

An excerpt from

The Long Affair

Thomas Jefferson and the French Revolution, 1785-1800

Conor Cruise
O'Brien

Thomas Jefferson and the Impending Schism in the American Civil Religion

In an address at Michigan State University on 5 May 1995, President Clinton warned right-wing paramilitaries not to attempt "to appropriate our sacred symbols for paranoid purposes."[1](#)

The President was speaking in the aftermath of the destruction, apparently by American right-wing fanatics, of the Federal building in Oklahoma City and its occupants on 19 April 1995. The aftermath of that ghastly act had brought media reports of widespread paramilitary conspiracies in several states—and notably around the militia groups in Michigan—for the organization of armed resistance to the Federal Government. The President was seeking to exclude such conspirators from what is called "the American civil religion."

There is quite a copious literature about the American civil religion and, while there are differences about the exact nature of this powerful but nebulous concept, there is also a broad consensus about its general nature.

The term "civil religion" was first used by Rousseau and refers to "the religious dimension of the polity." *American* civil religion has been summed up as "an institutionalized collection of sacred beliefs providing sources of cohesion and prophetic guidance through times of national crises."[2](#) Among the sacred beliefs, a cult of liberty has been important from very early on. Robert N. Bellah quotes a 1770 observer as noting that "the minds of the people are wrought up to as high a degree of enthusiasm by the word liberty as could have been expected had religion been the cause."[3](#)

In the American civil religion, liberty, nationalism, and faith are fused. As Norman Mailer put it: "In America the country was the religion. And all the other religions of the land were fed from that first religion."[4](#)

James H. Smylie declared, around the same time: "Civil religion is the way we have identified ourselves as God's people and under his providence, the way we have invoked divine sanction in the use of power and in the support of civil authority and

the way in which we justify our national actions."⁵

Central to the American civil religion are two eighteenth-century documents: the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Around these documents, and linked with them in the religion, is a limited number of historical figures; for all Americans, the Founding Fathers; for most Americans, also Abraham Lincoln. In the pantheon of the American civil religion, however, two holy personages stand out with larger halos. As the authors of *Civil Religion and the Presidency* write:

The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and later, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address became the scriptures of the new public faith. Just as the colonists saw their own church governments as vehicles of God's participation in history, so these public documents became the covenants which bound the people of the nation together in a political and religious union. A leadership imagery developed that paralleled the biblical covenant of Israel and led to the Founding Fathers mythology. Before long Washington had become the Moses-liberator figure, Jefferson the prophet.⁶

I. Jefferson the Prophet

There is no difficulty in seeing Jefferson as the prophet of the American civil religion if you think of him *only* as the author of its most sacred document, the Declaration of Independence, and leave it at that. But there is great difficulty in fitting the historic Jefferson, with all we know of him, into the civil religion of modern America—as generally and semi-officially expounded—at all, let alone seeing him as the prophet of the same.

Thomas Jefferson was indeed, in his day, a prophet of American civil religion. Indeed if his original draft of the Declaration of Independence had been accepted, the Declaration would have been more explicitly linked to the American civil religion than it is in its present form. Where the Declaration, as we now have it, opens its second paragraph with the words, "We hold these truths to be self-evident," Jefferson's original draft had had "We hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable." The drafting of the Declaration had been entrusted by Congress to a committee of five, of which the leading members were Jefferson, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin. Although Rousseau's phrase "civil religion" does not seem to have been in circulation in America at this time—when it would have been suspect in the eyes of churchmen—Jefferson (whether through Rousseau or not) was a "civil religion" person, in his habitual use of language. Adams objected strongly to the mixing up of politics and religion. Franklin was more consistently secular than Jefferson in his style. Carl Lotus Becker notes, on the change in the manuscript to "self-evident": "It is not clear that this change was made by Jefferson. The hand-writing of 'self-evident' resembles Franklin's."⁷ The change was an improvement, functionally speaking, for a revolutionary manifesto. Anyone who rejects a "self-evident truth" is, by definition, either a fool or a knave. And that is precisely what the Founders wanted to say about anyone who opposed the Declaration. Jefferson himself appreciated the polemical force of this word, and often used it later.

The Jefferson of the early 1790s, the champion of the French Revolution, was an ardent believer in, and prophet of, civil religion in the sense adumbrated by Rousseau. That is, he sought to animate an apparently secular and political idea—that of liberty—by breathing into it the kind of emotions and dispositions with which religion had been invested in the Ages of Faith. Of this religion Thomas Jefferson was more than a prophet, he was a Pope. As author of the Declaration of Independence he possessed the *Magisterium* of liberty. He could define heresy and excommunicate heretics. To fail to acknowledge (for example) that the French Revolution was an integral part of the holy cause of liberty along with the American Revolution was heresy, and the heretic had to be driven from public life.

John Adams, classed as a heresiarch within this system, naturally resisted the Jeffersonian civil religion: "John Adams argued in his 'Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law' that the linking of the religious and civil authority was a wicked one, subject to the worst kind of abuses."[8](#)

Thomas Jefferson ardently preached and energetically practiced his own version of civil religion. But is that civil religion compatible with the *American* civil religion as we know it today? Let us see.

In investigating that question we have to begin by asking another question: What kind of American was Thomas Jefferson?

He was a good American in the general sense; he held America and Americans to be vastly superior to Europe and Europeans, morally and socially speaking. But he was not an American nationalist, politically speaking. He was not an "America firster." He was a "Virginia firster." He continued to speak of Virginia as "my country" even when he was representing the United States abroad. Nor was this an isolated trick of speech. The United States was not an object that engaged his emotions; Virginia was. The Declaration of Independence was for him a sacred document, part of the civil religion of liberty. The Constitution of the United States was not; it was a political document, just about acceptable, and no more, for pragmatic reasons, and remaining acceptable only as long as the Federal Government respected what Virginians regarded as the limits of its authority. Federal institutions, including the Presidency, were workaday things, not invested with the spiritual aura of the civil religion. Virginia remained the holy land of Liberty.

In his will Jefferson did not mention the fact that he had been twice President of the United States as among the significant events of his career. He did mention—as well as his authorship of the Declaration of Independence—his foundation of the University of Virginia. In terms of that old dialogue between Head and Heart, the Heart was always with Virginia, and only the Head with the United States.

In political life, as in his personal emotional life, Jefferson's Head usually prevailed over his Heart; as in the case of the recall of Citizen Genet. But this was not always

the case. When Virginia appeared to be threatened by an excess of Federal Government, in 1798, under President John Adams, Jefferson encouraged Virginians to resist. Virginians, and other Southerners, of later generations, in challenging what they perceived as the excessive claims of the Federal Government were, to that extent, in the Jefferson tradition.

In the 1830s, John C. Calhoun, the great propagator of the States Rights ideology in the antebellum South, claimed Jefferson's authority for his "Nullification" doctrine: that states could treat as null and void Federal laws they regarded as intruding on the proper sphere of the states. Calhoun invoked as precedents the Virginia and Kentucky resolutions rejecting the Alien and Sedition Laws passed by Congress in 1798. Calhoun noted that the Kentucky resolutions were "now known to have emanated from the pen of Mr. Jefferson."[9](#)

Jefferson's authority was important to the leaders of the antebellum South, in the 1830s, as validating the philosophy of Nullification: a philosophy that had within it the germs of the eventual Secession. But by the 1840s the Nullification philosophy had come to be regarded by Southerners, as axiomatic—"self-evident truths," indeed—so Jefferson's validation was now surplus to requirements. And Jefferson was by this time becoming deeply unpopular with the more ardent defenders of Southern institutions. The reason was that the hated abolitionist press, from the 1830s on, had been making copious use of Jefferson's "anti-slavery" writings, mainly from *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Back in the late eighteenth century, the Virginian slaveowners who were Jefferson's contemporaries hadn't taken Jeffersonian "anti-slavery" seriously. They knew Jefferson personally, and knew he meant no harm. And many of them were in the habit of saying the same sorts of things themselves, in appropriate company.

By the mid-nineteenth century, however, Southerners *had* to take Jefferson's anti-slavery writings seriously because *Northerners* were taking them seriously, and using them against the South. Taking the Declaration of Independence in conjunction with Jefferson's "anti-slavery" utterances—well publicized in the North for more than two decades—Northerners, on the eve of the Civil War, were able to read anti-slavery intentions into the Declaration of Independence itself, and thus enlist both the Declaration and its author on their own side in the coming war. In a letter of April 1859, Lincoln wrote:

All honour to Jefferson—to the man who, in the concrete pressure of a struggle for national independence by a single people had the coolness, forecast, and capacity to introduce into a merely revolutionary document, an abstract truth, and so to embalm it there, that today, and in all coming days, it shall be a rebuke and a stumbling block to the very harbingers of re-appearing tyranny and oppression.[10](#)

This letter was really a campaign manifesto, Merrill D. Peterson writes, "Lincoln's letter circulated freely during the presidential campaign of 1860. It was a masterpiece,

the *Cincinnati Daily Gazette* declared, 'the most pointed and most forcible political letter ever written . . . a platform in itself.'" [11](#)

After the Civil War, that accolade from the martyred President secured a continuing place for Jefferson in the pantheon of the American civil religion. The Jeffersonian vessel had survived the rapids of the Civil War, and remained holy in the eyes of large numbers of Americans, both among the victors and the vanquished. In his posthumous reputation, as in his political career, luck was on Jefferson's side.

Still, there were always some begrudgers, and there were many more in the North than in the South. In the North, after the Civil War, Hamilton, not Jefferson, was at the center of the civil religion. In the South—more firmly than before the Civil War—it was Jefferson who was at the center. That is to say that the sectional and regional alignment, as between North and South, was again for a time essentially what it had been in the late eighteenth century. The reasons for the popularity of Jefferson in the postwar South are of great importance in relation to Jefferson's position in the American civil religion in the late twentieth century, and will be considered in a later section of this Epilogue (below, II and III).

In the first half of the twentieth century, the most important phase affecting the posthumous reputation and civil-religious status of Thomas Jefferson was the New Deal. As Merrill D. Peterson puts it: "The Roosevelt administration built a great national temple to Jefferson's memory." The temple is the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, dedicated by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt on the two hundredth anniversary of Jefferson's birth, 13 April 1943. According to an official brochure: "Inscriptions at the memorial were selected by the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Commission and were taken from a wide variety of his writings on freedom, slavery, education and government." The section of the inscriptions that deals with freedom and slavery runs as follows:

God who gave us life gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God? Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just, that his justice cannot sleep forever. Commerce between master and slave is despotism. Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate than that these people are to be free.

All of this passage, except for the last sentence, is taken from *Notes on the State of Virginia*. The last sentence is taken from Jefferson's *Autobiography*. That sentence, as isolated in the Memorial inscription, deceives the public as to Jefferson's meaning. For the original passage in the *Autobiography* continues: "*Nor is it less certain that the two races, equally free, cannot live in the same government. Native habit, opinion has drawn indelible lines of distinction between them.*" (Emphasis added.)

In short, these people are to be free, and then deported. Jefferson's teaching on that matter is quite clear and often repeated.

Those who edited that inscription on behalf of the Jefferson Memorial Commission must have known what they were doing when they wrenched that resounding sentence from the *Autobiography* out of the context which so drastically qualifies its meaning. The distortion, by suppression, has to be deliberate.

In that inscription on the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C. the liberal-Jeffersonian lie about Jefferson's position on liberty and slavery assumes, literally, monumental proportions.

The quarter-century following the dedication of the Memorial saw Jefferson's reputation, especially as a liberal, at its height. John F. Kennedy, and his liberal intellectual entourage, strongly contributed to the general and almost universal acceptance of the Jefferson Memorial. By the mid-1960s Jefferson's towering position, within the American civil religion, appeared assured for all time.

Merrill D. Peterson's invaluable work *The Jefferson Image in the American Mind* was published in 1960. By now, a successor volume, covering the last decades of the twentieth century, is badly needed. In particular, a detailed study of the impact of the civil rights movement, and ensuing changes, on Jefferson's image in the American mind, needs to be made. In default of such source material, I propose to "cut to the chase," as the filmmakers say, and consider factors affecting the place of Thomas Jefferson in the American civil religion, as these appear to me today (1995). The two major factors, in my opinion, are challenges to the authority of the Federal Government and the race issue. These factors have been linked in earlier momentous phases of American history: in 1798, when Virginia and Kentucky were threatening revolt against Federal authority; in the period before the Civil War, and after the Civil War itself, and in the civil rights crisis of the 1960s. They are still linked today, and they raise serious questions about the place of Thomas Jefferson in the civil religion of modern America. Let me begin with the challenge to the authority of the Federal Government.

The President's full name—William Jefferson Clinton—attests his family's allegiance to a Jeffersonian tradition, probably through FDR. As President-elect, Clinton attested his personal commitment to that tradition by a symbolic gesture: in the week of his inauguration, Clinton retraced Jefferson's trip—as President-elect—from Monticello to Washington (in December 1800). And the White House staff underlined the significance of this gesture by letting the press know that the new President-elect, at this solemn moment in his life, was reading an advance copy of a new biography of Thomas Jefferson.^{[12](#)}

When, therefore, Clinton warned the right-wing paramilitaries not to attempt "to appropriate our sacred symbols for paranoid purposes," we may assume that the heritage of Thomas Jefferson was associated in his mind with the defense of the sacred symbols. But Jefferson is an unreliable ally in this particular matter. Jefferson in his middle years—and even before the French Revolution—was in the grip of a

fanatical cult of Liberty, seen as an absolute, to which it would be blasphemous to assign limits. In this period—roughly 1787 to 1793—Jefferson was intoxicated with what Edmund Burke called "the wild *gas* of liberty." That phrase occurs in the book with the confutation of which Jefferson, as Secretary of State, managed to associate himself publicly in April 1791, greatly to his own political advantage at the time. The passage in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in which Burke uses this phrase is worth quoting here:

When I see the spirit of liberty in action, I see a strong principle at work; and this, for a while, is all I can possibly know of it. The wild *gas*, the fixed air is plainly broke loose: but we ought to suspend our judgement until the first effervescence is a little subsided, till the liquor is cleared, and until we see something deeper than the agitation of a troubled and frothy surface. I must be tolerably sure, before I venture publicly to congratulate men upon a blessing, that they have really received one. Flattery corrupts both the receiver and the giver; and adulation is not of more service to the people than to kings. I should therefore suspend my congratulations on the new liberty of France, until I was informed how it had been combined with government; with public force; with the discipline and obedience of armies; with the collection of an effective and well-distributed revenue; with morality and religion; with the solidity of property; with peace and order; with civil and social manners. All these (in their way) are good things too; and, without them, liberty is not a benefit whilst it lasts, and is not likely to continue long. The effect of liberty to individuals is, that they may do what they please: We ought to see what it will please them to do, before we risque congratulations, which may be soon turned into complaints.¹³

In America, the holy cause of liberty became "combined with Government," in the manner stipulated by Burke, through the enactment and acceptance of the American Constitution. Washington, Adams, and Hamilton were all spiritually Burkeans; so was Madison, while he worked with Hamilton on the *Federalist Papers*, and before he fell under the Jeffersonian spell, from 1790 on. (These Founders were Burkeans, not in that they got their ideas from Burke, but in that the principles on which they worked were identical with those enunciated by Burke in the passage where he refers to the matters with which liberty has to be "combined.")

In resisting the enterprise of the right-wing paramilitaries—who are also libertarian extremists—President Clinton has most of the Founders on his side, and the Constitution itself. But Jefferson is different. The liberty that Jefferson adores is not a liberty "combined" with all those tedious Burkean things, as in the Constitution, but a wild liberty, absolute, untrammelled, universal, the liberty of a great revolutionary manifesto: the Declaration of Independence. The other Founding Fathers saw the Declaration as embodying generalities which would need, at a later stage, to be combined with and confined by practical considerations. But Jefferson saw the principles of the Declaration as transcendent truths of which he himself, as author of the Declaration, was also the destined and authoritative interpreter.

Even before the French Revolution—and even before the American Constitution—Jefferson had approved the keeping of the spirit of armed rebellion alive in America and elsewhere. In the context of Shays's Rebellion in Massachusetts in 1767, Jefferson wrote: "God forbid we should be 20 years without such a rebellion. . . . The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure."

That is something very like a Jeffersonian charter for the most militant section of the modern American militias, is it not? If President Clinton is relying on the authority of Thomas Jefferson to keep those sacred symbols out of the clutches of paranoid paramilitaries, the President can be refuted out of the mouth of the very authority he invokes.

Jefferson's enthusiasm for what later came to be called "permanent revolution" antedates the French Revolution. But the advent of the French Revolution fortified and exalted that enthusiasm. In propagating the cause of the French Revolution in America, and incorporating it with the American Revolution, into a single holy cause of freedom, one of the things Jefferson is doing is emancipating the cause of freedom from the limits set to it in America by the American Constitution. The holy cause is now universal and transcends the limits of any merely local legislation. You can't tell the French Revolution that it is in breach of the American Constitution, so the Cult of the French Revolution clips the wings of the American Constitution. There are indeed *no* limits that can be assigned to the holy cause of freedom; neither geographical boundaries, nor limits assigned by conventional ideas of morality and compassion. In the "Adam and Eve" letter to William Short, the Secretary of State instructs that squeamish diplomatist (and defector from the ideals of his patron Jefferson) to stop complaining about French Revolutionary atrocities and accept that there is no limit (except the sparing of two persons per nation) to the slaughter that may legitimately be perpetrated in the holy cause of freedom. And the letter to Short is not a case—as Jeffersonian apologists like to imply—of an isolated flash of hyperbole. The letter to Short is a follow-up to the *Notes on a Conversation with George Washington*, in which Jefferson records that faith in the French Revolution has been his "polar star" and his belief that Washington is a belated convert to that faith (converted by the victories of French Revolutionary armies). In his letter to Short, Jefferson is setting out the merciless, and almost limitless, exigencies of polar faith.

Those in the culture of the modern American militias who see themselves as at war, or on the verge of war, with the Federal Government are fanatical believers in liberty as Jefferson was. In the letter to Short, what Jefferson is saying is that there is no limit to the slaughters that may legitimately be perpetrated in the cause of liberty. We cannot even say categorically that Jefferson would have condemned the bombing of the Federal building in Oklahoma City and the destruction of its occupants. If he believed that that action was *not* perpetrated in the cause of liberty, he *would* have condemned it, and demanded the punishment of its perpetrators (as he did in relation to the bloody deeds of certain persons classified by him as *banditti*, in the early

phases of the French Revolution). But if he had accepted that the deed *was* perpetrated in the cause of liberty—as its perpetrators and their admirers appear sincerely to believe that it was—then he would have condoned that act. This is not just an inference from the general principle laid down in the letter to Short. It is an inference from Jefferson's abiding faith in the French Revolution throughout its most sanguinary phases (1792-94). Jefferson condoned the September Massacres of 1792, atrocities on a far greater scale, numerically, than the 1995 massacre in Oklahoma City. After September, as before, the French Revolution remained Jefferson's polar star. The Adam and Eve letter was written after the news of the massacre of several thousand helpless people by the Paris mobs had reached America. Philip Freneau, Jefferson's protégé—an employee at the Department of State—explicitly defended the September Massacres in the *National Gazette*, at that date the principal organ of Jefferson's Republican Party, and under Jefferson's direct and active patronage in Philadelphia.

It is true that Jefferson later—and retrospectively—condemned "the atrocities of Robespierre." But that was in 1795, and Robespierre (who did not order the massacres of September 1792) was not only dead, but anathema to the new masters of the French Revolution. While Robespierre was alive, and the Terror was actually raging, Jefferson had no comment to offer on French Revolutionary atrocities. When Madison informed Jefferson, in a letter, of the massacre of the Brissotins (Girondins) in May-June 1793, Jefferson, in a longish letter in reply to Madison, makes no reference to that transaction. Presumably all such matters are still covered by the "Adam and Eve" doctrine of six months earlier.

It is true that there was a pragmatist in Jefferson as well as a visionary fanatic, and the pragmatist acquired the upper hand over the visionary in the late 1790s. Of this phenomenon Robert N. Bellah, the leading authority on the American civil religion, writes as follows, somewhat misleadingly.

Early in the history of the new nation there had been a deep revulsion against the excesses of the French Revolution and a tendency to contrast it with the moderate and humane character of the American Revolution. Such a contrast was stated most vigorously by the early Federalists and was in some form or other accepted by Jeffersonian Democracy as well.[14](#)

In reality the deep revulsion against the excesses of the French Revolution (while they were happening) was exclusively a Federalist affair. The Republicans, headed by Jefferson himself, stoutly defended the French Revolution throughout the period when the reports of the said excesses were reaching America. If possible, anything horrible in the reports from Paris was ascribed by Republicans to the manipulation of the news by the British (as in Jefferson's letter to Tom Paine of October 1789. In private, the esoteric doctrine of the Republican leaders—as revealed by Jefferson to William Short—was that what the Federalists called excesses were really taking place, but were entirely justifiable, however drastic, because undertaken in the cause

of liberty.

The Republicans, headed by Jefferson, began to detach themselves from the cause of the French Revolution after 1793, and especially from 1795 on. But this was not because Jefferson and the rest of them were belatedly experiencing some form of revulsion against excesses which they had systematically condoned (often by denying their existence) at the time of their perpetration. The detachment of the Republicans from the French Revolution was the result of a growing perception in 1794-95, that the enthusiasm for the French Revolution, among the American people, was cooling. It was cooling not because of those excesses—which were at their worst during the period when Americans (other than Federalists) were most enthusiastic about the French Revolution—but because of developments in the United States itself and in a neighboring territory, Saint-Domingue (Haiti).

Those developments included Citizen Genet's interferences in the affairs of the United States and the simultaneous victory of the black slaves in Saint-Domingue and ensuing massacre and dispersion of the whites. The exact nature of the connection between the black insurrection and the French Revolution remains open to argument. But it would have been hard for the slaveowners to remain enthusiastic for the French Revolution after February 1794 when the French National Convention, then dominated by Robespierre, decreed the emancipation of all slaves, both in the dominions of the French Republic and of Great Britain (which had included, up to 1783, the American colonies).

The emancipating Act of February 1794 was probably not the least of "the atrocities of Robespierre" in the eyes of Virginia slaveowners, including Thomas Jefferson.

After these events—and especially after Washington's withering stigmatization of the Republican and Democratic Societies in December 1794—Jefferson and his colleagues realized that the cause of the French Revolution, formerly a major political asset to them in the United States, had now become a liability. So they cut their losses. They never repudiated the French Revolution—still cherished by many of their rank-and-file—but it was as if this part of their political stock-in-trade had been removed from the front window. You could still get it, but only if you asked for it; as some of Jefferson's correspondents did.

In this matter, by the time Jefferson became President, the pragmatist had prevailed over the visionary, Head over Heart.

Yet when we are talking about the American civil religion and its sacred symbols, the visionary in Jefferson, the champion of the French Revolution, remains disturbingly—and subversively—alive and relevant. Jefferson does not fit into the modern American civil religion *as officially and semi-officially expounded*. That version of the ACR involves, as James Smylie puts it, "divine sanction in the use of power and in the support of civil authority." [15](#) That is not what the *Jeffersonian* civil

religion is about. But other versions of the ACR are extant in modern America, even if official America, and the textbooks written for it, take no cognizance of their existence.

In religion—in both its supernatural and political forms, and in America as well as in the Orient—the spirit bloweth where it listeth. The places and communities where it listeth to blow are seldom congenial either to urban sophisticates or to official establishments. At present the regions of America in which a revolutionary version of the American civil religion is most active are principally the wilder parts of the American Middle West and Northwest, from Oklahoma out to the State of Washington.

Out there, there are tens of thousands of Americans ready to fight the Federal Government in the cause of liberty. In Burkean terms, these people are intoxicated with "the wild *gas* of liberty." In Jeffersonian terms, they are people who are prepared to refresh the tree of liberty with its "natural manure," their own blood and that of those they identify as tyrants, including the agents of the Federal Government.

Some people seem to feel that since the militia rebels are "right-wing" they cannot be Jeffersonians. But the Tree of Liberty is a mystical, abstract, absolute entity knowing nothing of mundane political distinctions. It accepts its natural manure, the blood of patriots and tyrants. Which are the patriots and which the tyrants makes no difference to the quality of the manure or the health of the bloodthirsty organism that feeds on it.

As far as I know, the present revolutionaries in and around the militia movement have not made much use of Jefferson personally, though they do of course claim descent from the American Revolution and from the Declaration of Independence. Many of them would probably be put off Jefferson by the respect so long accorded him by urban intellectuals and (as far as the so-called "Christian right" is concerned) by his reputation for Godlessness. But if this movement prospers—as I fear it may in the coming century—then it will develop its own intellectuals, its own ideologies, and its own press, and these are certain to seek and find legitimation for *their* revolution—including its excesses—in the writings of Thomas Jefferson. Jeffersonian liberty is an absolute, not confined by specific ideological content, and revolutionaries of any stripe, whether right or left, have equal entitlement to his blessing, provided they are prepared to kill and die for whatever version of liberty they happen to believe in.

In Jefferson's own time, the defense of liberty included the defense of slavery (in practice, though not in theory) so that Jeffersonian liberty is not so liberal that it cannot accommodate libertarians of the white right.

Interpolation (February-March 1996): The opening sections of this Epilogue (above) were written in the summer of 1995. I was not then aware of any evidence of a specific link between any modern right-wing extremists and the Jeffersonian tradition. I have subsequently become aware of significant evidence to that effect. I

am letting the above sections stand, exactly in the form they originally went to the publisher, but I now wish to add the following:

It is now known that the two prime suspects in the Oklahoma City bombing both claim Jeffersonian inspiration. In a profile of the second man charged with the bombing, Terry Lynn Nichols, Serge F. Koyaleski (*Washington Post*, 3 July 1995) wrote: "[Nichols] read the works of Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine and was particularly impressed by Jefferson's maxim 'The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.'"

CNN, on 31 January 1996, broadcast a news item about Timothy McVeigh headlined: "McVeigh's Shirt Expected To Be Key Evidence." In the course of a discussion of the shirt, the following remarks were made:

Susan Candiotti, CNN Correspondent: "Sources tell CNN when Tim McVeigh was arrested driving away from Oklahoma City on the day of the bombing he was wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with words of rebellion and bloodshed. McVeigh's shirt bore this quotation, 'The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.' The words were written by Thomas Jefferson shortly after the American Revolution when some people felt threatened by the new federal government." (The words were actually written in February 1787, before the federal government came into existence, and they were about a rebellion against the State of Massachusetts. See above, chapter 2.)

Dr. Steven Hochman (identified as "Jefferson scholar"): "What Jefferson is saying is that it is a fact that in order to preserve freedom, you're going to have a situation where there is violence, as a wake-up call you might say, to the leaders." (We have encountered this Dr. Hochman before. He was Dumas Malone's research assistant, and co-author, along with Malone, of a contribution to the *Journal of Southern History* ridiculing the claims of Madison Hemings. See above, chapter 7.)

Susan Candiotti: "At the jail in Perry, Oklahoma, where McVeigh was first taken, the FBI asked for the clothing he was wearing but described the T-shirt in a way that kept the wording secret until now. CNN has been told the words are visible in McVeigh's mug shot taken at the jail. The FBI seized the only copy of that mug shot and will not release it. McVeigh's lawyer brushed aside any concern over the T-shirt slogan when we asked him how incriminating is this?"

Stephen Jones (McVeigh's lawyer): "Well, if Thomas Jefferson said it, I shouldn't think it would be incriminating at all."

II. Race and the American Civil Religion

It is difficult, in a general way, to fit Thomas Jefferson into the American civil religion in its official version (ACROV). But once the criterion of race is introduced,

it becomes logically impossible to fit Jefferson into ACROV. Of course, what is logically *impossible* can be politically—and pedagogically—sustained for quite a long time. But I don't think this can be indefinitely maintained in the case of Jefferson. Too much scholarly work has been coming out, in that area (see above, chapter 7), that would need to be suppressed, for the cult of Jefferson to remain fully acceptable within ACROV, into the Third Millennium, now fast approaching. Barring a white racist revolution, that is.

Modern America is, and has been for more than a quarter of a century, a post-racist society: post-racist juridically and institutionally and in the ethos of all its establishments: political, social, financial, academic, scientific, and—not least significant—in the field of sport. The American civil religion, if it is to be a bonding force through the coming century, must be unequivocally multiracial. I am not sure that this is yet altogether so. The civil religion has been implicitly or explicitly a religion of white people for most of its history. I am not sure how far it has, by now, lived down that past. But obviously it must do so, in the coming century, if it is to remain a civil religion for the American people as a whole. There are—as in other Western countries—powerful racist undercurrents still around. But for both reasons, *because* this is officially a post-racist society, *and* because the racist undercurrents are still there, Thomas Jefferson is becoming a most unsuitable and embarrassing figure in the pantheon of the American civil religion in the late twentieth century and into the next. For Thomas Jefferson was demonstrably a racist, and a particularly aggressive and vindictive one at that (see chapter 7).

I don't mean by this that Jefferson was a racist because he owned slaves. A person might own slaves, in the conditions of the eighteenth century, without being a racist. The person might simply have inherited slaves, and not quite know what to do about it. I believe Washington, who manumitted all his slaves by his will, was in that category. (Jefferson manumitted none of his, except for the young Hemingses, who were probably his own children [see Appendix].) I am not aware of any utterances of Washington's that could reasonably be classed as racist. Washington did not, as Jefferson did (in Query XIV of *Notes on the State of Virginia*), go on about such topics as the supposed preference of black males for white women, as compared with the supposed preference of orangutans for black women (Notes on the State of Virginia, Query XIV). Nor does Washington display, as Jefferson does (most obsessively in Query XIV), the classical racist itch to identify black characteristics that may be interpreted as indicative of genetic inferiority.

It is precisely Jefferson's status as the oracle of Liberty, within the American civil religion, that is becoming unsustainable in a post-racist America. Consider the implications of the story of Jame Hubbard (chapter 7, pp. 267-68). Hubbard's sole offense was to claim liberty for himself, and to try to win it. For that offense, Jefferson had him "severely flogged in the presence of his companions." For many Americans today—I would hope for most Americans, and most other people—the hero of Liberty, in that story, is not the famous Thomas Jefferson but the otherwise

unknown Jame Hubbard. And that perception has ominous implications for the future status of Thomas Jefferson in the civil religion of a post-racist and increasingly multiracial America.

The factor, however, that is bound eventually to eliminate a personal cult of Thomas Jefferson from the civil religion of a multiracial America is not his record in relation to slaves and slavery, but the policy laid down by him in relation to "free Negroes." Jefferson's vision of the future America—after the hypothetical abolition of slavery by the slaveowners themselves—is a lily-white one. All the ex-slaves are to be deported to Africa. In the meantime, free blacks have to be eliminated from Virginia. Jefferson's proposals for their elimination were too draconian to be stomached even by his fellow slaveowners (above, chapter 7). His proposed (and rejected) amendments to the Virginian legal code included a recommendation for the penalization of what Virginian slaveowners called "miscegenation": by which they always mean sexual intercourse between black men and white women, never between white men and black women, an event of frequent but unmentionable occurrence. Jefferson made provision for the case of a white woman who might bear a mulatto child. Both the mother and her child were to leave Virginia, immediately after the birth. In the event of their failure to do so, mother and child were declared to be "beyond the protection of the law." In the circumstances, that proposition was a license for lynching: for the physical destruction of mother and child by any Virginian who might care to do the job. Volunteers would not be lacking.

Jefferson's white contemporaries refused to accept that sinister recommendation. But later generations of Southerners were to act in its spirit. It is no coincidence that Jefferson was much more popular in the South *after* the Civil War than he had been before the war. Before the war the issue had been slavery, and Jefferson had been a bit unsound on that, by the standards prevailing in the South in the immediate antebellum period. After the war, however, the question of the hour, for white Southerners, was the status of free blacks. And on *that*, Thomas Jefferson was absolutely sound.

It is true that white Southerners, after the war, were in no position to achieve Jefferson's ideal solution: the deportation of all the emancipated blacks. But the white Southerners could and did act in the spirit of Jefferson's major premise in this matter: they could ensure that there would be no *free* blacks in the Southern states. The blacks could be free technically—that is, no longer slaves under Federal law—but in reality there would be no free blacks on Southern soil. Any black who attempted to achieve real freedom was, at best, treated as Jefferson had treated James Hubbard for *his* attempt to achieve freedom. More drastic penalties than flogging, however, were available against persons perceived as guilty of serious racial misconduct. Such people were "beyond the protection of the law." That is, they could be lynched, with perfect impunity for the lynchers. And they were, regularly and in large numbers, after the end of the Reconstruction period and through the first two decades of the twentieth century.

For all this, the enforcers of white supremacy claimed, and with justice, a mandate in Thomas Jefferson's well-known doctrine that there was no place for free blacks in American society.¹⁶ If blacks were emancipated and yet remained in America and in the South, then they had to be brought under restraint, in such ways as would insure that there were really no free blacks, at least on Southern soil. The Ku Klux Klan saw to that.

III. Liberal Jeffersonians

Liberal Jeffersonians will no doubt be outraged at my suggestion that the Ku Klux Klan was ideologically descended from Thomas Jefferson. I hope liberal Jeffersonians are outraged and I propose to go on outraging them. I intend, if possible, to outrage them out of existence: not out of physical existence of course, but out of existence as the confused and confusing school of thought they actually constitute. For "liberal Jeffersonian" is a contradiction in terms. It is so at least if you think that "liberal racist" is a contradiction in terms. And modern American liberals can hardly contest that last point.

In the 1970s and 1980s, American liberals were greatly exercised about *apartheid* in South Africa and busy tracking down any person who might conceivably have given any kind of aid or comfort to that iniquitous system. In that connection, how about Thomas Jefferson? The Jeffersonian doctrine of No Free Blacks in America is a doctrine of apartheid for America.

Someone should write a thesis on "The Influence of Thomas Jefferson on Hendrik Verwoerd."

In the Jeffersonian liberal tradition, there has always been a strong element of unconscious or subconscious racism. Thus, in the late nineteenth century, Henry George regarded Jefferson as a radical who had "allied himself absolutely, unreservedly, actively permanently with the wronged masses."¹⁷

By far the most wronged masses in America, at the time George wrote that, were the blacks of the Southern states. And Jefferson's only contribution to those blacks was the doctrine that they had no place in America as *free people*. Jefferson's white Southern disciples were busy enforcing that doctrine, by floggings and lynchings, while Henry George was writing about Jefferson's "unreserved" alliance with "the wronged masses."

What is surprising about Jeffersonian liberalism is that it has managed (so far) to survive *both* the comprehensive discredit of racism among the educated and in official America in the second half of the twentieth century *and* the scholarly work that demonstrates that Jefferson was a racist (above, chapter 7). Thus as late as 1984—that is well after the publication of all the studies quoted in chapter 7—we find Richard Matthews writing in *The Radical Politics of Thomas Jefferson: A*

Revisionist View (Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 1984): "Jefferson not only presents a radical critique of American market society but also presents an image of—if not a road-map to—a consciously made, legitimately democratic American future." A legitimately democratic American future without any blacks in it.

I believe that in the next century, as blacks and Hispanics and Asians acquire increasing influence in American society, the Jeffersonian liberal tradition, which is already intellectually untenable, will become socially and politically untenable as well. I also believe that the American civil religion, official version (ACROV), will have to be reformed in a manner that will downgrade and eventually exclude Thomas Jefferson. Finally, I believe that Jefferson will, nonetheless, continue to be a power in America in the area where the mystical side of Jefferson really belongs: among the radical, violent anti-Federal libertarian fanatics: the very same paranoid conspirators against whose grasp President Clinton is rightly resolved to defend "our sacred symbols."

The Impending Schism

As the twenty-first century advances, there will be changes within the American civil religion (official version)—ACROV—to correspond to great changes in the society itself. The multiracial character of the society will be increasingly realized, as significant numbers of blacks, Hispanics, and Asians move up the economic ladder. Women, of all races, will also be moving up, and in many cases even faster and higher than the general rate of ascent of non-white people.

In these circumstances, ACROV will be needed more than ever, as a bonding force for a more and more visibly diverse society and polity. But within ACROV, the cult of the Founding Fathers will be affected. The present assaults on the campuses on the authority, in every field, of "dead white males" are often absurd, but they have their implications for the future, and in particular for the cult of the Founding Fathers, within ACROV.

In the new circumstances, the emphasis is likely to be increasingly on *documents*, rather than personalities, as the core of ACROV. Of the two main documents, the Constitution presents no problems for the new societal coalition, in which women and non-white people exercise increasing authority. The Constitution, as it now stands, is the work, not just of Founding Fathers, but of many kinds of people, over many generations. Both abolitionists and feminists—overlapping categories in the nineteenth century—played their part in bringing the Constitution into the shape in which we have it today. The Constitution will be amended—an Equal Rights Amendment would appear to be inevitable, if present trends continue—during the first half of the coming century. The Constitution—amended and amendable—will be at the center of ACROV.

The Declaration of Independence is another matter; ACROV without the Declaration

is unthinkable. The Declaration is the primary assertion of American nationalism, and the primary function of the American civil religion is to invest American nationalism with the aura of the sacred. Without the Declaration, then, there is no American civil religion.

Yet there are problems about the Declaration, in its relation to a society no longer exclusively dominated by whites. There are problems about the wording, and problems about the authorship. It is accepted that the words "all men are created equal" do not, in their literal meaning, apply to women, and were not intended by the Founding Fathers (collectively) to apply to slaves. Yet it is also accepted that the expectations aroused by this formula have been a force which eventually changed the meaning of the formula, to include women and people of all races.

The wording, in itself, offers no basic difficulty. The trouble is in the relation of the wording to the perceived authorship. In ACROV, as we know it in the twentieth century, Jefferson has the sacred status which belongs to the author of the most sacred document: the Declaration of Independence. And nothing is more certain than that Thomas Jefferson did not intend that black people should be free, in America. Freedom and blackness were incompatible in America: free blacks were to be banished back to Africa. The sublime principles of the Declaration did not apply to them. They are for whites only.

For many years, Jefferson's real views, concerning the future of blacks in America, were hidden by a fog of soothing obfuscation best exemplified by the relevant inscription in the Jefferson Memorial. People were told that Thomas Jefferson was against slavery, and his words to that effect were quoted frequently. But people were *not* told that, for Jefferson, black people had no future in America at all, *except as slaves*. Once they ceased to be slaves, they were to be sent packing. Nor would other non-whites be welcome. Jefferson's bright vision of the future of America is a monoracial one: whites only.

It follows that there can be no room for a cult of Thomas Jefferson in the civil religion of an effectively *multiracial* America, that is, an America in which non-white Americans have a significant and increasing say. Once the facts are known, Jefferson is of necessity an abhorrent figure, to people who would not be in America at all—or not free there—if Jefferson could have had his way.

Those people don't need Jefferson. But they *do* need the Declaration. The words "all men are created equal," taken in their literal meaning (without Jeffersonian implied reservations), are an important part of their American title deeds. Racists hold that blacks are genetically inferior; that is, that they were *not* created equal. Against that doctrine, it is important to be able to invoke the authority of the most sacred of American documents.

In these circumstances, in which the Declaration is needed, and Jefferson is not

needed, I would expect to see a change in the perceived relation between Jefferson and the Declaration. There is an element of exaggeration in the present official perception of that relation, and that exaggeration will come under attack in the increasingly multiracial climate of the coming century.

The crucial question is: Was Thomas Jefferson the author of the Declaration of Independence?

Many Americans will answer that question with an indignant "*Of course* he was!" Yet there is really no "of course" about it. The Declaration was certainly not the sole and unaided work of Thomas Jefferson. The document did not spring fully formed from his head, like Athena from the forehead of Zeus. The work of preparing a Declaration—to justify the independence that Congress had actually proclaimed two days before—was entrusted by Congress, not to Jefferson alone, but to a committee which also included John Adams and Benjamin Franklin, figures of no less status than Jefferson in the America of 1776. Adams and Franklin would probably have had considerable input into discussions preceding the actual drafting of the document. Jefferson's draft was reviewed and corrected by the committee, before being laid before Congress, whose consensus it was designed to reflect. And Congress itself made further changes in the draft already amended by the committee. Carl Lotus Becker writes:

Congress discussed his draft for three successive days. What uncomplimentary remarks the members may have made is not known; but it is known that in the end certain paragraphs were greatly changed and others omitted altogether. These 'deprecations'—so he speaks of them—Jefferson did not enjoy: but we may easily console ourselves for his discomfiture since it moved the humane Franklin to tell him a story. Writing in 1818, Jefferson says: "I was sitting by Dr. Franklin, who perceived that I was not insensible to these mutilations. I have made it a rule, said he, whenever in my power, to avoid becoming the draughtsman of papers to be reviewed by a public body."[18](#)

Franklin's story follows, and though it is amusing, it is not relevant here. What is relevant is the word "draughtsman" and it is evident that it was in that role, and not the more exalted role of "author," that Jefferson's colleagues envisaged him, in relation to the collective elaboration of the Declaration of Independence.

In the (official) American civil religion, as it evolves under the conditions of the coming century, the Declaration will be increasingly seen as a collective document. The Founding Fathers themselves will have declined in importance, in comparison with the sacred documents, but the *collective* authority of the Founding Fathers will still be found to be vastly more acceptable than the idea of the personal authorship of Thomas Jefferson. George Washington owned slaves, but he was not, as Jefferson was, committed to the elimination of free blacks from America. On the contrary, in manumitting all his slaves in his will, without stipulating that they be immediately

deported to Africa, Washington was implicitly asserting that free blacks *do* have a future in America.

With the Declaration increasingly perceived as a collective document, Jefferson may be increasingly cast in the prosaic and subordinate role of a draughtsman. Jefferson's demotion from the sacred status of "author" of the Declaration would effectively put an end to the official cult of Jefferson within the American civil religion. Jefferson should be out of ACROV, I would guess, before the middle of the coming century. (Unless there is a racist counter-revolution by then, which seems highly unlikely, though not quite impossible.)

Jefferson should be out of ACROV. But he is likely to be at the center of an alternative, and powerful, version of American civil religion.

It is safe to predict that the liberal-Jeffersonian tradition will become extinct fairly early in the coming century. The huge contradiction within that tradition, with regard to race, renders it unfit to survive in a multiracial society. But the inevitable rejection of Jefferson by liberals, in multiracial America, will draw increasingly favorable attention to Jefferson on the far right. The very reasons why liberals will have to reject him are compelling reasons for the far right to adopt him. Or rather re-adopt him, for he was a hero to Southern white supremacists after the Civil War (above, chapter 7).

Doctrinally, Jefferson is far more suitable as a patron saint of white supremacists than of modern American liberals. The twin themes of State Rights and No Free Blacks in America fit the positions of the far-right militia movements like a glove.

Rhetorically and emotionally also, the mystical Jefferson—the Jefferson of the Tree of Liberty and of the French Revolution—meets the needs of the modern far right. Jefferson's Liberty, a powerfully emotive concept, unanalyzed and without intellectual content, is the kind of Liberty which the militias love: what Burke calls "the wild *gas* of liberty."

The Jefferson who admired Shays's rebels, and hoped they would find imitators in later generations, and who inspired the Virginian and Kentucky resolutions of 1798, is providing those now resisting the Federal Government with clear warrant for their cause, and for the use of armed force should the incursions of the Federal Government make that necessary.

Finally, the Jefferson who made a cult of the French Revolution provides aid and comfort, not just to the far right in government, but to the most ferocious of its militant extremists. In the paroxysm of his enthusiasm for the French Revolution, in January 1793, Jefferson laid down the principle that there are (virtually) no limits to the slaughter that may be legitimately perpetrated in the name of Liberty. So that anyone in modern America, who is planning any act of mass destruction, may invoke

the sanction of "the author of the Declaration of Independence," provided only that the act is deemed to be perpetrated in the holy cause of liberty.

For these and other reasons, I believe that at some time in the coming century the cult of Jefferson may, as it were, split off from its present home in ACROV, and find a new home on the wilder shores of American freedom. There may then be a new version of American civil religion, challenging the present orthodox version. Ironically—in terms of Jefferson's own civil-religious vocabulary—the new version would be seen, from the viewpoint of ACROV, as a heresy within the American civil religion. Schism would be a more appropriate term.

The schismatics could lay claim, and on more than plausible grounds, to the special protection of the most powerful prophet of the old united civil religion. The neo-Jeffersonian schism would be bitterly divisive, not only on religious but on racial lines. It would strengthen the tendencies that are already making for more attempted secessions, more inter-racial violence.

There might well be matter here for a new civil war, aimed at repealing the results of the last one. Only the next one would not be confined to the South nor—if it gains ground generally—would it be content with secession. It would aim at the enforcement, throughout America, of the Jeffersonian principle: No Free Blacks in America.

I believe that the orthodox multiracial version of the American civil religion must eventually prevail—at whatever cost—against the neo-Jeffersonian racist schism. That the orthodox version should prevail is vital not only for America, but for the future of non-racial democracy, and of Enlightenment values generally, in those parts of the world where these are now dominant and also in those parts where people are struggling to bring them into effective being.

IV. American Civil Religion and the Future of the Enlightenment

In a book of mine published early this year,¹⁹ I argued that the American civil religion may—somewhat paradoxically—be the major force working for the preservation of the Enlightenment, and with it democracy, in the world. There are two related points here: First, that Enlightenment and democracy are unlikely to survive in the rest of the world if they go down in America. Second, that democracy and the Enlightenment in America find a source of emotional sustenance in the American civil religion that has no equivalent in the other democracies of the world.

The central paradox is that the sacred documents of the American civil religion are Enlightenment documents, or rather documents which combine nationalism with Enlightenment, while the civil religion invests that combination with a sacred aura.

The word "combination" is a crucial one. I refer the reader here to the passage from

Burke's *Reflections*, which I quoted earlier. The Declaration represents what Burke called "the spirit of liberty in action." The Constitution spells out how that spirit is to be "combined with Government" and all the other matters listed by Burke. Thus, what would otherwise be "the wild *gas* of liberty" is canalized and put to rational and constructive ends.

The Constitution is an *Enlightenment* document and it is also a *sacred* document. The emotional force of nationalism—that wild *gas*—is harnessed into the sustenance of democratic institutions. That is the unique strength of American democracy. Democracy in other countries depends—to a much greater extent than people in those countries are aware—on the example and perceived success of American democracy. And hardly anyone in any of those countries realizes how much the success of democracy in America depends on the American civil religion.

When I wrote *On The Eve of the Millennium* I did not see, as I now do, that the American civil religion is on the verge of schism. I did not see that because I had not yet realized—as I now do on the evidence presented in chapter 7—that Thomas Jefferson was a determined and implacable racist: No Free Blacks. The civil religion of a multiracial society cannot indefinitely accept a racist as a prophet. It might be better if it could: the pragmatic acceptance of an anomaly might be the best thing available, socially speaking. But religion—supernatural or civil—does not work like that. A sincerely felt religion requires veneration for its prophets. And how can a multiracial society revere the man who ordered the flogging of Jame Hubbard, and who sought to withdraw the protection of the law from a white woman giving birth to a mulatto child and from her baby? That cannot be, I think. Above all, how long can a multiracial society tolerate the continuing cult of a prophet who found the very existence of such a society unacceptable? Not very long, I think.

The elimination of the cult of Jefferson from the American multiracial civil religion seems to me to be inevitable at some point in the course of the coming century. But that means schism. The cult of Jefferson would continue, outside the mainstream, as a *white* cult, at the very center of a whites-only version of the American civil religion. This schism in the present American civil religion could well make the present white racist reaction turn into something much more formidable. President Clinton rightly tries to keep "our sacred symbols" out of the hands of white racists who see themselves as at war with the Federal Government. But there is one of the sacred symbols which cannot long be kept out of their hands, because Thomas Jefferson belongs wholly on the white racist side, and not at all on the pro-Federal and multiracial side.

The schism which I believe to be impending in the American civil religion would be an event of global significance. On the outcome of the civil racial strife around that schism would depend the future of the Enlightenment tradition and democracy, not just in America, but in the whole world.

I believe the multiracial version of the American civil religion—without Jefferson—will eventually prevail over the white racist version—with Jefferson. The multiracial version should ultimately prevail because most white Americans as well as all non-whites within the civil religion can be expected to hold to it. I think.

But the implications of a schism in the American civil religion are potentially so far-reaching that they defy all prediction. The schism involves the release of a spellbinding and anarchic racist prophet within Jefferson, from the prison of obfuscation, which his liberal admirers constructed for him and in which they held him so long. In his dimly lit liberal cell, the manic prophet was incommunicado. Through his liberal biographers, his wilder utterances reached the world only in sedative, soothing, and muffled paraphrase or through oblique and obscure references.[20](#)

But now the time of obfuscation and occultation is drawing to an end. A drama is about to manifest itself.

What I *think* is that a multiracial version of the American civil religion must prevail against the racist challenge. But what I *feel* is awe and foreboding at the potential consequences in the coming century, for the world as well as for America, of the impending schism in the American civil religion and of the concomitant emergence of Thomas Jefferson—the mystic, implacable Jefferson of the French Revolution—as prophet and patron of the fanatical racist far right in America.

Footnotes

1. Reported in *New York Times*, 6 May 1995.
2. Gail Gehrig, *American Civil Religion: An Assessment* (Storrs, Conn., 1981) p. 2. Gehrig is summarizing a model proposed in 1960 by Robert N. Bellah, perhaps the most influential modern writer on this subject.
3. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Times of Trial* (New York, 1975). By this time, Bellah was pessimistic about his subject: 'Today the American civil religion is an empty and broken shell' (*Broken Covenant*, p. 142). Twenty years later, however, the American civil religion is palpably still there, and a force in the land. Soon, perhaps, to be more than *one* force.
4. Mailer, 'Evil in the Room,' in *Life*, Vol. 13-14, 1972. Like Bellah, around the same time, Mailer was pessimistic about the future of American civil religion. Both writers were reflecting the mood of national despondency in the immediate wake of the lost war in Vietnam. The Reagan years saw the recovery of the American civil religion.
5. Smylie, 'The President as Prophet, Priest, King,' in Harry F. Booth and others, ed., *Civil Religion in America: Manifest Destiny and Historical Judgement: A Symposium*, presented as part of the Two Hundredth Anniversary celebration of Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania (April 12-14, 1973).
6. Richard V. Pierard and Robert D. Lunder, *Civil Religion and the Presidency* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1988).
7. Carl Lotus Becker, *The Declaration of Independence: A Study in the History of Political Ideas* (New York ed., 1922 and 1940), p. 142, n. 1.

8. Smylie, 'The President as Prophet, Priest, King,' already cited. Smylie is not a believer in the identification suggested in his title, which had been proposed by other writers on the American civil religion.
9. *The Works of John C. Calhoun* (New York, 1854), pp. 352-59.
10. Quoted in Merrill D. Peterson, *The Jefferson Image in the American Mind* (New York, 1960), p. 162.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 163.
12. See Joseph J. Ellis, 'American Sphinx: The Contradictions of Thomas Jefferson,' in *Civilization* (November/December 1994), p. 38. I am indebted for this reference to Mr. Darin Waters of North Carolina.
13. *Reflections*, Penguin Classics ed., pp. 89-91.
14. Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, p. 123.
15. Smylie, 'The President . . .,' p. 93.
16. Merrill D. Peterson says that the Georgian Populist leader Tom Watson, in the early twentieth century, "through his magazine *The Jeffersonian* transmuted his class hatred into sectional and racial hatred of the most vicious sort" *The Jefferson Image*, p. 258.
17. Quoted in Peterson, *Jefferson Image*, p. 258.
18. Becker, *Declaration of Independence*, p. 208.
19. *On the Eve of the Millennium* (Free Press, New York, 1996).
20. Consider Dumas Malone's handling of the 'Adam and Eve letter' (above, chapter 4, n. 51).

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