

Religion Sector 3.0 - Emerging from the Conundrum

The Alignment of Religion Within Society in the United States


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It has been my contention that in the United States the term “civil religion,” as used by Robert Bellah, is counter to the prohibited national religion.

Furthermore, the concept of a “civil religion” acts to negate the reality of the diversity of the practiced religions in the United States.

The synonyms for “negate” all seems to imply this point:
-nullify, invalidate, counteract, disprove, refute.

I diagram this with a loop in which each use of Bellah’s statement of “civil religion” is a distraction, as it would loop back to the articles of the Constitution.

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1. No civil religion, US Constitution - 1st Amendment, 1776
 2. Framing the term civil religion, Bellah, 1967

To be sure, I do recognize much of what Bellah is driving at rather consistently. There are religion precepts which are woven into the fabric of American society.

There is also the attempt, within American society, to negate the recognition religion within that fabric with the phrase “a wall of separation between church and state.”

This is not Bellah’s intended outcome.

Bellah reflects Religion Sector 1.0 - “The Church, or Religion, On The Town Square.” This is countered by what is reflected in Religion Sector 2.0 - “A Wall Of Separation.”

The paradigm which has now emerged, after this long tension between the adherence to one of these two, is Religion Sector 3.0 - “Alignment - among congregations and within society.”

Religion Sector 3.0 enables a path forward, which recognizes Bellah’s validation of the existence in the United States of religion values and symbols. These reflect those expressed in the range of denominations he speaks of as “cousins,” finding their place within the spectrum of our society.

This Religion Sector 3.0 paradigm, which now finds its place in our society, calls for neither a “state” religion, nor for the negation of religion, in our society.

Religion moves within our nation without requiring us to choose between either a state sanctioned religion or the exclusion of religion within the fabric of society.

Finding that alignment - while identifying what are unique aspects of the relationship of religion and the Civic Sectors - is to be worked out. This is the historic process in an evolving democracy. The process is similar to other sectors, such as the education sector or even the business sector. It is also reflected within the process of navigating each phase of the expanding extension of who constituents “We the people.”

Having lived for that past 20 years in the one region in the United States where Religion Sector 3.0 defines “the landscape of religion in the United States,” I can attest that the advance to this phase (a) moves us beyond the debilitating tension between religion - yes or no, and (b) provides the context for the communal discourse on the resolution of factors that have been specific roadblocks hindering that discussion. These roadblocks have prevented the long sought beneficial relationship between the institutions of the Civic Sectors (government, education, human services, business) and the core institutions of the Religion Sector - clergy and congregations.

Significantly, this has resulted in the now “appropriate” and “efficient” strategies to attain the full potential of “Congregations Base Resources” (CBR) on behalf of the common good. This is enabled with the defined infrastructure of the Religions Sector, which now serves the widest range of collaborative efforts.

Furthermore, this has resulted in the initiation of “Congregation Based Constituent Engagement” (CBCE), enabling the much needed engagement of people across the full spectrum of the society. Congregations (a) are the most constituent based institution in any community, (b) gather weekly in significant numbers, (c) incorporate multiple communication vehicles of websites, emails and bulletins, and (d) act in response to a recognized leader. Congregations, internally and collectively, reflect the mix of denominations, demographics, and geography in any region.

In addition, of immediate concern today are the dynamics in the United States which have are resulting in cultural divisions. Divisions which have similarly influenced divisions within religion. This has impacted that vast aggregate of constituents.

These divisions within religions impact the progression of democracy, particularly given the dynamics of religion today and the dynamics of politics today, as it continues to advance in this democratic society.

Conversely, the innovation of the designed infrastructure for Regional Clergy Engagement has enabled a progression resulting in the shift from the ad hoc to the systemic model for the Religion Sector. This offers a countervailing asset at this critical time for democracy.

Congregation Based Constituent Engagement (CBCE) is an innovative platform for engaging vast numbers of constituents. In a designable context within a congregation and in congregational clusters, is the framework which systemically engages a diversity of demographics within the full spectrum of the fragments in our society.

While we focus on the need for “bridging the sides,” the real need is “connecting the full spectrum” of society. Fostering reciprocal and impactful communal discourse.

What does seem to make sense, when encountering the term “civil religion” in the writing of Bellah, is to remove “civil.” This would retain the intent of his assessment of the impact of religion, while it removes the impact of a suggestion that there is a designated religion, as well as the resulting discrepancy which I have suggested above.

This innovation of the Religion Sector 3.0 era finds further credibility when taken as an extension of Denis Lacorne’s book *Religion in America: A Political History*. One summary of Lacorne’s book reiterates his articulation of the concept of two competing narratives on religion defining American identity. This provides a clear statement of the current narrative which is now the context which Religion Sector 3.0 addresses.

Lacorne reiterates the long struggle between adherence to one of two narratives defining “the landscape of religion in the United States,” which precedes the emergence of an understanding of Religion Sector 3.0 - “Alignment: Among Congregations - Within Community.”

The critical clauses are here in bold.

I.

*The first narrative, derived from the philosophy of the Enlightenment, is essentially secular. Associated with the Founding Fathers and reflected in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Federalist Papers, this line of reasoning is **predicated on separating religion from politics to preserve political freedom from an overpowering church**. Prominent thinkers such as Voltaire, Thomas Paine, and Jean-Nicolas D meunier, who viewed the American project as **a radical attempt to create a new regime free from religion and the weight of ancient history, embraced this American effort to establish a genuine "wall of separation" between church and state**.*

II.

*The second narrative is based on the premise that **religion is a fundamental part of the American identity and emphasizes the importance of the original settlement of America by New England Puritans**. This alternative vision was elaborated by Whig politicians and Romantic historians in the first half of the nineteenth century. It is still shared by modern political scientists such as Samuel Huntington. **These thinkers insist America possesses a core, stable "Creed" mixing Protestant and republican values**. Lacorne outlines the role of religion in the making of these narratives and examines, against this backdrop, how key historians, philosophers, novelists, and intellectuals situate religion in American politics.*

In the delineation of the Religion Sectors 1.0 and 2.0, Lacorne’s I and II are reversed, resulting in:

Religion Sector 1.0 - The Church on The Town Square

Religion Sector 2.0 - Walls of Separation

Religion Sector 3.0 - Alignment: Among Congregations - Within Community

Yes, there are religion based precepts woven into the fabric of American society.

Yes, there is the attempted negation of that, with the phrase “a wall of separation between religion and state.”

Religion Sector 3.0 enables the presence in society of concepts found in religion values.

It does not call for a “state” religion.

It does respect the personal religion beliefs and practices of individuals in the society.

Religion concepts are within the fabric of our nation without having to be either state sanctioned or excluded from within the society. How religion sits in an alignment within the greater society is to be worked out, given the acknowledged unique aspects of the relationship of religion and the Civic Sectors.

Combining my lenses of both religion and political science, I would observe that this is a critical factor in addressing the current dynamics in the United States which has resulted in (a) a level of fragmentation which drives cultural divisions, and (b) leaves unresolved the specifics of the alignment of religion dynamics within the context of the full society.

The resolution of this conundrum is an essential step in accomplishing the task of achieving a pluralistic, inclusive, democratic society.