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## RELIGION AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY: CONTESTING THE OBVIOUS

### Introduction

*Religion in America must be regarded as the first of their political institutions*<sup>1</sup>  
Alexis de Tocqueville

The role of religion in U.S. foreign policy is a very complex issue. Dependent on the personal attitude of the researcher, religion can play a major or secondary role in analyzing the process of shaping American behavior in international relations.

This topic is extremely difficult for political scientists (and I daresay for other scholarly approaches as well) due to its inherently internal nature. It is easier to research and analyze open, accessible and, even if controversial, publicly discussed topics. However, this is not the case with religion. When asked to contribute to the volume on this topic the first feeling was confusion. Undoubtedly, there is religious inclination in the deeds and actions of the following American administrations, but does that mean that all the actions are guided by religious principles? Does it mean that the point of relevance is the divine principles of Christianity? Is the Decalogue the driving force of American foreign policy? Ultimately, how can we measure this topic? I will risk saying no to these questions.

This would mean that there should have been no wars with U.S. involvement, that there should have been no deception, that once being attacked the U.S. should not have retaliated, but accepted reality and simply turned the other cheek.

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<sup>1</sup> A. de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 1, ed. A. A. Knopf, p. 305; also quoted by S. P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*, New York 2004, p. 85.

It would mean that charity should have been unconditional and that suffering should not have been caused. If Christian values could overshadow national interests, national security and individual wellbeing, maybe that could have been possible. But it isn't. What to research then?

Generally, there are three research areas that are most often exploited concerning the role of religion in the American foreign policy decision-making process that can be traced in the scholarship on the subject. Some scholars focus on the activities abroad of particular American religious groups or denominations and attempt to evaluate their impact. Some, like Jeffrey Haynes or Walter Russell Mead, attempt to emphasize the importance of the religious vote in the presidential elections as well as the importance of selected religious groups on U.S. foreign policy. This indirect impact cannot be underestimated, but it should also not be overestimated. In certain cases, pressure from religious groups can augment or even determine certain political action. However, this model requires that other groups will not have significant interest in the case or that the religious motives supplement other political rationales.

Others have attempted to emphasize the role of religion in the actions of selected U.S. presidents. In U.S. presidential history cases can be found when religion plays more important role than usual. Remarkably in this case, instead of the Republican-Democrat political division, a rather Idealist-Realist division should be introduced in order to organize the American presidents. The impact of religion on Woodrow Wilson's deeds is commonly recognized among American scholars. My later remarks will also trace religious motifs in Franklin Delano Roosevelt's rhetoric and actions. The role of religion in the activities, policies and actions of other American presidents are also examined.<sup>2</sup> Despite the interesting conclusions, due to the chronologically limited research in these papers, they can hardly answer the more general question on the impact of religion on the decision-making process in the United States.

The third group of scholars focuses on the American actions promoting religious freedom abroad and analyzing the implementation of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998.<sup>3</sup> In this case, however, firstly, the consequences of the decision-making process are analyzed. Secondly, the rather pessimist conclusion made by Thomas Farr, that the implementation of IRFA provisions is not excluded from the mainstream decision-making process, which is much more realist and thus

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<sup>2</sup> M. Magee, *What the Word Should Be*, Waco 2008. See also among the numerous studies on the impact of religion on the American presidents: D. Jason Berggren and N. C. Rae, *Jimmy Carter and George W. Bush: Faith, Foreign Policy, and an Evangelical Presidential Style*, "Presidential Studies Quarterly" 2006, Vol. 36, No. 4, p. 606–632. See also Jeffrey Haynes's deliberations on Religious Fragmentation and Politics in *An Introduction to International Relations and Religion*, Pearson Longman 2007, p. 238–242; W. Dzielski, W. Michnik, *Religia w polityce zagranicznej USA – na przykładzie prezydentury George'a W. Busha*, "Teologia Polityczna" 2006–2007, No. 4: [www.teologiapolityczna.pl/assets/numery\\_tp/tp4/dzielskimichnik\\_religia\\_w\\_polityce\\_zagranicznej\\_usa.pdf](http://www.teologiapolityczna.pl/assets/numery_tp/tp4/dzielskimichnik_religia_w_polityce_zagranicznej_usa.pdf) [29.10.2011].

<sup>3</sup> T. F. Farr, *Word of Faith and Freedom, Why International Religious Liberty is Vital to American National Security*, Oxford 2008.

often these idealistic provisions are eschewed for other aims. Last but not least, this group of scholars actually neglects the fact that even the sole promotion of religious freedom abroad can be considered as a source of anti-Americanism.

None of these approaches embraces in a comprehensive manner the role of religion in American foreign policy. When I started discussing the subject with my colleagues, the first question that appeared was “what religion?” The United States is today described as a melting pot, hotchpotch or salad bowl. No matter what description serves our theoretical assumptions best, the United States is a conglomerate of various religious, denominational and sectarian strands. It is also true that in comparison to other parts of the globe, there is no more open and suitable ground for coexistence of various forms of praising the divine/transcendental.

Furthermore, before searching for the impact of religion on American foreign policy, comments of a more general nature need to be made. The uniqueness of American society includes the separation of the church and the state on the one hand, and the remarkable religiousness of the American society in general.

American society seems to be much more religious than its European counterpart.<sup>4</sup> Unlike in Europe, however, religion is sealed in the private and local sphere and subjugated by the necessity for tolerance in the public sphere. Still, several arguments for the higher prospects for religious presence can be made. Firstly, large portions of Americans (approx. from 40 to 70%) regularly attend religious services. Secondly, strong ties exist between religious affiliation and ethnic identity in the U.S. Thirdly, there is a remarkable diversity of religious opinions in the United States. Because of these factors, religion is an important feature in defining terms of political competition in America.

## Religion and American politics

As early as 1960, Luke Ebersole noticed that religious affiliation is not directly linked with political preferences. It cannot be ruled out that generalizations concerning the predominant support of particular religious groups for political parties exist. Explanations such as “conservatives vote for the Republicans” or “Jews vote for the Democrats,” and the even more general “the Democratic party is the party for minorities” can be heard during every election campaign. Even, if these generalizations indicate certain tendencies, they again do not say anything about the subsequent role of religion in the post-election political process and, in particular, on the practical impact of these votes on the policies of the particular administration. Is it that religious attitudes are blended in the political whirl and lose their transcendental halo, merging into the mainstream confrontation of interests?

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<sup>4</sup> Samuel Huntington emphasizes this aspect in a more diplomatic way, underlining the stronger religiousness of the Americans in comparison to the other industrialized countries. He does that several times in his chapter on the religious aspect of the American society in his book: S. Huntington, *Who We Are...*, p. 83–106.

Ebersole recalls a number of surveys from the late 1940s showing that although certain tendencies of religious political attitudes can be observed, they are neither steady nor decisive for the final results of election campaigns. Walter Russell Mead, although enthusiastic about the conservative revival during the Bush administration, summarizes that “Religion in the United States is too pluralistic for any single current to dominate”.<sup>5</sup>

A few years after Ebersole’s paper, in 1967, Robert Bellah systematized the role of religion in the United States. His essay “Civil Religion in America” structured the perception of religion’s role in society. Before analyzing Bellah’s theory, another observation needs to be made. What unites all research efforts concerning the role of religion is the obligatory mentioning of the legal framework of religious freedom in the United States. The constitutional provisions of the First Amendment prohibiting the establishment of official religion are underlined as a cornerstone of the American political system.<sup>6</sup> This, supplanted by the famous “wall of separation” and the generally accepted principle of recognition of religious alternatives in American society, provide the necessary fundamentals for the flourishing of religious diversity. As Bellah rightly observes,

The principle of separation of church and state guarantees the freedom of religious belief and association, but at the same time clearly segregates the religious sphere, which is considered to be essentially private, from the political one.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, as Haynes notices,

[...] rooted in unique historical legacy, there is both religious pluralism and vibrancy in the USA. This is, Haynes says, quoting Steve Bruce, ...contrary to what the secularization thesis proposes: religious pluralism is associated in the USA with increased, rather than diminished, religious adherence.<sup>8</sup>

There is general agreement among scholars that one of the sources, if not the main one, of establishing the English colonies was the religious tensions in England and other European states.<sup>9</sup> Various religious patterns of behavior, emphasizing more conservative or tolerating attitudes, were shipped to the United States and were among the constitutive elements of the basis for the American model of relationship between the state and the individual. Andrzej Bryk admits that the core

<sup>5</sup> W. Russell Mead, *God’s Country?*, “Foreign Affairs” 2006, Vol. 85, No. 5, p. 41.

<sup>6</sup> L. Ebersole, *Politics and Religion*, “Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science” 1960, Vol. 332 (Religion in American Society), p. 102.

<sup>7</sup> R. Bellah, *Civil Religion in America*, Reprinted by permission of Dædalus, “Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences”, from the issue entitled *Religion in America*, Winter 1967, Vol. 96, No. 1, p. 1–21, available at: [www.robertbellah.com/articles\\_5.htm](http://www.robertbellah.com/articles_5.htm) [29.10.2011].

<sup>8</sup> J. Haynes, *An Introduction to International Relations and Religion*, Pearson Longman 2007, p. 239. See also: *Religion and Modernization*, ed. S. Bruce, Oxford 1992, p. 1–7.

<sup>9</sup> Historians, political scientists, lawyers, sociologists and others agree and repeat unequivocally the religious impact on the new colonies. Z. Lewicki, *Historia cywilizacji amerykańskiej. Era tworzenia, 1607–1789*, Warszawa 2009, p. 215–238; H. Broghan, *Historia Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki*, Wrocław 2004, p. 100–124.

of American religion is Protestant in its nature, with its eschatological mission<sup>10</sup>. Thus the faith in the new continent was further supplanted by the Calvinistic concept of predestination that played a vital role, since it provided that the Scriptures teach both the sovereign control of God and the responsibility and freedom of human decisions<sup>11</sup>. They were additionally strengthened by John Winthrop's "city upon a hill" interpretation, which provided sufficient arguments for the settlers to consider themselves as citizens of "God's Country". These pillars of the American credo have a profound impact on the American foreign policy. They also provided fertile ground for the development of another, unique level of religiousness able to summarize the strongly individualist society, devoted to God in alternative ways. "Civil religion" is a unique American secularist-religious amalgamate.

### Civil religion

The uniqueness of American religion is in its Judeo-Christian tradition. Mauk and Oakland rightly observed that this is a symbiosis of two main developments in American history. On the one hand, the early settlers' religious pluralism, although recently highly idealized, requires acknowledgment in comparison to the European attitude in the same period. It was based in the Protestant tradition, which naturally spurred tolerated<sup>12</sup> alternative approaches towards the relationship between the individual and God. It also searched for protective mechanisms against the potential religious conflicts well known from Europe. The alternative was a much softer and moderate acceptance of various transcendental explanations, as long as they were grounded in the Judeo-Christian theology.

The second element is the natural inclusiveness of the American society that required human capacity to subordinate the vast new territory. The uniqueness of the immigration to the United States until the late 19th century is its predominantly Judeo-Christian character, which did not require social mobilization against fundamentally alternative religious doctrines.<sup>13</sup> Hence, Samuel Huntington's argument

<sup>10</sup> A. Bryk, *Cywilizacja amerykańska*, [www.miesiecznik.znak.com.pl/596/bryk596.html](http://www.miesiecznik.znak.com.pl/596/bryk596.html) [27.10.2011].

<sup>11</sup> On predestination see: J. Herbold Rainbow, *The Will of God and the Cross: An Historical and Theological Study of John Calvin's Doctrine of Limited Redemption*, Allison Park 1990; P. J. Thuesen, *Predestination: The American Career Of A Contentious Doctrine*, New York 2009; also M. Levering, *Predestination: Biblical and Theological Paths*, New York 2011.

<sup>12</sup> The word *tolerant* in this case means only comparatively wider margin of acceptance towards alternative Protestant approaches, and does not embrace the innate distrust for Catholics. The full lists of characteristic features of Mauk and Oakland's description of American religion and Huntington's definition of civil religion are published respectively in: D. Mauk, J. Oakland, *Cywilizacja amerykańska*, Wrocław 1999, p. 295; S. P. Huntington, *Who Are We?...*, p. 104. On civil religion in the Polish scholar literature see: M. Potz, *Granice wolności religijnej, kwestie wolności sumienia i wyznania oraz stosunku państwa do religii w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki*, Wrocław 2008, p. 202–218; as well as: R. Małajny, "Mur separacji" – państwo a Kościół w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki, Katowice 1992, p. 323–329.

<sup>13</sup> However, the anti-Catholic inclination of the Know Nothing party and the Ku Klux Klan should not be neglected. Although examples of hatred and persecutions were observed, their intensity was much lower than in comparison to the Asian immigration since the late 19th century.

on the religious base of the American society is rooted in the general conviction that whatever religious tensions appeared in the American society, they were always in the frames of the same creed.

These tensions required an overarching element binding the various approaches in one *ideal*, resistant to external influence. The American experience, inclusiveness and success grounded in the popular will provided the needed constituted parts for America itself to become a source of religion – the civil religion. Bellah explains that

[...] the civil religion expressed what those who set the precedents felt was appropriate under the circumstances. It reflected their private as well as public views. Nor was the civil religion simply ‘religion in general.’ [...] While generality was undoubtedly seen as a virtue by some, [...] the civil religion was specific enough when it came to the topic of America. Precisely because of this specificity, the civil religion was saved from empty formalism and served as a genuine vehicle of national religious self-understanding.<sup>14</sup>

Later, he says that civil religion is also

[...] 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 American civil religion.<sup>15</sup>

Bellah concludes

The God of the civil religion is not only rather ‘unitarian,’ he is also on the austere side, much more related to order, law, and right than to salvation and love,<sup>16</sup>

thus emphasizing the practical aspect of the religion’s social purpose. While, embracing Christianity in the widest possible terms, American reality used religion as a source of political and social organization. Remarkably, not in terms of uncompromising civil obligation characteristic in Europe since 1648, but rather as a source of common knowledge and guiding light for behavior. As it is often described,

[...] civil religion converts Americans from religious people of many denominations into a nation with the soul of a church.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> R. Bellah, *Civil Religion in America...*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>17</sup> The term “a nation with the soul of a church” can be found in numerous publications. It was in operation already in 1967, when S. E. Mead wrote the article titled *The Nation with the Soul of a Church*, “Church History” 1967, Vol. 36, (September), p. 262–283, and was later quoted among others by D. O’Brien, in *American Catholicism and American Religion*, “Journal of the American Academy of Religion” 1972, Vol. 40, No. 1, p. 40. Recently S. P. Huntington also used it in his book, *Who Are We?...*, p. 106.

While focusing on the external aspect of civil religion, it should not be forgotten that, ultimately, it plays a much more important role at home. As Haynes acknowledges, civil religion

[...] was a fundamental requisite for stable democracy in America, given that civil religion made a positive contribution to societal integration by binding a fractious people around a common goal, imparting a sacred character to civic obligation. [...] civil religion also provided an important public manifestation of religion, as opposed to the more privatized orientations of particular faiths.<sup>18</sup>

The civil religion used the success of the American political experiment to unify the mixture of individuals called Americans. The source of their unification is not only religion per se but also the much more earthly pursuit of happiness and freedom from want that proved to be best achievable in the United States. Hence, the political mechanisms that provided the necessary environment to be successful were naturally elevated to a higher “semi-transcendental” rank for securing their existence. The Founding Fathers were “beatified” and their legacy idealized, because it proved to be moderate and wise, far-sighted and practical, pragmatic and flexible – thus providing a much wider spectrum of possibilities for the individual. Huntington embraces this in his fourth point describing civil religion, where he underlines the religious aura of such national celebrations as Thanksgiving or Veterans Day and the official celebrations of presidential inaugurations and funerals.<sup>19</sup> There is probably no better proof of the power of American attractiveness than the constant flow of immigrants to the United States, which, although declining in the last decade as a result of the economic and political difficulties, even today does not cease.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, America still remains an ideal, a promised land for those exploited and suppressed by other political regimes.

Although in 1975 Bellah’s disappointment with the partition of the American society on social, religious and international matters provoked the publication of “the Broken Covenant”<sup>21</sup> as a negation of his enthusiasm of civil religion, his earlier observations seem to be accurate, at least in the realm of American foreign policy, also today. While Haynes presented the arguments for Bellah’s disappointment, such as the Vietnam War, the Watergate affair and the societal fragmentation over moral and ethical issues, Bellah’s conclusions seem coherent.<sup>22</sup> What seems to be neglected by Bellah, though, is the overarching aspect of his concept. The 1980s, being a time of conservative revival, the ‘90s and the end of the Cold War, which affirmed American dominance worldwide, and ultimately 9/11 and the

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<sup>18</sup> J. Haynes, *An Introduction to International Relations and Religion*, Pearson Longman 2007, p. 237.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 104.

<sup>20</sup> For detailed data on statistics on illegal immigration see the Department of Homeland Security Fact Sheet of July 2011, available at: [www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/ois-apprehensions-fs-2005-2010.pdf](http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/ois-apprehensions-fs-2005-2010.pdf) [20.10.2011].

<sup>21</sup> The electronic version is available online at: [www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=3042](http://www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=3042) [28.10.2011].

<sup>22</sup> J. Haynes, *An Introduction to International Relations and Religion*...

conservative revival described by Walter Russell Mead, brought a new updated meaning to his concept.

### **American religion and its impact on foreign activity**

Samuel Huntington, David Mauk and John Oakland all emphasize the American self-portrayal as God's chosen nation. The concept of New Jerusalem that Huntington so colorfully explains by comparing Europe to Egypt and the Americans to the Jews<sup>23</sup> is supplanted by the conviction concerning the promised land that finds its argumentation in the miraculous survival of the first pilgrims to the New World and the establishment of colonies, thus providing sufficient transcendental fundaments for the civil religion. This miraculous salvation requires "evangelicalism"<sup>24</sup> as a tribute to God's mercy and obligation to spread his word in this world. The central question on such evangelism is what word? Mauk and Oakland link religion with democracy and liberty; however, it was Bellah who stressed the importance of these basic American values through the words of George Washington:

The propitious smiles of Heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right which Heaven itself has ordained. The preservation of the sacred fire of liberty and the destiny of the republican model of government are justly considered, perhaps, as deeply, as finally, staked on the experiment entrusted to the hands of the American people.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, what was to be considered as an American experiment became a source of inspiration for American foreign policy. Unlike the 19th-century diplomacy of the European powers that was deeply rooted in the Machiavellian portrayal of the world, the United States introduced a unique approach towards the international environment. The distinctiveness of the American political experiment required consistency at home and abroad. Only such an attitude could guarantee that the new player in the international relations could gain recognition and respect. The consistency required sober evaluation of the American capabilities and a clear declaration of domestic values. Unlike the European states, the new state had not only to strengthen its position, but also to acquire respect for its alternative political system. Such a task required the firm adherence of the American foreign policy to the internal political norms that included respect for the individual and promotion of the American political system – republican democracy. Thus, the achievements that were rooted in the religious freedom of the Christian tradition became cornerstones of American activities abroad.

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<sup>23</sup> C. Cherry, *Two American Sacred Ceremonies: Their Implications for the Study of Religion in America*, "American Quarterly" 1969, No. 21, p. 748, quoted in: S. P. Huntington, *Who Are We?...*, p. 104.

<sup>24</sup> See: D. Mauk, J. Oakland, *Cywilizacja amerykańska...*

<sup>25</sup> G. Washington's first inaugural speech, quoted in Robert Bellah. The text is also available at: [www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=11&page=transcript](http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=11&page=transcript) [20.10.2011].



However, this evangelical enthusiasm was challenged by the 18th and 19th-century reality of international relations. The same George Washington, in his farewell address, was much more skeptical of the American role in international relations, where in a typically realist manner he recognized the limits of the new state and provided guidelines for a very pragmatic and moderate approach towards the important players on the international arena.<sup>26</sup> In this sense, a speculative conclusion can be made that even in the case of George Washington, his religious motivation was challenged by other external determinants that required a much more realist approach towards the international attitude of the New Republic.

The American notion of predestination was adjusting steadily to the international position of the United States. This conception can be traced in every direction of American expansionism, and was developed in the Manifest Destiny<sup>27</sup> and the following idealist programs coined by such leaders as Abraham Lincoln or Woodrow Wilson. Actually, a remarkable similarity can be found between the American idealism and the concept of predestination. This is reminiscent of the Christian approach towards suffering. Just as the Christians believe that suffering during the earthly life offers salvation, the American involvement in international relations was usually justified with the promising aura of a better future after the American engagement. The Spanish-American war of 1898 was supposed to offer brighter days for Cuba. The slogan associated with Woodrow Wilson of “a war to end all wars” is probably the most visible example of the American belief that the righteous cause will ultimately prevail. This pattern of moral involvement was subsequently affirmed by F. D. Roosevelt’s four freedoms. As Wiesław Waclawczyk<sup>28</sup> has noticed, this thus determined the ideological framework of the United States as a country devoted to the promotion of human rights worldwide<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> The full version of Washington’s farewell address is available at: [www.avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/washing.asp](http://www.avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp) [20.10.2011]. For an evaluation of Washington’s farewell address see: Ł. Wordliczek, *U.S. Foreign Policy: Procedure and Substance*, Kraków 2005, p. 18; J. McCormick, *American Foreign Policy and Process*, Wadsworth 2005, p. 12–14.

<sup>27</sup> Among the literature on the subject worth mentioning are A. Stevenson’s, *Manifest Destiny. American Expansionism and Empire of Right*, New York 1996; F. Merk’s, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History*, Cambridge Ma 1995.

<sup>28</sup> W. Waclawczyk, *Swoboda wypowiedzi politycznej w USA do roku 1918*, Toruń 2011, p. 437.

<sup>29</sup> The term “human rights” requires a thorough analysis, due to the fact that it embraces too many notions that ultimately become the source rather of confusion than clarification. The American notion of civil liberties is much narrower and embraces the political and personal rights and freedoms from the Bill of Rights. The European, and international, meaning of the term “human rights” is much wider, and also embraces economic, social and cultural rights (2nd generation of rights), as well as the 3rd generation of rights. In the works of scholars like David P. Forsythe, Michael Ignatieff, and Andrew Moravcsik a certain feeling of disappointment at the limited notion of the American concept of individual entitlements can be noticed. Nevertheless, the American rhetoric on the subject does not take into consideration the social and economic dimensions of internationally accepted human rights, because it is not a characteristic feature of the American political system. Moravcsik explains this by the lack of a substantial socialist movement in the United States. For a broader discussion of his arguments see: A. Moravcsik, *The Paradox of U.S. Human Rights Policy*, [in:] *American Exceptionalism and Human Rights*, ed. M. Ignatieff, Princeton 2005, p. 147–197; D. P. Forsythe, *US Foreign Policy and Human Rights*, “Journal of Human Rights” 2002, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 501–521.

The sources of American activism in foreign relations can be traced in the Protestant experience and its transposition to contemporary politics. Several notions play a crucial role in that regard. Firstly, the notion of “chosen nation”. There is no other country in the world that attracts such interest and is observed so closely. If John Winthrop’s concept of the “city upon a hill” in the 17th century was established for an internal purpose to unite the new community, today it has become a guiding light for suppressed countries and nations. The notion of predestination proved to be useful and necessary in every period of American history from the requirement to create and strengthen the nation, through the continental expansion and consolidation of the political structures, to the position of superpower in international relations.

However, this concept has a diametrically different understanding at home and abroad, and requires a short comment. For the United States, although predestination is hardly mentioned explicitly,<sup>30</sup> it offers sufficient moral explanation for the necessity of taking certain actions, even when popular approval is at stake. Actually, every major American intervention triggers the demand for a reasonable explanation of the U.S. involvement. Remarkably, since the Spanish-American war each U.S. intervention inclines an argumentation for a better future, based on the intrinsically American positive approach. It is grounded in the national experience that the rejection of oppressive systems and the transposition of power to the society is the key to a more promising future. However, this perspective is not unconditional, and also requires the incorporation of American values in order to be able to achieve the desired social and political results. Unfortunately, this additional requirement often proves to be the most sensitive aspect of American involvement, since the lack of appropriate cultural, religious, politically and socially experienced background often creates essential obstacles for the implementation of the “city upon a hill” know-how abroad. The desired outcome, however, often proves to be more difficult than expected, and becomes a source of disappointment and radical anti-Americanism<sup>31</sup>.

Concluding, all of the abovementioned aspects of civil religion, such as “God’s chosen nation”, the concept of predestination, and nationalist religiosity, have an impact on American foreign policy. They are exposed through the concepts of the republican form of government and liberty that are core pillars of the American foreign policy.

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<sup>30</sup> Which does not mean that descriptively various presidents do not use it to justify particular actions in international relations.

<sup>31</sup> The question of anti-Americanism and the impact of religion remains outside the scope of this research. However, it is a subject of deepened interest among scholars. See: G. Chiozza, *Anti-Americanism and the American World Order*, Baltimore 2009; *The Rise of Anti-Americanism*, ed. B. O’Connor, M. Griffiths, Routledge 2006.

## The pragmatic nature of American foreign policy

The set of values promoted by America around the globe is based on the American experience, and not on utopian ideals. The U.S. foreign policy is much more pragmatic, in a sense of attempting to promote only these aspects of the national experience that proved to be efficient at national level. As James McCormick observes,

[...] the core American values are internal in their nature and are exposed in the Declaration of Independence as life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. Although they are ‘abstract ideals’ that serve as ‘imperative’ for action, they provide sufficient ground for explaining the nature of certain actions in the American activities abroad.<sup>32</sup>

Often in the official rhetoric these values are included in the more general notions of human rights and democracy or in a detailed enumeration of particular human rights dependent on the purpose.<sup>33</sup>

Since then, the promotion of human rights and democracy by the United States all over the world triggers permanent accusations concerning the American hypocrisy on this matter. Michael Ignatieff has articulated it as a paradox that recently became a fundamental part of the evaluation of American foreign policy. Namely, why in some cases the American promotion of human rights was

[...] as if they were synonymous with American values, while under others, it has emphasized the superiority of American values over international standards.<sup>34</sup>

Some part of this riddle is hidden behind the notion of predestination. Once the American perception of particular case matches the international concern, these values become universal. Recently, only the United States holds such remarkable cultural, political and spiritual attractiveness that is able to transform domestic values into international principles.

On the other hand, the established international standards aim at providing predictable patterns of behavior among *equal* players in the international arena.

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<sup>32</sup> J. M. McCormick, *American Foreign Policy and Process...*, p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> For example, Barack Obama enumerated what particular rights America will promote during his speech “New Beginning” at Cairo University in 2009.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Ignatieff makes the comment differently, and here we fundamentally disagree. He claims that “under some administrations, it has promoted human rights as if they were synonymous with American values, while under others, it has emphasized the superiority of American values over international standards.” I would argue that the development of international relations after the Cold War does not allow a generalization concerning human rights to be linked to particular administrations. The same Clinton administration became very active in Bosnia after 1993 and in particular in Kosovo in 1999 and at the same time passive to the slaughtering in Rwanda in 1994. The Bush record on human rights is overshadowed by the loss of civilians in Iraq, Afghanistan, the existence of Guantanamo and the violation of domestic civil liberties, but his administration’s efforts to promote human rights in the post-Soviet space, the active involvement in Ukraine during the Orange Revolution of 2004 and official promotion of democracy as a reply to the contemporary threats should not be neglected. For the Bush doctrine see the National Security Strategy of 2002. The quotation from Ignatieff is from the book *American Exceptionalism and Human Rights*, ed. M. Ignatieff, Princeton 2005, p. 1.

However, in practice the world is not that simple, and the United States can hardly be equalized with other countries. Even the sole fact that in case of crisis, the world's eyes are turned towards Washington D.C. and demand more from the United States than the remaining international players requires an alternative approach towards their international obligations<sup>35</sup>. While closely observing the American actions, the remaining players in international relations accurately expose every U.S. deed considered as inappropriate according to international law. This should be considered a natural self-protecting reaction aiming at limiting the scope of action of a stronger player that cannot be challenged otherwise. In this sense, every inconsistency and contradiction in American foreign policy, even if officially justified with human rights and democracy, is considered rather as a screen for U.S. imperialist activity. The criticism varies from accusations of hypocrisy to open challenging of American exceptionalism and non-compliance with international norms. However, instead of trying to answer the long list of negative comments on the U.S. record on human rights and democracy, it is worth analyzing what the U.S. actually promotes in practice. The short 1965 book *Religion in the United States* written by Benson Y. Landis, while seeking to provide the basic facts about the religious and denominational diversity in the U.S., reaches the following general conclusion:

[the] General Beliefs of Four Denominations (Judaism, Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy or Protestantism) ... believe in one God, Creator and Sustainer of the universe, whom they worship. They give allegiance to Him and they acknowledge that this allegiance is their highest. [...] They believe that the moral law should govern world order; that international institutions to maintain peace with justice should be organized and preserved; that the material resources of the earth have been entrusted to men by God for the benefit of all.<sup>36</sup>

This rather simplistic perception of the particular denominations is dominated by the Protestant evangelism deeply rooted in American society. As the moral law appears as the guiding force of the majority of American society in its external relations, it will be based on the experience and achievements that make the Americans still “the city upon a hill”.

Recently, the majority of the promoted rights have been deeply rooted in the American experience. Personal rights in the United States were aiming to arm the individual with sufficient equipment for the “pursuit of happiness”. Religious freedom aimed to provide an alternative to the worst of human nature already experienced in Europe; ultimately, the political rights were to be cherished by those who

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<sup>35</sup> Such an approach was presented during the period of cooperation between the United States and the United Nations after the adoption of the Rome Statute in July 1998 when, while the Clinton administration was still searching for accommodation of the American position in the lower-rank procedural documents of the prospective ICC, argued among other things that the international role of the United States requires privileged treatment by the ICC. See: S. Domaradzki, *Stany Zjednoczone a Międzynarodowy Trybunał Karny. Od polityki poparcia do zwalczania*, “Krakowskie Studia Międzynarodowe” 2004, No. 4, p. 23–54.

<sup>36</sup> B. Y. Landis, *Religion in the United States*, Barnes & Noble everyday handbooks 1965, p. 78–79.

contributed to the society (no matter whether the Europeans like it or not).<sup>37</sup> The American concept of rights is also unique in its socially acknowledged origin that grants it with indisputable legitimacy at home and abroad.

### **The limits of American foreign policy evangelism**

The evangelical nature of the American soul often sees oppression of society and individuals as a wrong state of affairs that requires replacement. This attitude of Americans abroad often neglects the local circumstances as misfortunate elements of a bad mechanism that requires amputation and replacement by well-functioning democratic prosthesis. This is often perceived abroad as an element of outright American arrogance and lack of respect of others. Although calls for a milder, more sensitive and, as Daniel M. Fraser called it in 1979, “non-confrontational diplomacy”<sup>38</sup> approach towards international relations have appeared in the United States, they are often silenced by the messianic hurrah-optimism supplanted by the American military power and cultural attractiveness.

The American involvement during the Balkan wars of the 1990s can be regarded as a case study of such an attitude.<sup>39</sup> The U.S. military and political involvement proved to be crucial for the end of the bloody conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Only the American diplomacy, while using political pressure and simultaneously allowing by silent approval the reinforcement of the weaker Croat and Bosniak forces, was able to bring the fighting parties to the negotiation table. Although the peace agreement brokered in Dayton and officially signed in Paris in 1995 brought an end to the over three years of war and more than 200,000 victims, it created an artificial peace that totally neglects the historical, cultural and religious reasons for the conflict. The recent “Frankenstein” creature on the European map is hardly considered as a reliable partner with a stable future, and even the American evaluation of its development is not optimistic at all<sup>40</sup>. The European Union “hygienically” deals with the local authorities, and the controlled sovereignty under the supervision of the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina has not resulted in stable domestic political structures.

Kosovo provides another – probably the most radical – example of implementation of core American values abroad. A bloody dictator suppressing his own

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<sup>37</sup> For this reason the source of American civil liberties is not the “imaginable” human dignity, but is much more “pragmatic” and reflects the respect for the society’s subjective judgment about the individual contribution to the community.

<sup>38</sup> D. M. Fraser, *Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy: Some Basic Questions Regarding Principles and Practice*, “International Studies Quarterly” 1979, Vol. 23, No. 2, p. 183.

<sup>39</sup> Although more such examples can be analyzed, such as the war in Iraq since 2003 and the recent American involvement in Libya.

<sup>40</sup> P. C. McMahon, J. Western, *The Death of Dayton, How to Stop Bosnia from Falling Apart*, “Foreign Affairs” 2009, September–October.

citizens, whose guilt was only the fact that they belonged to another ethnic group, permanent instability, and the humiliation of the international community conducted by “the butcher of the Balkans,” as Slobodan Milošević was depicted, provided sufficient grounds for the military intervention. Only the United States<sup>41</sup> possessed the necessary capacity to enforce international principles. Thus, the newly defined concept of “humanitarian intervention” was aiming to protect the civilian population and secure their basic human rights.

The ultimate recognition of Kosovo as an independent state nine years later was met with regret by almost every Balkan state, except Albania. Such arguments were ultimately confronted with the American belief that the fire in Kosovo was extinguished and that the new political structure would be able to prove the effectiveness of the military actions. Today, four years later, the international community rather tries to ignore the dramatic economic situation, spreading corruption, and ethnic tensions between the Serbian minority and the Albanians and to disregard the fact that the Kosovo case is still considered among the sources of instability in the whole region.

On the contrary, the argument that is most often used to argue in support of the American actions in both cases is the fact that, since then, no full-scale military conflicts have occurred, and despite the ethnic clashes in Kosovo, and increased stiffening of the nationalist political parties in Bosnia, no bloodshed and war has erupted. The answer continues that the decreasing interest in the region is a consequence of 9/11 and the new threats for American national security from the Middle East and Afghanistan. However, such an answer neglects the necessity for persistence, typical of any religion in order to achieve lasting well-being for the others. Furthermore, it totally neglects the Christian values of compassion and respect so fundamental to the notion of human rights. Therefore, the religious driving force hidden behind the values of human rights and democracy is subordinated to the list of American national interests that does not allow firm and equivocal promotion of moral values. As Morgenthau explains, ethics in international relations is situational.<sup>42</sup>

### **...and President Obama**

Barack Obama also provides interesting material for observation as an example of our research on religion’s impact on American foreign policy. It has already been acknowledged that American presidents often use a religious note in their speeches. Since former presidents have been screened in that regard by others, Barack Obama is the most recent example of this pattern of behavior. His “New Beginning” speech in Cairo in June 2009 provides a “civil religion” template for the future

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<sup>41</sup> Within the framework of the NATO-led operation “Allied force” that lasted from March 24 until June 10, 1999.

<sup>42</sup> R. Jackson, G. Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations*, New York 2010, p. 70.

speechwriters of American presidents to come. While seeking to bridge relations with the Muslim world, shaken by the deeds of the Bush administration, Obama did not compromise the main American principles. While attempting to defuse prejudices and to emphasize the necessity for a more promising future, the speech is an all-embracing model of Bellah's description of civil religion. It includes quotations from the Gettysburg address and recalls the Declaration of Independence<sup>43</sup>. It recalls Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson's thoughts as guiding principles for behavior. But most importantly, it underlines the universal value of democracy and human rights that leave the societies themselves to make decisions concerning their future. Last but not least, the religious inclination, bearing in mind also the context of the speech, emphasizes the similar attitude in Christianity, Islam and Judaism that legitimize the American efforts.

Slightly over a year later, the U.S. ambassador to Poland Lee Feinstein delivered a speech at the Jagiellonian University. Among the questions he had to address was one about the religiousness of President Obama. The ambassador replied briefly: "President Obama is a very religious man". There is no reason not to believe Ambassador Feinstein. However, how much of that religious devotion directs the actions the president needs to take in the course of his work in the Oval Office, I dare not say.

## Conclusion

Concluding, American values, being the core of American foreign policy, are deeply rooted in the religious uniqueness of the United States and their remarkable historical development. The universalism of these values stems from the deep respect for the individual and the necessity to find an alternative, more humane, way of historical development. The Protestant eschatological tradition introduced messianism, exceptionalism and compassion as the driving forces of American foreign policy. The marriage of messianism and exceptionalism shaped the nature of human rights and democracy and guaranteed their position as the highest priorities in America's activities abroad.

The uniqueness of America's religious impact on foreign policy is in its inclusive character. The civil religion, as an overarching social semi-transcendental consensus, deprives the American religiousness in foreign policy of its fundamentalist inclination. Instead, it replaces the fundamentalism with persistence, charac-

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<sup>43</sup> "So no matter where it takes hold, government of the people and by the people [my underlining – S.D.] sets a single standard for all who would hold power: You must maintain your power through consent, not coercion; you must respect the rights of minorities, and participate with a spirit of tolerance and compromise; you must place the interests of your people and the legitimate workings of the political process above your party [...] and later 'No system of government can or should be imposed by one nation by any other'." See: President Obama's speech at Cairo University. The whole text is available online at: [www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-cairo-university-6-04-09](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-cairo-university-6-04-09) [27.10.2011].

teristic of the pragmatic attitude of the Americans, instead of imaginary emotionalism of other religions. The unique American position in international relations provides the necessary “channels of distribution” for American values to be spread. Just as the Judeo-Christian religion seemed to be universal for the colonists in the 17th century, so the American values of democracy and human rights seem to be universal to the global community today. As Obama stated in Cairo,

But I do have an unyielding belief that all people yearn for certain things: the ability to speak your mind and have a say in how you are governed; confidence in the rule of law and the equal administration of justice; government that is transparent and doesn’t steal from the people; the freedom to live as you choose. These are not just American ideas; they are human rights.

The question is, is it really so?