing on what it looks like and how it is able to develop or transform over time. But, at some point those included in the category of founding fathers were no longer active participants in American social life or its civil religion. After their deaths, any impact these figures could have, either individually or collectively (perhaps with the exception of the odd discovery of lost writings) is indirect. Any impact they could have would need to be through the living. Specifically, it would need to be as some type of idea expressed (e.g. as a sign) by a living person which is somehow associated with the historical person or group.

Since the founding fathers are no longer actively, directly engaged in social processes, we are left with two approaches to studying their connection to the ACR. The first would be to do as the scholars above have done and explore them from a historical perspective. This could certainly be a valid scholarly endeavor; but, it would tell us little about their impact on the ACR today because, as was just

[1]The exact time in which these people lived and who specifically this includes is debatable. However, the vagueness of the concept does not pose a problem for us. In essence, it means that it can mean different things to different people as the model in Chap. 2 suggests it should. What is of importance is that for people the signified which is associated with this signifier is afforded a sacred quality, as we will see below.

discussed, they themselves have no independent impact. Essentially, we know that they were instrumental in the creation of the ACR but not where, how or even if they form a constitutive element of this tradition. In order to understand this, we would have to take the second approach—to examine the founding fathers from the perspective of them being an idea which is present today. That is, we need to examine them as 'The Founding Fathers,' i.e. as an expressed idea, as a referent object within the ACR. We need to examine them as a sign.

Some scholars have moved in this direction by looking at individual founding fathers like George Washington or Thomas Jefferson as being American civil religious symbols (Bellah, 1967, 1975; Hay, 1969a; Herberg, 1973) and historical scholarship has also hinted at a symbolic role of individual founding fathers (Ellis, 1997; Furstenberg, 2006; Greenhalgh, 2007; Hay, 1969b; McCullough, 2008; McDonald, 1999; Peterson, 1960). However, these works have either missed an explicit civil religious connection which brings them into the wider discourse on the ACR or overlooked the important fact that Americans often speak of 'The Founding Fathers' i.e. they speak of them as a singular sign. Although not articulated in the language of the ACR, the latter point has not been lost on Ellis (2000). He recognizes this, in his important historical outline of the relationship between various founding fathers, asserting, "[t]he apparently irresistible urge to capitalize and mythologize as 'Founding Fathers' the most prominent members of the political leadership during this formative phase has some historical as well as psychological foundation" (p. 12).

Besides correcting the vulnerabilities in the literature just highlighted, exploring the founding fathers as a unified sign is an interesting area because it conflates, into a unified symbol, a large and politically, religiously and ideologically diverse group of individuals. This is a group, it is worth reminding the reader that includes both Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton. The latter, of course, was shot and killed by the former in a dual prompted by political rancor. Yet, somehow these two men can be included as part of the same socio-cultural idea which is expressed in 'The Founding Fathers' or similar signs.

In sum, something is missing from the current literature on the ACR as it relates to the founding fathers. There has been no exploration of 'The Founding Fathers' (i.e. as a unified idea) as a constitutive element of the ACR. In addition to the anecdotes above, the review of the existing literature above provides two reasons why, taken collectively, 'The Founding Fathers' should have a significant role as a referent object in the ACR. First, they were instrumental in its creation. We know, for example, that in other religious traditions important founding figures are central referent objects within that tradition. The Buddha, Jesus, Peter, Paul, Muhammad, Lenin and Mao serve as ready examples. There is even precedent for the conflation of individuals into a unified symbol which acts as a referent object within a religious tradition, e.g. the Apostles. Second, many scholars have argued that individual fathers serve as referent objects within the ACR tradition. That fact that so often these individuals are grouped together raises the notion that there is a civil religious dimension to them collectively and by extension the signs which point to them.

This chapter corrects the gap in the literature by theorizing the inclusion of 'The Founding Fathers' as a referent object in the ACR. More importantly for the present study, however, theorizing the place of this sign and its variants in the ACR provides us with an opportunity to help understand why some signs have special status in the American *Volksweltanschauung*. In Chap. 2, it was argued that signs which are used ritually have special emotional significance because of their use in those rituals. But, this reveals little about why some particular signs are used ritually and others are not.

This chapter will show that four significant conditions surrounding 'The Founding Fathers' help to establish its special status. They are: (1) the role the founding fathers had in establishing the independent existence of the *civitas*; (2) the *civitas'* role in shaping spiritual meaning for the American people; (3) the founding fathers' connection to two important civil religious documents (the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence; and (4) a deeply entrenched, cultural-historical tradition of filial piety. In short, what is found is that there is a direct connection between the shared historical, cultural experiences of the American people and the constitutive elements of the ACR narrative.

After theorizing 'The Founding Fathers' and related signs in the ACR, the chapter will then apply the model presented in Chap. 2 to understand the use of these signs in public political discourse, providing an idea of how this type of sign functions in this province generally. We will find that the sign, 'The Founding Fathers' and variations of it are consistently used in public political discourse in a particularistic way which attempts to tie the candidates and/or the candidates' preferred issue positions to the American civil religious sacred and that this has consequences for the successful resolution of differing issue positions.

The Advent of 'The Founding Fathers'

The first recorded use of the sign 'The Founding Fathers' was in 1916, by former President but then US Senator, Warren G. Harding. In his keynote address to the Republican National Convention, he exhorted the audience to be "as genuinely American today as when the founding fathers flung their immortal defiance in the face of old world oppressions and dedicated a new republic to liberty and justice" (Quoted in Bernstein, 2009, p. 4). Although it appears that Harding coined the term, this lofty political oration was not all that original. In fact, Harding was following a rather well-worn path in American political discourse. Slightly more than 50 years earlier President Lincoln, for example, famously stated at the dedication to the national cemetery in Gettysburg that "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

Lincoln's and Harding's speeches contain several features in common. To begin, there is the obvious use of a paternal sign to point to American revolutionary figures. Lincoln invokes the simple 'fathers' but qualifies it with a date these

'fathers' acted, 1776—a date clearly significant in the founding of the United States. Harding forgoes a specific temporal reference but like Lincoln, clearly indexes the same period with his use of the "founding fathers." Furthermore, additional examination reveals that both speakers posit some venture or project of these paternal figures and that there is an obligation on the living to continue that project. Indeed, this idea of an undertaking can itself be traced back to the revolutionary period. It is the *cœptis* which has been approved, the advent of a *Novus ordo seclorum*. These ideas, of course, are found on the reverse of the Great Seal of the United States. For Harding, the obligation was to be 'genuinely American today' in order to continue the task of liberty and justice of "the founding fathers." Likewise, for Lincoln it was to "take increased devotion to. . .a new birth of freedom" so that "government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth." In both instances, there is a call to maintain the charge of the revolutionary 'fathers,' to follow through on their *cœptis*. Lastly, we can see that both speeches contain an unambiguous connection between the paternal figures and the ideas of freedom and equality.

In sum, these examples show a commingling of three elements. First there is the invoking of paternal figures. Second, these paternal figures are associated with a project of liberty or equality or both. Third, there is a corresponding obligation on the living to continue that project. In combination, these elements form a powerful historic narrative or mythology of a people.

We have just seen the idea that the founding fathers had a specific *cœptis* can be traced back to the revolutionary period. However, the work of the prominent historian, Wesley Craven (1956) demonstrates that the roots of other parts of this paternalistic mythology are also deeply seeded in the American *Volksweltanschauung*, having their advent along with the advent of the people as a self-reflective community. In his classic work on the founding fathers, Craven (1956) shows that these elements were an integral part of the nascent social-historical narrative of the new nation which sought to provide a "historical sanction" (p. 3) to legitimize the grand undertaking unfolding at the time of the Revolution.

In short, Craven (1956) shows that "popular tradition in New England had come by 1765 to attribute the [Puritan] founding of that community to the very ideals we associate with the Revolutionary fathers" (p. 33). Central to this was to "attribute to the [Puritan] founders the establishment of a new order of human freedom" (p. 22). Furthermore, he shows that at the time of the Revolution there was a "disposition to view the liberties of the community as an inheritance from [those Puritan] fathers" (p. 22) and subsequently to see the revolutionary efforts as attempts to ensure that that inheritance was not squandered and the sacrifices of the Puritan fathers were not in vain.

Craven comes to these conclusions via a meticulous historical reconstruction which takes into account ritualistic social elements such as Forefathers' Day which was celebrated widely in New England in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries and often centered on the themes highlighted above. It also took into account the textual contents of key cultural artifacts from the revolutionary period. For example, Craven highlights the fact that John Adams' influential "A Dissertation on the

Canon and Feudal Law" argued for a resistance to the Stamp Act founded on an "appeal to history, and more particularly the history of New England" (p. 28).

The result of these things and others like it was the construction of a "national ideal" (p. 87) that represented those responsible for the initial European founding of the colonies. They were as Craven states, an "attempt by a new nation to find for itself a suitable group of national heroes" (p. 87) and of course national heroes needed a heroic narrative. In an important and consequential way, this heroic narrative served as the underlying myth of the American Revolution, lending legitimacy to it and providing affective support for the initiative, according to Craven.

But, this myth, although containing all the elements of the one promulgated by Lincoln and Harding referenced an entirely different set of heroes. While Washington is an exception as Craven (1956) puts, it being "deified, as a symbol of national unity, while he still lived. . .the rest of the great leaders of the Revolution, those we have agreed in later years to honor, lived on and fought on as active participants in [American] political life. In other words, they were not yet available for deification" (p. 87). At some point, however, a new generation of heroes emerged which at the time of the Revolution were not available for apotheosis because their feats and words were too immediate. So, the question becomes, "When did 'The Founding Fathers' come to mean the revolutionary fathers and not the Puritan fathers?"

The 'Glorious Exit' of Jefferson and Adams

According to Craven (1956):

> Before 1800 apologies for the review of familiar events in Fourth of July orations were being replaced by tributes to 'our fathers' for their courage and their sacrifice. [However,] Lyman Butterfield [(1953)] suggested that the emotional outburst which all across the country greeted the news that John Adams and Thomas Jefferson both had died on the Fourth of July, 1826, marks the point at which the American people came to remember the Revolutionary fathers for what they had agreed upon rather than for their disputes with one another. Whatever specific date one might wish to choose, it lies well forward in the nineteenth century. (p. 88)

Hay (1969b) also stresses the importance of this unlikely event in the formation of a devotion to the revolutionary fathers. He argues that the "glorious exit" of Jefferson and Adams "served as an occasion for the patterning of an optimistic legend which met the psychological needs of the countrymen they left behind them. The circumstances of [Jefferson's and Adams'] departure had given the American people a new faith in themselves and in the republican experiment" which the revolutionary fathers set into motion (p. 555). This was due in large part (as Hay convincingly shows) to the contemporary belief that their almost simultaneous deaths on such a historically significant day for the nation could not have been mere coincidence but was a providential event demonstrating divine sanction for the American experiment. Hay's meticulous readings of funeral and remembrance

orations and newspaper editorials after the deaths of the two men clearly demonstrate the ubiquity with which this notion was propagated throughout the country.

Another important element to the story of these men's deaths is that Adams and Jefferson had a personal and political estrangement which was publicly known. Yet, in later years the two reconciled and maintained a friendship marked by frequent, cordial correspondence and mutual respect. Likely, this personal reconciliation coupled with the 'cosmic' connection of their deaths on the fiftieth anniversary of Independence Day helped to create the impression that whatever it was that united them was of the most importance and deemphasized whatever it was that divided them. In short, the impression was that personal or political differences could not disconnect these figures. Not even the forces of nature would allow the true unity of the two to be overlooked. Indeed, the forces of nature would suggest a direct connection between the two and with the divine.

It is then not a far leap to image that if these two figures were thus united, this union would be extended to other heroes of the revolutionary period. Were they not also associated with Adams and Jefferson? Did they not also have important roles in the nation's creation?

In the study of American history, it has frequently been noted that Washington was already the object of god-like veneration during his life and this veneration continued after his death in 1799 (Craven, 1956; Cunliffe, 1958; Ellis, 2004; Fitz, 2002; Furstenberg, 2006; Greenhalgh, 2007; Gorski, 2011a; Hay, 1969a; Longmore, 1988; Meyer, 2001; Schwartz, 1987). As we have seen, Butterfield (1953), Craven (1956) and Hay (1969b) all suggest that the strange occurrence of Adams' and Jefferson's deaths along with their status as important socio-political figures allowed them to become apotheosized. This idea is further supported by Peterson (1960) and Wood and Brick (2006). Thus, these two historical figures joined Washington and an American pantheon began to emerge, a pantheon populated by political gods. Of course, people like Adams, Jefferson, and Washington would occupy special places in the pantheon; but, other revolutionary figures would also join them. This is because they too had a hand in the construction of the United States and its sacred foundational documents—things it was believed God approved of—*Annuit cœptis*—and had revealed his approval of by facilitating Jefferson's and Adams' assumptions on America's most important civic day, Independence Day.

In the end, a sort of mythological shorthand emerged linking symbols like Washington, Adams and Jefferson into one idea, an idealistic idea which imparted these figures with a connection to the supernatural—a connection to the divine.

History and Hagiography

This mythology was propagated and reinforced by the early historical accounts of the period which depicted revolutionary figures in sensationalized, heroic, hagiographic and hyperbolic ways (Craven, 1956; Fisher, 1912). In fact, it was so pervasive that its remnants are still with us. It can be seen, for example, as the basic organizing principle

for a substantial portion of contemporary, scholarly historical accounts of the founding fathers, either to reconstruct a more realistic account of the people and the actual historical events which underlie the myth (e.g. Ellis, 2000) or to emphasize the differences between the various fathers and undermine the part of the myth which contains the notion of a unified group (e.g. Wood & Brick, 2006). It's fair to say that in some ways, contemporary academic histories of the revolutionary period are a conversation against the apotheosis and hagiography of this early literature. Subsequent literature has humanized these figures; but the fact that it must do this so self-consciously says as much about present times as it does about the past literature. That is, the contemporary histories are not only speaking in contradistinction to past histories, they are speaking to popular perceptions formed by those past histories—not the perceptions of professional academics, but the perceptions of the (wo)man on the street.

In essence, there are histories which coexist. For example, there is the history of George Washington as presented by scholars such as Ellis (2004), Furstenberg (2006) and Longmore (1988) and then there is the history of Washington that every school child knows exemplified in Parson Weems' fable about Washington being so virtuous that when confronted he was unable to lie about hewing the cherry tree. The former is a history of empirics and evidences. It is true according to this criterion. The latter is a history forged by the ideals of a people and is true in an affective sense. It is true in that it reflects an idea, the spirit of Washington. The events might be apocryphal; but, the essence of the story is true, nonetheless, because it captures some deeper truth about Washington. The former is a profane history because it only deals with things of this world. The latter, is a totemic history, a sacred history because it deals with something spiritual. It is an American civil religious history.

This is not to say that the latter history is devoid of the empirical. Apocrypha aside, the sacred history is cemented by the empirical facts of past events. For example, Ellis (2000) and others demonstrate that historical evidence shows real connections between many of the historical figures we call the founding fathers. This is something that was never in contention; but more importantly the empirical histories clearly show that there was a concerted, corporate effort asserted by these individuals toward common ends. They worked together in institutional settings to create and carry out actions. Whatever the connection one makes between the founding fathers as individuals, however one constructs this idea 'The Founding Fathers,' the construction is based in demonstrable empirics. The sacred history, however, does not limit itself to those facts. It uses those facts to illustrate the 'truth' of the spirt enmeshed in and inseparable from the historic figures, artifacts and events.

These two histories, the sacred and profane exist together uneasily. The empirical (the profane) presents itself contrarily to the ideal (the sacred). This opposition legitimates the profane. It is legitimate because it stands against idealization. But at the same time this opposition also delegitimizes the profane because it can never account for the spirit of the history. Simultaneously, the sacred relies on the empirical. That is, the sacred is itself legitimated through the reference to the profane or empirical origins of itself. But, it is also delegitimized by 'truth' challenges and empirical validation called for by the profane histories.

The coexistence of these histories can, if intellectualized cause problems of cognitive dissonance. It is hard, for example, to reconcile the spirt of human equality with the fact that many of the founding fathers owned slaves and contributed to the subjugation of woman. So, what prevents this cognitive dissonance from producing widespread existential anxiety and causing the whole mythology to unravel and the *nomos* to collapse?

The easy answer is that, for the most part, the two histories are not intellectualized widely in this way. Instead, they are compartmentalized. One deals with them individually. On the Fourth of July one experiences the sacred history and when one watches the History Channel (s)he experiences the profane history. One rarely has to deal with a direct confrontation of these elements. There is no passage about the genocide of indigenous Americans in the Pledge of Allegiance.

But more than that, we can also see that the undermining of the sacred history by the profane history also results in the refining and strengthening of the sacred history. This happens because the sacred history admits to profane elements and the sacredness becomes a relative sacredness. The founding fathers made mistakes; they were human. Admitting to that means that one does not have to throw them away because they are not perfect. Instead, one can admit to an imperfect sacristy and thereby buttress this sacristy against all kinds of allegations of profanity. "Yes, of course" one is able to rationalize, "there are profane elements; but, that does not mean that they do not have sacred qualities." The sacred thus remains insulated from profane attacks. It is not slavery, genocide or the subjugation of woman which is sacred. Those are profane elements. It is wisdom, or the political ideal, or freedom or democracy or the 'American spirit' which is sacred and these stand apart from the repression and brutality.

From Puritan to Revolutionary Fathers

Two observations about the brief historical review above further help us understand the place of 'The Founding Fathers' in the ACR. First, the transformation was just that, a transformation and not a transmutation. That is to say, it is important for us to observe that while a change in the object of veneration occurred, the core elements of the piety remained intact. The persistence of filial piety in the American tradition over that amount of time suggests a deep permeation of the idea within the historical socio-cultural awareness of the people and the importance of it as a social value. It is hard to imagine that it would have persisted and have even been modified if it were not a significant social practice.

Second, it is significant that the objects of filial piety changed from the Puritan fathers to the revolutionary fathers. This supports two important contentions about the ACR found in the extant literature. The first contention is that the social condition of religious pluralism forces a civic piety that is, for the most part, devoid of sectarian religious symbols. Purdy (1982) argued religious pluralism was an important explanatory variable in the way Indonesian civil religion developed and

Mead, (1971), Coleman (1970), Cole and Hammond (1974) and Hammond (1980c) have stressed its importance in the unique character the American civil religious tradition has taken. Furthermore, Bellah (1967), Marty (1959) and Hecht (2007) have identified religious pluralism as a sort of restraint on the way religious ideas and practices manifest in public contexts in American society. Bellah and Marty, for example see the ACR as a sort of generalized religion that lacks clearly defined references to particular sectarian religious groups or to sectarian symbols being articulated by public figures. Underlying all these authors' arguments is the idea that the fact of religious pluralism prevents the use of sectarian religious symbols from being used as totemic symbols. Quite simply, they would have very little integrative potential and would likely have disintegrative potential because people from a given tradition would not rally behind symbols from traditions other than their own and would feel alienated by their use.

Given this, that the revolutionary fathers not the Puritan fathers would emerge as a collective symbol under these conditions is intuitive. Both sets of 'fathers' represented civic authority and could act as civic symbols; but, the Puritan fathers also represented sectarian religious authority in a way the revolutionary fathers never did. Since the new nation was, even at that early stage, clearly a religiously diverse body, the revolutionary fathers could stand more 'in common' for the entire community. It is hard to imagine, for example, Quakers or Baptists rallying behind a symbol like the Puritan fathers which, to them would also be representing their persecutors.

The second contention which is supported by the fact that the objects of filial piety changed from the Puritan fathers to the revolutionary fathers is that in the United States the *civitas* replaced the *ecclesia* as a source for framing ultimate reality and shaping group identity (Bennett, 1975; Richardson, 1974). Under the Puritan regime, the civic body was composed of one ecclesiastical body which was the central focus and root of social self-understanding. The primary purpose for the creation of the state (and thus the *civitas*) was to create a socio-political environment what was spiritually pure for the *ecclesia* so that they could help usher in the end times and the second coming of Christ, in accordance with their Millennial beliefs. In this way, the *ecclesia* was always of the utmost importance. The Puritans did not imagine themselves to be a civic body distinct from their ecclesiastical body. They understood themselves to be a religious body. The *ecclesia* was the reference for understanding one's world and one's self within it. A Puritan would have understood her or his community primarily in religious terms, not civic.

However, in the United States a shift occurred in the "locus of spiritualism from religious institutions to the political arena" (Bennett, 1975, p. 86). This "spiritual shift" included "a pervasive belief that ultimate wisdom, guidance, morality, and power reside in the Constitution" (Bennett, 1975, p. 87).[2] The change from the

[2]Additionally, Bellah's (1967, 1974a, 1974b, 1975, 1976a, 1976b, 1976c, 1976d) formulation of the ACR partly supports this position. He sees the ACR functioning as a historical narrative context by which the nation's place in history, its trajectory and moral state of being can be made sense of and that this narrative is both closely associated with (although distinct from) politics.

Puritan fathers to the revolutionary fathers accords well with this idea. The revolutionary fathers were civic leaders with strong ties to important political documents with civil religious implications. Because of their hand in creating them, the revolutionary fathers are intrinsically linked to both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. The former outlines a religio-philosophic justification for the independent existence of the *civitas* and the latter serves as the legal framework under which the political community operates. As we will see in more detail, in the next chapter, both of these documents are widely considered to have significant civil religious dimensions (Ball, 1989; Bellah, 1967; Burgess, 2008; Fairbanks, 1994–1995; Levinson, 1979; McDonald, 1999; Riemer, 1980).

The Founding Fathers and 'The Founding Fathers' in the ACR

The importance of: the *civitas* in forming spiritual meaning; the founding fathers' role in establishing that *civitas*; their connection to two important civil religious documents; and the deep permeation of filial piety all suggest a civil religious dimension for the founding fathers and subsequently, 'The Founding Fathers' and its variations, as signs which point to the historical figures in some way.

Furthermore, the anecdotes discussed above suggest the use of 'The Founding Fathers' in public political discourse is usually accompanied by consensus regarding its significance, legitimacy and importance.

Additionally, we might add that a superficial analysis indicates that as a cultural sign, 'The Founding Fathers' has rather religio-transcendent narrative associations. For example, the use of 'father' conjures the Christian paternal conceptualization of God, the father. There are also conceptual similarities in the Judeo-Christian and Deist concepts of God as a creator god and the founding fathers as creators of a new nation and state. Moreover, like these two conceptualizations of God, the founding fathers which the sign points to are often similarly associated with ideas such as wisdom, reason, virtue, morality, destiny and authority.

Finally, the idea that the founding fathers have been apotheosized and subsequently that 'The Founding Fathers' has sacred connotations is supported by the existence of the various monuments erected in their memory. Grandiose and on epic scales, they are reminiscent of and often surpass the great monuments the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans built to honor their gods. The Washington Monument, the Jefferson Memorial, these men's busts on the Mount Rushmore National Monument, the Memorial to the 56 Signers of the Declaration of Independence, Brumidi's fresco aptly named The Apotheosis of Washington which adorns the interior of the dome of the US Capital Building and depicts an exalted Washington clad in royal blue looking down from heaven, along with many other national monuments and remembrances are all, as Meyer (2001) has argued, "clear expressions of civil religion" (p. 6). These monuments have assisted in the transcendence of these historical figures from mere

temporal beings into a culturally available idea. They are now something beyond men. They have been immortalized, transcending time and space, not corporally but idealistically.[3]

In summary, the importance of: (1) the *civitas* in forming spiritual meaning for the American people; (2) that the founding father's established that *civitas*; (3) that they created the Constitution and Declaration of Independence (two important civil religious documents); (4) the deep permeation of filial piety within the historical, socio-cultural awareness of the American people; (5) the significance, legitimacy, importance, deference and authority attributed to the founding fathers and by extension 'The Founding Fathers'; (6) their religio-transcendent connotations; and (7) the great monuments made of iron and stone built to last the ages which have been erected in their memory all suggest that the founding fathers have a civil religious dimension and a sacred quality which is extended to the signs which index them. They and their signs are revered and thus 'The Founding Fathers' and its variants can be understood as American civil religious objects, emerging as such from the shared historical, cultural experiences of the American people and perpetuated through their representations in the *Lebenswelt*.

'The Founding Fathers' in Public Political Discourse

Summary of Findings

Now that we have established the sign, 'The Founding Fathers' and its variants as signs of civil religious significance, in the American civil religious tradition, we can examine their use in public political discourse.

As we can see from Appendix B, the founding fathers were objects of filial piety 29 times, in the datasets examined, spanning the entire temporal length of the data.[4] This ranked them third of 37 objects, in terms of the most frequently invoked, venerated objects of filial piety, behind Lincoln (39 times) and John F. Kennedy (33 times). This indicates that the signs associated with the founding fathers indeed

[3]This is not to suggest that there is a belief that these figures are divine. If asked, undoubtedly the overwhelming majority of Americans would say that these men are not gods. Indeed, other elements of American mythology would suggest these figures are more akin to prophets. In the Declaration of Independence, the revolution was justified through appeal to divine law—"the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God." Furthermore, the "unalienable Rights" like "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" are clearly argued to come from God. In this understanding, God is king and ultimate legislator and temporal matters are subordinate to the divine. The authors of the Declaration only delineated God's laws. Nevertheless, they are something more than simply men.

[4]In contrast, the Puritan 'fathers' were only referenced 3 times. This lends support to the idea expressed above that there was a shift in the objects of filial piety, occurring before this data was generated.

have a prominent place in the filial piety of the American civil religion as would be expected from the theory outlined above.

Generally speaking, these signs take two forms. Either they reference the people we call the founding fathers specifically or they reference the ideas which are attributed to them. In terms of referencing the founding fathers directly, several variants manifested. As one would expect, we find several references to "our founding fathers" (Dole, 1996, Second Debate; Palin, 2008, VP Debate; Reagan, 1984, Nomination Acceptance). However, other variants include: "the Founders of our Nation" (Carter, 1980, Nomination Acceptance); "our revolutionary founders" (Ford, 1976, Nomination Acceptance); the "nation's first leaders" (Carter, 1976, Nomination Acceptance); "the framers of the Constitution" (Perot, 1992, First Debate); "the sons and daughters of liberty [who] gave birth to our nation" (Kerry, 2004, Nomination Acceptance); "our forefathers [who] gave us the finest form of government in the history of mankind" (Ford, 1976, First Debate); etc.

The references to the ideas of the founding fathers also took several different forms, including: "the great ideals of the American Revolution" (Nixon, 1960, Nomination Acceptance); "the dream that began in Philadelphia 200 years ago" (Dukakis, 1988, Nomination Acceptance); "our founding ideals" (Obama, 2012, Nomination Acceptance); "Our nation's founding commitment" (Bush, 2004, Nomination Acceptance); the "founding premise" (Bush, 2000, Nomination Acceptance); "great principles that have guided this nation since its very founding" (Carter, 1980, Concession); "the promise of our founding" (Obama, 2012, Victory); etc.

Of course, these are not mutually exclusive categories. Other instances directly reference both the people and their ideas, e.g. the "dream of our founders" (Obama, 2008, Victory) and "the vision of America's founders" (Bush, 2000, Nomination Acceptance).

'The Founding Fathers' and the Politics of the Sacred

In Chap. 2, it was argued that civil religious signs are likely to have special emotional significance for the perceiver of those signs. This, in turn, makes it likely for those signs to act as orientating signifieds when they are internalized which helps to determine the type of meaning the perceiving agent makes of the field of perception of which those signs are a part. Specifically, it was argued that, in public political discourse civil religious signifiers like 'The Founding Fathers' and its variants are deliberately used to contextualize common (i.e. profane) signifiers. This is done in an effort to influence the perception of the profane signifiers, to have them cognitively processed in a certain way as to define the accompanying signifiers with sacredness and thus put the profane signifiers outside of the profane world of politics, into a sacred place and consequentially outside of the realm of political discussion.

If this proposition is valid, we should expect to see that civil religious signs are contextualized with profane signifiers, particularly those related to issues or the candidacy of the articulator of those signs. This would suggest an attempt by the candidate to deliberately contextualize her or his candidacy and/or self or the positions (s)he supports in a sacred way.

Indeed, this is precisely what is encountered in the dataset. To be more specific, in all 29 instances where signs were used to express a civil religious devotion to the founding fathers or their ideas, we see them contextualized either with signs expressing an issue or policy position or with signs indicating the candidate or candidacy of the speaker.[5] In fact, in 19 of the 29 cases (65.5%) we see contextualization with both an issue or policy position and a sign indicating the candidate or candidacy of the speaker.[6] Appendix E provides a table of all 29 examples which shows the precise form 'The Founding Fathers' sign took along with the particular issue(s) they were contextualized with and/ or the signs associated with the candidate or candidacy of the speaker.

A few qualitative examples will help to illustrate how this contextualization works. For example, in his 1984 Republican nomination acceptance speech, Reagan states:

> Isn't our choice really not one of left or right, but of up or down? Down through the welfare state to statism, to more and more government largesse accompanied always by more government authority, less individual liberty and, ultimately, totalitarianism, always advanced as for our own good. The alternative is the dream conceived by our Founding Fathers, up to the ultimate in individual freedom consistent with an orderly society.

To begin with, we can clearly spot the President's use of the filial piety sign the "Founding Fathers," which establishes a sacred reference point by which the entire field can be connected to the sacred. We can also see several signifiers indexing issues. For example, "the welfare state," "more government largesse," and "individual liberty." Moreover, note the use of the signifiers, "choice" and "alternative." With them, the President brings his candidacy and himself within the context. Within the entire context then we see three types of signifiers available, in the frame of perception: (1) a civil religious signifier, (2) issue signifiers, and (3) candidate signifiers.

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[5]In setting the parameters for determining which objects are contextualized together, one context was considered a passage of text that was thematically or structurally distinguishable. In order words, a contextualized passage was determined by locating the discernable shifts in the particular ideas being elaborated before and after the presence of the civil religious signifier. The passage begins where there is a discernable shift in an idea being elaborated, consists of the elaboration of the particular idea which incorporates the civil religious signifiers and ends when that elaboration ends.

[6]It should be noted that even when specific signs are not articulated to indicate the candidate or candidacy, the speaker is her or his self a sign within the field of perception and as the articulator, intrinsically linked to (i.e. contextualized with) the other signs (s)he is articulating. In this sense, the candidate and candidacy is always within the context even when verbal signs are not used to make that link explicit.

The emotional significance of the signified that corresponds to the civil religious signifier makes it likely to act as an orientating signified, impacting a perceiving agent's meaning formation of the field of perception by orientating the other signifieds in the process of cognitive meaning formation. In this case, that means orientating the signifieds which correspond to the issue signifiers and candidate signifiers.

In short, this means that the contextualization, in the *Lebenswelt* of the civil religious signifier with the profane issues and candidacy signifiers can help the perceiving agent to make sense of the signifieds which correspond to these profane signifiers as sacred. In other words, it makes it possible that within the *Weltanschauung* of the perceiving agent the signifieds which correspond to the issues and candidacy signifiers will be connected to (i.e. defined) as sacred or somehow associated with the sacred. Essentially, Reagan attempts to define limited government as something sacred by invoking a sign of filial piety referencing the founding fathers. Simultaneously he is also attempting to define himself as the candidate who can shepherd the nation down the path of righteousness, delivering it from the evil of totalitarianism. Specifically, note how Reagan says there are two alternatives. There is a path toward "totalitarianism" or one toward "the ultimate in individual freedom consistent with an orderly society." The latter is a righteous path consistent with the "dreams" of the nation's creator gods. The former path is presented in direct opposition to this sacred path. It is, then, to be understood as a sacrilegious path.

In 2012, we see another attempt to use a "Founding Fathers" filial piety sign to define the role of government. In his Democratic nomination acceptance speech, Obama asserts:

> We don't think the government can solve all of our problems, but we don't think the government is the source of all of our problems—(cheers, applause)—any more than our welfare recipients or corporations or unions or immigrants or gays or any other group we're told to blame for our troubles—(cheers, applause)—because—because America, we understand that this democracy is ours. We, the people—(cheers)—recognize that we have responsibilities as well as rights; that our destinies are bound together; that a freedom which asks only, what's in it for me, a freedom without a commitment to others, a freedom without love or charity or duty or patriotism, is unworthy of our founding ideals, and those who died in their defense.

Here Obama uses the signs "our founding ideals" and "We, the people" as signs of filial piety toward the founding fathers. The sign "our founding ideals" is a very general allusion to the ideas of the founding fathers while "We, the people" is specifically referencing an idea expressed in the Constitution. However, unlike Reagan, Obama contextualizes these "founding ideals" with federal government action. For Obama, government is not the problem, or at least not the source of all the problems. Instead, it is the vehicle which carries out the will of the "people," binds destinies together and carries out one's commitment to others. Whereas, government was a threat to individual freedom for Reagan, government allows for the fulfillment of freedom for Obama. Whereas a limited federal government was the vision of the founding fathers according to Reagan, an interventionist government is the vision of the founding fathers, according to Obama.

Both contextualize their positions using the founding fathers, effectively attempting to define their positions in sacred terms. In this way, both can be understood as making theological arguments about the role of government in society. Their source of theological authority is the founding fathers and this is revealed in their use of the similar civil religious signs, signs of filial piety indexing these creator gods. Furthermore, although the conclusions are different (even antithetical) each speaks confidently. Each speaks with the confidence of one who is professing the real truth.

The two examples just presented attempt to define an issue position as sacred using 'The Founding Fathers' or similar types of American civil religious signs of filial piety. In these two examples, however the issue (role of government in society) is a quite broad issue which could encompass any number of specific policy positions. In general, most of the issues that were contextualized with 'The Founding Fathers' or its variants were quite broad and lacked specific policy recommendations. This can be seen from the "Contextualized Issues" column, in the table constituting Appendix E.

However, at times we see examples of candidates attempting to define more particular policy positions as sacred through the use of 'The Founding Fathers' and its variants. To illustrate, in the third Presidential debate of 2000, Gore states, "We need campaign finance reform and we need to shoot straight with young and old alike and tell them what the real choices are. And we can renew and rekindle the American spirit and make our future what our founders dreamed it could be" (Gore, 2000, Third Debate). In this example, Gore invokes the sign "our founders" as well as their dream to contextualize the issue signifier "campaign finance reform." For Gore, the dream of "our founders" is being unfulfilled because politicians are unable "to shoot straight" with the people and "tell them what the real choices are." This is a result of campaign finance laws as is indicated by Gore's assertion of the "need" for "campaign finance reform." For Gore, because of the campaign finance laws, the United States is on a sacrilegious path, defying the dream of its creator gods by depriving the people of meaningful choices in government. Gore, playing the role of a proper civil religious theologian claims to be able to divine the dream of the founding fathers (i.e. the will of the national creator gods) and thus claims to be able to set the nation back on the path of civil righteousness.

Although there is a lack of detail about what shape that reform should take, it is nevertheless a policy position which Gore has attempted to define in a sacred way through the invocation of the founding fathers. It is also decidedly more specific than the extremely broad issue of the role of government in society that was seen in the previous examples, demonstrating some variation in the specificity of issues being contextualized with the language of the ACR. While this example does demonstrate that there is some degree of variation in the specificity of the issues, we should also note that this example and the others in Appendix E do not reveal much detail in any of the policy or issue recommendations being contextualized with the civil religious sign "The Founding Fathers" or its variants.

Another example of a politician using an American civil religious sign of filial piety referencing the founding fathers to contextualize a more specific policy position can be found in Nixon's nomination acceptance speech in 1960. He states:

> Let us make it clear to [nations that desire freedom] that our aim in helping them is not merely to stop communism, but that, in the great American tradition of concern for those less fortunate than we are, we welcome the opportunity to work with people everywhere in helping them achieve their aspirations for a life of human dignity. And this means our primary aim must be not to help governments, but to help people, to help people attain the life they deserve. In essence, what I am saying tonight is that our answer to the threat of the Communist revolution is renewed devotion to the great ideals of the American Revolution, ideals that caught the imagination of the world one hundred and eighty years ago and that still live in the minds and hearts of people everywhere.

Here, Nixon uses a sign referencing the ideas of the founding fathers with his use of "the great ideals of the American Revolution." This sign is contextualized with the issue sign "threat of Communist revolution" as well as the candidate signifier "I" as in "what I am saying."

For Nixon, the United States must renew its devotion to the ideals of its creator gods in order to deal with the 'threat' of communism. In this, he draws a distinction between the sacred ideals of the founding fathers and those of communism and indicates his ability to differentiate between them. Nixon, an American civil religion theologian (like Reagan, Gore and Obama after him) claims to have divined the will of the creator gods and justifies (at least in part) his ability to lead the nation based on his command of the ACR. He is saying, in effect, I know the way for the United States to survive the threat of communism, we must be faithful to our gods.

As in the previous example, while we see the presentation of a policy position contextualized with American civil religious language, this passage lacks policy specifics. For example, it does not specify exactly who those 'people' are and what form 'help' to them should take. Nevertheless, in this excerpt, Nixon is clearly establishing a foreign policy position (anti-communism) and is linking it to the founding fathers.

As was expected based on the theory presented in the second chapter, we find that this group of civil religious signifiers are contextualized with a host of particularistic issue or candidacy signifiers, providing strong evidence that this is done in an attempt by the candidate to deliberately contextualize her or his candidacy or the positions (s)he supports in a sacred way. That is, it suggests a disposition to engage in the politics of the sacred.

Signs of National Group Unity

The examination of this particular type of signifier also reveals another important characteristic of the use of the civil religious signs under investigation. Particularly, in all 29 examples, we see that not only are issue and candidate signifiers

contextualized with these civil religious signifiers, they are also contextualized with signifiers expressing national group unity.

To illustrate, in the selection of text above from Reagan's 1984 Republican nomination acceptance speech we can see that he uses the signifier 'our' three times. In the passage from Obama's 2012 Democratic nomination acceptance speech above, the candidate uses 'we' and 'our(s)' repeatedly as well as 'We, the people' and other signifiers of national unity. Finally, in the except from Gore's 2000 debate he repeats 'we' and 'our' and in Nixon's 1960 nomination acceptance speech he similarly uses 'us,' 'our' and 'we.' The column with the heading "Group Unity Signifiers," in Appendix E, provides a complete account of the group unity signifiers contextualized in each of the 29 cases.[7]

The presence of national group unity signifiers with the American civil religious signifiers creates a connection, in the *Lebenswelt*, between those two types of signifiers. This, in turn, helps to facilitate a connection, in the *Weltanschauung* of the perceiving agent between the signifieds which correspond to those signifiers. In short, it helps to define 'The Founding Fathers' or similar signifiers as 'our' or belonging to 'us,' i.e. the American national group. Simultaneously, it also helps to define 'us' or 'we.' We are something which is connected to "The Founding Fathers," and thus this sign, in its varying manifestations serves as a totemic object.

This finding is not surprising. Sociologists coming from the Durkheimian tradition have been consistent in their assumption that each cohesive social group will have a particular symbol system which helps to provide for collective identification and social cohesion. That the sign 'The Founding Fathers' and its variants are so vigorously connected with group identity signifiers, in public political discourse further suggests the civil religious significance of the sign. That is, it further suggests that 'The Founding Fathers' is an American civil religious totem.

Summation

In summation, this investigation of 'The Founding Fathers' and its variants has revealed a consistent pattern in the contextualization of these signs. All contexts included: (1) the civil religious signifier, (2) a candidate and/or issue signifier and (3) a group unity signifier. This relationship is represented below by Fig. 4.1. It demonstrates the interconnectedness of the universal and particularistic in the ACR. The civil religious and group unity signifiers are universal while candidate/issue signifiers are particularistic.

[7]For each case, care was taken to make sure that the group unity signifiers were not indexing for example the party of the speaker, his or her campaign, administration, etc. While group unity signifiers were used, at times, in the speeches in this way, these examples all index the national group.

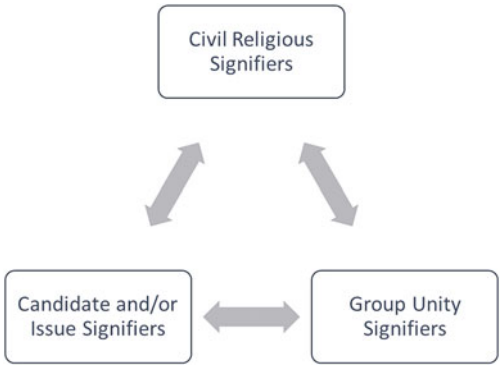

Fig. 4.1 How ACR signs are contextualized

Effectively this combination of signifiers produces a context like this: 'The Founding Fathers' represents a sacred principle(s), the group unity signifiers help to define that sacred principle(s) as everyone's (everyone including the perceiving agent to the extent that that agent defines her or his self as belonging to that group). Simultaneously, 'The Founding Fathers' is helping to define the group by expressing that which is sacred for the group. This connection between the group and the totemic sign is the node of the sacred. The sacred exists in the group. It is a product of the symbolic interaction of the individuals within that group. The sacred is represented and reproduced by the members of the group symbolically. At the same time the mutually re-enforcing group unity signifiers and civil religious signifiers are contextualized with and connected to the particularistic issue or candidacy signifiers. This, as was just discussed serves to define the candidate and/or issue positions (s)he advocates for as sacred—not an esoteric or sectarian sacredness but a sacredness for the entire nation.

Conclusion

This chapter began by theorizing the sign, 'The Founding Fathers' and variations of it as referent objects within the ACR tradition. To review, the importance of: (1) the *civitas* in forming spiritual meaning for Americans; (2) the founding father's establishing that *civitas*; (3) the founding fathers creating the Constitution and Declaration of Independence; (4) the deep permeation of filial piety within the historical socio-cultural awareness of Americans; (5) the significance, legitimacy, importance, deference and authority attributed to the founding fathers and the sign 'The Founding Fathers'; (6) their religio-transcendent connotations; and (7) the great monuments dedicated to the founders provide ample evidence that the founding fathers have a civil religious dimension and a sacred quality which is extended to the signs which index them.

The chapter then moved on to investigate the use of 'The Founding Fathers' and its variants in public political discourse. These civil religious signs were, in every

case, accompanied by either a candidate signifier or issue signifier and frequently by both. Furthermore, we found that these civil religious signs were also accompanied by national group signifiers further suggesting their importance as totemic objects.

From this examination of 'The Founding Fathers' and its variations, several conclusions can be drawn. First, in accordance with the prediction derived from the theory presented in Chap. 2, these signifiers are contextualized with the profane candidate and issue signifiers, framing the candidate or issue in sacred terms. This supports the idea that politics are a matter of definition. In these examples, we see the candidates attempting to define their positions or candidacy as sacred. Defining them in this way is an attempt by the candidate to confer political advantage upon themselves.

The second conclusion explains where that political advantage lies. From the examples above, we see that competing theologies can be and are articulated using these civil religious signifiers. Specifically, we saw this regarding the issue of the role of government in society where virtually the same signs were used to justify contradictory positions.

The reader will recall that in Chap. 2, we saw that defining objects is at its roots an idiosyncratic phenomenon. The idiosyncratic variation of individual *Weltanschauung* accounts for the differences in what 'The Founding Fathers' or its variants mean for the various speakers. These objects connect differently to other objects, in each speaker's unique but similar *Weltanschauung*. The fact that all these speakers still reference these objects in the same way, i.e. referentially and as if the object was an authoritative object reveals that the signified which corresponds to the signifier 'The Founding Fathers' or similar signs occupies similar (although not exact) places in the similar (but not exactly the same) *Weltanschauungen* of those speakers. Given this, we can say that there are differences in the location (i.e. definition) of the mental object (i.e. the signified) which corresponds to the civil religious sign within one's web of stored mental objects (i.e. one's *Weltanschauung*). In our example above, this means that there are differences in the connections between the signifieds that correspond to 'The Founding Fathers' and "Government" or "The Role of Government."

When these differing mental connections are articulated, they become differing issue positions draped in the ACR. This gives the appearance that the issue is, then, contested and thus contestable. However, while the issue is certainly contested neither example actually presents the issue in much of a contestable way because neither permits the possibility of a middle ground. By contextualizing the issue in a way that cements it to the founding fathers (i.e. to the American civil religious sacred) each politician tries to define their position as the sacred position. By extension, this means that positions which are different from their own are not sacred. When issues are presented in this manner there is very little, if any, room for compromise between differing positions. To do so would ultimately mean turning one's back on the sacred and committing some type of sacrilege. When positions are framed in this civil religious manner, the articulator must automatically reject alternative positions because those other positions are civic sacrilegious. So, while the issue of the role of government in society is contested, in these examples it is

contested in a way which *a priori* disqualifies a political reconciliation. In other words, it is contested in a way which restricts its resolution. In the two examples we examined, Reagan and Obama both effectively begin from non-negotiable positions and remove the issue from real contestability, if we define contestability as also presupposing a solution to the problem of different perspectives.

Consequently, the candidates are trying to confer political advantage on themselves by putting her or his position outside of the realm of contestable politics. They essentially frame their positions and/or self as sacred and attempt to force an acceptance of their position/self. They are in effect saying that one can either support him or her, remaining true and righteous according to civil religious dictates or one can go against him or her and head down the path of iniquity, taking the nation along with them. In short, they attempt to confer political advantage on themselves by setting up a dichotomous choice between righteousness and heresy, clearly pitting themselves on the side of righteousness.

Now, of course, an issue does not and is not always framed in civil religious terms. When it is not, the possibilities for reconciliation are different. However, when it is framed in a civil religious way, reconciliation is not possible without one admitting to heretical error. The issue of reconciliation will be taken up in more detail, in Chap. 6.

The third conclusion we can draw is that while the will or desire of the founding fathers may be in question, their authority and the signs referencing them are not. No case is made, nor has to be made, establishing their legitimacy or authority. All candidates using these signs have assumed the legitimacy and authority of them. This means, then, that the legitimacy and authority of the signs has already been established and, we can infer is widely, socially acquiesced to, at least tacitly, by many members of that national community. The legitimacy and authority of these signs, in effect, sit as background expectations for the audience and speakers and do not need explicit justification. This supports the idea that the signifieds which correspond to these civil religious signifiers are located and connect to other stored mental objects in a similar way within the similar *Weltanschauungen* of the American people. They are located and connected in a way that gives them the sacred quality discussed previously.

It is worth noting here, that this also means that none of the speakers question the validity of rooting their arguments in the ideas of people who have died nearly 200 years ago. This, despite the fact that since the deaths of the founding fathers there has been around 200 additional years of political and social sciences and normative social philosophy. Yet, these ideas are generally given preference to the newer (some might argue more advanced) ideas. Furthermore, this is the case despite innumerable advancements in technology, demographic changes and institutional development which make the American society significantly different now than it was during the period which gave birth to the ideas of the founding fathers.

Moreover, we can note that none of these examples provides any evidence of a speaker questioning the assumption that a coherent set of ideals can be identified as belonging to the founding fathers. All speak of them as a unified entity. This is, of course, a very tenuous assumption given the diversity of the founding fathers and

the fact of very real and fundamental disagreements between them. One time these disagreements ended in Alexander Hamilton dead after pistol dueling with Aaron Burr. Often these disagreements ended in comprise which may reflect the ideals of some and not of others or not truly reflect those of anyone.

Fourthly, since these signs of filial piety indexing the founding fathers have been a persistent and frequent feature of public political discourse for over 50 years, we can see that the deep social permeation of filial piety and the reverence to the founding fathers that was asserted in the theoretical section of this chapter above is supported by the empirical findings. We can state with high confidence that filial piety and the reverence to the founding fathers is deeply rooted in the American *Volksweltanschauung*.

Finally, 25 of the 29 cases (86.2%) contextualize the American civil religious signifier 'The Founding Fathers' or its variants with an issue signifier. This undermines Chapp's (2012) assertion that American civil religious discourse lacks "issue content" (p. 50). The level of sophistication of those arguments is another question. These findings do little to contradict his conclusion that the ACR discourse has little "sophisticated policy-based arguments" (p. 50). While, we have seen the discourse of the ACR is not completely devoid of policy-based arguments none of the 29 examples reveal much specificity.[8]

In the next chapter, we will continue to investigate the use of American civil religious signs in public political discourse. Specifically, we will examine the use of the signs which reference the sacred texts of the ACR, the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. This will provide us a standard by which we can compare and contrast the findings of this chapter and it will provide us with more confidence in the generalizability of our findings. As with this chapter, we will first examine how these objects emerged as referent objects within the ACR tradition. Once this is accomplished, we will continue to the empirical investigation.

[8]However, in order to really say anything meaningful about the level of sophistication one would first need to define and operationalize 'sophistication' and conduct a comparative survey which examines policy discourse undertaken with and without American civil religious language. Such an undertaking is outside the parameters of this study; but, the findings in this chapter allow us to say that minimally American civil religious discourse does not seem to be accompanied by many policy specifics.

Chapter 5
Sacred Documents, Sacred Signs: The Constitution and Declaration of Independence

Introduction

In the last chapter, the universal sign, 'The Founding Fathers' and its variants were found to be accompanied by universalizing national group signifiers. However, these universal signs were also found contextualized with either particularistic candidate or issue signifiers and frequently by both, in every instance they were encountered in the dataset. These findings led us to conclude that candidates attempt to define their (often contradictory) positions or candidacies as sacred. When this happens, it was argued, there is a limited political contestability because contradictory positions are presented in absolute, non-negotiable terms (i.e. terms defined by their accord with the civil religious sacred).

In this chapter, we will investigate two more important civil religious signs, those indexing the sacred texts of the ACR—the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. As with the last chapter, we will first see how these signs fit as referent objects within the ACR tradition through a brief review of American cultural history. We will then continue to an empirical investigation of these signs using our dataset. This examination will reveal that these signs are used in a very similar manner as those previously investigated. Specifically, we will see the signs explored here (like those examined in the previous chapter) are also generally contextualized according to the three-part pattern represented in Fig. 4.1. That is, we find them contextualized with (1) civil religious signifier(s); (2) candidacy and/or issue signifier(s); (3) national group unity signifier(s).

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Constructing a Narrative

In order to understand the position of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution within the ACR, we will be well served by examining a short re-construction of American history.

In the reconstruction of any history, one must present a narrative weaving together distinguishable events and signs (i.e. one must link them together in a logical, relational and discernable manner). Events can be understood as the particular arrangement of all the signifiers present and available, for perceiving agents, within the *Lebenswelt*, during a determined temporal span.[1] Events are ephemeral. Fields of perception are constantly changing in an unrelenting state of flux. But through the process of cognizing, individuals can and do make arbitrary distinctions signifying temporal periods and many of these distinctions (e.g. epochs, stages, steps, times, eras, episodes, moments, days, minutes, weeks, seconds, etc.) have levels of intersubjective validly. Some type of temporal distinction such as the ones just listed (including the arrangement of signifiers in the *Lebenswelt* during that temporal classification) can be understood as an event.

The act of constructing a historical narrative automatically implies editorial decisions on at least two accounts. First, one must choose and define the particular events and associated signs which are to be include and second, one must determine a way for those events and signs to relate to each other (i.e. one must determine how to connect them or fit them together so as to tell a cohesive and understandable story about them).

Since events are ephemeral, if one wishes to do this, one must do so based on two types of source material: through direct experience (i.e. perception) of the particular fields of perception that the event is composed of or through recorded representations and cultural artifacts of the fleeted fields of perception which compose the event.[2] These can be used separately or in combination with each other.

The way one can and ultimately does (re)construct a history is predicated on two factors: the signifiers one perceives in the *Lebenswelt* and the structure and makeup of one's *Weltanschauung*. As we saw in Chap. 2, the empirical connections of objects in the *Lebenswelt* impact the mental association of objects in the *Weltanschauung*, which help determine how those objects are understood. Simultaneously, the arrangement of mental objects in the *Weltanschauung* helps to determine what sense can be made of material objects in the *Lebenswelt*. For the first part, this means the history one (re)constructs is, in part, a matter of how one encounters and perceives events, in the *Lebenswelt* (i.e. as signifiers within a field of perception). As we just saw these could be experienced directly, through experiencing representations of something fleeted, or both. For the second part, this means fitting the

[1]The duration of an event is entirely determinable by the perceiving agent. From one individual to another an event may last longer or have a longer temporal duration.

[2]These representations, of course, have already gone through the two editorial decisions just discussed.

signifieds which correspond to the signifiers within a field of perception into one's *Weltanschauung* and being able to make sense of them given the present availability of connections of stored mental objects (signifieds).

The facts of individual biographies (experiencing different fields of perception and the same fields of perception from unique perspectives) and the resultant unique structures of individual *Weltanschauungen* mean that no history can or will be (re) constructed in exactly the same way by any two individuals just as we saw in Chap. 2 that no two definitions of objects can be exactly the same for two individuals. This means that there can be no definitive narrative of American history and there can be no definitive location of the Declaration of Independence and Constitution in that history.

Given this, the previous statement about reconstructing a short American history in order to understand the place of these documents in the ACR seems counterintuitive. However, as we also saw in Chap. 2, individuals within a common community often experience the same fields of perception (though from slightly different perspectives). The encountering and perception of signifiers in similar contexts helps to shape the points of structural similarity between individual *Weltanschauungen*. This means, then, that there should be some degree of structural similarity (i.e. similarity in the ways stored signifieds relate to other store signifieds) between the various individual *Weltanschauungen* of the American people or at least a good portion of them. This structural similarity between the individual *Weltanschauungen* of the individuals gives us some confidence that one can construct an intersubjectively valid history. This would be a more or less familiar story or narrative (i.e. a recognizable composition of signifiers capable of portraying some intersubjective meaning from one person to another) which would ultimately be defined idiosyncratically but, nevertheless would be identifiable, comprehensible, understandable, and cognizable for different agents. This story could only be based on an archetype or ideal form and could never exist in definitive form as we have just seen.

It is, then, the construction of an intersubjectively valid history, not the reconstruction of a definitive history which can aid us in our endeavor of revealing the place of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution within the ACR. How useful the reconstruction is depends on whether or not, or the degree to which the narrative is identifiable, recognizable, comprehensible, understandable and cognizable to the reader. In other words, the story is useful to understand the place of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution to the extent that the reader is able to recognize it as an understandable history. To help ensure that the history presented below is understandable, it is drawn, largely from already existing, recorded narrative accounts which demonstrate wide agreement on the relative arrangement of important signifiers.

The Constitution and Declaration of Independence in the ACR

The narrative begins like this: Puritans established colonies in the Americas, in order to enjoy the freedom to live as they believed God wanted and intended them to live. Generations later, the founding fathers were convinced that their government was not allowing them to live as God intended by depriving them of certain God-given rights. So, they organized and among other things wrote and promulgated a treatise, the Declaration of Independence.

This essay did several things. First, it outlined some ideas that were held to be basic God-given rights meant for the enjoyment of all. This, in turn meant the delineation of basic principles which the authors believed they were entitled to and according to which they desired to live. Second, it enumerated the ways in which their government was inhibiting their ability to enjoy the rights God intended them to enjoy. Third, it justified a revolutionary act of independence on the grounds that their government was not allowing them to live according to how God intended, i.e. according to God's law and God's legal dictates expressed in the law of nature.

In the words of that essay, it was argued that "Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." And that "[W]henever any Form of Government becomes destructive of [the] ends" of the "self-evident" "truths" of "all men [being] created equal [and being] endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights [such as] Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" "it is the Right [and "duty"] of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government."

As we can see, the essay laid out some basic divine principles which the authors argued were granted by a creator god and were the entitlement of all men (equality, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness). Since the authors were unable to live according to these principles (i.e. not as their god intended) under their current government, they were intent on forming a new state and a new *civitas* which would be in accord with the fundamental, universal, absolute, essential truth of what they saw as the divine law. From this, we can see the Declaration of Independence is "explicit in its theological underpinnings" (Fairbanks, 1994–1995, p. 554) and understand how "the key premises of the Declaration had set out the essentials of an American creed or civil theology" (Semonche, 1998, p. 15).

The argument in the Declaration of Independence provided a rationale and a basis of legitimation for the endeavor of establishing sovereign independence—legal disassociation of the colonies from the British government and the institution of a new government.[3] While this is relatively obvious, another consequence of

[3] Although some form of disassociation had existed to the extent that the colonies were quasi self-ruling, the Stamp Act, Tea Act, and the Coercive Acts clearly reveal that there was not, at the time of the Declaration of Independence, a true or complete dissociation. This is a fact recognized in the Declaration of Independence itself when it says that it became "necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another."

independence was the psychological disassociation for the people of the nascent (newly self-identified or newly beginning to self-identify) political community from their connection to the old political community. In turn, this required a disassociation of one from one's sense of self, to the extent that that sense of self was understood in terms of one's place within one's political community.

The extent to which one identified his or her self as belonging to a political community would be, of course an idiosyncratic matter. But, at any rate, the act of legal disassociation required some re-organization of the connections between the signified 'self' and 'community,' in one's universe of stored signifieds (i.e. one's *Weltanschauung*). It also entailed a redefinition of one's community. Likely this would have meant for many a re-organization of 'self' or the self-aware self—'the ego' and the existing totemic objects of the former political community.[4]

In short, because of the act of revolution which the Declaration of Independence called for, the 'self' and the group (i.e. the *civitas*) needed to be redefined. It caused one to redefine, change or alter their ego (their sense of self) and their sense of group or community. There needed to be a re-association of signifieds in the individual's *Weltanschauung* and there also needed to be a re-systemization, a collective re-association. That is, the development of new structural similarities amongst the individual *Weltanschauungen* of individuals (a realignment of the *Volksweltanschauung*) was necessary. Part of this realignment required new totemic objects with which the new political community could self-identify. The Declaration of Independence provided a convenient totem for this requirement because of its association in the *Lebenswelt* with the American moment of origin.

The American moment of origin has several features most origins of a *civitas* do not. First, it has an identifiable and relatively specific moment of origin. Of course, this moment is an event and thus an arbitrary distinction; but, nonetheless it is a distinction which can be and is often made. Secondly, the moment of origin was undertaken in a self-conscious way. There was an identifiable human intention to create a new *civitas*. Third, there are contemporary representations of that moment of origin. Finally, the event was, at least in part, framed according to the belief in divine, universal principles to which the *civitas* would adhere. As G. K. Chesterton notably stated, "America is the only nation in the world founded on a creed"[5] (quoted from Mead, 1964, p. 198).

The Declaration of Independence: corresponds temporally with the origin of the American *civitas*; records and thus provides a representation of part of the event, reveals a human intention to create the new *civitas*; and outlines the belief in divine, universal principles to which the *civitas* would adhere. For these reasons, the

[4]How close the average colonist connected 'self' to the 'the *civitas*' is a separate but interesting question. Likely, it was not close to the moral attachment and self-identification many Americans feel to their *civitas* today but this disassociation probably had the potential to have enough of a psychological impact to cause a sense of existential anxiety at least in some people.

[5]Of course, whether or not America is the only nation so founded is an empirical question and out of the scope of the present study. Nonetheless, it is probably a fairly uncommon occurrence and certainly applicable to the American case.

document provides a convenient sign to represent the American moment of origin—the origin of the American *civitas* and consequently the *civitas* itself. As Ball states: "The American story of origins is told as though the republic originated in the Declaration of Independence" (Ball, 1989, p. 2294). Because of its association with the origin of the American *civitas* and all that entailed theologically, the Declaration of Independence emerged as a "hallowed relic" (McDonald, 1999, p. 172)—a new totemic object for the individual to orientate their sense of self and their attachment to the group. Indeed, to this day, Independence Day, one of the most (if not the most) important public holidays in the United States commemorates and celebrates the formal adoption of this document and the act it represents. It is a civic holyday commemorating the formal adoption of this totemic object.[6]

If we continue the narrative of American history from the creation and adoption of the Declaration of Independence, it would proceed with an account of a war fought and won by the American founding fathers to ensure they could live according to the divine principles which their god intended them to live by and which they articulated in the Declaration of Independence. Subsequently, an American Constitution was written as James Madison (the chief architect of the document) put it, through the inspiration and guidance of "a finger of the Almighty hand" (quoted in Semonche, 1998, p. 32).[7]

In this narrative, the "Constitution appears to have grown out of the Declaration of Independence" (Ball, 1989, p. 2285) in an organic way. This is because the Constitution ostensibly "represents the will of the whole people" (Semonche, 1998, p. 49) who were dedicated to the divine rights and principles outlined in the Declaration of Independence. As Semonche (1998) puts it, the Constitution is seen as being "'deliberately planned' to embody the basic theology" (p. 194) of the Declaration of Independence. In this way, the Constitution can be seen as codifying or expressing higher (i.e. divine) law (Riemer, 1980, p. 142; Semonche, 1998, p. 35). Ball (1989) even goes so far as to argue that understanding the Constitution as the realization of the Declaration's theology "is the accepted, even mandatory, rhetorical starting point" for legal arguments for the legal protection of individual rights in the United States (p. 2294).

According to American civil religious theology as presented in the Declaration of Independence, the will of a divine, creator god provides certain rights for people—equality, life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness. People freely enter into a contract with each other establishing governments for the purpose of ensuring their God given rights. It is for this purpose governments exist.

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[6]The association of the Declaration of Independence with the American moment of origin is further supported by the fact that it is July 4th, the date the Second Continental Congress approved this document which is celebrated as Independence Day, not July 2nd which is the day the Second Continental Congress passed the Lee Resolution, a resolution declaring the independency of the colonies.

[7]Notice how this story conveniently leaves out the Articles of Confederation. This sign does not fit well with the narrative. It does not belong to this story as generally told.

In order to ensure that the new government's actions would be in accord with divine law, the framers of the Constitution included mechanisms of accountability. This way, the government would be accountable to the people, so they could ensure governmental authority remained consistent with divine, ultimate law. Accountability of this type is enshrined in at least two Constitutional concepts.

First, there are protections of individual rights and limitations on government power. These include several means of redress, if the government violates divine law (e.g. courts, freedom of public expression, freedom of the press, the right to assemble, the right to bear arms, etc.) and a distribution of power among separate branches of government. In this way, the Constitution can be seen as a sacred document in the ACR because it protects the people's God given rights and seeks to ensure God's will is done. While, the Constitution formally obtains its authority from the people, it is only legitimate to the extent that it is coterminous with the will of God. That is, it is only legitimate to the extent that it "secure[s] the Blessings of Liberty," as its preamble states.

The second mechanism of accountability found in the Constitution is the mandate for elections. Elections ensure accountability by providing for periodic changes in government make-up. If the people find the government acting in a way that is contrary to God's will, they are free to replace it through elections. In this way, they can help ensure that the system remains in accord with divine will.

According to Semonche (1998), "The Constitution's embodiment in the American faith structure, its civil religion, is what gives it such cultural importance" (p. 35). This embodiment gives the Constitution a sacred dimension, in the American context (Levinson, 1988; Perry, 1988). It makes it a "totem" or "fetish" object for the American "tribe" (Lerner, 1937, p. 1294) and an object of its "worship" (Lerner, 1937, p. 1295). Indeed, the Constitution is so sacred for the American people, oaths to it replaced the religious oaths public officials took in prior sociopolitical orders (Semonche, 1998, p. 23). Article VI, paragraph 3 states that:

> The Senators and Representatives. . .and the Members of the several State Legislatures, and all executive and judicial Officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by Oath or Affirmation, to support this Constitution; but no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.

In the American civil religious context, then, belief in the Constitution is a higher value than piety to any sectarian religious creed.

As was stated above this narrative of American history and the place of these documents in it is not a definitive narrative because such a thing does not and cannot exist. Nevertheless, Lerner (1937), Detweiler (1962), Bellah (1967), Bennett (1975), Riemer (1980), Levinson (1988), Perry (1988), Ball (1989), Maier (1997), Semonche (1998) and McDonald (1999) all provide historical narrative scenarios similar to the one (or parts of it) just presented. Each of them suggest the apotheosis of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution and their role as totem objects in the United States. Furthermore, although, they differ somewhat in terms of when this actually occurred, they do agree that over time the Declaration of Independence and Constitution emerged as the holy and authoritative writ of the

American national faith. The accord between these scholars lends evidence to the familiarity of an American historical story which places these documents as important and sacred referent objects within the American civil religious tradition. We will now proceed to analyze the signs which index these sacred documents as part of that tradition.

Summary of Findings

In total, signs indexing these sacred documents of the ACR were revealed 69 times, in the dataset. Of that the Constitution was invoked 53 times and the Declaration of Independence 16 times. The Constitution was indexed 18 times in the nomination acceptance speeches, 38 times in the debates and one time in the victory and concession speeches, while the Declaration of Independence was referenced eight, seven, and one times in these categories respectively. Similar to what we saw in the last chapter, each of these scared document signifiers were contextualized with either an issue signifier or a candidacy signifier and in 45 of the 69 cases (65.2%) they were contextualized with both. In 52 of the 69 cases (73.4%) the American civil religious signifier was contextualized with an issue signifier again bringing to question Chapp's (2012) assertion that American civil religious discourse lacks "issue content" (p. 50).[8]

As was the case with the filial piety signs, in the last chapter, the sacred document signs are also frequently contextualized with a group unity signifier. This was encountered in 57 of the 69 cases (82.6%). The findings in this chapter then reveal even further consistency in the pattern of contextualization represented in Fig. 4.1 which includes: (1) the civil religious signifiers; (2) a candidate and/or issue signifiers; (3) and a group unity signifiers.

The table in Appendix F provides a full list of each use of a sacred document signifier found in the dataset, along with the various issues, candidacy and group unity signifiers with which they were contextualized.

The findings derived from our dataset are also in accord with the assessment above which argues that the Declaration of Independence and Constitution are important and sacred referent objects within the ACR tradition. We can clearly see that these documents are treated with the special deference one would expect totem objects to be. For example, the Constitution has "majesty" (Carter, 1976, Nomination Acceptance). It is "a great, unbelievable Constitution" (Kerry, 2004, Third Debate) which contains "the greatest First Amendment rights in the history of mankind" (Kemp, 1996, VP Debate). The Constitution and the Declaration of Independence are America's "most sacred documents" (Reagan, 1980, Reagan-Anderson Debate). These documents contain principles which are "preach[ed]"

[8]However, like in the previous chapter, none of the 52 examples reveal much specificity or precise policy recommendations.

(Kennedy, 1960, Second Debate) like the "basic moral and philosophical principles" (Carter, 1976, Nomination Acceptance) that guide the country including "the sacred right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (Reagan, 1984, Nomination Acceptance) which are found in the Declaration of Independence. Moreover, the need and importance of maintaining the integrity of the Constitution frequently emerges. This is so important that one must take an "oath" (Ford, 1976, Nomination Acceptance; Gore, 2000, Third Debate) or "swear" (Bush, 2000, Nomination Acceptance; Mondale, 1984, Nomination Acceptance) to "preserve, protect, and defend" it (Mondale, 1984, Nomination Acceptance). It must be: "protect[ed]" (Kennedy, 1960, Second Debate), "guarantee[ed]" (Carter, 1980, Nomination Acceptance; Kennedy, 1960, Forth Debate; Romney, 2012, Nomination Acceptance), "uph[e]ld" (Ford, 1976, Nomination Acceptance; Kennedy, 1960, Nomination Acceptance; Kerry, 2004, Nomination Acceptance) and "respect[ed]" (Dole, 1996, Nomination Acceptance; Kerry, 2004, Second Debate, Third Debate). It must not be: "violate[d]" (Ferraro, 1984, VP Debate; Gore, 2000, Third Debate), "depart [ed] from" (Carter, 1976, Second Debate), "undo[ne]" (Kerry, 2004, Third Debate), "hinder[ed]" or "inhibit[ed]" (Reagan, 1984, First Debate), "tamper[ed] with" (Kerry, 2004, Second Debate) and one cannot "ignore it, violate it, or replace it" (Dole, 1996, Nomination Acceptance). Making sure that the integrity of the Constitution is ensured is a "great responsibility" (Kennedy, 1960, Forth Debate) and implies "commitment" (Carter, 1976, Second Debate). Finally, not only do these documents need to be supported and maintained, they also require an element of faith in them. One should 'believe in' them (Anderson, 1980, Reagan-Anderson Debate; Clinton, 1996, Nomination Acceptance; Clinton, 1996, Second Debate).

Qualitative Examples

An examination of some qualitative examples of the use of signs indexing the Constitution and Declaration of Independence will further reveal that these civil religious signifiers are used in a similar fashion as those explored in the previous chapter. For example, in the second debate of 1960 Kennedy states:

> There is a very strong moral basis for this concept of equality of opportunity. We are in a very difficult time. We need all the talent we can get. We sit on a conspicuous stage. We are a goldfish bowl before the world. We have to practice what we preach. We set a very high standard for ourselves. The Communists do not. They set a low standard of materialism. We preach in the Declaration of Independence and in the Constitution, in the statement of our greatest leaders, we preach very high standards; and if we're not going to be s- charged before the world with hypocrisy we have to meet those standards. I believe the President of the United States should indicate it.

In this passage, we can see that Kennedy invokes both the Constitution and Declaration of Independence.[9] In brief, his argument is that through these documents the nation 'preaches' a 'very high standard' which serves as an example internationally and which can be posed in contradistinction to the standard of materialism offered by the communists. The standard which is preached according to Kennedy is one of equal opportunity.

The religious terminology here is obvious. The signifier 'preaches' carries much more weight than would for example 'advocates' or 'promotes' because it connotes the sacred. To use the language from the second chapter, the signified which corresponds to the signifier 'preaches' is likely to be located in the *Weltanschauung* in a way which relates it to the sacred because it is often associated with i.e. contextualized with religious signifiers (Preacher, Bible, The Word, The Gospel).[10] It is frequently used with these sectarian religious types of signifiers and almost exclusively so.

By linking these documents to the signifier 'preaches,' Kennedy is helping to define them in a sacred way. Actually, it would be more accurate to say that he is perpetuating the documents being generally defined in a sacred way. As we have just seen there is a long history of connecting these documents to the civil religious sacred. Nevertheless, Kennedy's doing so here serves as a gentle nudge compelling the perceiving agent to understand this group of signifiers according to the familiar patterns. In other words, he is encouraging the perceiving agents to rely on cognitive economics and compelling her or him to use existing, pre-established and well-worn connections—connections to the sacred.

In this passage, we also see that Kennedy expressly links these sacred documents and the issue of equality of opportunity to the sacred through his contextualization of their signifiers. For Kennedy, equality of opportunity is a principle that has been enshrined in the holy writ. Since these documents are beyond reproach, so too must the principle of equality of opportunity which Kennedy reads out of them. In this sense, Kennedy is being an American civil religious fundamentalist. He is calling for adherence to what he sees as an essential belief which he justifies by arguing that the principle is taken from the civil religious scriptures. As we saw in Chap. 1, these civil religious holy texts are justified through their accordance with God's will as revealed in natural law and understood through the human capacity for reason.[11]

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[9]Kennedy was not the only candidate to use both the Declaration of Independence and Constitution in the same context. This was found eight times in the dataset. See Appendix F.

[10]Notice how these are sectarian religious symbols. Even though we have established that the ACR is a unique religious tradition, that should not be understood to mean that individuals would for example draw a distinction between the word 'god' as it is used in their church and the way it is used in the ACR. The particular element of the ACR means that people conceive of it differently and many would fit the signifieds which correspond to its signifiers close to sectarian signifieds and may not even draw a distinction between them. E.g. the god of the ACR is the god of their sectarian religion in their mind and that which is sacred for the nation is that which is sacred according to their sectarian religion.

[11]This type of Enlightenment thought has taken a step away from the prophetic revelation of the Abrahamic tradition. In the Abrahamic tradition, the prophets were direct recipients of God's word. Sometimes they were said to receive the word directly from God as in the myths surrounding

Additionally, in this context, Kennedy states that he believes that the President should indicate that the principle is an important one in order to provide an international example. His expression of a personal belief introduces a personal signifier pointing to himself as a candidate. In the passage, then, we see the combination of an issue signifier (equality of opportunity), a signifier indicating himself and thus his candidacy and civil religious signifiers (the Constitution and Declaration of Independence).

Finally, we can see that he also includes the group unity signifiers 'we' and 'our' rounding out the familiar three-part pattern we saw in the last chapter and which is expressed in Fig. 4.1. It is 'We' who 'preach' indicating that all Americans are bound by these documents and their principles. By extension, then, Kennedy's conclusions about equality of opportunity which he reads out of those documents should be the conclusions of all Americans. Essentially, Kennedy is making a claim that he is able to divine the true meaning of those sacred texts and translate that into an issue position which is the correct one for the entire *civitas*. As a priest of the American civil religion, Kennedy is indicating that he knows what is right and good for the nation and he knows what the truth of its sacred scripture is.

In this passage, Kennedy attempts to read something out of the Constitution and Declaration of Independence in order to link himself and an issue position to the American civil religious sacred. Other uses of these civil religious signifiers, however, are less issue driven. For example, Carter states:

> I see an America on the move again, united, a diverse and vital and tolerant nation, entering our third century with pride and confidence, an America that lives up to the majesty of our Constitution and the simple decency of our people. This is the America we want. This is the America that we will have. (Carter, 1976, Nomination Acceptance)

Whereas Kennedy reads a specific issue position (pro equality of opportunity) out of the documents, in this passage Carter simply asserts the 'majesty' of the Constitution. However, in this passage we still see the familiar trilateral connection. Carter links a civil religious signifier (the Constitution) to himself (I see) and a host of group unity signifiers (our third century, our Constitution, our people, we). In this brief passage, Carter brings his candidacy for President to the foreground by articulating (an admittedly vague) vision of the future with him at the Presidential helm. Effectively Carter attempts to define himself and thus his candidacy in the civil religious sacred by suggesting that he has the theological perspective the nation needs. Like the examples of the use of American civil religious signifiers we previously examined, Carter, in priestly fashion, indicates the nation is not on the right track. Notice how he says "on the move again," suggesting that America is

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Abraham and Mosses, for example. Other times the word was said to be received via an angelic intermediary for example in the case of Isaiah and the seraphims and Mohammad and Gabriel. In the Enlightenment thought of the founding fathers (at least as it is presented in the Declaration of Independence) God is less interventionist, though still knowable. The god's will and law are established in nature, exist self-evidently and humans are able to know the laws through their capacity for reason. Nevertheless, in both traditions humans can have knowledge of a divine will and that divine will is reflected in the sacred texts of those traditions.

stalled and thus not moving in the right (or any) direction. He then offers an alternative (himself) which is in accord with the ACR—an alternative that "lives up to the majesty of [the] Constitution."

As was the case in our examination of "The Founding Fathers" and its variants, signs referencing the sacred documents of the ACR are also used to support contradictory positions. The issue of abortion illustrates this well. For example, Anderson, in the 1980 Reagan-Anderson debate states:

> I also think that that unborn child has a right to be wanted. And I also believe, sir, that the most personal intimate decision that any woman is ever called upon to make is the decision as to whether or not she shall carry a pregnancy to term. And for the state to interfere in that decision, under whatever guise, and with whatever rationale, for the state to try to take over in that situation, and by edict, command what the individual shall do, and substitute itself for that individual's conscience, for her right to consult her rabbi, her minister, her priest, her doctor—any other counselor of her choice—I think goes beyond what we want to ever see accomplished in this country, if we really believe in the First Amendment: if we really believe in freedom of choice and the right of the individual.

In this selection of text, Anderson is clearly demarcating his position. He uses the personal signifiers "I. . .think" and "I. . .believe" bringing his candidacy into the context explicitly. He links these candidate signifiers with issue position signifiers (prochoice) and rounds out the familiar trilateral contextualization with his use of the civil religious signifier "the First Amendment." For Anderson, if "we" believe in the First Amendment as "we" should (i.e. as pietistic devotees of the American civil faith should) then "we" should also be supportive of a woman's right to choose.

As with the passage from Kennedy above, Anderson here is being an American civil religious fundamentalist deriving his theological position (and subsequently his issue position) from the sacred text. For him, the answer to the contentious social issue of abortion is clarified by the holy writ and if one 'really believe[s]' in the Constitution or specifically the First Amendment of the Constitution then one will ultimately have to be on the side of prochoice, which is, in Anderson's formulation a sacred "right."

Not surprisingly, not all theologians of the ACR agree with Anderson. Take Reagan for example. In the first debate of 1984, he states:

> I believe that until and unless someone can establish that the unborn child is not a living human being, then that child is already protected by the Constitution, which guarantees life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to all of us.[12]

In this passage, Reagan marks out his anti-choice stance on the issue using the issue signifiers "unborn child. . .protected" and the personal signifier "I believe." Like Anderson, Reagan finds clarity to the issue in the holy script of the ACR. It is

[12]This passage illustrates nicely the validity of the argument found above that there exists a recognizable narrative where the Constitution was an extension of the Declaration of Independence. Even though life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is mentioned in the Declaration of Independence and not in the Constitution, the Constitution guarantees these things nonetheless, according to Reagan. In short, there is a natural link between the two documents for Reagan.

found in the Constitution and indirectly the Declaration of Independence (life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness). Furthermore, he uses the group signifier "us" which re-enforces the collective national devotion to this sacred writ, reminding the audience that these texts are all Americans' sacred texts. The conclusion is that since the sacred texts are everyone's so too should be Reagan's preferred policy position.

Discussion

As was the case with our examination of the signs of filial piety, this investigation of signs indexing the sacred texts of the ACR reveal a contextualization of profane candidate and issue signifiers with civil religious signifiers as was predicted by the theory presented in Chap. 2. This further lends evidence to the argument that these speakers are attempting to define these profane signifiers as sacred. It also supports the assertion made in the second chapter of politics being a matter of definition. Specifically, we see the candidates trying to define their positions or candidacy as something sacred (or at least consistent with the sacred) according to the civil religious faith.

Additionally, like in the last chapter, we can see that this type of sacred signifier is also used in attempts to define contradictory issue stances. In this chapter, we saw the civil religious sign "the Constitution" being used to define both anti-choice and prochoice issue stances in much the same way we saw "the Founding Fathers" being used to try to define the role of government in society in the examples from the last chapter.

There appears to be real differences in the connections between the signifieds that correspond to 'abortion' and 'the Constitution' within the *Weltanschauungen* of Anderson and Reagan suggesting once again that defining objects is at its roots an idiosyncratic phenomenon. Although we cannot gauge the internal workings of these two politicians' minds from the data we are working with we can minimally, safely say that there are real differences in the connections made between the signifiers 'abortion' and 'the Constitution' as articulated and made available in the *Lebenswelt* by them.[13]

Finally, this examination of civil religious signifiers indexing the sacred texts of the ACR again reveals the limited nature of political contestability when civil religious signs are employed to help define issue positions and candidates. Since the speakers contextualize their particularistic issue positions or selves with the universalized American civil religious sacred they effectively posture themselves as in accord with the sacred and position those with differing standpoints as

[13]It is implied by our theory, however, that one will organize the signifiers one presents and thus makes available in the *Lebenswelt* according to the way in which her or his corresponding signifieds are organized in her or his *Weltanschauung*.

heretics. As was discussed in the previous chapter, this leaves little room for resolution at least not in the realm of public political discourse. Though as we will see in the next chapter, there is room for some type of resolution through institutional politics.

Essential Meaning

In the next chapter, we will begin to address the issues of particularistic interest contestation and resolution in-depth. However, this inquiry into the sacred texts of the ACR reveals something striking about the way these documents (particularly the Constitution) are generally spoken about which has important implications for the issue of contestability and is thus worth exploring here. Specifically, the examination of these civil religious signs showed that the Constitution is ubiquitously held (at least rhetorically) to contain some essential quality or qualities. That is to say, it is spoken of in a way which suggests that the speaker believes it to have a permanent, definite, absolute, unalterable and identifiable essence (as in an essential meaning or truth) at its core. This is expressed in different ways. For example, this essence is sometimes referred to as the Constitution's "vision" (Carter, 1976, Second Debate; Gore, 2000, Concession), what it "stands for" (Carter, 1976, Second Debate), what it "says" (Bush, 2004, Second Debate) or the "meaning" it has (Carter, 1976, Second Debate).[14]

What these things express, is an idea that one, definite, definitive, true and essential meaning can be divined or extracted from the sacred text. This essential meaning is seen as the sacred truth of the document that is unambiguously, self-evidently available for anyone who just looks at the documents correctly. Through simply reading the text one can "understand" (Dukakis, 1988, Nomination Acceptance) or 'interpret' (Bush, 1984, VP Debate, 1988, Second Debate, 2000, First Debate; Bush, 2004, Second Debate; Dole, 1996, Nomination Acceptance; Kerry, 2004, Second Debate) its true and essential meaning.[15]

However, many political commentators, from our dataset, allege (formed almost exclusively as straw man arguments) that individuals (primarily judges) purposely ignore the sacred truth of the Constitution for political (i.e. profane) motives. In John Edwards' words, it is argued that individuals are using the Constitution as "a political tool" (Edwards, 2004, VP Debate).

Many examples of this sort of argument can be found in our dataset including: "We want justices who will interpret the Constitution, not legislate it" (Bush, 1984, VP Debate); "what I would do is appoint people to the Federal Bench that will not

[14]Other times, this essential meaning is understood as what "the framers of the Constitution intended" (Perot 1992, first debate).

[15]Some scholars believe this authoritative view of the Constitution is rooted in the model of the Bible's treatment in Christianity (See Lerner, 1937, p. 1294; Semonche, 1998, p. 18).

legislate from the Bench, who will interpret the Constitution" (Bush, 1988, Second Debate); judges should "strictly interpret the Constitution and not use the bench to write social policy" (Bush, 2000, First Debate); "My litmus test for judges is that they be intolerant of outrage, that their passion is not to amend but to interpret the Constitution" (Dole, 1996, Nomination Acceptance); judges should use "a strict interpretation of the Constitution" (Kerry, 2004, Second Debate); "I want to make sure we have judges who interpret the Constitution of the United States according to the law" (Kerry, 2004, Second Debate); and "We've got plenty of lawmakers in Washington, D.C. Legislators make law; judges interpret the Constitution" (Bush, 2004, Second Debate).

In all these examples, there is at least an implied accusation that individuals are at best ignoring or more maliciously, deliberately circumventing the essential truth of the Constitution in order to advance political ends. In other words, there is an accusation that the sacred or universal is being violated for profane or particular purposes. What is significant about this is that these are more than mere policy disagreements. They are allegations that intolerable sacrilege is being committed.

Though most of the accusations were (as we see from the examples provided above) levied against straw men there was one example, in the dataset, where an accusation was levied against a specified person. In the third Presidential debate of 2008, Senator McCain states:

> Senator Obama voted[16] against Justice Breyer[17] and Justice Roberts on the grounds that they didn't meet his ideological standards. That's not the way we should judge these nominees. Elections have consequences. They should be judged on their qualifications. And so that's what I will do. I will find the best people in the world—in the United States of America who have a history of strict adherence to the Constitution. And not legislating from the bench. (McCain, 2008, Third Debate)

In this excerpt, McCain accuses the then Senator Obama of putting politics above the Constitution by opposing Samuel Alito's and John Roberts' nomination confirmation for the Supreme Court because of his "ideological standards." In this, McCain is revealing the common (though completely erroneous) assumption that there is (and thus normatively should be) something in the Constitution which is above ideology, and above politics. This something is, of course, what we have been referring to as it's essential (sacred) truth.

We can comfortably say that this is a completely erroneous assumption because as we have seen in Chap. 2 all cognitive meaning formation is a dialectical process which involves both the material substances available in the *Lebenswelt* and the idiosyncratic structure of one's individual *Weltanschauung*. This means that meaning is not, nor can it possibly be 'held' in a text. Nor can it be self-evident. In order

[16]The process for selecting Justices of the US Supreme Court is outlined in Article II, Section 2 of the US Constitution. It specifies that "the President. . .shall nominate, and by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, shall appoint. . .judges of the Supreme Court."

[17]Here Senator McCain almost certainly meant to say Justice Samuel Alito who was the other nominee to be appointed by President Bush while Obama was in the Senate. Justice Stephen Breyer was nominated by President Clinton in 1994, 10 years before Obama joined the Senate.

for any sense to be made of it, the text needs to be internalized. That is, the signifiers which comprise the text must be transformed into signifieds which are then fitted into one's *Weltanschauung*. To borrow from Nietzsche, the text cannot speak for itself, but stands "mute to the world" (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 86). It waits for internalization and inevitable idiosyncratic definition.

Any sign one may offer as representing the essential truth of the Constitution (e.g. freedom, democracy, justice, the people, equality, equality of opportunity, popular sovereignty, due process, civil liberties, civil rights, majority rule, minority rights, free commerce, etc.) can only stand, in the *Lebenswelt*, as a signifier devoid of any meaning waiting for definition. So, while many in the society may agree that any one of these signs (or even all of them) reference the essential truth of the document, each will have her or his own definition of that sign or signs. This, then undermines and falsifies the idea that an essential truth can and does exist, let alone could be divined or extracted from the document.

The lesson to take away from this is that these discursive fights played out in public political discourse are fights over a fiction. They fight ostensibly over a singular, absolute truth which does not and cannot exist. In essence, each person claims that she or he knows the truth and is in accord with the sacred, while her or his political opponents are ignorant of or maliciously obfuscating the truth. This is to effectively say that one's political opponents are sacrilegious villains or at least misguided heretics.

Furthermore, there is something terribly ironic about these appeals to an essential sacred truth to the Constitution—a truth that stands above politics—and the decrying of political uses of the Constitution. First, the Constitution is by its very nature a political tool. This is true not just of the Constitution of the United States of America but of all constitutions. They serve to structure how a group is to contest politics. They structure what is and is not permissible in the contestation over public policy decisions. In a constitutional democracy, the whole political-social order is predicated on the premise that one and all *must* use the constitution as a tool for the contestation of politics.

Second, in the final analysis, the very act of saying that the Constitution should not be used as a political tool is to do exactly that, to use it as a political tool. When one does this, she or he expresses the idea that there is one essential and absolute truth provided for in the document (which is represented in the sign "the Constitution") and simultaneously infers that she or he knows and supports that truth (i.e. is faithful to the sacred). By extension it also infers that those with differing issue or policy positions (i.e. political opponents) do not support or even defy the truth and sacredness of the document. That is, it infers that they are heretics and that if one is a faithful civil religious devotee one must reject their heretical position(s). This is, one could argue, not just a political move but the ultimate political move because it attempts to forever close off discussion and permanently define one policy or issue position as the only true, sacred, correct, righteous and proper position. In short, it seeks to foreclose the opposition.

The notion that civil religious signs have one singular, universal and sacred truth is not unique to "The Constitution." If we go back to the signs we examined in the

last chapter, we see that there is also an expressed assumption that "The Founding Fathers" and its variants represent one universal, essential and sacred truth. For example, in our dataset, we can see that this sacred truth has been referred to as: what "the Founders of our Nation meant" (Carter, 1980, Nomination Acceptance), the "vision" of the revolutionary founders (Bush, 2000, Nomination Acceptance; Ford, 1976, Nomination Acceptance); the revolutionary "spirit" (Dukakis, 1988, Nomination Acceptance); "Our nation's founding commitment" (Bush, 2004, Nomination Acceptance); the "ideals" of our founding (Nixon, 1960, Nomination Acceptance; Obama, 2012, Nomination Acceptance); the "founding premise" (Bush, 2000, Nomination Acceptance); "the promise of our founding" (Obama, 2012, Victory); "the way the framers" of the Constitution intended our government to be (Perot, 1992, First Debate); the founding "principle(s)" (Carter, 1980, Concession; Obama, 2012, Victory; Reagan, 1984, Victory; Ryan, 2012, VP Debate); and the founding fathers' "dream" (Carter, 1976, Nomination Acceptance; Gore, 2000, Third Debate; Obama, 2008, Victory; Reagan, 1984, Nomination Acceptance).

The dataset is, in fact, abounding with expressed assumptions that civil religious signs have one universal, absolute, essential and sacred truth. Kerry's 2004 nomination acceptance speech offers a final illustrative example. In it, he states: "tonight we have an important message for those who question the patriotism of Americans who offer a better direction for our country. . .they should remember what America is really all about" (Kerry, 2004, Nomination Acceptance). In this passage, Kerry invokes the sign "America" (an obvious totemic object), assuming or at least articulating an assumption that it has one true and definite meaning—what it is *really* about. Of course, as any true theologian of the American civil religion (and one who seeks to translate that theological purity into elected office), Kerry claims to know what that true meaning is and attempts to define "America" according to his definition.

American civil religious signs and totemic objects are generally treated as if they have one and only one true and essential meaning. There is, then, a constant fight (played out in public political discourse) over what that meaning is. This fight—the politics of the sacred—is very important. As Chap. 3 has shown, most in society and certainly those engaged in public political discourse agree that these are the signs which are the most important, critical or central for society and this has been the case for at least the last 50 years of American public political discourse. Therefore, if one is able to shift or shape the definition of one or all of these objects in the Volksw*eltanschauung* of the people, in a way which corresponds to his or her political agenda, that agenda would seem inviolable and sacrosanct. It would be shielded in sacredness.

Summary

After first theorizing the place of signs referencing the sacred texts of the ACR within the American civil religious tradition, this chapter has shown that like the signs examined in the previous chapter we see a frequent pattern in the way they are contextualized in the *Lebenswelt*. In sum, we see a three-part contextualization consisting of (1) civil religious signifier(s); (2) candidacy and/or issue signifier(s); (3) national group unity signifier(s). Since these findings are strongly in line with what we previously encountered, we can proceed with some confidence as to their generalizability. There is a consistent pattern of attempts to connect particularistic (i.e. profane) issue and candidacy signifiers to civil religious signifiers and group unity signifiers—that is, to connect the profane signifiers to universal sacred, totemic signifiers. This is so pervasive that we might say it is the modus operandi or at least one modus operandi of American public political discourse. It is a ubiquitous narrative form.

By forming these types of contexts, candidates are effectively fighting over an essential truth. They are attempting to define that essential truth. However, as we have just seen, an essential, absolute and universal truth for any of these signs is unobtainable and impossible given the nature of cognitive meaning formation. Nevertheless, this does not discourage those involved in public political discourse from trying. In the next chapter, we will examine what this means for the contestation over the sacred in the realm of public political discourse and how that contestation is played out in the development of public policy and public law.

Chapter 6
Contesting the Politics of the Sacred

Introduction

In the first chapter, we saw that there has been an inattention, in the ACR literature, to its political dimensions. After introducing the concept of the politics of the sacred or the politics of defining something according to its relation to that which is sacred for a political community, we began to investigate the ACR, from this perspective. In order to help us do this, Chap. 2 presented a semiotic and social psychological model for the study of civil religious signs. In short, this model argued that meaning formation is a product of the individual structure of one's *Weltanschauung* and the way that signifiers are contextualized and perceived in the *Lebenswelt*. Idiosyncratic variation in individual *Weltanschauungen* produces the condition that the way things are defined and made sense of is an idiosyncratic matter. However, it was also argued that while no two *Weltanschauungen* are exactly the same, the perception of similar signifiers in similar contexts that occurs within a social setting produces structural similarity between the *Weltanschauungen* of individuals. This structural similarity allows for some level of intersubjective validity in communication which in turn makes it possible for one to frame (i.e. contextualize) one's speech in such a way as to impact the way the perceiver ultimately makes sense of what is said.

It was further argued that signifieds which correspond to some signifiers have the potential for special emotional significance. Within a particular contextualization of signifiers, the presence of these signifiers help to orientate the definition of the signifieds which correspond to the other signifiers within that context. Specifically, they help to define them according to their relation to the signifiers that have corresponding signifieds with special emotional significance. Because of their use in ritualistic activities, it was argued that civil religious signifiers which are totems representing that which is sacred for the political community have this quality. They are used, then, to help define political issues according to that which is sacred for the political community.

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Politics involve defining. They require the *techne* of consciously and deliberately arranging signifiers in such a way as to influence how other agents make sense of them, helping to determine the meaning assigned to a signifier or signifiers in order to affect practical action or inaction toward it and other objects in the *Lebenswelt*. When civil religious signs are employed, politics become the politics of the sacred. That is, it becomes the conscious and deliberate attempt to define things according to their relation to that which is sacred in an effort to affect political decisions and outcomes.

In Chap. 3, a broad empirical study of the ACR was conducted as it was revealed in our sample of public political discourse over a 52-year period. From this study, we verified some fundamental assumptions about the ACR. In particular, we found substantial and widespread use of American civil religious tenets and symbols, lending credence to the idea that the ACR can be understood as a narrative form used to talk about and understand the nation. We also found considerable stability in the level of articulation of American civil religious language over time, no statically significant difference in articulation between parties, no statically significant difference between incumbents and non-incumbents and no statically significant difference between Vice-Presidential and Presidential candidates. These findings suggested that the ACR is a pervasive, deeply entrenched and widely diffused cultural phenomenon which transcends particularism and political affiliation. In short, these finding demonstrated the socially universal nature of the ACR.

Furthermore, we also found high levels of positive and strong correlation between the various signs and ideas associated with the ACR, lending evidence to the idea that the ACR serves as a cohesive narrative.

From the study conducted in the third chapter, we were also able to identify relevant signs of the ACR by looking at the revealed narrative elements of it. In Chaps. 4 and 5 we took a closer look at two different types of civil religious signifiers: signs of filial piety and signs of the American civil religious scared texts. These closer examinations showed that, in public political discourse, American civil religious signs are generally contextualized in a patterned way which is comprised of (1) civil religious signifier(s); (2) candidacy and/or issue signifier(s); (3) national group unity signifier(s).

The presence of universal civil religious signifiers and national group unity signifiers together with the particularistic, profane signifiers suggested that there are frequent attempts to have the signifieds which correspond to those particularistic signifiers defined in relation to the ACR sacred. This is so pervasive that it was asserted that this type of contextualization is a prevalent modus operandi in American public political discourse and a ubiquitous narrative form. In short, frequently it is the way in which American politicians talk about (and accordingly the American people hear about) American politics. This, in turn, means that candidates which are competing against each other and have contradictory issue positions attempt to define themselves and the issue positions they support according to his, her or its relation to the American civil religious sacred. There is then a contestation over these definitions. This contestation is what we have been calling the politics of the sacred.

As we saw in Chap. 4, the way that the politics of the sacred are contested in public political discourse practically precludes the possibility of reconciliation. Essentially, it amounts to an attempt to sanctify political positions and insulate them from definitive resolution. By defining issue positions and candidacies according to that which is sacred, one effectively attempts to sanctify them, to place them outside the bounds of contestable politics and insulate them from critique.

In the last chapter, we saw that the attempt to sanctify issue positions, to define them according to that which is sacred, to wage the politics of the sacred discursively, is also an attempt to ground issue positions and candidacies in an essential, sacred truth. However, we also saw that this essential, absolute and universal truth is an unobtainable fiction given the nature of cognitive meaning formation.

So far, we have encountered two reasons why the American politics of the sacred as they are contested in public political discourse elude resolution. First, the defining of an issue position or candidacy according to the American civil religious sacred means defining it in absolute, nonnegotiable terms. It means defining in such a way that any compromise would essentially mean committing sacrilege or admitting to heretical error. Second, the sacred has no (nor can it have any) absolute, true, universal or essential meaning which can act as a standard by which differing definitions can be arbitrated.

In our dataset, many examples can be found where different stances on an issue are defined according to the American civil religious sacred and these differing positions can persist over many years. For example, as we saw in Chap. 4, in 1984 Reagan was using signs of filial piety to contest the politics of the sacred on the issue of the role of government and 28 years later Obama was doing the same thing only doing so with a different issue stance. This is to be expected given the reasons stated above about how the politics of the sacred as they are contested in public political discourse elude resolution.[1]

But what does this mean? Does this suggest that the politics of the sacred are incapable of resolution? Are no resolution mechanisms available? This chapter addresses these questions. In brief, the answer to both of them is no. In the first case, we can say that, at least theoretically some types of discursive resolution are possible. Several means of discursive resolution will be explored below. As for the second question, institutional politics serve as mechanisms for the resolution of the politics of the sacred. What follows will show how electoral politics and judicial politics are both forms of institutional politics where the politics of the sacred are contested and resolved to different extents.

[1]This is also to be expect because to resolve the politics of the sacred would also mean to resolve contentious political issues. Sometimes this would mean resolving even extremely polemical issues like abortion or the proper role of the federal government. The fact that issues have real-life consequences, individual and group interests which are attached to them and the fact that the political losers will have to accept something they otherwise would not like to accept also presents an obstacle to the resolution of the politics of the sacred. However, of course this obstacle would be present regardless of whether or not the politics is contested as the politics of the sacred or along some other grounds.

The Politics of the Sacred and Discursive Resolution

Entrenchment in the Volksweltanschauung

One possible means of discursive resolution could result from the entrenchment of specific connections between specific signifieds in the *Volksweltanschauung*. This would produce a situation where a hegemonic definition would emerge in society whereby something is or is not closely associated with the civil religious sacred in a somewhat resolved way. That is, a certain type of issue could become connected to the sacred so firmly in the individual *Weltanschauungen* of many people, across the population that it effectively becomes the typical, commonsense, taken-for-granted, everyday definition for an overwhelming majority in the community. In other words, the definition would become entrenched (or sedimented, to borrow a concept from Husserl) in the *Volksweltanschauung*. If this occurs contestation would effectively be eliminated in public discourse. This might not ever be a complete resolution giving the diversity of individuals' *Weltanschauungen*; but it would be what we could term a general resolution. Alternative definitions would largely disappear and subsequently not be reproduced very often. This infrequency in reproduction would contribute to the unlikelihood of future reproductions because as we saw in Chap. 2 the material presentation of signifiers in the *Lebenswelt* contributes to the structuring of *Weltanschauungen*. The structure of one's *Weltanschauung* influences the manner in which one reproduces her or his world. At the same time the hegemonic, commonsense, taken-for-granted, typical, everyday definition would be frequently reproduced reinforcing this definition within the *Weltanschauungen* of the individuals in the community and contributing to the likelihood of its future reproduction, in the *Lebenswelt*.

The issue of slavery may serve as an example of this. If we see the argument over slavery in the American Civil War era and the years preceding it, in terms of the ACR (as Semonche (1998) has) we can understand it to be, at its core, a rather extreme case of the politics of the sacred. It was, in the final analysis an argument over definitions. Generally speaking, on the one hand, Southern interests defined slaves as property and thus defined the issue of slavery according to a connection to the sacred principle of property rights which in the Lockeian/Jeffersonian tradition are argued to be essential to one's sustenance and life-maintenance which are prerequisites to liberty. If one is unable to sustain one's self then one is susceptible to dependence on and ultimately enslavement to the state. To those espousing this tradition, to deny one of one's property was to not only effectively remove their liberty to use and enjoy property, it was also to make one susceptible to the tyranny of the state and subjugation of those in control of it. In short, we can say that the Southern cause (as reduced and reproduced here) can be understood as an attempt to define the issue of slavery in terms of the sacred rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. These are, of course, enshrined in the holy scripture of the ACR, the Declaration of Independence and it was thought to be protected in its equally sacred corollary, the Constitution of the United States of America.

On the other hand, generally speaking, interests represented by the Union cause defined slaves as people and thus defined the same issue according to the sacred principles of equality and liberty, specifically the proposition that all men are created equal and entitled to liberty as a matter of natural and divine law. This too is, obviously, codified in the sacred writ of the ACR as a fundamental assumption of the Declaration of Independence.

What is presented here is, of course, a simplification of the contestation but one which is representative of a large amount of philosophical and legal discourse surrounding the issue around the time of the American Civil War (Semonche, 1998). In sum, it was a contest over definitions where different particularistic sides found, essential, absolute and authoritative conclusions in the American civil religious sacred texts.

In present times, in public political discourse, however, there is virtually no argument about the way slaves and their descendants are defined and if we take mainstream public political discourse as the example, differing definitions are completely absent. Former slaves and their descendants are defined as human and the institution of slavery is ubiquitously seen as a dark spot in American history because it was not in accord with the American civil religious sacred. In the end, it became a given that the proper (i.e. the true, absolute, correct, universal and in accord with the sacred) conclusion to come to was that slaves and their descendants are human and that slavery was antithetical to the principle of all men being created equal which is professed in the holy writ of the ACR. Thus, this definition has become the quasi-official definition. It is the definition which is reproduced overwhelmingly and exclusively in mainstream American culture. It is the typical, commonsense, everyday, taken-for-granted (i.e. hegemonic) definition. It is the definition in the *Volksweltanschauung*.

Now, this is not to suggest that the losing definition has disappeared entirely. As was stated above, because of the diversity in *Weltanschauungen* across the American people, it is better to think of the resolution in terms of a general resolution. It may not be complete but the losing definition is certainly marginalized to the point where nothing even approaching it could be found in the dataset we examined in this book, for example. This is the case despite the fact that it was extremely prevalent during the period preceding the American Civil War, during it and even persisted for some time afterward.

Resolution Through Force, Coercion and Violence

When we consider this example of the issue of slavery as a case of the politics of the sacred, we must also take seriously the idea that the politics of the sacred in this instance were not simply played out in public political discourse. It is also a case of the politics of the sacred being waged on the battlefield. A resolution in the realm of public discourse was elusive. There were few, if any (at least those of note or influence) willing to publicly admit or accept that they were the propagators of a

heretical error before the war. A resolution was also evasive in the realm of normal or institutional politics (i.e. politics played out according to the established institutions and procedures of governance) for the same reason. Though efforts like the Missouri Compromise of 1820 which maintained a balance between slave states and free states could stave off violence for a time, ultimately these types of efforts could do little to prevent the politics of the sacred from first producing an outright schism of the ACR and then erupting into a holy war.

In the end, the winning definition was not so much accepted or acquiesced to, as it was imposed through physical violence, coercion and force. The terms of surrender were the acceptance of the theology identified with the Northern cause and a more apparent codification of this theology integrated as a sort of New Testament in the American holy book, the Constitution. This, of course, took the form of the Civil War Amendments which are the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments. The 13th Amendment prohibited slavery. The 14th Amendment provided for equal protection of rights and due process of law for all but was particularly meant to protect those of former slaves and their decedents and the 15th Amendment provided for their enfranchisement. In sum, these Amendments made explicit what the Northern theology professed, that is, that slaves are human and thus entitled to treatment as such, in accordance with the will of the god of the ACR as revealed in the Declaration of Independence.

Of course, the Civil War and the Civil War Amendments did not resolve all issues of race but it did change the way the dispute was conducted. The War cemented the signified which corresponds to the signifier, "African-Americans" and its historical counterpart "Negros" firmly to the signified which corresponds to the signifier, "humans." Consequently, it forced racial issues to be addressed in terms of equality and the politics of the sacred were often made in reference to the civil religious signifier "equality." The question became "What sort of policies with racial implications can and cannot or should and should not be connected (i.e. defined in terms of) "equality?"" For example, could things like segregated schools and public services be defined in terms of equality?

Resolution Through Discursive Processes

Although the use of force, coercion and violence weighted heavily in the sedimentation of a hegemonic definition in the example of the issue of slavery, these things were only factors (albeit important ones) in a larger discursive process. The Civil War helped to establish the parameters of the discourse. These parameters were, as we have just seen, that African descendants will be defined as human and this is an authoritative dictate of the civic faith—something which, from that point on, falls more or less outside of the bounds of contestable politics. However, not all general resolutions of the politics of the sacred need result from such dramatic conflict. They could result more directly through normal processes of social discourse.

Normal processes of social discourse are here defined as those processes of social discourse which fall short of violent confrontation.

Resolutions through normal discursive processes is in all likelihood a slow progression which would be carried out over generations. Perhaps, John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr. or Ronald Reagan emerging as objects of filial piety could be examples of this. Certainly, none of these people were always revered in the way they are now. They were not always referent objects of the American civil religion. Previously they were contentious and polarizing political figures, themselves contesting the politics of the sacred with contentious issues and before that they were virtually unknown by the American public. But, over time they have become totemic objects of the ACR, as we have seen in Chap. 3. For many individuals in American society, at some point the signifieds which are associated with these signifiers became intertwined with that special group of related signifieds in the *Weltanschauung* we have been referring to as the sacred. Yet, there were no wars fought to establish these statuses.[2] The exact means by which these figures became referent objects in the ACR is a matter for another study, though it likely included deferential treatment of the signifiers associated with those people in the mass media as well as retrospectives and commemorations (ritualized activities) which provided an articulated civil religious context for these signifiers. These articulated associations with the ACR would be internalized by perceiving agents and subsequently be reproduced over and over again, shaping the individual *Weltanschauungen* of individual Americans and the way she or he reproduced her or his world. These internalizations and reproductions would increase exponentially until a critical mass was achieved making them a sedimented feature of the *Volksweltanschauung* of the American people.

The Politics of the Sacred and Institutional Politics

Institutional politics operate within and as part of social discursive processes. They constitute a set of forums for social discourse. The words and actions found in them both affect and are affected by the wider social discourse. Congress declaring a public holiday commemorating Martin Luther King Jr., minting Kennedy's image on half-dollar coins and changing the name of Washington National Airport to Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport are all examples of normal or institutional politics contributing to a filial devotion to these figures. These political decisions carried out through institutional politics helped to make them referent objects in the American civil religion. They contributed to the signifieds which correspond to their respective signifiers to be located in the *Weltanschauungen* of

[2]Although, all three of these figures were victims of violent acts (which are also a type of discursive act). These acts may have helped steer the discourse toward their inclusion as referent objects in the ACR.

many individuals in American society (and subsequently the *Volksweltanschauung*) in such a way as to be connected to the civil religious sacred by publicly and officially placing the signifiers which index those figures in places of national reverence, importance and honor. At the same time, the actors within institutional politics were willing to make these decisions because there was a social climate conducive to it, a climate which was reflected in the social discourse of the times.

Although institutional politics are fora for social discourse they are also unique among the various fora of social discourse because they are where the various positions available in public discourse are chosen between. Whereas, in other fora of social discourse individuals say what should or should not be accepted or prohibited in the society, in institutional politics decisions are made as to what is and is not permissible in society. They are where the normative becomes prescriptive.

Waging the politics of the sacred can be about at least two things. First, they can be about impacting discourse and thus the way people make sense of their world. This works on the individual level but also has societal wide implications. As we have seen, the shaping of individual *Weltanschauungen* impacts the *Volksweltanschauung*.

Impacting discourse and its corresponding cognitive implications are at the heart of politics as understood in this book. Not coincidently, it is also central to the way several important Marxist thinkers conceptualize politics. Barthes (Barthes, 1972; Barthes & Lavers, 1972), Gramsci (Gramsci, Hoare, & Nowell-Smith, 1971) and Brecht (see Squiers, 2014), for example, fall into this category.

Nevertheless, discourse and how individuals within a group comprehend their world are of little importance in and of themselves. These things are, however, extremely important to the extent that they impact the way that world is ultimately organized. That is, they are important to the extent that they affect which things and actions are prohibited or allowed in the society and 'who gets what.' This then—demarcating what is and is not allowed in society—is the second thing the politics of the sacred can be about. In the final analysis, the politics of the sacred as a discursive process is a means to social imposition and regulation. It is a means of impacting what people can and cannot do within a community, delineating what is and is not allowed, determining distributions and the enforcement of these things. This includes the prohibitions or permitting of material things and objects, actions and inactions, obligations, and social relations of all types and at all levels. It also includes what sort of outcomes are or are not permissible in the society and what actions can or cannot be undertaken by the government in the name of the people. In short, the politics of the sacred as practiced in the United States is about affecting public law. The decisions reached in institutional politics (to the extent that they involve issues which are contested as the politics of the sacred) are then resolutions of the politics of the sacred. However, as we will see, these resolutions have varying degrees of finality and are never totally complete.

Electoral Politics

The United States of America is a republic which holds regular democratic elections. These elections decide who is entitled to enact, administrate and enforce public law. Elections are the test by which authority is bestowed and legislative and administrative powers granted. While we have been discussing the election related rituals in our dataset as being rituals with civil religious implications, they also have the obvious practical dimension of allocating power. In this sense, the politics of the sacred are waged in part with the practical goal of winning elections to gain access to legislative and administrative power and consequently have a say in what is prohibited and allowed in society. They are about translating electoral success into an ability to influence what is and is not public law and how that law is administered and enforced. This assertion is completely in line with the empirical findings presented in Chaps 3–5. In our examination of public political discourse, we have seen ubiquitous use of American civil religious language, throughout time and across a range of political actors, occupying different roles and having different partisan affiliations. If we understand the data from the perspective of it being held in the context of political campaigns (at least the nomination acceptance speeches and the debates undoubtedly fall in this category) we can see that the use of the language of ACR is done in the context of electoral contestation.

This is not to suggest that the ACR narrative is exclusively used in electoral politics. Clearly it is not (Bellah, 1967; Toolin, 1983). Electoral politics are just one dimension of the broader social discourse. But, this is a dimension with much importance for the reasons discussed above. When the politics of the sacred intertwine with electoral politics, electoral victories are simultaneously theological victories of sorts. Elections provide a means of civil theological contestation. As we have seen, elections offer a forum for presenting alternative civil theologies and permit the society to choose between them through the ballot. In this way, elections stand as periodic instruments for the temporary resolution of civil theological discord.

However, these resolutions are incomplete for several reasons. First, they are only temporary and they are reversible. Because elections are held periodically and power can be redistributed through them, theological course may change with the contestation of subsequent elections. Second, electoral victories do not always translate into victories in the creation, administration and enforcement of public law. These things have to be played out according to whatever restraints are present in and among the various political institutions. Divided government, interparty disagreement, filibusters, judicial review, organized opposition, public opinion, strategic considerations and other factors can prevent an elected candidate's civil theological positions from translating into public policy. Finally, as is the case with all instances of the American politics of the sacred, the possibility of reconciliation is elusive for the reasons outlined in Chap. 4. Nevertheless, to the extent that electoral politics do influence public law and to the extent that that public law

was contested using the narrative of the ACR, elections can be seen as provisional theological victories of the politics of the sacred.

The ACR and Differentiation

The fact that the ACR narrative is such a persistent and ubiquitous feature of American electoral politics, however, introduces an interesting conundrum. In general, political parties seek to differentiate themselves from other political parties in order to give voters discernable alternatives to choose from, and to highlight things that will attract supporters to the party. However, as we have seen, candidates from both of the major parties (and even the odd third party candidates) use American civil religious language in such a way that we were unable to find any significant variation between them. Therefore, American civil religious language cannot be a factor which would help a voter decide between parties. So why then do representatives from the parties employ the language of the ACR so frequently?

We can answer this question by returning to our finding of the three-part contextualization of (1) civil religious signifier(s); (2) candidacy and/or issue signifier(s); (3) national group unity signifier(s). While the civil religious signifiers and the group unity signifiers[3] provide no means of differentiation, the issue position signifiers do. Moreover, by and large American election campaigns are not about convincing unconvinced voters to vote for one party or another. The overwhelming majority of American voters have consistent and strong partisan proclivities and these partisan attachments are generally very stable over time (Berelson, Gaudet, & Lazarsfeld, 1944; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1966; Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Green & Palmquist, 1994; Green, Palmquist, & Schickler, 2002; Holbrook, 1994, 1996). Therefore, election campaigns are primarily about making sure those who have an attachment to one's party get out and vote. In short, they are about mobilizing party supporters and sympathizers. When a candidate links himself or herself (and by extension his or her party) or the issue positions he or she supports to the civil religious sacred there is the potential to create in his or her supporters a sense of emotional excitement—the effervescence to which Durkheim referred. This is especially true if we again see these speech acts as part of ritual activities. The emotional excitement which is produced can stimulate a potential voter's desire to participate in the election.[4] It can incite a religious fervor which can be translated into political action.

[3]These also have a religious dimension in the Durkheimian sense of religions being that which maintains group collectivity.

[4]This may work by producing a stronger more positive evaluation of the candidate which would, in turn, make the potential voter more enthusiastic and thus more likely to vote. Although Chapp (2012) has not fully articulated the causal chain between American civil religious discourse, candidate evaluation and turnout, this is one possibility which is consistent with his findings.

In sum, the use of American civil religious language makes one's supporters more susceptible to mobilization efforts. This helps to explain why candidates rely so heavily on discursive features which cannot help them differentiate themselves from their opponents.

Judicial Politics

Electoral politics are not the only case where institutional politics offer the opportunity for civil theological contestation and resolution in America. Judicial politics are also an institutional ground for contesting the politics of the sacred. However, unlike the type of resolution we encountered in the case of electoral politics, those found in this realm are much more lasting and final in character.

In order to understand the American politics of the sacred as they are contested and resolved in the judicial branch, it will be helpful to review some of the structural characteristics and functions of the judiciary. To begin, the United States has a hierarchical system of appellate courts. With few exceptions, these courts rule on the legality and constitutionality of lower court decisions. On the top of the hierarchy sits the Supreme Court of the United States. It is the highest court in the United States and its decisions are not reviewable by any other court. It is the country's court of last result.

One of the principle functions of the Supreme Court is to review and determine if executive actions and legislation are in accord with the Constitution of the United States. This is known as judicial review. Although this function is not specifically granted to the Court in the Constitution, it has become an accepted principle of American politics beginning with an 1803 Supreme Court case known as Marbury and Madison. In this case, the Court examined a provision within an act of Congress that had been signed into law by President Washington. The law was known as the Judiciary Act of 1789. In part, it attempted to extend the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court beyond that which was provided for in the Constitution. The Court ruled that this provision was contrary to the Constitution and thus was void.

This move did two things of importance for the current discussion. First, it helped to establish the preeminence of the Constitution in the legal system. This is something which is also supported within the text of the Constitution itself. Article Six, Clause Two, often referred to as the Supremacy Clause specifies that the Constitution, federal law and treaties are the highest law within the country. In Marbury and Madison, the Court clearly established the Constitution as the highest form of federal law by using it as the basis for invalidating a duly enacted piece of federal legislation. Thanks, in part, to the precedent established in this case, the Constitution emerged, in American institutional politics, as the authoritative legal text.

Second, in the Marbury and Madison case the Supreme Court established a precedent which would ultimately position that body as the highest interpreter of the Constitution. Effectively, it granted itself the power to interpret the

Constitution, something which other political actors including the other branches of government or the various states were not granted.[5,6,7] The only other actors capable of interpreting the Constitution are courts under the Supreme Court and decisions by these courts are reviewable by the Supreme Court and thus can be overruled by it.

Although the procedure and power of judicial review and the parallel ability to nullify federal legislation and governmental actions are not specified in the Constitution, the authority and legitimacy of these types of Supreme Court rulings have been accepted as a stable and established convention of American politics. It has become a broadly recognized and expected institutional feature of American politics since Marbury and Madison. Furthermore, it is a convention which those in the other branches of government and other political actors have been willing (though sometimes begrudgingly) to accept as binding and conclusive even though they may strongly disagree with the Court's judgment. This idea can be seen for example, in Gore's 2000 concession speech found in our dataset. Referring to the Supreme Court's decision in Bush and Gore (2000) which ended vote recounts in the closely contested state of Florida and eliminated any chance of Gore winning the election he stated, "Now the US supreme court has spoken. Let there be no doubt, while I strongly disagree with the court's decision, I accept it. I accept the finality of this outcome. . ."[8]

We have just seen that the Supreme Court is the highest judicial authority in the United States and thanks to established convention it has the highest authority to rule on the constitutionality of political decisions made by others. In addition to this, the Supreme Court is able to act largely without worry of intervention,

[5]Semonche (1998) offers a well-researched and detailed view of the path the Supreme Court took in achieving its status as the ultimate authority in Constitutional interpretation, arguing that in Marbury and Madison the Court donned "the mantle of the high priest charged with interpreting the holy writ of the American civil religion" (p. 58) and in Ableman and Booth (1859) "In repulsing Wisconsin's challenge to federal authority, [Chief Justice Roger B.] Taney had claimed ultimate authority for the Court in interpreting the Constitution" (p. 98).

[6]Ableman v. Booth, 62 U.S. 506 (1859).

[7]Obergefell v. Hodges, 576 U.S. ___ (2015). Note for the Obergefell case the underscore is part of how these cases are cited.

[8]It should be noted that there are, at times, those willing to question whether the Supreme Court should have this power and those who are openly hostile to it. A recent example can be found in the reaction of some conservatives to the decision handed down in Obergefell and Hodges (2015) which ended the practice of discrimination against homosexual couples in the area of marriage and effectively legalized gay marriage throughout the entire United States. For example, the former Republican Governor of Arkansas, Mike Huckabee decried what he referred to as, the "notion of judicial supremacy" and argued that states could ignore the Supreme Court decision (Bobic, 2015). Nevertheless, the principle of what Huckabee refers to as 'judicial supremacy' is the standard operating procedure of American politics and is firmly established as such. This fact explains, at least in part, the widespread attention his statement received and the widespread rejection of it even among other conservatives who were equally disappointed with the Court's decision. Ending 'judicial supremacy' would mean fundamentally altering the American political system and changing the taken-for-granted, everyday, commonsense way of thinking about American politics.

influence or retribution from other political actors. There are several reasons for this including the facts that: Justices enjoy life-tenure and thus do not have to worry about remaining popular to maintain their positions; their compensation cannot be diminished during the duration of their service; and it is extremely difficult to impeachment them. Article II, Section 4 of the Constitution reserves impeachment for "Treason, Bribery, or other High Crimes and Misdemeanors" and the process itself requires formal charges to be adopted by a majority of votes in the House of Representatives and a conviction by a two-thirds supermajority vote in the Senate.

Not only does the Supreme Court enjoy the highest authority to interpret the Constitution and virtual immunity from the pressures of other political actors, several institutional factors contribute to its rendered decisions having a more or less final character. First, the mechanisms available to supersede a Supreme Court ruling are limited and where available difficult to make use of. Essentially, if the Supreme Court rules that something is or is not unconstitutional, opposition who wish to remain within the bounds of institutional politics have two options for further contesting that ruling. One option is to amend the Constitution. This is a difficult process which involves two stages—a proposal stage and a ratification stage. In order for a constitutional amendment to be officially proposed either a two-thirds vote in both houses of Congress or a national constitutional convention called by Congress at the request of two-thirds of the state legislatures is needed. The ratification stage is also very difficult to obtain. In order for an amendment to be ratified and thus become Constitutional law a three-fourths approval by state legislatures or a three-fourths approval by state conventions is required. As we can see, in both phases of the amendment process supermajorities are needed to successfully amend the Constitution. These processes set a very high threshold for superseding a Supreme Court decision through this mechanism by allowing a relatively small opposition to stifle it. In fact, it is so difficult to change the US Constitution that it has only been done 27 times since its inception in 1789 and ten of those Amendments were proposed in the very first Congress of 1789 and ratified shortly afterward, in 1791.

The second option within institutional politics available for those wishing to supersede a Supreme Court ruling is to wait until a differently comprised Court emerges and hope that this Court will rule differently than its predecessor. Although this has happened before[9] it happens very infrequently for a couple of reasons. The first reason is the lengthy tenure of Supreme Court justices. The Supreme Court is comprised of nine members. Members are nominated by the President and obtain

[9]Brown and The Board of Education of Topeka Kansas (1954) is perhaps the most famous example of this. In this case the Court overruled a previous Supreme Court decision handed down in Plessy and Ferguson (1896). In the Plessy case the Court ruled that the provision of "separate but equal" facilities for those of different races was constitutionally permissible, effectively upholding the principle of racial segregation. In the Brown decision, the Court ruled that segregation in public schools violated the Constitution, specifically the equal protection provision of the 14th Amendment, arguing that "separate but equal" facilities were inherently unequal.

their position after confirmation by the Senate. Once confirmed the justices can serve for as long as they maintain 'good behavior' which effectively means a lifetime tenure. This produces a situation where substantial variation in the composition of the Court often takes decades. By that time, the ruling which some might hope to supersede by another Supreme Court ruling has already had time to become a fixed and institutionalized expectation of American politics and social discourse making it very difficult for social and practical reasons to overrule. The second reason is that overruling previous Courts is antithetical to the long standing judicial principle of stare decisis or the policy of allowing previous judicial decisions to stand. This principle has the practical appeal of allowing things to move forward by preventing continual reassessment. The idea is that once the matter is resolved, it is resolved. This principle serves as one of the most basic and longstanding in the American judicial system and as such Justices have historically been reluctant to contravene it.

To summarize, in American institutional politics the Constitution stands as the highest, most authoritative legal document. The legality of actions, rules, laws, regulations, etc. are ultimately judged based on their accord with the principles and procedures of this document. The Supreme Court enjoys the highest authority to decide what is and is not legal according to the highest, most authoritative legal text. Furthermore, the structural position of the Supreme Court in institutional politics is that of the most authoritative and most conclusive interpreter of the Constitution. Once decisions are made by the Court, options to override them while still remaining within the bounds of institutional politics are limited and difficult to utilize.[10]

Thus far, this section has been addressing the Constitution as a legal document. However, as we have seen, the United States was founded on a religious legal-political, self-understanding which attempted to order social organization according to divine, transcendent principles. These principles formed the basis of a civil faith structure which was outlined in the Declaration of Independence and is generally believed to be embodied in the Constitution. In this way, the Constitution is seen as not only codifying human law, it is seen as codifying higher, divine law and is thus treated as a sacred document. Given this, when the Supreme Court makes a ruling about what is or is not in accord with the Constitution they are simultaneously laying down a civil religious and a legal judgement. It is legal in the sense that it decides matters of public law and public administration. It is civil religious to the extent that the judgment is derived through the interpretation of what is considered a sacred, divinely inspired civil religious text.

Understood in this way, the Supreme Court has a dual function. They are the chief legal authority in American institutional politics and they are also the chief theological authority in the American politics of the sacred. They are something like an American council of Ayatollahs tasked with extracting the truth from the

[10]Though of course options outside institutional politics (e.g. discursive options, violence, civil disobedience, etc.) remain open.

holy text. This is a function that has been recognized by several scholars. Semonche (1998), for example argues that the Supreme Court is the "supreme priestly interpreter of the Constitution" (p. 11) and consequently the "high priests of the American civil religion" (p. 12) while Levinson (1979) has said that "The United States Supreme Court plays an essential role in the [American civil] religion. It is, so to speak, the institutional church that incarnates the sacred document" (pp. 123–124) and Lerner (1937) has stated that the Court exercises "a guardianship over" the holy writ (p. 1293) and has played "the role of the Platonic guardians that watched over the mythical Greek republic" (p. 1308).

In this role as chief interpreters of the Constitution, the Supreme Court has become intricately tied to that holy document (Casey, 1974; Lerner, 1937; Levinson, 1979; Semonche, 1998) and in turn has become invested "with all the panoply of sanctity with which the Constitution has itself been invested" (Lerner, 1937, p. 1293). This notion of sacredness is reinforced by the highly symbolic and ritualistic mode in which the Supreme Court operates. Vining (1986), for example has drawn parallels between sectarian churches and the Supreme Court in this regard suggesting that court proceedings are high rituals, the Justices' robes are akin to priestly vestments, and the Supreme Court building itself is a solemn temple. Likewise, Petrick (1968) has discussed the "somber, dignified and sacred setting surrounding the Court" (p. 19) while Lerner (1937) argues that "the Court still wears the ancient garments of divine right" (p. 1291). Furthermore, as Semonche (1998) shows continuously and overwhelmingly throughout his excellent book, the language of Supreme Court decisions is littered with American civil religious narrative elements. The decision handed down in Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania and Casey (1992)[11] can serve as an illustrative example of this:

> Our Constitution is a covenant running from the first generation of Americans to us and then to future generations. It is a coherent succession. Each generation must learn anew that the Constitution's written terms embody ideas and aspirations that must survive more ages than one. We accept our responsibility not to retreat from interpreting the full meaning of the covenant in light of all our precedents. We invoke it once again to define the freedom guaranteed by the Constitution's own promise, the promise of liberty. (Quoted in Semonche, 1998, p. 390)

By framing its decisions in the American civil religious narrative, the Supreme Court shrouds its decisions in the ultimate or highest legitimacy—the divine, the transcendent—and thus gives their decisions (as well as themselves) the appearance of being completely authoritative. By framing decisions in the American civil religious narrative, legal rulings become rulings on divine law. They become fatwas.

Because of its institutional position both in terms of American institutional politics and the American politics of the sacred, the Supreme Court's civil religious/political decisions are the most final experienced in the country. However, as we have seen they do not provide a complete resolution to the politics of the sacred.

[11] Planned Parenthood v. Casey, 505 U.S. 833 (1992).

There are some means available within institutional politics for further contestation, there are further means available in terms of normal discursive contestation and of course there are means available outside of the realms of normal discourse and institutional politics such as civil disobedience and violence. Notwithstanding, these decisions do have a decidedly final appearance and are often treated as such. Supreme Court decisions such as the Brown case discussed in the footnote above have a way of firmly shaping the theological outlook of the nation.

Conclusion

Throughout this book, we have been understanding the ACR, in terms of a narrative form. As such, it is composed of a set of themes and ideas which are represented in symbolic form and broadly understood to be sacred for members of American society. The representation of these themes and ideas in the *Lebenswelt* are what Durkheim referred to as totems. A totem is a sign (signifier) which when internalized as a signified 'belongs' to a set of closely related signifieds within one's universe of stored signifieds (one's *Weltanschauung*). The set of signifieds which totems 'belong' is what we have been calling the sacred. Signifieds within this set of closely related signifieds have special emotional significance due to the use of their corresponding signifiers as central components of social ritual activity.

As signs, totems have the potential for intersubjective validity. That is, they have the ability to mean something to those who perceive it. In particular, they have an ability to register a cognitive connection between its corresponding signified and signifieds which carry with them special emotional significance. It is this potential which one hopes to make operable, when one contests the politics of the sacred in electoral politics. Here, the politics of the sacred are about forging cognitive connections in one's audience in an effort to elicit an emotional response within that individual which can serve as an impetus for practical action.

This is and is not the case with the politics of the sacred as they are contested in judicial politics involving the Supreme Court. Whereas in electoral politics the practical action one hopes to provoke is a decision between options (e.g. vote instead of not voting or vote for me, not my opponent), the action the Supreme Court hopes to provoke is not optional or at least is not optional if one desires to remain within the bounds of legality. The structural position of the Supreme Court allows that body to dictate the action. Nevertheless, the Court must take seriously the notion of compliance. It is one thing to rule that someone must do or not do something. It is quite another if that person does what is ordered. While courts in the United States do have some coercive means available to them like fines and incarceration for contempt of court, these mechanisms are very weak, generally speaking and thus cannot be relied on as mechanisms of coercion. So, if the Court lacks coercive mechanisms how or why do they have such power? Why, for the most part, are coercive mechanism not needed? Simply put, judicial rulings and

orders are followed because they are seen as legitimate. Political actors adhere to them because they believe it is the right or just thing to do.

The Supreme Court is in a very precarious position in that there is no textual legitimation to be found in the Constitution for the powers they exercise, nor do they have the repressive powers to force compliance. Therefore, they must provide their decisions with another type of sanction. They must claim legitimacy by other means. This legitimacy is achieved through promoting the appearance of being oracles and shaman. It is in the fiction that the Court is capable of finding the one true and essential meaning of the sacred text. Moreover, it is in the notion that this body and this body alone is able to do so. The ritualization of the Court, its ceremonial garb and its commanding use of the American civil religious narrative all contribute to the general acceptance of this fiction. In short, the Supreme Court uses the language of the ACR to lend its edicts the appearance of being authoritative, ultimate and divinely sanctioned. They use it to put whatever issue they rule on outside of the bounds of contestable politics.

This chapter has provided us with a closer look at the nature of the politics of the sacred as they are contested in the United States. As we have seen, the politics of the sacred are thoroughly immersed in American political culture. It shapes and provides parameters for social discourse and is an established feature of institutional politics. It can even serve as the basis for civil disobedience and other forms of extra-legal political contestation. The irony of this is, of course, that their rulings are rarely unanimous. Even though a majority decision is authoritative and thus universally applied, judicial dissents reveal that the particular is always there despite the mask of a totalized universality.

In the first chapter, it was argued that the United States was founded upon an Old-Testament theological outlook which viewed a divine entity as the ultimate authority over society and a check on the actions of the nation. In this sense, from the beginning, the United States has been a theocracy. There has been an intermeshing of metaphysical, religious beliefs and transcendent principles with public institutions and public law. The prevalence of American civil religious language in American social discourse and institutional politics which has been revealed in this study suggests that these foundations are still operative assumptions of social order in the United States, today. In the next chapter, we will see how this socio-cultural tradition mediates the antagonism between the particular and universal.

Chapter 7
Conclusion: The Mediation of the Universal and Particular

This book has sought a better understanding of the political dimensions of the ACR and in the process, to resolve the central contradiction within the literature between the core idea of a universal, socially held set of beliefs which structure the society's political outlook and the partisan realities of those politics. To accomplish this, it has theorized and revealed the ACR as a phenomenon with a particular and a universal nature.

The examination in Chap. 3 revealed its universal qualities by finding substantial and widespread use of American civil religious tenets and symbols in public political discourse over an extended period. In sum, this chapter showed the ACR to be a prevalent, deeply entrenched and widely diffused narrative, cultural phenomenon which transcends particularistic factionalism and political affiliation.

In Chaps. 4 and 5, we signaled out some ACR totems for closer inspection—signs of filial piety and the American sacred texts. In these chapters, we found a recurrent pattern in the way these representations were contextualized in an overwhelming majority of the cases in our dataset. Specifically, we found that these totems were contextualized with issue positions signifiers and/or candidacy signifiers as well as signifiers indexing national group unity. This finding showed us the nature of the particularistic usage of the ACR. Specifically, candidates attempt to define conflicting issue positions or candidacies by that which is sacred for the American people. As we saw in Chap. 5, however, the attempt to define something according to that which is sacred is an attempt to define it according to an unquestionable, absolute, universal and essential truth which is an unobtainable fiction given the nature of cognitive meaning formation. Nevertheless, there is a widespread belief or minimally the purported belief that this fiction is real.[1] In many ways this contradiction, battling over something that does not nor cannot exist, is the essence of the

[1]For a discussion on how the education system in the United States contributes to this by disseminating the catechism of the ACR see: Michaelsen (1969, 1970, 1971), Gleason (1977), Smidt (1980), Hook (1984), Gamoran (1990) and Bankston and Caldas (2009).

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politics of the sacred. The whole logic of the business is predicated on the assumption that this falsehood has ontological validity, that it is something real, knowable and beyond subjective interpretation. More than that, it is made operable by the willingness of actors to either believe (or at least claim) that they have the Archimedean point whereby they can access the essential truth.

In essence, the politics of the sacred is largely a discursive battle over definitions where the object is to encourage one's own definition to be the definition others accept. There are long term and short term objectives for this. In the short term, it can legitimate political decisions. It can also lead to political mobilization and gaining access to governmental power through electoral politics in order to affect political outcomes through public law and public policy. The other side of that coin is that it could also help prevent others from achieving governmental power. In the long run, it serves to shape how most in the nation know and understand reality, sets restrictions on what can be known and understood and consequently informs the manner in which those in the society reproduce their world. In a word, it molds the *Volksweltanschauung*. This too has the practical consequence of affecting public law and public policy because the *Volksweltanschauung* structures what the empirical 'realities' of the time are (i.e. how the *Lebenswelt* is made sense of and what is believed). These 'realities' are then translated into normative prescriptions which in turn become the political positions which are contested and are subsequently transferred into public policy and law.

In the final analysis, the politics of the sacred are means through which social imposition (i.e. the prohibition and acceptance of things, actions, social relations, distributions, etc. within a society) is achieved and justified. Social imposition exists when political decisions are made and enforced regardless of whether those politics are contested as the politics of the sacred or by other means. In all instances, political decisions tell people what they can, cannot and must do. However, the justification for these impositions are qualitatively different when they emerge from the politics of the sacred. Here, the justification is allegedly to be found in the transcendent, the universal, the sacred. In this way, the politics of the sacred are contestations over civil theological discord. But, they are also contestations over power, fought-out in the institutional, political mechanisms of the country.

How the Universal Mediates the Particular

The political dimensions of the ACR, then, are both ideational and practical, existing as belief structure and in praxis. The way the ideational and practical intertwine is the mediating force between the universal and particular, in the United States. This is an integrated, dialectical process working in several dimensions at once.

Discursive Mediation

To begin, the ideational and practical which comprise the ACR work together to mediate the particularistic antagonisms in society in two ways. First, there is a discursive mitigation. The ideational character of the ACR shapes how the world is conceived, which in turn affects how that world is reproduced, which subsequently molds how that world is conceived and then subsequently reproduced. In other words, the way the world is understood through the *Weltanschauung* affects one's praxis in the world (in this case, what is said). This, in turn, creates new signifiers and new arrangement of signifiers which when internalized impact the *Weltanschauung* which once again affect the praxis of describing the world. This process continues ad infinitum.

In its articulated narrative form, the ACR vigorously connects particularistic political utterances to American civil religious totems. This reveals that there is then a psychological connection between these things in the individual *Weltanschauungen* of the American people and thus also in the *Volksweltanschauung* which is reproduced, consequently strengthening the connections in an individual's *Weltanschauung*, in turn impacting representations.

This framing is so prevalent, its reproductions so frequent that it has taken on a quasi-essential, rule-like character and is a commonsense, taken-for-granted way of understanding and speaking about politics. It is an ingrained, deep-seated and anticipated social narrative form in public political discourse. As such, it shapes and limits discursive, particularistic political competition. It orientates and persuades the competition to remain within the unstated but nevertheless coercive, discursive rules of engagement laid out in the American culture. In other words, it demarcates discursive boundaries—it says, "these are the signs, ideas, values and principles one references when talking in public political discourse."

What results is that particularistic utterances and the way they are internalized are simultaneously reaffirmations of the ACR and thus the universal. In this narrative tradition, particularism doesn't stray far from the universal. It is bonded to it. Thus, there are limits to particularistic political competition built into the narrative form that mediate the extent of that competition. Particularistic political competition is tethered to the universal. The length of this tether is the extent of the discursive limits.

Institutional Mediation

The second way the ideational and practical work together to mediate particularistic social antagonisms has to do with the establishment of institutional arbitrating mechanisms in the sacred writings. The Constitution lays out mitzvoth for acting toward particularistic interests. It establishes a Congress, Presidency and judicial branch giving each specific roles in the resolution of particularistic competition. It

also prescribes processes for delegating power within those institutions and these processes all originate, in some way through a public ritual which is open to nearly all in the *civitas*[2] and represents the most widely participated in public act of collective behavior in the United States, elections.[3] Since these institutions have their origins in the civil religious sacred text, they have a sacred authority to decide between particularistic positions and are therefore perceived as the legitimate mechanisms for hatching out particularistic political competition. In short, since they are derived from the sacred Constitution they are perceived as being the only proper (i.e. civil religious holy) way of settling particularistic discord. Their presence in this sacred text, its place within the ACR narrative and subsequently the *Volksweltanschauung* of the American people serve to channel particularistic competition into these prescribed institutional pathways. The ACR belief structure thus limits, confines and restricts the manner and scope of particularistic competition in society, in its practical application. It mediates it by bounding it within certain parameters. Furthermore, people largely accept the political decisions reached through these institutions even if their particular interest loses because ultimately the decisions were reached in accord with the way the god of the American civil religion has prescribed. This belief keeps the people from seeking redress outside the bounds of normal politics (i.e. those handed down in the holy scripture). This point is supported by the civil religious nature of election concession speeches and was made especially clear in our examination of Gore's concession.

Reciprocally, the praxis of settling to one degree or another the particularistic discord through these institutional mechanisms also has the practical application of reinforcing the ACR belief structure. These are highly ritualized processes which frequently present and make American civil religious totems available for public perception. We have already seen that other scholars have commented on the civil religious importance of Presidential rituals and we have also seen for ourselves that electoral and judicial politics are replete with civil religious representations. The use of civil religious totems contributes to the future likelihood of civil religious re-representations thus helping to perpetuate the ACR. Additionally, these rituals infuse effervescent potential into the ACR. They serve as the source of effervescent possibility in the signifieds which correspond to the American civil religious signifiers. It gives them special emotional significance.

[2]Of course, this access has gone from less to more inclusivity over time. The Fifteenth (1870), Nineteenth (1920), Twenty-third (1961) and Twenty-sixth (1971) Amendments all expanded enfranchisement.

[3]The sheer number of participants, the fact that it carries out what is written in the civil holy writ (the Constitution) and the way it reinforces the narrative of the ACR by directly linking the praxis of the *civitas* to the religio-political mechanisms of the society make elections, in this author's mind the most significant civil religious ritual in the United States. Strangely, this is an argument which hasn't been made previously in the extensive literature on the ACR.

How the Particular Mediates the Universal

So far, we have seen the ways in which the universal is able to mediate the particular through the dialectic of the ideational and praxis that comprise the ACR. But, the particular also limits the extent of the universal. Every time a particularistic utterance is tied to an American civil religious totem in public political discourse, it has some implication for the definition assigned to it in the *Weltanschauungen* of the agents who perceive it. These implications on the *Weltanschauungen* of the people will, in turn, affect their practical action, which again impacts the *Weltanschauungen*, ad infinitum. Furthermore, each political decision reached as a result of an institutional practical playing out of the politics of the sacred also impacts the way future representations of ACR totems will be understood and thus the way the ACR will be understood. This, of course, will affect future action, in turn affecting future understanding, etc. Over time, these processes forged by particularistic action and conceptual understanding can change the *Volksweltanschauung*, the archetype of collective understanding, including the points of conceptual overlap which constitute the sacred. In other words, these processes can over time change the sacred (i.e. the universal). Since the particular has the potential to reshape or redefine the sacred, it can therefore limit the universal. It prevents it from becoming a complete, totalized universality.

The flexibility of the sacred which is rooted in its absent, fictive nature helps mediate the tension between the particular and universal. There is always an unresolved nature to the universal which is a condition brought about by the particularistic. As we saw in the last chapter, there is a discursive impermanence and there is an impermanence to the institutional decisions arrived at in the politics of the sacred. The politics of the sacred are never completely resolved in mind nor praxis.

As we can see, the ACR exists as a mutually reinforcing system of belief and praxis where actions reaffirm beliefs and beliefs shape actions. Within this system, particular beliefs and actions demand an opening up of the universal which restricts it from becoming a totalized universality while the universal demands a closing off of the particular which bounds particularistic competition within certain parameters. The universal is always there shaping the particular and the particular is always there shaping the universal—the gravity of each pulling the other, preventing them from moving out to their extremes. In this way, partisan sentiments and society's fundamental and defining principles exist coextensively. They exist bonded together like dancers in a dialectical *pas de deux*—each one existing in its own right but tied together so as to move as one, in an overall direction. Each one reacts to and reacts on the other to create this direction. But, this is not a fixed direction. It is under-determined to the extent that the human mind is capable of producing new and different connections in the *Weltanschauung*. Each new or different connection, its subsequent representations and internalizations by others can move it in seemingly infinite ways.

It is this relationship at the heart of the ACR between the ideational and praxis that is the mediating force between the universal and particular in the United States. It mediates the tension between social cohesion and individualistic interests holding together each in an uneasy tension which effectively limits the extent of each. This finding is what has been missing in the literature on ACR and stands as the principle contribution of this book, bringing together the "macro and micro level" and encompassing "the view from high altitudes and more localized and contested ground-level picture" (Murphy, 2011, p. 231).

This is an important finding not just because it sheds light on the political dimensions of the ACR, something we have desperately lacked in our understanding of this phenomenon; but, because it sheds light on the functionality of the entire socio-political order of the United States. It is logical to assume that a functioning democratic society must have a viable coexistence between social cohesion and particularistic competition. To move to one extreme would mean the cutting off of particularistic competition and thus the end to the democratic form of government. To move to the other extreme would mean limitless partisan discord and the dissolution of the society. What this book has shown is that the narrative of the ACR and the social belief structure which is shaped by that narrative create the groundwork for practical action in the realm of electoral and institutional politics which re-enforces that narrative and belief structure, again laying the groundwork for practical action that re-enforces the narrative and belief structure. This dance of the ideational and praxis holds the universal and particular together in a way which maintains social cohesion by allowing what is taken (broadly speaking) by the society as 'just enough' or 'an acceptable amount' of particularistic competition; but, at the same time prevents a totalization of the universal and absolute negation of the particular.

Discussion

One of the advantages of the ACR is that it allows political institutions to serve as mechanisms for the resolution of civil theological disputes. As we have seen, both electoral politics and judicial politics were able to resolve theological conflict to greater or lesser degrees. But, this resolution is never complete and the recourse to violence is always available for the future contestation of the theological disagreement. Nevertheless, the significance of having institutional mechanisms for resolving theological disagreement should not go unnoticed. The history of the planet is abounding with examples of the violence which emerged when theological discord could not be resolved through institutional remedies and as we saw in the last chapter, at least one example can also be taken from a survey of American history. The resolution or at least temporary, impermanent or not quite resolved resolution which is obtained through institutional political channels is preferable to many than would be for example, a resolution forged by AK-47s and car bombs or a resolution through means of genocide.

Nevertheless, the politics of the sacred have a tendency to obscure the fact that the political decisions derived from them are nothing more nor less than just that, political decisions. If a society pretends that political decisions are something more than that, if they continue to be beholden to the fiction of the absolute, that society limits and relegates itself to the world of possibilities found only inside the sacred palisades it has erected around itself. At the same time, it restricts and prohibits itself from the world of possibilities outside its gates. Even though the sacred can be redefined in the ACR it can only move incrementally and these increments might not be good enough. An example from the American experience can help to make this important point more concrete:

> When the Great Depression stimulated new and often unprecedented federal government activity that was challenged as unconstitutional, critics saw this popular reverence for the Constitution as an obstacle that would have to be overcome. Although such profound respect might satisfy certain psychological needs, they said, such an attitude only furthered the rule of the privileged and deflected the people from their need to use the law as an instrument to improve their condition. (Semonche, 1998, p. 36)

Of course, some would argue that to bound society is exactly the point of having sacred principles and a justification for the continuance of the social practice regardless of any baggage that may accompany it. We cannot deny that some principles by which a society lives and organizes itself can be seen as more preferable than others, on any number of accounts and social principles are not a bad thing in themselves. However, there are vast historical examples of sacred principles that have all been cast aside for the sake of 'progress' only to be replaced by other sacred principles. Most see that which was sacred in the past and is now discarded and discredited as rightly rejected and justly shunned. These things are considered myth, illusion, falsehood, mistaken, incomplete, confused, etc. Few, however, are likely to believe that one day their beliefs, their sacred principles will be chucked unto the trash pile of antiquated (or worse yet 'false') beliefs. However, if past experience is indicative of the future, today's sacred principles will at some point join the ranks of the scorned.

But this raises an interesting question. Could a society organize itself entirely by principles and ideas which do not take on the quality of the sacred? Even if a society continually questions, debates and even revises its basic principles that impulse to continually question and revise may in itself still be a sacred principle and one that falls outside the bounds of contestable politics. One could argue that in such a society the cult of relativism would reign.

This then brings us back to Durkheim and his insistence that all societies have a religious center (i.e. that which is sacred) holding them together. If this is correct then all societies probably have arguments about how socio-political alternatives relate to those sacred principles. In short, they all have some form of the politics of the sacred. Exploring the various ways different societies may contest and resolve the politics of the sacred would be a logical and illuminating extension to the research conducted in this book. The theoretical framework employed in this study can be of use toward this endeavor. This would require identifying the sacred principles and symbols of the society and then attempting to identify which political

contestations were framed according to them. One could also use the ACR as a baseline for comparing the extent to which (and rate that) the civil religious sacred intertwines with political discourse. It could also involve examining the extent to which institutional politics are bounded by and act upon the socio-religious narrative.

Furthermore, besides the comparative examination of the politics of the sacred, there is still room for future exploration into the American case. The work presented in this book is only the first step in a more complete picture of the political dimensions of the ACR. For example, we might ask if there are other institutional means available for the contestation and resolution of the politics of the sacred which have been overlooked or one could investigate how the politics of the sacred have been waged outside the bounds of institutional politics or normal discourse. The Civil War, the KKK, Daniel and Philip Berrigan, Martin Luther King, Jr., abortion clinic bombings, and more recently Kim Davis are just some examples of the politics of the sacred being waged outside the bounds of institutional politics and normal discourse. A full accounting of the history of the politics of the sacred in civil disobedience and political violence would certainly be an interesting and revealing project. Finally, we have seen that the ACR acts as a narrative form through which individuals contextualize and speak about politics. But, are there other narratives used and if so what are they and how do they compare to the American civil religious narrative in terms of ubiquity and authoritativeness of use? Knowing the extent to which the ACR narrative form is used in comparison to other forms would reveal much about American political, civil religiosity and indeed about the culture from which it emerges.

These are potentially fruitful and worthwhile avenues for future study and it is this author's belief that additional research could be conducted using the framework of the politics of the sacred. Discord and the resolution of discord are essential features of a stable and functioning society. The politics of the sacred are about contesting and resolving disagreement over the most central and fundamental aspects of the society. To understand a society's politics of the sacred is to understand something about the essence of that society. It is also to understand what makes that society a society.

Appendixes

Appendix A: Coding Definitions of Terms

Filial piety	Text expresses a devotion to and/or faithful adherence to the 'founding fathers' or the invocation of a particular founding father. Or text expresses a devotion to and/or faithful adherence to the ideas of other figures in American history.
Sacred texts and symbols	Text expresses a belief that certain secular texts like the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence and the Gettysburg Address, etc. are sacred. Or text expresses a belief that certain secular symbols like the flag, etc. are sacred.
The sanctity of American institutions	Text expresses a belief that American institutions are sacred. Institution is here defined as a set of rules, structures or mechanisms which serve to help achieve social order and cooperation and regulate behavior. Institution can apply to formal institutions like Congress, Courts, the Presidency, etc. or informal institutions like marriage or the media.
The belief in God or deity	Text expresses a belief in God or a deity. Or the text expresses faith in God or a deity or a higher power.

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Rights are divinely given	Text expresses a belief that rights derive from God or are endowments from God, or a higher power.
Freedom comes from God through government	Text expresses a belief that freedom derives from God, or a higher power or is an endowment from God or a higher power and/or that government ensures or should or needs to ensure it.
Governmental authority comes from God or a higher transcendent authority	Text expresses a belief that governmental authority is derived from God or a higher transcendent authority or is an endowment from God or a higher transcendent authority.
Knowing God through the American experience	Text expresses a belief that God can be known through the historical experience of the American people.
God is supreme judge	Text expresses a belief that God is the highest judge of people and their actions.
God is sovereign	Text expresses a belief that God is the ultimate or highest sovereign entity or that God is sovereign over man.
America's prosperity results from God's providence	Text expresses a belief that Americans' prosperity or the prosperity of the United States of America results from God's providence or will or that Americans' prosperity or the prosperity of the United States of America is attributable to God's will or intervention.
City on a Hill/ U.S. as beacon of hope and righteousness	Text reveals a belief that Americans or the United States of America is (or should be) an example of: righteousness, hope or salvation. Or promoter of God's will and an example for other countries and/or individuals to follow or aspire to. Or that Americans or the United States of America acts (or should act) in such a way, in the international arena, as to promote, secure, enforce, or carry out righteousness and/ or God's will. Or the United States of America or Americans have a divinely sanctioned obligation and/or mandate to lead the world or other countries.

Sacrificial death and rebirth	Text expresses the notion that people or some individuals have sacrificed their life or lives for national transcendent principles and that their sacrifice has led to renewal or rebirth of the nation, the state, or the transcendent principles of the nation. Or text expresses the notion that people or some individuals should make sacrifice of some type in order to promote national transcendent principles which could lead to the renewal or rebirth of the nation, the state, or the transcendent principles of the nation.
Higher purpose	Text expresses a belief that Americans or the United States of America serve, should serve, need to serve or have a higher purpose than self-interests.

Appendix B: Breakdown of Filial Piety by Individual or Group Across Datasets

	Nomination	Debates	Victory and concession	Total
Lincoln	18	17	4	39
LBJ	2	1	0	3
Wilson	3	5	0	8
Nixon	2	0	0	2
FDR	12	16	0	28
Ford	2	0	0	2
JFK	13	20	0	33
Reagan	8	4	0	12
Truman	10	9	0	19
John Winthrop	1	0	0	1
Eisenhower	2	2	0	4
F.L. Hamer	1	0	0	1
Founding fathers	16	7	6	29
Humphrey	1	0	0	1
G. Washington	2	3	0	5
Scoop Jackson	1	0	0	1
J. Adams	1	0	0	1
MLK	2	4	1	7
D. Webster	1	0	0	1

(continued)

	Nomination	Debates	Victory and concession	Total
Greatest generation	5	1	0	6
H. Clay	1	0	0	1
N. Armstrong	1	0	0	1
S. Rayburn	1	2	0	3
Franklin	1	0	0	1
R. Taft	1	0	0	1
L. Morris	1	0	0	1
Abstract references	6	3	0	9
RFK	1	1	0	2
S. Douglas	0	0	1	1
Puritans	2	1	0	3
Paine	1	2	0	3
B.T. Washington	0	0	1	1
Jefferson	2	0	3	5
T. Roosevelt	4	4	1	9
Hugo Black	0	1	0	1
Eleanor Roosevelt	0	1	0	1
H. Greeley	0	1	0	1

Appendix C: Breakdown of Sacred Texts and Symbols by Item Across Datasets

Text or Symbol	Nomination	Debates	Vic/con	Total
Constitution	18	38	1	53
Gettysburg Address	1	0	0	1
Flag	13	3	1	17
Dec. of Independence	8	7	1	16
Pledge of Allegiance	4	4	0	8
4th of July	1	3	0	4
Statue of Liberty	3	1	0	4
Lincoln Memorial	1	0	0	1
I Have a Dream Speech	1	0	0	1
Stars and Stripes Forever	1	0	0	1
Bill of Rights	3	8	0	11

Appendix D: Correlation Matrix

	Piety	Sacred~s	Instit~n	Deity	Divine~s	God_Fr~m	God_Au~y
Piety	1.0000						
Sacred_Texts	0.4094*	1.0000					
	0.0001						
Institution	-0.1075	0.2053	1.0000				
	0.3273	0.0594					
Deity	0.1233	0.3473*	0.0395	1.0000			
	0.2610	0.0011	0.7199				
Divine_Rig~s	0.0199	0.2660*	-0.0837	0.2383*	1.0000		
	0.8567	0.0139	0.4463	0.0281			
God_Freedom	0.0791	0.2467*	-0.0191	0.4218*	0.5299*	1.0000	
	0.4716	0.0228	0.8624	0.0001	0.0000		
God_Author~y	-0.0541	0.0401	-0.0637	0.1556	-0.0258	0.2997*	1.0000
	0.6231	0.7155	0.5626	0.1551	0.8147	0.0053	
Experience	0.0693	-0.0217	-0.1459	0.3147*	-0.0591	0.2318*	0.4364*
	0.5284	0.8436	0.1827	0.0034	0.5910	0.0328	0.0000
God_Judge	0.2832*	-0.0219	-0.0637	0.0644	-0.0258	0.2997*	-0.0119
	0.0086	0.8425	0.5626	0.5583	0.8147	0.0053	0.9139
God_Soverign	0.0255	0.1630	-0.0098	0.1787	0.0298	0.0054	-0.0330
	0.8170	0.1362	0.9289	0.1017	0.7863	0.9609	0.7640
Prosperity	0.1653	-0.0380	-0.1179	0.1229	0.2032	0.0849	-0.0289

```
             |   0.1306   0.7299   0.2825   0.2626   0.0622   0.4398
0.7932
   City_Hill |   0.4713*  0.3154*  0.0553   0.1068   0.1424   0.3733* -
0.0595
             |   0.0000   0.0033   0.6152   0.3305   0.1937   0.0004
0.5887
Death_Rebi~h |   0.2607*  0.2777*  0.1669   0.0910   0.0168   0.0019  -
0.0625
             |   0.0159   0.0101   0.1269   0.4076   0.8784   0.9859
0.5699
Self_Inter~t |   0.4759*  0.3445*  0.0447   0.1795   0.1104   0.3866*
0.0025
             |   0.0000   0.0012   0.6845   0.1003   0.3146   0.0003
0.9820

             | Experi~e God_Ju~e God_So~n Prospe~y City_H~l Death_~h
Self_I~t
-------------+------------------------------------------------------------
  Experience |   1.0000
   God_Judge |   0.4364*  1.0000
             |   0.0000
God_Soverign |   0.1817  -0.0330   1.0000
             |   0.0960   0.7640
  Prosperity |  -0.0661  -0.0289  -0.0801   1.0000
             |   0.5477   0.7932   0.4662
   City_Hill |   0.1682   0.4027* -0.0769   0.0659   1.0000
             |   0.1239   0.0001   0.4843   0.5491
Death_Rebi~h |   0.0500   0.0218   0.0840   0.0325   0.0633   1.0000
             |   0.6495   0.8428   0.4447   0.7681   0.5650
Self_Inter~t |   0.2358*  0.5310* -0.0151  -0.0260   0.8618*  0.0175
1.0000
             |   0.0298   0.0000   0.8909   0.8133   0.0000   0.8740
```

.1 < | r | < .3 small correlation

.3< | r | < .5 medium correlation

| r |> .5 large correlation * p <.05

Appendix E: Filial Piety Signs and Contextualized Signifiers

Source texts	"Founding Fathers" signs	Contextualized issues signifiers	Candidate or Candidacy signifiers	Group unity signifiers
1960 Nixon Nomination Acceptance	The great ideals of the American Revolution	Threat of the Communist revolution	What I am saying	us/our/we/
1976 Carter Nomination Acceptance	America's birth/ Unspecified people that dedicated themselves to principles/ Principles of the Declaration of Independence	Global inequities		Ours/national commitment/ our/we/the character of the American people
1976 Carter Nomination Acceptance	Nation's first leaders	Freedom/equality/ economic needs/ environment/ privacy	My vision of this nation and its future	We/our/us/our nation's first leaders
1976 Ford Nomination Acceptance	Our revolutionary founders	Limited govern-ment/opportunity	The mandate I want in 1976/ my mission	Ours/Together/ We/our/ Americans
1976 Ford First Debate	Our forefathers gave us the finest form of government in the history of mankind	Trust/size of government/ industry/labor unions/education	On November second all of you will make a very, very important decision	We/our great country/our nation's history/ us
1980 Rea-gan Nomi-nation Acceptance	Those people pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor to found this nation.		My view of government	We/our/us/the people/pledge to each other
1980 Carter Nomination Acceptance	The Founders of our Nation	Strength and security	Join me/Choice between two futures	Join me/we/ Americans/us/ our
1980 Carter Concession	Great principles that have guided this nation since its very founding	Progress	This has been a long and hard-fought campaign	This nation/We must come together
1984 Reagan Nomination Acceptance	Our Founding Fathers	Welfare state to statism/freedom/ orderly society/ role of government	Our choice	Our

(continued)

Source texts	"Founding Fathers" signs	Contextualized issues signifiers	Candidate or Candidacy signifiers	Group unity signifiers
1984 Reagan Victory	Patriots more than 200 years ago	Opportunity		The people/our country/we
1988 Dukakis Nomination Acceptance	The dream that began in Philadelphia 200 years ago/ reference to Valley Forge	Military strength/ economic strength/a foreign policy that reflects the decency and the principles and the values of the American people	I want the members of congress to work with me and I'm going to work with them	We/our
1992 Perot First Debate	The framers of the Constitution	Special interest money	Principal that separates me/The thing that separates my candidacy and makes it unique/I go into this race	The people/our/ we
1996 Dole Nomination Acceptance	Ghosts of Valley Forge	Commit to the American solider/ international leadership	I will never commit the American solider to an ordeal without the prospect of victory	Our/the nation/ us/we
1996 Dole Second Debate	Our founding fathers	Power of central government	The President has a great responsibility. That's one that I understand and certainly will carry out	Our/we/country
2000 Bush Nomination Acceptance	Founding premise	New cures of medicine/ technologies/ economy/peace/ struggle for human dignity	If you give me your trust, I will honor it/ Give me the opportunity to lead this nation, and I will lead	This nation/we/ our/our nation
2000 Bush Nomination Acceptance	The vision of America's founders	Restoring the country		We/our
2000 Gore Second Debate	Our founders	Freedom/free markets	I see our greatest national strength	Our/this nation/ we/Americans/ us

(continued)

Source texts	"Founding Fathers" signs	Contextualized issues signifiers	Candidate or Candidacy signifiers	Group unity signifiers
2000 Gore Third Debate	Our founders	Campaign finance reform		The American people/we/our
2004 Kerry Nomination Acceptance	The sons and daughters of liberty [who] gave birth to our nation	Freedom/the middle class/fair shot [opportunity]	I accept your nomination	Our/us/ the American people
2004 Bush Nomination Acceptance	Our nation's founding commitment	Safer world/conservative philosophy/extending the frontiers of freedom	I am running for President with a clear and positive plan	We/Our/here at home
2004 Bush Nomination Acceptance	Settlers on perilous journeys, inspired colonies to rebellion	Progress in the Middle East/ aiding the rise of democracy	I believe that America is called to lead the cause of freedom	We/the American people/our/ Americans/our nation
2008 Palin VP Debate	Our founding fathers	MaCain's Agenda [Planform]	We will do what is best for the American people	Our/the American people/we/this nation.
2008 Obama Victory	Dream of our founders		Tonight is your answer [election night victory]	Our/this nation Americans/we
2012 Obama Nomination Acceptance	Heart of our founding	Citizenship/ obligations to one another/personal responsibility/free enterprise system/ mortgages		We/Americans/ our/citizenship/ obligations to one another
2012 Obama Nomination Acceptance	Our founding ideals	Role of government/ commitment to others		We/our/ours/ We, the people/ our destinies are bound together/ commitment to others/duty/ patriotism/us/us, together/My fellow citizens
Ryan 2012 VP Debate	Our founding principles	Economy/ government dependency	I will not duck the tough issues, and we will not blame others/ The choice is clear	our

(continued)

Source texts	"Founding Fathers" signs	Contextualized issues signifiers	Candidate or Candidacy signifiers	Group unity signifiers
2012 Obama Victory	A former colony won the right to determine its own destiny		The task of perfecting our union/ our journey has been long	Our/this country/ we/an American family/one nation/one people/the American people/us/we
2012 Obama Victory	The principle we were founded [on]		I am looking forward to reaching out and working with leaders	Our/ourselves/ us/us together/ we
2012 Obama Victory	The promise of our founding	New jobs and new opportunities and new security for the middle class	We can build on the progress we've made	We/our

Appendix F: Sacred Text Signs and Contextualized Signifiers

Source texts	Sacred text signs	Contextualized issues signifiers	Candidate or Candidacy signifiers	Group unity signifiers
Kennedy 1960 First Debate	Constitutional rights	Enjoy[ing]. . .full constitutional rights/ chance [equal opportunity]	I'm not satisfied	Our/we
Kennedy 1960 Second Debate	Constitutional rights	Fair employment. . . regardless of their race or color/ Title Three/ protect Constitutional rights	He [Nixon]/ his [Nixon] support	Around the country/ everyone
Kennedy 1960 Second Debate	The Declaration of Independence/ the Constitution	Equality of opportunity	I believe	We/our
Kennedy 1960 Forth Debate	The Constitution	Foreign policy	I've been/I run for the presidency/select	We
Kennedy 1960 Forth Debate	Constitutional rights	The minimum wage and for housing and economic growth and development of our natural resources, the Tennessee Valley/ defense, strong in economic growth, justice for our people	I believe/ this party—Republican party	We/our

(continued)

Source texts	Sacred text signs	Contextualized issues signifiers	Candidate or Candidacy signifiers	Group unity signifiers
Kennedy 1960 Nomination Acceptance	The Constitution	Religious pressure or obligation/public education/separation of Church and State	I am/nominating someone of my faith/my ability/ My record	The American people
Ford 1976 Nomination Acceptance	Constitutional oath	Our long national nightmare is over [Watergate scandal]	I/myself	Our people/our institutions/My fellow Americans
Ford 1976 Nomination Acceptance	The Constitution		I	My fellow Americans
Carter 1976 Nomination Acceptance	All people are created equal and endowed with inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness	Act abroad [foreign policy]		Ours/nation/ national commitment/ our/we/ ourselves
Carter 1976 Nomination Acceptance	Constitution		I see	America/ united/nation/ our/our people/ we
Carter 1976 Second Debate	Constitution	Foreign affairs/ foreign policy	I know	We/our country/our people/the American people
Carter 1976 Second Debate	The Constitution	Foreign affairs	I believe/Mr. Ford	Our people/the American people/we
Carter 1976 Second Debate	Bill of Rights/ Constitution	Boycott of American businesses by the Arab countries	I've/I/Mr. Ford's administration	Our country/ we've/our
Carter 1976 Second Debate	The principles of our Constitution and Bill of Rights	Proliferation of atomic bombs	This election	Our children/ our top leadership/we/ our/us/the American people/our government
Carter 1976 Second Debate	Vision of the Constitution	Peace/freedom/individual liberty/basic human rights/world leadership		We/our people/ us in the greatest nation on earth

(continued)

Source texts	Sacred text signs	Contextualized issues signifiers	Candidate or Candidacy signifiers	Group unity signifiers
Carter 1980 Nomination Acceptance	The Constitution	Good jobs/decent health care/quality education/opportunity for all people/ equal rights	I	
Reagan 1980 Reagan-Anderson Debate	Most sacred documents—the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence	Return to traditions and values	I	This country/ Our Government/ we're a nation
Anderson 1980 Reagan-Anderson Debate	First Amendment	Unborn child has a right to be wanted [abortion]	I	This country/ we
Reagan 1984 Nomination Acceptance	The sacred right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness	Welfare state/statism/government largesse/government authority/less individual liberty/ individual freedom/ orderly society	Our choice	Our/We/bonds that tie us together as one nation under God
Mondale 1984 Nomination Acceptance	Constitution	Equal Rights Amendment	I/my second Inaugural/ my	
Reagan, 1984 First Debate	The Constitution	Separation of church and state	I	
Reagan 1984 First Debate	The Constitution/ guarantees life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness	Unborn child [abortion]	I	Us
Mondale 1984 Second Debate	The Constitution	Strengthen enforcement at the border/ undocumented workers	I	We
Ferraro 1984 VP Debate	Our Constitution	Supreme Court justices [selection of]	I/me	Our
Bush 1984 VP Debate	The Constitution	Abortion/ picking the Supreme Court justices	I/Mr. Mondale/ Ronald Reagan	
Dukakis 1988 Nomination Acceptance	The Constitution	Nominees to the federal bench	We're	

(continued)

Source texts	Sacred text signs	Contextualized issues signifiers	Candidate or Candidacy signifiers	Group unity signifiers
Bush 1988 Second debate	The Constitution	Appoint[ing] people to the Federal Bench	I	Us
Perot 1992 First Debate	The Constitution	Special interest money	The principal that separates me/I/the ballot	The people
Clinton 1996 Nomination Acceptance	The Constitution/ the Bill of Rights/ the Declaration of Independence	Discrimination		Our/America/ we/us/our people/fellow Americans/our family
Clinton 1996 Nomination Acceptance	The Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the Declaration of Independence	Religious liberty/ freedom of speech/ working hard and playing by the rules.	I/I'm	
Dole 1996 Nomination Acceptance	The Constitution	Equal protection/ opportunity	I/my administration	Every American/us/ the unity of the nation/this country/we
Dole 1996 Nomination Acceptance	The Constitution	Judges [nominating]	I	
Dole, 1996 Nomination Acceptance	The Constitution	Judicial appointments	I/President Clinton/this campaign/My administration	Citizens
Dole 1996 First Debate	The Tenth Amendment	Power back to the states and back to the people [role of federal government]	I/my/my difference with the President	The people
Dole 1996 Second Debate	The Tenth Amendment	All-powerful central government	I/my pocket	We/the people
Clinton 1996 Second Debate	Our constitution	Equal treatment	Me/I	We/our country/us/our
Clinton 1996 Second Debate	The constitution/ the Bill of Rights/ the Declaration of Independence		Me	We/our America
Kemp 1996 VP Debate	First Amendment		I/electing Bob Dole/make up their minds about who should be the leader	This nation/the American people/this country

(continued)

Source texts	Sacred text signs	Contextualized issues signifiers	Candidate or Candidacy signifiers	Group unity signifiers
Gore 2000 Nomination Acceptance	The Constitution		I	All the people
Bush 2000 Nomination Acceptance	The Declaration of Independence		This [Clinton] administration/ They/ We/ another chance, another shot/ this year	Our/this country/ American character and American courage
Bush 2000 Nomination Acceptance	The laws of our land		I/my	Our
Bush 2000 First Debate	The Constitution	Judges [nomination]	The voters/I/my opponent/me	
Lieberman 2000 VP Debate	The Declaration of Independence	Employment Non-Discrimination Act	I	The country/all of us/our/us
Gore 2000 Third Debate	The Constitution		I	Our country/ the United States of America
Gore 2000 Concession	Declaration of Independence/ constitution		I/my	Americans/our
Kerry 2004 Nomination Acceptance	The Constitution		I	Us/our
Kerry 2004 Nomination Acceptance	The Constitution		I/President George W. Bush/ opponents	The American family
Kerry 2004 Third Debate	Constitution	Discriminat[ion] in the workplace	I	We/the United States of America/we're a country/we
Kerry 2004 Third Debate	First Amendment/ Fifth Amendment/ the Constitution		The President/I	America/our
Kerry 2004 Third Debate	Second Amendment	The assault weapons ban	I	
Kerry 2004 Second Debate	The Constitution	The Patriot Act	I	We/ Americans/our

(continued)

Source texts	Sacred text signs	Contextualized issues signifiers	Candidate or Candidacy signifiers	Group unity signifiers
Kerry 2004 Second Debate	The Constitution	Pick somebody [Judicial nominations]	I/me	
Bush 2004 Second Debate	The Constitution	Pick people [Judicial nominations]	I/one of us	We've
Kerry 2004 Second Debate	The Constitution	Judges [Judicial nominations]		We
Kerry 2004 Second Debate	The constitution	Abortion	I	All the people in the nation
Edwards 2004 VP Debate	The Constitution	Marriage [same sex]		This country
McCain 2008 Nomination Acceptance	All people are created equal and endowed by our Creator with inalienable rights		Sen. Obama and his supporters/ big differences between us/my/ me/I	Unites us/We are fellow Americans/ association/ We're
Palin 2008 VP Debate	The Constitution	An agenda	we/ i	Our/the American people/this nation
McCain 2008 Third Debate	The Constitution	[Judicial] nominees	Senator Obama/ Elections have consequences/ I	
Romney 2012 Nomination Acceptance	America's first liberty: the freedom of religion	Taxes/sanctity of life/marriage	Me/ President Obama/ I	America's
Romney 2012 Nomination Acceptance	Endowed by our Creator/ Constitution	Rights		America/our
Obama 2012 Nomination Acceptance	Endowed by our creator with certain inalienable rights	Personal responsibility, and we celebrate individual initiative	My opponent	We/this country/ Americans
Romney 2012 First Debate	The Constitution/ the Declaration of Independence	The role of government	I	Us
Romney 2012 First Debate	Endowed by our creator with our rights	Commitment to religious tolerance	I	We/our

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