

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria

Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

UNIVERSITY 8 MAI 1945/ GUELMA

جامعة 8 ماي 1945 / قالمة

FACULTY OF LETTERS AND LANGUAGES

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قسم الآداب واللغة

الانجليزية



MASTER DISSERTATION

The American Model of Religious Pluralism

A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Letters and English Language
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master's Degree in
Anglophone Language, Literatures, and Civilizations

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2022 - 2023

Dedication

To Allah, I thank you for everything you have given me. I sense your presence in my difficulties and at all times “So, surely with hardship comes ease”. These sacred words followed me through dark nights, pushing me to trust you and move forward. Without you, I couldn't do it, and I know you are reading this. You are my reason to continue.

Mom, my best friend, As I continue to walk through life's journey, I carry your blessings with me, knowing that I am blessed to have you in my life.

Dad, Aya, my little angel Firas. Hanin, my little princess. I love you from the bottom of my heart. Having such a supportive family helped me be successful for you and only you. You might not understand my words in English, but I can feel how proud all of you.

And to you Ines (with one S), my partner in this remarkable journey of our dissertation, I am filled with an overwhelming sense of warmth and pride as I reflect upon our shared experiences. We have encountered countless challenges along the way, but through our unwavering determination and collective effort, we have triumphed over every obstacle. Each small victory we celebrated brought us closer, and our collaboration spirit has been truly exceptional.

Iness Boutemdjet

Dedication

First of all, Alhamdulillah who gave me strength to start when I couldn't, and finish when I didn't think I would. I wholeheartedly dedicate this dissertation to my family. My supportive parents, Nadia, and Mohamed Tayeb Harieche, thank you for being such two beautiful souls and brightening my life, for being in the hardest moments before the happiest ones, for being such a source of moral, spiritual, emotional, and financial support. To my sister Intissar, and my two brothers Bahaa Eddine and Moatez Billah, thank you for always making me feel that I deserve to be successful.

To my close friends, Sabrine Aounallah thank you for being such an amazing partner during these 17 years, for appreciating my efforts and handling my constant complains about being tired to finish, I love you from the bottom of my heart. Nesrine Sissaoui my QUEEN thank you for the daily reminders that you believe in me and being such a motivation to continue, you have a special part in my life. Achouak Menasria my superwoman, thank you for being proud of me. A special thanks to Amal Selaimia for the guidance and the remarks, and to Abby for always picking up the phone whenever I need help.

Not forgetting to send love to my aunt Akila mom, uncle Kamel, and my cousins Asma, Darine who are my other sisters, you are amazing. My colleague Iness Boutemdjet, you were amazing and will always be. I'm grateful for the opportunity you gave me to share with you this project, you were so helpful and easy going, it was joyful working with you, I love you.

LAST BUT NOT LEAST, I WANNA THANK ME FOR BELIEVING IN ME, I WANNA THANK ME FOR DOING ALL THIS HARD WORK, I WANNA THANK ME FOR HAVING NO DAYS OFF, I WANNA THANK ME FOR NEVER QUITTING.

Ines Amira Harieche

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our sincere appreciation and gratitude to Dr. Mahfoud Ali Zoui, our supervisor, for contributing in the accomplishment of this work. His guidance and advice have been constantly enlightening our way to reach the project's objective. We would also like to thank the jury members for devoting their time to read our dissertation and accepting it.

Thanks must also be extended to our five years' teachers; without them we wouldn't even be where we are now. We gratefully appreciate the department workers for always dealing with our studies concerns.

Lastly, we would like to thank the almighty God for giving strength and courage to surpass all the trials we encountered and finish.

Abstract

The United States is one of the most diverse nations in the world. Various approaches to managing religious diversity have emerged throughout the country's history. The most important foundational document of American religious pluralism is the first amendment to the US constitution which prohibited the government from recognizing a specific religious belief system or giving privileges to any religious group. These rules aim to preserve the unique foundations on which American society is established. Since September 11, 2001, the American experience of religious pluralism has attracted increasing interest. The attacks not only reshaped global responses to terrorism, but they also raised new questions on religious diversity. The founding fathers used civil religion to bridge divisions and develop a common civic identity. This study explores the unique American experience of managing religious pluralism, covering both the legal and sociocultural aspects. It examines the main foundations of American religious pluralism, including the constitutional principles and the influence of civil religion. Through historical analysis and an examination of contemporary studies, this research aims to provide insights into the American approach to religious diversity and its relationship with civil religion.

الملخص

الولايات المتحدة هي واحدة من أكثر الدول تنوعاً في العالم. ظهرت أنماط مختلفة لإدارة تنوع الأديان على مر تاريخ البلاد. أهم وثيقة أساسية للتعددية الدينية الأمريكية هي التعديل الأول للدستور الأمريكي، الذي يحظر على الحكومة أن تعترف بنظام ديني محدد أو أن تمنح امتيازات لأي مجموعة دينية. تستجيب الحكومة لتنوع الأديان عن طريق فرض مجموعة قواعد متعددة على الجماعات الدينية. تهدف هذه القواعد إلى الحفاظ على الأسس المهمة التي يستند إليها المجتمع الأمريكي. منذ الحادي عشر من سبتمبر عام 2001، جذبت تجربة التعددية الدينية الأمريكية اهتماماً متزايداً. الهجمات لم تجعل العالم يستجيب فقط للإرهاب، بل أثارت أيضاً تساؤلات جديدة حول تنوع الأديان. استخدم آباء الدستور الدين المدني لتجاوز الانقسامات وتطوير هوية مدنية مشتركة. تستكشف هذه الدراسة التجربة الأمريكية الفريدة في إدارة التعددية الدينية، وتشمل الجوانب القانونية والاجتماعية. كذلك تدرس الأسس الرئيسية للتعددية الدينية الأمريكية، بما في ذلك المبادئ الدستورية وتأثير الدين المدني. من خلال التحليل التاريخي وفحص الدراسات المعاصرة، يهدف هذا البحث إلى توفير نظرة عميقة في النهج الأمريكي للتعددية الدينية وعلاقتها بالدين المدني.

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Introduction

The United States has a unique experience in managing religious diversity. The reputation of the American model of religious pluralism which is based on celebrating and encouraging diversity helped attract immigrants of different religious backgrounds. This has shaped the country's identity, creating an environment where American citizens are exposed to a wide range of beliefs and practices. This thesis explores the relationship between religious diversity and promoting tolerance and understanding in the American society.

The coexistence of various religions in the United States including the Native American religions, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, fosters harmony and respect. It brings people from different religious backgrounds. understanding and learning. This pluralism shapes the united American identity. Moreover, religious diversity influences both society and government by ensuring religious freedom and equal rights for all individuals, regardless of their beliefs.

In the 20th century, religious diversity in the United States expanded significantly, attracting the attention of numerous researchers. Studies have examined this growth and its implications. Scholars have coined the term "pluralism" to describe the coexistence of various prominent religions alongside lesser-known ones and indigenous traditions. The roots of this religious diversity can be traced back to indigenous religious movements during the 1830s and 1840s, which were further influenced by increased immigration following the European revolutions of 1830 and 1848.

The study examines the unique American experience of religious pluralism by exploring how various factors contribute to the complex religious landscape of the United States. It delves into the historical foundations, exploring how interactions between Native American religions and European settlers have shaped the diversity of beliefs and practices. It also explores the experiences of religious communities, investigating how persecution and conversion have

influenced the religious composition of American society.

Moreover, this research examines the legal framework governing religious diversity in the United States, analyzing the guarantees of religious freedom and the separation of church and state under the First Amendment. By exploring the complexities of religious freedom and the tensions between individual rights and societal interests, it provides insights into the mechanisms shaping the management of religious diversity. This contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced and the efforts made to address them in the United States.

The dissertation also explores the concept of civil religion in America. It takes a look at how the founding fathers used civil religion to promote harmony among a religiously diverse population. It explores principles, symbols, and rituals that have been integral to the development of a shared civic identity. This examination helps us understand how the founding fathers sought to bridge religious divides and create a common ground for diverse religious communities.

By studying these interconnected aspects, this research contributes to a deeper comprehension of the challenges, complexities, and achievements associated with religious pluralism in the United States. It underscores the significance of religious diversity in shaping American identity and emphasizes the ongoing efforts to promote understanding, respect, and coexistence among diverse religious communities. Furthermore, by examining the evolving religious landscape, tracing the historical background of religious movements, and exploring the role of civil religion, this research sheds light on the complex tapestry of religious pluralism in the United States.

The first chapter gives a general overview of how various waves of immigration throughout history have shaped the religious landscape in the United States. With a population of approximately 340 million people, the United States is the third-largest country in the world and is known for its ethnic and religious diversity. The country is home to hundreds of religions,

with Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism being the most practiced. There are also numerous other minor religions that the government recognizes.

It delves into the history of religion in America, highlighting how different religious groups found their way to the New World and established their beliefs and practices. It explores the early colonization period, when European settlers brought their own religious traditions, such as Christianity, to America. It explores the influence of Christianity, both Protestantism and Catholicism, which have remained significant throughout American history.

The chapter also sheds light on Native American religions that existed before the arrival of Europeans and the subsequent efforts to convert indigenous peoples to Christianity. Furthermore, it examines the establishment of these major religions in the United States, including Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, and discusses their growth and integration within American society. It also explores the various forms of religious expression within these major religions, ranging from diverse rituals and practices to the formation of religious communities and institutions.

Overall, this chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the religious landscape in the United States. It highlights the diversity of religious groups, their historical roots, and their impact on American culture and society. Additionally, it emphasizes the multicultural nature of the country, fostering a rich tapestry of religious traditions that continue to shape and influence the American experience.

Chapter two delves into the management of religious diversity in the United States, emphasizing the significance of religious pluralism. It explores the challenges faced in promoting tolerance and understanding among different religious communities and the importance of coexistence within a diverse society. It highlights the value placed on religious diversity in the United States, shaped by historical factors such as immigration waves and the pursuit of religious freedom.

The chapter discusses the legal framework that support religious pluralism in the United States. It briefly touches upon the establishment clause, which prevents the government from favoring or establishing a national religion. Additionally, it mentions the separation of church and state as a means to maintain a secular government that respects individual beliefs.

The Second Chapter emphasizes the crucial role of religious freedom and its legal protection. It focuses on the freedom of exercise clause as a fundamental approach for individuals to freely practice their religion. The chapter underscores the importance of religious pluralism in fostering mutual respect and coexistence among diverse religious communities within society.

Chapter three explores the concept of civil religion in America, focusing on its historical development, key figures, and the role of religious symbols. Civil religion acts as a unifying force in American society, combining patriotism and devotion to the country with religious language, symbols, and rituals. It emerged during the early settlement period, when religious beliefs were integrated into political institutions.

The Founding Fathers played an important role in shaping civil religion, emphasizing the importance of religion and morality in achieving political success. The principles and values influenced by civil religion can be seen in foundational documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Civil religion took on a more pronounced religious tone to maintain national unity.

The interaction between civil religion and the First Amendment of the US Constitution is a central theme explored in Chapter three. While the First Amendment prohibits the establishment of a state church, it allows for religious freedom and expression. The Supreme Court has dealt with numerous cases that have examined the balance between religious expression and the separation of church and state.

Scholars have proposed a revival of civil religion that promotes the coexistence of

religious and secular symbols, finding a balanced approach that respects both individual beliefs and national unity. The chapter also delves into the role of religious symbols in civil religion, ranging from physical elements like national monuments and memorials to national holidays and mottos. These symbols add a religious dimension to everyday cultural products and contribute to the underlying framework of civil religion in American society.

Chapter Three delves into the complex idea of civil religion in America. It is explored by respected scholars like Robert Bellah. This chapter helps us understand how civil religion combines patriotism, national identity, and shared values with religious language, symbols, and rituals. These scholars show us that civil religion has been important in promoting religious diversity, bringing people together, and protecting religious freedom in the United States. Even though people may have different interpretations and criticisms of civil religion, it remains a vital part of American history and culture, as explained by the experts in this chapter.

This study seeks to deepen knowledge of religious pluralism in the United States, find effective ways to manage religious diversity, and understand how civil religion influences the accommodation of different beliefs. It also aims to explore how the American experience with civil religion shapes the acceptance of religious diversity. Ultimately, the research findings explain how the American model creates a society that embraces diverse religions, encourages inclusivity, protects religious freedom, and uses a unique approach to civil religion to foster harmony and unity.

Chapter One

The Religious Landscape in America

Due to the various immigration waves that have been arriving in the United States throughout its history and till the present day, the rate of the American population kept increasing and becoming more and more diverse to make it the third largest country in the world and one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse countries in the world.

Many persecuted religious minority groups from various regions found that America is the land that promotes the freedom of religion and fosters immigration to a country that has always been presented as the land of liberty. The interaction between the various religious and cultural components of the country within a well-established legal framework that organizes the interaction led to the development of a unique system of religious pluralism in America.

1.1 An Overview

According to the last estimation in 2022, the total number of the population in America is 339,996,563. This large number is composed of different races, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds and it is the reason that made the United States one of the biggest multicultural nations across the globe ("United States Population 2023").

Today the different immigrant groups in the United States today consider the country as a home, they built their own communities, spreading their beliefs, celebrating the traditions that they brought with them from their nations, and practicing their religions freely and independently. There are hundreds of religions in the United States and only 221 of them are recognized by the government ("A Wider Range of Beliefs"). The most practiced religions are Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism. Other minor religions include Sikhism,

Bahaim, Satanism, Christian Science, the Church of Scientology, Falon Gong, Wicca, Amish, and Pentecostalism (Orth).

Understanding the current religious landscape in America, the relationship between different religious affairs are managed and necessitates understanding the history of religion in the country, how religious groups found their way to the new world, and how they brought with them their beliefs and practices. Religion in the United States is the history of several religions with varying numbers of followers that grew up alongside one another (Corrigan and Hudson 1). As reported by “Religious Landscape Study”, besides Christianity, the largest religion in the country, there are notable populations of Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and other faiths.

Nonetheless, American nationalism is usually associated with Christianity, as demonstrated by statement like "God Bless America" and "In God We Trust". This is often observed during American events including the Fourth of July and Christmas ceremonies ("American Culture - Religion"). As America is a nation of immigrants from diverse national, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, the waves of immigration throughout the nation's history contributed in making America the most religiously diverse country in the world.

Religion was always an important marker of identity among immigrants to America. When European settlers made their way to America in the 16th and the 17th centuries, they brought their own concepts of space and used a variety of rites to establish their colonies and claim the lands they discovered. The English walled off their land; the Spanish established missions, and the Portuguese and the French set up religious monuments such as the Christian crosses (Corrigan and Hudson 1).

Since the time of early colonies, Christianity has consistently held the position of the most relevant and powerful religion in the American society. Most of them identify as Protestants first, and secondly as Catholics. The percentage of the US adults who identify as

Christians is 63% (210 million), with 43% as protestant (140 million), 21% as Catholics (70 million), and 2% as Mormons ("Measuring Religion"). The Christian church comprises other denominations too, which are the Eastern Orthodox, the Anglican Communion, Lutheranism, Presbyterianism, Methodism, Baptists, Evangelical Free Church, Restorationist Movement, Pentecostal and Charismatic Traditions, and Non-Denominational Churches (Wax).

Judaism is thought to be the second largest religion in the United States. Around 2.5% of the American population is Jew, which is about six million. The whole population is situated in the Northeast with considerable communities in the south and the far West (Neusner 107). Judaism in America includes main branches, Orthodox, Reform, Conservative Judaism, and reconstructionist ("American Jews by Religious Affiliation").

The third religion is Islam. In the United States, 1.3% of whole population is Muslim and it is estimated to be around 3 to 4 million ("Islam in America"), it involves five major recognized sects, the Sunni and Shi'a that are the most dominant ones, Ahmadis, Ibadism, and Sufism are the recent ones (Jain).

The fourth largest religion in America is Hinduism and with around 3 million Hindus representing 1% of the total population followed by Buddhism which is practiced by 1% of the nation's population with about 3 million Buddhists in the country ("The American Religious Landscape 2020").

Nonetheless, the early Christian settlers did not find an empty continent with no faith affiliations and belief. They found Native Indian nations with their own customs and beliefs. Hence, the history of religion in America may have roots older than Christianity.

1.2. The Religious Demography in America

1.2.1. Native American Religions

Long before Europeans arrived in the New World, the North America continent was already explored and inhabited by local native peoples (Corrigan and Hudson 1). The religious

core beliefs of different native groups were shaped by fundamental questions about human race and destiny (8). There were different tribes in North America during the time of Columbus, each with its own language, cultural practices and rituals (Jocks and Sullivan).

Their rites were diverse and varied across different tribes and regions, according to Corrigan and Hudson, they often involved oral traditions of nature and spiritual practice (8). European Christian settlers, both Catholic and Protestant, since their first contact with Native Indian tribes sought to convert them Christianity. Even after the United States gain its independence from the United Kingdom, its Government continued to suppress Indigenous practices and there are many reports about forcible conversion in many Indian Nations.

1.2.2. Christianity

Christianity spread rapidly during the recent centuries due to the European missionaries that go back to the time when the land was owned by the native Americans that were practicing their spiritual beliefs and decided to spread the religion among them (Fischer). The religious missionaries began with the Spanish who spread the Christian faith to the natives, established Christianity as the formal religion, and constructed churches in different regions as Florida, Mexico, Northern Arizona, Utah, and California.

However, not only Spain was involved in the missionary work across the new world but also France, Portugal, England, and especially the Polish and German that presented the practice of Christianity with all of its Protestant and Catholic denominations ("Christian Settlements").

The term Protestantism refers to all Christian denomination that broke away from the Roman Catholic church and rejected the pope's authority in order to express their disagreements with its teaching. It is made up of four major branches that are Baptists, Lutherans, Anglicans, and reformed Christians (Faulkner).

The Protestant population is concentrated in the South of the United States, Alabama

and Mississippi with 77% and 75%, Arkansas, Tennessee, and South Carolina with 72%, 71%, and 70%, Oklahoma with 68%, West Virginia, North Carolina and Georgia with 66%, and Kentucky with 63%.

Catholicism in the other hand, it is the second dominant Christian denomination in the United States and is commonly concentrated in the Northeast, Catholics make 44% of inhabitants in Rhode Island, 40% in New Jersey, 38% in Connecticut and Massachusetts, 34% in New York, 30% in New Mexico, Illinois, and New Hampshire, 29% in California and Wisconsin ("The Religiously Distinct States of America").

Sizeable portion of Catholics are immigrants, the majority of whom are of Hispanic origin. At the same time, there has been a migration of Catholics from the Midwest and the Northeast (which have historically been home to a significant number of devout Catholics), to the western portion of the United States and the Southern part (Lipka).

1.2.3. Judaism

Jacob Neusner in his book *World Religions in America* states that there are around six million Jews in the United States and they belong to different races, ethnicities, colors, cultural and economic backgrounds. Half of them live in the northeast with considerable communities in the south and the far west. The Jews in the United States live their lives in the same way as any American citizen do. 28% are integrated in the American society through the intermarriages with other faiths and they are called gentiles, 4% are married to people that are newly converted to Judaism, and around 8.2 million Americans live in households with at least one Jew (107).

The first Jew community in the United States was formed by the arrival of the three Jewish immigration waves, the one that came in 1654 from Brazil to Philadelphia, Charleston, Savannah, and Amsterdam that later on became New York. These immigrants created racial diversity and refined groups within the American society, organized every Jewish individual according to the established Jew rules they had made. The wave is characterized by combining

both the modern manners with the Jewish traditions (Zollman).

The second wave is characterized by the arrival of the Germans in 1840's. The Jews fled Germany because of the persecutory laws, injustice, the financial distress, and the failure of their movements that they were promoting revolution and reform through them. They hoped that by moving to the United States they may find a solution to their problems, as well as greater chances in terms of both their professional and personal lives, freedom, liberty, and good living conditions.

After the World War One, around 250.000 Jews came to the United States and established their lives in small towns and cities all over the Midwest, west, and the south, they worked as peddlers, run stores and small businesses, surprisingly they expanded in a way they reformed Judaism, and created social constitutions that serves them.

The third wave was characterized by the arrival of the eastern European Jews after 1880's precisely from Russia, Austria, Romania. The reasons behind their immigration is their feeling of elimination, and suffering from poverty and legislative policies, so as a result they turned their eyes to the United States as a key solution for their issues and to guarantee a social advancement (Zollman).

Today, every town and city in the United States has at least one synagogue which serves as a location for Jewish people to assemble, study Torah or what is called Jewish education, practice their religious rituals and pray together as a community. The majority of synagogues run schools for children and teenagers which typically meet every Sunday morning and afternoons throughout the week, and organizes educational programs for adults; also most synagogues provide everyday worship services. In addition, every synagogues brings Jewish people from different Jewish communities together for social events and spiritual refreshment to take pleasure in one another company to get to know each other, and discuss their shared issues, perspectives, commitments and duties (Neusner110).

The acceptance to the Jews in the United States and considering them as a part of the country today opens for them a way to assimilate in the American social and political life and gave their community an opportunity to grow ("The Challenge of Assimilation"). Jewish Contribution to the American culture from the Nation's Founding to the Civil War indicates that the Jews are an integral part in the social and political life and are equal to every American individual ("Jewish Contribution").

1.2.4. Islam

The United States has one of the world most diverse Muslim communities with members that are practically coming from different nationalities and cultural backgrounds. Today, it is estimated that the number of Muslims in the United States is around 3 to 6 million, with 1.3% of the population. There are about a third of African Americans, a third of South Asians, a quarter of Arabs, a number of Latinos, and the rest came from all over the world.

The majority of Muslims came to the United States for obvious reasons as looking for democratic freedom, study, and bettering their lives. They belong to the middle class, and highly integrated within the society, they can be found in a wide variety of professions, including those of physicians, lawyers, taxi drivers, academic and media personalities entertainers and sports.

Islam in the United States is nothing new, after the slave trade of the Muslim African during the period of the colonial era, in the late of the 19th century, Muslims from Lebanon

and Syria arrived to the United States, most of them settled in the American Midwest. However, the change in the immigration laws brought more immigrants to the United States from the middle east and south Asian countries as Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh in 1965 ("What is the Truth About American Muslims").

Back to history, the slavery is the way through which first Muslims came to America. They brought with them their religious practices as fasting Ramadan, using prayer beads, veiling, and avoid the forbidden food as pork and drinking alcohol. Muslim names existed in states as South Carolina, Georgia, and Louisiana and they were giving them to their children as Mustafa and Mohamed (Gershon).

It is no surprise that in the last 20 years, the number of mosques in the United States has grown as Muslims have found a welcoming environment there. In 2000, 1,209 mosques were counted; later on in 2020 the number doubled to 2,769 (Mohamed). The mosque is the place where Muslims worship Allah, attend for religious lectures, and recite Quran. The mosque is one of the strongest features that represents the power of the Muslim community there in America because it symbolizes the reinterpretation of their traditions, the Islamic background, and imitates the ancient with its rich distinctive architectural design (Khalidi).

1.2.5. Hinduism

The first Hindu community in the United States was formed by the arrival of the missionaries and travelers that brought Hinduism in the late 18th century and the translations of the Sanskrit texts by the European orientalist. These translated texts created a cultural background to the Americans about Hinduism.

However, by the 20th century, the first Hindu immigration waves arrived to the United States from different regions bringing with them their religious beliefs and practices, the majority of these immigrants were Gurus and religious man. The Gurus in the United States

found the audience that was interested in the religious messages and influenced by them. In 1960 the political policies in America gave opportunities to the Hindu immigrants to establish their own community and flourish in the United States and the American curiosity opened doors for them to integrate in within the society (Saunders).

Hinduism becomes the fourth religion in the united states forming 1% of the total population which is estimated to be around 2.7 million Hindus (Hoffman and Batalova). the majority are immigrants from India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Fiji, Bhutan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Southern and Eastern Africa ("US States by Population of Hindus").

The Hindus put in a lot of efforts to build up their community in the United States by establishing temples and worship places, organizing themselves into religious groups, in addition to preserving and strengthening their ethnic identities and cultural backgrounds.

These temples and religious organizations are open to all the Hindus from different countries for learning the Indian languages and scriptures, to attend the Hindu events, celebrations and festivals, share different ethnic food, and also supporting building relations and creating solidarity (Lucia).

In Hinduism, they do not believe only in one God, but they worship several Gods since this affiliation come from various origins, every temple is independently dedicated to a different God, as one to Krishna, another to Shiva, and other ones to Vishnu, Sarasvati, and Kali. America today contains around 450 Hindu temples spread in differed states as San Francisco, Utah, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, California, New York, and Texas ("5 Most Popular Hindu Temples in USA").

1.2.6 Buddhism

Jeff Wilson the assistant professor of religious studies and East Asian studies at University College in Canada, and the author of the famous books *Buddhist Guide to New*

York, and *Mourning the Unborn Dead: A Buddhist Ritual Comes to America*, claims that the roots of Buddhism in America go back to the 19th century with the arrival of immigrants from Asia looking for social and economic opportunities and to improve their life conditions.

The Buddhist immigrants came from Sri Lanka, China, Japan, Korea, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam, and gathered to create a Buddhist community in the United States. The first Buddhist immigrant wave was formed by the arrival of the Chinese immigrants in the period of the Gold Rush of California in 1849 seeking for better living conditions by working as miners.

The Chinese brought everything that has a relation with their nation and traditions, established their community, and began to practice their faith, they built Buddhist temples for worship and brought with them images of their God Buddha, their holy books, and Chinese decorations. By 1875 there were around eight Buddhist temples in the United States, and by the end of the century the Buddhist community spread along the country and hundreds of temples were built.

After the Chinese, the Japanese immigrants also began to emerge in huge numbers and helped in establishing the religion within the American society by 1880s. Hundreds of temples and Buddhist associations were headed by priests from Japan ("Buddhists in the American West"). However, besides the Chinese and Japanese immigrants, Buddhist immigrants from other countries arrived to the United States and brought their ancestral rituals and worship patterns, and started practicing them in America (Feuerherd).

Besides the Chinese and the Japanese, Buddhists in America hail from different countries of Asia as Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Korea, and Thailand (Foye). And 800.000 are Americans that converted to it from Christianity, Judaism, and other different secular

philosophies to make it the fifth religious group in the United States ("The American Religious Landscape 2020").

In their ritual practices, the Buddhists tend to meditate to focus, develop their self-awareness, and achieve mental state, tranquility and wisdom ("Why Do Buddhists Meditate"). They believe in karma, which is how the person's actions will impact him in the future.

Rebirth, which is when the person dies his or her soul will embody some other body, and in impermanence ("Buddhism"). Their major values are love, wisdom, self-control, goodness, compassion, and calmness (Fronsdal).

Buddhism glorifies nature and respects animals. It is forbidden for Buddhists to cause them harm or kill them, this is why the majority of Buddhists are vegetarians. One of the Buddhist spiritual beliefs is that when the person dies will turn to an animal and vice versa (Finnigan).

When it comes to integration in the United States, the Buddhist ideas appears in every different domains of the American society, their religious values and beliefs appears in psychology, and the medicaments that has roots in the natural medical mixtures of the Buddhist traditions. It should be also mentioned that the Buddhist studies are flourishing in the American colleges and universities such as Smith and Stanford. Their values are remarkably noticed in the American social movements of peace, human and animal rights, equality, and preserving the environment ("Comments On Tensions in American Buddhism").

1.3. Conversion

The phenomena of converting from one religion to another played a significant role in shaping the current American religious landscape. Religious conversion is the act of changing one's religion to another one, adopting new religious beliefs and practices and abandoning the original one. Religious conversion can be out of a personal decision, family, or the society.

Due to the nation's rich religious landscape, religious conversion is also a part of the American diversity. Both those who came from a religious background and those who never had a religion convert to different faiths. Religious conversion can occur for a variety of reasons, such as personal spiritual experiences, the sense of belonging to a certain religious community, or a conscious choice to make a change in the religious belief according to personal perspectives, in which the person sees that that specific religion is the one that suits him. In America the religions that witnessed growth in converts are Christianity (Mormons especially), Islam, and Buddhism.

Islam, for instance, spread within the African American population through conversion. Today, there is a sizable Muslim community among the African American population that amounts to millions due to the waves of conversion from Christianity to Islam since the first decades of the twentieth century.

In America switching religion and giving up on religion is not something new, and it goes back to several decades. According to a survey that had been done in 1972, 90% of the American society were Christian and 5% were unaffiliated, in 1993, the number increased to 9%, in 1996 it was 12%, in 1998 it was 14%, then in 2017 raised to be 29%, and the Christian community has fallen to 63% ("Religious Switching and Inter-marriage").

There are also growing numbers who choose to leave religion and become either atheists or agnostics in the last decades. According to 2019 estimations, around 31% of people who were born as Christians become unaffiliated or switch their religion in young ages from 15 to 29 years old, and 7% switch in late ages from 30 and on ("Modeling the Future of Religion in America").

Theories say that the reason behind leaving the religion and disaffiliation is because America became a secular nation, and people are experiencing societal improvement,

technological and scientific advancement that made their lives much easier, and their need to religious guidance and regulation reduced since everything is provided and are able to meet their needs. According to Michael Lipka in his article Why America's 'nones' Left Religion Behind, some people grew up in a religious environment but they lack faith in their religions and do not believe in their religious doctrines and teachings, others believe only in science and logic not God, saying that religion is just a myth and magic, others says that they do not like to be tied with religious principles nor following a certain affiliation believing that religion is just a hierarchical nature, in which people are born and opposed to believe in their parents and ancestors religions instead of making his own choices.

Transmitting religion plays a huge role in forming the religious identity, by holding the original religious belief, converting to another, or following agnosticism and atheism. The Pew Research Center survey claims that to guarantee commitment in a certain religion, the religious teachings, beliefs, and principles must be transmitted through parents to their children as it is the first institution that they are exposed to.

However, the Christian religion as an example, has declined according to several reasons occurred in the familial institution. It would be difficult for children who are raised by parents with two different religions as Christianity and Judaism to identify their religious belief or affiliation, and as a result the children will neither follow their mother nor their father's religious since it's so confusing for the majority of them.

The other cause is when both parents are not that religious or fully practicing it, the process of transmitting the religion fails since they do not have a strong commitment to it. Other parents give their children the full freedom to search for the suitable religion for them, and engage in the affiliation they believe it represents their ideas and perspective, and forms

their identity, however since America is a secular nation they end up being agnostics or atheists ("How U.S. religious composition has changed in recent decades").

1.4. Interreligious Relations and Persecution in the United States

Throughout long decades, the various religious groups have interacted with each other and engaged in dialogue. Interaction between the different religious communities has not always been peaceful and there have been episodes of interreligious violence and religious persecution. Today, however, the various religious groups in America often live in peace and harmony. There is a level of tolerance that prevent interfaith conflict and widespread animosity.

It is believed that the religious diversity in the United States means that every religion is special on its own way and no religion is superior to the other. The relationship between religious communities is based on mutual respect to each other and preservation of dignity.

Since the different religious communities live together in the United States and despite their various beliefs, they generally live in a tolerant environment of harmony and peace, mainly as a result of the interfaith dialogue and debate. This debate focuses on the acceptance and the celebration of religious diversity and differences, understanding each other, openness toward the other faiths despite the commitment to their own paths, and making relations to one another (Hemeyer 40).

However, both major and minor religious groups do complain from cases of discrimination, hatred, and persecution based on their religious beliefs and affiliations. Also disagreements, misunderstandings and Frictions between members of different faith groups happen from time to time. Persecution involves treating people in an unfavorable manner as well as emotional, verbal, and physical abuse because of their religious beliefs ("Religious Discrimination").

Despite being the dominant religious community in the United States, Christians complain being subject to discrimination. Most of those who discriminate against them are more likely to be white, highly educated people, wealthy, engaging in politics, secularists, and do not practice any religion (Yancey).

Despite being members of the largest religion in the country, Christians in the United States do face oppression and harassment in the workplace and other places because of their religion, and get punished because of their religious beliefs. It is reported that since May 2022, over 120 Christian places as churches and organizations got burned, corrupted, and vandalized ("Christian Persecution Increasing in US").

Yet, the religious group most associated with persecution and discrimination in America is the Muslim group. It is the one that is persecuted more than any other religious group in the United States. The obvious reason behind that is the association of their religion with violence and terrorism after the terrorist attacks of Sep. 11, 2001. When the United States accused more than 160 Muslim Americans for being the reason behind the terrorist attacks, the American media and society stereotyped them as terrorists, violent people, dangerous, promoting a feeling of fear and hate towards Muslims and their faith. A lot of pressure has been exerted upon them as physical abuse, defiling the mosques, and racial profiling (Mohamed).

Muslim women wearing hijab have particularly been subject to discrimination and attack. This is because they are easily identifiable to the attackers. They were stereotyped, got attacked, faced harsh rules against wearing hijab, got fired from their jobs, and denied access to public places ("Discrimination Against Muslim Women").

In general, life becomes more and more difficult to Muslims living in the United states in the era that followed 9/11. Islam was subject to a hateful campaign hat aimed to exploit the

feeling of fear and anger after the attacks of 2001 to distort the image of Islam and Muslims and ignite hatred against them.

Besides Christians and Muslims, the Jews also complain about facing hate or what is called Anti-Semitism. The negative views against them are freely expressed and rising more than before especially in the recent years including online bullying, violence, hostility, harassment, and being a target of hate crimes ("Jewish Americans in 2020"). They face problems in work places, according to Schneider, Coleman, et al., "Jews ... tend to link discrimination to group based stereotypes and describe a sense of being seen as religiously foreign or other", which means that they are rejected and unemployed, seen as different, socially excluded instead of being treated as simple human beings, also stereotyped as greedy, violent, and unrefined.

A study found that the Jewish community is considered as an outsider because the Americans believe that the Jews are trying to become the dominant group in the United States, so this led Americans to discriminate against them by using stereotypes, hostility and aggression (Prell).

Hindus in the United States also complain facing a set of attitudes by the Americans they prefer to give the name "Hindu phobia". They face hate, fear and inappropriate and violent reactions by members of the American society. The Hindus in the United States face a bunch of attacks against their religion, traditions, and culture. They even go through physical violence, hateful speech, temples getting demolished and burned, they are viewed as untrustworthy, bigoted and thieves ("Hindu phobia").

Hinduism today is misused in public discourse. The media discriminates against followers of this religion and represent them in a negative manner according to their own perspectives about the religion. The media misrepresents the Hindu religion to the American

society and demonize the Hindu traditions everywhere in any possible way even in public schools, text books that convey disrespect to the larger Hindu population in America ("Hindus in American Text Books").

As far as the perception of Buddhism is concerned, in comparison to the past, the way the American society sees the Buddhists today has changed. Going back to the 19th and the 20th century, Buddhism was seen as a devil, dangerous religion, and considered as a complete threat to the nation. Americans were particularly against Buddhist immigration policies in America for many decades. Hence, Buddhists have faced prejudice, white discrimination, and racism (Wilson).

Today, Buddhists are in a way accepted and feel a bit welcome in the American society. They are seen more in a positive way and less discriminated against compared to other Asian religions and the prove is that millions of Americans are converting to Buddhism because for them it is more peaceful, loving, and a harmonically balanced religion. Since the American society is a secular nation, Buddhism for them is a religion of science; it benefits their culture and promotes the scientific development. The Buddhist doctrines are also included in the scientific contexts that are presented as spiritual science especially in psychology and physics (Anningson and Feureherd).

Generally speaking, the current religious landscape in the United States is the product of various factors including immigration, conversion, and proselytizing, in addition to the favorable socio-political conditions in the country. Freedom of religion and freedom to proselytize and change religion helped creating this dynamic religious mix in the country.

Reputation of the United States as a country of freedoms and democracy helped attracting religious immigrants from every corner in the world especially from countries and regions which lack religious freedom and tolerance.

Chapter Two

The Management of Religious Diversity in the United States

Throughout its history, America has been home to a multitude of religious groups that have contributed to the country's cultural and religious diversity. As the nation grew in population and became more multicultural, it became increasingly important to establish political policies that would support the existence of these religious groups, and help to create a society that is inclusive and respectful of all faiths.

These policies would not only ensure the protection and freedom of these groups, but also promote a sense of security for all citizens. The establishment of such policies was crucial in maintaining a harmonious and inclusive society where individuals of all faiths could coexist peacefully. By recognizing and respecting the religious beliefs of its citizens, America has been able to foster a sense of unity and tolerance that has helped to shape its identity as a nation.

This theoretical chapter examines with an acute focus the management of religious diversity in the United States. The initial section entitled "Pluralism and Religious Diversity" defines the ideology of pluralism and the American experience with religious diversity. The next section entitled "The Three Foundations of Religious Pluralism" provides authentic information about the constitutional clauses that contribute in controlling the American religious diversity, which are freedom of religion, establishment clause and the separation of religion and states. The following section entitled "The Legal Framework" deals with the American policies that identifies people's rights and human liberties and how they are protected, addressing the role of the first amendment. The last section entitled "The Challenged of Religious Pluralism" focuses on the different problems that America faces in applying the religious pluralism.

2.1. Pluralism and Religious Diversity

Religious diversity made the United States a rich country, it was formed by the immigration waves centuries ago, when people were looking for economic opportunities distant from home, escaping political exiles, fearing death or jail in their homelands, in addition to the religious missionaries wanting to spread their beliefs (Spickard). Religious diversity occurs when members of various religious backgrounds exist in the same country, establishing their religious centers such as Mosques, Churches, contribute in the societal life, and practice their various ceremonies, festivities, prayers, religious beliefs and ideologies ("Exploring the Trend in Religious Diversity").

The American experience represents how the religious diversity is represented in each aspect of life in the USA, and how America celebrates this diversity for making it a very rich and powerful nation. Mosques, temples, synagogues, and churches can be seen in every American state, people's way of dressing according to their religious doctrines is respected and honored, the Jews can wear the yarmulke, Muslims especially women can wear headscarves, the Sikh can wear a turban, in addition to the different religious ceremonies and celebrations that has a place in the society, as the sacred month of Ramadan in Islam, Christmas in Christianity, Diwali in Hinduism, Rohatsu in Buddhism, and Hanukkah in Judaism ("USA and Europe").

However, in America there is a series of standards and laws that manages the religious diversity, promotes tolerance among the different religious communities within the society, and avoids conflicts. These policies are characterized by pluralism in which the United States welcomes the religious freedom, and does not prioritize any religion over the others (Tuggy). Also, it gives people the opportunity to ask for their religious freedom, express their free opinions about the issues that threatens their religious beliefs, without any governmental interventions (Witt).

Religious diversity refers to the existence of multiple religions in one country. Living

under one law, having the same rights and duties, integrating together in tolerance, and not facing any kind of religious discrimination or any sort of prejudice. The nation also gives these religious communities the right to defend themselves and others from or any ministerial and civic oppression to leave their religions, or any kind of aggression against their freedom of expressing the faith, and finally the prohibition of any sectarian war.

These religious affiliations can also interact with one another, recognize areas of profound and irreparable difference while focusing on regions of common ground, seeking for more knowledge about each religion, find common points and share their perspectives without sensitivity. So, pluralism is the tool of equality that the United States of America uses to promote the common good of the society, prosperity, supporting stability and the security of the nation ("Religious Pluralism 101").

According to Chris Beneke in his book *Beyond Toleration: The Religious Origins of American Pluralism*, the ideology of pluralism in general conveys that the government is obliged to safeguard all religions, not making their differences a reason for conflicts, and respect the peculiarities of each group. He adds that the religious communities have the right to call themselves by their religions and define their identities. In the other side when it comes to the public civility, it establishes a relation between the civilians despite their different religious backgrounds and builds a social network that is based on mutual respect, unity despite dissimilarity, and harmony (175, 177).

2.2. The Three Foundations of Religious Pluralism

Religious pluralism in the United States is based on three foundations, that ensures the effectiveness of the religious liberty in the American society. These foundations are the Religious Freedom, Establishment clause, and Church and States Separation.

The three foundations are implied in the first amendment by the congress with the famous quote that says "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...". Both clauses are combined in the two statements, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion" that is referred to the establishment clause, and "or prohibiting the free exercise..." that goes to the religious freedom. The quote conveys that the congress does not impose any religion on the American citizens nor give the power of religious dominance over the country, and everyone has the free will to practice their religious rituals, beliefs and doctrines. These two principles are known as the religion Clauses.

The separation of church and state is also implied in the first amendment. Since the United States is a secular nation, it believes in the state is independent from religion, and religion cannot be interfering in politics. The separation policy joins both the non-establishment and the freedom of religion clauses to create the strongest policies in managing this religious diversity, and establishing religious pluralism ("Establishment Clause of the First Amendment").

Religious Freedom clause is the first guaranteed human right by the states and federal legislative. It preserves peoples' rights to live, express, and act peacefully and openly in accordance with their convictions. It protects their capacity to be oneself at work, in educational institutions, and in social situations.

2.1.1. Freedom of Religion

The United States is the haven that allows the different religions to flourish and thrive. Whether a person is religious or not, religious freedom upholds the rights of all groups and individuals, even the new and unpopular ones ("Religious Freedom").

The policies adopted by the US authorities work on protecting places of worship from any kind of attacks, or violent conflicts and assaults. Organizations manages the maintenance

of places of worship as mosques, prayers rooms, congregations, churches, and temples. They also manage nominating or electing religious leaders that they believe are capable to organize their practices according to the religious doctrines ("The Structure of Religion in the U.S").

However, religious freedom is limited to not give any small opportunity for the individuals to harm each other, and to avoid conflicts between citizens. None of these religious groups have special rights in the United States, all of them are the same and no community is better than the other ("Religious Freedom: What's at Stake If We lose It").

According to the U.S, Government Publishing Office, the religious freedom gives the right to establish religions within the country, protects the individuals' liberties to practice their faiths, forbids the state control of religious beliefs in general, and to not punish its individuals for their religious views, perspectives, and principles ("First Amendment Religion and Expression" 1005).

However, the first amendment is what made religious freedom the base that created a strong country as America. Any attempt to limit it is considered as an attack on the human dignity in general, and the personal liberty in specific ("Religious Freedom: What's at Stake If We lose It").

2.1.2. The Establishment Clause

The next foundation is the Establishment clause. It is a fundamental law that bans the government of the United States from establishing a national church (religion) in the society. Also to prevent preferring a religious community over the others by giving it special rights that shall benefit it over the other communities. Additionally, it forbids the government from unreasonably favoring either religion or non-religion ("Establishment Clause").

According to the U.S. Government Publishing Office, legally, no one is imposed to pay or collect taxes to fund any specific religious enterprises, institutions, and organizations, whatever their names are, or whatever shape they use to educate or practice religion, and no

matter how great or little the amount of money is. Neither the state nor the federal government may, overtly or surreptitiously, intervene in the activities of religious organizations or groups, for instance the way they express their beliefs, practice, and vice versa ("First Amendment Religion and Expression" 977-978).

2.2.3 Church and State Separation

The third foundation of the religious pluralism is state and church separation that is the basis of the establishment clause. According to Douglas Laycock in his article "The Benefits of the Non-Establishment Clause", the separation of state and church is that religion and politics cannot meet each other, and religion cannot interfere in the political system of the nation and in laws making (381).

Historically, before the separation of state and the religion, many monarchs ruled because they claimed that their power of ruling comes from the divine authority that allowed them to do so. This can still be happening today, and you won't have to look far to find politicians and monarchs claiming this power today.

The separation factor is the distinction between then and today, electing rulers now is based on their skills, capability, worthiness, rather than their claims. Unlike before they ruled because of claiming that they have divine powers to do so.

Relating religion with the state and giving some authority to religion to control can lead the church to a whole different direction in making decisions. The church focuses more on morality, so when the authority refers to it, many laws will not be applied and the government cannot intervene in that. The church also can make laws that do not go with all religions, and encourages hatred. The separation of these two compounds abolishes the religion's dominance that leads to conflicts, corruption, and civil wars against the government, because every religion has its own doctrines that are different from the governing religion

Without separation of the state and religion, the structure of the society would be different. Religion would control what the individuals should be working according to the dominant religion, so equality among religions wouldn't exist, and the other individuals would not have the same rights that people of the national religion have.

With the separation of states and religion, the structure of the society would be different. Religion would control what the individuals should be working according to what religion is the dominant one, so equality among religions wouldn't exist, and the other individuals would not have the same rights that people of the national religion have.

With the separation of state and religion, people will be unique to one another. The separation gives the chance to people from different religious communities to communicate, and know each other differences, offers opportunities that makes them stronger and raise their knowledge (Gaille).

2.3. The Legal Framework

The United States has established firm laws and adopted policies to manage the religious diversity in the country. There are principles that are guiding the administrative agencies and the executive department in governing religious diversity, and these principles according to the memorandum should be respected to achieve stability and give equal rights to every individual in the United States.

Freedom of exercise clause implies that every individual has the right to practice the religion however the way it is. It also protects the individuals' freedom to join or not engage in other any other religions. The practice liberty is also defined widely under federal legislation, such as the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 (RFRA), to include all elements of worship.

The Freedom of Exercise clause does not only focus on one person, but on the religious communities in general to practice their religions openly. According to the act, they can worship

through organizations and institutions, schools, companies... etc.

In America according to the policies, no one is apart from the civil society, all are engaging in it together, and the individuals are not better than each other in social services as the right of education, and healthcare. Neither the government nor the society itself obliges someone of a specific religious group to give up on his religion just to get employed, the laws prohibits that.

The government can make changes in some policies just to consider the existence of a certain religion. It doesn't exclude any faith from the secular rules, and give attention to the religious organization so that it won't cause any harmful decisions ("Federal Law Protections for Religious Liberty").

In June 1964, the congress passed The Civil Rights Act that forbids discrimination against people from different religions, besides other elements as sex, color, racial and ethnic origins. The act gave these people the right to participate in voting, desegregation of schools, and prohibits the religious persecution in public places. Additionally, it is against hiring and firing people for their beliefs ("Legal Highlight: The Civil Rights Act of 1964").

The American policies are supported by an official governmental document to ensure that their rights are respected and written not just spoken, and it is The First Amendment. The First Amendment was established in the United States as a part of the Bill of Rights to protect the essential liberties of the American individuals, by James Madison in December 15, 1791 ("You Will Love History"). James Madison served in the Continental Congress, and was the leader in the Virginia Assembly, before becoming the fourth president of the United States of America from 1809 to 1817. James Madison is called the father of the constitution for his

pivotal role in the development and promotion of the American constitution and the rights of bill ("James Madison The 4th President of The United States").

The First Amendment protects a number of rights, including the ability to urge the government to address issues, assemble or join in a group for a protest or other cause, and to use speech and press to convey ideas. The freedom to practice one's religion is also protected, and it forbids the establishment of or support for a religion by the government ("Why a Constitution").

2.4. The Challenges of Religious Pluralism

Despite the fundamental guarantees that the United States' constitution provides to the religious groups, there are multiple challenges that face the co-existence of these communities. Starting with rising religious intolerance, many people of different religious background are seen as outsiders, and facing exclusion, discrimination, violence, and oppression. This may lead to a social division, and prevent people from practicing their freedom of religion without fear (Corrigan; Tyler).

The other challenge relates to the clashes that can happen between religion and human rights. Sometimes they can't meet because of the religion's standards and values. The human rights are universal and everyone can enjoy them, but not all the human rights are accepted by all the groups, and are considered as a violation to their principles, such as considering gay communities as a part of the society. As a consequence, problems and clashes occur between the nation's secular policies and religions, and there would be no balance in the society's structure.

Also, in the workplace there are different people of religious and irreligious backgrounds, so it happens when the employment sphere is not regulated. The employer may impose unexamined and unfair rules that can't work with everyone. What fits the atheist

doesn't necessarily fit the religious one, and vice versa. For instance, when the employee is obliged to work in religious holidays, and this is a reason why tensions can appear (Bowers).

Another important difficulty that religious pluralism is facing in America is debating about religions in public life. The primary role of the debates is to have a mutual understanding to each other, find the common points, and learn from each other. But in some cases in America debates takes a whole other way and may promote conflicts and hate.

The aggressive debates about religions in the United States lead to division and animosity. Conflicts over religion in public schools, for example, are not new in the American society, and people are still fighting for integrating in public schools, also there are so many debates about excluding religion from schools and following one system in which no one has exceptions from the schools' rules whatever his religion is.

There are continuous discussions about the need to limit the religious expression on public property and the individual rights, how prayer should be handled in public schools which is a complete violation to the first amendment's principles about religion, prohibiting people from putting religious symbols in public spaces, also how employers should manage religious diversity, among other things. These debates can be tense, especially when there is a lack of awareness and respect for differing opinions and values ("Lupu et al.").

Religious conflicts in the United States can manifest in a variety of ways, ranging from verbal and physical violence to harassment, racism, and discrimination. These conflicts unfortunately occur all too frequently, and religious groups in the United States often find themselves facing significant obstacles as a result. In some cases, these groups may even be marginalized or excluded from certain sectors of society, making it difficult for them to fully participate in the social, economic, and political life of the country. This exclusion can have far-reaching consequences, not only for the individuals and communities affected, but also for the broader society as a whole ("Harassment of Religious Groups").

In the wake of the high-profile terrorist incidents, such as the 9/11 attacks, Muslims in the United States have often been subjected to unfair treatment, including prejudice, bullying, and hatred. These individuals have been unfairly stereotyped as being savage and violent. This discrimination has led to a sense of being victimized among Muslim communities ("Decades after 9/11, Muslims Battle Islamophobia in US").

Similarly, the Jewish community witnesses disturbing trend of anti-Semitic violence. They have been facing discrimination in other forms, such as being denied bank loans, persecuted for their religious attire, and judged for their hairstyles. Discrimination is not limited to the Jewish community alone, as Muslims have also been facing similar challenges. For instance, some Muslims have been prohibited from entering restaurants, which is a clear violation of their basic human rights. Such discriminatory practices are not only unjust but also go against the principles of equality and freedom that the United States stands for ("Discrimination Because of Religion or Belief").

These types of acts can lead to contravening the aims and principles of the religious pluralism in America by creating social gaps among the different religious communities, and threatens their stability and reduces the chances of living, study, and work together in harmony. It creates social instability, which means people who face religious prejudice feel oppressed, which leads to mental health issues as depression, anxiety and anger which affects the religious community as a whole (Hope).

In conclusion, the management of religious diversity in the United States is founded on the principles of pluralism, which embrace and celebrate the rich tapestry of religious beliefs and practices present in the country. The American experience demonstrates how religious diversity is embedded in all aspects of life and contributes to the cultural and social fabric of the nation.

The three foundations of religious pluralism in the United States are the freedom of religion, the establishment clause, and the separation of church and state. These constitutional principles ensure that all individuals have the right to practice their religion freely, without government interference or the establishment of a national religion. The separation of church and state prevents religious dominance and promotes a secular government that respects the autonomy of religious communities.

The legal framework plays a fundamental role in governing religious diversity in the United States, it includes laws that protect religious freedom and prohibit discrimination based on religious beliefs. The First Amendment serves as a cornerstone, safeguarding the rights of individuals and religious communities to worship, express their beliefs, and participate fully in society.

However, managing religious diversity also poses challenges. Some Americans may still hold misconceptions or prejudices towards religions different from their own, and there is a need for increased understanding and interreligious dialogue. Additionally, concerns may arise regarding the preservation of individual identities and the potential tension between religious beliefs and societal values.

Overall, the United States strives to maintain a harmonious and inclusive society where individuals of all faiths can coexist peacefully. Through the recognition and respect of religious beliefs, the nation fosters unity, tolerance, and the protection of religious freedom for all its citizens.

Chapter Three

Exploring Civil Religion in the United States

According to the history Professor Raymond Haberski, who writes on the relationship between civil religion and American exceptionalism, civil religion in America is a distinct idea that resembles like a religion but lacks a church or creation myth. It was introduced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau to challenge the French monarchy and the Catholic Church, embracing the nation's Christian roots and guiding its principles through religious leaders, symbols, and rituals. This notion of civil religion has contributed greatly to the success of pluralism in the United States (Religious Pluralism in the United States 16).

Civil religion in the United States has played a significant role in fostering pluralism and national unity. This concept combines patriotism and devotion to the country with religious language, with Americans perceiving their civic and religious lives as intertwined.

Symbolism like "In God We Trust" on currency and the invocation "God save this honorable Court" at the Supreme Court exemplify this blending of religious and civil traditions ("Religious Pluralism in the United States" 16).

American civil religion refers to the moral beliefs, values, symbols, and stories that unite the American people. It's not an official religion, but a philosophy that binds the diverse population together. It combines religious and secular elements, blending ideas from religious traditions with democratic ideals of virtue, self-government, and rights (Carlson and Lindsey).

This chapter will examine American civil religion, highlighting its historical development and its connection to the First Amendment. It will also go through Robert N. Bellah's concept and how it plays an important role in fostering unity and preserving American identity. Additionally, there will be a critical examination of the idea of civil religion as a myth rather than an authentic part of American history.

3.1. Robert Bellah's Concept of Civil Religion in America

Robert Bellah was a well-known American expert in the study of religion, an author, and a lecturer on sociology at UC Berkeley. His research primarily revolved around understanding the influence of religion on moral values, societal norms, and political systems.

Bellah achieved significant recognition in his field and was appointed as the Ford Professor of Sociology at UC Berkeley in 1967 (Anwar).

Civil religion, as explained by Robert Bellah, is a collection of beliefs, symbols, and practices that act like a religion in a society without an official religion. Bellah introduced this concept in his important book "Civil Religion in America," published in 1967. He described civil religion as a unifying and powerful faith that exists alongside people's individual religious beliefs, bringing together a shared sense of national identity and purpose (12).

Bellah's argument regarding the existence of a common civil religion in America, characterized by shared principles and beliefs, was exemplified during his 1976 Bicentennial celebration. He emphasized this concept within the field of sociology of religion, which received notable attention at academic conferences. According to Bellah, Americans hold a collective belief in the divine nature of the United States and demonstrate a strong dedication to their nation (Thompson).

Bellah believed that civil religion incorporates elements from the nation's past, stories of how it was founded, and symbols that represent patriotism. These elements come together to create a shared belief system that is separate from individual religious beliefs. Civil religion may use religious language and symbols, talking about things like God's guidance and important values, but it is not tied to any specific religious group or church (17).

Bellah noted that American civil religion is separate from Christianity because while presidents often mention God in their speeches, they rarely mention Jesus Christ. He also argued that the idea of keeping church and state separate serves two purposes: it protects

religious freedom and ensures that religion does not interfere with politics (Everton).

In Bellah's book *The Broken Covenant*, he suggests that American society is becoming more focused on individualism and losing its sense of community. Bellah criticized the American civil religion, seeing it as a shallow and fragmented idea that now includes other nations and cultures. He argued that instead of empowering people to make their own choices, those in power used civil religion to control the public (Nyitray 48).

Robert Bellah argues that American culture is a "secular civil religion," which encompasses a collection of shared values and practices that hold religious significance. Scholars suggest that these values and principles may need the foundation of a belief system to offer a sense of purpose to a nation. An essential element of civil religion is the notion that moral principles are universal (Gjelten).

Robert Bellah's 1967 essay shaped the discourse on religion in American public life. Bellah highlighted the influence of dominant Anglo-Protestant religious beliefs on American politics and how those critical of the existing political and economic systems in the United States drew inspiration from the "Judeo-Christian" messianic tradition. However, it is important to note that Bellah's belief that American civil religion was the primary driving force behind the nation's quest for change has certain gaps that need to be addressed (Danielson).

Bellah's argument regarding the existence of a common civil religion in America, characterized by shared principles and beliefs, was exemplified during his 1976 Bicentennial celebration. He emphasized this concept within the field of religious sociology, which received notable attention in academic conferences. According to Bellah, Americans hold a collective belief in the divine nature of the United States and demonstrate a strong dedication to their nation ("Civil Religion").

3.2. Historical Overview of Civil Religion in America

The origins of civil religion in the United States can be traced back to the early settlement period prior to the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776. John Davis, a prominent figure responsible for bringing Protestant sectarians and Mayflower passengers to a state of spiritual salvation, strongly advocated for the dissemination of God's message. As the settlers migrated to America, they carried their religious beliefs and values with them.

The first settlers of the United States enhanced the significance of religion in society by incorporating religious principles into their political institutions. Earliest written constitutions, many colonies declared the Bible as the supreme law, emphasizing their commitment to protect the purity of the Gospel. These pioneers were influential in introducing their ideas and governmental systems to the New World, establishing religion as the pillar of society (8, 9).

In the early years of the United States, the presidents often made references to a higher power, but they did so using symbolic language rather than specific religious terms. George Washington, in his inaugural address, spoke of the "Almighty Being who rules over the universe" and acknowledged the "Great Author of every public and private good." Thomas Jefferson, similarly, referred to an "Infinite Power which rules the destinies of the universe." Even James Monroe, in his Second Inaugural Address in 1821, cut to the chase by mentioning "Almighty God." This tradition of invoking the divine continued over a century later with John F. Kennedy, who, in his 1961 Inaugural Address, emphasized that he had taken an oath before both the American people and the Almighty God, recognizing the solemn duty to lead the nation ("The Origins of Civil Religion").

The prominent figures known as the Founding Fathers, including George Washington, James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin, played an important role in shaping the American Revolution. They incorporated the concerns and values of the colonists into the establishment of a new government and filled both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution with their principles, thereby laying the foundation for

future American institutions (Gwydir 10).

Thomas Jefferson and James Madison strongly supported keeping religion separate from the government. John Adams and George Washington, on the other hand, believed that religion played a crucial role in shaping virtuous citizens, which they considered vital for a successful republic. The founders, who signed the Declaration of Independence, likely believed in a God who oversaw nature, created human rights, would eventually judge the deceased, and guided the world through his providence (Edwards)

The religious beliefs of the Founding Fathers have sparked a cultural debate in the United States. Scholars argue that most were religious rationalists or Unitarians, while some Evangelicals claim they held orthodox or born-again Christian beliefs. However, despite their specific beliefs, the Founders came from similar religious backgrounds, with the majority being Protestants. Anglicanism, Presbyterianism, and Congregationalism were the largest Christian traditions among them, with other Protestant groups and a few Roman Catholics also represented (Holmes).

Jefferson, like other Founding Fathers, was a Deist who rejected traditional Christian doctrines. However, he maintained a religious outlook. Influenced by Joseph Priestley, Jefferson focused on Jesus of Nazareth and believed that his message had been distorted. Using a razor, he removed miracle accounts from the Gospels and kept Jesus' ethical teachings. The resulting work, *the Philosophy of Jesus of Nazareth*, portrayed Jesus as a moral teacher rather than a divine figure ("God in America: People: Thomas Jefferson ")

Robert Bellah's book *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* does indeed discuss the concept of civil religion and its relationship with the founding fathers of the United States. In his book, Bellah explores how the founding fathers, such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin, contributed to the development of civil religion in America. He argues that these key figures were not only political leaders but also

moral and religious thinkers who incorporated religious elements into the nation's civic life.

During the American Civil War, religion played a pivotal role in shaping people's understanding of the conflict. It provided solace and justification, fueled debates on slavery, and impacted church activities and membership. Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address challenged simplistic interpretations, and the war resulted in theological questions and significant religious consequences such as the exodus of African Americans from Southern churches and the rise of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (Rable).

President Abraham Lincoln played a role in promoting religious revival, drawing from his Puritan values and personal commitment to Christian doctrine. The Civil War deepened his spiritual journey, leading him to find guidance and faith in God. Lincoln believed it was his responsibility to fulfill God's purpose, declaring freedom for the slaves based on his belief in God's support for emancipation (Gwaydir 15-6).

The Gettysburg Address, delivered by President Abraham Lincoln 150 years ago, is widely studied for its structure and historical importance. However, its religious undertones and significance have often been overlooked. A retired English professor named A.E. Elmore argues that many of the speech's key terms and phrases have religious origins, emphasizing the speech's religious context and its deeper impact.

Contrary to popular myths, Lincoln did not hastily prepare the speech, but carefully crafted his words. His concise and eloquent address stood in stark contrast to the two-hour speech by the main speaker, Edward Everett. Lincoln's remarks focused on the preservation of equality and self-governance, encapsulating the essence of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. The speech became a defining interpretation of these documents and reshaped America's identity, emphasizing unity and the pursuit of a shared vision.

The religious influence on Lincoln's speech raises questions about his own faith. While he did not formally join a church or frequently discuss Jesus, Lincoln's evolving faith is evident

in his personal reliance on God during times of grief and struggle. Historians have debated whether the phrase "under God" was in the original draft or added spontaneously, but Elmore argues that it was intentionally included. Lincoln's faith influenced his decisions and his belief in a divine plan for history is reflected in his second inaugural address (Brown).

Historical research has consistently affirmed Abraham Lincoln as the greatest leader in American history, highlighting the significance of his presidency during the Civil War. This observation suggests that Americans give much importance to fundamental religious concepts and regard them as valid and relevant, even within the realm of politics. Consequently, this demonstrates that civil religion continues to exert a substantial influence on contemporary American culture and politics (Gwydir 19).

Reverend Billy Graham received a special honor after he passed away. He became only the fourth private citizen to lie in honor in the Capitol Rotunda, a place usually reserved for important elected officials and military leaders. As a spiritual advisor to many presidents, Graham exemplified the strong relationship between politicians and religious groups.

During the 1950s, President Eisenhower and Reverend Graham played a significant role in making religion more important in America. Eisenhower got baptized while he was president and believed that faith was connected to being an American. He added the words "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance, and he sent soldiers to protect African American students in Arkansas who were trying to go to a previously all-white school (Hitchcock).

3.3. Civil Religion and the First Amendment of the US Constitution

Although the First Amendment prohibits the establishment of a state religion, most Americans value religion in their lives. They perceive the United States as a reflection of their religious beliefs and the foundation of their religious liberties. Academic studies commonly refer to this blend of nationalist and religious principles as civil religion.

The First Amendment's free exercise clause ensures that individuals have the freedom

to express their beliefs, while the establishment clause prevents the government from adopting any particular religion and restricts the public display of religious symbols. The Supreme Court has ruled that institutions cannot force students to stand for the American flag if it contradicts their religious beliefs and has prohibited the display of the Ten Commandments in public institutions. However, the Court has demonstrated a growing acceptance of the coexistence of religious and secular symbols, particularly during holiday celebrations.

Philip Gorski, a former student of Robert Bellah, proposes the revival of civil religion that promotes the coexistence of religious and secular symbols. Gorski emphasizes the need to keep religious nationalism and radical secularism separate and presents civil religious history as a balanced approach that recognizes and respects both religious and non-religious elements within the American creed. The inclusive ideology appeals to believers and skeptics alike, rejecting repression while striving to maintain a harmonious relationship between religion and society (Fait).

3.4. The Significance of Religious Symbols in American Civil Religion

According to Nyitray, cultural scholars have utilized symbolic representations of trees and icebergs in their research. The visible elements of a society encompass those that are apparent to an external observer, while the invisible aspects refer to the underlying beliefs and systems that enable the visible elements to thrive. Civil religion supports principles, symbols, and practices that add a religious dimension to the explicit cultural products of everyday life, constituting part of this underlying framework (44).

In America, notable physical elements include the White House, the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Bible, and the American flag. Additionally, the country's landscape presents numerous renowned national monuments and memorials that honor prominent leaders like Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington. Moreover, there are memorials specifically dedicated to honoring Vietnam veterans, the brave crew of Flight 93,

and the victims of the September 11 attacks in New York City, including John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., and George Washington.

Bellah and other scholars identify the Declaration of Independence and Memorial Day as the most significant civic and religious holidays in the United States. Since many other countries also have their own special days to celebrate their independence, it can be challenging to grasp the significance of July 4th and Memorial Day. In contrast, the White House declared the Thanksgiving Proclamation and disseminated it in newspapers and on online platforms, offering a more comprehensive portrayal of American culture (45).

The term "Judeo-Christian" gained popularity in the United States during the Great Depression as a response to growing xenophobia. Its origins can be traced back to nineteenth-century England, and American civil religion evolved to embrace a wide range of faiths, including Judaism and the Catholic Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This allowed individuals from diverse religious and spiritual backgrounds to partake in a shared civic religion and foster a sense of public compassion (48).

3.5. Can America's 'Civil Religion' Still Unite the Country?

According to Gjelten, the requirement for Americans to stand for the national anthem and recite the Pledge of Allegiance is rooted in the country's distinct identity and religious heritage. In schools, the founding fathers are depicted as heroic figures, while the American principles outlined in the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution are taught with a sense of divine revelation.

Similar to other nations, the United States introduces its civil religion principles to young Americans along with the religious teachings received from their parents. A case in point is the "Citizenship in the Country" honor badge, a requirement for Boy Scouts aiming to achieve the prestigious rank of Eagle. To obtain this badge, participants engage in studying and discussing historical texts such as the American Declaration of Independence and the Bill of

Rights with a counselor who is an adult.

The Scouts must also choose a speech with significant national meaning and explain why it is still relevant to modern Americans. By imposing this condition, we hope to encourage discussion on what makes the United States of America unique. Cheryl Repetti, a merit badge instructor, asks the Scouts if they believe that America is a single nation because of its citizens' shared citizenship or because of the nation's long tradition of cultural and social tolerance.

During the discussion, Joe, a young participant, voices his perspective, emphasizing that the United States remains unified thanks to shared ideals such as democracy and tolerance. In summarizing his viewpoint, he highlights how the "American citizenship" honor badge plays an important role in educating young Americans about civil religion. These young Americans contend that focusing on America's unique identity and highlighting the significance of national values in fostering unity are the two main ways to achieve civil religion.

3.6. Contemporary Debates and Controversies Surrounding Civil Religion in America

Eric Hobsbawm argues that a historian cannot be a committed political nationalist, as nationalism often rests on historically inaccurate beliefs. Historians have a professional obligation to maintain objectivity and avoid perpetuating nationalist myths. Advocates of civil religion, by presenting their views as historical facts, become storytellers instead of researchers.

Myths aim to portray what is socially constructed as unchangeable and inherent. As Bellah's detractors have pointed out, the notion that there was once a single civil religion that brought all Americans together until the 1960s is a patriotic myth that ignores the history of duty, authority, and oppression. It serves as a nationalist attempt to promote its resurgence, despite contradictory historical evidence.

The belief that America's well-being equates to the world's well-being has been used to justify mistreatment of people of different races both domestically and internationally.

Nativism, characterized by a commitment to Anglo-Saxon values and the exclusion of

racial minorities, has repeatedly emerged throughout American history. This had a particularly negative impact on women, African Americans, and poor whites, as well as on Bellah himself, who identified as a white Anglo-Saxon boy who held different perspectives.

Paul Kramer argues that attempts to revive civil religion or national unity are not based on historical evidence but are rather like passionate speeches known as jeremiads. Kramer suggests that historians should distance themselves from the current trends in public and political debates, as they do not accurately reflect reality (Danielson).

President Trump broke with tradition by disregarding civil religion in his inaugural addresses. Instead of bringing the nation together and emphasizing shared values, he worsened divisions and used divisive language to appeal to his supporters. His emphasis on personal loyalty and rejection of universal principles weakened the idea of a united America and undermined the moral foundations of the presidency.

American civil religion goes beyond the boundaries of the nation and acknowledges the significance of universal principles that surpass national interests. It involves a sense of purpose and active involvement in the world, advocating for freedom, dignity, and equality for everyone. However, the essay argues that Trump's isolationist rhetoric and policies have disregarded this vision and placed narrow national concerns above global cooperation and participation (Carlson and Lindsey).

The concept of civil religion is broad. It allows for various interpretations, as any nationalist activity can be seen as part of it. However, it is unlikely that people participating in activities like standing for the anthem or pledging allegiance are as deeply devoted to America as religious individuals are to their faith (Thompson).

There are strengths and limitations to civil religion. It links divine affection to national law, encourages citizens to offer prayers for their country, and stimulates the political system. The political entity could become more skeptical, superstitious, and intolerant, and there could

be ethical or practical issues as a result (Swaine).

Limiting access to abortion on the basis of religious ideology has emerged as an issue of debate in the United States when trying to cover all aspects of civil religion. Politicians like Vice President Mike Pence are turning to religious beliefs in an effort to gather voters behind the "pro-life" cause. Vance said that we have to commit ourselves to restoring the value of life to the very foundation of American law. This movement may pose a threat to the passage of the Health Care Reformation Act (Gwydir 23).

In conclusion, the concept of civil religion in the United States represents a unique blend of patriotic devotion and religious elements that unite the American people. Civil religion, as explored by scholars like Robert Bellah, has played a significant role in fostering pluralism, national unity, and a shared sense of identity among Americans. Civil religion is not an official religion but a quasi-religion that binds American citizens together during national events.

The historical overview of civil religion in America reveals how the founding fathers, such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin, shaped the nation's civic life by incorporating religious principles into their political institutions. Their influence, along with the religious undertones evident in pivotal events like the Gettysburg Address, showcases the enduring impact of civil religion on American culture and politics.

The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution protects religious freedom and restricts the establishment of a state church, while allowing the coexistence of religious and secular symbols. Researchers like Philip Gorski advocate for a revival of civil religion that respects both religious and non-religious elements, promoting a balanced approach and an inclusive ideology that accommodates diverse beliefs and values.

Religious symbols play a significant role in American civil religion, with physical representations such as national monuments, memorials, and symbols like the American flag serving as visible reminders of shared beliefs and values. These symbols contribute to the sense

of unity and patriotism among Americans, reinforcing the bonds that connect the nation's diverse population.

While civil religion in the United States has contributed to pluralism and national unity, it is essential to critically examine its potential drawbacks, including the potential exclusion of marginalized voices and the manipulation of civil religion for political purposes.

By acknowledging these complexities and engaging in thoughtful analysis, society can ensure that civil religion continues to evolve as a unifying force that respects the diverse beliefs and values of the American people.

Further research is needed to fully understand civil religion. American citizens should pay attention to what leaders say and thinking about why they bring up this quasi religion in their speeches. This helps them differentiate between religious beliefs and empty words used to manipulate people. Civil religion is a complex subject with many different viewpoints because it includes any kind of nationalist involvement as a key part of its framework.

Conclusion

Religion has always been an important component of American culture and civilization. Even before the coming of Europeans in the 16th century and before the establishment of the republic, the indigenous peoples of America before the arrival of Europeans had their own spiritual beliefs that differed from one region to another along the land. The long history of immigration to the “land of liberty” gives shape to the current religious landscape of the USA.

Today, America is considered as the most religiously diverse nation in the world and the American model of religious coexistence is seen by many as successful and unique. It is not concerned about diversity alone, but it is more about the political system and organization that brought together a wide variety of religious affiliations without any official preference given to any of them.

The laws and policies and the general religious climate in the country have certainly encouraged religious immigrants to continue to come to the USA and establish their communities easily and freely. Many religious and faith communities that have been established in the United States have come into existence primarily because their members escaped religious persecution in their countries of origin.

Considering America as a home the American religious landscape today is characterized by the presence of the five conspicuous religions in the world with millions of followers, Christianity holds the first place, followed by Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, and other religions besides the agnostics and atheists. These religious ideologies and dogmas exist under one system, and individuals of every religious affiliation can be recognized once the person sees them.

Living together, these affiliations are promoting mutual respect for each other, and engage in all life aspects; because of the ultimate belief that all religions are the same. Yet, people still feel a sense of discrimination and hateful treatment because of their personal

religious beliefs and practices, which violates the personal freedom that is the base of the United States.

Some religious affiliations in the United States were concerned about their security and ability to engage in the American society and guarantee their right to live, so as an attempt to preserve this religious existence and create peace, America developed a system of religious pluralism protected by the laws, policies, and traditions which allow a smooth management of the widely diverse religious landscape in the country.

These policies are applied under the political philosophy "Pluralism", which supports the existence of multiple religions in one country, without any preference for any religion over the other, considering them all the same, working on supporting people's religious freedom and liberty of practice, in addition to giving them the right to express their concerns and the problem they face in the society based on religion, as violence and exclusion.

Also, religious pluralism does not control only the citizens' actions toward each other, but the government itself, which forbids the use of laws and power to treat religious groups with harsh policies, and to not intervene in their businesses. Another thing is the government is not allowed to establish a national religion to represent the nation as a whole, because it leads to religious conflicts among the religious groups, creates corruption and violence, gives a chance to the dominant religion to control others with its principles that are different from the others', and making severe dissections against these affiliations, so instead, America separates religion and state and follows a secular system.

America's legal aspect also includes the freedom to adopt a religion, leave a religion, or proselytize and no one should be coerced to give up on his religion and follow a certain one. All these rights are implied in the First Amendment that was established in 1791 as a part of the Bill of Rights, written on papers not just being said, and preserved by the constitution.

Despite the general success of the American system of religious pluralism, there are issues that citizens are facing which are considered as challenges. These problems could be found in workplaces, schools and universities, restaurants and public spaces. People being judged for the way they dress and present their faith and others are stereotyped as aggressive and evil, and this has a huge negative impact on the social stability.

Religion in the United States was the motive behind the American revolution and declaration of independence, therefore nation's very first presidents as George Washington believed that religion has the biggest role in shaping social morality and gaining political success. However, generally, being a secular nation, America is not presented by a specific religion as Christianity, but it has a sort of civil religion that concentrates on the necessity of following the ethical and morals and moral values adopted from religions, and shared by all the American people whatever their religions are.

According to Bellah, the American civil religion is not about religion or god himself, but it is about the principles and practices that America have in common with its citizens upon the idea of the existence of God and spiritual beliefs, focusing on the elements that make people of different religious, ethnic, and racial background united, and bind together. However, civil religion also sheds light on the symbols and occasions that has a religious dimension which represents parts of the creation of the American identity and what made America today.

The concept of civil religion concept was criticized for its reliability; thinkers believe that it is a type of the Christian faith that influences American politics to exclude other religions. Others believe that it is just a myth made up by some historians who hide what America has been through, ignoring oppression, corruption, and contradicts all the historical events.

To sum up, America continue to hold the position of the most diverse country in the world, and a land of liberties despite all the political and social problems. Its model of religious pluralism is the fundamental concept and the motive that contributed in the creation of

constitutional decisions that formed such a strong nation by imposing flexible laws for religious protection, and supporting the establishment of new religions within the land.

However, America for sure will continue making new policies that guarantees legal protections, rights, and duties to these religious groups.

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