

9/11 and the “American Civil Religion” Today ¹⁾

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Summary

Facing the 9.11, American people gathered together under the National Flag and Biblical God. That is because 90% of American people believe in God of the Bible. Three days after 9.11, “National Day of Prayer and Remembrance” was held at the Washington National Cathedral, and an Islamic Imam prayed at the ceremony. This might be the symptom that Islam will be the element of American Civil Religion with Christianity and Judaism.

The cause of Iraq War for the United States deeply relates to the cause of founding the nation. American people believes that the mission of establishing the human rights for all people of the world. American Civil Religion has justified this American sense of mission, but at the same time, it has criticized the policies of the government from the stand point of the transcendence. However, Bush’s understanding of America lacks the element of self-criticism, and we may say it “Fundamentalism of America”.

Keywords: America, civil religion, 9.11, Iraq war, President Bush

1. President Bush’s Religious Discourse

On September 11, 2001, centers of the economic and military might of the U.S.A., the only military and political superpower in the world, were attacked by terrorists. That incident of simultaneous terrorist attacks itself, and the intentions of America’s post-9/11 reaction, should be analyzed academically by both interdisciplinary and comprehensive studies.

What are the intentions of the U.S. in fighting the war in Iraq? This question has been posed and analyzed, with various answers, by many scholars, even in Japan. The often-heard analysis is that America’s aim is oil or the establishment of U.S. hegemony in the Middle East. This analysis, however, does not seem able to fully answer the question. If 9/11 had happened in a country other than the U.S., one of the countries in Europe for instance, would that country have reacted the same way as the U.S.? To justify war, would that country have engaged the kind of religious language through which President Bush has been interpreting the war in Iraq?

Around March 2003, the U.S. mass media started to point out the religious beliefs behind the actions of President Bush. *Newsweek*'s March 20, 2003 issue included a special feature article on “Bush and God.” Stephen Mansfield published *The Faith of George W. Bush* in 2003, emphasizing the influence of the president's faith on his policy-making.²⁾

My opinion is that the religious language used by President Bush is the result of a cool logical calculation on the part of White House advisors, rather than an expression of the president's passionate religious beliefs. It should be understood as rhetoric mirroring the reality of the United States as a religious nation.

2. Influence of the Religious Right

It is important to pay attention to the political influence of the Religious Right. Those living outside of the U.S. seem to underestimate this influence. The Religious Right is that group of Americans who take positive actions so that their conservative values and understanding of their faith are reflected in politics. We could say that they are “politicized Evangelicals.” Their political actions consist of casting ballots, helping carry out election campaigns, and engaging in lobbying activities.

According to a Gallup survey, the percentage of the citizenry self-described as belonging to the Religious Right is 18%.³⁾ They are a bloc of people who definitely show up at the voting booth. Taking account of the fact that actual voter turnout in the 2000 presidential election was 51% of total registered voters, it is easy to understand how great was the power of this group's political influence. The results of the 2004 presidential election show voter turnout to have been around 60%. Typically, the higher the voting rate gets, the less influence distinct blocs of voters have. It is said that in the 2004 presidential election, the Religious Right played a crucial role in the re-election of President Bush. Clearly, the Republican Party mobilized and gathered the votes of the Religious Right more than in the previous presidential election.

To understand further the power of the Religious Right's political influence, I would like to compare it to that of African Americans. The population ratio of African Americans in the U.S. is 12%. In other words, as a percentage of total population, the size of the Religious Right is 1.5 times that of African Americans. The Religious Right is the biggest bloc of support in the Republican Party, which means that without their support no one can become a presidential candidate – which is to say, no one can become a president. The presidential election in 2004 has been an issue of the greatest concern for President Bush since 9/11. Therefore, it is very clear that he has been engaging in rhetoric and policy actions which recognize the existence of the Religious Right.

Sometimes “Neo-conservatives” and the Religious Right are described as the head and the body of support for the Bush administration. Both of these groups are minorities from the standpoint of public opinion. But the reason why such minority groups can strongly influence

the Bush administration lies in the memory and fear of 9/11 in the hearts of Americans, and in the reality that the “cause” justifying U.S. military actions after 9/11 has been supported by broad public opinion.

By looking at the reactions of President Bush and American society at the time of 9/11 and afterwards, the aim of this study is to illuminate some present phenomena of the religious dimension of American society, the “American Civil Religion,” and to search for some of the distinctions of American religion.

3. Reactions Immediately after 9/11

The Star-Spangled Banner began to be placed everywhere right after 9/11. This kind of patriotic reaction might well have appeared in Europe if 9/11 had happened in one of those countries. However, the U.S. went one step further. The words “God Bless America” and the patriotic song titled “God Bless America” spread rapidly throughout the country. It is not an exaggeration to say that Americans feel their affinity for this song even more strongly than the national anthem. The song “God Bless America” has become a second national anthem.

God bless America
Land that I love
Stand beside her and guide her
Thru the night with a 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

On the night of 9/11, many members of Congress gathered around the front stone steps of Capitol Hill, joined hands, and sang this song, “God Bless America.” The scene was broadcasted on TV throughout the country. Later, in his speech of September 20, 2001, President Bush mentioned this scene and said that the hearts of all the people who saw it were deeply moved. In the unprecedented national crisis, President Bush tried to unite the people under the Star Spangled Banner and in the name of God. The “God” here is not a god in the sense of a common noun, but God as a proper noun: the God of the Holy Bible. Herein lies a distinction of American religion.

On 9/11, the day of the terrorists’ attacks, I was in Berkeley, California. At about 8 o’clock the next evening I was driving near the Berkeley campus of the University of California and noticed many people heading toward the campus. I got out of the car and joined them. About two thousand people had gathered in the campus square, holding candles in their hands. It

reminded me of the scenes I was familiar with from having lived in Berkeley back in the early 1970s. I thought it must have been very rare in the last few decades that this many people would gather for a political issue at an American university.

The campus event was being held in the form of free speeches. Students from Palestine, representatives of Jewish-American student organizations, and others made their speeches one after another. Among the speeches there were some intent on enhancing nationalistic prestige, which were denounced with booing. The students were overwhelmed by the reality of facing a national crisis like nothing they had ever experienced. However, the leading tone of the speeches was the assertion that America should think of the reason why it was attacked by terrorists. This maturity of the students was a relief to me. Later, however, President Bush brought in the diagram of “Civilization or Terrorism” and tried to prove the absolute justice of anti-terrorism. In the wake of this official line, the atmosphere of seriously questioning why the U.S. had been attacked disappeared.

On the first Sunday after 9/11, on September 16, I went to San Francisco to attend the service of Glide Memorial United Methodist Church, one of the most famous churches in the city. The Glide is the church I introduced in “The Future of the American Dream,” the last chapter of my book, *Shukyo kara yomu Amerika* (“America” Viewing from Religion). I wrote that the Glide Memorial Church is a good example of the road of hope that America should pursue.

I arrived a half an hour before the service, but there was already an 800-meter-long line ahead of me and I had to give up my hope of attending, which was a great disappointment to me. That long waiting line at the Glide Memorial Church was not the only one. According to a Gallup poll, the rate of service attendance in America increased from 40% to 47% right after 9/11.⁴⁾ The Gallup survey showed that Sunday service attendance has remained at approximately 40% since the end of World War II. This ratio is very characteristic compared to that of the former Christian nations of Europe, which is approximately 10%.

A Gallup survey conducted in December 2001 asked the question: “Is religion important to your life?” The poll shows that 86% of Americans responded that religion is “very important” or “important.” The Gallup organization asked the same question to 10,000 people in nine Islamic nations. To the same question, 72% of them answered that religion is “very important” or “important.”⁵⁾ This poll is very interesting in suggesting that America is more religious than some Islamic nations.

4. Separation of Church and State in the United States

On September 14, 2001, three days after the terrorist attacks, a “National Day of Prayers and Remembrance” was held at Washington National Cathedral. This cathedral is named with the word National, which does not mean that it is a state-managed cathedral. Rather, it is an

Episcopal church, belonging to the tradition of the Church of England in the U.S.

The position of America on the issue of the separation of church and state is different from that of Japan or France. Article 1 of the Amendments to the U.S. Constitution, which clearly describes the separation of church and state for the first time in human history, begins as follows:

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...”

Judicial judgment has long been that this amendment prohibits establishing a national religion or giving special treatment to a specific religious organization, while it respects “free exercise” of any religion not only in private but also in public spheres. That is to say, America’s understanding of the separation of church and state is not the strict separation of religion and politics that is the case in Japan and in France, but the separation of church or specific religious organizations, on the one hand, from state or public institutions including the government, on the other.

In America, it is prohibited for a public institution to grant favors to a specific religious organization such as a church or a religious community. However, America has traditionally recognized that the religion of the greatest common factor can play a certain role in the American public sphere.

The religion playing the role of integrating the United States in the public sphere (in areas such as politics or public education) was called the “Civil Religion in America” by Robert N. Bellah, who borrowed terms from Rousseau’s *The Social Contract*.⁶⁾ Elsewhere, I have translated this designation into my own term, “Invisible National Religion.”⁷⁾

Conducting a national observance in the name of the president, at a cathedral which belongs to a specific religious organization called the Episcopal Church, is clearly against the fundamental principle prohibiting of the establishment of a national religion in the First Amendment, even if it is a memorial service commemorating a national disaster. We can assume the intention of the White House in this case was to place the priority on the unity of the state, even though it had to violate fundamental principles of the separation of church and state to do so.

5. Islam and Civil Religion in America

The memorial service included something that had never been witnessed in public observances. An Islamic Imam was invited to take part in this service, the first occasion in history in which an Islamic religious leader performed a role in a public observance at a national level.

The memorial service began with the opening invocation by Rev. Nathan D. Baxter, Dean of Washington National Cathedral. He addressed “God of Abraham and Mohammed and Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ.” In public observances in the past, the words “Jesus Christ” had been intentionally avoided. This is because the Civil Religion in America today is based on Judeo-Christian tradition. In other words, to use the words “Jesus Christ” would marginalize Judaism. However, the memorial service tried to indicate the co-existence and the commonality of the three “Semitic monotheistic religions” born in the Middle East, or “Abrahamic religions,” by intentionally naming them in the prayer.

Imam Dr. Muzzamil H. Siddiqi of the Islamic Society of North America delivered his prayer in the National Cathedral not in Arabic, but in English. He translated the “Al-lah” of Islam into the English word “Lord,” the same word that designates the “Lord,” God of Christianity. His prayer began with the Islamic phrase, in English: “In the Name of God, the most merciful and the most compassionate. Lord...”

Rabbi Joshua O. Haberman read from the “Lamentations” chapters of the Hebrew Scriptures. His reading started with the words, “The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases...” This “LORD” became a keyword throughout the memorial service on the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance, expressing the message that Judaism, Christianity and Islam are “brotherhood religions” that believe in one “LORD.” In other words, on that day the message was delivered that the Civil Religion of America, which hitherto had meant “Lord” as understood in Judeo-Christian tradition, included Islam in its frame; its “Lord” was that of all the Abrahamic religions.

Such inclusiveness is significant. If it were applied to the case of Japan, it would represent an incredibly big decision: equivalent to including religions other than Shinto in the performance of the *Daijousai*, the ceremony of the Emperor’s inauguration, or *Taisou-no-rei*, the Emperor’s funeral ceremony.

This manner of treating and representing Islam on the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance reflected a diplomatic intention on the part of the Bush Administration. The intention was to show that America’s war against terrorism is not against Islam or Arab states, but against terrorists.

Now the question is, how is Islam accepted in U.S. society? American Islam is diverse, and the degree of the Americanization of Islam is different in each case. Contrary to the intentions of the White House, Islam remains a “foreign religion” in public opinion. There is no exact data about the number of Muslims in the U.S., and even Islamic organizations don’t have precise figures. According to the most reliable data, a Gallup poll shows approximately 2.5 million Muslims, which is less than 1% of the total population. Some scholars estimate a number as high as 7 million. I presume that the reason for the difference in these estimations reflects the social atmosphere in the U.S., in which Muslims cannot but hesitate to identify themselves as such to the Gallup poll question, “What is your religious preference?”

Islam, one of the “Abrahamic religions,” has greater potential to be Americanized than Buddhism or Hinduism. However, considering the fact that it took about a century for the Catholic Church to be Americanized, Islam clearly might not find it very easy.

There are two necessary conditions for American Islam to form a part of American Civil Religion. A comparison with the history of the Americanization of Catholicism may be illustrative here. One condition is the assimilation of American ideas such as republicanism and democracy to the religion. In the case of the Catholic Church, this meant the democratization of the Church and the establishment of its independence from the Vatican. And the other condition is a responsible acceptance of America’s destiny as that of the religion. In other words, one should become a Muslim who is proud of himself/herself being American. Islam cannot form a part of American Civil Religion as long as “Black Muslims” refer to themselves as “Nation of Islam,” and consider being American negatively.

6. “God” and the Cause for the Iraq War

Since he gave his address at the joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001, President Bush has repeated his assertion that the terrorist attack was against freedom and civilization. Here, civilization seems, however, to mean “American civilization.” The U.S.A. interprets “American civilization” as a global, universal understanding.

What does “American civilization” mean? In the series of speeches made by President Bush, he holds out “freedom” as the important factor in “American civilization.” This “freedom” is the cause for which the nation of America was founded. It is not too much to say that the significance of America’s existence lies in the realization of this “freedom.”

The terrorist attack against the World Trade Center buildings was an attack against a symbol of “American civilization.” The background design of the Great Seal of the United States contains an “unfinished pyramid,” which symbolizes the distinctive character of “American civilization.” The unfinished pyramid signifies that America is on the path to the completion of its civilization. Aiming for this completion in the future is what America is. To climb the steps toward realizing this future is what the “American Dream” is. And it can be said that the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center were a symbol of this aspect of the American Dream. The American people had to witness on TV the scene of the Twin Towers tumbling down. It doesn’t seem to be an exaggeration to say that the American people gazed in fear of the collapse of “American civilization.”

“Dream for the higher” is what the American Dream is. However, I think that there are actually two conceptions of the American Dream. One is the Dream at the level of an individual life. It is the dream that each person can become richer than his or her parents’ generation. All the people enjoy the right to a chance for economic success, and this has been the driving force to unite America, the country of immigrants, in diversity. When the people

despair of the American Dream, the possibility arises that the unity of American society may collapse. An example of this is the riot by African Americans in Los Angeles in 1991. The other conception is the dream of the nation, the social dimension of the Dream. It is the dream expressed at the end of the speech given by Martin Luther King Jr. on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1963, at the time of the March on Washington. In this speech, he said that the dream for African Americans is "a dream deeply rooted in the American dream."

Then what is "the American dream" behind the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., or: what is America's idea of the "common future"? The answer is, "the cause for the founding of America," and it is what America declared to the world in "the Declaration of Independence":

We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal,
That they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights,
That among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.

The equal rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are the fundamental concepts of basic human rights. The "Founding Fathers" could have expressed America's foundational concepts in non-religious words, in a manner that insisted on human equality and unalienable rights. But it was more appropriate and natural in that era to use biblical words, or the words of American Civil Religion, such that "all Men are created equal" and "they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights."

This situation hasn't changed even today. I mentioned earlier in this paper that after 9/11 the words "God Bless America" spread rapidly throughout the country. "God" here means "the God of the Holy Bible." Those who believe in the religions of "Judeo-Christian tradition" – this includes Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Christianity, Judaism, and Mormonism – make up 90% of the population of the U.S.A. Therefore, it is quite natural and understandable to explain America's "cause" with the term "God." There are no other words to substitute for "God" as the symbol to unify a diversified America.

The abusive treatment of Iraqi prisoners by American troops at Abu Ghraib Prison, uncovered in May, 2004, shook to its foundations America's sense of cause for the Iraq War. In the midst of the election campaign, President Bush recognized this incident as the most serious crisis for his re-election. To justify a military campaign in Iraq as part of the war against terrorism after 9/11, President Bush had declared, among other reasons, that the American cause was to liberate the Iraqi people from oppression by Saddam Hussein and to restore their human rights.

Right after the prisoner abuse case was brought to light, President Bush received a favorable wind to help save him from the crisis. The State of Massachusetts, presidential candidate John Kerry's home state, began accepting the marriage registrations of homosexual couples on May 17, 2004. This news of steps to legalize gay marriages greatly shocked

devout Evangelical believers and moderate Evangelicals as well. President Bush tactfully took advantage of this crisis of the sense of values and morals. He criticized and fought on to the end against John Kerry, who could not make his standpoint on the issue of gay marriage clear. In this way, President Bush was able to overcome the greatest crisis of his re-election campaign.

7. The Pledge of Allegiance

Since the Revolutionary age of independence, most Americans have found it adequate to understand and express American national identity in relation to “God.” By thinking in this way, however, they have marginalized those who think this American Civil Religion in terms different from their religious beliefs. The court ruling in June 2002 which declared that the Pledge of Allegiance is unconstitutional, and the reactions of public opinion about this judgment, are a very interesting case through which to study this issue.

The Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco ruled that the enforcement of the Pledge of Allegiance in public schools was unconstitutional and that it should not be recited because the Pledge’s phrase, “one nation under God,” supports a specific religion in violation of the First Amendment’s separation of church and state. A doctor, a self-proclaimed agnostic, claimed that it was against the freedom of religion guaranteed by the Constitution for his daughter to be forced to recite the Pledge of Allegiance with the phrase, “one nation under God.” In deciding the case, the federal court ruled that the enforcement of the Pledge in public schools did violate the separation of church and state.

The government’s executive and legislative bodies reacted immediately to this judicial decision. “White House press secretary Ari Fleischer said President Bush believes the ruling is ‘ridiculous.’” On Capitol Hill, the Senate unanimously passed an opposing resolution, and the House of Representatives also resolved its opposition with an overwhelming majority vote. Quite possibly, the members of the Congress were aware of the public sentiment of their constituencies. According to a public opinion poll carried out by the ABC TV network and *the Washington Post*, 84% of the American population was against the federal court judgment, and 89% responded that the phrase “one nation under God” should be kept in the Pledge of Allegiance.⁸ This figure is identical with the number of people who profess belief in “God of the Holy Bible.”

The judgment of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco was made on the basis of the court’s mandate to uphold the separation of church and state and the freedom of religion. However, it was far from the judgment given with either American majority public opinion or with America’s particularity of accepting “God” as the greatest common factor of its religiosity. America’s religiosity accepts diversity as well as the pursuit of unity without, however, having a special connection with any specific religion or religious organization.

Considering the fact that the Circuit Court’s legal ruling was made only a year after 9/11, I think that it was a case of poor timing.

The reactions of the government and America’s public opinion do not imply a sudden conservative shift in American society. The government’s reaction was certainly not caused by the shift of control from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party. In his “Memorandum about Religious Expression in Public Schools” (1995), former President Clinton states:

Though schools must be neutral with respect to religion, they may play an active role with respect to teaching civil values and virtue, and the moral code that holds us together as a community. The fact that some of these values are held also by religions does not make it unlawful to teach them in school.

Clinton admits religious expression in the following three areas.

- (1) Students...have the same right to engage in individual or group prayer and religious discussion during the school day as they do to engage in other comparable activity.
- (2) Public schools may not provide religious instruction, but they may teach about religion, including the Bible or other scripture: the history of religion, comparative religion, the Bible (or other scripture) as literature, and the role of religion in the history of the United States and other countries. All are permissible public school subjects. Similarly, it is permissible to consider religious influences on art, music, literature, and social studies.
- (3) Student religious activities are accorded the same access to public school facilities, as are student secular activities.⁹⁾

This Memorandum was drafted with a careful calculation of trends in public opinion in order to succeed in the presidential election for his second term the following year. In other words, it was publicized as the golden mean for public schools in consideration of public opinion.

Clinton’s strategy was successful. He gained 35% support of Evangelical groups, many of whose members were Republican supporters. In comparison with Clinton, John Kerry couldn’t get more than 21% support from white Evangelical groups.¹⁰⁾ Many of the “moderate Evangelical groups” that supported Clinton changed their support from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party, a crucial factor in the result of the latest presidential election.

According to the national opinion research conducted by the Princeton Religion Research

Center two months after the publication of Clinton's memorandum, American public opinion shows an interesting response. To the question, "Do you agree to the amendment of the Constitution to allow students to say prayers in public schools?" 71% respondents answered "Yes." "If yes, should the prayer be basically a prayer of Christianity, or the prayers of major religions including Christianity?" Here, 81% of the people answered that the prayers should be of major religions.¹¹⁾

The stance of the American people today regarding "Civil Religion," evident in the result of this research, appears to be as follows. Even when multiculturalism is presently respected, Civil Religion is necessary to unite the nation, and education about this idea of "Civil Religion" should be given even at public schools. However, the content of the Civil Religion should be considered to embrace, more carefully than ever before, religious traditions other than Judeo-Christian tradition.

Then what, concretely, is the content of this Civil Religion? Or, does American public opinion call for religious multiculturalism based on tolerance of others as the significance of the nation's existence, but not as its Civil Religion? If that is the case, the question is whether it is possible for any pluralistic Civil Religion to have the same power to unite the United States as the Judeo-Christian Civil Religion, with the "God of the Bible" as its core symbol, had in integrating the nation when the United States faced the never-experienced national disaster of 9/11.

8. U.S. Understanding of Civilization and Awareness of Mission

In his rhetoric, President Bush uses the terms "civilization" and "freedom" in parallel without offering precise definitions. He explains that 9/11 was an attack against "civilization" and "freedom, an attack against the "cause" of the United States. The origin of President Bush's understanding of "civilization" can be traced back to the Spanish-American War at the end of the nineteenth century, in 1898.

The Spanish-American War marked the turn of the diplomatic policy of the United States from that based on the Monroe Doctrine to that based on active diplomacy. U.S. foreign policy was changed from one that limited itself only to the Western Hemisphere (South and North America), to one without such limitations. As a result, the United States colonized the Philippines and placed Hawaii, Guam, and other Pacific islands under its control. As for the purpose or the legitimizing reason for the colonization of the Philippines, then-President McKinley said, "The United States rule the Philippines to educate, civilize, and Christianize Filipinos."¹²⁾ "To civilize" here means to inculcate with the values of Anglo-Saxon civilization. In McKinley's time, the United States comprehended civilization and world history in terms of the evolutionary ideas of Social Darwinism.

The common understanding of civilization at the turn of the century one hundred years

ago can be resumed as follows: Civilization evolves, and Anglo-Saxon civilization has its place at the top of this evolutionary process. The leader of Anglo-Saxon civilization used to be Great Britain, but the United States had taken over its role as leader. The United States is given by God the mission to spread its civilization throughout the world. In other words, to assimilate the world into American civilization constitutes evolution, which is the progress of civilization. The essence of “Anglo-Saxon civilization” is republicanism, democracy, and Christianity.

The United States has never understood other civilizations relatively or in a paratactic way, but has comprehended them from the evolutionary point of view. In other words, civilization, Anglo-Saxon civilization, Americanization, and Christianization are practically synonymous words for the United States. The understanding of civilization a century ago has basically not changed today; globalization and Americanization are on the same trajectory.

At the end of the Second Memorial Ceremony commemorating 9/11, President Bush delivered his speech to the nation from Ellis Island, the island next to the Statue of Liberty. The Statue of Liberty stands in New York Harbor, holding a torch up high. Originally it welcomed immigrants coming into the United States from Europe. Ellis Island was the first official entry place for those immigrants who passed the health screening. President Bush's speech was only 7 minutes long, but it was long enough to tell the people about the ideal of the United States of America and the meaning of the nation's existence. The following is from his speech on that occasion:

...The attack on our nation was also an attack on the ideals that make us a nation. Our deepest national conviction is that every life is precious, because every life is the gift of a Creator who intended us to live in liberty and equality. More than anything else, this separates us from the enemy we fight. We value every life; our enemies value none... And we will not allow any terrorist or tyrant to threaten civilization with weapons of mass murder.... America strives to be tolerant and just. We respect the faith of Islam, even as we fight those whose actions defile that faith. We fight, not to impose our will, but to defend ourselves and extend the blessings of freedom.... Yet, we do know that God had placed us together in this moment to grieve together, to stand together, to serve each other and our country.... And our prayer tonight is that God will see us through, and keep us worthy.... Our country is strong. And our cause is even larger than our country. Ours is the cause of human dignity; freedom guided by conscience and guarded by peace. This ideal of America is the hope of all mankind. That hope drew millions to this harbor. That hope still lights our way. And the light shines in the darkness. And the darkness will not overcome it. May God bless America.

We shouldn't miss what the statement “...our cause is even larger than our country”

implies. President Bush stated that there exist ideas and values that transcend the nation. The question here is whether President Bush spoke these words with a true understanding of their significance. Does President Bush recognize the other tradition in the American Civil Religion, as represented in Abraham Lincoln or in Rev. Martin Luther King?

9. Confrontation between Two Fundamentalisms

“Fundamentalism” was originally one of the understandings of Christianity and was a theological conception. This term, however, has more of a political meaning at present. I understand the definition of “Fundamentalists” at present as follows.

Fundamentalists are those who think they know the truth. The truth they think they know is very plain and it is shown plainly in the Bible or Qur’an. That is, the scriptures are not to be interpreted but to be believed literally, without interpretation. Fundamentalists are conservative people with respect to the understanding of their religious faith. They not only have conservative values on the personal level, but they also try to realize these values in the real world through politics. I would argue that here lies the difference between Fundamentalists and other conservative religious believers. The key is the manner of “participation in politics.” The political behaviors of Fundamentalists vary from terrorism to lobbying activities by members of the Religious Right.

From the perspective of such an analysis, leaving aside for now Islamic Fundamentalism, the understanding of civilization and the understanding of America reflected in President Bush’s rhetoric and foreign policy can also be said to be “Fundamentalist.” In this sense, the 9/11 incident and the reactions of the United States should be understood as a conflict of two Fundamentalisms: that is, Islamic Fundamentalism and American Fundamentalism. A characteristic of Fundamentalism is absolutization of itself. This, of course, is a characteristic of any religion. A religion follows the path to absolutize itself, but at the same time, as regards what a religion originally is, it always has the possibility of the path of self-transcendence.

I’d like to look at the case of Islam and that of Judeo-Christianity. The first Commandment of the Ten Commandments, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me,” is the most important teaching both in Judaism and Christianity. And the basic idea of the Islamic faith is to testify that “there is no god but Al-lah.” These teachings can be comprehended as expressing that only the God of their own respective religion is right. However, I see that what each of the religions is trying to express commonly is that the only absolute is God or Al-lah, and that whatever is created by humans – that is, faiths, religions, religious theories, nations, and national ideas – is not absolute. In other words, it is idol worship to make whatever is other than God or Al-lah an absolute. The mistakes of Fundamentalists are to confuse the Absolute with religions or to confuse the Absolute with nations.

10. The Two-fold Anxieties

Three years have passed since 9/11, and the U.S. is succumbing to a two-fold anxiety. One is the anxiety and fear of leading the homeland into the battlefield again. I was in the United States at the time of the 9/11 incident, and have experienced 9/11 memorials in the U.S. every year since then. I realize that the anxiety about mass terrorism, which I can feel when I am there, is beyond my anticipation. Without taking into account this anxiety and fear in America, we can hardly discuss or understand the so-called “Bush Doctrine.”

The majority of the people in the U.S. do not think preemptive attacks alone can prevent terrorism. However, can terrorism be prevented if preemptive attacks are not taken as one protective measure? President Bush and the American nation chose the path of making preemptive attacks on targets that may represent potential danger to the country. The U.S. launched the war in Iraq as if to forget their anxiety and fear, and President Bush has consistently chanted the “American Cause” in the war against terrorism.

The “American Cause,” as I mentioned before, is “to protect freedom and civilization.” The Iraq War is a war to liberate the oppressed people living without freedom under a totalitarian regime: this is how the U.S. has justified the war. Using the words of Christianity and the Bible, the U.S. has expressed the Enlightenment ideal of “liberty, equality, the pursuit of happiness” as stated in the Declaration of Independence. From this point of view, the war in Iraq is a “just war,” and with 90% of the U.S. population believing in the God of the Bible, it might be regarded also as a “holy war.”

The upsurge of sentiment after the events of 9/11 seems to be declining as the years pass by. On the 9/11 memorial days in 2003 and 2004, the people’s sentiment seemed to be divided, which was also beyond my expectation. Here I saw the rise of the other anxiety, one of the two-fold anxieties I mentioned. It is anxiety and doubt about the “American Cause.” The May 2004 incident of abusing Iraqi prisoners at the Abu Ghraib detention facility had a great impact, shaking the “American Cause” for the Iraq War. As for this war, a situation similar to the “Vietnam War syndrome” seems now to arise.

Under the gloom of this time of suffering, liberal Christian groups in the U.S. keep quiet and do not dare to speak out. On the 9/11 memorial days in 2003 and 2004, I attended the services of the Glide Memorial United Methodist Church in San Francisco. This church has been well known internationally as a church that expresses straightforwardly the realities of injustice and repression in the world through various visual media. However, the first Sunday services after the 9/11 Memorial Day in 2003 and 2004 did not refer at all to the 9/11 incident or the subsequent American military actions, which surprised me. In the sermons, the preacher criticized domestic racial and sexual discrimination, but not the political strategy of American globalization.¹³⁾

11. What lessons does America learn from the Iraq War?

It is probable that public opinion will become unable to tolerate the increasing numbers of fallen soldiers and enormous financial burden of war, and that the U.S. will gradually have to withdraw from Iraq. When such a time comes, what will the U.S. have learned from involvement in the war? Before asking this question, what did the U.S. learn from the Vietnam War? When I watched the scene of the American people in victory fever over the Gulf War in 1991, I could not but ask what the U.S. had learned from the Vietnam War. So I ask the same question now about the Iraq War. Unless the U.S. seriously tries to learn, the country will make the same mistake again in the future, the mistake of “idolizing” America as a nation, the mistake of making the nation into a god.

In the American Civil Religion as a form of religiosity, there exists “Fundamental” civil religion and “transcendental” civil religion. If we study the history of American Civil Religion from the time of the nation’s founding, Fundamental civil religion has been overwhelmingly stronger than its transcendental counterpart. However, the distinctive characteristic of American Civil Religion is that the transcendental form has never disappeared, even in periods when Fundamental civil religion was dominant.

Presently the U.S. is in the grip of the two-fold anxieties, but has so far hardly heard the call to grasp its relation to the transcendental God. Nor has a charismatic figure like Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. appeared to advocate “transcendental” American Civil Religion. In order to overcome the “Fundamental” American Civil Religion represented by President Bush, it is important to recognize this other, transcendental tradition, and to speak out and initiate actions from there.

Would it be right for the U.S. to keep standing in the world as “the sole superpower” with its great military might? If God is the only transcendental and absolute, the human world is relative. If I dare not to be afraid of causing misunderstanding, I will say that in the relative world it might sometimes be necessary to practice evil. The important issue regarding the Fundamental American Civil Religion represented by President Bush is that the present course of U.S. anti-terrorist diplomacy has been justified as the “cause,” but not as an “evil but inevitable choice.”

President Bush and Abraham Lincoln have the common distinction of being U.S. presidents during wartime. Lincoln, in his address to the New Jersey State Senate on Feb. 21, 1861, referred to the people of America as “his almost chosen people.”¹⁴ Lincoln meant “his” as God’s. Both President Bush and President Lincoln chose to take military action. In this respect, there is no difference between them. However, the word “almost” used by Lincoln has significant meaning when compared with the statements made by President Bush. Lincoln’s statement reveals a posture of self-criticism and an attitude of respect for otherness as well.

The U.S. military strategy supported by the “Bush Doctrine” after 9/11 is a war that has

made the homeland a battlefield. It is a strategy led by the anxieties and fears of a possible second or third 9/11. The source of the anxieties and fears is the attack on and the collapse of the World Trade Center buildings, watched on TV by all Americans that day, September 11, 2001. It seems that the U.S. absolutizes this experience, and understands that anything can be justified in the light of this reality.

If we turn our eyes to the Middle East or Africa, we have to admit that there have been a number of more distressing realities like genocides, events more disastrous than 9/11. The existence of many 9/11s in the world, however, has hardly been recognized in the U.S. or other parts of the world. The reason for this is the "North-South Information Gap," which is said to be one of the causes for terrorism. It is also very critical to overcome this "North-South Information Gap."

The U.S. should now look deeply and thoroughly into the details of the 9/11s suffered by peoples in regions outside the United States. Furthermore, America needs to recognize that it has forgotten the fundamental human rights and the dignity "endowed by their Creator" expressed in the Declaration of Independence. This is the starting point for the U.S. to overcome the Fundamentalism of the American Civil Religion. I hope for and would truly like to see this recognition.

NOTES

- 1) This research paper is a study which reviews and adds to my paper entitled, "America no Miezarukokkyo Saiko ("Reexamination of 'American Civil Religion,'" in: *America Kenkyu (Journal of American Studies)*, [Journal of Japanese Society of American Studies], vol.38, 2004.
- 2) Stephen Mansfield, *The Faith of George W. Bush*, Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2003.
- 3) The question is "Do you recognize yourself as a member of the Religious Right movement?"
- 4) <http://www.gallup.com/poll/topics/religions4.asp>
- 5) *Foresight*, March Issue 2002, p.43.
- 6) See Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-traditional World*, Harper & Row, 1970, pp. 168-189.
- 7) See Koichi Mori, *Shukyou kara Yomu America ("America" Viewing from Religion)*, Kodansha, 1996.
- 8) *The Asahi Shimbun*, July 3, 2002.
- 9) See Clinton, William J., "Memorandum on Religious Expression in Public Schools," *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, Vol.31, No.28 (July 17), 1995, pp. 1229-1230
- 10) *International Herald Tribune*, November 5, 2004.
- 11) *PRRC Emerging Trends*, September, 1995; According to the public poll presented in September, 2003, by *U.S.A. Today*, CNN, and Gallop Poll, 78% of the people supported the idea "to pray non-denominational prayer" in public schools. See *The CQ Researcher*, July 30, 2004, p. 641.
- 12) "Interview with President McKinley," *The Christian Advocate* LXXVIII, January 22, 1903.

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See John Edwin Smylie, "Protestant Clergymen and America's World Role, 1865-1900: A Study of Christianity, Nationality, and International Relations," Th. D. Dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1959, p. 506.

- 13) Ms. Janice Mirikitani, the wife of former head Pastor Cecil Williams and one of the leaders of the Glide Memorial Church, stated in my interview with her at the church on September 12, 2004 that political criticism may be beclouded because the Church receives grant funds through the Faith-based Initiative and the Citizen Service Act.
- 14) President-elect Abraham Lincoln spoke in Trenton, NJ at the State Senate on February 21, 1861, on his inaugural journey to Washington, D.C.