One Nation Under Whose God?:

Interfaith Work in the Unique Religious Setting of the United States

Melissa I. Tucker

Point Loma Nazarene University

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for graduation with

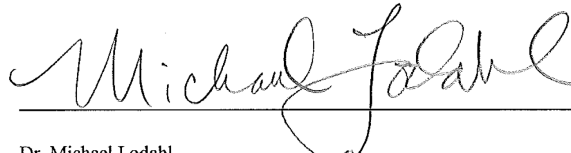Master of Arts in Religion

POINT LOMA NAZARENE UNIVERSITY

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By:

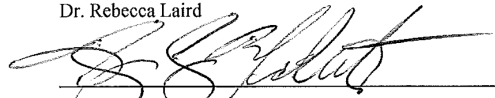Melissa I. Tucker

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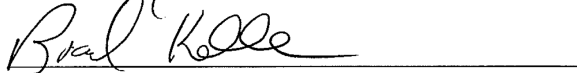
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Dr. Brad E. Kelle

Acknowledgments:

I never intended to get a masters degree. And I certainly never expected to get one in theology. I expected, as someone who anticipated working as an elementary school teacher well into her 70s, that if I ever did sense a pull to grad school, it would be in curriculum development or administration or something like writing children's fantasy novels. Nowhere in my plan was a career change, a return to my alma mater as an employee, pursuit of ordination as Nazarene clergy, church work, a masters degree in nonprofit management, or another one in theology. Yet, nowhere has God's goodness and grace been more evident to me than in the gentle way I have been guided through each of these adventures. I cannot explain this dance God and I are in, how I know the moves of my partner who is often elusive and quiet, but that mysterious process is the most sacred, treasured aspect of my life.

Not often do I face a challenge and think, "I can't do this". Even amidst daunting circumstances, formidable time crunches, or a serious lack of skill/knowledge, my ridiculous amount tenacity and energy can forge a path. I remember exactly what I was wearing when I admitted to my minsters' group, the first time I spoke the words aloud, that I didn't believe I could actually write this thesis. I was intimidated and scared by a project this lengthy and I actually did not feel that I could wrangle in my ideas, wrap them into the research I'd done, and offer something of use. Our conversation that Tuesday morning got me out of paralysis. Every minister should be so blessed to have such a safe, sage, irreverent, funny group of people to lean on. Thank you, friends.

Though I have always gravitated to the spirituality or theology sections of bookstores, I was not prepared for the shock of being dropped in the deep end of subject

matter I knew I would come to love, but could not quite access in the beginning of my

theological studies. My first class in the program, *War in the Hebrew Bible*, with Dr.

Brad Kelle, was a rigorous, fascinating journey through the most troubling, confusing

passages of the Old Testament. It was quite an initiation. From that first class to every

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That second class was with Dr. Michael Lodahl, professor for the majority of my

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and more capable than I really am. Our conversations are filled with light and laughter

and bad Jewish accents. I am absolutely a better thinker, minister, and Christian because

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This thesis is 1,000 times stronger because of my brilliant committee. Dr.

Rebecca Laird not only breathed new life into my project by asking what would make

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This thesis allowed me the great privilege of interviewing those who dedicate themselves to interfaith work; their stories and lessons punctuate and enliven the research. Many thanks to: Joan Campbell, Laurie Coskey, John Adam, Abigail and Steve Albert, and Mary Ferro.

I know there are much higher hurdles to jump, but writing this was the hardest thing I've ever done. It has taught me, as hard things often do, that the deep well of God's peace, energy, and joy is an unending and surprising supply. I offer this project as a gift back to God and I pray that the ways it stretched and educated me will be used in service of loving God and every neighbor.

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Introduction

"The question 'Whose America?' is increasingly being answered as the words,
though not the deeds, of America's founders demanded."[1]
- William Hutchison

The United States is one of the most religiously diverse nations in the world (Pew

Research Center, 2008a) – and some experts would argue it is *the* most (Eck, 2001).

While the Pew Research Center's Global Religious Diversity report categorizes the

United States as a moderately diverse nation according to its definition and criteria for

diversity, the study notes, "The U.S. would register as considerably more diverse if

subgroups within Christianity were counted" (Pew Research Center, 2014a). The majority

of these subgroups exist as individual denominations within Christianity and New

Age/Thought Movements (Kosmin & Keysar, 2009). The United States is home to a

significant spread of belief and spirituality systems. Researchers Barry Kosmin and

Airela Keysar, in their 2008 summary report of the American Religious Identification

Survey, compiled a list of 78 religions and denominations based on respondents' answers

to the question, "What is your religion, if any?" in which no prescribed or prompted

options were provided (2009). The actual number of religious/spiritual groups is difficult

to capture, given immigration patterns, constantly evolving religions and denominations,

and varying definitions of religious categories.[2]

The United States, a country created as a refuge for those seeking religious

freedom, has indeed become what it set out to be. Ideally, it is a place where all faiths are

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[1] Hutchison, 2003, p. 240
[2] The same American Religious Identification Survey study conducted in 2001 (Mayer, Kosmin, & Keysar, 2001), named 60 religions and denominations present in the U.S., which shows substantial growth in just seven years. Another source, attempting to include a comprehensive list of "Other" or "New Age" groups, estimate the number of U.S. religions and denominations is actually 313 (Under God in the Pledge ProCon, 2008).

not simply present and accepted, but protected and defended. It is home to the non-religious, the seeking, the spiritual-but-not-religious, the observant, and the zealous. This environment is a direct result of the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States, penned in 1791, which declares two distinct but connected freedoms: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof…" (U.S. Const. amend. I). These clauses theoretically ensure that the government will neither impose nor impede a religion and it will allow its citizens to practice their religions in whatever forms they believe best express their religions. They point to something much greater than toleration, for "'toleration is a favor, liberty a right; toleration may be withdrawn by the power which grants it, liberty is as inalienable as conscience itself'" (Dawson, 2008, p. 677).

The phrase *separation of church and state* (SCS) does not actually occur in the Constitution, but as theologian and minister Joseph Dawson notes, "neither does 'religious liberty' nor 'Bill of Rights.' However, these designations are convenient and are fully warranted because they are succinct and descriptive terms" (Dawson, 2008, p. 678). Thomas Jefferson is credited with the origin of SCS terminology by using the metaphor "a wall of separation between church and state" to describe the ideal distance between the two entities (as cited in Howard, 1984, p. 361). SCS has since been embraced as a core American ideal. It is a fundamental right, privilege, and distinctive. And yet, the practical implications of this right are being determined even now. In fact, the majority of litigation on the religious provisions in the First Amendment has occurred since 1940 (Howard, 1984, p. 363). It appears the increasing religious diversity of the U.S. is resulting in an increased need for legal precedent.

Cases involving the First Amendment are often complicated by nuance and the passion and emotion that accompany strong belief. The nature of the Constitution itself further frustrates clean outcomes. It is a purposefully vague document. "The Constitution becomes successful because people don't agree on what it means...The Constitution isn't a set of answers; it's a framework for argument. It's a document which allows us to continue to discuss and debate the core issues that we face" (Padgett, Abumrad, & Krulwich, 2013, at podcast timing 11 minutes and 22 seconds).

In cases regarding the separation of church and state, much is left to interpretation depending upon the specifics of the religion or the way in which it is practiced. The majority of these cases concern the free exercise clause of the First Amendment. It is more subjective and, at the same time, more concrete than its counterpart clause regarding establishment. Judges and lawyers "often seem more comfortable with immediate, real life problems than with theory and abstract principle. Thus they get the feel of the issue before them…and try their hand at what seems like a workable approach to the problem" (Howard, 1984, p. 391). Central questions of cases concerning free exercise include: *Can Jehovah's Witness students refuse to say the Pledge of Allegiance in school? Is denying one's child medical care based on religious belief honorable or abusive? What restrictions can abortion clinics place on protesters? Should parochial schools be subject to state mandates for curriculum?* These and similar issues of the blurred lines between church and state have been hotly debated in courts of law, where each case builds upon the other. Over time, verdicts, media attention, and public discourse have given the American people a sense of what the free exercise clause

actually means –and how far the freedom of religious expression (an entirely other realm

of the church-state relationship) can roam within freedom of exercise.[3]

While the free exercise clause is complicated to contend with because of the

variations and specifics of religious experience, the establishment clause is equally

complex. Illustrative of this, is a series of establishment cases beginning in 1863. The

National Reform Association formed around the common proposition that Christianity be

named the official religion of the U.S. in the Constitution. Interestingly, they did not

demand the removal of church and state separation; in fact, they approved of the position

for its promise of religious freedom to all. Though this would seem a simple case given

the First Amendment safeguards, the House of Representatives spent 11 years in

deliberation, ultimately deciding against its inclusion. The House deemed it contrary to

the Founders' intentions since this "country 'was to be the home of the oppressed of all

nations of the earth, whether Christian or pagan,' [and] it would be inexpedient 'to put

anything into the Constitution or frame of government which might be construed to be a

reference to any religious creed or doctrine'" (Hutchison, 2003, p. 79). The interweaving

of sacred and secular life can be insidious and blatant (like the National Reform

Association agenda) or quite subtle. While the government is prohibited from making any

claim to an official religion or any requirements about religion, a religion does not need

to be state-sanctioned for it to be popularly-sanctioned. Though freedom of religion

stands as one of America's proudest accomplishments, many argue the division between

the state and the church is not as clean in reality.

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[3] In the 1940s and 1950s, a new church and state issue permeated civic discourse and courthouses.
Questions about the limits of the freedom of religious *expression* spiked during these years. These cases
were different than typical freedom of *exercise* cases in that they focused more on the practices of religion
and the infringement of other First Amendment rights. The high caseload and burden of managing them
nearly caused the removal of the freedom of exercise clause from the Constitution (Howard, 1984, p. 365).

Data and experience combine to tell a story of a United States aligned in many

ways with Christianity. For some, Christianity was the driving force behind the U.S.'s

greatest documents and, therefore, is to be praised as the source and the inspiration

behind its democracy and legal system. For others, the founding fathers and mothers who

ascribed in great majority to Christianity imparted a legacy of Christianity for all true

Americans to follow (Boyd, 2005). Still others argue that since the majority of its

residents are Christian, the nation is Christian and all other religions should be subject to

if not secondary to its preferences and ways (Straughn & Feld, 2010).

These individual perceptions and ideologies aside, the political sphere is laden

with ties to Christianity – both because of the founding members' religious loyalties and

also because of the loyalties of those who have continued to hold positions of power. The

fact that there is no blatantly stated religion has not precluded Christianity from

becoming one of the dominant forces that has shaped and driven the American cultural

ethic and way of life.

This thesis will combine research in the four areas of the separation of church and

state, civil religion, religious demography, and interfaith practice to provide a snapshot of

current U.S. religiosity – the present state of church and state.[4] Considering these various

aspects, a central question emerges: What commentary do these various lenses of U.S.

religiosity offer regarding the presence and function of Christianity within the United

States? Protestant privilege will be explored as a central theme arising from the findings.

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[4] The study of interfaith ideology and work will rely on research and practitioner testimony. Interfaith
practitioners are those who build and participate in intentional opportunities for those from different
religions, denominations, and faith systems – or no faith – to work, think, and learn together. The list of the
questions used in practitioner interviews, is provided in Appendix C.

Attention will be then shift to the impact of Protestant privilege on interfaith

organizing. Those involved in interfaith work face a salient and challenging task; there is

more reason than ever to be educated about and sensitive to the various religious

communities inhabiting the U.S. A new question must be asked: In the modern religious

landscape of the U.S., what role does interfaith practice play and how is it influenced by

the actual - or assumed - predominance of Christianity?[5] This thesis ultimately intends to

illuminate interfaith work in light of the current U.S. religious climate and offer

commentary on the conditions in which it can thrive. A special emphasis will be placed

on the religious context of the Western U.S. and Southern California to provide regional

parameters for such interfaith interaction and activity.

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[5] The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life conducted a survey on American religiosity in 2007, which
found 51.3% of the population identified as Protestant and verified "the United States is on the verge of
becoming a minority Protestant country… [with] Catholicism experiencing the greatest net losses as a
result of affiliation changes" (Pew Research Center, 2013, p. 5 & 6). In 2014, the follow-up to the original
survey showed a significant drop in Protestant affiliation to 46.5%, thereby proving their predictions true
(Pew Research Center, 2015b).

Chapter One: Separation of Church and State

> "A union of government and religion tends to destroy government and to degrade
> religion. Religion is too personal, too sacred, [and] too holy, to permit its 'unhallowed
> perversion' by a civil magistrate."[6] – Justice Hugo Black

> "Religion is also too powerful, too sinister, and too greedy to permit its unhindered
> pervasion of the civil magistracy." [7] – John Witte, Jr.

The notion of distinct religious and national realms is perhaps *the* fundamental

ideal on which the United States was founded and has remained one of the great magnetic

pulls for immigrants seeking harbor from religio-political regimes, persecution, or wars

fueled by religion. While it is a core distinctive of the U.S., it is not a distinctly American

concept, as religion-and-law expert John Witte, Jr. emphasizes in "Facts and Fictions

About the History of Separation of Church and State" (2006). He references biblical

teaching and examples of Jewish relationship to the government as the crux of this

Western doctrine. In addition to the Old Testament's grand theme of Israel's being set

apart, admonitions throughout the New Testament speak to an important distance

between political and religious life. Mandates to give to the state and to God independent

of each other, to be in the world but not of it, and to remain conscious of the divide

between Jews and Gentiles demonstrate this ideology at work at a very practical level

(Witte, Jr., 2006, p. 16). Not surprisingly, this system of split allegiances informed the

early Christian church – its structures, hierarchy, and relationship to state rulers.

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[6] Quoted from Supreme Court Justice Black's ruling in the 1962 case Engel v. Vitale (Witte, Jr., 2006, p. 41)

[7] Witte's addition to Justice Black's comment (2006, p. 41)

Origins of Separation Ideology

Church and state separation in Western Europe, given Christianity's reign as the religion of the empire, focused mainly on the modes of authority. The idea of the temporal sword and the spiritual sword was a prominent metaphor. The temporal sword represented civic power and, though distinct in form and dominion, was weaker than the spiritual sword, which was a combination of the Catholic Church's rule of law and the word of the Pope (Witte, Jr., 2006, p. 20). In this system, the state was absolutely subject to the Church. Even so, Augustine and other prominent early Church leaders defended and enforced a split of power by ensuring that Roman emperors were not also members of the clergy. This housed the priestly functions of preaching, confession, and sacraments securely inside the Church (Witte, Jr., 2006, p. 19). Over time, however, the Church's sense of authority expanded, especially during the rule of Pope Gregory VII, as he "and the clergy claimed exclusive personal jurisdiction over clerics, pilgrims, students, heretics, Jews, and Muslims. They claimed subject matter jurisdiction over doctrine, liturgy, patronage, education, charity, inheritance, marriage, oaths, oral promises, and moral crimes" (Witte, Jr., 2006, p. 20). Here again, the two swords metaphor emerges as justification for an all-powerful Pope, seen as the ambassador of Christ on earth, the one entrusted by God to hold both swords simultaneously. It is this system, one that separated church and state power in theory but clearly privileged the position of the church, that contributed in large part to the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation was a movement away from this system and toward new freedoms: freedom from the Pope for the church, freedom from law for the individual, and freedom from religious privilege and power for government officials (Witte, Jr., 2006, p. 21).

Martin Luther's call for separation of church and state was not unlike Augustine's call more than 11 centuries prior. Luther advocated a system in which the Church would focus on the rites and activities befitting the training of priests – preaching, administration of sacraments, catechism, and acts of charity – and the individual Christian would honor the government's role as legislator insofar as its legislation did not conflict with Christian teaching (Witte, Jr., 2006, p. 23). While this stance still placed an expectation on the government to perform according to Christian ethics and practices, it reestablished a clear division of labor between the clergy and state officials. Luther's advances were mirrored in other early Protestant movements, as well. John Calvin instructed his followers to keep the political and spiritual kingdoms separate and assigned the Church specific societal functions such as marriage, charity, worship, and moral oversight. Similarly, Anabaptist communities pronounced their separateness from the world through strict behavior and dress codes, while promoting a biblical allegiance to the state in matters of taxation and property ownership. Even the Anglican Church, modeling the Catholic system in establishing itself as the national religion, showed evidence of these shifts in a carefully negotiated sharing of civic powers and functions (Witte, Jr., 2006, p. 24). John Wesley affirmed in various correspondences the power of the state, but consistently remained a dedicated Anglican in his stance, which is one of cooperation between church and state entities with the undergirding belief that "the realm of politics is governed by Divine Providence. God rules the nations according to that 'higher law' which expresses his very nature. He causes the righteous nations to flourish and the disobedient ones to decline and decay" (as cited by English, 2004, p. 93 & 96).

Early Enlightenment thought aligns with these Reformers' views, as well. While there was a call for definition of the realms and responsibilities of church and of state, there was also a strong deference to Christian values. Given that citizenship in England required parallel citizenship in the Church of England, it is quite remarkable that John Locke described the ideal Church as a "voluntary society of men, joining themselves together of their own accord in order to the public worshipping of God in such manner as they judge acceptable to Him, and effectual for the salvation of their souls" (Witte, Jr., 2006, p. 26). Undoubtedly, the religious and political climate of 16th and 17th century Europe shaped the separationist logic of the founders of the U.S., carrying them to the eventual creation of the First Amendment of the Constitution in 1791.

Development of the First Amendment

While the founding figures of New England differed on exactly *how* to keep religion apart from the political realm, there was broad agreement on the importance of protecting religious freedom. Roger Williams, an outspoken proponent of clearly defined boundaries between the two realms, led his colony, Rhode Island, from this central stance. His particular articulation of his philosophy, implemented in Providence, was "the absolute freedom of conscience from civil control…and the civil rights and privileges due him as a man, a subject and a citizen" (Dawson, 2008, p. 678). For Williams, freedom of religion was a matter of basic human rights and his staunch commitment to this ideal provided the basis for First Amendment language. James Madison strengthened Williams's position by arguing that the voluntary nature of religion automatically negates the need for state intervention. As an entirely separate system with its own unique purposes, government should neither bother itself with "'jurisdiction' over religion" nor

possess any "shadow of right to intermeddle' with it" (Dawson, 2008, p. 681). Even John

Wesley, an ardent supporter of the Anglican Church, when sent to the American colonies

as a missionary to the Native Americans, cautioned against the union of church and state.

For Wesley, that system had become an "entanglement" that dominated the English way

of life (English, 2004, p. 84).

There is no question that the early founders and residents desired religious liberty.

As J. Brent Walker put it, "Religious liberty is the goal; church-state separation is the

means of ensuring that goal" (Walker, 2008, p. 693). The need for such terminology, the

separation of church and state, developed throughout the Revolutionary and National

periods, as early "Americans realized that all forms of establishment were hostile to

equality" (Dawson, 2008, p. 678). With equality as a primary value, this sentiment guided

the development of the two principal clauses of the religious section of the First

Amendment. The first clause, *Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of*

religion (U.S. Const. amend. I), "outlaws government prescriptions of religion— actions

that coerce the conscience, mandate forms of religious expression, discriminate in favor

of religion, or improperly ally the state with churches or other religious bodies" (Witte,

Jr., 2006, p. 42). This overall covering ensured a sharp restriction on any form of national

religion. The second clause, *or prohibiting the free exercise thereof* (U.S. Const. amend.

I), targeted the freedoms of individuals within the state. "The Free Exercise Clause

outlaws government proscriptions of religion—actions that unduly burden the

conscience, restrict religious expression, discriminate against religion, or invade the

autonomy of churches and other religious bodies" (Witte, Jr., 2006, p. 42). Of the two

clauses, it was the freedom of exercise that captivated the new American people. While

the concept of freedom of establishment was the overarching legal protection motivating the creation of the new republic and sparking massive immigration, it was the freedom to practice freely that struck the personal chord in those immigrants. Central among early documents and debates concerning the language and meaning of the First Amendment was the "need to protect religious sects, denominations, groups, or societies, to guarantee their rights to worship, property, and practice" (Witte, Jr., 2006, p. 30). Both clauses were designed to oppose systemic and individual oppression due to religion and the creation of this radical ethic exposed a need for new terminology.

Though Roger Williams of Rhode Island may have championed the cause of separate civic and religious life most fervently, perhaps the most enduring commentary is Thomas Jefferson's use of the *wall of separation* metaphor. He famously wrote:

> Believing with you that religion lies solely between man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legislative powers of government reach action only, and not opinions, I contemplate with solemn reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should "make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," thus building a wall of separation between church and state. (as cited in Howard, 1984, p. 361)

This assertion, made in 1802, along with a growing appreciation for the phrase, warranted entrance of *separation of church and state* into common vernacular – just 11 years after the adoption of the First Amendment.

This new American way was forged on the ideal of protection from government intervention. J. Brent Walker expresses the concept of SCS this way:

> Separation of church and state means separation on an official, organizational,
> legally contractual level. This allows freest interaction between both on the moral
> and spiritual level. In a free society religion is expected to apply to all of life, to
> public service as well as other spheres of activity, which warrants personal
> identification with religion on the part of public officials…If religion is to guide
> and control the state in any acceptable way, it must do so morally and spiritually
> rather than officially. (2008, p. 695)

With freedom as the sacred priority, several smaller protections were woven into the
overall desire for protection from government intervention. While freedom for the
individual from state-induced religious mandate or coercion may be the obvious one,
John Witte Jr. expresses four unique protections assumed into the creation of the first
amendment principle: for the individual, society at large, the church, and the independent
states (2006). At the societal level, this new way would eliminate practices of mandatory
tithe, regulated attendance, and forced citizenship so common to the immigrants'
experiences in their home countries (2006, p. 33). This move was a radical departure
from deeply ingrained societal norms. For the church (or religions), this amendment
enforced a position of protection that was already a central concept of the prominent
religions of the infant U.S. (Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism) – all of which
emphasized the idea of separateness, whether from the world, sin, or other people groups.
The official freedom from the state for the church only reinforced a commonplace stance
(2006, p. 29). Additionally, the amendment implied an important protection for the
church from, in essence, itself. To this end, seven of the original colonies instituted laws
prohibiting clergy from holding political office, so as to minimize the threat of coercion

or manipulation of the people who viewed them as highly authoritative (2006, p. 30).

Lastly, the states could claim independence from the nation's dictate over the practice of

religion in their specific dominions, though this division of authority has been much more

difficult to enforce in reality, due to two primary factors: the supremacy of federal law in

relation to state law and the intersection of religion and politics in specific sectors of civic

life (education, taxation, Sabbath days, etc.).

      With the separation ideal officially established, the colonies set out to implement

the law. Though a combination of federal and local legislation would eventually carve a

framework for the management of the practical effects of SCS for state governance,

religious institutions, and citizens, the most immediate issue was relationship between the

state and the nation at large. Who would have final say in breaches of the free exercise or

anti-establishment of religion clauses? A movement in 1833 clarified that the

responsibility would rest on the state; protections for religion would be built into state

constitutions as well and would then guide state cases regarding religion (Howard, 1984,

p. 363).[8] Another arena of state-federal concern was over taxation. While the First

Amendment made it clear that any taxation supporting religious entities or activities was

illegal, the question of how to approach financial dealings with religious groups still

remained. Ultimately, the state was determined to be the locus for tax protocol. "Tax

exemption provisions were presented as a better way to ensure non-preferential state

support to all religious organizations, rather than continuing to give preferential status to

those religious groups who had majoritarian power to extract funding from the

legislatures" (Witte, Jr., 2006, p. 40). Early grappling with the First Amendment

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[8] SCS cases would remain in state control from 1833 until a polygamy case in 1878 warranted federal
government intervention. This case established that both state and federal courts would have jurisdiction on
SCS cases and resulted in a clearer set of protocol for state response (Howard, 1984, p. 363).

established state primacy in matters of SCS, though the negotiation of this principle

would result in legal battles for the next 100 years (Witte, Jr., 2006, p. 34).

The Challenges of Implementation

John Wesley's limited exposure to the new American way led to the following

conclusion: "Wesley thought of the relationship between the churches and government in

terms of reciprocity. The churches inculcate the rule of law and the responsibilities of the

citizen. Government, in turn, protects religious institutions and facilitates their work in a

variety of ways" (English, 2004, p. 84).[9] Wesley's viewpoint denotes the graceful dance

of mutual benefit the founding figures intended with the creation of the freedom of

religion – the churches would be free to worship and embody their beliefs while

simultaneously producing law-abiding, moral citizens. This harmonious picture, however

lovely in its sentiment, did not mirror reality. Religious prejudice and competing

interpretations of free speech fueled interfaith and political clashes. Catholic citizens,

familiar with – and often partial to – co-mingled power between the church and state,

struggled to accept the new system of separation. Protestants, skeptical of the papacy and

Catholic claim to be the one true church, opposed Catholics, using SCS as one of the

> strong new weapons in the anti-Catholic arsenal…To be a Catholic was to oppose
>
> separationism and American-style liberties. To be a Protestant was to defend
>
> separationism and American-style liberties. To bash a Catholic was thus not a

---

[9] English relies on the scholarship of Methodist scholar Albert C. Outler for this sense of Wesley's view of the relationship between the church and the state. Outler writes about this in the chapter, "'Biblical Primitivism' in Early American Methodism," from his book *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage,* published in 1991. English writes, "Wesley was convinced, Outler says elsewhere, that 'the Constantinian state-church and its successors added up to a sustained disaster'" (English, 2004, p. 84).

manifestation of religious bigotry, but a demonstration of American patriotism.

Protestants and patriots began to run closely together, often tripping over each

other to defend separationism and to decry and deny Catholics for their failure to

do so. (Witte, Jr., 2006, p. 35)[10]

In addition to these interreligious battles, the fight to clarify First Amendment freedoms

in relationship to each other immediately emerged. For example, where freedom of

speech would empower a politician to speak passionately about a religious viewpoint,

freedom of religion protections would necessarily question whether this act imposed such

belief unconstitutionally on his or her constituents (Howard, 1984, p. 380). The fledgling

United States faced a true conundrum, as old-world tensions and new-world dreams

confronted each other and demanded greater definition and shape of the First

Amendment.

Since the inception of the First Amendment, America has contended with its

meaning and rule in matters of everyday life. An abundance of litigation and legislation

in the latter half of the 20th century has faced the "tradition of a 'living Constitution'" in

an attempt to determine "what seems like a workable approach to the problem(s)"

presented by a society bound by SCS (Howard, 1984, pp. 363, 391). The types of

conflicts that arise because of SCS are endless and range from minor to quite serious

topics: e.g., government funding for private schools, conscientious objection from war,

federally acknowledged holidays, and the wording of the Pledge of Allegiance. The legal

system faces the challenge of discerning when to intervene in such cases since, as Witte

cautions, "to press separationist logic too deeply into 'unessentials' not only 'trivializes'

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[10] This early meshing of Protestantism and patriotism will be readdressed in the next chapter of this paper.

the place of religion in public and private life;...it also trivializes the power of the

Constitution, converting it from a coda of cardinal principles of national law into a codex

of petty precepts of local life" (Witte, Jr., 2006, p. 44). The fine line legislators have

walked, from the moment separationism has been enforced, is to determine when

intervention is necessary, recognizing that its intervention is the very action the

amendment aims to guard its citizens from.

The 1940s was a pivotal decade in setting legal precedent for SCS cases. Multiple

cases reached the Supreme Court as new school systems and civil rights appeals

increased. Justice Owen Roberts, in response to the growing demand for legislation,

distinguished between two freedoms inherent in the First Amendment: "freedom to

believe and freedom to act. The first...'is absolute,' the second is not" (Howard, 1984, p.

364). This ideology guided Supreme Court throughout the 1950s, as the courts witnessed

a sharp rise in cases regarding freedom of *expression.* While this shift to identify clearer

parameters for religious action helped establish bedrock tenets of modern American civic

life,[11] this period nearly abolished the free exercise clause from the First Amendment.

Free *expression*, a much more nuanced realm, was congesting the courts and causing

concern that the intention of the law was being lost in the deliberation over the

implications of free exercise (1984, p. 365). To manage the increase of free expression

cases, justices gradually formed a set of metrics by which the courts could judge SCS

charges. These tests – simple statements that give specific definition to primarily the

establishment clause – include checks against the government's promotion of secular

legislative purpose, primary effect, entanglement, or political divisiveness (Howard,

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[11] *Reynolds v. United States,* which made certain that states could not establish their own official religion, and *Everson v. Board of Education*, which allowed for public transportation of students to parochial schools, are examples of seminal cases from this era (Howard, 1984).

1984); however, these are being reconsidered as they prove vague and difficult to uphold.

Chief Justice Warren Burger famously stated, "The proliferation of tests has hardly

clarified the issues" (Howard, 1984, p. 378). A strong example of this exists in the sphere

of education. Though religion's presence in education has dominated SCS legal debates

and the generation of concrete legislation, states routinely tend to grant greater leniency

to universities than primary or secondary schools. This seemingly hypocritical posture is

bolstered by the consideration of the age of students at various stages. University students

are generally less impressionable and, therefore, less susceptible to manipulative

overtones or gestures on the part of the institution. Their status as adults results in less

regulation, even though the law is stringent in similar educational environments (Howard,

1984, p. 372). As Burger's statement implies, for every test there is a new circumstance

to consider in the murky waters of the separation of church and state.

As the U.S. grappled with the new religious freedoms of the First Amendment

and how to enforce the protections therein, a different kind of dynamic related to religion

was emerging concurrently. A national identity – what it meant to be "American" – was

taking shape. It certainly involved appreciation for and ownership of religious choice,

but it also engendered an adherence for the actual nation. With so many early colonists

fiercely devoted to the ideal of religious freedom, their own religious beliefs, and to the

development of a radical new way of governing a nation all at once, the U.S. was the

perfect setting for civil religion to blossom. The following chapter will focus on its

development throughout U.S. history, the features of it as it exists currently, and the

challenges it presents given its relationship to Christianity.

Chapter Two: Christianity & Civil Religion in the United Staes

"A separation between church and state? Yes!
A separation between religion and society? Never!"[12] – J. Brent Walker

"The civil religion has been a point of articulation between the
profoundest commitments of Western religious and philosophical tradition
and the common beliefs of ordinary Americans."[13] – Robert Bellah

The great promise of what would become the United States was, in a word,

freedom. Disaffected by government control in their countries of origin and influenced

heavily by Enlightenment thinkers, the founders of the U.S. leaned into the

Enlightenment rhetoric that the "separation of state authority from religion [was] an

essential condition for freedom" (Friedland, 2001, p. 126). It is not surprising, then, that

the disestablishment clauses are included in the First Amendment. Whereas the national

church had been the locus of the sacred for centuries in the old world, in this new

configuration individuals would become the bearers of holiness.

> [R]eligion was to set up shop in the interior of the believer's soul, within the walls
>
> of the family, not in the public square and the state house. Religion, whose
>
> transcendence and absoluteness used to bolster the rule of state, to set states into
>
> conquest and war, to spark civil wars, and to establish the ethical habits
>
> conditioning the accumulation of productive wealth, was sequestered, made safe
>
> and platitudinous. (Friedland, 2001, p. 127)

As state-enforced religion was giving way to a more privatized version of faith, a new

unifying set of beliefs began to emerge in the young U.S.: nationalism.

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[12] Walker, 2008, p. 696
[13] Bellah, 1967, p. 15

Form & Function of Civil Religion

Allegiance to a nation is similar to allegiance to a religious tradition or group. Both the state and religion provide a sense of security based in their authoritative and organizing power, the provision of a social ethical code, and an appeal to faith in their followers (Friedland, 2001, p. 127).[14] These elements work together to create a cohesive society and soothe the individual's need for belonging and security. As Gregory Boyd notes, the modern notion of nationalism as the dominant religion of the people serves the public by "providing the culture with a shared worldview, shared history, shared values and practices, common holidays, and so on. In short, it helps bind the culture together. We might think of this as the civil role of religion" (2005, p. 111). Roger Friedland, in his study of the blending of religion and nationalism, discusses the resulting mesh as

> both cultural and social. It is cultural in its promotion of a particular cosmology, a codex of values, a program of comportment, a way of life. But it is social in that its agents seek control over material resources, the machinery of state, territory, reproductive bodies, the law courts and the police, the schools. Religious nationalism is about both values and things, the one through the other. (2001, p. 134).

"Politicized religion" implies a relationship with the state that denotes a sense of honor and obedience characteristic of religious loyalty (Friedland, 2001, p. 139). In order for this sense of duty to function, there must be sufficient motivation for the people.

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[14] Jacques Derrida speaks of faith as especially crucial to the operation and power of the state. For him, faith "cannot be reduced to knowledge, on an unproducible and unnamable 'other,' an absolute, present-absent witness that guarantees all testimony, all witness, all nomination. Faith, beyond reason and proof, thus undergirds the performativity of authority, the saying so that makes it so" (Friedland, 2001, p. 127). Faith, which traditionally is required for belief in an unseen deity, is now being transferred to the distant, unknown rulers of the nation.

Enlightenment philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau articulates this motivation as the

social contract the state makes with its inhabitants to "ensure 'each one is perfectly free

in everything that does not injure others'" (McDonald, 2013, p. 49). Once this guarantee

of freedom is established and clarified, "then the state can only be interested in the

particular religious dogmas of its citizens insofar as…[they] have a religion that will help

them become responsible, loyal citizens of the state" (McDonald, 2013, p. 49). The

compelling reason to submit to the state's religion – a version of worship of itself – is that

it defines who is in and who is out. It is a matter of belonging, which is always a matter

of boundaries. Civil religion "works to heighten boundaries, and convinces people that

those boundaries are natural and even sacred; it can provide the motivation for digging in

behind them" (Williams R. H., 2013, p. 254). As the religion of the nation enforces its

gods, creeds, modes of worship, and other such religious trappings, it provides the

structure in which one may exist, contribute, and even thrive. Jermaine McDonald,

responding to sociologist Robert Bellah's seminal work on civil religion, adds to Bellah's

work by proclaiming civil religion as a central force of the "mythic [narrative] of a nation

of people that…establishes the parameters for which a person or group of people may be

popularly considered an authentic or recognizable citizen of the nation" (McDonald,

2013, p. 50).

Just as important for the effective functioning of the nation is a clear

understanding of who does *not* belong in the system. McDonald continues, "the religion

of the citizen…casts outsiders (those who do not follow the rules of worship) as infidels,

strangers, and barbarians" (McDonald, 2013, p. 48). This dynamic certainly exists in

religion. For the citizen who belongs not only to a nation, but also to a religion, the line

between the two entities blurs significantly – especially when a propaganda of religious nationalism, or civil religion, is strongly enforced. The end result is a society that is interchangeably devout and patriotic. In essence, this captures the nature and spirit of American civil religion.

The Development of American Civil Religion

Borrowing mainly from Rousseau's ideology about the possibilities of a religion-like nation state, sociologist Robert Bellah was the first to coin the term "American civil religion" (ACR) in his famous 1967 essay for the journal *Daedalus* (1967). The following passage features and defines the phrase, while also outlining certain aspects of this uniquely *American* religious nationalism:

> Considering the separation of church and state, how is a president justified in using the word God at all? The answer is that the separation of church and state has not denied the political realm a religious dimension. Although matters of personal religious belief, worship, and association are considered to be strictly private affairs, there are, at the same time, certain common elements of religious orientation that the great majority of Americans share. These have played a crucial role in the development of American institutions and still provide a religious dimension for the whole fabric of American life, including the political sphere. This public religious dimension is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals that I am calling the American civil religion. The inauguration of a president is an important ceremonial event in this religion. It reaffirms, among things, the religious legitimation of the highest political authority. (Bellah, 1967, p. 3)

The ACR that Bellah outlines is an orientation that has been in the making since the colonial period. While it shifts and bends as society and culture influence it, its roots begin with the conversations surrounding the formation and the actual articulation of the new nation's guiding documents, the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.

Founding Figures & Core Documents: As has been examined in Chapter One, Christianity undeniably influenced the ideology forming the First Amendment's promise of freedom of religious belief and from formal state-enforced establishment. As the reigning religious affiliation of the founders and earliest immigrants, but also the religion from which so many were seeking refuge, Christianity's relationship to the creation of American policy and legislation is complex. Religious scholar Diana Eck writes of this dynamic, "There was much debate over what constituted Christian principles then as now. This is one of the reasons the founding fathers wisely wrote what some have called a 'godless' Constitution, one that deliberately steered away from the establishment of any sect of Christianity, even Christianity itself, as the basis of the new nation" (Eck, A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation, 2001, p. 42).

Early Growth of the Republic: Judge Welch, of the Ohio Supreme Court, reiterated this logic in an 1872 ruling: "Religion is not—much less Christianity or any system of religion—named in the preamble of the Constitution as one of the declared objects of government; nor is it mentioned in our Constitution as being essential to anything beyond mere human government" (Dawson, 2008, p. 681). Judge Welch, in this statement, points to a new kind of connection between government and religion that the nation was embracing. It was a connection that was distinct from, but not averse to,

Christian principles and values. The way the founding figures managed their faith in the

political realm set in motion the very same Christianity-influenced civil religion that

Americans recognize and follow today (Bellah, 1967, p. 7). "Though much [of American

civil religion] is selectively derived from Christianity, this religion is clearly not itself

Christianity. For one thing, neither Washington nor Adams nor Jefferson mentions Christ

in his inaugural address; nor do any of the subsequent presidents, although not one of

them fails to mention God" (Bellah, 1967, p. 7). The God they refer to ordains law and

rights, in a deistic manner, while being much more invested in America than a typical

deist rendering of God would allow (Bellah, 1967). The early and common invocation of

"American Israel" depicts the "special concern" U.S. founders believed God reserved for

this new democratic republic (Bellah, 1967, p. 7).

In the earliest days of the flourishing nation, what resulted from the founding

figures' work was a dual religious track of a nascent civil religion and formal

Christianity. Both religions, in subtle and gradual ways, were promoted and served to

establish a set of citizenship boundaries. Despite pointed statements of the U.S.'s refusal

to establish an official religion, an informal religious – specifically Protestant -

establishment was powerfully alive practically from the inception of colonial life. This

was expressed through the influence of the largest Protestant denominations (Baptists,

Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Methodists, and Presbyterians); parachurch

organizations advocating for moral reform; and a general dominance over "English-

language, cultural, literary, educational, and journalistic entities that were Protestant in

personnel and outlook" (Hutchison, 2003, p. 61). Perhaps the most pervasive Protestant

entity of all, however, was the "personal network of Protestant leadership that extended

across the churches, controlled most of the nation's political life, and managed virtually

all of the major secular institutions and entities in American society" (Hutchison, 2003, p.

61). Amidst this predominant presence of Protestantism, a growing set of artifacts and

practices began to give shape to a new civil religion. "This religion – there seems no

other word for it – while not antithetical to and indeed sharing much in common with

Christianity, was neither sectarian nor in any specific sense Christian. At a time when the

society was overwhelmingly Christian, it seems unlikely that this lack of Christian

reference was meant to spare the feelings of the tiny non-Christian minority" (Bellah,

1967, p. 8). Even in the earliest days of the republic, glimpses of who would – and who

would not – belong were apparent.

     Democracy & American Exceptionalism: The US.'s resolution to remain

religiously neutral collided with the dominant Christian worldview *and* with an emerging

nationalism with religious overtones. For European onlookers, these tensions were

obvious and confusing. While freedom of religious expression and belief may have been

generally well tolerated, it appeared that "the Americans had not disestablished religion

after all" (Hutchison, 2003, p. 59). In 1840, French political scientist and historian Alexis

de Tocqueville criticized the U.S.'s version of separation of church and state, stating

"'there is no country in the word where the Christian religion retains greater influence

over the souls of men than in America...In the United States, Christian sects are infinitely

diversified and perpetually modified; but Christianity itself is an established and

irresistible fact'" (Hutchison, 2003, p. 59).

     While de Tocqueville's analysis has significant merit, it is imperative to

distinguish the particular way in which Christianity was adapting under the freedoms and

aims of the new republic. The Christianity of Western Europe was giving way to a new formation of Christian faith, one that began to absorb new American values – and one that would ultimately be hospitable to the fusing of ACR. Even before the formal establishment of the United States, the sweep of Christian evangelism from 1730-1760 known as "the Great Awakening" greatly influenced this new brand of Christianity. The preaching and writings of revivalists such as Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and Samuel Davies contributed to a new ethic that

> located the basis of religious authority in personal faith, not in ordination, the
>
> profession of doctrine, or a church hierarchy. This 'new light,' an emotional,
>
> indeed physical knowing, as opposed to a disembodied intellectual knowing, of
>
> God, was open to all, to those without formal education, to the poor, even to
>
> women and slaves. This postmillennial religious transformation, in fact, helped
>
> create the intercolonial unity, the solidarity and the democratic moral order that
>
> would forge the American nation-state. (Friedland, 2001, pp. 129-130)

Bellah contends that this spirituality catalyzed during the Great Awakening decades solidified into a "predominantly activist, moralistic, and social rather than contemplative, theological, or innerly spiritual" approach to American religion that has continued since the early1800s (Bellah, 1967, p. 12). Not only were the earliest residents of the colonies and new republic adjusting to this more personal, emotional version of their faith, but they were also being molded into the kind of citizens who would readily embrace democracy.

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, America was contending with its sense of autonomy and identity. Clearly, the U.S. was grappling with its religiosity.

Simultaneously, a respect for and growing familiarity with democracy was gradually transforming into a fervent enthusiasm for – and even worship of – this new politic. De Tocqueville characterized American church religion as purely political with the sole purpose of "'powerfully [contributing] to the maintenance of a democratic republic among the Americans' by supplying a strong moral consensus amidst continuous political change" (as cited by Bellah, 1967, p. 12). Pastor and theologian Greg Boyd, in his study of modern-day Evangelical obsession with politics, situates this fascination with Americans' long-standing belief that their priority on religious, personal, and political freedom matches God's. "Indeed, it seems clear to many that God uniquely established America and leads America for the express purpose of promoting this supreme value around the globe" (2005, p. 149).

Boyd goes on to describe Jesus' teachings on freedom, distinguishing America's emphasis on political freedom from Jesus' on freedom from sin and fear (2005, p. 149). Throughout the 20th century, the U.S. fully adopted an ideology of "American exceptionalism", based on this divine view of democracy. It has become an integrated view of the nation and what it means to be associated with it that began as an "analytic concept, explaining how U.S. history and development differs from Europe" and has now become a "normative concept, in which politicians must assert that the United States is the greatest nation on earth, now and in history. The nation was and is chosen by God, in this view, and was built by people answering a call to create a better society—and for some, of course, to build a Kingdom of God on Earth" (Williams R. H., 2013, pp. 251-252).

Fundamentalist & Evangelical Contributions: The liberal Protestantism that flourished in early America and became the leading "mainline" Christian voice nurtured a healthy relationship with ACR. It found resonance with H. Richard Niebuhr's "Christ of Culture" notion and a sense that "Christianity is not at war with the culture; indeed it has 'baptized' the culture" (Balmer & Winner, 2002, pp. 24-25). Amidst the influence of mainline Protestantism, The Second Great Awakening, a reprise of the revivals earlier in the 18th century, materialized between the 1790s and1840s. It is considered "one of the most influential religious and social movements" in American history (Balmer & Winner, 2002, p. 15). Its attractiveness was in the "organic relationship between political and religious liberty" and its success was in forming an "atmosphere where resistance to authority and orthodoxy formed the ascendant ethos in the religious sphere as well as the secular" (Finseth, 1995). The period forged and confirmed a uniquely American religious group: the Evangelical Protestants. Leaders of the Second Great Awakening, through their "reorientation of Calvinist theology and practice irreversibly changed the religious landscape of the United States" by establishing "an organizing process that helped to give meaning and direction to people suffering in various degrees from the social strains of a nation on the move into new political, economic and geographical areas" (Finseth, 1995). The Evangelical movement was a natural product of its time, producing a set of individuals ardently committed to their beliefs, eager to spread their morality and win converts, and sold on their nation's blessedness.

As the Evangelical strain of Christianity grew in prominence throughout the 1800s, so did biblicism, a stance granting the Bible the highest level of authority overall with a special emphasis on its inerrancy (Friedland, 2001, p. 139; Hutchison, 2003, p.

65). Their focus on the Bible as fundamental earned certain pockets of Evangelicalism

the designation of "Fundamentalists", a term which has been extended to religious groups

of all types who tend toward extremist ends of the spectrum (Friedland, 2001, p. 139). A

strict adherence to scripture led Evangelicals to adopt "born again" language and conduct

large-scale evangelistic revivals (Balmer & Winner, 2002, pp. 14-15).[15] As Balmer and

Winner explain, Evangelicals were largely absent from politial and civic life,

overwhelmed by the "social problems caused by industrialization, urbanization, and the

arrival of non-Protestant immigrants" (2002, p. 15). Evangelicals became known for

their biblical fervor and conservativism and made soul-winning and discipleship of

converts their main priority until the late 1970s (2002, pp. 21-22).

     Interestingly, certain features of Evangelicalism that compelled it to withdraw

from the world were some of the very attributes that propelled them into the heart of

America's political milieu in the 1980s. Evangelicalism's key features made it an

effective holding environment for the interweaving of American Christianity with ACR.

Decentralized church hierarchies, the authorization of the individual to interpret and

apply the Bible, and a clear moral code (extracted from a literal reading of the Bible)

meshed well with the Christian values infused in the nation's founding documents and

subsequent rhetoric supporting democracy. Evangelical values aligned with the political

right and a natural partnership concomitantly formed – a partnership that has remained

strong up to today. The Pew Forum "Religious Landscape" study, conducted in 2007,

concluded, "When it comes to religious affiliation and basic political outlook, for

instance, Mormons and members of evangelical churches are much more likely than

other religious groups to describe their political ideology as conservative" (Pew Research

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[15] These concepts are pulled respectively from John 3 and Matthew 28.

Center, 2008b). While Evangelical groups have always been defined by their

conservativism, the 1980s marked a significant shift in Evangelical focus on publicity

and civic engagement as a means of actively living out their faith.

      The rise and clout of the religious right in the 1980s and 90s elicited groups such

as The Moral Majority and Christian Coalition, which promoted a political agenda with

religious backing. Jerry Falwell spoke of his founding of the Moral Majority in these

terms: "I was convinced that there was a moral majority out there among those more than

200 million Americans sufficient in number to turn back the flood tide of moral

permissiveness, family breakdown and general capitulation to evil and to foreign policies

such as Marxism-Leninism" (KPBS, 2010a). Concern for the spirituality of American

individuals was indistinguishable from concern for the *nation* of America. Falwell's

sentiments echoed those of his contemporaries at his "I Love America" rallies, "a potent

mix of religion and patriotism that attacked what he believed were evils threatening to

bring down the country: the Equal Rights Amendment, homosexuality, pornography and

women's liberation" (KPBS, 2010a). Right-wing Evangelicalism's wide popular support,

blatant political success, and media dominance throughout these decades eventually

waned as presidential polls in 2000 showed a growing preference for moderation and

political schisms within the Christian right demonstrated a lack of unity and mission

(Hutchison, 2003, p. 231). American religion historian William Hutchison notes, "radical

or extremist movements…to be effectual…must maintain a high degree of unity and, in

addition, forge alliances with those moderates who lean in their direction. But the

religious right in the second half of the 1980s was finding it impossible to paper over its

bitter internal divisions" (Hutchison, 2003, p. 231).

This need for unity among extremist groups is a necessary condition for ACR to thrive, which is precisely why Evangelicals tend to be among its best torchbearers. As sociologists Straughn and Feld discovered in their study entitled "America As A 'Christian Nation'?", "much evangelical discourse about 'reclaiming' America is simply talk to construct and maintain collective identity (2010). This Evangelical rhetoric is functioning not so much to actually get the troops ready to re-Christianize America as to express and reinforce a distinctive identity for its adherents" (2010, p. 283). Greg Boyd, among a host of critics, has serious concerns about Christianity being used as a tool to form this American "distinctive identity". His belief that "a significant segment of American evangelicalism is guilty of nationalistic and political idolatry" is a stern accusation, but one that speaks to the powerful influence of ACR on Christians and non-Christians alike (Boyd, 2005, p. 11).

Distinct Features of American Civil Religion

ACR is an ever-evolving tradition, one that morphs in much the same fashion as any religion does by indoctrinating native and new residents, responding to the important events of the moment, and building up traditions over time. Likewise, civil religion appropriates artifacts, symbols, language, and figures in a distinctively religious manner. In the case of ACR, its religious features borrow heavily from, not surprisingly, Christianity, which surely adds to the complexity of discerning one from the other. Bellah traces the development of ACR's religious elements through three pivotal episodes in U.S. history[16], which he calls "Trials".

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[16] Jermaine McDonald, in his article "A Fourth Time of Trial: Towards an Implicit and Inclusive American Civil Religion," responds to Robert Bellah's premise by expanding on his list to include a fourth

1. Trial 1 - American Revolution: The resistance and victory against Britain embedded the sense that Americans were a "set apart" people. The storyline of American exceptionalism began here. The documents produced in this era serve as the "canon" for ACR.

2. Trial 2 - Civil War: The clash between the North and South resulted in a cycle of sacrifice, death, and resurrection that mimicked the central Christian narrative of Jesus' life, thereby cementing a parallel journey for Americans.

3. Trial 3 - Civil Rights Movement: The chief virtues guiding the movement indoctrinated certain principles into the national ethic. Advocacy, justice, humility, and self-reflection became more valuable to the general public. This era elevated new "priests" and "saints" to add to the roll of the faithful and honorable.

(Civil Religion in America, 1967)

Of ACR's many religious parallels to explore, four will be examined: the deity figure, priests and saints, calendar and rituals, and core values.

Parallels to Religion – Deity: Religions operate generally from a deference to and worship of a holy god-like figure (or many). In ACR, a deity is certainly present, but it is difficult to ascertain much of the character of this vague god. Furthermore, its god is not always the object of its worship; in fact, the preservation of the nation state through veneration of democracy and obedience to law is the focus, sanctified by the benevolent, pro-U.S. deity. It is interesting to note that the specific term "God" was not a part of the public discourse and vernacular for the U.S.'s earliest leaders. "God" is specifically acknowledged in the political sphere first in 1821, at President Monroe's second

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momentous occasion in the development of ACR. He holds that the terrorist attacks of 9/11 challenge American notions of the model citizen and offers an invitation "for an increase in American tolerance and diversity" (McDonald, 2013).

inauguration (Bellah, 1967, p. 19). Prior to his speech, Presidents Washington, Jefferson,

Madison, and Monroe used the following terms to reference the new American deity:

> that Almighty Being who rules the universe, Great Author of every public and
>
> private good, Invisible Hand, benign Parent of the Human Race, … Providence,
>
> Being who is supreme over all, Patron of Order, Fountain of Justice, Protector in
>
> all ages of the world of virtuous liberty,…that Infinite Power which rules the
>
> destinies of the universe,…that Being in whose hands we are…that Almighty
>
> Being whose power regulates the destiny of nations, and Heaven.[17] (Bellah, 1967,
>
> p. 19)

It appears national leaders grew more comfortable with the use of "God" as the nation

simultaneously grew in acceptance of the presence of ACR. The god of ACR was

gradually becoming mistakable for the God of Christianity. In sharp departure, however,

from the God of Christianity, of which whole theologies have been developed, the deity

of ACR is quite thin. "'God' has clearly been a central symbol in the civil religion from

the beginning and remains so today. This symbol is just as central to the civil religion as

it is to Judaism or Christianity…[but] the meaning of 'God' is by no means so clear or so

obvious. There is no formal creed in the civil religion" (Bellah, 1967, p. 15). Though the

invocation of God in ACR does not point to anything of much substance, it holds a

strangely dear sentimentality for American people. Bellah, in his 1967 essay, posits that a

presidential-hopeful unwilling to call upon this pseudo-Christian God would likely fail

(p. 15). His words have proven prophetic over the past 45 years of American politics. He

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[17] In his first inaugural speech, Monroe uses "Providence" and "the Almighty" to recognize the deity. In his second inaugural speech, the first in U.S. history to use the word "God", he chose the phrase "Almighty God" (Bellah, 1967, p. 19).

goes on to suggest, "If the whole God symbolism requires reformulation, there will be obvious consequences for the civil religion, consequences perhaps of liberal alienation and of fundamentalist ossification that have not so far been prominent in this realm" (1967, p. 15). While the extreme conservatism of the 80s and 90s may have approached a "reformulation" of the "whole God symbolism", the system has maintained its allegiance to the vague god of ACR.

Parallels to Religion – Priests & Saints: In ACR, the favorable political leaders – namely, presidents – who represent a model citizen within the system of ACR become the priests of the religion. If successful enough, they go on to immortality as its saints. The role of the priestly government official is nowhere more pronounced than following a crisis involving Americans, whether domestic or abroad. Natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina or Sandy, foreign military conflicts like the Iranian hostage crisis and Bay of Pigs invasion, or unexpected tragedies akin to the Challenger explosion immediately invite a mix of patriotic and civil religious response from the public (Williams R. H., 2013, p. 243). Alongside this outpouring of emotion and activism, the U.S. president intervenes, much like a priest or pastor would, to comfort his/her people. The response follows a predictable pattern.

> Following such events, the U.S. president typically appears in public immediately
> to assure the nation that this will not permanently damage our society or our way
> of life, and asserts our national resolve to deal with the disaster. Further, he
> typically claims that the resilience just asserted itself reveals the basic strength of
> our national character and the goodness of our people. The president evokes civil
> religious blessings on the country that serve to remind us of our national

relationship to the Divine. There is usually a 'rally around the president' effect in

public opinion, and approval ratings for the president typically increase

dramatically in the immediate aftermath of the event. (Williams R. H., 2013, p.

243)

For Presidents Bush and Obama, the aftermath of 9/11 has afforded both leaders ample

opportunity to perform their sacred duties of consolation, pronouncing hope, blessing,

and working for justice. They are the "high priests", the guards of American freedom,

ensuring that Islamic terrorists no longer pose a threat to American lives or their way of

life in general (McDonald, 2013).

Parallels to Religion – Calendar & Rituals: Like any religion, civil religion

operates on its own calendar, marked by its signature rituals. Though the U.S. has a

variety of national holidays commemorating significant developmental moments in its

history, the dates that dot the ACR calendar are ones with a particularly *religious* thrust.

President Lincoln, one of the hallmark saints of America, established in his tenure the

formal holiday of Thanksgiving. This day, while serving as a vital symbol for religious

freedom and harmony among a nation of immigrants, also makes a clear statement about

the importance of family and a traditional meal together (Bellah, 1967, p. 11). This

practice infuses the national consciousness with a strong message about the place of

family and wraps Americans at a young age into the greater narrative. Memorial Day and

Veterans Day have a similar effect. Both these holidays are general in nature, not

pointing to a specific moment in time, and regularly call national attention to the military

population that has protected American freedom. These holidays are celebrated with

rituals involving special services, decorations of military property, and flying flags at

half-mast. The events surrounding these days indicated a solemnity typical of religious observance. These, and other more minimally civil religious holidays such as presidents' birthdays and Labor Day, are also accentuated by federal declaration of time off from work or public school, which is another significant factor in "[integrating] the local community into the national cult…The public school system serves as a particularly important context for the cultic celebration of the civil rituals" (Bellah, 1967, p. 11).[18]

Parallels to Religion – Core Values: Of all the religious paraphernalia of ACR, perhaps the most powerful and necessary component is the set of shared core values. Just as Judaism promotes shalom as a communal ethic; Buddhism teaches the path toward cessation of suffering as the highest goal; Hinduism views reincarnation as a vehicle for compassion toward humans and animals; and Christianity honors loving one's enemies as a means to freedom, so ACR has developed its own code for how its members order their lives, consider their place in the world, and interact with others. Three main values central to ACR will be reviewed: supremacy, individual agency, and preservation of the family.

As has been discussed throughout this chapter, America's sense of chosenness has been a driving force since its inception. Fueled by a belief in its representative democracy and the successful secession from Great Britain, the U.S. has placed a high priority on the

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[18] This discussion of federal holidays, especially in light of the separation of church and state, raises a question of the legality of Christmas as a national holiday. The 1999 case, Ganulin v. US, addresses this very issue. Richard Ganulin claimed the designation of Christmas as a federal holiday violated: 1) the establishment clause of the First Amendment 2) his right to freedom of association 3) his right to equal protection. The Court ruled against him. Regarding the establishment clause they found, "Christmas Day as a legal public holiday does not violate the Establishment Clause because it has a valid secular purpose, it does not have the effect of endorsing religion in general or Christianity in particular, and it does not impermissibly cause excessive entanglement between church and state" (Ganulin v. US, 1999). The court may not have found justification for infringement on religious freedoms, but it does indicate a governmental alignment with and acceptance of Christian values over and against other religions.

indoctrination of its residents and making converts of other nations. Early comparisons of America to Israel have reverberated throughout the U.S.'s history (Bellah, 1967, p. 7). However, as Boyd highlights, "Unlike Israel, we have no biblical or empirical reason to believe God ever intended to be king over America in any unique sense...[H]umans have always tended to fuse religious and nationalistic and tribal interests. We want to believe that God is on our side, supports our causes, protects our interests, and ensures our victories" (Boyd, 2005, p. 148).

This worldview, as Boyd notes, has become internalized within the general American consciousness and the claim to supremacy has powered a vigorous evangelism on a global scale — an evangelism of its particular variety of politics and religion. America has been driven by "an overwhelming sense that God's kingdom *is* advancing, and that the American nation and society are the special instruments of this advance…The notion that the heathen are pleading with us, urgently, 'to deliver their land' was an especially important part of the rationale for foreign missions" (Hutchison, 2003, p. 73). While U.S. involvement abroad, whether through military intervention or missionary work, has been appropriately criticized as hubristic and imperialistic, Americans have largely operated under the notion that their principal faith held the key to a "true imperialism" in which "the world was their colony" (Hutchison, 2003, p. 237). As imperialism overall declined throughout the 20th century, Americans have been confronted with a crisis of identity and continue to grapple with how to effect their sense of supremacy. "For a people to suffer the loss, or even the decline, of that sort of cosmic self-assurance can easily be more deeply traumatic than the mere loss of an Algeria or an India" (Hutchison, 2003, p. 237).

Closely connected to the American sense of supremacy is the high value placed on the autonomy and agency of the individual. Rousseau characterized the thrust of "civil religion" as primarily "interested in nurturing the morals and values of the individual to develop dutiful citizens and in crafting a national identity that is tolerant of religious pluralism, as a matter of individual conscience" (McDonald, 2013, p. 49). His definition was especially apt in the new U.S., whose separation of church and state signaled its openness to religious plurality. Civil religion could serve, ideally, as a binding agent across religious traditions – if the individual could be appropriately valued within the larger framework. Amidst America's altruistic welcome of a diverse society, Christianity's prevalence, especially in colonial America, meant that American Christians had little choice but to assimilate the unifying values of the dominant civil religion. American Christians adopted a new sense of individuality into their belief and practices, which, in their homelands, were largely corporate and guided by religious authorities.

> In religious terms, *individualism* was focused on each person's responsibility to work out his or her own salvation. This was expressed in almost countless forms of sermonic, artistic, musical, and literary discourse…Humans, born as sinners and surrounded by inducements to remain in that condition, must somehow find the road - or ladder - to virtuous lives. And the assumption was that the desired result, even though the grace of God is fundamentally involved in bringing it about, cannot happen without a decision on the part of the individual. (Hutchison, 2003, p. 65)

This radical shift in the way people interacted with the divine for salvation soon translated into motivation to co-labor with God to compel others toward this same

salvation. A bursting zeal for evangelism was symptomatic of the American emphasis on

the individual and what was possible for one alone to accomplish. "[D]uties that fell to

aspiring Christians once they had chosen between God and Satan…was the regenerated

individual's imperative responsibility to save others" (Hutchison, 2003, p. 70). What

distinguished these bold Christians was not coercion, as religions had relied upon

throughout time, but instead *persuasion* delivered at the impetus and in the style of the

individual believer (Hutchison, 2003, p. 70). With a reigning religious belief that "human

beings were relied upon to take action toward the advancement of God's kingdom on

earth," it is not surprising how this mentality easily fused with and fueled both

missionary activity and imperialistic pursuits.

The glorification of the family unit is certainly not a uniquely American value. As

Friedland observes, in order for civil religion to function anywhere, it must derive its

power and very being from "its politicized practices…that locate collective solidarity in

religious faith shared by embodied families, not in contract and consent enacted by

abstract individual citizens" (Friedland, 2001, p. 126). While this may seem in conflict

with the value of individualism just described, the way in which the family concept

developed in America merges the two notions into a highly functional compatibility. The

veneration of the family is a recent acquisition of ACR. Though mainline Protestants in

the 19th and early 20th centuries held the family as a sacred and central to faith, this

remained a minority view until after World War II (Friedland, 2001, p. 134). As divorce

among the middle class population increased, the fundamentalists were incited to action.

Formerly dismissive of focus on the family as "feminized and sentimental" (Friedland,

2001, p. 134), the outspoken and activist Evangelical Christians latched onto the

protection of the family as "the primal medium through which they sought to reconstruct the social order. The polemical series that today constitutes American fundamentalist discourse is organized almost completely around familial issues: divorce, birth control, abortion, feminism, homosexuality, and sex education" (Friedland, 2001, p. 134). To accomplish their aims, a strategy in alignment with ACR values already at work was crucial. Shapers of this movement looked not to "the pre-modern familial structure, with its extended networks of kin loyalties, but to the bourgeois nuclear family" (Friedland, 2001, p. 136). A brilliant hybrid of family loyalty and individualism, the nuclear family became a highly effective central organizing unit for ACR.

Similar to the post-World War II concerns over higher incidents of divorce, Americans face a new dilemma – the rise of public approval for homosexuality and the state sanction of homosexual marriage. Boyd addresses this current crisis for ACR adherents.

Why then are so many evangelicals publicly obsessed with cracking down on this particular sin? There are undoubtedly a number of reasons, not least of which is that the loss of the traditional definition of marriage is a poignantly symbolic indication that the quasi-Christian civil religion of America is on the wane. And as we've said, many evangelicals believe that preserving and recovering this civil religion is their central kingdom duty. Whatever the reasons, however, outsiders have the impression that evangelicals go after this sin because it's one they don't generally have. (Boyd, 2005, p. 137)

A set of espoused religio-political values "corresponds to the crafting of a coherent

national identity" and, in this way, become the most significant determinant of who is a

"true citizen of the state" (McDonald, 2013, p. 49).

    Image of a Model ACR Adherent: As has been suggested throughout this chapter,

the purpose of civil religion – and the reason for its parallel structure of deities, priests,

calendars, rituals, symbols, and core values – is the formation of citizens. "A common

theme, amidst the tension of competing manifestations of American civil religion, is a

concern for what it means to be, and who shall be considered, an 'authentic' American

citizen" (McDonald, 2013, p. 48). ACR, in all of its iterations, has relied upon a set of

beliefs and practices that determine "boundary *criteria…*For example, the statement that

'America is a Christian nation' not only posits an intersection between religious and

national boundaries; it also implies that the boundary between Christians and non-

Christians helps regulate the threshold between more and less 'prototypical' Americans"

(Straughn & Feld, 2010, pp. 282-283). Words like "authentic" and "prototypical" in

terms of the model American citizen have resurged in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist

attacks. The response of America maintains the presupposition that being a good U.S.

citizen – and therefore, one who *belongs* in America –means being a good ACR adherent.

The election of Barack Obama provides a worthy case study in this arena.

    Following September 11th, the "shift in public discourse about Muslims and Islam

coincided with an increasing hardline conservatism regarding immigration, another issue

in which there is a blending of religion and race in a civil religious understanding of who

can be an American" (Williams R. H., 2013, p. 245). This national conversation and

concern prominently figured in the presidential race of 2008, as doubts and questions

about Obama's fitness for presidency arose specifically around the "implicit cultural triangle of race, religion, and national identity that…is foundational to American civil religious mythology" (Williams R. H., 2013, p. 248). While Obama's blackness was an undeniable issue given the history of slavery and racism in the U.S., some sociologists contend that the skepticism surrounding his citizenship and his religion were even greater sources of concern for the general American public. "The persistent contention that Barack Obama is not truly American, and moreover, is a Muslim, is analytically fascinating—particularly because the persistence of this claim (like the [birthplace] claims about Obama's citizen status) flies in the face of available, conventional evidence" (Williams R. H., 2013, pp. 249-250). Proof of U.S. citizenship and an overwhelming attempt to affirm Obama's Christianity through photographs, baptism and marriage records, and campaign efforts located in Christian churches were requisite measures for ensuring votes and engendering trust from the general American public. Even with sufficient evidence to the contrary, the persistence of the allegations that Obama is neither an American-born citizen nor a Christian indicates how significant these factors are for determining belonging in America. These claims, in addition to the doubts and concerns based on his race, "signify that 'Whiteness' and Christianity are still the primary markers of American identity" (McDonald, 2013, p. 54). Yet, the kind of Christianity that is being referred to here is the kind that has been tempered, borrowed from, or coopted by ACR. If Obama's church membership and professed faith system are not enough to substantiate his Christianity, then clearly something altogether different is at play – and this difference is subtle enough that distinguishing Christianity from ACR is a confusing, at times impossible, task.

The Conflation of Christianity & Civil Religion

ACR necessarily has had to draw upon Christianity for its structure, rationale, and support base. With Christianity as the predominant religion and worldview of not only the founders of the U.S. but also the majority faith of immigrants and residents throughout the U.S.'s entire history, it continues to be the obvious foundation for ACR and greatest source for overlapping ideology. "Civil religion has never been an alternative to any deistic faith; it adapts selective elements of the national tradition 'in such a way that the average American saw no conflict between the two'" (Kazin, 2013). Theologians and ministers, those tasked with protecting and promoting Christianity's theology, witness, and ministry, face the challenge of confronting the common interchangeable use of Christianity for ACR. The fact that one has, for many, become the other indicates the successful infusion of ACR in quotidian American life and presents a challenge to those who attempt to preserve Christianity in its authenticity. Boyd addresses this cause in light of American Evangelical preoccupation with political freedom.

> This is an amazing and significant new twist on the Christian religion. Indeed, it arguably constitutes a new nationalistic religion — what we might call 'the religion of American democracy.' Like all religions, this religion has its own distinctive, theologized, revisionist history…This nationalistic religion co-opts Christian rhetoric, but it in fact has nothing to do with real Christianity, for it has nothing to do with the kingdom of God. (2005, p. 149)

To demonstrate both the complexity and depth of the conflation between Christianity and ACR, the popular notion of America as a Christian nation will be examined.

Since the House of Representatives ruling against the "Christian America Amendment" 150 years ago, groups continue even now to beseech Congress to declare the U.S. a Christian nation, to do "what the Constitution forbids it ever to do, namely, establish religion" (Dawson, 2008, p. 681). The rhetoric of the National Reform Association has been echoed throughout the years: the Founding Fathers intended for America to be Christian precisely because they understood their new nation to be specially sanctioned by God (Hutchison, 2003, p. 226). "From the start, we have tended to believe that God's will was manifested in the conquest and founding of our country—and that it is still manifested in our actions around the globe" (Boyd, 2005, p. 11). Experts of the Constitution call this appeal to the Founding Fathers' desires for America as "original intent" and it has remained a hotly contested issue (Hutchison, 2003, p. 226). Though examples like the repeatedly rejected Christian Amendment proposal make clear statements about original intent, the persistent mantra "take America back for God" reveals the nation's propensity to believe "the founders intended America to be a Christian nation, established on Christian laws and exemplifying Christian morality. This is what many want to take America back to" (Boyd, 2005, p. 100). The rallying cry is often enlisted to defend against America's declining morals, a list which bears close resemblance to the core values of ACR: protection of the nuclear family, praying in school, teaching creationism, and keeping "one nation under God" as prominent as possible (Boyd, 2005, p. 90).

For every defender of the "God bless America" ideology, an equally strong contingent maintains that the founders of the U.S. actively worked against this notion. For one, as Abigail Albert reiterates, the U.S. was founded not solely on Christian beliefs

but on strong Unitarian, theosophical, and philosophical principles, as well (Albert &

Albert, 2015). Diana Eck offers another counter-narrative, "[The founders] had vision

enough to see that whoever arrogates to oneself or one's community full truth and

authority in matters of religion is usurping the authority that, they believed, was God's

alone. They constructed, in effect, a theology of religious freedom and constitutional

democracy in which even their own faith would have no pride of place" (2001, p. 383).

Bellah confirms Eck's description of an intentionally instituted civil religion. "The words

and acts of the founding fathers, especially the first few presidents, shaped the form and

tone of the civil religion as it has been maintained ever since. Though much is selectively

derived from Christianity, this religion is clearly not itself Christianity" (1967, p. 7). In

line with the stance that a Christian nation contradicts the very nature of the separation of

church and state, critics of the Christian nation thesis hold that it is oppositional to

democracy and the populations that comprise the non-Christian minority. Dawson asserts

the "notion's utter inconsistency with freedom and democracy" (Walker, 2008, p. 301).

Straughn and Feld, in their 2010 study on perceptions of the U.S. as Christian,

found that non-Christians "overwhelmingly reject the notion that being 'truly' American

requires adherence to the dominant faith…[which] represents a desire to downplay the

symbolic significance of religion for defining American identity, in favor of religious

pluralism and tolerance for diversity—values that also have deep roots in U.S. history"

(2010, p. 301). Still others decry the notion of America's inherent Christianity based on

theological and ecclesiological definitions of Christianity. "There was nothing

distinctively Christlike about the way America was 'discovered,' conquered, or governed

in the early years…[it] was a rather typical, barbaric, violent, kingdom-of-the-world

affair" (Boyd, 2005, p. 99). Freed slave Frederick Douglass outlined the two versions of

Christianity this way, "I love the pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ; I

therefore hate the corrupt, slaveholding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial and

hypocritical Christianity of this land. Indeed, I can see no reason, but the most deceitful

one, for calling the religion of this land Christianity" (Boyd, 2005, p. 101).

　　　　Sociologists Straughn and Feld determined to measure Americans' views of the

Christian America (CA) thesis in their study, "*America as a 'Christian Nation'?*

Understanding religious boundaries of national identity in the United States" (2010). As

the Pew Forum Religious Landscape survey shows, Christianity in America is declining,

with now under half claiming Protestantism (47%) and 20% Catholicism (Pew Research

Center, 2015b). Yet, even as America is less Christian than ever before, "paradoxically,

the growth of religious diversity has not produced a concomitant decline in the view of

America as a Christian country" (Straughn & Feld, 2010, p. 281). "Sixty-seven percent

characterize the country this way, down just slightly from 71% in March 2005. A decade

ago, Americans were somewhat less likely to tie the nation's identity to Christianity. In

1996, 60% considered the U.S. a Christian nation. By 2002, however, the figure had

climbed to 67%, and since then views on this question have remained fairly consistent"

(Pew Research Center, 2006).

　　　　Though the researchers themselves were surprised to find that even among young,

educated respondents a high level of belief in CA, they were accurate in their hypothesis

that non-Christians would be less enthusiastic about the CA thesis (Straughn & Feld,

2010, p. 301 & 290). "Among Christians, nearly 62 percent believed that being Christian

is either 'very important' (44 percent) or 'fairly important' (18 percent) for being truly

American, whereas nearly 66 percent of non-Christians felt that Christian faith was 'not

at all important, and almost one in five (19 percent) thought it was 'not very important'

[for being truly American]" (Straughn & Feld, 2010, p. 290). Taking into account the

upswing of belief in CA and the disparity between Christian and non-Christian views of

CA, two possibilities seem to emerge. Between 1996 and 2002, the percentage of those

believing in CA jumped 7%, which points to a reactionary grasp for control following

9/11. Secondly, as Straughn and Feld conclude, "the recent surge in these beliefs likely

signals a growing divergence in attitudes between American Christians and their non-

Christian compatriots…[A] widening religious divide over the meaning of American

identity could become a source of future social conflict" (Straughn & Feld, 2010, p. 282).

Again, the theme of what constitutes national belonging in America rises to the

surface. The conclusions of the CA study resonate with those of political scientists,

sociologists, and theologians who have attempted to trace the trend of an increasingly

strong allegiance to civil religion as some form of Christianity amidst decreasing

numbers of those professing Christianity. They maintain the CA position must be

"viewed through the lens of recent work on symbolic boundary construction. Rather than

merely describing the demographic status quo, statements like 'America is a Christian

nation' represent a discursive practice that seeks to align the boundaries of authentic

national belonging with adherence to the dominant religious faith" (Straughn & Feld,

2010, p. 281). ACR, even in the increasingly religiously ambivalent and diverse U.S., is

alive and well; it is obviously still of great concern who is in and who is out.

That ACR borrows so much of its form from Christianity creates a complicated situation of differentiating one from the other.[19] It creates internal division within the large Christian community; some defend the patriotic ACR as true Christianity, while others defame it is a mockery of the Christian gospel. Within an environment heavily saturated by ACR, it is difficult to deconstruct what is societal and what is theological. "Because the myth that America is a Christian nation has led many to associate America with Christ, many now hear the good news of Jesus only as American news, capitalistic news, imperialistic news, exploitive news, antigay news, or Republican news. And whether justified or not, many people want nothing to do with any of it" (Boyd, 2005, p. 13). As Chapter Three will explore in depth, Christianity is facing high attrition rates; both Protestant and Catholic populations are filtering rapidly into the "Liberal Faiths" and "Unaffiliated" religious categories where spirituality is of value but church attendance and institutional religion is much less prominent.

Perhaps the greatest challenge of Christianity's intricate relationship with ACR is the inability to extend "Americanness" beyond either religion. As has been shown, religion is a principle shaper of national identity and belonging in the United States. Ironically, the U.S.'s firm commitment to the separation of church and state that many maintain flows from the Christian value on freedom is the very promise that has drawn people of varying faiths, cultures, and nationalities to the U.S. Eck observes,

> Through the same decades since the liberalization of immigration policy in 1965,
> the Moral Majority and Christian Coalition have raised the public profile of
> fundamentalist Christianity. The language of a 'Christian America' has been

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[19] See Appendix B for an example of this complication in the program for a 2015 National Prayer Breakfast. Horizon Christian Fellowship in San Diego, CA sponsored this particular breakfast.

voluminously invoked in the public square. However, I sense in some of the most

strident Christian communities little awareness of this new religious America, the

one Christians now share with Muslims, Buddhists, and Zoroastrians. They

display a confident, unselfconscious assumption that *religion* basically means

Christianity, with traditional space made for the Jews. But make no mistake: in

the past thirty years, as Christianity has become more publicly vocal, something

else of enormous importance has happened. The United States has become the

most religiously diverse nation on earth. (Eck, A New Religious America: How a

"Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation,

2001, p. 4)

The next chapter will highlight this diversity, an unavoidable consequence of

immigration and environment of religious freedom, but also an invitation to redefine

what it is to be an American. Though ACR's grip on American consciousness is a tight

one, its predication on uniformity and fear may be giving way to a new shared ethic of

difference as strength and cooperation.

Chapter Three: The Religious Diversity of the United States

"Religious affiliation in the U.S. is both very diverse and extremely fluid."[20]
– Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life

The U.S.'s commitment to protecting the religious freedoms of its residents since its earliest days as a nation has produced a national setting in which religious diversity not only exists but, theoretically, should flourish. While other nations outrank the U.S. in terms of similar percentages of adherents across the spread of general religious categories, the U.S. may still be classified as a diverse nation by a different set of criteria.[21]

Defining Diversity

The mere presence of the five major and numerous smaller world religions, regardless of the numbers of followers, signifies a diversity of affiliation. Relatedly, the variety of sub-groups and denominations within larger religions is a distinctive quality of U.S. religious life. Though 94% of U.S. adults and children comprise two major categories (Christian and religiously Unaffiliated), "the U.S. would register as considerably more diverse if subgroups within Christianity were counted" within the Pew Research Center's "Global Religious Diversity" report (2014b).[22]

Another factor contributing to a sense of the U.S.'s religious diversity is the level of fervor with which Americans believe and practice their faiths. A considerable

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[20] Quote from the "Religious Affiliation" Report (Pew Research Center, 2008a).

[21] The Pew Forum's Global Religious Diversity report determines *diversity* according to how equivalent the percentages of followers are within eight major religious categories: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, the religiously unaffiliated, folk/traditional religion, and "other" (smaller religions such as Unitarian Universalist, Baha'i, and Zoroastrianism; Pew Research Center, 2014a).

[22] It is worth noting that the Pew Research Center, in conducting any of its research on religion, includes Mormonism and Jehovah's Witness within the category "Christian", along with Protestantism, Catholicism, Orthodox, and Non-Denominational groups (Pew Research Center, 2008a).

openness, despite the attention given to fundamentalist pockets of various religious

entities, characterizes the American religious ethic.

> For example, while more than nine-in-ten Americans (92%) believe in the
>
> existence of God or a universal spirit, there is considerable variation in the nature
>
> and certainty of this belief. Six-in-ten adults believe that God is a person with
>
> whom people can have a relationship; but one-in-four – including about half of
>
> Jews and Hindus – see God as an impersonal force. And while roughly seven-in-
>
> ten Americans say they are absolutely certain of God's existence, more than one-
>
> in-five (22%) are less certain in their belief. (Pew Research Center, 2008b, p. 5)

Perhaps the most telling attribute of a solid majority of religious adherents is an anti-

fundamentalism that acknowledges 1) salvation is possible through multiple religious

avenues and 2) the fluidity of interpretation of major teachings of one's chosen religion.

"This openness to a range of religious viewpoints is in line with the great diversity of

religious affiliation, belief and practice that exists in the United States" (Pew Research

Center, 2008b, p. 3). This lack of dogmatism signals a growing acceptance of the other, a

leaning into the options available and, notably, away from traditional Christian belief in

God. Considering the changing dynamics of religious populations and immigration

patterns in the U.S., the nation will only continue to diversify, especially in terms of non-

Christian groups.

Characteristics of the Religious in the U.S.

The Pew Research Center, a nonprofit research agency in the U.S., provides

"public opinion surveys [that] allow the voice of the people to be heard, and…de-

mographic, economic and political analyses [that] provide context to understand how the

world is changing" (Pew Research Center, 2015a). Among its many projects, the Pew

Research Center has tasked itself with capturing the religious affiliation, attitudes, and

practices of Americans. The data cited throughout Chapter Two relies heavily on the Pew

Research Center's extensive work based on their Religious Landscape Survey, first

conducted in 2007 with 35,556 adult participants (Pew Research Center, 2008a) and

again in 2014 with 35,071 adult participants. [23] This investigation of U.S. religiosity not

only serves to provide an accurate set of percentages regarding adherence to religions, but

also to provide insight into the behaviors of Americans in relationship to religion. The

survey offers general commentary on the U.S. population's attitudes about, and

participation in, religion that are important to note prior to reviewing the results.

The diversity of religious presence in the U.S. seems to have contributed to a

growing openness about the uniqueness or absolute truth of one's own religion. This

trend exists both in the conception of other religions and of individual faith. The majority

of survey respondents who are religious maintain that other religions outside their own

also lead to salvation/eternal life and there are multiple ways to interpret their religion's

teachings while still remaining faithful (Pew Research Center, 2008b, p. 3 & 4). In fact,

the only groups in which a majority contend the opposite - that their religion is the only

true way and there is only one correct way to interpret its teachings, at that – are

Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses (Pew Research Center, 2008b, p. 3 & 4). This

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[23] Full analysis of the 2007 data and explanation of survey methodology is available in the two reports
entitled "Religious Affiliation: Diverse and Dynamic" and "Religious Beliefs and Practices: Diverse and
Politically Relevant" (Pew Research Center, 2008a; Pew Research Center, 2008b) and online at the link
found in the 2013 Pew Research Center references (Pew Research Center, 2013. The same for the 2014
update can be found in the report entitled "America's Changing Religious Landscape" (Pew Research
Center, 2015b) and online at the link found in the 2015c Pew Research Center reference (Pew Research
Center, 2015c).

movement away from a fundamentalist approach to faith is perhaps a product of the

gradual normalization of diverse religious paths and options available in the U.S.

Regarding formal institutional involvement, 54% Americans attend a worship

service "regularly" (which is defined as once or twice a month) and 39% attend weekly

(Pew Research Center, 2008b, p. 12). Groups with the highest weekly attendance are:

Jehovah's Witnesses (82%), Mormons (75%), members of historically black churches

(59%), and evangelical (58%) Protestants (Pew Research Center, 2008b, p. 12). Those

groups that do not attend weekly church services as frequently are: Catholics (42%),

mainline Protestants (34%), Hindus (24%), Buddhists (17%), and Jews (16%) (Pew

Research Center, 2008b, p. 12). Another way to measure commitment to religious

institutions is the level of involvement outside of official worship times. Again, Mormons

(77%), Jehovah's Witnesses (76%), members of historically black churches (60%), and

those in evangelical (54%) Protestant churches participate most frequently (Pew Research

Center, 2008b, p. 12). This involvement entails "musical programs, volunteering,

working with children or social activities. Members of these religious traditions also tend

to be most likely to participate regularly in prayer groups, Scripture study groups or

religious education programs" (Pew Research Center, 2008b, p. 12). Similar to church

attendance, Catholics, mainline Protestants, Jews, Buddhists and Hindus are less engaged

in their congregational life throughout the week (Pew Research Center, 2008b, p. 12).

Not surprisingly, religious affiliation (or lack thereof) has a strong connection to

political ideology, especially in regard to the level of religious commitment and

involvement. The groups with the most conservative members are Mormons and

Evangelical Christians and the ones with the most liberal members are Jews, Buddhists,

Hindus, and atheists (Pew Research Center, 2008b, p. 6). While these are general leanings that leave room for exceptions and disagreement within groups, a commonality emerges among those who are highly involved in religious services and activities across denominational and religious lines. The two firebrand issues that unite the highly involved regardless of religious affiliation are homosexuality and abortion (Pew Research Center, 2008b, p. 7). For example, roughly 60% of those who attend religious services weekly believe abortion should be illegal in most or all situations whereas roughly 30% who attend less frequently believe the same – and this difference is consistent across various religions, not just those in conservative camps (Pew Research Center, 2008b, p. 7). One area in which a great majority of the religious population does come together politically is around the issue of the government's role in providing charity to those in need, caring for the environment, and peaceful intervention (as opposed to military force) in foreign conflicts. The consensus is that the government should do more in each of these areas, even at the risk of going into debt to do so (Pew Research Center, 2008b, p. 18).

Current Religious Composition

Capturing the religious composition of the people of the United States is a tremendously complex endeavor. Shifting attitudes about the place and function of religion, immigration trends, and the explosion of denominational growth – a dynamic particular to the United States – constantly affect religious commitment, loyalties, and participation. A review of the survey results at a basic level indicates the following:[24]

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[24] All data in bullet point list from Pew Research Center, 2015b.

- Christianity contains the largest number of followers at 70.6%. For the purposes of this study, Christianity is inclusive of Protestantism, Catholicism, Orthodox, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and a broad grouping of unassigned Christian groups noted as "Other".

- While Christianity holds the clear majority, the Unaffiliated group (consisting of Atheists, Agnostics, and those with no particular leaning) is the next highest category, at 22.8%.

- Of those in the Unaffiliated category, the "nothing in particular" group has the largest percentage of adherents, with 15.8%. Atheists are the smallest group, at 3.1%.

- Judaism claims 1.9% of religious respondents. Among them, the largest subset participates in the Reform movement.

- Religions with 1% or less adherents are:
  - Unitarians/Liberal Faiths (e.g., spiritual but not religious), 1%
  - Islam, .9%
  - Buddhism, .7%
  - Hindu, .7%
  - New Age (e.g., Wicca, Paganism, New Thought), .4%
  - Other world religions (e.g., Zoroastrianism, Baha'i, indigenous folk religions), .3%
  - Native American religions, <.3%

- Of all respondents, .8% either refused to answer or reported they do not know their religious affiliation.

For a detailed overview of the Center's findings on religious categories and affiliation by percentage, see Appendix A: Major Religious Traditions in the U.S. While the numbers themselves tell an interesting story on their own, it is also worth uncovering the underlying messages about U.S. religiosity.

Significant Patterns & Trends

Overall Belief in "God": Delving into the data at a deeper level reveals important

general conclusions about U.S. residents and their relationship to religion. For one, an

overall belief in God is the reigning unifying tie. "Americans are nearly unanimous in

saying they believe in God (92%), and large majorities believe in life after death (74%)

and believe that Scripture is the word of God (63%)" (Pew Research Center, 2008b, p. 8).

This acknowledgment of the divine, the afterlife, and the authority of the Bible is likely

largely related to the great majority of U.S. people being Christian, as these tenets align

neatly with Christianity – but these percentages also imply a waning belief among

Christians in the importance heaven and scripture, as both numbers fall below the

percentage of Christians (78.4%). This trend nods to the diminishing focus on dogma,

even amidst a thriving belief in some conception of God.

By Race: When considering the categories of religion, it is important to examine

related racial demographics, as they speak to the societal, historical, and cultural meaning

of religion for people. Black Americans constitute the most traditionally religious

population, with a strong reporting of fitting within formal, established religions. Even in

the Unaffiliated category, 75% of Black respondents "belong to the '*religious* [emphasis

added] Unaffiliated' category (that is, they say that religion is either somewhat or very

important in their lives), compared with slightly more than one-third of the unaffiliated

population overall" (Pew Research Center, 2008a, p. 8). Religion has played an

anchoring and empowering role in the Black community throughout U.S. history, evident

in the formation of the network of Historically Black Churches. Of these churches, two-

thirds are in the Baptist tradition and most are American Baptist (formerly known as

"Northern Baptists"), a denomination birthed out of opposition to slavery. Not surprisingly, the Black Baptist church is conservative in terns of hierarchy and format, but progressive in thought and action with justice issues (Pew Research Center, 2008a, p. 9). While Christianity plays a significant role in the history of Black people in the U.S., in fact only 16% of the religious Black population claims Christianity; two religions actually outnumber Christianity in terms of Black adherents – 22% are Jehovah's Witnesses and 24% are Muslim.

Latino/a residents, representing significant immigrant populations from Latin American – and therefore largely officially Catholic (Barro & McCleary, 2005) - nations, "already account for roughly one-in-three adult Catholics overall, [and increasing immigration] may account for an even larger share of U.S. Catholics in the future. For while Latino/as represent roughly one-in-eight U.S. Catholics age 70 and older (12%), they account for nearly half of all Catholics ages 18-29 (45%; Pew Research Center, 2008a, p. 8). One fourth of Asians claim no religious affiliation and even among this Unaffiliated group, only 22% selected *religiously* Unaffiliated (whereas the remainder chose atheist, agnostic, or secular Unaffiliated). Other significant populations of religious Asians are Catholics and Evangelicals, at 17% and Hindus at 14% (Pew Research Center, 2008a, p. 14). Lastly, regarding the religious makeup of racial groups, "Jews and members of mainline Protestant churches are the groups most heavily comprised of whites (95% and 91%, respectively), followed closely by Orthodox Christians (87%) and Mormons (86%)" (Pew Research Center, 2008a, p. 44). Interestingly, the Unaffiliated category is the most representative of racial demographics of the U.S. population of all

the categories (Pew Research Center, 2008a, p. 45). The following table shows the

comparison:

Those in the "Unaffiliated" Category Compared to U.S. Population Overall

	% of Unaffiliated	**% of U.S. Population**
White	73%	62%
Latino/a	11%	17%
Black	8%	13%
Asian	4%	5%

(Pew Research Center, 2008a, p. 45; United States Census Bureau, 2015)

Also, it is worth noting that the racial composition within the subgroups of the

Unaffiliated category is quite varied. While roughly 85% of atheists and agnostics are

white, only 60% are in the *religious* Unaffiliated group. Of this group, about a third are

Blacks and Latino/as together (Pew Research Center, 2008a, p. 45).

    By Geography: In a similar fashion, religious concentration by geography offers

another perspective by which to understand the U.S.'s relationship to religion. The

Center's study divides the nation into four regions – the Northeast, Midwest, South, and

West – and so an overview of the findings will be presented according to these regions.[25]

- The Northeast: Perhaps the most significant information about the Northeast is the
  prominence of Jews. It holds the highest population of Jews (42%) of all four
  regions and is more than double the population of the Jews in the South (20%),
  which is the second most populous region of Jews. It also has the strongest

---

[25] Note that the findings presented below are in terms of overall percentages for the religion. For example, the citation of 41% of Jews living in the Northeast means that, of all Jews, 41% of them live in the Northeast. In terms of overall population, of all Northeasterners, 4% are Jewish. All data in the following section is considering the religion as the basis of measurement.

Muslim and Orthodox populations, at 31% and 33% respectively. Within
Protestantism, it has the lowest Evangelical community of the four regions.

- The Midwest: In contrast to the Northeast, the Midwest has the lowest population
  of Jews (12%) and Catholics (21%). In fact, it does not hold in the majority of
  adherents in any of the religious categories, even though it is the second most
  populous region overall of the U.S. (23%). Of note, "The Midwest most closely
  resembles the religious makeup of the overall population" (Pew Research Center,
  2008a, p. 71).

- The South: The South is the most populated region of the U.S., holding 37% of all
  residents. It has the strongest number of Protestant adherents, and by far the
  highest number of Evangelicals. At 49%, it is more than double the Evangelical
  population of the Midwest, which is 22%. It also claims the highest Historically
  Black Churches and Jehovah's Witness populations. Also, it holds the highest
  numbers of Unaffiliated people of the four regions., though the South has a
  substantial majority of the religiously Unaffiliated (those who claim no faith but
  for whom religion is important).

- The West: The West contains a strong majority of Mormons (76%), Buddhists
  (45%), and Hindus (38%) and the lowest numbers of Historically Black Churches,
  Mainline Churches, and Muslims. Among the Unaffiliated category (at 28%), it
  has the highest numbers of atheist, agnostic, and secular Unaffiliated.[26]

Though the results within the geographic regions may not be surprising, given U.S.

history, immigration trends, and general societal patterns (e.g., conservativism within the

center and greater liberalism on the coasts), these are important factors to consider,

especially when noting the shifts explained in the next section.

Denominations: Before exploring the major religious shifts presently occurring,

one other pattern should be explored. The presence, variety, and proliferation of

denominations (or sub-groups of major religions) within the U.S. is unique and a

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[26] All data cited and analyzed in this section comes from the "Religion and Geography" tables in the Pew
Research Center's report "America's Changing Religious Landscape" (Pew Research Center, 2008a).

characteristic of U.S. religiosity (Roberts & Yamane, 2012). While denominations are thriving worldwide (approximately 33,830; Roberts & Yamane, 2012, p. 187), it is a phenomenon with deep roots in American religion. As sociologists of religion, Keith Roberts and David Yamane discuss in their book, *Religion in Sociological Perspective*, the U.S.'s implementation of and commitment to the separation of church and state has created the fertile ground for denominationalism.

> Religious disestablishment and religious freedom are key social structural preconditions for denominationalism to flourish. When Greeley referred to America as "the denominational society," he means a society that is characterized neither by an established church nor dissenting sects but religious bodies or associations of congregations that are united under a common historical and theological umbrella, that are presumed equal under the law, and that generally treat other bodies with an attitude of mutual respect. As a consequence of this 'social organizational adjustment to the fact of religious pluralism', there are hundreds of denominations in America. (2012, p. 187)

By far, the group with the most internal divisions and groupings is Protestantism. Though there are three major family groups within Protestantism – Evangelical, Mainline, and Historically Black Churches – the categories within these categories comprise an extensive list (Pew Research Center, 2008a, p. 5). Of those participating in the Pew Research Center survey, the numbers of independent denominations reported, by family group, were (a) 150 Evangelical churches; (b) 52 Mainline churches; and (c) 42 Historically Black churches (2008a, pp. 103-107). The abundance of Evangelical churches reported in the survey is particularly interesting, especially given the

Association of Religion Data Archives list of official Evangelical denominations, which

contains only 131 groups (2015). Of Protestants, the greatest number of members belong

to some form of Baptist church (Baptist churches are present in each of the three major

family groups); Baptists comprise a third of all Protestants, nearly one-fifth of all U.S.

adults, and spread across 31 of their own denominations (Pew Research Center, 2008a, p.

9; Roberts & Yamane, 2012). This splitting into sub-categories is not unique, however, to

Protestantism.

> Even smaller religions in the U.S. reflect considerable internal diversity. For
>
> instance, most Jews (1.7% of the overall adult population) identify with one of
>
> three major groups: Reform, Conservative or Orthodox Judaism. Similarly, more
>
> than half of Buddhists (0.7% of the overall adult population) belong to one of
>
> three major groups within Buddhism: Zen, Theravada or Tibetan Buddhism.
>
> Muslims (0.6% of the overall adult population) divide primarily into two major
>
> groups: Sunni and Shia. (Pew Research Center, 2008a, p. 6)

Roberts and Yamane conclude that though "denominationalism is a Protestant dynamic, it

has become fully accepted in principle by all major religious groups in the United States"

and because of this dynamic, the nomenclature and approach is being adopted rapidly by

non-Christian religions, both in and outside of the U.S.

Significant Shifts in U.S. Religiosity

As is evident in the previous section, U.S. beliefs, attitudes, and practices

concerning faith and religion are in flux. Among the patterns and trends that are visible

through the survey data, it is important to also consider the major shifts religions are

experiencing as a result of shifts within populations and preferences in the U.S.

Decline of Catholicism & Protestantism: Perhaps the greatest of these shifts is

taking place within the Christian Church in the U.S. While Christianity is exploding in

the Global South (Africa, Asian, and Latin America) with 1.3 billion adherents, the

number of Christians in the Global North (Europe and North America) is down to 860

million (Pew Research Center, 2011). In the century between 1910 and 2010, the

percentage of Christians in the Americas as a whole dropped from 96% to 86%, and the

current figure for Christianity specifically in the United States is 70.6% (Pew Research

Center, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2008a). The survey data is clear – the U.S. is a

minority Protestant country at 46.5% (Pew Research Center, 2015b, p. 4). This fact

stands in great contrast to the figures from the earliest days of the U.S. Considering that

"the European component in colonial society had been well over 95 percent Protestant"

(Hutchison, 2003, p. 20), the decline of Protestantism is a massive change – and one that

continues to unfold as immigration patterns change.

Concerning Catholicism, it is the religion with the most attrition of all religious

groups, whether people leave to other religions or none at all (Pew Research Center,

2008a, p. 19). "Roughly 10% of all Americans are former Catholics" (Pew Research

Center, 2008a, p. 7). Certainly, people continue to join the Catholic religion as well, but

the single largest contributor to its sustenance is the high rate of Catholicism among

immigrants, which is 46%, compared to 21% of those born in the U.S. (Pew Research

Center, 2008a, p. 19).

Attraction to the "Other Faiths" Category: Another noteworthy shift is the

attraction to the religious groups within what the Pew Center classifies as the "Other

Faiths" groups. This group consists of Unitarians, Liberal Faith, a wide variety of New

Thought and New Age subgroups, Native American religion, and the general category of

spiritual but not religious. Though this group is quite small comparatively at 1.5% of the

U.S. adult population, it is growing not only in adherents but also in denomination

options (Pew Research Center, 2015b, p. 4). For this group, it is most interesting to study

the dynamics surrounding movement into this fairly new category of religious

association. In terms of those who have switched their affiliation from the religion of

their family of origin to a new religion, the Other Faiths category boasts the largest group

by far. 91% of their total adherents have joined the religion of their own choice (Pew

Research Center, 2008a, p. 27). The only other figure that rivals this extremely high

number is the 90% that switch into "Other Christian", which (for this component of the

report) does not include Catholics, Mormons, Orthodox, or Jehovah's Witnesses (Pew

Research Center, 2008a, p. 27).[27] Another unique aspect of movement into this category

is the high number of Protestants who switch their affiliation to one of the religions of the

Other Faiths group. Of Protestants, 50% switch and of Catholics, 23% do (Pew Research

Center, 2008a, p. 29). This data point suggests that attributes of the spiritual communities

within the Other Faiths category appeal to those raised in the Christian paradigm.

Rapid Rise of Unaffiliated: The third shift to be explored is the rapid – and recent

– increase in the numbers of those who consider themselves part of the Unaffiliated

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[27] Protestants and non-denominational Christians are the groups that comprise the "Other Christian"
category in this case. The reason certain Christian groups are not considered is that they have significant
differences between those who remain in the faith and those who convert into it. Specifically with
Protestants, this group has high numbers of retention, as 54% remain in the religion from childhood and
29% stay within the tradition by switching denomination only (Pew Research Center, 2008a, p. 28).

category. This category, commprised of atheists, agnostics, and those with no particular

religious affiliation (referred to often as the "Nones"), is showing unprecedented growth,

which is clearly demonstrated by comparing the results of two separate Pew Forum

studies. In 2007, when the Pew Research Center collected its data from the Religious

Affiliation survey cited frequently in Chapter Two, the Unaffiliated group totaled 16.1%

(Pew Research Center, 2008a). Only five years later, based on a survey of those claiming

to be unaffiliated with any religion, the same organization released a report entitled

"'Nones'" on the Rise". The report found that the number had jumped significantly to

just below 20% – "the highest percentages ever in Pew Research Center polling" (2012).

In the 2014 update of Pew Center's 2007 survey, the Unaffiliated percentage climbed to

22.8% (Pew Research Center, 2015b, p. 4). Several factors are contributing to the

attraction of the groups within this irreligious umbrella. Because this group is growing

substantially, it is important to consider where its members are coming from. **"**Among

those who are currently unaffiliated with any particular religion, nearly half (41%) were

raised as Protestant and more than one-in-four (28%) were raised as Catholic" (Pew

Research Center, 2015b, p. 43). This data offers an interesting commentary on

Christianity's waning influence and retention rates, which is apparent in other aspects of

the same Pew Research Center study and substantiated by religious surveys conducted by

different orgnizations. While the number of those moving into the Unaffiliated category

is three times greater than those moving out of the category, it is worth noting that "more

than half of people who were unaffiliated with any particular religion as a child now say

that they are associated with a religious group" (Pew Research Center, 2008a, p. 7).

Despite quite high attrition rates, this category continues to thrive.

Internally, this group holds a simliar diversity to other religious groups. Nearly

one-third are agnositcs and atheists (3.1% and 4.0% of U.S. adults, respectively) and the

remainder identify as "nothing in particular" (Pew Research Center, 2015b, p. 30).

Within this sub-group, two major categories emerge: the secular Unaffiliated (roughly

9%) and the religious Unaffiliated (roughly 7%) (Pew Research Center, 2015b, p. 30,

Pew Research Center, 2012). This group is divided along the line of how important

religion or religious practices are in one's life; the religious Unaffiliated responded that

"religion is either somewhat important or very important in their lives" (Pew Research

Center, 2008a). In fact, the "Nones on the Rise" report shows

> that many of the country's 46 million Unaffiliated adults are religious or spiritual
>
> in some way. Two-thirds of them say they believe in God (68%). More than half
>
> say they often feel a deep connection with nature and the earth (58%), while more
>
> than a third classify themselves as "spiritual" but not "religious" (37%), and one-
>
> in-five (21%) say they pray every day. In addition, most religiously unaffiliated
>
> Americans think that churches and other religious institutions benefit society by
>
> strengthening community bonds and aiding the poor. (Pew Research Center,
>
> 2012)

This information provides a window into the perspectives of the Nones, those who find

religion personally unnecessary, but tend to consider spirituality a vital component of life

and even maintain a respect for what religious institutions can provide.

Consistent with the general trend in this category's growth from 2007-2012, one

quarter of those in the 18 to 29 age block reported themselves as Nones in 2007, while a

third did so in 2012 (Pew Research Center, 2008a, p. 6, Pew Research Center, 2012).

This "youngification" of the Unaffiliated category is perhaps the greatest contributor to its growth. As "generational replacement, the gradual supplanting of older generations by newer ones," occurs, the 9% of Unaffiliated who are 65 years or older are overshadowed by the 33% of adults under 30 (Pew Research Center, 2012). Considering that "young adults today are much more likely to be Unaffiliated than previous generations were at a similar stage in their lives", it seems the trend will hold steady (Pew Research Center, 2012). A related characteristic of those under 30 is a growing societal trend of delaying marriage and parenthood, both of which are proven pull factors toward church involvement (Pew Research Center, 2012). Desire to disassociate from organized religion for political reasons has created a corollary attraction to the Unaffiliated category. The enmeshment of religion and conservative politics throughout the 1970s, '80s, and '90s has left a strong contingent of people disaffected with religion, particularly in regard to sexual ethics (i.e., abortion, contraception, and homosexuality). These issues "became emblematic of the emergent culture wars…[and] many young Americans came to view religion as 'judgmental, homophobic, hypocritical, and too political'" (Pew Research Center, 2012). This negative view of the entangled relationship between religion and politics certainly has had its effect on the political affiliation of the Nones. Of all religious groups, the Unaffiliated have the largest percentage of Democrats/those with Democrat leanings of any group (24%; Pew Research Center, 2012). Sociologists Michael Hout and Claude S. Fischer maintain that the 1990s suffered the sharpest drop in religious loyalty overall, as political liberals frustrated by a conflation of religious and political agendas shifted broadly into the "nothing in particular" category (2014).

Though the Unaffiliated group contains certain demographic anomalies (young adults, Democrats, residents of Western U.S.), there is surprising balance across the spectrum of other demographic categories such as income, education levels, and gender (Pew Research Center, 2012). This conclusion speaks to a growing normalization of the Unaffiliated way of life. In many ways, it mirrors the secularization characteristic of the European approach to religion. Social scientists contend that as the United States becomes a more secure nation in terms of economic, political, and medical access, that the need for religion will only decrease. Though the U.S. seems to be an exception to the general notion that "societies in which people feel constant threats to their health and well-being are more religious, while religious beliefs and practices tend to be less strong in places where 'existential security' is greater" because of its high GDP per capita and simultaneously high religiosity, "some theorists view the rise of the Unaffiliated as a sign that secularization is advancing in America" (Pew Research Center, 2012).

Results of Immigration: The fourth shift to be explored is the effect that new patterns of immigration have on the religious makeup of the U.S. When assessing the populations in the U.S. practicing non-Western religions (Islam, Buddhism, and Hindu), the majority of these adherents are immigrants (Pew Research Center, 2008a, p. 47). A group that has shown a surprising surge in immigration within the last century is Hindus. Whereas Hindu rates of immigration between 1910-1959 were less than .5%, between 2000-2007 that same number jumped to 4% (Pew Research Center, 2008a). This is a significant shift that speaks to Hindus search for educational and economic opportunities in the U.S. To this point, nearly half of all Hindus receive post-graduate degrees and a much higher percentage are in higher income brackets (Pew Research Center, 2008a, p.

9). 87% Hindus in the U.S. are foreign-born (Pew Research Center, 2015b, p. 54).

Considering that Hindus in the U.S. retain their childhood faith at extremely high rates, it

is possible that Hindi religious loyalty for U.S. Hindus is tied to recent immigration.

As of 2015, the Council on American-Islamic Relations' best estimate of Muslims

in the United States is approximately 7 million, which is a significant increase from 2.75

million in 2011 (Tuttle, 2015). Two-thirds of the Muslim population in the U.S. are

immigrants and the largest subset of this group has originated from sub-Saharan Africa,

where a great diversity within the Muslim faith exists. This has significant implications

for the way these communities practice Islam and interact with other native-born

Muslims in the United States (Tuttle, 2015; Barreto, Masuoka, & Sanchez, 2008, p. 24).

Muslim immigrants hail from more than 50 countries, represent more than 30 languages,

and practice variations of the religion through various forms (Barreto et al., 2008, p. 24).

Adding to the complexities of the Muslim population in the U.S. is the attraction of the

religion for U.S.-born Blacks and, to a lesser extent, Whites (Barreto et al., 2008). By far,

Muslims are the greatest percentage of immigrants coming from Africa and the Middle

East (24%) and the second highest percentage coming from Asia-Pacific (27%) (Pew

Research Center, 2015b, p. 54). Given that many countries in these regions "are

disproportionately dominated by dictators means that tyranny, persecution, poverty,

violent regime changes, civil strife, and wars" have created immense push factors driving

immigrants to the U.S. (Durán & Pipes, 2002). This data on Muslim origin and reasons

for immigrating are strong predictors that Muslim populations will only continue to

increase and impact the composition of U.S. religion.

While Hindu and Muslim populations are on the rise, other immigrant groups are declining. "Jews are relatively less well represented among the more recent arrivals. There are three times as many Jews among immigrants coming before 1960 than among those coming after 1989" (Pew Research Center, 2008a, p. 52). The greatest drop in immigration between 1910 and 2007 is in the mainline Protestant population, falling from 19% to 5% over the century (Pew Research Center, 2008a, p. 51). Protestants in general are immigrating less and have been overshadowed by the immigration of those belonging to religions outside of Christianity, particularly following the passing the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (The Hart-Celler Act). This amendment to the original act by the same name "abolished the national origins quota system that had structured American immigration policy since the 1920s, replacing it with a preference system that focused on immigrants' skills and family relationships with citizens or residents of the U.S." (Starkweather, 2007). Alleviation of the quotas prompted a flood of new types of immigration, causing an

> unprecedented amount and rapidity of demographic change [marked by] a severe reduction in Protestant Christianity's numerical dominance in the American population…What made the religious changes of the era so traumatic, and subjected ideals of tolerance to so much stress, was not simply the presence in the American population of people who were markedly different; it was the contrast with what had been the case in the colonial period. Colonials had thought of their society and culture as diverse, but in fundamental ways it had been broadly homogeneous for more than two centuries. (Hutchison, 2003, p. 19)

Though Protestant numbers (in both immigration and general U.S. affiliation) are steadily

waning, still the greatest percentage of immigrants are Christian – and this is due to the

rising number of Catholic immigrants (Pew Research Center, 2008a, p. 51). Almost half

of all immigrants are Catholic (46%), whereas only 21% of the adult population born in

the U.S. is Catholic (Pew Research Center, 2008a, p. 47). Even though overall the

Catholic Church has struggled to retain childhood adherents, "the many people who have

left the Catholic Church over the years have been replaced, to a great extent, by the large

number of Catholic immigrants coming to the U.S.", which has kept the Catholic

population consistent since the 1970s (Pew Research Center, 2008a, p. 23). Sociologists

Michael Hout, Claude Fischer, and Mark Chaves have given significant attention to this

dynamic within Catholicism. "For almost two generations Catholics had the demographic

advantages of higher fertility and, just as fertility dropped, higher immigration began

adding more Catholics to the population. These population fundamentals predict that one-

third of Americans would be Catholic, all else being equal…In the light of this

information, we can see that the 24 percent who were currently Catholic in 2012 actually

represented a serious loss of 11 percentage points (or about one-third of the pool of

potential members) for the Catholic Church in America" (2013, pp. 4-5). The rapidly

changing face of Catholicism in the U.S. will certainly have impact in California, home

to "the nation's largest Hispanic population, with about 14.4 million Hispanics…or more

than one-fourth (28%) of U.S. Hispanics" (Brown & Lopez, 2013).

        The next chapter, an overview of interfaith practices, purposes, and people, relies

heavily on the current snapshot of American religiosity formed throughout the previous

chapters. A solid foundational understanding of the religious dynamics at play in

America provides insight, momentum, and justification for the interfaith movement. Diana Eck masterfully notes the connection between where America has been religiously and where it is heading.

> Religious freedom has always given rise to religious diversity, and never has our diversity been more dramatic than it is today. This will require us to reclaim the deepest meaning of the very principles we cherish and to celebrate a truly pluralist American society in which this great diversity is not simply tolerated but becomes the very source of our strength. But to do this, we will all need to know more than we do about one another and to listen for the new ways in which new Americans articulate the 'we' and contribute to the sound and spirit of America.
> (Eck, 2001, p. 6)

Chapter Four: Interfaith Ideology & Work

"If truth were told, the story of the Tower of Babel plagued me with troubling questions for years…What kind of God was this, I thought, that would make it impossible for people to find the God they seek, as we are all meant to do. It took me a lot of thinking to understand the situation. The arrogance of it, I began to understand as the years went by, for any one group to think that they can achieve a monopoly on God. Instead, God explains in the story, 'I will confuse their language so that they can come to know one another'. Suddenly I understood: We are not mean to go to God alone, no matter who we are. We are meant to go together, enriched by one another's faith and wisdom and insights into the way of God."[28]
- Joan Chittister

"Being religious is no longer enough in today's world. In order to lead richer, more fulfilling religious lives, each of us must learn to be interreligious, a state of being that travels the pathless path to the truth that is beyond all religious labels." [29]
- Swami Tyagananda

Chapter Three's examination of the religious composition of the U.S. provides a

helpful backdrop for Chapter Four's study of the aims and approaches within the

interfaith movement in the U.S. Namely, to understand the complexities, challenges, and

successes of interfaith work, it is vital to hold an awareness of the multiple levels of

difference within American religiosity. At the most basic level, the presence of numerous

denominations within just one version of a faith calls for *intra*faith sensitivities, not to

mention what is required for understanding between the various versions of that one faith.

This is the case even between peoples from the same faith. Moving to the interfaith level,

among all the religions represented in the U.S., the variations in dogma, doctrine,

practices, fervor, emphases, proselytization, and adherence are grand and wide. The

scope enlarges when considering the ways these many faiths are experienced outside the

U.S. – and the effect this has on American religious experience when transmitted by a

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[28] Peace, Rose, & Mobley, 2012, p. xi
[29] Tyagananda, 2011, p. 230

steady stream of immigrants. Peggy Levitt of Harvard Divinity School addresses this
reality.

> It is not only the cast of religious characters that changes through migration. Ideas
> about what religion actually is and where to find it change as well. The separation
> of church and state is so firmly embedded in the American psyche that most
> Americans treat religion and culture as more distinct than they actually are. Many
> new immigrants come from places where religion and culture go hand in hand.
> They cannot sort out Irishness from Catholicism, Indianness from being Hindu, or
> what it means to be Pakistani from what it means to be a Muslim. Faith guides the
> way they live their everyday lives, who they associate with, and the kinds of
> communities they belong to, even among people who say they are not very
> religious. Their ideas about tolerance and diversity are shaped by having lived in
> states where religious life is actively regulated and where expectations about
> relations between "us" and "them" are quite different from those in the United
> States. (2006, Remapping the Religious Landscape section)

Interfaith practitioners and religious professionals who engage across religious lines
constantly move among these multiple levels of difference; diversity defines their work.
It is the most energizing and simultaneously challenging aspect of their work. New
Thought ministers and interfaith proponents Abigail and Steve Albert describe the patient
openness required to sustain their vision, "We believe that each soul is here on earth and
is choosing a spiritual path. Some of the paths are open and receptive and other paths are
not. We believe that everyone is on a spiritual evolution…So, when we find people

coming up against us, we honor and respect that that is where they are on their spiritual

journey" (Albert & Albert, 2015).

Introduction to Interfaith Work in the U.S.

At the heart of the religious search for any one person or group is the thirst for

truth. Jewish theologian and historian Arthur Green, an ardent proponent of interfaith

activity, describes his relationship to truth this way,

> Of course there is a level where all I see is my own truth. I am fully engaged in
>
> that tradition, its symbols, its liturgy, and all the rest, just as a person is fully
>
> engaged in (and hopefully fulfilled by) a single marriage. I will never know what
>
> it is like to be engaged in any other marriage. Similarly, I will never know what it
>
> is like to ingest the body and blood of Christ or to walk around the Kaaba. But I
>
> don't need to. As a married person, I am happy to know that there are other good
>
> marriages in the world. That confirms the truth of my marriage, rather than
>
> challenging it. (Peace, Rose, & Mobley, 2012, p. 67)

Green's understanding is consistent with an evolving view of truth that solidified in the

19th century. Throughout the two previous centuries, truth was viewed as something more

universal and constant, but the 19th century ushered in a new era of "more relational,

dynamic understanding" of truth's nature where "texts and doctrines could no longer be

regarded as conveying universal meaning—they had to be understood in light of the

context of their historical situation" (Sheetz-Willard, 2012, p. 250). Into this setting the

landmark interfaith gathering, the World's Parliament of Religions, emerged in 1893 at

the Columbian Exposition in Chicago.[30] This international summit, often referred to as

the "birth of formal interreligious dialogue" (The Pluralism Project, 2015a, Purpose &

Scope section), provided education about various religions, addressed interreligious

concerns, and forged relationships – all of which are the foundational objectives of the

Parliament today (which now goes by the name of Parliament of the World's Religions)

(Sheetz-Willard, 2012, p. 251). The Parliament's Council, formed in 1988, seeks to unite

people in developing "a framework for expressing many visions of a just, peaceful and

sustainable future" (The Pluralism Project, 2015a, Purpose & Scope section).

While the Parliament of the World's Religions lay dormant throughout most of

the 20th century, interfaith efforts increased in popularity and notoriety. This is largely

due to the Holocaust, which profoundly influenced interreligious interactions by

prompting nations and religions to reconsider their religious loyalties and enemies.

Meeting together regardless of faith was a "way to forge mutual understanding and

compassion between individuals from different religious expressions. In the last half [of

the 20th] century, this movement has made tremendous progress in achieving those goals,

particularly among Jews and Christians" (Suomala, 2012, p. 368). In addition to

improved Jewish-Christian relations in the second half of the 20th century, the U.S.

witnessed a surge of interfaith councils during this period (America's Growing Interfaith

Infrastructure, 2015b). These councils have learned to read and interpret their contexts,

surroundings, and neighbors to gain inspiration and vision for their work and

---

[30] This initial event was followed by a century of inactivity. The Chicago Exposition's centennial celebration in 1993 sparked its rebirth and sufficient energy existed to establish a formal nonprofit and global effort. Its conferences and networks have grown to become major centers for interfaith training, education, collaboration, and connection (Sheetz-Willard, 2012, p. 251). More information is available at: http://www.parliamentofreligions.org.

partnerships. A major turning point in the prioritization of U.S. interfaith relations was September 11th. This event catapulted interfaith work into a new and prominent place in the academy and on the ground. Bettina Gray, a lifelong organizer in the interfaith movement, articulated the distinct shift by saying "unimaginable projects [before] then are bearing fruit now" and named "the current moment 'Interfaith 3.0' [as] interfaith efforts have moved from obscurity, to urgency, and now, into maturity" (The Pluralism Project, 2015a, Summary Report section). Suomala echos Gray's sentiments by stating, "We are now at another turning point, however, and our circles of discourse must become more inclusive, in part because the first round was so successful" (2012, p. 368).

The main question for these emerging interfaith councils, associations, and professionals has been one of purpose. While at the heart of interfaith work is a general commitment to goodwill and creating understanding, there are endless projects to pursue, complex and evolving issues to tend to, and communities with whom to link arms with. For this reason, many practitioners prefer to view their work as a *movement* instead.

> A movement is not an organization: it has no single center, but is constituted by a common energy and commitment to improve relations between people of different religions. As the soil of society changes, a multitude of new interfaith groups have sprung up. Some interfaith groups focus on learning and understanding through dialogue; others address common social concerns; still others revolve around campus environments, or public spaces such as hospitals or prisons. Amid these different approaches, the movement represents a new cultural consensus: that better relations can be intentionally cultivated to shape a better society. (America's Growing Interfaith Infrastructure, 2015b)

While there is a burgeoning set of best practices that accompany interfaith ideology, what

is also clear, given the increasing diversity of the U.S., are new dilemmas. "Every public

institution in America today faces the challenges of pluralism, and developing an

interfaith infrastructure for increasingly multi-religious cities and suburbs is increasingly

becoming a priority on the American agenda" (America's Growing Interfaith

Infrastructure, 2015b). Public relations experts Tilson and Venkateswaran note that

religion has been strangely absent from much scholarly communications/public relations

work on media and societal development. While religion has an undeniable media

presence and obviously shapes society, there is a void of substantial research on its power

and role in the broad communications realm (2004, p. 42) (The Pluralism Project, 2015a;

Ecumenical & Interfaith Relations, 1999; The United Methodist Church, 2012; Interfaith

Relations Commission, 2010). This indicates a strong need and hopeful possibilities for

the expansion of interfaith philosophy and work as an academic discipline. The

motivations for doing interfaith work – and doing it well – not only reach across religious

lines, but across the private, public, nonprofit, and educational sectors as well.

The Pluralism Project, spearheaded by Diana Eck of Harvard Divinity School, has

been attempting to fill this gap in interfaith study by helping "Americans engage with the

realities of religious diversity through research, outreach, and the active dissemination of

resources" (President and Fellows of Harvard College and Diana Eck, 2015). In support

of their mission, the Pluralism Project conducted a large-scale, nationwide study of the

presence of interfaith organizations, their goals, and common patterns about their

influence as a whole. They funneled their findings into a web-based platform to

accomplish two main priorities: "to document and to resource the interfaith movement"

(The Pluralism Project, 2015a, Opening section). The website offers an overview of the

efforts within the top 20 U.S. cities with a thriving interfaith base, to "reveal a

kaleidoscope of individuals and communities who engage with one another to tackle

issues of social import, invite each other to share in acts of hospitality, and learn from one

another about the traditions and inspirations that bring them to a common table" (The

Pluralism Project, 2015a, Opening section).

The study's qualitative and quantitative analyses point to trends within the

growing movement. In terms of which faiths are most involved in interfaith efforts,

respondents reported the following groups in descending order of participation rates:

Christians, Jews, Muslims, Unitarian Universalists, Buddhists, and Hindus (The

Pluralism Project, 2015a, Typologies & Survey Results section). Of import is the rate of

particiaption of those in the Unaffiliated category – more than one-third of the

respondents cited members from this group as involved in their efforts (The Pluralism

Project, 2015a, Typologies & Survey Results section).

A review of demographic data reveals notable findings about the involvement of

women and members of minority faiths in the movement. Women hold just under 50% of

the leadership positions in interfaith organizations at 44.9% (The Pluralism Project,

2015a, Typologies & Survey Results section). As for minority faith representation, the

numbers are less favorable. Only 15.9% of those from minority faiths are in formal

leadership positions, though 74.4% of interfaith organizations have at least one member

of minority faiths on their board. Even so, only 23.1% of those minority faith board

members hold a position of official leadership within the board itself (The Pluralism

Project, 2015a, Typologies & Survey Results section).

By far the most targeted group for interfaith organizations is "youth". 71% of the organizations represented by respondents named youth as a central focus of their mission. While youth comprise a small percentage of formal leadership as staff or board members (2.9% and 32.4% respectively), 79.4% of the organizations reported youth as core volunteers (The Pluralism Project, 2015a, Typologies & Survey Results section). "Youth", in terms of the study, is defined as those under 18 years of age. While this category is a major emphasis for interfaith education, young adults – specifically college students – are quickly becoming a new focus area for interfaith practitioners. "Many American public and private colleges and universities are changing chaplaincy, religious life, and/or student affairs structures to reflect the growing religious diversity on campus. Liberal arts colleges established a century or more ago and linked to Christian denominations have, in many cases, led the way" (America's Growing Interfaith Infrastructure, 2015b). Not only are student and spiritual development offices tasked with catering to the multi-religious needs of their populations, but also so are academic departments, as they navigate how to supplement curriculum with an understanding of the current religious diversity and related issues of the U.S. (The Pluralism Project, 2015a, Typologies & Survey Results section). This trend was highlighted by President Obama's "Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge", an initiative that prompted hundreds of universities to partner with local interfaith organizations (The Pluralism Project, 2015a, Typologies & Survey Results section). Another emerging need to accommodate a diverse religious setting are chaplains in public spaces, such as hospitals and prisons (America's Growing Interfaith Infrastructure, 2015b). Just as the clientele has become more diverse, so are those who attend to their spiritual needs.

In addition to tracking current trends within interfaith work, The Pluralism Project also uncovered prevalent challenges common to those doing interfaith work. Related to the trend of a growing awareness of need for various spiritual outlets and counsel in public spaces such as hospitals and airports is the difficulty in creating sacred spaces that are functional, appropriate, and flexible (The Pluralism Project, 2015a, Typologies & Survey Results section). Even with the obvious reality of such religious diversity in the U.S., combating attitudes of indifference or judgment is a consistent subtext of interfaith work in general. In areas with higher rates of conservativism or skepticism of difference, the climate serves "as both a challenge and an impetus" for interfaith work (The Pluralism Project, 2015a, Typologies & Survey Results section).

Many organizations spoke to the challenges of staffing – an issue mirrored by the nonprofit sector in general. "Finding the right balance between volunteer and paid staff for an organization – and finding the resources necessary to support either approach is difficult for many interfaith organizations", especially when volunteers in interfaith work are usually doing so in addition to full-time and often taxing work (The Pluralism Project, 2015a, Typologies & Survey Results section).

Perhaps the greatest challenge of all for interfaith practitioners is how to sensitively navigate concrete differences and painful tensions among various faiths. The conflict in the Middle East is a useful example for exploring this aspect. Celebrated interfaith advocate, Joan Campbell names the tensions within the Abrahamic family of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as the most dire interfaith crisis in the United States. Attacks on houses of worship are a blatant reminder of this. Her assessment is the power imbalance among these groups as lived out in America (Campbell, 2014). While

conversations about the Middle East can easily become polarizing or explosive, groups are finding success in naming the "elephant in the room" and from there "[harnessing] the sensitive and difficult nature of these issues and [using] them as an opportunity for diffing deeper and building further turst across religious differences" (The Pluralism Project, 2015a, Typologies & Survey Results section).

Another area of sensitivity in which trust is crucial is a religion's degree of emphasis on conversion. In an environment where Jews and Hindus are not encouraged to convert others and Evangelical Christians see this as their primary objective, interfaith is often threatened by a concern for conversion – whether perceived as a threat or a mission. Mary Ferro, the Faith Liaison for San Diego Interfaith Community Services, states the single biggest challenge for those doing this work is the inherent distrust that another's ulterior motive is to proselytize (Ferro, 2015). Campbell reiterates Ferro's concern that the greatest challenge of religious diversity in the U.S. is "mostly within the Christian faith, within the deeply held belief that we are God's chosen people with the charge to go into all the world and preach the gospel...What does it mean if it's not our job to make everyone a Christian?…We'll never get there until we train Christians to respect their own religion with passion and recognize that others hold same passion" (Campbell, 2014). Lastly, a challenge practitioners cite – though it is undeniably a good problem to have – is how to translate the reality and danger of religious prejudice and conflicts to a (mostly younger) population that doesn't experience the other as someone to be judged or feared. Participation among young adults and college students in interfaith dialogue often is less than older adult numbers out a lack of felt need (The Pluralism Project, 2015a, Typologies & Survey Results section).

Common Aims

The interfaith movement, as it has gained momentum and attention over the past 50 years in the U.S., is marked by common goals around which practitioners across various disciplines, settings, regions, and religions concentrate their efforts. These have been grouped into three main categories: preserving religious liberty, promoting peace and justice, and building connections through professional networks.

Preserving Religious Liberty: As is apparent by the data offered in Chapter Three, the religious diversity of the U.S. is directly related to the material presented in Chapter One – America's special and protective emphasis on religious freedom. This section begins with the purposes of interfaith organizing that relate to preserving religious liberty. Joan Campbell maintains that the U.S.'s "gift to the world is that we believe in religious liberty [which is] possibly the greatest freedom we have" (Campbell, 2014). Diana Eck argues in article "Becoming a More Complex 'We'" that this is the opportune moment to "claim for our time the principles of religious freedom that have shaped our nation. We need to find ways to articulate the 'we' of our nation anew – whether we are Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, or secular Americans" (Eck, 2009). Eck's desire for the present moment in America is one reflected in past eras of U.S. history. Movements around civil rights and against the Vietnam War faced similar tensions of how to govern, organize, and serve a nation of such diversity – including religious diversity. It was in these contexts throughout the 1960s and 70s that the idea of the U.S. as a pluralistic nation moved from an idea with limited resonance to a widely accepted description of U.S. society (Levitt, 2006, Opening section). The Pluralism Project chronicles the way Americans have contended with the growing diversity of the nation in these terms:

The exclusionist answer to the tumultuous influx of cultural and religious

diversity that seemed to threaten the very core of American civilization was to

close the door, particularly to "aliens" — whether Asians, Catholics, or Jews.

Assimilationists, like those who envisioned America as a "melting pot," invited

new immigrants to come, but to leave their differences and particularities behind

as quickly as possible. The message was: come and be like us, come and conform

to a predominantly Anglo-Protestant culture. For pluralists,…the American

promise to immigrants was: come as you are, with all your differences and

particularities, pledged only to the common civic demands of American

citizenship. Come and be yourself, contributing in your distinctive way to the

"orchestra" of American civilization. (From Diversity to Pluralism, 2015c)

Much of interfaith work aims to assist Americans in general to accept and even

embrace their pluralistic society. While many fear that pluralism "waters down one's own

religious beliefs by acknowledging that others believe differently", Eck is confident that a

"vibrant and hopeful pluralism" is achievable (From Diversity to Pluralism, 2015c) (Eck,

2009). "In a world of increasing fragmentation where there are few good models for a

truly democratic multi-religious society, we can be such a place" (Eck, 2009). In fact, the

Constitution institutes the very protections of the First Amendment that enforce a healthy

dialogue and debate across lines of difference instead of a prioritization of agreement on

religious and spiritual matters and values (From Diversity to Pluralism, 2015c).

Proponents of pluralism are careful to distinguish pluralism from diversity, two

terms that are frequently used interchangeably. Diversity is the presence of difference,

while pluralism is the "engagement that creates a common society from all that diversity"

(From Diversity to Pluralism, 2015c). "Engagement" is a term used frequently

throughout interfaith practice research and interviewer testimony. It is connected to the

concept of pluralism in that it invokes intentionality; it is purposeful "interaction with

difference, rather than its simple acknowledgment" (Levitt, 2006, A Blessing or a Threat?

section). Information about and recognition of the other is not enough. The Pluralism

Project (obviously an advocate of pluralism, given its very name) envisions a new reality

based on the presence of such diversity as exists in the U.S. "For those who welcome the

new diversity, creating a workable pluralism will mean engaging people of different

faiths and cultures in the creation of a common society. Pluralism is not a 'given,' but an

achievement" (From Diversity to Pluralism, 2015c). Acceptance, assimilation, tolerance,

and respect are insufficient in and of themselves – they are means to an end. Pluralism's

end goal is meaningful encounters that cannot help but challenge, influence, and teach

those involved. "The dynamic of pluralism, however, is one of meeting, exchange, and

two-way traffic" (From Diversity to Pluralism, 2015c).

Pluralism also recognizes, and even respects, the inevitability of change. In terms

of theology or religion, this means "even the most ardent inclusivist will have to come to

terms with irresistible change that ensures that over time every religious outlook will

morph into or be replaced by its successor" (Rose K. , 2011, p. 70). Kenneth Rose, a

theologian who specializes in researching the pluralistic trend of the U.S., endorses the

notion that pluralism is the constant and rallying point for the religious whose religions

will, ultimately, succumb to incessant change and that it can be so precisely because it

affirms change (2011, p. 71). He goes on to argue that the "current impasse in the

theology of religions" could be reconciled if the religions based in absolutist ideologies

would recognize and accept the inescapable certainties of "change and the indifference of

the unpersuaded" that no amount of absolutism can prevent (2011, p. 75). One of the

most monumental changes in religiosity across the globe is the shift from multi-sited to

multi-centered religions. As Levitt analyzes,

> Buddhist ideas and practices, for example, now move with unprecedented speed
>
> to non-Asian countries, but it's not simply a move from the religion's center to
>
> periphery—it's about the emergence of multiple new centers, with regionalized
>
> Buddhist interpretations and practices. Because the centers are constantly in
>
> communication with each other, East and West, the "old country" and the new,
>
> infuse and transform one another. (Levitt, 2006, Opening section)

Her finding is significant, as it suggests an entirely new paradigm on the essence and

reach of religion. Faiths no longer have a home base – and this is revolutionary. Another

example of the power and effect of change is the rather new concept of multiple religious

identities within the individual. Yann Martel's novel *The Life of Pi* addresses this

phenomenon within the life of his central character, an Indian boy named Piscine "Pi"

Patel. "'In these troubled times it's good to see a boy so keen on God. We all agree on

that.' The imam and the priest nodded. 'But he can't be a Hindu, a Christian and a

Muslim. It's impossible. He must choose…' 'Hmmm, Piscine?' Mother nudged me.

'How do you feel about the question?' 'Bapu Gandhi said, 'All religions are true.' 'I just

want to love God'" (Martel, 2001, p. 66). Pi's experience of claiming many religions as

one's own fused creation of various beliefs and practices is increasingly more common

than ever before. For others, this complex religious identification is not necessarily by

choice but instead by inheritance. "In the last century, for example, 'the number of

interfaith marriages rose in every decade, reaching highs in the 30 to 33 percent range as

the twentieth century closed'…the children from these marriages 'do not choose to

belong to multiple religious communities; they simply do so by virtue of their birth'"

(Suomala, 2012, p. 361).

Another motivation for embracing a robust pluralism is the development of a

common ethic that serves the good of all. Interfaith practitioners that promote this

ideology believe that the best outcomes for all of society are possible when members of

various faiths work together. A belief that bolsters this viewpoint is a respect for the

unique contribution of religion in general. Lawrence Hoffman notes the era of U.S.

history in which the nation made a major conversion from "religion as belief into religion

as feeling" (2010, p. 238).

> Eisenhower specifically… said outright, 'Our form of government has no sense
>
> unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don't care what it is.'
>
> But he defined faith loosely as, 'honesty, decency, fairness, service, that sort of
>
> thing.' Critics…cringed at Eisenhower's feel-good blandness but missed the
>
> point: Eisenhower's religious faith was something that (in his words) was 'deeply
>
> felt,' not deeply argued, reasoned, believed, or otherwise cognitively affirmed. In
>
> his folksy way, Eisenhower thereby [heralded] America's newest romantic era.
>
> (2010, p. 238)

Hoffman shows here the shift toward the national adoption of a set of principles that

would guide its good citizens, regardless of religious background.

The predecessor group of the current Parliament of the World's Religions, its

Council, attempted to harness a general set of ethical guidelines to which members of any

faith would ascribe. This list, originally developed in 1999, still serves as the

foundational piece of the Council's work today. They define *global ethic* not as "global

ideology or a single unified religion beyond all existing religions, and certainly not the

domination of one religion over all others" but "a fundamental consensus on binding

values, irrevocable standards, and personal attitudes. Without such a fundamental

consensus on an ethic, sooner or later every community will be threatened by chaos or

dictatorship, and individuals will despair" (Council for a Parliament of the World's

Religions, 1993, p. 5). In much the same way that American Civil Religion functions in

the U.S., the Parliament promotes a global agenda of a universal civil religion. Their

goals focus on items such as: intervention in human rights abuses, preservation of the

earth, and encouragement of centering practices like prayer and mediation (Council for a

Parliament of the World's Religions, 1993, p. 4). Their 15-page document is a highly

structured, detailed approach.

Others, with a similar hope of a common ethic, search for a reigning virtue that

encapsulates and enhances all other noble virtues. Tilson and Venkateswaran, working

from a public relations perspective, promote tolerance as this primary ethic. They

describe "the relation of religious tolerance and freedom of speech — an essential

ingredient for a democratic society — throughout history, noting that intolerance

inhibited the growth of such freedom in ancient Egyptian, Sumerian, Hebrew, African,

Islamic and European cultures" (2004, p. 43). Diana Eck offers a different principal ethic

– love. Borrowing from John Wesley, she notes,

> …the theological foundation of inclusivism is John Wesley's conviction that
>
> universal love is the heartline of the Christian message. No one could say,

according to Wesley, that the "heathen and Mahometan" would suffer damnation. Far better to leave this matter to God, "who is the God of the Heathens as well as the Christians, and who hateth nothing that he hath made." And who is this God? Charles Wesley's famous hymn "O Come Thou Traveller Unknown" written on the theme of Jacob wrestling with the unknown God, exclaims, "Pure Universal Love thou art!" The refrain repeats throughout the hymn – "Thy Nature, and thy name, is Love." (cited by Eck, 2001, p. 180)

A unifying tie across the interfaith endorsement of pluralism is skepticism of fundamentalism. Much work is focused on educating about the dangers of exclusivist thinking and enlightening those who belong to these groups. Rose explores the major challenge absolutist believers face when they intersect with each other – the "stalemate where apologists for competing absolutes meet in conflict and contradiction" (Rose K. , 2011, p. 73). His concern is that members of these groups, without an adequate awareness of the other, retreat to "custom, nostalgia, narrowly interpreted religious experience, fideism, authority, fundamentalism, or, in the worst instances, force" (Rose K. , 2011, p. 73). While much pluralism work concentrates on bringing people out of narrow interpretations of religion, a strong contingent views these groups as the people to work *around*. Colleagues from different religious traditions, Roger S. Gottlieb and Bill J. Leonard, have developed a significant friendship out of their academic intersections. They have reconciled their Judaism and Christianity and call themselves "co-religionists".

There is no interfaith learning here, for there is just one faith. There are Buddhists and Hindus, Sikhs and Native Americans, Evangelicals and Catholics with whom

we share this faith. But we do not share it with fundamentalists on either (or any)

side who are attached to their metaphysics, their particular religious script, their

moral arrogance and exclusivity...In the end, perhaps, there are only two religions

in the world. Ours, and the one that makes creed more important than love, being

right more crucial than staying in touch with other people.

(Peace et al., 2012, p. 88)

While inviting the general U.S. population to embrace pluralism as a response to

rapidly increasing religious diversity is a major goal for those doing interfaith work,

another goal under the broad umbrella of preserving religious liberty is addressing

prejudice and discrimination. "Couple a deep negativity toward religious difference with

a deep ignorance of other religious traditions, and we have a recipe for prejudice" (Eck,

2001, p. 304). Eck's concern is timely one, as "diversity has produced fault lines, the

cracks that indicate deep fractures and divisions. As experienced by immigrant Hindu,

Buddhist, Sikh, or Muslim communities, stereotypes and prejudice have taken both old

and new forms. There are encounters – at times hostile – over 'zoning' and 'traffic,' as

new religious communities move into the neighborhood" (From Diversity to Pluralism,

2015c).

Rev. Gerald Durley represents a growing number of faith leaders with his rally

cry, "We are convinced that spiritual leaders representing the various faiths in the United

States have a moral responsibility to stand together and to denounce categorically

derision, misinformation, or outright bigotry directed against any religious group in this

country" (KPBS, 2010b). Freedom from oppression and hatred is a core tenet of

America's general promise of freedom. A surge of interfaith partnership intent on

ensuring this liberty is extended to those in religious minorities is now especially

apparent.

The catalyst event for heightening awareness to the bigotry alive in the U.S. was

clearly 9-11. The attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon not only highlighted

the viable presence of Islam in the U.S., but also simultaneously created a new and highly

charged skepticism of Muslims. "Islam has taken the place of the Soviet Union as the

next great enemy of the free world, and partly that's understandable given Al Qaeda,

given the threat of Islamic radicalism, the proliferation of jihadist movements. But, of

course, those movements are a tiny minority of the 1.5 billion Muslims in the world"

(KPBS, 2011). KPBS went on to report that even a decade after the original terrorist

invasion, the tensions for Muslims are still high and relations strained. Strong objections,

protests, and even violence regarding Muslim places of worship and public practices are

on the rise and state law limiting sharia law have been enacted in 24 states (2011). "There

are parts of a tradition, whether it's Christianity, Islam, or Judaism that can be lifted up,

twisted, and used as a cudgel, as a weapon, against people you don't like because you are

fearing them for a variety of reasons, and that's what's happened to Islam today" (KPBS,

2010b). Establishing a safe and hospitable climate for Muslim-Americans is a primary

goal for interfaith practitioners, who also have their eye on U.S. citizens at large,

watchful for discrimination based on religion. Rabbi Michael Lerner, a longtime advocate

for interfaith harmony and shared work, reiterates the necessity for all faiths to work

together for the cause of reducing bigotry. "People of all faiths need to shape a political

and social movement that reaffirms the most generous, peace-oriented, social justice-

committed, and loving truths of the spiritual heritage of the human race. It is only this

resurrection of hope that can save us from a new wave of global hatred" (Claiborne &

Campolo, 2005).

Promoting Peace & Justice: The second major aim of interfaith work is the

promotion of peace and justice for all. Though related to the desire for a thriving

pluralistic society, this goal is the specific energy driving interfaith action in pursuit of

peace and justice. The power available through religion's emphasis on "self-reflection

and trust in a transcendent power can be a force for good instead of violence and an

impetus for developing shared values among world traditions that can make for peace and

safety around the globe" (Sheetz-Willard, 2012, p. 263). Similar to pluralists' efforts to

from a common ethic by which all might agree to live by, those seeking interfaith unity

on issues of peace and justice center their work on a common set of values.

The Council for a Parliament of World Religion's grounds their attempt in the

collective altruism of the Golden Rule. For the Council, the Rule eradicates "all

selfishness, whether individual or collective, whether in the form of class thinking,

racism, nationalism, or sexism. We condemn these because they prevent humans from

being authentically human" (1993, p. 7). Practitioners like Mary Ferro point to the

common value of service to the broader community. By amassing the resources and

volunteer labor from across an array of religious communities in North San Diego

County, Interfaith Community Services seeks to pay attention to the presenting needs and

address them jointly (Ferro, 2015). Contained within a commitment to care for the

surrounding community is a specific value on caring for the poor. The dialogue between

Evangelical ministers Tony Campolo and Shane Claiborne highlights the commonality of

this value across religious lines. "When it comes to what is ultimately important, the

Muslim community's sense of commitment to the poor is exactly in tune with where

Jesus is in the 25th chapter of Matthew. That is the description of judgment day. And if

that is the description of judgment day what can I say to an Islamic brother who has fed

the hungry, and clothed the naked?" (Claiborne & Campolo, 2005). Najeeba Syeed-

Miller, an interfaith community organizer specializing in conflict resolution, ardently

believes that the goal of "interreligious engagement is not about changing someone's

theology; it is about developing the skills to engage productively across lines of

differences" (Peace et al., 2012, p. 111). She asks her participants to sharpen their

ideologies about the common good and justice and question the internal blocks

preventing them from linking with those of other faiths. "I often tell my students that the

most vibrant interfaith projects can happen between two people who avowedly believe

the other is going to hell but somehow still find ways to feed the homeless in their

community" (Peace et al., 2012, p. 111). Ferro echoes this sentiment with her observation

that, when groups work together to impact the community in ways they could not situated

in their silos, that "God smiles" (Ferro, 2015).

In addition to the development of a common value base to work from, interfaith

practitioners motivated by a desire to promote peace and justice take up their moral

authority. This authority affords them a voice with their adherents, certainly, but also

with civic leaders. A key strategy for Laurie Coskey of the Interfaith Committee for

Worker Justice is to funnel the authority her organization's leaders and volunteers have

"in order to persuade elected policy-makers. We speak at the council and senate, trying to

change the framework around our issues, trying to show the dignity of every human

being as created by God…My issue is to inform public policy through a moral authority

that lifts up the inherent value of human beings, which contrasts the dominant economic paradigm" (Coskey, 2014). Coskey, like her fellow interfaith organizers, seeks to offer an alternative narrative to the story of dominance by those with power and privilege. They see their positions as clergy as performing a service for society in general; they help people become "aware of these norms [of human dignity, rights, and social and economic justice] and mobilize their adherents to support them" (Levitt, 2006, Remapping the Religious Landscape section).

Connectedness through Professional Networks: A third aim, the ability for religious professionals and academics to connect, serves a small population but fuels the interfaith movement in general by providing webs of support and learning. Jennifer Howe Peace, Or N. Rose, and Gregory Mobley's anthology of stories of interfaith connection features countless essays by professors, clergy, writers, and activists whose work in the religious realm has intersected with those of other belief systems (2012). A consistent theme throughout the book attempts to answer the question, "What happens when you find (or are found by) a text, a person, or an idea from this neighboring world that is so powerful that it (or he or she) cannot be denied or suppressed?" (Peace et al., 2012, p. 1). The Pluralism Project's Interfaith Infrastructure Study ultimately led to the creation of their parallel web and platform *America's Interfaith Infrastructure: An Emerging Landscape*, a dynamic compilation of best practices, case studies, and city profiles – with the major goal being to unite religious leaders (The Pluralism Project, 2015e).

Or Rose, a Jewish Rabbi and social activist, writes prolificly about the need for interntional interfaith interactions among clergy of all faiths. Though his writing focuses

primarily on rabbinic development, his suppositions can be easily extrapolated to clergy

of any religion.

> It is important for Jewish seminarians to learn with peers from other religious
>
> traditions who are also preparing for leadership roles in their respective
>
> communities. This provides students with the opportunity to explore a range of
>
> religious and professional matters, participating in experiences of "co-formation."
>
> These encounters can also help the aspiring Jewish leader to begin creating
>
> networks of interreligious peers whom they can call on in the future for support
>
> and advice, and with whom they can engage in cooperative ventures. (2014, p. 6)

His statement addresses the multiple advantages of clergy who cross religious lines:

spiritual formation, collegiality, and partnership. Rose emphasizes the importance of

genuine engagement and repeated practice, which become especially valuable during

times of "anxiety, scarcity, or conflict", when religious groups tend to polarize and

leadership is truly essential (Rose O. N., 2014, p. 4).

Common Approaches

The Interfaith Infrastructure Study found that participating interfaith organizations

named the following three approaches as most central to their mission: relationship-

building, education, and dialogue (The Pluralism Project, 2015a, Typologies & Survey

Results section).[31] Given that relationship-building is an activity infused into all the

major purposes cited in the Study's top responses, this section will focus on education,

dialogue, and activism for peace and justice as popular and effective approaches that

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[31] "Service" ranked fourth and "Spiritual Development" fifth in the Study's findings (The Pluralism
Project, Typologies & Survey Results section).

accomplish the major aims discussed in the previous section. Joan Campbell weaves

these essential components into her assessment of the greatest challenge of interfaith

work, which is "[bringing] people back to the conversation when they walk

out…Interfaith work is very hard because deep in our hearts are faith and feelings…so

we have to do training on how people come back after disagreeing. [Our faith] relieves us

and defines us. If faith makes us open and loving people then we can be better at this

(Campbell, 2014).

    Education: The multi-centeredness of religions across the globe and diversifying

populations of nations in every continent call for a greater understanding of one another.

Intentional efforts to deconstruct myths of the other and develop cultural and religious

competencies are at the heart of interfaith educational practices.

    Objectification, scapegoating, or fear of the different "other" become deeply

rooted and subconscious paradigms because they are reinforced by powerful influences:

family, religion, schooling, media, or art. It takes intentionality to depart from ingrained

mindsets and attitudes and interfaith educators approach this task through various means.

"We all live in these communities and sub-communities where we tend to associate with

people we know. We live in silos and watch the news that tends to agree with the way we

view the world. The challenge is to break through that and experience another of a

different faith and fundamentally see them as human" (Adam, 2014). An important factor

in deconstructing myths of someone else is to move beyond tolerance. While tolerance is

an important piece of the process, it can impede real growth in that it alone does not

require truly knowing anyone. It can be achieved simply by knowing *about* someone

"and so can let us harbor all the stereotypes and half-truths we want to believe about our

neighbors…It is too thin a foundation for a society as religiously diverse and complex as

America's" (From Diversity to Pluralism, 2015c). As was mentioned in the pluralism

section, the principle that is drawn upon instead is engagement. Liyakatali Takim, expert

in global Islam, reviews this strategy though the lens of the way Muslims in the U.S. are

mischaracterized as violent and radical. In response to the rise in prejudicial and hateful

speech and behavior toward Muslims, particularly those from the Middle East, he says,

"Such destructive mythification is often born in spaces of non-contact, adversarial

contact, or ignorance" (2004, p. 344). This assessment could accurately be applied to any

groups of difference. Interfaith practitioners, motivated by a vision of "peaceful

coexistence", mobilize people to make real and deep connections with members from

other traditions so that they "become real people and not simply representatives of certain

other religious traditions…Peace is only possible when we no longer see a group as the

other but as a concrete human community with ancient values and norms" (Takim L. ,

From Conversion to Conversation: Interfaith Dialogue in Post 9-11 America, 2004, p.

348). Lest peaceful engagement imply a gentle avoidance of controversial topics and

differences, true honest encounter must certainly move into the realm of conflict and

disagreement. With careful attention given to navigating it with dignity and sufficient

prior knowledge, conflict becomes a means of bonding and respect for disparate groups.

"Time and again, stories that begin with incidents of hatred or conflict evolve in time into

stories of new neighbors who have, in the course of their conflict, learned much more

about one another. Distant images have become people with faces, voices, and problems.

Strangers, in time, become neighbors…[who] become allies in creating our common

society" (Eck, 2001, p. 332).

Some educators would take this type of interactive learning about another group one step further to the level of embodiment. Embodiment takes into account the sensory nature of religion. While knowing about a religion's core beliefs and history can provide its form, it does not always capture its substance. The practices, community characteristics, icons, smells, tastes, rhythms, and art of a religion give it life and flavor. Judith Berling tells of her participation in a Daoist fire-walking ceremony that prompted her own spiritual rejuvenation as an Episcopalian Protestant. "Although it is not the only effective way to encounter another religion, I have come to feel that a 'dialogue' or encounter that does not include the witnessing of or participating in living religious practice is somehow thin or colorless. Practice conveys a great deal, most particularly about embodied religion" (Peace et al., 2012, p. 77). Rabbi Rose concurs with the belief that "one-time and short-term encounters can be powerful educational experiences that ignite or fortify one's commitment to this work", but it is the longer-term "learning in the presence of the other" that transforms learning about to understanding in a much more holistic sense (2014, p. 6). "For rabbis to be effective actors in the interreligious sphere they need to understand the ways in which actual Christians and others embody their religious traditions, gaining insight into what are the animating questions, fears, hopes, and dreams of religious people searching for meaning and purpose in today's world" (Rose O. N., 2014, p. 5). By trying on the religion of another, stereotypes and myths of the mind give way to the intuition and feeling of the body.

Another significant avenue for educational work is fostering religious and cultural competence. A movement with growing loyalty is religious literacy. The desire to build a society with a functional, fact-based knowledge of the major religions present within a

region has fueled an interfaith collaboration toward the development of curriculums, college courses, and teacher preparation programs. "[M]any voices across the country question the adequacy of the ad hoc approach to religious studies in light of the pervasive impact religion has on the lives of the citizenry of the world. An increasing number of voices call for religious literacy to foster broader understanding, whether cross-cultural, cross-campus, or cross-town" (Waggoner, 2003, p. 74). Abigail Albert, an interfaith organizer, agrees with this premise. She and her husband Steve have attempted to bring a new awareness of religion and the practices of various religions to public schools in San Diego, though their efforts have been met with resistance and even fear (Albert & Albert, 2015). "We're not going to preach, we're going to share principles. From it, there will be less prejudice, bias, and fear" (Albert & Albert, 2015).

The First Amendment Center, an initiative that serves to "support the First Amendment and build understanding of its core freedoms through education, information and entertainment" (First Amendment Center, 2015), launched a large-scale effort to produce a private and public school curriculum for secondary level students. By incorporating the perspectives and input of multiple constituencies (e.g., teachers, lawyers, senior citizens, charities, youth), the editing team formed the curriculum with this guiding premise:

> While religion and ideology have been the most potent sources of meaning and belonging in human experience, so that neither human life nor world civilizations are understandable without them, they have also been responsible for spilling "rivers of blood." In the 20th century, the most murderous century in history, religion and ideology were leading causes of state repression and sectarian

> violence; yet, they also prompted courageous stands for freedom of conscience,
> human dignity, peace and the preservation of life. (First Amendment Center,
> 2009, p. 130)

Operating from a place of respect for the positive power of religion and honesty about the ugliness of it, the committee produced "a course in religious liberty…not a course in world religions or even religion in America...If the approach to these discussions is objective and sensitive, neither promoting nor inhibiting religion, teachers can foster among students understanding and mutual respect for differences of belief" (First Amendment Center, 2009, p. 7). The First Amendment Center's curriculum is one of many options available, though standardized religious education has yet to be implemented nationwide. Michael Waggoner, a proponent of religious literacy, certainly supports the adoption of a robust curriculum for public schools, but recognizes the need for teacher education as the first priority. "As with most strategies of change, the introduction of religious literacy into educator preparation programs is a leadership issue. An organization must have a champion of this idea with an uncommon combination of commitment, power, and skill…to bring disparate groups together to fashion a common agenda" (2003, p. 83).

University campuses tend to be leading the charge. As their student development programs focus on inclusivity and offices of diversity are becoming standard, so are their academic offerings as religious literacy emerges as a new field of study (Waggoner, 2003, p. 83). Seminaries and theological schools are another environment in which an increasing focus on religious literacy is taking place. Rabbi Rose maintains that administrators and faculty "need to be skillful in implementing new courses and related

activities and lifting up important interfaith issues in existing academic frameworks… [as

well as] make creative use of co- curricular opportunities for such learning. The goal is to

help cultivate a new generation of moral and spiritual leaders" who are not only strongly

committed to their own tradition but conversant in and connected to others within other

traditions (2014, p. 10). Along these lines, Eboo Patel, a Muslim organizer and activist,

promotes the notion that religious leaders must be able to develop a facility with the core

stories, sacred texts, chronology, and views of God of other religions in order to speak

each other's language and therefore do better work together (as cited in Rose O. N., 2014,

p. 6 & 7).

A setting that has received much more attention recently for its awareness (or lack

thereof) of religious competence is the workplace. As America diversifies, so does its

work sphere, which has resulted in new legal protections, hiring procedures, and policies.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) reports that "religion-based

charges of discrimination have increased approximately 41% since 1997, and payouts

have increased approximately 174%" (Anti-Defamation League, 2012, p. 1). These

dismal numbers make a strong case for increased measures to understand and

appropriately manage religious difference.[32] The Pluralism Project advocates that

companies develop a culture of "workplace spirituality" that encourages "a level playing

field for religious and spiritual expression among employees of all backgrounds" through

co-created shared values and acknowledgment of religious preferences and requirements

(Religious Diversity and the Workplace, 2014).

Dialogue: Of the research conducted on approaches within interfaith organizing,

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[32] A positive shift is beginning to show, as the number of harassment complaints has been steadily
decreasing since 2013 due to a concerted effort by the EEOC to provide training and resources for
employers (Religious Diversity and the Workplace, 2014).

there is an abundance of material available on dialogue. While it certainly is a method

that complements the previous approach of education, it is an entire field, avenue, and

end goal in and of itself. Four types of dialogical interaction are commonly

acknowledged: replacement (exclusivist dialogue that rejects the other), fulfillment

(though other religions may hold some truth, they must be converted to the truth),

mutuality (all religions are equal in terms of social and intellectual realms but not in the

spiritual realm), and acceptance (all religions are fully equal) (Tyagananda, 2011, p. 228).

For research and perspectives offered in this section, the mutuality and acceptance

positions are assumed, as they are proven to be the most dialogical in nature

(Tyagananda, 2011). These two positions also take a much different stance on the

concept of "truth" than the more closed first two positions (replacement and fulfillment).

Researcher Sheetz-Willard, in critiquing and comparing popular methods of interreligious

dialogue, explores the relationship between truth and communication. "Knowing is not

simply a passive receptivity to what is but, rather, a back-and-forth process of

questioning and reshaping" (2012, p. 251). This negotiation process is the justification for

dialogue. Truth must be "always interpreted, within the limitations of language, out of

specific desires, from a particular historical, cultural, and, indeed, religious location. As a

result…the pursuit of truth requires dialogue with multiple others" (Sheetz-Willard, 2012,

p. 251).

Before investigating the nuances of interfaith dialogue, it is important to name a

significant qualification. A dynamic that is common, but inappropriate and ultimately not

that helpful, is burdening one member of a faith group with the expectation that they act

and speak on behalf of the whole. "For dialogue to be meaningful, it is also important to

convey to the other that religious space is contested by many factions and that there are

many perspectives within each religious tradition. Hence, the partners in dialogue

represent just one, rather than all, of these positions" (Takim L. , From Conversion to

Conversation: Interfaith Dialogue in Post 9-11 America, 2004, p. 350). In considering

various aspects of dialogue, it must be acknowledged that placing this assumption on any

one person is ostracizing and pressuring. Also, basing strategies and understanding on

one solo experience can skew outcomes. While this is a something to watch for, it is also

a truth that is reinforced through compelling, honest dialogue marked by true listening.

> The stories of interreligious encounter remind us that religions are not fixed
>
> entities but dynamic movements, as people of all faiths struggle to address brand
>
> new questions about such problems as AIDS, the degradation of the environment,
>
> the rising tide of youth violence, and the presence and vitality of other
>
> communities of faith. These stories of interreligious encounter also remind us that
>
> our religious traditions are multivocal, that no one speaks for the whole, that we
>
> argue within our traditions about some of our deepest values, and that newfound
>
> alliances may be made across the political and religious spectrum. (Eck, 2001, p.
>
> 384)

In this section, the following facets of interfaith dialogue will be reviewed: key features

that mark effective dialogue, the importance of preserving the essential nature of each

faith involved, and issues that require special consideration.

The three features of intentionality, trust building, and empathy typically

characterize effective interfaith dialogue, as outlined by the following sections. Sheetz-

Willard defines intentionality as "the willingness to get to know others of different

religious persuasions and openness to the idea that one can even learn from them" (2012, p. 269). In this view, intentionality goes beyond its typical definition of purposeful or thoughtful to a posture of expectant receiving. It requires active listening of the other, a willingness to hold one's own views openly, and a readiness to be challenged or enlightened. While formal, programmed dialogues can certainly hold these aspects, Pravrajika Vrajaprana, a Hindu nun, promotes the idea of "interfaith incognito", which is the notion that one can enter into interfaith dialogue at any moment and that these unrehearsed, unprompted encounters can be the most effective (Peace et al., 2012, p. 22). "We are not dealing with auditoriums of hundreds of thousands of people, we are addressing one human being at a time and we are also *being* changed as we change others who encounter us" (Peace et al., p. 22). This spontaneous interaction Vrajaprana praises is one that is only possible when the participants carry within them a sense of intentionality. These informal conversations and moments are birthed out of two people meeting each other with an obvious openness for the learning that could come from the other.

A second theme that emerges as central for doing interfaith work well is the ability to build trust. This grows within a relationship that begins with the intentionality described above as the parties discern that they are genuinely listened to, respected, and, ultimately, known. The group Women Transcending Boundaries, formed in the wake of September 11th by women of the Abrahamic faiths who sought an alternative response to fear and mistrust, exists as a thriving example of such trust. They have grown from 40 to 500 women and gather regularly to "learn about one another's faith traditions through building relationships. The conversations are open and honest. The group uses what it

calls a strict 'ouch' policy...If anyone feels offended or hurt by anything they can just say,

'Ouch,' and we stop and we say, 'What is it?' And that person can say, 'That really hurt

my feelings'" (KPBS, 2011). The group has discovered a method for managing the

unavoidable and largely unintentional clashes of interfaith interaction. Creating a

structure within which to acknowledge and address offense sends a clear message from

the outset that accidental insult will happen, but that it can become a tool for learning and

strengthening relationships. Practitioners realize the benefits of this kind of interaction

are not just for the spiritual growth and collaborative strategies of religious participants,

but also for society as a whole. "Such social pragmatists reason that, since we have to live

as fellow citizens anyway, it is better that we get to know one another well so we can live

harmoniously, or at least tolerate one another's presence without too much suspicion,

misunderstanding, and distrust" (Tyagananda, 2011, p. 228).

A third aspect that characterizes interfaith relating – and builds upon the

intentionality and trust building concepts already named – is empathy. It is the emotional

equivalent of the embodiment principle described earlier in the chapter. Takim calls this

an "attempt to enter the heart of the partner in dialogue" (2004, p. 346). He maintains that

"dialogue needs to progress beyond negating misconceptions and understanding the

beliefs and praxis of others" and move into the next level of relating that involves

communicating not just the basic tenets of one's own tradition but "also what is

meaningful in it, how they experience and relate to the sacred within their tradition"

(2004, p. 346). This kind of exchange allows for both the logical and passionate

connection to another's religion, which complements the practices and tangible

experiences of embodiment. Another avenue for connection across religions is the power

of myth, as Lawrence Hoffman explores in his research. Hoffman describes myth as the stories religions cling to and pass on that define them, shape their adherents' worldviews and perceptions of themselves, and distinguish them from other faith systems. Because religious myths are about God, they provide a perfect base for interfaith dialogue as participants theorize and discuss subject matter that, ultimately, is unknowable (Hoffman, 2010, p. 241). Hoffman cites the unifying power of similar Jewish and Christian narratives of being chosen – Jews through the promise delivered through prophets and Christians through Christ's death, resurrection, and salvation (2010, p. 244). These mythic beliefs do not have to compete with each other. Rather, as Hoffman suggests, "[both] are narratives with the scope required to face our future as two allied peoples of God, committed alike to a deep and compassionate response to human suffering" (2010, p. 244). Additionally, empathy provides a pathway for religious participants to bond through the dark side that every religion contains. Scandal, war, oppression, or silence in the face of injustice, vicious as they may be, are common to all religious history and have too often marked relationships between religions. The honest exploration of these abuses and the peacemaking that can result is achievable with an empathy that takes seriously another's perspective and one's own complicity.

> When communities compare their respective realities, they often discover that
> both of them have been unjust to the other and, in the name of religion, have
> committed atrocious acts. Indeed, disputes between groups often arise when one
> party believes that it is the only injured group or victim and refuses to accept its
> role in the conflict. Dialogue provides the challenge and opportunity [for
> example] for both Muslims and non-Muslims to acknowledge that they have both

inflicted and suffered much pain. For this to occur, dialogue needs to go beyond

merely understanding the other; it has also to provide the platform for people to

acknowledge and experience the pain of the other. (Takim L. , From Conversion

to Conversation: Interfaith Dialogue in Post 9-11 America, 2004, pp. 349-350)

The three key features of interfaith dialogue – intentionality, trust, and empathy –

provide the foundation for safe and productive dialogue. As dialogue progresses,

however, new dynamics emerge and different tools are necessary. Though participants

become more educated about different religions and even take on the practices of them so

as to more deeply understand them, it becomes critical for members to maintain a healthy

respect for the essentialism of the religions involved. Essentialism refers to the core

identity and features of a religion – those things that make it what it is. Interfaith

dialogue, without care to preserve the essence of every religion represented, can easily

slip into attempts to morph religions into one. "Examples include attempting to distill

diverse traditions into consistent assertions about a singular ultimate reality resembling

the Christian God and fusing various ethical norms into nonsubstantively different

iterations of the golden rule. Arguably, another instance of essentialism is the

categorization of a growing diverse collection of 'Nones'" (Sheetz-Willard, 2012, p.

255).

Campolo and Claiborne, in their interview about Evangelicals doing interfaith

work, address this dynamic. Claiborne comments, "In many interreligious gatherings I

have experienced the feeling that we are forced to walk on eggshells in a shallow murky

spirituality that does not honor the distinctiveness of each tradition. This universalism, in

its attempt to honor every tradition, often merely creates a culture where their beauty and

distinctiveness are lost" (Claiborne & Campolo, 2005). Campolo responds, "Maybe we do [all believe in the same God], but we don't define God in the same way. We don't come to God in the same manner. And each of us makes exclusivist claims, and we have to recognize that. We cannot allow our theologies to separate us, and we cannot allow our theologies to get watered down lest we lose our integrity" (Claiborne & Campolo, 2005). Interfaith practitioners widely agree that a bland universal version of faith is unhelpful – and even does violence – to the religions and partners at the table. "Dialogue does not mean everyone at the 'table' will agree with one another. Pluralism involves the commitment to being at the table – with one's commitments" (Rose O. N., 2014, p. 6). Campolo relates a conversation with Rabbi Michael Lerner following their arrest during a protest against welfare legislation in which Lerner rejects a posture in interfaith work that downplays the real differences between participants (2005). Lerner holds that only when participants share their core beliefs despite differences that a meaningful way is made *through* the differences on common commitments to peace, justice, and love (Claiborne & Campolo, 2005).

The great shadow that looms over the essentialism issue, however, is the delicate matter of conversion. While not all religions value proselytization, for those that do, the act lies at the core of the belief system and signals faithfulness from believers. The main groups that adhere to an ideology of conversion are Islam and Christianity, with Evangelical Christians leading the charge. Yet, Sheetz-Willard notes a new trend for Evangelicals. These "groups have also been exhibiting an increased interest in conducting dialogue rather than proselytizing. Examples of such involvement include theological dialogues and increased participation in interreligious endeavors, social activism, and

addressing issues such as human rights and environmental concerns" (2012, p. 266).

Illustrative of this idea, Don Thorsen, Wesleyan theologian and ethicist, writes, "If

Christians are to love their neighbors as themselves, then love should include more than

evangelizing them. Care of neighbor also includes getting to know them for who they are,

dialoguing with them, and cooperating in areas of mutual concern (e.g., interfaith

marriages,…religious freedom, disinformation, injustice, persecution)" (Thorsen, 2012,

p. 63). Campolo and Claiborne (both Evangelicals) discuss their belief that "We don't

have to give up trying to convert each other" but immediately assert, "What we have to

do is show respect to one another. And to speak to each other with a sense that even if

people don't convert, they are God's people, God loves them, and we do not make the

judgment of who is going to heaven and who is going to hell. I think that what we all

have to do is leave judgment up to God" (2005). Their conversation then goes on to

explore the differences between Christian and Muslim conversion beliefs and tactics –

and the contrast between the Muslim acceptance of faithful Christians and the judgment

Christians often display toward Muslims (2005). Interestingly, another kind of conversion

is on the rise. As interfaith dialogue grows in popularity, recruitment to a new general

faith of "liberal, pluralistic religious values" is being aimed at those who are firmly

committed to their religion (Sheetz-Willard, 2012, p. 255). Regardless of the brand of

conversion taking place, the conversion dilemma is a considerable factor in interfaith

dialogue and can quickly dismantle conversation or the spirit of the group. This concept

will be further explored in Chapter Five.

Lastly, entry into interfaith dialogue requires careful consideration of several

factors. It must be recognized that interfaith dialogue is principally a Western endeavor.

This carries with it several implications. First, even the term "religion" is problematic for some traditions and cultures for whom there is no conceptual or linguistic notion of "religion" (Sheetz-Willard, 2012, p. 254). Second, the home cultures of many immigrants to the U.S. do not promote open dialogue about religion, much less across religions. Coming from climates where religious persecution or state faith is the norm, immigrants may be skeptical of or even opposed to participation (Takim L. , From Conversion to Conversation: Interfaith Dialogue in Post 9-11 America, 2004, p. 345). This should engender a special sensitivity when inviting recent immigrants or religious minorities to dialogue. Third, the majority of the most prominent voices championing and promoting interfaith dialogue are scholars from wealthy, Western countries. The work often "falls prey to elitism – engaging scholars, secular-influenced liberals, leaders, and the wealthy more than their counter-parts: nonacademics, religious conservatives, laypersons, and the poor" (Sheetz-Willard, 2012, p. 255). Methods and research modes are predominantly Western-centric; even when Western countries hold large populations of non-Western adherents to a particular religion, those who speak for the religion are often native-born converts (Sheetz-Willard, 2012, p. 264).

Activism for Peace & Justice: A third approach interfaith practitioners take when bringing together those of various faiths is working on initiatives for peace and justice with resonance for the faiths involved. This approach relies heavily on education and dialogue but it is distinctive in that it specifically incorporates action – usually in the form of a goal that mutually benefits all parties for the betterment of the surrounding community or target population. "Theologian John Hick in 2004 further identified three arenas or venues of interfaith activism that he felt deserved priority attention: studying

together as intellectuals, living the concerns at the grassroots level, and solving common

global problems together. These three arenas, for Hick, allow people of faith and

humanists who eschew organized religion to loosen the constraints of faith-based

initiatives and become more humanistic" (Sheetz-Willard, 2012, p. 258). Hick's

assessment points to the accessibility of the activism approach. It speaks to audiences

both in and outside of faith in a way unique from education and dialogue, which tend to

attract the religious.

The projects and focuses of interfaith activists vary widely and to attempt to

describe their scope and effect would be impossible. Instead, a few common attributes

will be named. First is the emerging role of interfaith collaboration in brokering

international peace in intense conflicts. Sheetz-Willard illustrates a fusion of dialogue and

activism for peace:

> As the role of religion in international conflicts is being increasingly recognized
>
> by scholars across disciplinary boundaries, so has the potential been seen more
>
> clearly for religion and particularly interreligious dialogue to bring peace…The
>
> stakes of interreligious dialogue are much higher in conflict and post-conflict
>
> situations, where the difference between dialogue and no dialogue can mean the
>
> difference between life and death – between destruction, ethnic cleansing, and
>
> genocide on the one hand, and survival on the other. (2012, p. 268)

An example from Jimmy Carter's presidency demonstrates the power in understanding

the religious convictions of the international leaders involved in a conflict. Carter's

facility with Judaism and Islam enabled him to speak intelligently and convincingly to

Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat by appealing to biblical and Koranic mandates and

the Abrahamic story (Claiborne & Campolo, 2005).

Thorsen, writing from a Wesleyan perspective, advocates for engagement in

interfaith activity based on the ecumenical life of Jesus. Reprimanding fellow Christians

for abstaining from interfaith relationships out of arrogance or ease of insularity, he calls

fellow Wesleyan Christians to embrace the religious other (2012).

> In Jesus we find a role model of peacemaking that has significant implications for
>
> dealing with people of other faiths collectively and individually. Our present
>
> world is filled with injustice, violence, and other social problems…Christians
>
> should be in the forefront of trying to bring about greater understanding,
>
> appreciation, and cooperation among people of differing faiths.
>
> (Thorsen, 2012, p. 63)

Thorsen models the ability to lean into one's tradition to find the supports for interfaith

engagement that bridges one's religious convictions and the realities of surrounding

society. "In our so-called postmodern world, we have become increasingly aware of the

problems of bigotry, racism, cultural triumphalism, and other social forms of violence

toward others in the world. These problems ought not to be ignored by Christians"

(Thorsen, 2012, p. 70).

The clarion call inciting action from members of any faith is care for the poor.

Interfaith groups have worked together to open soup kitchens, free the wrongly convicted

from prison, equalize public education, offer free legal council, and tutor refugee

children. The list of charitable action and advocacy achieved through interfaith

collaboration is endless. For Mary Ferro and Laurie Coskey, interfaith organizers in San

Diego, both speak of their organizations' agendas being shaped by the needs of the

marginalized in their communities. Ferro acknowledges the multiplication of efforts

when resources are shared and that this aspect is appealing to involved clergy and their

congregations (2015). Coskey addresses the process of determining what projects to

tackle. "There is serious difference. Catholics work against [reproductive] choice, and

Muslims don't take a position, and the progressive mainstream work for it. Our work is

completely goal-focused. It's the big social issues of our time that we don't work against

each other on. We are successful because we are goal-driven and not just trying to chat"

(Coskey, 2014). For Coskey and her team, energy is focused on what are the pressing,

current issues that all can support. Service to humankind, woven into the fabric of nearly

every religion, is a compelling attractor to the work of interfaith organizing.

> No group has a monopoly on truth. So in a sense, orthodoxy – correct belief – is
>
> not that important…What should take precedence is orthopraxis – correct action.
>
> Calling oneself a Catholic, Protestant, Jew, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim,
>
> *curandera/o*, or *santero/a* is less important than living one's faith, and each of our
>
> traditions instructs us to care for the poor and marginalized members of our
>
> societies. This reminds me of the New Testament passage found in the book of
>
> James: "You say you believe in one God – big deal; even the demons believe and
>
> tremble with fear. You idiots, don't you know that faith without praxis is dead?"
>
> (Peace et al., 2012, p. 262).

Reinforcement of One's Own Religious Commitment

Throughout the book *My Neighbor's Faith*, various authors share their

experiences of interfaith interaction – whether informal encounters or structured

programs – and the lessons gained from the religious other (Peace et al., 2012). While

many of the insights are those one could expect – stereotypes being challenged, the

power in collaboration, theological sharing – a consistent and unexpected thread appeared

throughout the stories. Interactions with those of other faiths had the effect of

strengthening one's own religious commitment. This occurrence is not unique to Peace,

Rose, and Mobley's collection of essays; it is a common sentiment across the interfaith

literature and research. "Some idea or some concept from another religion that we hear

about in the course of a dialogue may awaken in our minds the memory of an idea or a

concept from our own tradition. When we put the two ideas or concepts alongside each

other and study them employing not only faith but also reason, there is an opportunity to

have a deeper understanding of both" (Tyagananda, 2011, p. 230).

Takim adds another dimension to Tyagananda's affirmation of the recollection

aspect of interfaith work. Interfaith dialogue prompts the participants to actually

reexamine their faith in light of the experiences of another and in that reexamination,

discover a fresh and enlivening experience of the sacred (2004, p. 346). Consistent with

this idea, the Interfaith Relations Commission of the National Council of the Churches of

Christ in the USA, in their publication *Interfaith Relations and the Church: Study Guides

on Key Issues* outlines the "Identity Challenge" for Christian participants. "Our

engagement in interfaith relations, like our engagement with other Christian traditions,

calls us to re-examine ourselves, our formulations of our faith, and our practices. We are

called to ask: how does interfaith engagement affect the way we understand ourselves –

or affect our identity – as followers of Christ?" (Interfaith Relations Commission, 2015).

This kind of honest evaluation is available at a personal level, but also at the

organizational level, when one is willing to consider the positive gains possible for their

religion. Christian pastor Gregory Mobley, through interactions with Rabbi Meirowitz,

discovered the concept of tikkun, a notion developed from the Jewish mystical tradition

of a vulnerable God who enlisted Israel's support in redeeming creation. For Mobley, this

notion revolutionized not only his personal view of the narrative of Christ's birth, but

also prompted him to wonder what other essential components of Christian tradition

might be complemented by the influence of other religion's ways of describing and

understanding God. "Interfaith dialogue, then, is its own kind of *tikkun* as we recover the

lost fragments of our respective faiths that the sibling preserved, initially for themselves,

but also, as it turns out, for the Other too" (Peace et al., 2012, p. 50).

Chapter Five: Conclusions & Questions

"In Christendom Christians needed no such effort, for identity simply came with the territory, as it always does for a dominant faith."[33] - Walter Brueggemann

"The only way to genuinely effect change - change in ourselves and change in others - is to *be* what each of our religions tells us that we should be. To be a Hindu in the best way possible is to be a human being in the best way possible. It works with every faith tradition. By *being* our religion we do much more for interfaith work than all the speeches we've ever made put together. Do it, and make it a lifetime commitment."[34]
- Pravrajika Vrajaprana

Chapters One through Three have attempted to capture a current snapshot of American religiosity through the various lenses of the separation of church and state, American civil religion, and religious demographic data. The material presented in these first three chapters set a stage for Chapter Four's overview of the various motivations for doing interfaith work and the main approaches practitioners employ to accomplish their aims. Out of these four chapters, a new subject arises: What impact does the current religious environment of the U.S. have on interfaith relations? More specifically, what is required to ensure that the best opportunities and outcomes for interfaith interaction are possible? This final chapter proposes answers to these questions in the hopes that interfaith work can be an endeavor marked by intentionality, hospitality, equality, and effectiveness.

A resounding theme throughout the research and interviews for this project is the prevalence and prominence of Protestantism in the U.S. While this is not a shocking discovery, the effects of Protestantism's pervasive presence on interfaith dealings are substantial. The religious power and privilege that Protestants inherently hold as the

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[33] Brueggemann, 1998
[34] Peace et al., 2012, p. 24

dominant religious group deserves greater attention than has been afforded within

interfaith conversation and study. This privilege, it should be noted, is not necessarily

something Protestant communities are posturing for (though there are certainly instances

of this), rather it is a systemic advantage rooted in the founding of the U.S. and affirmed

throughout history by socio-cultural development. The resulting impact on American

culture is inescapable.

> Christian privilege…is an evolved system of cultural referents derived from
>
> Christian assumptions. The referents influence the social order, however subtly or
>
> directly, toward a normative Christian worldview. Christian privilege results in an
>
> environment permeated by Christian assumptions that, at a minimum, fail to
>
> acknowledge more and diverse perspectives from different ideological or
>
> religious traditions, or when full blown, create a social power hierarchy that
>
> favors Christianity. So pervasive is Christian privilege in the United States that
>
> many of its citizens seem oblivious to the growing religious diversity within its
>
> borders. (Waggoner, 2003, p. 75)

While U.S. citizens are perhaps unaware of the increasing presence of non-Christian

residents, they might also be equally unaware of the presence and influence of

Protestantism. Levitt regards Protestantism as "the wallpaper in the mental furnishing

department in which America lives, always in the room but barely noticed" (Levitt, 2006,

A Blessing or a Threat? section). Protestantism has been a simultaneously protected and

ignored entity.

The reality of Protestant privilege is a theme that has surfaced throughout the entirety of this thesis. The following section will review Protestant privilege as it relates specifically to the main focus of each previous chapter.

The Reality of Protestant Privilege in the U.S.

Connection to Chapter One: The intention of the founding figures in establishing a nation without an official religion and inclusive of all versions of religious practice has remained a central liberty for U.S. citizens and an attractor for immigrants seeking religious freedom. While the separation of church and state is vigilantly defended and legally reinforced, Protestantism has become the unofficial religion of the U.S. It is as though the two core values, separationism and Protestantism run on parallel tracks, keeping America moving forward. This co-existence is a product of a majority Christian population living within a society of strong democratic ideals. Boyd notes that the "kingdom of the world is intrinsically tribal in nature, and is heavily invested in defending, if not advancing, one's own people-group, one's nation, one's ethnicity, one's state, one's religion, one's ideologies, or one's political agendas" (Boyd, 2005, p. 46). Boyd's assessment speaks to the inherent need to preserve one's cultural markers – and religion is a key component of culture. It stands to reason, then, that the dominant culture's religion would gradually become "just the way things are", as Protestants are the ones who "make the rules, and determine what is right and wrong, good and bad, normal and abnormal" (Diamond & Cross, 2015).

Campbell addresses how this assumed privilege looks in practical terms. "Despite the fact that we hold separation of church and state dear, there is still a Christian prejudice in this nation. Our Supreme Court is still heavily Christian (there is one Jewish

member and no Muslims). The Court is not representative…and we have to keep pressing

until other religions also can be present" (Campbell, 2014). Ferro echoes Campbell by

citing examples of prayers at public political gatherings, swearing on the Bible in court,

and printing "In God We Trust" on dollar bills as traditionally Christian symbols and

practices that have been incorporated into civic life, though separation of church and state

should have deemed these unconstitutional (Ferro, 2015). Glenn Archer, a pro-separation

activist, was adamant in his concerns about a muddled grey zone between state rule and

church influence. "Surely the pages of history are replete and the examples in many a

foreign country convincing that this kind of church-state union – whatever the original

motives, or however noble the original purposes – winds up with a state that is less than

stable and a church that is less than sanctified, and with the poor still hungry" (Archer,

2014).

Connection to Chapter Two: As discussed in Chapter Two, if the purpose of

American Civil Religion is to determine who qualifies as a proper citizen of the nation,

then the group that has been most honored and protected as the ideal image of a U.S.

citizen is Protestantism.

> While American culture claims secularity and tolerance, in fact it demands
>
> religiosity, and religiosity of a certain kind. Protestant assumptions and models
>
> permeate American corporations, universities, and charitable institutions. The
>
> Bush administration's openly religious orientation [was] new only in degree, not
>
> in kind, an explicit, more extreme version of the marriage between religion and
>
> politics that has always been in place. (Levitt, 2006, A Blessing or a Threat?
>
> section)

Levitt here uses the strong language of "demand" to describe the obedience to

Protestantism that is required to exist peacefully and succesfully in America. According

to Suomala, this particular sociological phenomenon was a dynamic set in motion before

the founding of the U.S. Clashes between Protestants and Catholics in Europe and the

encounter with new Native American and African religious forms in America provided

the foundation for the "dilemmas, judgments, hatreds, and longings of modern Christian

history [that] were inevitably if unconsciously embedded [and] became one medium for

construing the peoples dominated by European nations, at home (in factories, on slave

plantations, in urban working class enclaves) and abroad (Suomala, 2012, p. 363). The

"profound discomfort that white Christians had with any type of blending or mixture of

European Christianity and indigenous culture" led early colonists and founders to fight to

"preserve the status and power of white Christians and their institutions" (Suomala, 2012,

p. 363). The prototype for *the* American citizen was established well before there even

was a United States of America to join.

　　　Also, because of the common confusion of American Civil Religion for

Christianity, the power that is afforded a good adherent to ACR is generally extrapolated

to Protestants as well. ACR's roots in Protestant values allows for participants benefit

from the preferred status. In this way, those engaged in the cultures of ACR and

Protestantism are more easily blinded to the situation and reality of a religious other.

Consistent with traits of the powerful, those in ACR or Protestant groups foster a society

in which those in subordinate groups develop "submissiveness; dependency; passivity;

lack of initiative; inability to act, think, do or decide for themselves" as a means of

ensuring their power (Veneklasen, 2002).

Connection to Chapter Three: The examination of religious diversity in the U.S.

revealed a substantial shift – Protestants are a religious minority in the U.S.

> We find ourselves in an ongoing, hundred-year transition from Protestant Era to
>
> Pluralism…[where] two basic markers define a century of transition. The first is
>
> the 1960 election of John F. Kennedy as first Catholic president of the U.S., an
>
> event that marks the beginning of pluralism. The second is the projected date in
>
> the mid-twenty-first century when people of color will be the majority population
>
> nationwide. (Lindner, 2009, Youth Groundswell, Grounded section)

With 46.5% of the adult population claiming Protestantism in 2007 (Pew Research

Center, 2008a), the strong majority Protestants have had numerically is slipping –

particularly among the mainline group. Ironically, the responsibility for the rapid growth

of the Unaffiliated (or Nones) category might be linked to Protestantism. While this is

certainly true for younger generations and their distaste for Protestantism's comingled

relationship with civil religion, in another sense, Protestantism may have been too

effective in spreading its core message. "Protestant churches are victims of their own

teachings. By valuing an ethos of the individual quest for faith, Protestant practice has

resulted in a drift toward the self-authentication of truth, suspicion of ecclesiastical

authority, an outbreak of freelance spirituality, launching generations of seekers"

(Lindner, 2009, An All-American Ethos). The decline of Protestantism is also a predictor

of a power exchange in the future. At the present moment though, the Protestant

numerical advantage has only bolstered the privilege this group has been granted since

America's beginnings. And that privilege is one that will exist well into the era when

Protestants are the numerical minority. Since in sociological terms "majority" is not a

ratio or percentage issue, rather a matter of which group has the power and access to opportunities, Protestant privilege will continue to hold its dominant position (Rollings, 2006).

Protestant privilege will certainly not step aside quietly. Researchers Magee and Galinsky studied the relationship between power and status and describe power in this way: "Power, related to one's control over valued resources, transforms individual psychology such that the powerful think and act in ways that lead to the retention and acquisition of power" (2008, p. 351). The drive to maintain power is a primal instinct and one that the whole of the faith will have to contend with as they wrestle with a loss of voice and influence. This situation will be made even more complex with the common American tendency of blending Christian values and patriotic loyalties. For those Protestants for whom being a good citizen is essentially equivalent to – or at least complemented by – being a Christian, the struggle will be even more charged. "To survive and thrive as a nation, many believe, America needs newcomers to 'become Americans,' which means subscribing to a core set of values, and abandoning their ancestral homes" (Levitt, 2006, A Blessing or a Threat? section). The "many" that Levitt refers to here are the Protestant majority – many of whom are also aligned (whether aware of it or not) with American Civil Religion. The struggle to reclaim and defend the preferred Protestant value set will likely only intensify.

Connection to Chapter Four: Chapter Four's focus on the nature of interfaith relations, specifically the common aims and approaches practitioners employ in their work and ideology formation, reveals perhaps the strongest proof of the sovereignty of Protestant privilege in the U.S. Those most deeply engaged in the work, whether

Christian or not, acknowledge the effect of Christian dominance on their work. Laurie

Coskey, lead convener of an interfaith community organizing coalition, speaks from her

perspective as a Jewish woman. "Being Christian is like being a white male in the

religious world. Sociologically, we know that subordinate communities know so much

about the dominant ones, but dominant ones don't know about subordinate ones because

they don't have to. It's not necessarily evil – in some ways it's phenomenological and

other ways it's insidious" (Coskey, 2014). Though Coskey's table is composed of

religious authorities of multiple faiths, she contends with Christianity being the dominant

perspective and the "assumptions about the values that go with that" by appealing to the

"prophetic imagination of the traditions represented [and that] everyone comes from their

own holy theological perspective" (Coskey, 2014).

Coskey's position as a non-Christian practitioner gives her the ability to clearly

name the dynamics of Christian power and control on her organization's activities and

meetings. Others note the tensions present within the Christian faith community that

create a hierarchy of judgment. New Thought ministers Abigail and Steve Albert

facilitate interfaith conversations and educational experiences and view "intrafaith

[interaction as even] more volatile. There are more Christian ministers who will accept

those of other faiths than Christian ministers who will accept [other] Christian ministers.

They are split on issues of baptism and ways of practicing their faith" (Albert & Albert,

2015). In their observations, the greatest divide is between mainline and fundamentalist

Evangelical ministers (Albert & Albert, 2015). This speaks to the schism that

Protestantism has been experiencing in the last half of the 20th century and into the 21st –

an institutional power struggle that complicates who becomes a representative

spokesperson for the group as a whole.

To more closely examine the connection between Protestant privilege and

interfaith work, a distinction must be made between non-Protestant practitioners'

experience and that of Protestant practitioners. The next section will expound on the

premise suggested here that Protestants dominate interfaith dealings and, often in well-

intentioned ignorance, make them unequal places for non-Protestants.

Implications of Protestant Privilege on Interfaith Work in the U.S.

Non-Protestant Practitioner Experience: A resounding note among those who

dedicate themselves to the interfaith community is how challenging it is to do their work

and to honor all faiths and members equally in a broader cultural environment that values

and aligns itself with Christianity. Societal adoption of Christian rituals, holidays, and

language permeates interfaith gatherings and communication. Coskey cites Christmas and

Easter as prime examples of a societal valuing of Christianity's calendar – a calendar that

does not align with the high holy days that "no one leaves her alone to prepare for" as a

minister (Coskey, 2014). This Christianizing of culture at the macro level that Coskey

addresses is mirrored in the microcosm of interfaith interactions. Judith Plaskow, a

Jewish feminist theologian, describes a scene that acutely expresses this parallel dynamic.

> I repeatedly found myself in situations in which 'religion' was identified with
>
> Christianity in much the same way as humanity has been identified with
>
> maleness. In one emblematic moment, the facilitator of a project to establish a
>
> supposedly interfaith feminist theological institute in New York called on the
>
> women assembled to birth the baby so that we could baptize her. I had to interject

that no one was going to baptize my baby! I also regularly participated as the

lone Jew at events or on panels where I carried the impossible burden of

representing 'the' Jewish perspective. (Peace et al., 2012, p. 58)

Plaskow's experience – both of calling out the dominant Christianity that does not

represent all members *and* resisting tokenism – is strongly reiterated throughout non-

Protestant narratives across faiths and disciplines. Pushing back on the normalization of

Christianity in order to establish a balance of spirituality in interfaith gatherings becomes

an additional task that non-Protestant practitioners assume alongside their organizational

or personal mission.

New criticisms of the interfaith movement are surfacing that question not only the

strong Christian preference and tone of dialogues and collaboration, but also the way in

which interfaith as a general category is conceptualized. Gagandeep Kaur, a Sikh

organizer and director of the Interreligious Council of San Diego, challenges the very

language used to describe and bolster interfaith efforts. She names the "Abrahamic,

particularly Christian, language that is applied by many to all world religions as the

biggest stumbling block to effective engagement…Language [is] a very big part of the

challenge in interreligious dialogue; language is charged and powerful" (Leadership

Profile: Ms. Gagandeep Kaur, 2015d). Kaur has grown uncomfortable with the common

phrase "interfaith", as it conveys an origin and meaning that can be alienating for faiths

outside of Christianity and she prefers the term "interreligious" instead as it encompasses

a wider spectrum of those involved and more accurately identifies that which unites

participants (Leadership Profile: Ms. Gagandeep Kaur, 2015d). An additional dynamic

that enters interreligious work is the presence of multi-religious identification, a trend

that is certainly on the rise as was noted in Chapter Four. Those who ascribe to a blended faith or whose spirituality was formed in an interfaith home environment, can often feel like outsiders in interfaith gatherings that tend to cater to those who belong to an easily classifiable faith, a "master category that determines an entire set of norms for an individual member's entire faith and practice—allowing some practices as 'good' or consistent with the organization's religion and condemning others as 'bad' or even heretical" (Suomala, 2012, p. 365). Suomala's obvious concern with this limited perspective is the growing net of people it excludes. As she puts it, "Christian-Jews and Zen-Presbyterians need not apply" (2012, p. 365). Whether it is Christianity itself or the way in which the religion has influenced public awareness of religious activities and people in general, non-Protestant practitioners must contend with this overarching context in every aspect of their work.

Protestant Practitioner Experience: As much as Protestants hold the privilege in the U.S. overall, many Protestant practitioners are aware of the upper hand they have inherited and are working consciously on behalf of – and often in spite of – their religious affiliation. Joan Campbell, a minister with standing in both the Disciples of Christ and American Baptist Church, openly analyzes those within her own tradition. "Christians can't help but see themselves as superior. It is so in the ethos and way of the nation" (Campbell, 2014). Campbell commends the Jewish community for serving as the "great protectors of our religious liberty", by consistently voicing the reminder that America is not a Christian nation (Campbell, 2014). Campbell has devoted her energy to interfaith work and particularly on compelling Protestant communities to see it as valuable and prioritize it within their denominational goals. Within the past 20 years, a new emphasis

has been placed on education about and how to embrace pluralism. While these moves

have been controversial and unpopular, there is also a burgeoning interest in the

endeavor.

> As the dominant religious tradition of America, the climate of Christian life and
>
> thought unquestionably contributes to both the stunting and nurturing of
>
> pluralism. No doubt, the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have seen
>
> the resurgence of a strong exclusivist Christianity in some churches, some to the
>
> point of attacking other traditions…But there has also been a concurrent re-
>
> examination of the relation of Christianity to other world religions that has been
>
> strong, positive, and biblically-based…Such emphasis on engagement with
>
> Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, and others has created among many Christians
>
> a climate of commitment to a vibrant and productive pluralism. (From Diversity
>
> to Pluralism, 2015c)

This increase in Protestant denominations' awareness of interfaith organizing and

potential has led to the creation of institutional statements and educational material and

guides for their members.

The National Council of Churches, an ecumenical alliance across Christian

denominations and traditions, has produced a five-part series of study guides that walk

readers through the challenges of interfaith relations: missional, moral, theological,

ecumenical, and identity (Interfaith Relations Commission, 2015). They frame these as

"challenges" out of their understanding of their audience – a largely Protestant group that

will have difficulty grasping the various aspects and advantages of interfaith work. In

their Theological Challenge guide, they describe interfaith relations as an "adventure",

one in which they "hold continuity and creativity in tension" (Interfaith Relations

Commission, 2010, p. 9). Continuity here refers to reliance upon Christian scriptures and

traditions and creativity to the unmanageable, mysterious Spirit of God. "We are not

reinventing the faith, but we are opening to a deeper, broader experience of the majesty,

grace, and providence of God…Our compass is God in Jesus and we take the adventure

propelled and guided by the freedom of the Spirit" (Interfaith Relations Commission,

2010, p. 9).

The Presbyterian Church (USA) has been a leading Protestant denomination in its

welcome of interfaith awareness. Its Ecumenical and Agency Relationships Office has

spawned policy, polity, and councils around ecumenical and interreligious issues for over

a century (Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations, 2015). In 1999, it

produced a set of materials designed to inform Presbyterians of purpose behind and

methods involved in interfaith work. The statements convey the same mix of Christian

particularity and openness to the movement of God as the National Council of Churches

literature referenced above. "We are called to work with others in our pluralistic societies

for the well-being of our world and for justice, peace, and the sustainability of creation.

We do so in the faith that, through God's Spirit, the Church is a sign and means of God's

intention for the wholeness and unity of humankind and of all creation" (Ecumenical &

Interfaith Relations, 1999). A fine balance between leaving room for the movement of

God's Spirit and the certainty of the role of the Church is an interesting stance that is

reflective of the way positions are often formed by participants in interfaith work from

any religious orientation. The Presbyterian guide ends with a reference to its doctrinal

Study Catechism. "The limits to salvation, whatever they may be, are known only to God.

Three truths above all are certain. God is a holy God who is not to be trifled with. No one will be saved except by grace alone. And no judge could possibly be more gracious than our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Ecumenical & Interfaith Relations, 1999). This statement serves to not only communicate a submission to God's ways but also to very intentionally steer participants away from the urge to convert others in the process.

The United Methodist Church has been intentional in developing structures and statements that support a commitment to interfaith work, evidenced by the creation of their General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns and the inclusion of the subject in the Book of Resolutions, the church's policy and position handbook. The Book of Resolutions' section opens with an exploration of what "neighbor" means and then moves into both an apology for Christian "unneighborly" actions and a justification for interfaith engagement. Regarding the issue of conversion, it states, "Is not this urge to witness an obstacle to interreligious dialogue? It often has been, but it need not be. Where there is listening as well as speaking, openness and respect as well as concern to influence, there is dialogue and witness. Indeed, dialogue at its most profound level is an exchange of witness" (The United Methodist Church, 2012). Throughout the statement, new operational definitions are offered (such as "witness" here). There is also reliance upon the theological leanings of John Wesley as rationale for conducting interfaith work without fear and from a place of humility. The Wesleyan notion of prevenient grace allows for the "activity of the Holy Spirit [to be] at work in the church and in the world, in the lives of all persons, including those of other religious traditions" (The United Methodist Church, 2012).

The examples shared here are a small representation of the significant strides Christian communities are making to enter the interfaith arena, yet several questions surface. Is it enough to promote an awareness of the importance of interfaith relationships and influence? What of engagement or even embodiment – are these intentional movements to acquaint oneself with others and experience their traditions and practices sufficient to make interfaith relations and work a genuinely effective project? While these establish an environment of curiosity, interaction, and safety, these approaches alone will not propel the interfaith movement forward in ways marked by equality and ultimate honesty. Examination, acknowledgment, and engagement of Protestant privilege have not been adequately pursued within the interfaith community. Protestant churches are at a relatively new place of embracing interfaith awareness and education for their people; meanwhile non-Protestant practitioners accommodate Jesus-centric prayers, extrapolation of Christian rituals and language, and primarily Protestant leadership. The remainder of the Chapter will focus on postures that Protestants might consider as they participate in interfaith work. These will be geographically situated in the U.S. West and Southern California to provide parameters, as religiosity varies widely according to region.

The Religious Context of the Western U.S. & Southern California

It is important to establish major features of the religious context of the West and Southern California before offering a position on Protestant interaction in these settings. The demographics and dynamics highlighted in this section are in conjunction with material present in Chapter Three and are offered not so much a review but as a base on which to build a current understanding of the specifics related to the following markers of

Western U.S./Southern Californian religiosity: a high amount of religious diversity, a strong presence of the those in the Unaffiliated category, Catholic immigration from Latin America, and the proliferation of Evangelical megachurches.

High Religious Diversity: As has been explored in Chapter Three, the West shows a high level of religious diversity. The spread across major categories – Christian faith, non-Christian faith, and Unaffiliated – is most evenly distributed in the West (Pew Research Center, 2015b, p. 66).[35] The West holds the largest share of those in the Unaffiliated category and is home to nearly the same amount of those in the non-Christian faiths category as the Northeast, which currently ranks highest in this population (Pew Research Center, 2015b, p. 66).

Mark Silk, a sociologist whose specialty is religion and its relationship to geography, comments on the religiosity of the American West, a region he names "the Pacific" or, more specifically, "California above all" (Silk, 2005, p. 267). Silk differentiates between the pluralism of the Middle Atlantic and the Pacific by noting, "the way religion is 'read' culturally [in both places] is very different. In the Pacific region…we are in a world of fluid identities, where the dominant ethos emphasizes the individual shaping his or her own spiritual existence. As in the rest of the West (outside of Utah), religion is institutionally weak" (Silk, 2005, p. 267). Another feature distinctive of Western spirituality is the high comfort level with blending and borrowing religious traditions, beliefs, and practices from multiple religions. This "mix-and-match spiritual style comes naturally" and does not elicit the kinds of questions of one's core faith or conversion in California that it would elsewhere in the U.S. (Silk, 2005, p. 267).

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[35] 21%, 28%, and 28% respectively

The presence of such religious diversity in the West creates an atmosphere of at least general tolerance, if not engagement, of other traditions. There is a familiarity with diversity that engenders interfaith friendship and desire for collaboration. Brie Loskota, managing director of the Center for Religion and Civic Culture at the University of Southern California, describes the dynamic this way:

> For example, within a mile of MacArthur Park, you can find dozens of religion-infused sites across a wide spectrum of belief, from Korean Pentecostal storefront churches, to botanicas selling products that blend folk and Catholic beliefs, and several Vietnamese Buddhist temples…And all of these movements and organizations flourish side-by-side in a degree of harmony that is rare or even unheard-of in other parts of the world. The occasional crisis, like the 1992 civil unrest, has prompted diverse groups to extend the olive branch and build bridges, even when these relationships are challenging. (Loskota, 2015)

Strong Presence of the Unaffiliated: As has been noted in the previous section and in Chapter Three, the Unaffiliated category is increasingly rapidly in the U.S. The West contains the largest percentage of this population of the country (29%) and while many aspects of this group are telling markers of American religiosity, post-Christendom, and postmodernity, of interest to this study are the questions of who is moving into this category and why they are doing so.

Mainline Protestants are, by far, the largest religious group migrating into the Unaffiliated category:[36]

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[36] The groups that closely trail Protestants in losing adherents to the Unaffiliated category are Buddhists and Jehovah's Witness (40% and 35% now Unaffiliated, respectively) (Pew Research Center, 2015b, p. 39)

Protestant Movement into the Unaffiliated Category (by Type)

	% Still Identify with Group	% Now Identify as Unaffiliated
Mainline	45%	26%
Evangelical	65%	15%
Hist. Black	70%	13%

(Pew Research Center, 2015b, p. 39)

A related trend is the relationship between members lost through switching and gained

through active joining. Of Protestant groups, only nondenominational groups are showing

positive gains.

> Just 2% of Americans say they were raised as nondenominational Protestants, and
>
> half of them (1.1% of all adults) no longer identify with nondenominational
>
> Protestantism. But 5.3% of adults now identify as nondenominational Protestants
>
> after having been raised in another religion or in no religion, meaning that
>
> nondenominational Protestantism gains roughly five adherents through religious
>
> switching for every adherent it loses. (Pew Research Center, 2015b, p. 37)

Of note, however, with the nondenominational group – made up largely of Evangelicals –

is the data available on the movement of the Millennial generation (those reaching young

adulthood around the year 2000). "Looking at just the young people who identified as

evangelical when we first surveyed them as teenagers, only 5 percent moved to mainline

Protestant denominations and only 2 percent moved to the Catholic Church. Fully 25

percent of these emerging adults now identify themselves as 'not religious' and have few

or no ties to any religious group" (Flory, 2015). For mainline Protestants, the ratio is

about one gain for every two losses. This trend is especially apparent with Baptist,

Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Congregationalists (Pew

Research Center, 2015b, p. 37). Historically Black Protestants experience the highest retention rate among Christian groups (Pew Research Center, 2015b, p. 40).

Mark Silk's calculations are that, specifically in the West, just under 50% are Unaffiliated or unaccounted for. Along with this lack of formal tie to religious belief, there is also a parallel relationship to church attendance. "The West – especially when you take out the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints – is far and away the least 'churched' part of the country, and here it is important to recognize the gap between those claimed by religious institutions – membership – and how individuals identify themselves" (Silk, 2005, p. 266).

Catholic Immigration from Latin America: As noted in Chapter Three, steady Latino/a immigration has carried with it the Catholicism native to México, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. The majority of these countries are officially Catholic and though the face of Catholicism is rapidly changing south of the U.S. border, it is still the predominant faith perspective of Latin Americans and Caribbean residents (Pew Research Center, 2014c). Currently, the Latino/a population in the U.S. is about 55 million and is expected to reach 119 million by the year 2060 (Brown & Stepler , 2015c). Of this group, Latino/as born outside of the U.S. have "increased by more than 20 times over the past half century, from less than 1 million in 1960 to 19 million today" and of these immigrants, Mexicans comprise the largest percentage – currently at 64.1% (Brown & Stepler , 2015c & Pew Research Center, 2008a, p. 48). The Pew Forum's Religious Landscape Survey found that "[n]early three-quarters (72%) of Mexican immigrants are Catholic; among immigrants from the other Latin American countries, only half (51%) are Catholic" (Pew Research Center, 2008a, p. 48).

The strong Catholicism of Mexican immigrants certainly affects the West and

Southern Californian contexts, as this region holds the highest populations of Latino/as in

general and Mexican immigrants. In the West, Latino/as make up 40.3% of the total

population and in California 27.3%; California has by far the largest Latino population in

the U.S. (Brown & Stepler , 2015c). The Public Policy Institute of California reports that

53% of California's immigrants were born in Latin America and of these immigrants 4.3

million are from Mexico alone (2015). This high rate of Mexican immigration has

significantly increased the Catholicism of the West and California, as demonstrated by

the table below regarding the Catholic population of San Diego County specifically.

Catholic Demographics in San Diego County

	2000	2010
Churches	105	115
Adherents	445,655	801,850
% of Total Population	26.1%	25.91%

(Center for Religion and Civic Culture, 2009)

With such a Catholic presence in the West – particularly the Mexican immigrant –

it is imperative to consider the implications for being a Catholic in the U.S. In America's

earliest days, as William Hutchison outlined in his book *Religious Pluralism in America:*

The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal, Catholics and Jews encountered

pronounced discrimination (2003). Such anti-Catholic sentiment has been a consistent

theme throughout America's history. History of American religion scholar Joshua

Paddison highlights this while reflecting upon his course about religion in the 19th

century American West. "One of the surprises of the course, for me as the instructor, was

the extent to which anti-Catholicism spanned virtually every topic we learned about…It

leaves me convinced that Protestant-Catholic tensions, though discussed, are not emphasized enough by scholars of western religious history" (Paddison, 2013).

Along with the internal national divide between Protestants and Catholics, there is a similar – but distinctively unique – form of conflict between the two groups throughout Latin America. Protestant and Catholic communities, though branching from the same parent of Christianity, consider movement from one category to the other *conversion*. The tensions between the groups stem from the clash of national/cultural loyalty versus the appeal of Protestantism's charisma and focus on the individual (Pew Research Center, 2014c & Woods, 2014). Christianity Today reported that the strongest pull factors from Catholicism to Protestantism are: desire for a more personal relationship with God, worship style, more interaction with church community/clergy, interfaith marriage, Protestant evangelism, moral stances on social issues, and relocation (Woods, 2014). This situation has created a chasm between Protestants and Catholics in Latin America that follows these groups as they immigrate to the U.S. In México, Catholics comprise 81% of the population and Protestants only 9%, whereas in the U.S., 55% are Catholic and 22% are Protestant (Pew Research Center, 2014c). The Catholic-Protestant divide in Latin America has real implications for the ways these groups interact with each other in the U.S. – and for interfaith practitioners hoping to engage the Latino/a immigrant populations in the West and Southern California, specifically.

Proliferation of Evangelical Megachurches: The megachurch is a fairly recent phenomenon within Protestantism. Because of its popularity and rapid growth, it has been described as one of "the most significant sociological phenomenons of the 20th century," and "the only organization that is actually working in our society" (Brook, 2013).

Predominantly nondenominational and Evangelical in nature[37], megachurches attract very large crowds (technically 2,000+ people in one worship setting); over the course of a weekend roughly 10% of American Christians attend megachurches (Bird & Thumma, 2011, p. 3 & 6). "If this group of churches were a Protestant denomination, it would be the nation's second largest such group" (Bird & Thumma, 2011, p. 3).

Researchers Warren Bird and Scott Thumma, working out of Hartford Seminary and the Christian nonprofit Leadership Network, conducted a large-scale study on the modern megachurch in the U.S. They found that megachurch crowds are largely White (82% of total population) with 70% younger than 50 years of age (2011, p. 6 & 8). "People attracted to the average megachurch are youthful, family oriented and solidly middle class…This means that megachurches are not just filled with adults but with vast numbers of children and teens as well" (Bird & Thumma, 2011, p. 8). A common assumption about these large Evangelical epicenters is that they are politically-motivated and -aligned and the findings show that voter education and registration is conducted regularly by a third of megachurches. Of much greater programmatic and educational interest for megachurches, however, is the emphasis on prayer, knowing the Bible, children's discipleship, and sexual abstinence before marriage – 75% of megachurches consider these central practices and priorities (Bird & Thumma, 2011, p. 10). "'Megachurch' is an umbrella term that refers to size, and while there are common factors among them (very active seven-day-a-week congregational community, complex organizational structure, more affluent attendees, televised services), the sermons and messages are unique to each church" (Brook, 2013).

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[37] "Whether a denominational affiliate or not, the vast majority of the sample (71%) described the theological outlook of the membership as evangelical. Interestingly, barely 1% chose labels at the two theological extremes – either fundamentalist or liberal" (Bird & Thumma, 2011, p. 6).

In the West, instead of the historical and influential religious institutions of the

East, these megachurches are claiming a religious authority as they captivate significant

media attention and attract high numbers of attenders for a considerably unchurched

region. The Barna Group tracks "churchlessness" and defines the unchurched population

as those who have not attended a worship service of any kind with the exception of a

holiday or special event in the past six months (2015). Of the top 20 unchurched cities in

the U.S., 10 are located in the West and four are in California. "The San Francisco metro

area tops the list of America's most churchless cities: Six in 10 Bay Area residents meet

the Barna definition of unchurched (61%)" (Barna Group, 2015).

Megachurches in the West are finding great success despite these odds. Of the

nation, California leads in the number of megachurches at 219 (Hartford Institute for

Religion Research, 2010). Of these, 88 categorize themselves as

nondenominational/independent/unknown, comprising the largest group by far of

"denominations" that have megachurches within in; this finding is consistent with other

regions of the country in which megachurches are predominantly nondenominational

(Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2010). 25 different denominations in California

claim only one, two, or three megachurches within California (Hartford Institute for

Religion Research, 2010).

In San Diego County, 19 churches qualify as megachurches by having 2,000 or

more members and nine of these have 5,000 or more (Crittenden, 2015). Nearly 100,000

people worship at San Diego's 20 largest churches, which is roughly 3.2% of the city's

population (Crittenden, 2015). Since 4.81% of San Diego's residents attend

nondenominational churches, that means that 66% of this group attends megachurches

(Center for Religion and Civic Culture, 2009). The most attended church in San Diego,

The Rock Church, welcomes 15,259 weekly attenders and is the 17th fastest-growing

church in the nation (Crittenden, 2015).

The region's lack of authoritative religious institutions with prominent voice

leaves a void that pastors of megachurches are filling. Often referred to charismatic

leaders, "pastorpreneurs", or celebrities, they are not only effective at attracting attenders

in a religiously skeptical or apathetic region, but they also serve as societal spokespeople

for morality and the Christian Church (Brook, 2013 & Crittenden, 2015). For example, in

San Diego, Miles McPherson of The Rock Church is a former San Diego Charger and

well-known motivational speaker, Larry Osborne of North Coast Church has authored

seven books, and David Jeremiah of Shadow Mountain Church hosts a popular radio

show (Crittenden, 2015). Undeniably, the most influential of the Southern California

megachurch voices is Rick Warren of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest. News giants

such as Newsweek, Time Magazine, and U.S. News and World Report have granted him

such titles as "one of 15 World Leaders Who Matter Most", "one of America's Top 25

Leaders", "one of the 100 Most Influential People in the World", and "one of 15 People

Who Make America Great". These, in addition to his appointment to the Council of

Foreign Relations, speak to his immense reach (Fiorazo, 2014). With 30,000 weekly

attenders, over 300 community ministries, a global network of churches in 162 countries,

and multiple best-selling books, Warren exemplifies the place of leadership and authority

that megachurch pastors have stepped into over the past 20 years (Warren, 2015).

The Protestant Position in Interfaith Relating

Given the reality of Protestant privilege in the U.S. and the ways in which it permeates interfaith relations and work, it is crucial to consider what posture Protestants should take when in interfaith settings. A general conclusion will be explored first and then more specific suggestions regarding the Protestant position in Western and Southern Californian contexts will be offered.

Acknowledging Protestant Power & Privilege: Power and privilege are natural, unavoidable political constructs. Anytime people – the polis – gather, they undoubtedly bring with them their personal interests (Morgan, 2006, p. 157). People "live 'in' [their] interests, often see others as 'encroaching' on then, and readily engage in defenses or attacks designed to sustain or improve [one's] position. The flow of politics is intimately connected with this way of positioning" (Morgan, 2006, p. 157). It is a positioning that ultimately completes with others for dominance. Institutionalized dominance occurs as certain groups over time establish their clout and are afforded societal and cultural advantage. The fight to preserve political prominence and power is detrimental to a healthy, productive organizational environment and for the non-dominant individuals that exist within the structure. In the U.S., Protestants have the clear religious privilege and – as this section will argue – therefore, have a responsibility to understand and manage this privilege.

> Women's rights and civil rights activists woke us up to the pervasive power of white, male privilege. A similar conversation needs to take place around Protestant privilege. This is not to deny the positive legacy of tolerance and diversity bequeathed to us by our Protestant forebearers. It is to drive home how

individuals feel when they are on the wrong side of the default category. Just as women internalize a certain minority status when the operative pronoun is "he," so Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Jews feel like outsiders when Christian cultural references and practices are the automatic norm. (Levitt, 2006, A Blessing or a Threat? section)

Leadership gurus Ronald Heifitz and Marty Linsky coined the term "adaptive leadership" to encompass their theory of how leaders mobilize a group through inevitable change (Heifitz & Linsky, 2002a). Central to their theory is the contention that real leaders must be willing to "alter their ways; as the people themselves are the problem, the solution lies with them" (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002b). For Protestants to step into leadership in the interfaith realm, they would have to address the privilege that has been granted them and embrace the possibility that they have contributed to the problem, even if subconsciously. Seizing the moment to reflect upon past political relationships and dynamics and the ways that current structures reinforce negative attitudes and behaviors can open the doorway to a refreshing new mode of honesty, change, and focus on the actual work at hand (Stapley, 2006). This mode of operating is referred to as "raising the conflict" (Heifitz & Linsky, 2002a). An ability to elevate conflict to productive levels gives all an opportunity to air grievances, be heard, collaborate on true common interests, and arrive at creative new solutions (Hammond & Mayfield , 2004). Viewing conflict as a key to collaborative health instead of a threat reaps the benefits of adaptive change – but involves a courageous step into the political sphere where interests, power plays, and systems reside (Williams D. , 2005, pp. 6-7).

Raising the conflict demands honesty and an ability to harness the energy of a group. The process is often compared to turning up the heat dial on an oven. "You can constructively raise the temperature by focusing people's attention on the hard issues, by forcing them to take responsibility for tackling and solving those issues, and by bringing conflicts occurring behind closed doors out into the open" (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002b). When raising the conflict, two main strategies should be employed: name the "undiscussables" and challenge assumptions. Organizational Theorists Hammond and Mayfield refer to the undiscussables subjects as the "*unnamed elephant*. Subjects that are undiscussable in organizations become so in order to 'avoid surprise, embarrassment or threat.' An undiscussable is a taboo subject, something people don't talk about in an open forum" (2004, p. 21). In the interfaith realm, the elephant in the room is Protestant dominance and their ease of operation within U.S. society. At risk is the threat to their power that an open dialogue and confrontation of this reality might cause. Yet, as Hammond and Mayfield acknowledge, failure to name the elephants "can pull the pillars away from your organization's foundational strengths, bringing down the entire structure. The real challenge is to decide which is more destructive: acknowledging the elephant to deal with it or ignoring it at your organization's peril" (2004, p. 4). Unaddressed, underlying Protestant privilege that pervades interfaith work makes it ultimately an inequitable arena and may be stalling and diminishing interfaith efforts at a subliminal and severe level.

The second aspect of raising the conflict is challenging the ruling assumptions that dictate "how the world works. We create them throughout our lives, through the filter of our unique set of experiences and education. Assumptions are sometimes called frame

of reference, mind-set, worldview, point of view, mental model, operating assumption, belief, lens, conventional wisdom, context, our story, values or 'the way we do things around here'" (Hammond & Mayfield , 2004, p. 33). As the ones with the privilege at the interfaith table, Protestants will inherently reflect the dominant way of doing things and, because this has been the operating norm since the inception of the U.S., they are the group that will struggle to see this powerful position the most. "The longer the assumptions are in effect, and the more success the group has, the harder it is for the group to see any new information that contradicts its beliefs" (Hammond & Mayfield , 2004, p. 34). It will take conscious effort and real work for Protestants to see their position.

Acknowledging Protestant Power & Privilege in West & Southern California

The religious dynamics of the West and Southern California named earlier in this chapter will now be explored in light of the lens of Protestant privilege. It is important and pertinent to ask how Protestant privilege specifically affects the religious diversity, Unaffiliated population, Catholic immigration, and megachurches that are representative of the region. See Appendix D for a description of interfaith organizations in the West and Southern California that effectively engage these dynamics of their context.

Protestant Privilege & Religious Diversity: Regarding the religious diversity of the West, Quincy Newell states,

In religious terms, everyone is a minority in the West. The West has thus become the poster child for a new understanding of American society based on pluralism rather than "Protestant-Catholic-Jew." That's not to say, of course, that there haven't been conflicts: the West has been the place where white American

Protestants have perhaps worked the hardest to impose their vision of what it

means to be an American. (2011)

The opportunities for interfaith interaction are infinite in the West and the strategies

noted throughout the approaches section of Chapter Four offer an array of methods by

which to engage outside of one's own faith (or non-faith) perspective. The proven

methods of education, dialogue, and activism around peace and justice issues are well

established and prove to be effective means for moving the interfaith community forward

in search of its aims of embracing an ever-increasing pluralist society, promoting peace

and justice, and connecting religious professionals across faith lines. Utilizing these

approaches, however, without the honest acknowledgement of the power dynamics

present in any gathering restricts the potential and fullness of the work. It relegates it to a

soft endeavor that stays comfortably diverse in name and maybe even in appearance, but

without the authenticity that would lead to genuine relationship, recognition of the

experiences of all involved, and an equal footing that would bolster the best work

possible.

Essential to this endeavor is actively listening to non-Protestant participants to

understand subtle power moves and language, as is a genuine attempt to employ new

methods of interacting sensitively with others and openly apologizing for ignorance.

Praying "in the name of Jesus" looks differently when a Protestant minister is aware of

the others is in the room. The ones running the meeting, on the platform, or speaking the

most would shift from Protestants to those of other faith traditions. Protestants would

have a functional knowledge of Ramadan, Jewish high holy days, and Hindu Veda texts

much in the same way as other groups have no real option in the U.S. than to know of

Christmas and the Bible. If Protestants were willing to challenge the assumptions that

grant them privilege and serve as a model in this direction, then a way might be made for

others to take central places of leadership as their perceptions and realities are equally as

honored. Sikh interfaith practitioner Gagandeep Kaur optimistically "stresses the ongoing

need for 'the interfaith plane' to become 'equal as possible in order for it to be effective.'

Kaur's life experiences, especially since she began organizing interfaith initiatives, give

her hope that such equality is possible" (Leadership Profile: Ms. Gagandeep Kaur,

2015d).

      Protestant Privilege & Catholic Immigration: It is not difficult to imagine the

*intra*faith scenario in which Protestants and Catholics come together under the banner of

Christianity to work together around common objectives. The Protestant advantage and

relatively peaceful interactions between Protestants and Catholics in the U.S. would

suggest that this is a worthy endeavor and likely a workable starting point for interfaith

organizing overall. Protestants in the West and Southern California, however, would be

wise to understand the long-standing tensions between Protestants and Catholics

throughout Latin America and in México specifically when working with Catholics –

particularly those who are Latino/a immigrants. In order to get to the heart of the

interfaith education, dialogue, or activism, first the hurdles of trust and understanding

must be crossed. Catholic immigrants invited to tables with Protestants may approach

with skepticism and dismissiveness based on experiences in the home country – and the

greater the understanding Protestants have of this dynamic, the better equipped they will

be to navigate conflict, communicate goals and positions, and extend patience throughout

the process. Significant time for and attention to relationship building will be crucial to a

genuine process of intrafaith organizing between Protestants and Catholics (specifically immigrants from Latin America).

Protestant Privilege & the Unaffiliated Population: Embedded in the research showing direct relationship between the decline of Protestantism and the rise of the Unaffiliated population is a clear message for Protestants. When doing interfaith work with atheist, agnostic, or spiritual-but-not-religious people in the Western U.S., Protestants must tread lightly. Obviously, each member of the Nones group is unique in his or her experiences, but a general awareness of this religious shifting offers Protestant practitioners a helpful place from which to engage those who may have drifted from Protestantism out of discontent, disappointment, frustration, or even pain. Acknowledgement of the Protestant baggage that others may carry and an equal acknowledgment of the triggering emotions and opinions that one's Protestantism may spark can only increase the likelihood that trust can be built despite religious differences.

Similarly, the disaffection those in the Unaffiliated group may have for the comingling of Protestantism with American Civil Religion will require sufficient time and understanding to untangle the two entities. Protestant practitioners here have the opportunity to educate on the distinctions between the two forms of adherence. Important to these interactions is not that Protestants lose or neutralize their beliefs in order to appease those in the Unaffiliated category, rather that they accept an invitation to present perspectives and practices honestly while also humbly and respectfully making space for the other by giving substantial time, attention, listening, and validation.

Protestant Privilege & the Megachurch: Recalling that one of the concerns in interfaith work is that Evangelicals will seek to convert non-Christian participants,

engaging the predominantly Evangelical megachurch in interfaith work should be attempted with an educational bent. Because megachurches have such a wide audience and their leaders tend to be prominent voices in their communities, they hold great potential to be powerful agents in interfaith organizing. Central to their inclusion, though, must be an education about the assumptions and reservations regarding Evangelicals in the process alongside an invitation to participate in the wide array of interfaith work and collaboration available. The networks that megachurches influence and touch are vast and partnership potential is rich. Bringing megachurches into the conversation and activity would greatly influence the interfaith movement in the West, but without a regard for the effects of Protestant privilege and the anxiety that Evangelicals can produce in interfaith settings, their strong presence could be more harmful than helpful.

Laurie Maffly-Kipp, a historian specializing in American religion, conceives of those who occupy the West as "American outcasts, people who had been shut out from the ideals of republican freedom. They all held significantly different understandings of what religious freedom could mean, and their very presence reinforces the fact that intolerance still existed in the United States even after the establishment of the nation" (Maffly-Kipp, 2003, p. 135). She refers to Mormons and Shakers, pioneering Protestants, and African Americans fleeing the slavery of the South as the radicals who shaped the region and made it the complicated, diverse, beautiful mix that it is now (Maffly-Kipp, 2003). The present state of the American West is a product of the legacy of America's founders, those who envisioned a land where its residents could practice any religion of their choosing, free from governmental rule or fear of oppression. While freedom is a nuanced word in America, its promise is one to which America remains firmly

committed. And Protestants – those who have formed the majority since the founding of

America and could not help but privilege their own views and values – who now choose

to do the hard work of uncovering that privilege and the power it allows them, can be the

kind of change agents needed in moving America forward toward a genuine religious

equality, toward a "more perfect union" (U.S. Declaration of Independence, 1776).

Appendix A:
Major Religious Traditions in the U.S. (% Among Adults)

Christian			70.6
Protestant			46.5
	Evangelical Churches		25.4
	Mainline Churches		14.7
	Historically Black Churches		6.5
Catholic			20.8
Mormon			1.6
Jehovah's Witness			0.8
Orthodox			0.5
	Greek Orthodox		< 0.3
	Russian Orthodox		< 0.3
	Other		< 0.3
Other Christian			0.3
Non-Christian Faiths			5.9
Jewish			1.9
	Reform		0.8
	Conservative		0.4
	Orthodox		0.3
	Other		0.4
Buddhist			0.7
	Zen Buddhist		< 0.3
	Theravada Buddhist		< 0.3
	Tibetan Buddhist		< 0.3
	Other		0.3
Muslim			0.9
	Sunni		0.3
	Shia		< 0.3
	Other		< 0.3
Hindu			0.7
Other World Religions			0.3
Other Faiths			1.5
	Unitarians & Other Liberal Faiths		1.0
	New Age		0.4
	Native American Religions		< 0.3

Unaffiliated			22.8
	Atheist		3.1
	Agnostic		4.0
	Nothing in Particular		15.8
		Secular Unaffiliated (religion is not important in their lives)	8.8
		Religious Unaffiliated (religion is either somewhat important or very important in their lives)	6.9
Don't Know/ Refused			0.6

(Pew Research Center, 2015b)

Appendix B:
National Prayer Breakfast Program

An American Medley

AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL

O beautiful for spacious skies
For amber waves of grain
For purple mountains majesties
Above the fruited plain

America! America!
God shed His grace on thee
And crown thy good, with
brotherhood
From sea to shining sea

O beautiful for vision clear
That sees beyond the years
The nighttime sky
Our hopes that fly
Undimmed by human tears

America! America!
God shed His grace on thee
Till selfish gain, no longer stain
The banner of the free

O beautiful for heroes proved
In liberating strife
Who more than self
Their country loved
And mercy more than life

America! America!
May God thy gold refine
Till all success be nobleness
And every gain divine

GOD BLESS AMERICA

God bless America, land that I love
Stand beside her, and guide her

Through the night
With the light from above.
From the mountains, to the prairies
To the oceans, white with foam
God bless America
My home sweet home
God bless America
My home sweet home

**BATTLE HYMN OF THE
REPUBLIC (new chorus)**

Glory, glory Hallelujah!
Glory, glory Hallelujah!
Glory, glory Hallelujah!
His truth is marching on

Sing His praises all you nations
Sing His praises, adorations
Sing His praises, all you nations
His truth is marching on

Sing His praises all you nations
Every voice and generation
Sing His praises, all you nations
His truth is marching on

Glory, glory Hallelujah!
Glory, glory Hallelujah!
Glory, glory Hallelujah!
His truth is marching on

HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD

How great is our God! sing with me
How great, is our God!
And all will see
How great! How great, is our God!
You're the name above all names
You are worthy of all praise
And my heart will say...
How great is our God!

MAY 7 • 2015

Lord, hear Our Cry

"Hear the cry and the prayer that your
servant is praying in your presence this day."
— 1 Kings 8:28

www.NationalDayOfPrayer.org

Appendix C:
Interfaith Practitioner Interview Questions

INTRODUCTION:
- What is your name, the organization you represent, and your role within the organization?
- What is the purpose of your organization?
- How is your organization's work "interfaith"?
- Does your organization approach its work from a particular faith tradition or perspective?

SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE:
- What is your conception of what this originally meant?
- What is your conception of how it plays out today?
- Are there areas in which you feel this separation is respected?

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY:
- How would you define the religious make-up of the United States? How does that compare to the region where you live?
- What are the challenges of religious diversity?
- What are the advantages of religious diversity?

CIVIL RELIGION:
- When you hear the phrase "national religion" in terms of the United States, what do you think of?
- Do you think the United States has a national religion?
  If so…
- How would you define it?
- What effect does that have on your practice?

INTERFAITH PRACTICE:
- What methods have you found to be most effective?
- What is the project/program/event/movement you are most proud of? Why?
- What is a project/program/event/movement that was unsuccessful? Why?
- What are two of your long-term goals?
- Do you feel your work is well-received or not? Explain
- What makes it most difficult to accomplish your goals?
- What resources do you drawn upon to motivate people?

Appendix D:
Interfaith Organizations in the West & Southern California

The following organizations are notable leaders in the field of interfaith work, dialogue, and collaboration. An overview of organizational history, mission, and impact is provided.

- Interfaith Power & Light (San Francisco, CA):
  www.interfaithpowerandlight.org
  - Founded in 1998 by a group of Episcopal churches combining resources to purchase renewable energy
  - Encourages faith communities to be "faithful stewards of Creation by responding to global warming through the promotion of energy conservation, energy efficiency, and renewable energy"
  - Currently in 38 states with a wide spread across religious and spiritual traditions, emphasis is on responding to energy issues of local context
- United Religions Initiative (San Francisco, CA):
  www.uri.org
  - Founded in 2000 out of an effort to link interfaith organizers from around the world
  - Through the power of networking, URI seeks to harness "collective power to take on religiously motivated violence and social, economic and environmental crises that destabilize regions and contribute to poverty"
  - 530 "Cooperation Circles" in 78 countries exist and tackle a variety of issues, including environmental degradation, labor, slavery, and gun laws
- Tri-Cities Interfaith Council (Fremont, CA):
  www.tcicouncil.org
  - Founded by clergy of various faith traditions in the 1960s
  - In response to the uniquely high diversity of Fremont, the organization exists "to promote respect, understanding, cooperation, and appreciation for the many religious and faith traditions within our community"
  - TCIC's website hosts a robust calendar of community events, educational resources on the faith traditions of the area, articles of varying perspectives on interfaith work, and information on monthly forums for members
- Interfaith Council of Southern Nevada (Las Vegas, NV):
  www.interfaithsn.org
  - Founded in 2005 by those in Las Vegas with a passion for connecting those from diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious groups in the U.S.'s fastest-growing city
  - Their ambitious mission seeks "to promote mutual understanding, respect, appreciation and cooperation among people of various faith and cultural communities in Southern Nevada and in the world as a whole by appreciating the sacred, extending hospitality, offering educational opportunities, encouraging compassionate leadership, sharing in service and working for justice"
  - ICSN's network includes 60 organizations that sponsor frequent and multi-focused public events such as Table Talk, dinner dialogues, forums, Camp Anytown, Mayor's Prayer Breakfast

Appendix D:
Interfaith Organizations in the West & Southern California

- Interreligious Council of Southern California (Los Angeles, CA): *www.irc-socal.org/faith*
  - Founded in 1969 by Christians and Jews desiring greater unity, soon grew to involve members of other faiths
  - The Council serves as a hub of information, resources, and networking for interfaith practitioners throughout Southern California in support of its mission "to promote religious pluralism, diversity, and collaboration in Southern California"
  - The Council convenes regular meetings and tracks efforts across the region through its "Future 50" leaders-to-watch list, 15 official membership partners including the Los Angeles Mayor's Office
- San Diego Regional Interfaith Collaborative (San Diego, CA): *www.sandiegointerfaith.ning.com*
  - Founded in 2009 by concerned San Diegans following the Parliament of World Religions conference
  - The SDRIC attempts to focus on issues specific to the San Diego border region by "creating space for communication, compassion and collaboration"
  - The organization's website promotes interfaith events and dialogues and allows for members to create profiles through which to connect
- Interfaith Center for Worker Justice (San Diego, CA): *www.icwj.org*
  - Founded in 1998, the ICWJ was formed out of a shared concern for the labor issues San Diego workers
  - Its board is intentionally religiously diverse and "represents faith leaders of San Diego County who feel called by their respective religious traditions to work for justice and stand up for the poor and marginalized"
  - The ICWJ has expanded its mission to incorporate justice issues of the moment that are salient for the San Diego-Tijuana region, more recent focuses have included energy conservation and immigration
- Interfaith Community Services (San Diego, CA): *www.interfaithservices.org*
  - Founded in 1982 by members of various faith traditions concerned about the lack of services available to the low-income, homeless, and under-served populations of North County San Diego
  - Faith communities sign on as members and commit "to promote mutual understanding and respect among the member faiths; to deal with issues which affect the religious community; to share the members' concern for these problems; to voice these concerns when, by common consent, the members feel that moral leadership is needed; and to implement programs…which will empower the disadvantaged in our community"
  - ICS has grown into a direct-service agency that responds to nine areas of need and social service, 19,000+ individuals served yearly

Appendix E:
Thesis Outline

1) Chapter One: Separation of Church and State
   a) Origins of Separation Ideology
      i) Biblical References
      ii) Western Europe
         (1) Catholicism
         (2) Protestantism
      iii) Enlightenment Contributions
   b) Development of the First Amendment
      i) Jefferson's "Wall of Separation"
      ii) Free Exercise Ideal
      iii) Anti-Establishment Ideal
      iv) Important Protections
      v) State vs. Federal Responsibility
   c) The Challenges of Implementation
      i) State & Federal Tensions
      ii) Early Experience & Opposition
      iii) Legal Precedent

2) Chapter Two: Christianity & Civil Religion in the United States
   a) Form & Function of Civil Religion
   b) Development of American Civil Religion
      i) Founding Figures & Core Documents
      ii) Early Growth of the Republic
      iii) Democracy & American Exceptionalism
      iv) Fundamentalist & Evangelical Contributions
   c) Distinct Features of American Civil Religion
      i) Parallels to Religion
         (1) Deity
         (2) Priests & Saints
         (3) Calendar & Rituals
         (4) Core Values
      ii) Image of a Model ACR Adherent
   d) Conflation of Civil Religion & Christianity
      i) Perception of U.S. as a Christian Nation
         (1) In Favor of a Christian America
            (a) God's Will
            (b) Founding Figures' Intention
            (c) Christian Values
         (2) Against a Christian America
            (a) Founding Figures' Intention
            (b) Preservation of Separation of Church & State & Promotion of Pluralism
            (c) U.S. Never Truly Christian

Appendix E:
Thesis Outline

       (3) Demographic Data
          (a) Current Christianity in America
          (b) Support for Christian America
       (4) Why a Popular Notion?
    ii) Resulting Effect

3) Chapter Three: The Religious Diversity of the United States
   a) Definition of Diversity
   b) Characteristics of the Religious in the U.S.
     i) Attitudes
     ii) Practices
   c) The Current Religious Composition
     i) Religious Affiliation & Percentages
   d) Significant Patterns & Trends
     i) Overall belief in "God"
     ii) By race
     iii) By Geography
     iv) Denominations
   e) Significant Shifts in U.S. Religiosity
     i) Decline of Catholicism & Protestantism
     ii) Attraction to "Other Faiths" Category (e.g.: Unitarian, Spiritual-But-Not-Religious, New Thought, New Age),
     iii) Rapid Rise of Unaffiliated (Atheist, Agnostic, & Nothing in particular Categories)
     iv) Results of Immigration

4) Chapter Four: Interfaith Ideology & Work
   a) Introduction to Interfaith Work in the U.S.
     i) History
     ii) Major Motivations
     iii) Trends
     iv) Challenges
   b) Common Aims
     i) Preserving Religious Liberty
       (1) Embracing a Pluralistic Society
       (2) Confronting Prejudice & Discrimination
     ii) Promoting Peace & Justice
       (1) Common Values & Collective Power
       (2) Moral Authority
     iii) Connectedness through Professional Networks
   c) Common Approaches
     i) Education

Appendix E:
Thesis Outline

        (1) Deconstructing Myths of "The Other"
        (2) Religious & Cultural Competence
     ii) Dialogue
        (1) Key Features
           (a) Intentionality
           (b) Trust building
           (c) Empathy
        (2) Essentialism & Respect
        (3) Special Considerations
     iii) Activism for Peace & Justice
  d) Reinforcement of One's Own Religious Commitment

5) Chapter Five: Conclusions & Questions
  a) The Reality of Protestant Privilege in the U.S.
    i) Correlation to Chapter One: *Protestantism is the unofficial religion of the U.S.*
    ii) Correlation to Chapter Two: *Protestants have been honored and protected as the image of an ideal U.S. citizen.*
    iii) Correlation to Chapter Three: *Though Protestantism has been the majority religion in the U.S. since the nation's inception, it is on the decline.*
    iv) Correlation to Chapter Four: *Protestants dominate interfaith dealings and make them unequal places.*
  b) Implications of Protestant Privilege on Interfaith Work in the U.S.
    i) Non-Protestant Practitioner Experience
    ii) Protestant Practitioner Experience
  c) The Religious Context of the Western U.S. & Southern California
    i) High Amount of Religious Diversity
    ii) Strong Presence of the Unaffiliated
       (1) Movement into Category
       (2) Features of the West
       (3) Skepticism of Christianity & Influence of American Civil Religion
    iii) Catholic Immigration from Latin America
       (1) Rate & Trends
       (2) Protestant-Catholic Divide
    iv) Proliferation of Evangelical Megachurches
       (1) Numbers & Common Characteristics
       (2) Influence & Public Voice
  d) The Protestant Position in Interfaith Relating
    i) Acknowledging Protestant Power & Privilege in General
    ii) Acknowledging Protestant Power & Privilege in West & Southern California
       (1) Rely on Interfaith Beth Practices in Environments of Religious Diversity
       (2) Sensitively Acknowledge Intrafaith Tensions between Catholics & Protestants
       (3) Earn the Trust of the Nones
       (4) Build Partnerships & Avenues for Education with Megachurches

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