

Nikola Samardžić
Associate Professor
Department of History, Scholl of Philosophy
Belgrade, Serbia

UDK: 2-67(73)
316.74:2(73)
Originalni naučni rad
Priljeno: 22.05.06.

IS THERE AN AMERICAN CREED? MASTERY IN TOLERANCE

*And we Americans are the peculiar,
chosen people – the Israel of our time;
we bear the ark of liberties of the world
(Herman Melville).*

Summary

Theocratic convictions in absolute rightness, occasionally even serene religious sentiments, located in front of concrete political and economic interests, still animate ethnic disputes and international conflicts. Contemporary southeastern European mess of independent states and those under international custody has emerged from a historical sequence of skirmishes within an extensive chauvinistic framework. On traditional boundaries of three dominant denominations (Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy and Islam), modern collective identities have been designated by convictions in particularity and purity of ethnic provenience, sustained by sharp religious assignment, not always meaning a deep and sincere devotion. Especially the entities scarcely differentiated by language and genealogical descent have equalized their ethnic and religious appropriation. Even under custody of modern powers, rudimentary and troublous ethnic communities remained too remote from currents of modernity. In such terms, the second, possibly definite disintegration of Yugoslavia has sometimes been considered as a failure of initial project, conceived by the same victorious allies in two world wars together with the USA, of a multicultural, presumably democratic experiment. Experiment that hasn't succeeded, during the collapse of the eastern communist confederation, to carry out a democratic and liberal transition, the union perished in its internal, purposeless disputes, in another butchery of civil, ethnic and religious war.

Although religious communities are historically associated with non-democratic and anti-liberal forces, in most of the contemporary civilized societies the need for a separation of the church and the state has been accomplished almost entirely. (In Northern Ireland, along with the poverty, only in the last two decades religious troubles caused a violent death of more than two thousand persons.) While in Europe, and elsewhere, dominate the churches, in the USA the religious life is mostly contained by the sects. The churches, in structure, are hierarchical, founded on traditional authority. Sects are predominantly congregational. In Europe, religious orientation is mostly ancestry, inherited, and derived from the family. In the USA that must not be a case, since individuals are asked to make a religious commitment only upon reaching the age of decision. In Europe, churches are historically linked to the state. American Protestant sectarianism has strengthened social, economic and political individualism. Generally, American sects are running an optimistic view on human nature,

while traditionalist societies both human nature and human institutions consider weak, corrupt and immoral. American religion "demonstrates many of the characteristics that theorists have identified with modern culture." In Europe, the efforts to introduce a church into the deepest structures of contemporary life usually fail, and sometimes appear grotesque.

Europe and the USA also differ in the patterns of individual and collective identities. European culture has risen mostly from ethnic and regional communities (these regional structures have been partly translated in USA, especially in the early colonial period). Max Weber already emphasized that the USA was the only purely bourgeois country, the only which was not post-feudal, that skipped the predominance of church establishment and aristocracy. He stated that the Protestantism facilitated the rise of capitalism, while the liberal orientation derived from its specific religious tradition in the sense that the sectarian beliefs appeared as the most conducive to the kind of rational, competitive, individualistic behavior. In impossibility, each of them, to assign its predominance, the most of the American sects evolved as congregational, not hierarchical communities, fostering egalitarian, populist, anti-elitist values. While in much of Europe liberal politics came to be associated with direct opposition to the clergy and the Christianity, and the secularization of the state even got definite anti-Christian implications, in America took place a gradual and largely peaceful differentiation of religious and secular domains.

Key words: *religious community, science and religion, church and state, America*

The one who believes in science and scientific progress should deal carefully with religious and mystical events. Science is objective, logical, systematic and coherent method of rational and empirical collecting, describing, classification, explanation, control and valuation of very concrete secrets and problems. Religion stays as a supposed believing in absolute and prestige power, as well as in cognitive, emotional and mystical experience, that the man is dependable of, controlling his life and death. Religion may be a specific kind of life, materialized in rituals, expressed in symbols and reflected in its highest values. Religion is a kind of "symbol system which evokes a sense of ultimate, transcendent, encompassing meaning".⁵⁴ Among the matter they share, science and religion both attract attention and concern in ways they tend to affect social and public life, even international relations. There is constant fear focused on use and abuse of nuclear energy, ecological and biological contamination, genetic engineering, regardless the truth that, except when misused, the scientific progress has expanded human knowledge and raised the conditions of survival.

In those terms, science appears as a kind of an opened and impersonalized topic. Discussing the religious matters could be sensible, touchy, or even offensive. The very recent history has revealed the persistence of religious beliefs that, in service of

⁵⁴ Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion. Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton UP, 1988), p. 302.

a divine right, justify the use of human extermination. Not by chance, as the violence is a specific, immanent attribute of human behavior, the religious feelings are so as well, including internal impulses of self-destruction.

Scientific knowledge hasn't succeeded to overpower the religious or superstitious beliefs as no valid and no testified. The highest percents of active believers are found in most developed societies, with highest achievements in domain of individual freedom and human rights, where a separation of the church, or any denomination, and the state has been completed. Therefore, the scientific doubt in religious thinking may not be decisive in religious derogation. Religious communities are persistent and adaptable. So it is a religious practice. Contemporary life doesn't allow too much dedication to mess or a pray, however, attending the service has never been an enough proof of religious devotion. As well there are true believers that still do not, or rarely, go to church. Today's civic religion allows a withdrawal into the private life, and introducing of scientific knowledge into religious dogmatic systems (meaning, mostly, the modern social sciences), involving the urban glowing troubles into a field of interest of organized religious groups (alienation, crime, drugs), and, finally, a wide openness in terms of social behavior or sexual preferences. Furthermore, there are appearances of personal religiosity, when the choice isn't restricted to the affiliation to a denomination. Religious learning is usually very complex, incomprehensive, even inconsistent, and on that point individualism traditionally endangers ecclesiastical discipline and uniformity.

Both science and religion search for a universal truth. But the certainty of ideas, or believing, is not a sufficient condition of their acceptance, and reverse, wrong ideas and believing have never been obstacles for being accepted, pursued and lived. Even when the religious statements are wrong, in terms of scientific perception, they are not meaningless and absurd. Spreading any idea or belief doesn't, but itself, proves its veracity. Believing is something else, or something more than a pure mistake in process of thinking. Abstract reasoning, unfounded in scientifically proven facts, and logically incorrect is not meaningless or absurd. Human perspective must not be considered as an endlessly contemplative and analytic system. It would also be wrong to reduce a difference between scientific and theological statements to a distinction between significance and absurdness. Even scientifically improbable theological statements have their profound or hidden meaning. Science hasn't proved if there is a God, if there is a life, in any form, after death, but, neither is absolutely doubtless that these beliefs are definitely false. And that's the point where, offering answer to every question, the inexhaustible machinery of deception and illusion outshines scientific thought and perception of reality. The scientific analysis is alien and incomprehensible for the majority of mankind, poor, desperate and illiterate. Science can hardly offer any precept of soul redemption or universal moral conduct. Religious beliefs, however, tend to offer effective ways of pacification, happiness or salvation. The imperishable strength of religious beliefs is supporting piercing systems of illusion in the eternal search of

mystical secrets of life. Beyond the scientific scope, human beings feel those appearances that the reason can hardly understand and explain.

Science and religion, finally, conceive the basic values of life and death from different attitudes. Religious believing meet one among the strongest human obsessions, aim for immortality. The material, terrestrial life, is just a temporary station on a soul journey conceived by a supreme reason and divine will. Until now, science has revealed nothing more than a perceivable substance of life based on a concrete material shape and measurable body energies. Treating the phenomenon of life, religious thinking is seeking for a sublime, majestic reason of the human presence, in its relationship with the Supreme Being. Science hasn't found any other reason of human existence, as the existence by itself, as an outcome of the organic nature's history. Religious systems have extended life up to eternity. Science has prolonged human life but only for a decade or two, or three, if it matters. Theology has considered human material existence exclusively in respect to the divine cause. Science hasn't offered other reference, than the one that the human life is irreversible, restricted to the flesh and blood, therefore unique or, theologically said, sacred. Theology predicates living and dying in service of God or supreme reason. Science, as well, is proving premature, violent perishing, but only in particular cases: when the science itself is a reason to die for, when there is a need for condolence homicide, euthanasia, and when certain legislation castigates brutal crimes by the penalty of death. For euthanasia, the medicine is still hesitating to offer a universal and definite solution. In jurisprudence, deliberate and utilitarian penalties and executions have subsisted owing to varieties of conjunctures and motives. There are explanations, acceptable or not, that a state disposes with a reason and right to extinguish those for whom the penalty of prison could be, seeming, too moderate, and their staying in custody should still endanger the others safety and life. Leaving aside the abolitionist dispute, the real problem begins when the penalty of death arises from purely theocratic conviction in any kind of a sublime, divine reason that may request frying someone on an electric chair, or just cutting his head off. And those sentences are, as well, pronounced in the name of a supreme but metaphysical authority that is quite indefinite, the God, the Law, the Justice, or the People. Here, it seems that the firmness of an apportionment between a legal symbolism and the substantial avocation in a supreme cause depends of the level of separation between the juridical and executive power. However, there might stay a doubt, if pronouncing the God's name is just one of these spots where the theocratic convictions subsist as superfluous ingredients of the state affairs. Not mentioning that there is any imperishable testimony that the death penalty reduces crime rates and upraises the juridical prestige.

Religious feelings are among most ineradicable ones. Human believing in a supreme reason hasn't extinguished even in atheist, ostensibly secular regimes, where the substantially religious belief in a party leadership is forcedly imposed to the whole of the society. Political power unrestricted by democratic institutions, rude and alienated, involves a demonic sensation of a majestic, magical mightiness.

Mastery is worst among the vices. Such power converts the individual wishes to a divine law of sublimated evil. Events like mass executions in China show any essential difference in respect of the very life and death. There is always an indisputable, sacred purpose, for sadistic legislation, executive brutality and pseudo juridical rampage.

Theocratic convictions in absolute rightness, occasionally even serene religious sentiments, located in front of concrete political and economic interests, still animate ethnic disputes and international conflicts. Contemporary southeastern European mess of independent states and those under international custody has emerged from a historical sequence of skirmishes within an extensive chauvinistic framework. On traditional boundaries of three dominant denominations (Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy and Islam), modern collective identities have been designated by convictions in particularity and purity of ethnic provenience, sustained by sharp religious assignment, not always meaning a deep and sincere devotion. Especially the entities scarcely differentiated by language and genealogical descent have equalized their ethnic and religious appropriation. Even under custody of modern powers, rudimentary and troublous ethnic communities remained too remote from currents of modernity. In such terms, the second, possibly definite disintegration of Yugoslavia has sometimes been considered as a failure of initial project, conceived by the same victorious allies in two world wars together with the USA, of a multicultural, presumably democratic experiment. Experiment that hasn't succeeded, during the collapse of the eastern communist confederation, to carry out a democratic and liberal transition, the union perished in its internal, purposeless disputes, in another butchery of civil, ethnic and religious war.

Taking their part in the conflicts, churches and religious communities have also followed some of interests of their outside advocates, proceeding from a weird association of the communist lobby and the official church in Russia, the German political and economic outspread, derived after the state union and a leadership in European Union, the Islamic states concern about the post-soviet rearrangements in Europe and the Near East; and a close and persistent activity of Vatican and the Catholic Church. Too much for a narrow space already fulfilled with an impatient intolerance.

Although religious communities are historically associated with non-democratic and anti-liberal forces, in most of the contemporary civilized societies the need for a separation of the church and the state has been accomplished almost entirely. (In Northern Ireland, along with the poverty, only in the last two decades religious troubles caused a violent death of more than two thousand persons.) While in Europe, and elsewhere, dominate the churches, in the USA the religious life is mostly contained by the sects. The churches, in structure, are hierarchical, founded on traditional authority. Sects are predominantly congregational. In Europe, religious orientation is mostly ancestry, inherited, and derived from the family. In the USA that must not be a case, since individuals are asked to make a religious commitment only upon reaching the age of decision. In Europe, churches are

historically linked to the state. American Protestant sectarianism has strengthened social, economic and political individualism. Generally, American sects are running an optimistic view on human nature, while traditionalist societies both human nature and human institutions consider weak, corrupt and immoral. American religion "demonstrates many of the characteristics that theorists have identified with modern culture."⁵⁵ In Europe, the efforts to introduce a church into the deepest structures of contemporary life usually fail, and sometimes appear grotesque.

Europe and the USA also differ in the patterns of individual and collective identities. European culture has risen mostly from ethnic and regional communities (these regional structures have been partly translated in USA, especially in the early colonial period).⁵⁶ Max Weber already emphasized that the USA was the only purely bourgeois country, the only which was not post-feudal, that skipped the predominance of church establishment and aristocracy. He stated that the Protestantism facilitated the rise of capitalism, while the liberal orientation derived from its specific religious tradition in the sense that the sectarian beliefs appeared as the most conducive to the kind of rational, competitive, individualistic behavior. In impossibility, each of them, to assign its predominance, the most of the American sects evolved as congregational, not hierarchical communities, fostering egalitarian, populist, anti-elitist values. While in much of Europe "liberal politics came to be associated with direct opposition to the clergy and the Christianity", and the secularization of the state even got definite anti-Christian implications, in America took place "a gradual and largely peaceful differentiation of religious and secular domains."⁵⁷

American writers generally claim that the USA is essentially more egalitarian even than the most emancipated European society. A new settler federation of diverse communities that emphasized equality in formulating its national identity, egalitarian social relations, the stress on meritocracy and even opportunity for all to rise economically and socially, the American system has been raised long before the liberal concept emerged in the romantic period of European history.⁵⁸ Therefore the European meaning of liberalism by Americans is perceived as conservatism. History of American evangelism is further more than a chronicle of a religious movement. That history is offering an explaining of the new American spirit of civic life. During the conquering of the West, the evangelistic role consisted not only in conversion of individuals, but as well in inspiring the communities to raise common institutions, or transform those available. Possibly unconsciously, opening the

⁵⁵ Wuthnow, pp. 304-305.

⁵⁶ Celia Applegate, A Europe of Regions: Reflections on the Historiography of Sub-National Places in Modern Times, *American Historical Review*, 1044 (1999), pp. 1157-1182.

⁵⁷ George M. Marsden, *Religion and American Culture* (Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1990), p. 104.

⁵⁸ Seymour Martin Lipset, Affirmative Action and the American Creed, *Wilson Quarterly* (Winter 1992), pp. 53-55

average, illiterate man towards the divine grace, the preachers used to prepare him in becoming a citizen. The lack of predominant denomination could have been a prosperous occasion in forming a secular state, uninfluenced from any of the religious communities. Distrustful of centralized authority, the Americans relied on a separation and division of authorities in the political life, as they insisted on a distribution of ecclesiastical power in the religious sphere.

Americans also shared a passion for individual liberty. The phenomenon of "voluntary religion" impressed most nineteenth-century observers. Today Americans are the most churchgoing in Protestantism and the most fundamentalist in Christendom. However, they don't receive their values and images of themselves, of their social world, from the churches and the clergy; they are getting them mostly from the media culture in which they live. (Therefore, together with the movies or radio and TV broadcasting, the American values are spread all over the world.) Especially movies throw back "a popular consensus that traditional religion is deeply untrustworthy", while the media often consider all forms of religious loyalty as actually or potentially dangerous to the freedoms of the public sphere, mostly, due to their character, focusing on fundamentalist forms.⁵⁹ Nevertheless even 94 percents of Americans are expressing faith in God, 86% believe in Heaven, 43% attend church services weekly; 69% stated that they believe that the Devil exists. Americans place a higher importance on the role of religion in their lives, close to fourth fifths stated that the religion is very important in their lives (less than 50% of Europeans). "Eight of every nine persons say they feel that God loves them; 80 percent they feel close to God; and, negatively, only 16 percent say they have ever felt afraid of God."⁶⁰

Emergence of growing religious feelings may be a signal of some kind of crisis. American society is huge and fulfilled with discrepancy. Among the civilized nations, the USA figure with the highest crime rate, and relatively most imprisoned persons. Traditional family shape is seriously endangered, as the proportion of single-mother families is growing. Low electoral turnout is indicating a decrease in democratic decision-making. In global perspective, the only superpower left, the USA is one of the most feared of and hatred nations and states. Overshadowed by occasionally aggressive foreign policy, the basic American civic values as well as liberal tenets and the very idea of democracy are disputed, both by serious analysts and political extremists of every breed, dictators, fundamentalists or sick gurus. On the other side, the flow of immigrants, of all nations, races and religious beliefs, desiring nothing but a decent job, higher standard of living, personal dignity, even new identity, erodes the myth about the Evil Empire.

The history has shown, up to now, that empires emerge in their ideological, genealogical and religious conjuncture. But is there an American creed? The road to

⁵⁹ Margaret R. Miles, *Seeing and believing. Religion and Values in the Movies* (Beacon Press, Boston, 1996), p. 12.

⁶⁰ Wuthnow, p. 305.

an answer would be similar as the attempt to define the American nation, even harder to find. The USA are not "a nation-state like France or Poland or China or even Brazil, but a multinational federation, like Canada and Switzerland and the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia." The American nation is not homogenous, it's divided in subcultures which, some of them, more or less correspond with race, as the European nations bear their regional varieties.⁶¹ The most of the Americans believe in something, and the only content of such feeling is not limited to their pure religious appropriations. They believe in the value system based on personal will and capabilities, on expectations of protecting individual, as codified in Bill of Rights, the Constitution and the subsequent laws. In such content should be included the Affirmative Action as an emergent derogation from the basic principles of absolute egalitarianism in behalf of "genuine equality of opportunity".⁶² A historical debate over the Constitution's relation to democracy originates from two major, opposite but righteous presumptions. One, that the document was a fulfillment of the Revolution, providing a republican and popular government, and the other, rather grounded on the yonder historical juncture, that it was an "aristocratic document calculated to crate an undemocratic government benefiting the few at the expense of the many".⁶³ It really seems that, from its beginnings, American history in building a liberal society started from a convivial and economic inequality which enabled a negligible number of individuals and families to appropriate the most of national goods. Therefore, a democratic counterbalance had to be translated into political life. The critics of American system of government and social relations sometimes indicate that the process of equation of personal wealth and political influence used to be incomplete.

The answer to the question related to existence of an American creed, leaving aside the formal meaning of the First Amendment, would stay definitely negative as long as the term determinates an organized substantial denomination. In context of the American melting potting assimilationist kitchen, that a life in an endless diversity makes bearable, religious identity stays as an inviolable label of anyone's specific individuality. Besides, there is still a serious dispute about the American practice in intruding the official language. An assimilationist opinion is that Americans "enjoy the best of all cultural worlds", as "America's English traditions have given them their language and their freedoms".⁶⁴ Relatively opposite, multiculturalists view, indicates that "proclaiming English as a unique language of United States prove a needless fear and arrogance".⁶⁵ If it's incontestable that "the secular appeal of the work ethic for Americans can be traced to its powerful

⁶¹ Michael Lind, Are we a Nation? An Argument for "Trans-America", *Dissent Magazine* (Summer 1995) p. 355-357.

⁶² Lipset, p. 57.

⁶³ Gordon S. Wood, Democracy and the Constitution, in Robert A. Goldwin and William Schambra, eds., *How Democratic is the Constitution?* pp. 1-3.

⁶⁴ Peter D. Salins, *Assimilation, American Style* (Basic Books, New York, 1997), p. 99.

⁶⁵ Carlos Fuentes, Los Estados Unidos por dos lenguas *El País* (18. de junio de 1998), pp. 13-14.

religious endorsement",⁶⁶ and that could be valid, likewise, in several European cases, examples of rigid Puritan morality which determinates a behavior in everyday public life may seem, from an easier perspective of individual's rights in behavior and preference, quite backward, even weird. Otherwise sectarian calls on moralistic life can hardly be found in societies whose predominant denominations have evolved from state churches. As the traditional forms of European individuality, including national, regional identities or dialect varieties seem sectarian and archaic, however they are maintaining capable in offering the answers to a possible church malpractice or false morality pollution. After centuries of religious wars and struggles between the churches and the states, Europe has remained exhausted and reserved.

Especially in last few decades, the USA is becoming more and more multicultural and multiracial. Even the traditional race classification tends disappearing. As the world lives, more and more, in American style of life, the US reflects its endless internal diversity. There is a spectacular growth of Hispanic and Asiatic descent citizens. In last ten years only, percent of the whites has declined from 75.7 at 71.6 percents; from 188.3 it grew only to 196.1 million. About ten percents of citizens are born abroad, and the immigration is no more preponderantly European.⁶⁷ However, facing religious topics, Americans appear unexpectedly coherent in opinions and attitudes. Americans are some kind of utopian moralists. Most of them believe that the God is a supreme moral authority of American democracy. The predominant vision of thing as, mostly, the struggle between the Good and the Evil, between God and Devil, tend to use, as the same simplifying pattern, serious political propagandists, even analysts, explaining severe and composite problems, arising from all over the world. In the 1990 World Values Survey most of the Americans responded that there "absolute guidelines" amount what is good and evil. Discussing the place that free thinking educated individuals have acquired in the Western public life, Agnes Heller (Hannah Arendt) once stated that intellectuals in France enjoy a significant function, in Great Britain already not as much, but that in the US there is almost no intellectuals. Still, whether it's correct or not, what it really matters, in the whole of the problem, is the American foreign policy in perspective of the theocratic background of its moral absolutism. The black/white curriculum is somewhat incomprehensible for the rest of the democratic world. Especially in a situation where, for example, the old, respectable European countries have to, each for itself, to renounce a significant part of its sovereignty in the foreign affairs in behalf of the EU, and the EU itself as well in name of the close relationship with the USA.

Moreover, the Americans are inclined to support the elimination of "evil" by illegal and even violent means if necessary. The both sides in the Civil War used to

⁶⁶ Salins, p. 126.

⁶⁷ Javier Valenzuela, *Imparable 'poder' latino en EE UU El País (19. de septiembre de 1999)*, p. 35.

see the other essentially sinful, as the advocate of the Devil. In the very recent history, the moralist principles have been expressed both in anti-war and pro-war activities. While a large numbers of Americans refused to support the World War I, or Korean and Vietnam wars, the other part claimed the resistance towards colonial powers led by Germany, or totalitarian, Nazi, fascist or communist expansionism. There has always been an eminent and hardly comprehensive reason while supporting various dictators (Latin America or Indonesia), instead of forces that seemed democratic, or Moslem fundamentalists in opposition to more secular forces.

Foreign conflicts invariably involve a battle of the good and the bad. In the USA the advancement in course of political maturity and cultural assimilationism has also been fulfilled with theocratic convictions that the "God has marked the American people as His chosen nation", above "savage and senile peoples", and that "He has to finally lead in the redemption of the world."⁶⁸ While the rest of the mankind is sometimes declined to consider the States just as the Evil Empire, the Americans, setting their moral goals, democracy above everything, have fought against more kinds of evil empires as well, for "if we fight the evil empire, if we fight Satan then he must not be allowed to survive"...The United States does not ally itself with Satan."⁶⁹ Still, there is a plenty of cases when the painful compromises have been emergent. One of the atrocious consequences of the Allies victory in the World War II has been the creation of the communist block in Eastern Europe, led by the USSR. (By the number of its victims, communism has been the most murderous ideology ever.) The other that proceeded from the communist threat was a revival of fascist regimes in Latin America. The custom of isolating the unbearable regimes, together with the whole of submitted societies, has contributed to their subsistence, even a kind of a bizarre moral prestige. Castro has been fed by American disregard. On the other side, the fascist regime in Spain was peacefully beaten, after Franco passed away, and democratic transition completed in just a few years, just because the Spain, despite its authoritarian, even theocratic political system, took part in Euro-Atlantic process of economic and defense integration. Dealing with USSR and its commonwealth, and with China, North Korea, Cuba and Vietnam, the USA has maintained a strict, rigid attitude, expecting the enemy's unconditional surrender. While the states traditionally more related to their dominant churches, after being separated from them definitely, like Great Britain, France, or even Canada, have been taking a more realistic and dispensable attitude, with more perceptible results, as the Devil is not black as he's supposed to be.

It also seems that during the foreign affairs crises Americans have been loosing a faith in their ability to solve the world's problems.⁷⁰ The nineties brought a fresh

⁶⁸ Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant. American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (The University of Chicago Press, 1992, 2nd Ed), p. 38.

⁶⁹ S. M. Lipset, *American Exceptionalism. A Double-Edged Sword* (W. W. Norton & Company, New York & London, 1997), p. 65.

⁷⁰ Wuthnow, p. 270.

enthusiasm. Moreover, the renovated attitude, especially towards the Islamic countries, has become much more complex, and less reliable to the moralistic patterns. When the president of Iraq Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, the US and their allies reacted with the Gulf War, in 1991. The conflict really exceeded its local significance, which could be supported by the facts that the Kuwait was a historical part of Iraq, from thousands years and pre-Arab period. Iraq, even, used to be one of the most secular states in the Islamic world; the real problem is, that his chief manager is a little bit more dangerous and crazy than the other Ayatollahs in these parts of the world are (George Bush has frequently described Hussein as another Hitler, the incarnation of the absolute evil). But Kuwait is any kind of democratic state and opened free society, not a brutal dictatorship as Iraq, but surely one of the dark cavities ran by a dynastic tyranny and Islamic laws. Likewise is the close USA ally, the Saudi Arabia, where those relicts of traditional brutality are applied in purpose of low class human, especially female terror and humiliation. (If someone steals, they cut his hand, if he does something else, they cut some other extremity, including the head; in the early years of their, mostly miserable, life, girls are castrated, because women are not supposed to feel any sexual pleasure.) And that's all quite known. On the other side, in atheist ruled China the senile authorities execute every year at least a few thousands of persons, however any kind of foreign resentment is repressed mainly by very concrete trade interests.

"Moralistic and movement politics have remained important in the last decades of the twentieth century. Both conservatives and liberals see their domestic opponents as advocates of immoral policies".⁷¹ In other terms, there is a sort of krypto-religios war within the American society, whose more perceptible consequences derive in the foreign policy. Hence, considering the USA, the first world power in scientific and economy growth, as deeply religious society must not be an extravagance, and not too difficult to explain. To be underlined, there is any significance in the fact that Americans have reached the Moon (if they really did), and, nevertheless, no one has seen God, or Devil, and nothing strange has been discovered. Although the religious statements are scientifically unproved, and probably untrue, people believe in them, and (even) the Americans are human, as well.

The Protestant learning "offered Americans a collective task and a sustaining hope". The tenets of the Protestant ideology were simple and comprehensive. "Aiming at nothing less than the redemption of mankind, it held that God had assigned America the leading role in the enterprise." A whole American history and destiny assumed a sacred character, a sense of divine mission. The Calvinists looked forward to the New Order. Those who immigrated to America identified themselves as a people especially chosen, as the Scripture promised an ultimate reign of holiness, peace and happiness. The American Republic has been seen as the Kingdom of God. And the Protestant doctrine "attached itself to American

⁷¹ Lipset, *American Exceptionalism*, p. 67.

nationalism." That ideology was supranational. "It subordinated all political structures and all territorial communities to the will of God."⁷²

Is there any American creed? There is, finally, a sort of common believing in an abstract, metaphysical deity, as the one-dollar banknote reminds, but not at all any structured theological edifice, in any aspect of the known, traditionalist configurations. In those terms, however, the history of separation of the church and the state seems like a never ending story about a vacant reliance in holiness of power, or theocratic convictions in absolute rightness when dominating and disposing with overall destiny. Samuel Huntington has noted that Americans give to their nation and its creed "many of the attributes and functions of church" which are reflected, as Robert N. Bellah stated, in American "civic religion" which has provided "a religious dimension for the whole fabric of American life, including the political sphere." If anything else, the state sheltered behind a divine cause lives as long as its citizens remain willing to perish for its sake. Conjointly, as a partnership in death, they remain on their road to Hell.

Bibliography

- Celia Applegate, A Europe of Regions: Reflections on the Historiography of Sub-National Places in Modern Times, *American Historical Review*, 1044 (1999), pp. 1157-1182.
- Jon Butler, Grant Wacker, Randall Balmer, *Religion in American Life. A Short History* (Oxford University Press, 2003)
- Diana L. Eck, *A New Religious America. How a «Christian Country» has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (Harper San Francisco, 2002).
- Carlos Fuentes, Los Estados Unidos por dos lenguas *El País* (18. de junio de 1998), pp. 13-14.
- John Higham, Hanging Together: Divergent Unities in American History, *The Journal of American History*, LXI (1974), 5-29.
- Michael Lind, Are we a Nation? An Argument for «Trans-America», *Dissent Magazine* (Summer 1995), 355-362.
- Seymour Martin Lipset, Affirmative Action and the American Creed, *Wilson Quarterly* (Winter 1992), 50-65.
- Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism. A Double-Edged Sword* (W. W. Norton & Company, New York & London, 1997)
- George M. Marsden, *Religion and American Culture* (Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1990).

⁷² John Higham, Hanging Together: Divergent Unities in American History, *The Journal of American History*, LXI (1974), pp. 13-15.

- Margaret R. Miles, *Seeing and believing. Religion and Values in the Movies* (Beacon Press, Boston, 1996)
- Peter D. Salins, *Assimilation, American Style* (Basic Books, New York, 1997)
- The Shaping of American Religion*. Volume I, Religion in American Life, eds. James Ward Smith and A. Leland Jamison (Princeton University Press, 1961)
- Javier Valenzuela, 'Imparable 'poder' latino en EE UU *El País* (19. de septiembre de 1999), p. 35.
- Gordon S. Wood, Democracy and the Constitution, in Robert A. Goldwin and William Schambra, eds., *How Democratic is the Constitution?*
- Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion. Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton UP, 1988)

Nikola Samardžić
 Filozofski fakultet, Beograd

Rezime

Da li postoji američka veroispovest, ili umeće tolerancije

Sekularizam američkog društva i duboka, bogato razučena i strukturirana, ali iskrena religioznost Amerikanaca, uporedne su pojave samo naizgled protivrečne. Štaviše, naučno znanje nije uspeo da prevlada i obesmisli religiozna ili praznoverna uverenja, kao bezvredna ili neproverena, nepotvrđena. Ukoliko su SAD zaista imale pionirsku ulogu u izgradnji otvorenog, demokratskog i sekularnog društva, postavljenog na osnovama racionalizma, prosvetiteljstva i prvenstva nauke i neposrednog, empirijskog iskustva, američko društvo je, u takvom kontekstu, podsticalo individualnu religioznost i sektarijanizam koji je, u američkom slučaju, ukazivao na značajno razmicanje granica sloboda savesti. U američkom slučaju, drugim rečima, naučna sumnja u religiozno verovanje nije bila činilac njegovog osporavanja. Građanska religioznost, koja se emancipovala i razvila upravo u američkom društvu, dopušta povlačenje u privatnost, usklađivanje određenih naučnih znanja u verske dogmatske sisteme (pre svega savremene društvene nauke), i prilagođavanje oblicima, iskušenjima i nedaćama urbanog života, naročito u angažovanju organizovanih verskih grupa i njihovim suočavanjem sa otuđenjem i kriminalom. Građanska religioznost je takođe vremenom postajala trpeljiva i otvorena u domenu društvenog ponašanja ili seksualnih opredeljenja.

Verska osećanja spadaju u najdublja i najteže ih je potisnuti. Ako verovanje u vrhovni razlog nije uništeno u sekularnim društvima, u ateističkim totalitarnim režimima je jedno takođe suštinski religiozno verovanje u istorijsku nuždu i partijsko rukovodstvo nasilno nametnuto celini društva. Politička moć neograničena demokratskim institucijama, gruba i otuđena, obuhvata i demonsko osećanje uzvišene i magične svetosti. Gospodarenje, apsolutna vlast, spada u najgore poroke. Politička moć pretvara individualne želje u božanski zakon sublimisanog zla. Totalitarni režimi, smišljeno, planski ili spontano, uništavajući ljudske živote, otkrivaju suštinsko nepoštovanje života i smrti, ne pominjući osnovna ljudska prava. Sadističko zakonodavstvo, izvršna brutalnost i pseudopravna obest, tu uvek postoji i jedna nesporna, gotovo religiozna svrha.

Teokratska uverenja apsolutnu ispravnost, ponekad ispunjena iskrenim religioznim osećanjima, smeštena u sistem konkretnih političkih i ekonomskih interesa, pokreću etničke obračune i međunarodne sukobe. Etnički šovinizmi proistekli su iz utilitarnog i uobraženog tumačenja prošlosti i uloge u opštoj istoriji, i teoloških uverenja u sopstvenu transcendentnu kolektivnu ispravnost. Upravo su na evropskom jugoistoku, na tradicionalnim granicama dominantnih veroispovesti, nastajali savremeni identiteti obeleženi uverenjem u čistotu etničkog porekla i naročitih kolektivnih osobina. Pri tom se verski identiteti, takode apsolutno vrednovani, nisu morali zasnivati na istinskoj religioznoj predanosti.

Inače su verske zajednice istorijski povezane s nedemokratskim i antiliberalnim snagama. Mada je u većini savremenih civilizovanih društava potreba za odvajanjem crkve i države ostvarena gotovo u potpunosti, i u njima se neretko nailazi na formalne, nekad i suštinske primere odstupanja od sekularizma (u Severnoj Irskoj su, uporedno sa siromaštvom, samo u poslednje dve decenije verski sukobi izazvali nasilnu smrt više od dve hiljade osoba.) Naročito su u tom domenu primetne razlike između evropskih zemalja i SAD. Dok u Evropi dominiraju crkve, u SAD su većinske verske zajednice protestantske denominacije; crkve su, po strukturi, hijerarhijske, zasnovane na tradicionalnom autoritetu, dok su denominacije uglavnom kongregacionalne, više demokratske. U Evropi se versko opredeljenje preuzima od predaka i prenosi u porodicama, dok u SAD to ne mora da bude slučaj, budući da se versko opredeljenje iskazuje tek u dobu kad se donose sve važne odluke. U Evropi su crkve istorijski vezane za državu, da bi američki protestantski sektarijanizam osnažio društveni, ekonomski i politički individualizam. Američke denominacije većinom neguju optimističko viđenje ljudske prirode, dok tradicionalističke zajednice ljudsku prirodu i ustanove smatraju slabim, iskvaženim i nemoralnim.

Evropski i američki primeri nude i različite obrasce pojedinačnih i kolektivnih identiteta. Evropska kultura potekla je iz regionalnih, etničkih i verskih zajednica, mada su se one, u tadašnjim oblicima, prebacivale i na američku stranu, naročito u ranom kolonijalnom razdoblju. Već je Maks Veber primetio da su SAD građanska sredina, jedina koja nije ponela postfeudalna opterećenja. SAD nisu poznavale ni prevlast crkvenog establišmenta i aristokratije. I liberalne težnje su se, u SAD, oslanjale na specifičnu religioznu tradiciju u tom smislu da je verski individualizam bio prirodan racionalnom i kompetitivnom ponašanju. U nemogućnosti da bilo koja od verskih zajednica osvoji neki oblik apsolutne prevlasti, većina američkih denominacija okupljala su se oko kongregacionalističkih, umesto hijerarhijskih zajednica, podupirući egalitarne i antielitističke vrednosti. Dok su u najvećem delu Evrope liberalne politike bile u vezi s neposrednim opiranjem kleru i hrišćanstvu, da bi sekularizacija države stekla gotovo antihrišćanske implikacije, u SAD se odigrala postepena i u velikoj meri pomirljiva diferencijacija verskog i sekularnog domena.

Ključne reči: verske zajednice, nauka i religija, crkva i država, Amerika