



4-30-2005

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Recommended Citation

Stelmach, Harlan, "Civil Religion in the Interfaith Context of Northern California: Revisiting Robert Bellah's Broken Covenant Project" (2005). *Collected Faculty Scholarship*. Paper 58.
<http://scholar.dominican.edu/all-faculty/58>

Civil Religion in the Interfaith Context of Northern California:

Revisiting Robert Bellah's *Broken Covenant* Project

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Revised Paper from Presentation at

Pacific Coast Theological Society

November 6, 2004

Are there signs of new emerging myths and stories about our religious self-understanding as a nation that will help us address what Robert Bellah calls, our "third time of trial"? On and off for many years, I have been interested in the questions raised by Robert Bellah's work on civil religion. Specifically, I have sought answers to the above question posed in the last Chapter of *Broken Covenant*, "The Birth of New American Myths." Perhaps to be more precise about my interest in this question, I would at least have to go back to my graduate student days in Berkeley at the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) in the 1970's. In 1975 at the release of *Broken Covenant*, I organized a book event that included, Bellah, theologian, Robert MacAfee Brown, and ethicists, John Bennett, and Robert Lee. Brown and Bennett were teaching at Pacific School of Religion and Lee was teaching at San Francisco Theological Seminary. There was a packed sanctuary for the event at the University Christian Church. In the social, political and religious effervescence of the 60's and 70's, emerging new cultures were of interest to all.

But in some deeper sense, my interest in Bellah's civil religion project probably took hold in the late 60's while I was in seminary in the Divinity School at Harvard. Bellah's Daedalus article, "Civil Religion in America," which was written in 1966, seemed to be part of the warp and woof of the classes I was taking with James Luther Adams, Herbert Richardson and Talcott Parsons. In retrospect, I was probably more fascinated with the ideas than fully understanding or agreeing with them. It is safe to say that the idea of a nation having a religious meaning was intuitively important to me. With an early identity steeped in our American myths of "specialness" and my upbringing in the Protestant moral traditions, it was easy to assume the reality and the logic of Bellah's formulations.

The *Broken Covenant* also made a deep impression on one of my cultural heroes, journalist Bill Moyers. In 1988, after having returned to the GTU to direct the Center for Ethics and Social Policy, I was responsible for helping to arrange the GTU Dean's office for Moyers' interview with Bellah, which was part of Moyers' PBS "World of Ideas" series. In a private conversation, Moyers made a special point to single out *Broken Covenant* as his favorite work by Bellah. This comment was striking, for it was mentioned at the time Bellah's co-authored book, *Habits of the Heart*, was most recently a national best seller. If I recall correctly, Moyers was impressed with Bellah's deep Christian faith that guided his sociological interpretation and critique of American religious culture. He was aware that the two worlds of social science and religion rarely conversed with each other in the academy. In addition for Moyers, and I think for many of us who have studied the book, it is easy to be reminded of it whenever one of our Presidents delivers an inaugural or state of the union address. If not at these moments, at least during the presidential campaigns, Bellah's analysis of past public theology certainly becomes a means of historical and comparative analysis as well as very personal self-understanding as an American.

Therefore, for many, and certainly for me, and perhaps for Moyers, *Broken Covenant* is a book that has become a touchstone in our journey to understand the religious meaning of the United States as "people" searching for our purpose in history. It is a deeply intellectual and personal journey of responsible citizenship. I continue to use *Broken Covenant* in my "Religion and Social Theory" courses. I look to the book for insight to comprehend President George W. Bush's view of America as the implicit (and increasingly explicit)^[1] vehicle for spreading "God's gift of freedom to the world." It is also helpful in interpreting Ronald Reagan's remake of scriptural language in his own image when he referred to the United States as a "shining" city on a hill.^[2] Bellah has returned time and again to the themes outlined in this book since 1975. Published just prior to the bicentennial of our independence, it is a book that helped us to understand our myth of origin as it relates to our purpose as an "American experiment," and an "exemplar nation." Since then, Bellah has continued to deepen his analysis of our national religious symbols, myths and language. His subsequent writings have extended his analysis of this third time of trial and the individual, economic, social, political and cultural factors that have helped to create the crisis.

It is not surprising that I return once again to *Broken Covenant*, Bellah's most complete account of American civil religion, to attempt to understand my work in the interfaith activities of Northern California. It is not my plan in this paper to address all of Bellah's writings on civil religion.^[3] However, I will make reference to a number of these in order to make my point about *Broken Covenant*. It is also

important to note that Bellah rarely uses the term "civil religion" since the debates about the concept in the 70's and 80's. I will not debate the concept in this paper. I will only offer Bellah's early operational understanding, with which I agree. A quick literature search about civil religion will reveal that Bellah's concept and the debate is very much alive and active in the academy.^[4] My goal in this paper is to revisit the original formulations in *Broken Covenant* and to build on them. I will do this in four steps.

- Outline Bellah's notion of a "third time of trial" for the United States.
- Describe Bellah's concept of the original covenant with God to which we as an American people have sought to be faithful as an expression of our best sense of ourselves.
- Present Bellah's analysis of the forces that have undermined our covenant promise to build an ethical society.
- Revisit Bellah's speculations about new movements in American society that might help us meet the test of our third time of trial.

Taking the lead from Bellah's formulations and his speculations about potential positive changes in America, I will apply these insights to my experience in the last ten years while working on interfaith activities. I will try to discern whether or not those of us participating in the interfaith activities are helping to meet the third time of trial as Bellah defines it. Further I will speculate on whether or not we might be deepening the crisis or just producing results that are of limited importance. My preliminary judgment is hopeful but not optimistic. My analysis will rely on informal interviews, survey data and my reflections as an organizer and long-time participant in these activities while serving as a Board Member of numerous inter-religious organizations. I will conclude my analysis with some constructive suggestions for the interfaith movement.^[5]

First, some clarification of terms, I use the following statement of Bellah's as my working understanding of civil religion in general and how it applies to the United States. It was written as a footnote to the reprinting of his "Civil Religion in America" article in *Beyond Belief*.

...I defend myself against the accusation of supporting an idolatrous worship of the American nation. I think it should be clear from the text that I conceive of the central tradition of the American civil religion not as a form of national self-worship but as the subordination of the nation to ethical principles that transcend it and in terms of which it should be judged. I am

convinced that every nation and every people come to some form of religious self-understanding whether the critics like it or not. Rather than simply denounce what seems in any case inevitable, it seems more responsible to seek within the civil religious tradition for those critical principles which undercut the ever-present danger of national self-idolization.^[6] [Emphasis mine]

My use of the term "interfaith" is less precise. Typically I will be using it the way most individuals in the interfaith movement define it when they use it. In this sense, it is most often meant to describe activities that are designed to encourage an encounter with faith traditions other than one's own. The basic motivation for this encounter grows out of a respect and a willingness to appreciate the difference of another faith tradition.^[7] From my experience, when one talks about being "interfaith," it also suggests that individuals affirm a multi-religious path to religious truth or religious self-understanding. My preference is to use the concept "religious pluralism" when talking about multi-paths to religious self-understanding, either as a search for truth, salvation or enlightenment.^[8] Therefore, I often interchange the two terms "interfaith" and "religious pluralism" to have the same meaning. I will also suggest distinctions such as, "deeper" or more "authentic" pluralism. I use "religious diversity" to suggest a simple observable fact about religious expression today in the United States: it is more diverse than it has ever been.

However, when analyzing American civil religion, the scope and depth of religious diversity, and therefore the possibility of pluralism, become a more complex issue and an open question. By this I mean two things. First, a significant majority of Americans still seem to be influenced by Jewish and Christian symbols, whether explicitly or implicitly. Second, the grip of American culture is so strong that second generation immigrants are homogenized to an "American" cultural identity that is often more defining than their religious identity.^[9] The lack of a constitutive religious content of this identity is part of the focus of this paper. At a minimum, I am suggesting, similar to Bellah's concept of civil religion, that a constitutive religious expression must not be self-worship of any kind, national or cultural, but one that must be subordinated to a divine source that transcends us and in terms of which one should be judged. This concern underlies Bellah's analysis of our "third time of trial."

The Third Time of Trial

Bellah sounds the alarm on the first page of *Broken Covenant*. As a nation begun self-consciously as an experiment in freedom and justice, we are being tested once again. Can the experiment be fulfilled? Can we be an "exemplar nation?" Bellah: "We live at present in a third time of trial, at least as severe as those of the Revolution and the Civil War. It is a test of whether our inherited institutions can be creatively adapted to meet the 20th Century crisis of justice and order at home and in the world."^[10] Or in "Civil Religion in America," though we have yet to fully meet the second time of trial, he says we have been "overtaken by a third great problem that has led to a third crisis, in the midst we stand. This is the problem of responsible action in a revolutionary world..."^[11] In both statements Bellah is focusing on at least three important concerns. First, there is a question about whether the institutions of our origin are sufficient as constituted or presently interpreted. Second, we have unfinished business internally, there is still the goal of extending equal protection under the law for all our citizens. Third, and it is here that I think Bellah is most concerned, defining our role as a responsible nation among other nations.^[12]

His first civil religion article was written during the Viet Nam War. In most of his subsequent writings about the United States, as with *Broken Covenant*, our international role is the focus of this time of trial. If Bellah was worried during the Viet Nam War, our current war in Iraq may be our pen-ultimate test. However, what really concerns him is that there are forces internal to our nation that will truncate our responsible role in the world. "It is a test of whether we can control the very economic and technical forces which are our greatest achievement, before they destroy us."^[13] Our ability to meet the external challenge of being a responsible nation in the world will be determined in large part by how we interpret our "success." Is this a success of wealth or of faithfulness, in civil religious terms? Has wealth become an end in itself and our birthright or is it a hoped for consequence, but not a guarantee, of our faithfulness to our covenant when we are under the judgment of transcendent principles? National self-idolization is again presenting itself as a test. Bellah saw this clearly in the 70's and he sees it today. Therefore, it is as crucial for the first part of the 21st Century as it was for the last half of the 20th Century.

As in previous trials, Bellah suggests that our test is severe; "the existence of our nation is called into question," and even our destruction. During our war of Independence, our first test, we fought for the "institution of liberty." The Civil War, our second time of trial, was the "preservation of the union and the extension of equal protection of laws for all members of society."^[14] What is it about our own

success that may destroy us in the third trial? And why is this a perversion of our civil religious tradition? The answers to these questions are at the heart of the meaning of the American experiment from the beginning of the European settlements on this continent. There was and is, according to Bellah, a sense that if we were a faithful nation, lived up to our "covenant" we would "succeed." But if we became corrupted, even by our own success, we would go the way of other great nations. What was the content of this covenant? What were the signs of corruption? Bellah turns to the writings of John Winthrop, and later, those of Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln, to illustrate what he feels was the self-understanding of the young American nation.

The Covenant

If we survived the two previous times of trial, our "solutions" should give us a hint of the content of the covenant. Winthrop, a Christian, in colonial times articulates for Bellah the essential structure and internal value content of the covenant. Jefferson, a Deist, helps to sustain the basic ingredients during the revolutionary war and the institutionalization of the external covenant, the Constitution. Lincoln extends the interpretation of the covenant and broadens the religious language of a nation under divine judgment. It is important to stress that Bellah has both a sympathetic and critical view of each of these figures, as well as of the original formulation of the covenant that he felt could be and was perverted. His is not a wishful or romantic understanding of the tradition. He also helps to point out that at its inception, there was a religiously pluralistic solution to the covenant that became institutionalized in our first amendment and the Constitution itself. A fact that is often overlooked and that has important consequences for sustaining a religious pluralism today through the interfaith movement.

The key role of Winthrop for Bellah, has been underscored in many of his books and lectures since *Broken Covenant*. But in *Broken Covenant* a major portion of Winthrop's 1630 sermon, "A Modell of Christian Charity,"^[15] is reprinted. Preached on board ship before the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, of which he was the first leader, Winthrop stresses consequences for a *Broken Covenant* with God:

...for wee shall be as a Citty upon a Hill, the eies of all people are uppon us: soe that if wee shall deale falsely with our god in this worke wee have undertaken and soe cause him to withdrawe his present help from us, wee shall shame the faces of many of gods worthy servants, and cause

their prayers to be turned into Curses upon us till wee be consumed out of the good land whither wee are going...^[16] [Emphasis mine]

Bellah points out that from our beginning we had a sense that we were doing something special in our American experiment. Winthrop gives voice to this, "a City on the Hill with the eyes of the world upon us." But this specialness was not unconditional, we had to uphold our share of the bargain. Not only shame will come to us but we will be sent out of the land. The structure of the covenant is clear. Our success had to be earned and even then it was not a total guarantee. He gets more specific about how we are to uphold our end of the agreement.

...Beloved there is now sett before us life, and good, deathe and evill in that wee are Commaunded this day to love the Lord our God, and to love one another, to walke in his wayes and to keepe his Commaundements and his Ordinance, and his lawes, and the Articles of our Covenant with him that wee may live and be multiplied, and that the Lord our God may blesse us in the land whither we goe to possesse it: *But if our heartes shall turne away soe that wee will not obey, but shall be seduced and worship...other Gods, our pleasures, and proffitts, and serve them; it is propoinded unto us this day, wee shall surely perishe out of the good Land whither wee passe over this vast Sea to possesse it.*^[17] [Emphasis mine]

Here and elsewhere Winthrop stresses we must love God, love one another, walk in his ways, keep his commandments, not worship other gods, or pleasures or profits. In other parts of the sermon he reinforces certain social values that are crucial to living in the ways of God. Building on the biblical injunction from Micah to do justice and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God, Winthrop states:

For this end, wee must be knitt together in thei worke as one man, we must intertaine each other in brotherly Affeccion, wee must be willing to abridge our selves of our superfluties, for the supply of others necessities, wee must uphold a familiar Commerce together in all meeknes, gentlenes, patience and librality, we must delight in each other, make others Condictions our owne, rejoyce together, mourne together, labour and suffer together, allwayes having before our eyes our Commission and Community in the worke, our *Community as members of the same body*...^[18] [Emphasis mine]

In addition to the structure of the covenant that is under divine judgment, there is a social vision that rests on building what Bellah calls an "ethical society in the light of a transcendent ethical vision." We must "abridge our selves of our superfluties, for the supply of others necessities." Our obligations in

living up to our promise of the covenant had the requirement to focus not on our false needs but on justice, mercy and the common good by making "others Conditions our owne."

Being faithful to this Covenant was a mixed story in our history. Even from the very beginning the Covenant was broken. In a recent lecture Bellah cites Roger Williams, a later founder of the Rhode Island colony, "who pointed out that the Puritans were building their city on somebody else's hill, that the Native Americans were being unjustly deprived of their inheritance by the Puritan colonization."^[19] In a complicated history of trying to fulfill the promise of the new nation, Bellah traces the strands of what he has come to call in other works such as *Habits of the Heart*, the biblical and republican values of this covenantal tradition that have mitigated against utilitarian and expressive individualism that lacks the strong social vision of Winthrop. What in this history has led to the Bellah assert that "today the American civil religion is an empty and broken shell."^[20]

The Source of Our Brokenness

In 1975 in *Broken Covenant* Bellah stated that for a long time Americans were able to hide from the fact that the Covenant was broken almost as soon as it was made. Therefore, we were able to hide from our sense of responsibility by not understanding our brokenness. And maybe in somewhat of an understatement to many of us, he asserted that "today the *Broken Covenant* is visible to all."^[21] Maybe today he might also add: it is most visible to the international community. Denial of the dark side of American history is very much part of our American identity. The myth of American innocence is still powerful today. But what is the reason the covenant has been broken? Bellah's answer to this question obviously relates to the values set forth by Winthrop. At the most basic level of our relationship to our fellow Americans: we undermined the values that might help us see our fellow citizen in the same body. Why did this happen?

Bellah's analysis of this undermining has been an evolving and deepening one. It is many layered. He pursues an answer at the psychological, political-economic, social, cultural and religious level. He does not see one level independent of the others. In this sense he is still very much influenced by his work with Talcott Parsons. However, he has increasingly added the overlay of Jurgen Habermas to his analyses, especially in *The Good Society*.^[22] *Broken Covenant* is an early working out of these frameworks for him, but they are very much present. Much like *Habits of the Heart*, we see in *Broken*

Covenant an interplay of biblical and republican virtues and expressive and utilitarian individualism, but with less typological explicitness.

In the original Preface to *Broken Covenant* he lays the blame for our deviation from our promise to build a society on transcendent ethical values and compassionate social interconnectedness on both our Puritan past and on the utilitarian critique of this past.

To the extent that the Puritan and early republican notions of "the good" and "virtue" were too narrow, too bound up with repressive social and psychological mechanisms, too easily subverted to the defense of particular social arrangements, the utilitarian critique has been genuinely liberating. To the extent that the utilitarian critique was not itself able to construct a moral-religious context for a viable society, it has had to fall back on an uneasy symbiosis with the traditional pattern that it continues to undermine. As the older moral pattern declines in persuasiveness, the only remaining category for the analysis and evaluation of human motives is *interest*, which by now has replaced both virtue and conscience in our moral vocabulary.^[23]
[Emphasis mine]

While acknowledging "interest" as a valid concern, Bellah explains that in the American setting, "public morality has torn interest from its larger traditional context."^[24] Today he analyzes a reality where we understand it "only in terms of the self-interest of the isolated individual." It is here that he is most doubtful that this type of self-interest can provide a "coherent morality for a viable society." This is particularly acute for him when he sees the "notion of self, lacking any larger identification with social and religious realities."^[25] However pessimistic he is about this state of affairs, it is his intent in *Broken Covenant* to show that the "liberal utilitarian model was not the fundamental religious and moral conception of America."^[26] Crucial to his project, however, is to analyze how this "common sense" utilitarianism has permeated all areas of our life.^[27] With this analysis we are better able to understand its deviation from the original conception of the American experiment, which he feels has never "ceased to be operative." The increase of technical rationality which has dominated our capitalist economic system and our fascination with science and its technical solutions come under close scrutiny in *Broken Covenant* and all of his subsequent writings.

Each of the chapters in *Broken Covenant* can be seen as Bellah's attempt to describe the competing conceptions of America, and how "technical reason," the "basis of our 'success' carries the seeds of our doom. It is not technical reason^[28] as such that is at fault but the fact that it has come unhinged from a larger religious and moral context."^[29] Perhaps one illustration might be sufficient to make Bellah's point. In his chapter on why socialism has never taken root in American culture, he

analyzes the ways corporate capitalism has undermined "essential American values" that he associates with Winthrop and the original covenant and the formal covenant of our Constitution.

Decisions that in their general implications are profoundly political are made on the basis of economic considerations and decided by the balance of private economic power. Private profit outweighs public good. Nothing in the current American institutional order is capable of placing proper restraints on such tendencies.^[30]

"Proper restraints" that Winthrop called for in the original internal covenant are now almost impossible due to an economic system that has institutionalized constant indulgence through what Bellah calls the "tyranny of profit." He states that "our economy can only survive through constant expansion...[it] is like a heroin addict: only another shot of the very profit narcotic that creates a recession will get us out of it. But how many more belts of uncontrolled economic expansion will we be able to absorb before the social and ecological consequences totally undermine our democratic society, not to speak of our physical health."^[31]

The engine for building a city on a hill that is an example to the world is no longer our faithfulness to a transcendent ethic that controls and restrains our indulgences, but indulgence itself, whether this be money or technology. Again, in a recent lecture, Bellah puts the problematic very bluntly:

But the much newer form of political organization, which I am calling liberal constitutionalism, though it grew in the very seedbeds of modern republicanism, developed a markedly different ideal of political life, partly in response to a newly emerging economic order...this tradition gave rise to what would appear to be the most wildly utopian idea in the history of political thought, *namely, that a good society can result from the actions of citizens motivated by self-interest alone when those actions are organized through the proper mechanisms.* A caretaker state, with proper legal restraints so that it does not interfere with the freedom of the citizens, needs to do little more than maintain public order and allow the economic market mechanisms and the free market in ideas to produce wealth and wisdom.^[32] [Emphasis mine]

This passage has strong echoes in Bellah's co-authored books, *Habits of the Heart* and specifically, *Good Society*. What kind of city on a hill, with the eyes of the world upon us, have we become? What resources, if any, remain from the tradition we inherit from Winthrop? Has the language of the original vision been re-framed to support this new self-interested narrowly rationalistic utopianism? In *Broken Covenant* Bellah was cautiously optimistic. "The recognition of the *Broken Covenant* does not mean to me the rejection of the American past. We are not innocent, we are not the saviors of mankind, and it is

well for us to grow up enough to know that." This is a high standard for the United States, given our messianic tendencies. But it is the standard that Bellah suggests was articulated and affirmed at many moments in our history. We must admit the evil with which we have been complicit. We must avoid claiming our agency in salvific terms. When this standard was in jeopardy according to Bellah, people and movements have tried to "pick up the pieces" and try to once more "build an ethical society in light of a transcendent vision."^[33] Our tradition, he feels has capacity for renewal. But what are the resources for this renewal?^[34]

"The Birth of New American Myths"

The last chapter of *Broken Covenant* is one of his most suggestive and systematic attempts to address the sources of renewal. It was written in the midst of what many thought was a time of a cultural revolution. However, by 1975 Bellah was becoming less optimistic for expressions that might be the equivalent of past "Great Awakenings,"^[35] that restored a sense of the internal covenant of republican and biblical values. This was also a time when Bellah was engaged in a project with fellow sociologist at UC Berkeley, Charles Glock, and a group of graduate students from GTU and the Sociology Department of Berkeley to study new religious consciousness in the Bay Area. As a member of this team I was aware of the extent to which we were all somewhat seduced by the political and social upheaval that seemed to be centered in the Bay Area. Perhaps it was a mix of hopefulness, self-delusion, and a dash of hubris that made us feel as if the Bay Area was the new city on a hill. Throughout this project Bellah was both our encourager and our sharpest critique. His last chapter in *Broken Covenant* reflects his ambivalence about this time. However, I maintain that some of his lines of inquiry are still very fruitful for us to revisit. Explicit and implicit in this chapter are the outlines of what I will call Bellah's "Covenantal Standard." This Covenantal Standard will be a good test to evaluate the activities of the interfaith movement in the last part of this paper.

In a very real sense, I have not stopped working on this "new religious consciousness" project, personally or intellectually. My doctoral dissertation on the Berkeley Free Church was a self-analysis as well as an analysis of the public theology of a Bay Area religious organization. My founding of the journal *Radical Religion*, during these times was part of this effort to understand and help change the culture of the United States. My return to GTU to run the Center for ethics and social policy fit into what I saw as my calling. Equally so, my ecumenical work with the World Council of Churches in the late

1980's and early 90's was in continuity with these commitments. My latest efforts in the interfaith movements of the Bay Area are an extension of my desire to explore the religious meaning of our culture and provide personal meaning. During this period of time Robert Bellah has remained a mentor and friend. It is hard to deconstruct his influence on my own thinking and religious commitments.

As a student of eastern religions and Japanese society, Bellah has always looked to the increased interest in the East, and Buddhism in particular, as a possible corrective in American society. Specifically on the question of new religious movements, especially from the East, in the 70's Bellah saw them more on the periphery in their social criticism of America. He suggests that "while this spiritual ferment does not threaten the established order, it does signal a shift in the main line of American culture."^[36] He further seems to have hope that the "dominant liberal utilitarian culture" has never been challenged by so many religious alternatives outside the Protestant tradition. He extends this analysis to political groups "opting for direct political action."

Many Americans, more than in a long time, have come to feel that our problems do not arise merely from a faulty choice of means but from a failure of our central vision. They seek a new or renewed vision and turn to the great myths and symbols of the world's religions to find it. In humanistic psychology and in certain areas of philosophy, anthropology, literary criticism, and religious studies concerned with the meaning and function of myth and symbol, there is a return to the comprehensive or holistic reason, a new emphasis on the immediacy of experience, that makes the appropriation of religious traditions more possible for educated people than has been the case for a long time.^[37]

This is the voice of the encouraging Bellah. There is another voice. He saw then, and I think he still sees today, that these movements are still on the periphery. They are not core movements with a disciplined base. Therefore, he is worried that the "main drift of American society is to the edge of the abyss." He also cautions that the new movements are not without their own problems. He is especially concerned with groups suggesting that a total loss of "normative order will be a prelude to revolution." He is more inclined to see this as prelude to "authoritarianism, if not fascism."

Also with a deep appreciation of Native American culture and religion, Bellah has been conversant with American Indian traditions and the current inspirations from Native American culture. As we will see below, he seriously addresses the difficulties of the Native American community, in providing the resources from their traditions to help restore what he calls a broader "imaginative vision"^[38] for American Society. In addition, as someone schooled in Marxism, Bellah is aware of the attraction and

pitfalls of socialist experiments as possible alternatives to American society. As one who has lived through the various civil rights and liberation movements, Bellah is painfully aware of their promise and failures to be renewing visions to inform a new civil religion. All of these efforts are analyzed or alluded to to some extent in the last chapter of *Broken Covenant*.

As he starts his analysis he clearly recognizes that none of these movements have reached the staying power to give him optimism. For him, "American civil religion is an empty and broken shell."^[39] His lack of optimism comes from his judgment that just as in the past, American culture has the capacity, perhaps the grip, to transform what appears to be genuine difference and diversity into something that is molded in its own image of material and technical success. When at key moments in the past this molding may have been towards a positive view of creating an ethical society, today it truncates this commitment to an ethical society into a dismembered utilitarian individualism. "Cultural pluralism" for Bellah may be an ideal and founding myth of American society, but its reality at a fundamental sense of what American now is and means, is questionable. Even reform movements have been truncated by activities that are just another version of this dynamic. Counter cultural experimentation is valuable for Bellah but they will not solve our problem as a nation. He is looking for the seeds of a national movement.

...Americans must not leave the tradition of American idealism entirely to the chauvinists. The history of modern nations shows that segmentary rational politics is not enough. No one has changed a great nation without appealing to its soul, without stimulating a national idealism...^[40]

In my lifetime, perhaps the black civil rights struggle is the best example of a social movement to appeal to the soul of our nation. From, W.E.B. DuBois to Martin Luther King Jr., and even Malcolm X in his final year, each talked about reaching the soul of America. It can be argued that because the black civil rights struggle so touched our idealistic core as a nation, it helped to spawn other liberation movements of the last quarter of the 20th century, women, youth, gay and the differently abled. It seems to me that Bellah is searching for such a movement today to activate our idealistic core. Again, though hopeful in the 70's he was not optimistic, as he often says today. For Bellah, "hope" is a theological sentiment.

To illustrate his lack of optimism he uses the case of Larry Casuse, a young Navaho student at the University of New Mexico. Police shot Casuse to death after he threatened, Frankie Garcia, Mayor of Gallup, New Mexico with a gun pointed to his head. Casuse was objecting to the appointment of the Mayor as regent of the University of New Mexico. Garcia, the owner of a tavern, epitomized to Casuse

the Navaho conception of "false people," and according to the account by Bellah, "so lacking in human feeling and so hypocritical that they can scarcely be considered human."^[41] This view of Garcia was seen over against the Navaho ideal of harmony with nature and man. In the end Bellah judges Casuse to have made the "classic [American] mistake of defining his community too exclusively, distinguishing too radically the subhuman 'false people' from the "Human Beings." I think Bellah is right, this type of "Protestant moral splitting,"^[42] is so deep into American culture that for it to transform a world view so different from our "saved and damned" or "good guys and bad guys" mentality is profound. Therefore, the use of Native American culture to illustrate his point is significant. In the perceptive book, *The Way of the Human Being*, Calvin Luther Martin, tries to capture a Native American way of being human.

Am I finally discovering Native America? And is this something I can know without becoming known in turn? This is an unsettling thought. The implication is that 'the personhood of the known enters the relation as well. The known seeks to know me even as I seek to know it.' A disturbing thought indeed.^[43]

If Martin is correct, then Bellah is right to ask, why did Casuse "so utterly violate his own ideals?" In drawing our attention to these potential reform movements and how their imaginative vision gets truncated, Bellah gives us a glimpse of what needs to happen to have a new civil religion that affirms a culture that can move beyond our moral splitting. That is, a moral and religious vision that can embody in our best sense of ourselves in our vision and our actions to achieve that vision. The question for me is, do I see this capacity to fill the "empty broken shell" of our current civil religion emerging in the interfaith activities in Northern California?

In order to answer this question a summary of what I consider to be the "Covenantal Standard" that emerges out of *Broken Covenant* is in order. I see at least six broad themes or principles:

1. We must **confess and confront the dark side of our history**. Though we profess lofty ideals we are not categorically innocent. We must act out of a discipline of self-reflection and humility, not out of false pride. The covenant has been broken.
2. We **"spread" our ideals best by example**. If we cast ourselves as "saviors," or as God's allies, in spreading our ideals we mis-understand that human history is at best "ironic," that is, with often consequences we never intended.

3. Any movement to reform our culture must **speak to its "soul," our best instincts as a nation**. They cannot be just counter-cultural experiments that exist only for the benefit of the well-being of the sub-groups. This is to insure that the movement is of a scale to make a difference.
4. Though these movements may dissent from a culture that lacks a moral vision, if they do not **engage with the larger society and its history**, successes and failures, they may reinforce values of individual self-interest, an isolated self or technical reason.
5. We must be **judged by a transcendent ethic**^[44] so our movement sustains faithfulness in our actions. This can grow out of our religious or humanist traditions that have often spawned change in the United States. Our means must be consonant with the values of our ends.
6. This transcendent ethic has its best chance if it is **sustained by an "immediacy of experience," encouraged by an authentic religious pluralism and an imaginative vision**.
7. Perhaps the most important principle that we inherit from the original covenant is a social ethic that **affirms the common good**. Self interest, even enlightened self interest, does not fulfill the test.

Quite a standard! No wonder it is hard to find a movement so conceived. Yet this does seem to me to be the challenge to which Bellah points, one that comes from our own history as a nation. The principles on which these themes rest, help mitigate against so-called reform movements that are often just the mirror image of our utilitarian and individualistic culture.

Religious Pluralism and American Civil Religion: The Interfaith Movement Meeting the Covenantal Standard?

Bellah has always looked to the religious community in the United States for "the renewing impulse the 'new birth' any ethical institution so frequently needs."^[45] Just five years after *Broken Covenant* Bellah concluded:

I am not prepared to say the religious communities, among whom I would include the humanist communities are not capable even today of providing the religious superstructure and infrastructure that would renew our republic. Indeed, I would look to them, as always before in our history...But the empirical question as to whether the moral capacity is still there on a sufficient *scale* seems to me to be an open question.^[46] [Emphasis mine]

If Bellah's analysis of American culture is correct, in *Broken Covenant* and in subsequent works, that most of our institutions have been overtaken by values imported from the market and driven by technical reason, why has this not totally happened to religion? Bellah's argument is a complex one that is grounded in his challenge to a narrow materialist view of history. He sees the so-called superstructure, cultural and religious symbols, to have an independent influence on how we change history. His systematic development of this argument can be found in *Beyond Belief*. However, for our purposes it suffices to indicate that religious conviction may be that part of our identity that is least likely to be "colonized" by market values. This is so, because religious identity is dealing with fundamental moral and existential questions that we confront whether we want to or not. We have a greater difficulty in being in denial about our finiteness and mortality.

Therefore, Bellah has suggested that pluralism and real diversity in American culture is most distinct at the level of religious self-understanding. What is perhaps least un-meltable in our "iron cage" melting pot (to mix metaphors) of technical reason is religious identity. On face value, it seems to me that given our increased religious diversity in the United States, religious solutions to our brokenness must be pluralistic, or at least might emerge in this diverse context. The constitutional guarantees of religious freedom, from our beginning as a nation, suggest an ongoing pluralistic solution. This early pluralism was, albeit limited, across Christian and Deist lines, but non-the-less, authentically pluralistic in conception. Looking at our new diversity, if we were to authentically engage across multi-religious lines and with secular humanism, this may give us a social movement informed in part by the religious community that could speak to the soul of our nation today. At least, this is the rationale and premise for my inquiry.

This rationale and Bellah's understanding of our third time of trial, leads to numerous questions:

1. Is there, in fact, a viable religious diversity in this country? Could this diversity be the basis for a transforming ethic emerging from an authentic religious pluralism?
2. Could there be an alliance of interfaith activities with other social and political movements (such as peace and environment groups) to help reinstate a commitment to an ethical society under judgment by a transcendent ethic?
3. Does this diversity of religious perspectives suggest that the old formulations of our Protestant civil religious heritage no longer has the power to engage this nation? And if not, what are the new myths and stories about our self as a nation that are emerging?

4. Are there signs that we once again see these activities merely serving an isolated self in the grip of utilitarian individualism or at best expressive individualism?

And most notably, does this movement meet the Covenantal Standard? But before trying to give some preliminary answers to these questions, given my experience in the interfaith movement, let me give a little background information. A basic profile of individuals likely to be active or ripe for activities that have an interfaith character is the following:^[47]

1. They see religions, other than their own, providing equally authentic paths to reaching God or spiritual wholeness.
2. Therefore, they see the concept of "interfaith" as positive.
3. They see a clear distinction between being "spiritual" and "religious." Religion has an institutional commitment and spiritual is a personal dimension. Even if they make this distinction, most, however are still members of organizations or one faith tradition.
4. There are a growing number of individuals, however, who may have a spiritual identity but they are "non-affiliated," that is, they are less likely to belong to a group or regularly attend religious services. The institutional means of expressing this spirituality take the form of retreat centers or small religious "denominational" groups or humanistic groups. The mainstream interfaith organizations are largely dominated by individuals from one of the great world religions. However, interfaith "events" often see a growing number of the non-affiliated or those from the smaller groups.
5. They are likely to be active in social justice activities that focus on homelessness, AIDS, housing, race, domestic violence, anti-war, the environment, etc. These are efforts that focus on institutional change not just acts of charity.
6. They have often switched from one religious tradition to another; or they "practice" in more than one tradition.^[48]
7. Therefore, they often characterize themselves as spiritual seekers or searchers.
8. They seem to have an ambivalent relationship to the traditional civil religious language and symbols inherited from our Protestant Christian heritage. This seems increasingly so in the current climate of President Bush's appropriation of some of these symbols.^[49]

Is There an Authentic Religious Pluralism that is Emerging?

My focus on an "authentic" pluralism rests on my assumption that pluralism, and specifically religious pluralism, can generate an effervescence that stokes the imagination to articulate new symbols that can speak to the soul of the nation. However, if our so-called pluralism is just a non-engaged diversity or a mere reduction to sameness, whether religious or cultural, there may not be much hope for a renewing spirit building on our past civil religious heritage.^[50] From the profile sketch above and other data, there are hopeful signs within the interfaith movement that it is building a capacity for an authentic pluralism. It is clear that these individuals are willing to define their own religious or spiritual path in non-exclusivistic ways. They are willing to acknowledge that their religious understanding may not be the only expression of ultimate meaning. Therefore, there is an interest to encounter the faith of others from a perspective of deep knowing, not just tolerance or curiosity, but for their deeper understanding about a connected self and a desire for ultimate meaning.

Recently Dominican University's Humanities Department, the Marin Interfaith Council, the International Association of Sufism, and the Interfaith Center at the Presidio, with funds from the Marin Community Foundation, have sponsored a six-part workshop and a half day concluding conference over a four-month period to have just this type of encounter. A majority of the individuals attending the series have a strong faith tradition. The motivation for attendance appears to be as much to deepen one's own religious commitment to a specific tradition, as it is to understand that of another's. Much has been written about how we better understand ourselves when we encounter the "other."^[51] Perhaps this is the "knowing" that was referred to in the Native American tradition. Knowledge of the other happens when the encounter reveals something about ourselves. This in turn gives us knowledge about ourselves not as isolated humans but as "real" not "false" people. If this knowledge then reinforces our own faith traditions and deepens this commitment, then the interfaith activities will contribute to an authentic religious pluralism. In order for there to be "religious pluralism" in this culture, according to Bellah, it has to be an identity that goes deeper than the utilitarian materialism of our culture, or valuable, but limited, "respectful tolerance." There are signs that these activities may have that potential and that individuals are seeking this deeper "knowing" of the other and themselves as relational beings. This is a sizable accomplishment in Marin County. Or maybe Marin County has the cultural and spiritual seedbed to make this happen.

It just may be that an authentic pluralism is the pre-condition for meeting the Covenantal Standard. My concern is that though there is a genuine desire for a pluralistic viewpoint, it may not go deep enough, particularly if we avoid engaging on difficult issues. This may only happen if we expose our dark side, perhaps the first principle of the covenant. Not only is each faith tradition not innocent, the interfaith movement is not innocent, just as the nation is not innocent. If the interfaith movement is to be a transforming movement, it needs a way to help each faith tradition "confess" this dark side of each tradition. This may be possible only if the interfaith movement has this capacity to reflect more self-critically about its own activities. There is currently a challenge before us that may define our movement in the Bay Area. The Presbyterian Church, in the U.S.A. has voted in its General Assembly to research the divestment of its own investments in companies supplying the state of Israel with materials to fight the Palestinians. Can we construct a dialogue that allows us to engage in all our pain of past and present on this issue? I believe we have to find a way.^[52] We need to engage in ways that are not just about how we appreciate and respect each other in a profoundly human way, or what we have in common, as important as this is, but we need to engage most when we have seemingly intractable differences.^[53] We may still end up realizing that perhaps all that we do have in common, is our common humanity.^[54] My sense is that out of this struggle our common humanity may become a greater reality.

Here I am not advocating to focus just on issues that are contentious and only elaborate on these differences. I am advocating a way to construct an engagement that helps us explore these differences and not deny that they are there. None of us are beyond the experience of darkness. When we construct a safe environment for the expression of difference and diversity we all win.^[55]

Are There Bridges Being Built in the Public Square for Dissent Among Interfaith and Other Groups?

Gary Tobin, in his 2000 study, *Religious & Spiritual Change in America: The Experience of Marin County, California*,^[56] quotes at length an article in the New York Times about Marin County. The Times journalist was trying to understand the conversion of John Walker (Lindh) to Islam and then the Taliban.

If we want to blame Marin for John Walker's choices, then I guess we should say he was rebelling against the values of the community rather than reflecting them. Maybe he wanted more than a two-car garage and winter weekends up at Tahoe...Walker was not rebelling against spiritual uncertainty and wacky religions, but rather against the most traditional of religious institutions represented by the Episcopal church and against Marin's stifling and materialistic values.^[57]

Marin County and Northern California, and for that matter, perhaps many regions of the nation at large, are not too different. There is survey data indicating that there is a growing questioning of these materialistic values.^[58] My experience with the interfaith movement in the Bay Area confirms that the participants in these events are struggling to be dissenters from dominant utilitarian values and technical reason. One could say, even in Marin. But perhaps one should say particularly in Marin or the Bay Area.^[59]

My experience with the interfaith groups, much like many of the liberal or progressive Protestant and Catholic movements, is that social justice is a second pillar of their existence. Often interfaith groups were founded to deal with major social problems facing their communities. In the case of Marin Interfaith Council, it was founded to address community needs after flooding occurred. The faith communities continued to be mobilized on civil rights, housing, AIDS, homelessness and other issues facing its African American residents in Marin City and the Latinos in the Canal District. In a survey conducted by the Marin Interfaith Council, the seventy members of the Council who responded to the survey, were equally interested in "inter-faith encounter" and "social justice."

There are growing signs that organizations such as the Interfaith Center at the Presidio and various regional interfaith councils are increasingly focusing on social issues as their way of developing relationships with other like-minded activist groups and single-faith oriented organizations. A "Healing the World" series will be planning its second conference in Asilomar, California on issues similar to the one's I am raising in this paper.^[60] The first conference was on the topic of "Peace in a Warring World." Each of these conferences is a vehicle for the dissenting community to build alliances of strength to counter American values that reflect materialism and a narrow view of our religious self understanding as a nation. Similar initiatives are under way with the Marin Interfaith Council and the activists opposing the Patriot Act and the War in Iraq. Concepts such as the "common good" are common place in these activities. However, in many cases this "oneness" or "common good" vision is more likely to be promoted by Buddhist or Hindu participants, rather than Protestant Christians. The role of Catholic Social Teachings as a voice in these activities is present, but often more implicitly rather than explicitly. This reality is often due to the fact that Catholics have their own parallel organizations where they accomplish many of the same social justice goals that are attempted in the interfaith events. There is a challenge for the interfaith movement to find ways to better engage with the Catholic community.

Again using the lens of the Covenantal Standard, what do these observations tell us about the capacity of the interfaith movement to meet Bellah's third time of trial? It is clear that the interfaith movement

is seeking to hold onto the social ethic of the original covenant by its emphasis on the common good. Is it possible that a well articulated social ethic, beyond a narrow self-interest may provide the ground bed for a transcendent ethic? That is, a "transcendent ethic" that at least suggests we are not isolated individuals but we are fulfilled in our interdependence with others. This is the voice of an ethical society that is not based solely on interest. How the "divine" element gets expressed may not match the original notion of Winthrop or our nation's founders. The concept of "personal God" is often challenged as not "inclusive" enough. The interfaith movement has to distinguish between the moment when someone speaks about God as if all have the same view of divinity, and when one speaks about God only as an expression of their faith. The latter position is the authentic pluralistic stance. It is possible that the interfaith movement, with an insightful practice in articulating an authentic a "divine pluralism," may speak imaginatively to the increased diversity of our nation. The hope is that a "transcendent ethic" worthy of our commitment will be an outgrowth of this pluralism.

When the interfaith movement seeks to build bridges beyond the faith community on shared values to transform our materialism and individualism it is also working to develop a dissenting movement beyond the periphery. Perhaps as it continues to try to address wider circles of Americans, these alliances beyond the religious community, may achieve what Bellah has described as the building of a movement of scale to address the soul of the nation. However, on the issue of scale, it is easy to suggest that this larger impact is not emerging. It is certainly difficult in the current climate dominated by the so-called religious right to sense that this pluralistic worldview is getting the media coverage or captivating the soul of the nation.

The movement has to continue to evaluate to whom it is speaking and whether or not anyone is listening. The ability of the interfaith movement to engage the so-called "non-affiliated seekers" is important. They have often been on the periphery of the formal organizational structure of the interfaith movement. This engagement must be an honest engagement that addresses the dark side of the seekers and the interfaith movement's bias against them. Too often the non-affiliated are a flip side of the individualism coin. Often found in "new age" religions, these are the "expressive individualists" that Bellah has identified as in keeping with strong American roots represented by Whitman and Thoreau. However, they, like the non-affiliated seekers of today, were dissenters from the materialism and self-worship of American culture. The question is whether or not their dissent in the wilderness can be the basis for a disciplined social movement to transform institutions. I am inclined to have hope that this engagement will bare fruit. I read Thoreau^[61] as someone who was able to exhibit the imaginative

vision and immediacy of experience that Bellah finds crucial to the emergence of new myths and stories. I also read Thoreau as someone capable of articulating a social ethic of the common good. Perhaps this comes from his full understanding of "humanness," that is, being part and parcel of creation, or "nature" in his terms. Or maybe it comes from his critique of a narrow view of private property that defines freedom in too negative terms. It seems clear to me that the energy and imagination of these individuals, if coupled with disciplined institutionally based movements, have the potential to provide a necessary partner for new myth making in the American culture. However, a sober evaluation of the interfaith movement's impact leads one to only talk about caution, potential and hope at this point in its development.

Do the Original Civil Religious Symbols and Myths Still Provide Meaning for the Interfaith Movement? Are there new Myths Emerging?

At the first Asilomar conference on "Healing the World," I conducted a survey that included questions about civil religion. Fifty participants of the over two hundred attendees filled out a ten-page survey. The results of this survey, and my experience in the other interfaith activities, indicate that many people are increasingly negative about the explicit Christian or Jewish language from this tradition. Ironically, they are more positive, yet ambivalent, about the use of God language from the tradition. My interpretation of this data has not sorted out precisely how members of the various religious organizations or spiritual practices respond to the language. But, roughly one third of those answering the questionnaire were from traditions other than Jewish or Christian. The vast majority "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" with such formulations as: "We are a light to other nations," or "We are a New Jerusalem," or even "We are a "nation under God." Again ironically, they were less likely to be offended when the President of the United States used "God" in his speeches.^[62] Almost one third said it "depends" if they are offended or not. However, it was almost unanimous when asked: "Are you offended if the President only asks for a blessing on US troops and the United States when we go to war? Only four said they were not offended.

The hollow shell of the covenant that Bellah refers to perhaps is illustrated by the lack of resonance with some of the language of this tradition. This may be a symptom of the deeper crisis of our lack of faithfulness to the original experiment of Micah's admonition to "do justice." Or it may be a reaction, as already mentioned, to the current use of the tradition by President Bush and those seemingly equating

God's intent with the actions of the United States. Whatever the reason, at least within the interfaith movement, this language is currently problematic.

Is there a language that is replacing this language of the past? Or is there a way to reconnect with the intent of the original language and its call to faithfulness to a transcendent ethic? My sense is that we are still too early in our transition as a nation and a world society to a new culture, or paradigm if you prefer, to see a new compelling story about our identity as a nation and how we understand our purpose in a religious sense. What we call our "post-modern" culture is likely to be just the time of transition to a future epoch that answers the questions of modernity. If we are looking to the interfaith movement for a new language, during this transitional time, I am not sure what it will look like. In fact we are beginning to see a genuine religious pluralism emerging in some of our encounter experiments, maybe it will be out of these activities that we see a new language. The language of renewal and rebirth may be at the heart of our American psyche and experience. It may be a language about our humanness in all its fullness. Winthrop sensed the full scope of our humanity, our goodness and our corruptibility.

Alasdair MacIntyre, in an article entitled "How to be a North American," begins by recounting the role Sophocles played in Ancient Athens with his play "Philoctetes." MacIntyre said Sophocles was telling the Athenians a story and inviting them "to recognize that story as their own, so that by learning to re-imagine themselves they could find new sources to confront [their] a future."^[63] Sophocles wanted them to understand their inability to face up to two rival views of justice, of what human beings owe to each other." One view sees a people based on a calculation of our self-interest, the other sees our responsibilities based on seeing others in the world, not just vehicles for our security, but as part of the same body. We need to re-write our story of this nation. Will this story arise from our potential religious pluralism as being facilitated by the interfaith movement?

Perhaps the answer to this question could arise from evaluating the current interfaith activities in light of the Covenantal Standard. It seems to me that the interfaith movement is clear that casting the United States as a savior nation with God on our side does not conform to our tradition at its best. Lincoln deeply felt the civil war was a type of punishment for our sin of slavery and our inability to live up to our constitutional ideals of all being "created equal." God and the nation are not one and the same. Further, a total rejection of the civil religious language of our past, with some form of divine judgement, specifically if it is stated in concepts from other traditions, cannot be viable if we wish to speak to the American people. As Bellah points out, we must, at least, build on this past. Often times in the interfaith movement we back off a language that is too tied to one tradition so not to offend. A

better approach would be to explore the depth of one tradition's language out of respect and genuine interest. It seems to me that only in this approach will we be able to produce new language that speaks to our future while being rooted in the best of our past as a genuine resource. We are still Americans in some deep and abiding sense. The hope is that this deep meaning also makes us the most human to see our connectedness to others and all of creation.^[64]

Is American Utilitarianism and Individualism Once Again Undermining the Potential in the Interfaith Movement?

In answering this question I am most self-reflective and self-critical. This is also my most speculative section of the paper. I am ambivalent in my answer to this question. Why? Looking systematically through the lens of the Covenantal Standard, the interfaith movement does appear to have embodied many of the themes in the Standard in its own activities and its view of the American civil religion. On other themes there are signs the movement is making progress. The common good social ethic is very strongly represented in the core of the movement. It avoids casting the nation as a savior to others. It is working to enlarge its impact beyond sub-group status. It is grappling with articulating an imaginative vision. And most importantly it is working hard to foster a practice of authentic pluralism. Therefore, why am I tentative in my assessment of the movement's capacity to avoid being undermined by America's own success in technical reason, materialism and our abundant wealth?^[65] There are several themes in the Standard that I think we have not met. First, as already mentioned, we, like American society in general, have not fully addressed our dark side, or the dark side of America's past. Second, we have not yet connected strongly enough with the positive side of America's past in the civil religious tradition that Bellah outlines. Without this tie in some way to our past we may not speak to the soul of this nation or articulate a transcendent ethic worthy of our commitment. Each of these shortcomings has hindered the practice of the movement. This becomes most apparent in our weakly articulated purpose and our small circle of conversation partners, especially within the religious community.

Many organizers in the interfaith movement, my self-included, often see our work as "strategic." We want to mobilize the faith community for this or that cause. This is utilitarian and technical reason at work. We "calculate" the outcome of our success by how many people attend, whether or not we please the funding agencies or whether or not we have good media coverage. I think we spend time on

these measures of our success because we are less sure of our purpose. Therefore, we end up focusing less on outcomes of substance tied to our vision. In this sense we are very much like American culture in general. The practical, the useful, "the getting it done" mentality is very much ingrained in our American culture. Quantitatively measurable outcomes, tangible goals, good consequences, these "utility" measures are our default categories of success. This is a brand of technical reason. There is nothing wrong with technical reason, per se, as Bellah has pointed out. However, the problem arrives when it is divorced from an authentic religious vision that insures the technical reason will be in service to this vision. The hope is that it is a vision that engages individuals in a commitment to a calling beyond themselves. I wonder if such a vision might be capable of transforming the nature of technical reason itself.^[66]

What is the vision and purpose for the interfaith movement as it exists today in the Bay Area? There appear to be many, some laudable and some less so when still tied to self-interest and American individualism. According to Han Kung, "peace" is at stake; we must get along as religions to have peace.^[67] For others it is a good place to shop for a spiritual practice that is compatible with personal desires.^[68] For others it is a place of genuine exploration of the stranger, the "other." It is also a vehicle to mobilize for good causes, from emergency preparedness, youth alienation, domestic violence, and HIV AIDS solidarity. Some are seeking a new pan-religious expression. Some marginalized religious groups are using the interfaith movement to gain legitimacy. As a confession, I have been motivated by or contributed to all the above in some way or at some time in the past. However, if we cannot go beyond many of the above narrow expressions, the interfaith movement will be a truncated reform movement or at best a false hope. It will certainly not meet the third time of trial and the Covenantal Standard. How might we avoid the pitfalls of some of the limited reasons for being involved in the interfaith movement?

What should the interfaith movement's purpose be to avoid being undermined by utilitarian individualism? If we assume that our purpose in the interfaith movement is not to create a new religion, what is our purpose? I have already alluded to my hopes. First, it is a place to more deeply understand one's own faith as one encounters the authentic faith of other traditions. Second, in this encounter, I hope we see a new narrative emerging to speak to the soul of this country. This is a narrative that is grounded in our best instincts as a Covenantal nation. This would mean that the standard we have for the nation is the same standard we have for the movement itself. In both cases neither the interfaith movement nor America is a religion. They are infused with religious meaning; but neither can be

worshiped. If the interfaith movement is not clear on this point from the start, it will be undermined. It is not clear to me the interfaith movement is clear about its purpose or that it recognizes its limited, yet perhaps crucial, role in religious formation and energizing our civil religious self-understanding.

The above judgment comes out of my own practice within the movement. One experience that has driven home our lack of clarity of our purpose has been the numerous "strategic visioning" processes in which I have participated as a board member of various interfaith organizations. We have had difficulty in articulating our purpose. This has become most crucial when trying to assess our relationship to the vast group of "non-affiliated" religious seekers, especially in Marin County. Inadvertently we have a tendency to see them as less than a partner because they do not have an organization from which to sustain their participation in our organizational structures. We are more inclined to want an encounter with a person of another "established" faith tradition. I think our relationship to the non-affiliated seekers carries with it a meaning about our future capacity to develop a new story about ourselves through the so-called interfaith movement. I have already alluded to the complexity of this issue. At a minimum, our difficulty in addressing this issue head-on, short circuits us from expanding our conversations partners. We need to realize that we are all seekers. Many of the non-affiliated seekers are no less or no more tied to our dominant utilitarian individualism. In fact they may have reached a level of dissent with our culture from which we can learn. They may reveal to us the result of a baptism by the fire of expressive individualism that can also be a confessional stance to meet others in solidarity.

If the "non-affiliated" seekers pose a challenge for the interfaith movement, the evangelical community, often exclusivists in their faith commitment, perhaps offer a bigger challenge. These individuals have often "bought into" the success of American wealth as a direct reward for their piety. They are not dissenters. However, there is an authentic search for a religious message about life. Is there a way to engage the evangelical community? If we start from the perspective that we are not innocent either, we could at least engage at the level of our common humanity. We do not need to give up our perspective of a Covenantal nation. In fact, there may be common themes by which we could engage this community about faithfulness to God. I think a confessional stance will assist our engagement. We have to engage this community as conversation partners if we are to speak to the soul of this nation.

If we are not clear about our conversational partners and allies, and this can only be accomplished by being clear about our purpose and vision, we will limit the effectiveness of the interfaith movement. In fact we will grow as a movement when we put ourselves in the frame of mind to learn from others and not treat them as "false people." We do not want to make the same mistake as Larry Cruse. On each of

these issues, a clear sense of purpose and challenging conversation partners, that is, combining the vision with strategy, we have to embody all the elements of the Covenantal Standard. All instincts of the Covenantal standard are necessary, and other themes will no doubt be identified, but the first one is foundational: confess and confront our dark side. This means a confessional practice, no denials, no false innocence. There are many ways in which the interfaith movement manifests this Covenantal Standard. A fuller embodiment likely follows most directly from the first theme. More than just mirroring technical reason, the movement has the American disease of exceptionalism. We need a humility we seek in others. We need to see the light and return to the hard task of illuminating others with the awareness that we do not always shine so brightly ourselves.



It is not surprising that Bellah ends *Broken Covenant* with an admonition about our innocence and a reminder about the source of our hope. First the admonition. We need to be awakened from our "false innocence" about our goodness. The interfaith movement has to confront this in its work. We need, just as our nation does, to look at our negative side as a stimulus for rebirth, as Bellah suggests. As a nation and as a movement, we need to incorporate both sides of our self-understanding. To do this we need to be a vehicle for honest reflection about all of our traditions in the interfaith movement. We need to foster in the interfaith movement not only an encounter with the "other" in each tradition, but the hidden other in each of our traditions. The interfaith movement cannot paint over these differences. When we are fully self-critical and confessional in all of our traditions, which may be the time when we see new life affirming stories and myths from our efforts.

And we do have hope! Bellah reminds us of this hope, by grace, in his last paragraph of *Broken Covenant*:

We should not be so overawed by the late American worship of technical reason that we enter once again the illusion of omnipotence. One of the tenets of the early Puritans that we could well remember is that the millennium is brought by God, not man. Above all, Americans need to learn how to wait as well as to act. We have plunged into the thickets of this world so vigorously that we have lost the vision of the good. We need to take time again to see visions and dream dreams. But as Plato wrote so long ago, the vision of the good does not exempt us

from life in the cave. Faith is not utilitarian but neither is it an escape from the search for the useful.

We do not know what the future holds and we must give up the illusion that we control it, for we know that it depends not only on our action but on grace. While recognizing the reality of death, we may return finally to Winthrop's biblical injunction:

Let us choose life.^[69]

It seems to me that we have lost sight that we have a choice. To be reminded that we still have the chance to dream with our eyes open, rather than just calculate in denial, may be the birth of the new city on the hill. Only then will we avoid the narrow self-interest and the disembodied technical reason that will destroy us and our world.

Post Script

I want to suggest some further lines of research that could be undertaken if something like the Covenantal Standard has validity.

First, I think there are many issues that are raised as to whether or not I have adequately expressed a Standard that does justice to Bellah or helps us accept Bellah's challenge to build on our past when formulating a vision for our future.

Second, much like I have tried to evaluate the interfaith movement in light of this Standard, there are many lines of analysis that may go beyond my limited experience in the Bay Area.

Third, I think some principles like those expressed in this Standard can be used to analyze the Bush Administration's proper and improper use of the tradition, or at a minimum, to understand what one's agreement or disagreement might be. It is increasingly clear to me that we have an administration that does not understand or believe in the concept of the common good as we have inherited it from most of our religious traditions, particularly from Winthrop and the Catholic Social Teachings.^[70] We are on the verge of being told the most self-interested and self-destructive story about ourselves and a nation: if you structure your institutions on what you as an individual think is best for yourself, that is, what is in

your interest will be the ethic that helps all. If Reagan rewrote the new Jerusalem in his image, Bush is rewriting the ethic of Jesus in his image. More research and Covenantal informed social action, please!

Some possible lines of research that unfold from the Covenantal Standard are:

Theme 1: We must confess and confront the dark side of our history. Though we profess lofty ideals we are not categorically innocent.

Theme 2: We "spread" our ideals best by example. If we cast ourselves as "saviors," or as God's allies, in spreading our ideals we mis-understand that human history is at best "ironic," that is, with often consequences we never intended.

Research:

- Psychological studies are needed about innocence and denial tied to social movements, especially those that are informed by fundamentalist world views and divine sanctions.

Theme 3: Any movement to reform our culture must speak to its "soul," our best instincts as a nation. They cannot be just counter-cultural experiments that exist only for the benefit of the well-being of the sub-groups. This is to insure that the movement is of a scale to make a difference.

Research:

- More examples of moments in our history when this has happened need to be analyzed and explained. We especially need examples when the marginalized have become part of the American experiment.

Theme 4: These movements must act out of a state of self-reflection and humility not out of false pride. Though they may dissent from a culture that lacks a moral vision, if they do not engage with the larger society and its history, successes and failures, they may reinforce values of individual self-interest.

Research:

- A deeper understanding of what Bellah has suggested as the most "wildly utopian" idea of building an ethical society from self-interest, needs to be explored.
- Do we have an economic and political analysis of American society that helps us expose our unwitting support of a narrow view of the human condition?

Theme 5: There must be a transcendent ethic to our movement by which we judge the faithfulness of our actions. This can grow out of our religious or humanist traditions that have often spawned change in the United States.

Research:

- What is the content of this ethic for today?
- What are the natural partners for developing this ethic and establishing a national movement to communicate it to the American people?

Theme 6: This transcendent ethic has its best chance if it is sustained by an "immediacy of experience," encouraged by an authentic religious pluralism and an imaginative vision.

Research:

- Does Bellah's concept of "symbolic realism"^[71] help us better understand the possible grounding for this religious pluralism?
- How is imaginative vision cultivated in a way that insures that the religious sensibility is neither reductionistic nor "used" as a commodity?

Theme 7: Perhaps the most important principle that we inherit from the original covenant is a social ethic that affirms the common good? Self-interest, even enlightened self-interest, does not fulfill the test.

Research:

- As a defining ethic in the Covenant and in most religious traditions (minimally as the golden and silver rule), how is this expressed today?

- What is the concept of justice that is assumed in the common good?

I have included this post script as a challenge for others to help think about our priority intellectual tasks in research and action on behalf of a renewed social vision for the United States as a responsible citizen nation in the world. This was Bellah's third time of trial, our responsible role in a "revolutionary world." How we define and live our internal covenant will play a big role in deciding this global role. There is another option: we may be forced by our mistakes or by the international community to confront ourselves. That is another topic worth our research and activism.

[1] I say "increasingly explicit" because it is difficult to interpret his second term inaugural speech as having only an "implicit" role in what seems for him, a cosmic enterprise. Also in one of his stump speeches during the campaign for presidency, Bush explicitly said, "we will bring freedom to Cuba." This was said immediately after he again stated that, "Freedom is God's gift to the world." This was from a speech covered on the nightly news during the 2004 election. See the *New York Times* web-site or the White House's web-site for the full texts of his speeches.

[2] There is not a Biblical reference to the word "shining" as it relates to Jerusalem. A positive interpretation of this addition may be that Reagan was following in the footsteps of those wanting the United States to be the brightest example. A more cynical interpretation might use Reagan's lens of his famous statement in which he suggested that America was a great nation because we provided the opportunity for anyone to get rich. This sentiment is certainly out of step with John Winthrop. I am inclined to believe it is just another illustration of Reagan's projection of his personality and view that what moves the American people is their desire to feel good about themselves, regardless of the reality of the United States. For example, "deep in his heart" Reagan "believed" he was not exchanging weapons for the return of US hostages in Iran. He said this when it was disclosed that he was aware of the policies in his administration that condoned the transaction. This "confession" was part of the many TV specials at the time of Reagan's death.

[3] The following make up the "corpus" of Bellah's writings specifically on civil religion (or understanding our purpose, religiously and how this understanding leads to a unique critique of American culture). Besides *Broken Covenant*: "Civil Religion in America," in *Beyond Belief*; "American Civil Religion in the 1970's" in *American Civil Religion*, edited by Richey and Jones; "Religion and the Legitimation of the American Republic," "The Japanese and American Cases," "The Five Religions of Modern Italy," and "New Religious Consciousness and the Crisis in Modernity," in *Varieties of Civil Religion* by Bellah and Hammond. Important themes about civil religion are carried on in his two co-authored books, *Habits of the Heart* and *The Good Society* and the Epilogue to his festschrift, "Meaning and Modernity, America and the World," in *Meaning and Modernity*, edited by Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton. There are numerous public speeches worth including, some recent ones of note are: "Religion and Empire: What Kind of America Do We Want to Be?" Iliff School of Divinity, Denver Colorado, January 2003; "Educating

Citizens in an Imperial Republic," Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio, October 2004. A "Bellah reader" to be published by Princeton University Press next year will also be worth reading.

[4] Much of this debate is focused on whether or not, going back to Rousseau or Durkheim, there is too much of an emphasis on the "social integration" side of the concept and not enough on the social critique side of the concept. A close read of Bellah makes it clear that the social critique side is not missing. Also *Broken Covenant's* relevance was witnessed to at the recent annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in San Antonio Texas. In a sub-section of the "Scriptural Reasoning Group," Dr. Basit B Koshul, a Muslim, from Concordia College declared in the middle of the public discussion portion of the session, with a little hyperbole, "...just read Robert Bellah's, *Broken Covenant*, most of the answers are there...."

[5] In my Post Script below I make some preliminary suggestions for future research on these topics, A future article will make more detailed suggestions about future lines of research that should be undertaken to extend Bellah's civil religion project. Here I will refer to the connections among Bellah's other writings with his civil religious works. Specifically, I will suggest how to address the current Bush administration's use (and mis-use) of our civil religious heritage as defined by Bellah.

[6] Robert N. Bellah, *Beyond Belief, Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditionalist World* (Berkeley: University of California, 1991) 168.

[7] I rely greatly on the work of Robert Traer, former General Secretary of the International Association for Religious Freedom and a colleague on the faculty at Dominican University. See his book, *Quest for Truth, Critical Reflections on Interfaith Cooperation* (Aurora, Colorado: The Davies Group, Publishers, 1999); especially Chapter 18, "Interfaith Dialogue." In recent conversations with Traer, he has suggested interfaith activities presuppose a pluralistic context that is protected by legal traditions. We take this fact for granted.

[8] I generally accept John Hick's formulation of what one means when they say they are "religious pluralists." I am in fact suggesting that most in the "interfaith" movement do go beyond his "inclusivist" designation. See his many formulations of the pluralistic hypothesis. One easy entry into his thought is in his *A Christian Theology of Religions, The Rainbow of Faiths* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995).

[9] In an unpublished manuscript Richard Madsen, one of the co-authors of *Habits of the Heart*, has identified an American religious identity that has less traditional religious content and is more driven by American cultural values, regardless of the professed faith tradition.

[10] Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (New York: Seabury, 1975) 1.

[11] Bellah, *Beyond Belief*, 184.

[12] Our current national debate about our "pre-emptive" war in Iraq in spite of a lack of international consensus and at times, a degrading view of the United Nations, highlights Bellah's concern.

[13] Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, 1.

[14] Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, 1.

[15] Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, 14-15.

[16] Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, 15.

[17] Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, 15.

[18] Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, 14.

[19] Robert N. Bellah, "Educating Citizens in an Imperial Republic," a lecture delivered at Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio, October 26 2004.

[20] Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, 142.

[21] Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, 139.

[22] See Bellah's Introduction to the forthcoming "Bellah reader" by Princeton University Press where he further discusses his work in relationship to Parsons and Habermas.

[23] Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, xii.

[24] Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, xiii.

[25] Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, xiii.

[26] Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, xiv.

[27] This observation parallels Habermas' formulations that the values that drive the market economy have now "colonized" the "life world," i.e. the realms of life built on personal relationships like the family. But Bellah is also making a further point. He is saying that even the market must be guided by a social vision. It has been this struggle in American history to help insure this social vision.

[28] A useful statement of the meaning of "technical reason" for Bellah can be seen in the comparison to "moral reason" in: Bellah, *The Good Society*, 44: "There is a profound gap in our culture between technical reason, the knowledge with which we design computers or analyze the structure of DNA, and practical or moral reason, the ways we understand how we should live....What we need to know is not simply how to build a powerful computer or how to redesign DNA but precisely and above all what to do with that knowledge." A deeper understanding of this concept for Bellah would entail tracing it to at least Bellah's understanding of the work of Max Weber and Habermas.

[29] Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, 152.

[30] Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, 132.

[31] Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, 133.

[32] Bellah, "Educating Citizens in an Imperial Republic," 5-6.

[33] Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, 141-142.

[34] Richard Madsen, et. al, *Meaning and Modernity* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2002) 260-262. Here in 2002, Bellah reflects on his civil religion writings. He is "almost" admitting that by 1978 he is writing the obituary to a vital "civic republican" tradition. However, I do not think he has given up hope in the possibility that a recommitment to "an ethical society in light of a transcendent vision" might re-emerge. His most recent public lectures still have the ring of a "public theologian."

[35] See historical accounts of the two Great Awakenings that have put an indelible mark on the identity and conscience of Americans. Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (New York: Macmillan, 1939). And John Dillenberger and Claude Welch, *Protestant Christianity, Interpreted Through Its Development* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954)

[36] Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, 157.

[37] Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, 157.

[38] Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, 137-154. This section clarifies his notion of "imaginative vision."

[39] Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, 142.

[40] Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, 162.

[41] Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, 147-148.

[42] Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, 105. Bellah has also elaborated on this concept in recent lectures and his growing criticism of our Protestant culture. See Bellah, "Religion and Empire: What Kind of America Do we Want To Be?" 8.

[43] Calvin Luther Martin, *The Way of the Human Being* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) 159.

[44] It seems to me that each historical epoch must find a way to articulate this ethic for its own time. We have a real challenge in today's "post-modern" environment when the clearest answers seem to be either some form of relativism or exclusivistic fundamentalism. In a re-reading of Immanuel Kant's challenge to articulate a transcendent ethic for his time, I am struck by the creativity of his solution. If we have the intellectual equivalent of Kant today, will there be a social or spiritual movement to articulate and embrace it in a way to speak to the soul of our nation? See unpublished manuscript delivered to the Pacific Coast Theological Society by Douglas McGaughey of Willamette University, for insight on the value of Kant to this discussion: Douglas R. McGaughey, "Everything After Kant Depends Upon the Imagination,"

[45] Bellah and Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980) 21.

[46] Bellah and Hammond, *Varieties*, 21.

[47] For a fuller analysis of how new religious sensibilities are shaping our religious landscape see Gary Tobin's study of Marin County and the various works of Wade Clark Roof. See Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace, Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999) and Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers, The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (San Francisco, Harper, 1994). Gary Tobin, *Religious & Spiritual Change in America: The Experience of Marin County*, (San Francisco, California: Institute for Jewish & Community Research, 2000).

[48] Tobin, *Religious and Spiritual Change in America*.

[49] The interfaith movement is politically liberal, i.e. it sees policy solutions not driven by market solutions or a focus on the negative freedom of individuals, and therefore, it is clear that it will have a problem with Bush's total individualization of the symbols.

[50] See my unpublished article, "Civic Engagement and Religious Pluralism: A Liberal Education Challenge," which was first delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges and Universities in Washington DC January 2004. In this article I argue for the necessity of religious pluralism and a fully engaged diversity as essential to the human quest for self-understanding and ultimate meaning.

[51] The major proponent of this position is Diana L. Eck. See Diana L. Eck, *A new Religious America: How a "Christian Country Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001)

[52] See the unpublished manuscript of Robert Traer and his website (<http://christian-bible.com/>) that addresses this issue. It also includes references to other groups discussing this issue. Robert Traer, "The Presbyterian Resolution on Divestment, A Review of the Ethical Argument."

[53] Perhaps a case study of how to engage on difficult issues may be the way certain groups discussed the Mel Gibson movie about the passion of Christ. There was a full range of activities. However, those that went to the heart of the controversy, were the most rewarding. However, within the interfaith movement there was less deep discussion and more "solidarity," with our Jewish colleagues. The real challenge will be when this solidarity is not so easy to achieve and does not gloss over key issues.

[54] See the work of John Cobb in his view that dialogue does not need common ground, or a "universalists" position, but only a desire to engage in our differences: John Cobb, "Order Out of Chaos: A Philosophical Model of Inter-Religious Dialogue," in James Kellenberger, ed. *Inter-Religious Models and Criteria* (London: Macmillan, and New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993) and John Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

[55] I learned this lesson in producing a documentary film, "Cine(mas) for Change," with filmmaker Douglas Fry about diversity on the Dominican campus. It became clear to me, once we had achieved a level of diversity at Dominican, where no ethnic group felt marginalized, we created a positive community, perhaps even the beginning of an authentic pluralism amongst our students. They voiced

the reality of this ideal in their interviews. Are we at this point in our country? There appears to be more mis-trust in our nation as a whole. I do think my experience in the Bay Area suggests that we are trying to achieve this reality in the religious community. It seems we need to sustain it through confessional dialogue.

[56] Gary Tobin, *Religious & Spiritual Change in America: The Experience of Marin County, California*, (San Francisco: Institute for Jewish & Community Research, 2000)

[57] Tobin, *Religious & Spiritual Change in America*, 7.

[58] See the data from the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press on the Internet, and Robert Wuthnow's studies, particularly: Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven, Spirituality in American, Since the 1950's* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998). Also Gary Tobin's study suggests this. See also the work of Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (Reading, MA: Addison-Welsey, 1995).

[59] I am willing to confess to a little Bay Area ethnocentricity. However, I also think the Bay Area is a magnet for individuals seeking to be in a culture of kindred spirits. The question is what will this "progressive" cultural homogeneity produce?

[60] Robert Bellah will be a keynote speaker at this conference. See the Healing the World web-site: www.pnme.info/.

[61] In Thoreau's *Walking* I see a strong social ethic challenging narrow private interests and built on an interdependence ethic. See also paper delivered at the Pacific Coast Theological Society by Owen C. Thomas, "On Doing Theology During a Romantic Movement." Thomas is less sanguine about the transformation of expressive individualism.

[62] Once I disaggregate the responses the reasons behind these seeming contradictions may be clear.

[63] Alasdair MacIntyre, "How to be a North American," pp. 9-10

[64] I am aware I am changing the nature of my discourse from the analytic to the imaginative at key moments. Bellah has highlighted these different forms of human activity and discourse in his own writing when he talks about the mimetic, mythic, and theoretic. See his unpublished Bellah reader.

[65] A simple answer is that we can be anesthetized by our wealth. We have too much! Yet there seems to be an awareness that this wealth is destroying us. Can the interfaith movement help to accentuate this awareness? I think this is the minimum we need to do. The complex reasons are in need of further analysis beyond what I try to do in this paper.

[66] I realize I am taking a big conceptual and category leap here. But I wonder if utilitarianism as an ethical theory, when pushed to its limits doesn't "become" transformed. Can "means" be transformed by "ends?" By the same "logic," or flight of imagination, can technical reason be transformed into practical or moral reason? I suspect the logic of quantum physics may give us an answer here.

[67] Hans Kung, ed. *Yes to a Global Ethic* (London: SCM Press, 1996)

[68] Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace*.

[69] Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, 163.

[70] These same themes are embedded in many of the world's religions. See Robert Traer, *Faith in Human Rights: Support in Religious Traditions for a Global Struggle* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1991).

[71] I have not developed this notion in this paper. I do in: Stelmach, "Civic Engagement and Religious Pluralism." See Bellah's treatment in *Beyond Belief* and his *Habits of the Heart* "team's" Introduction in Madsen, et. al., *Meaning and Modernity*. I am also intrigued by a paper delivered by D. Herman C. Waetjen at the Pacific Coast Theological Society: "So-Called 'Gnosticism' and the Aporia of Spirit and Matter." I understand his exegetical approach to be similar to how I understand "symbolic realism."