

The People of Promise and the People of Hope:

A Response to the American Dream

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Abstract

America has long seen itself as a Land of Promise, the embodiment of a distinctive dream. Yet the American story is a tale of disillusioning failures as well as reassuring improvements. Nevertheless, even American Christians have found it tempting to identify the American promise with God's eschatological intent.

This interpretation charts eight emblematic episodes in the American story that illustrate varieties of the American Promise. It then turns to eight "chapters" in the *Christian* story to show how the transformational gospel of Christ offers a hope that, without glossing over the hard realities of history, shines in bold and bright hues yet shuns the utopianism, arrogance, and obliviousness that has often marked Americans' characteristic optimism.

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*The outlook wasn't brilliant for the Mudville nine that day:
The score stood two to four with but one inning left to play.*

So begins the immortal Ernest Thayer saga-in-verse, "Casey at the Bat." Thayer dashed it off in the 1880s, and it still speaks to the American soul. We're instantly right there in the Mudville bleachers . . .

*A straggling few got up to leave in deep despair; the rest
Clung to that hope that springs eternal within the human breast.
They thought, if only Casey could get a whack at that,
They'd put up even money now with Casey at the bat.*

With those gloomy fans we just know that it cannot be. And yet (Red Sox Nation understands this) it happens! Two hitters reach base, Casey steps to the plate, takes two strikes, digs in, and . . .

*Now the pitcher holds the ball and now he lets it go,
And now the air is shattered by the force of Casey's blow!
O, somewhere in this favored land . . . somewhere children shout,
But there is no joy in Mudville, mighty Casey has struck out.¹*

1. Hope: The Baseball Analogy

Baseball's story, I like to say, is an epic of biblical proportions. America's game owns a history so claimed by its faithful that it rivals the scriptures of old. In football, comic George Carlin reminds us, you fight it out on a gridiron, and throw the bomb to get in to the end zone. But in baseball, you play in a park, and sacrifice to come home. Doesn't that sound like the Golden Rule?

Baseball is mythic saga. Baseball is enduring truth. And baseball is essential Americana. It evokes the hope that springs eternal — and then delivers . . . dashed dreams, joyless Mudvilles. It's actually a game that's about failure: If you fail two times out of three as a hitter, you're a superstar. Baseball, says the Cardinals' cerebral manager, Tony LaRussa, "is the all time humbler." To know baseball is therefore to grasp the paradox of the American spirit. No matter how often that "hope that springs eternal" is crushed when the proud hero fails us in the clutch, there is still joy in Mudville — if we'll just "wait till next year." That unshakable, endlessly renewable hope is baseball. It's America too.

That's why "whoever wants to know the heart and mind of America had better learn baseball," as the French-born Columbia University historian Jacques Barzun famously wrote. "Americans understand baseball," he continued, for it is a "true realm of clear ideas."² And whoever wants to understand the incurable optimism of America had better study spring training. That's when, under sunny skies and lengthening daylight, hope unaccountably blossoms all over the land. On Opening Day, everyone's in first place.

Yes, baseball, as Walt Whitman said quite early in the game's history, is America's Game. As such, baseball becomes a metaphor for America. Some would even see baseball as a metaphor for life. I wouldn't say that. Baseball is not a metaphor for life; life is a metaphor for baseball.³ I think that is so in part because baseball evokes rhythms of hope and disillusion and renewed hope; such incurable optimism is an oft-noted characteristic of Americans. Americans expect to better themselves. More than that, they expect to better everybody. It is both nobility and hubris, both our genius and our tragic flaw.

Now hope is not limited to the human species. Let me introduce you to a member of our household, our cocker-lab mix, Cyrus the Great. He's a puppy . . . who will soon turn 11 years old. Cyrus is an uncannily shrewd reader of situational cues. If, for example, he hears my dresser drawer open, Cyrus will with unnerving predictability suddenly, silently appear, staring intently. If I confirm his suspicions

by lacing my running shoes, he pads to the front door, stub-tail vibrating, snout gapped in a goofy grin, staring back at me with a demanding gaze. *You're going for a run, now, aren't you? And you're going to take me with you, aren't you?*

He is consumed, clearly, with the hope that springs eternal within the doggy breast. Cyrus is a prototypical American: always hopeful that better things are in store — either a stroll or a snack — and always visibly crestfallen when hope is crushed by my cheery words, “You stay home and be a good dog.”

In expressions as varied as they are persistent, hope has long been a prominent sentiment in mainstream American culture. (I'm well aware of quite different attitudes in the sweatshop, on the rez, around the 'hood.) Hope has many vocabularies. In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson modified John Locke to proclaim that the *pursuit of happiness* is the natural right of us all. (*The Readers Digest*, true barometer of American mass consciousness, is far less tentative than the cautious Sage of Monticello: An article last month, like most months, was titled, “Happiness: How to Have It Now.”⁴) *Land of Opportunity* shows up in many settings, from town mottoes to scholarly studies of immigration. In my classes I often use the expansive term *possibility* to describe the multidimensional impulse that drove immigrants to America and Americans to the West.

In this presentation, however, I will describe Americans as a *People of Promise*. It is a common enough phrase: The language of promise gets claimed by everyone from students to public intellectuals to textbook authors.⁵ Max Lerner once wrote that “There is no other civilization in whose life-history promise has played so great a part, nor one whose promise has meant so much to the older civilization.”⁶ But I actually borrow the concept from a writer of a century ago, from the Progressive Era of Theodore Roosevelt, the suffragists, and Billy Sunday. It was a time of energy, optimism, and reform. Among the shrewder Progressive thinkers was the journalist Herbert Croly, who in 1912 wrote a book with the significant — and not ironic — title, *The Promise of American Life*.⁷ I take my cue and vocabulary from Croly. Americans, in temperament as in self-description, are relentlessly a People of Promise.

In short, “promise” is a word deliberately chosen. It is a two-edged sword, like the word of God to the biblical author. We say a young woman shows promise; we also say that a gentleman makes a promise. We recognize the first as contingent, the second as assured. So with the description of Americans as a People of Promise. This ambiguity is highlighted in a current exhibit at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. “The United States has always been a place of possibility and promise,” reads the introductory placard, but the exhibit itself reveals some of the utopianism, arrogance, and obliviousness that marks American optimism.⁸

Hope has many expressions, human and canine. Hope has many vocabularies. And hope has many uses. Political leaders thrive when they offer hope. FDR was the master. Franklin Roosevelt's infectious grin, jaunty cigarette, and reassurance that “there is nothing to fear but fear itself,” with “Happy Days Are Here Again” bouncing in the background, gave Americans hope amid the despair of the Great Depression. Roosevelt then led Americans into war with the promise of “inevitable triumph — so help us God.”⁹ As with the quotable FDR, certain phrases echo through time, recurring in later political oratory. John Winthrop called his fellow Puritans to fulfill the biblical image of a “city on a hill.” Jefferson imagined an American “empire of liberty.” African-American leader Jesse Jackson used to recite the mantra of “Keep Hope Alive.” And Ronald Reagan proclaimed it was “Morning in America.”

Speaking of Reagan, did it strike you last summer, as it did me, that the media buzz surrounding his funeral focused on his upbeat spirit and ability to project hope? “He always told us,” said the current president, that “for America the best is yet to come.”¹⁰ And speaking of last summer, did it strike you, as it struck me, how deliberately and meticulously the Democratic National Convention choreographed a litany of references to hopes and dreams? Most electrifying was candidate (now U.S. Senator) Barack Obama, sounding biblical themes of hope. “This country,” he proclaimed, “will

reclaim its promise.” In Kennedyesque cadences no less: “Do we participate in a politics of cynicism, or do we participate in a politics of hope?” The next evening, as vice-presidential nominee John Edwards returned to the theme, signs “spontaneously” sprouted around Fleet Center: “Hope is on the way.”

Hope makes for good politics. The American Promise still plays in Peoria.

Promises unshackle tomorrow from yesterday, and breathe hope into today. But promises can lead to betrayal and frustration no less than fulfillment and improvement. As the Smithsonian’s exhibit emphasizes, all American “stories circle around the mixture of hope and disappointment” that attends a people of promise, remarks Edward Countryman.¹¹ His observation leads me to my central concern.

A fundamental connection and distinction to be explored in this analysis is this: There is an ironic but crucial difference between this American cultural tradition that I call “promise” and a religious doctrine for which I reserve the label “hope.” Promise may be described as a wishful optimism rooted in human effort, hope as a confident expectation based on the character of God. The irony is that the American cultural inclination to embrace the promise traces its origins, distantly to be sure, to the hope embedded in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Turning this American attribute back to its source, I want to suggest that authentic hope should be the stance of Christian communities toward the American promise, the Christian response to the American dream.

I further wish to show that both impulses arise out of stories — stories experienced, recounted, remembered, enlarged, absorbed into the bloodstream of a people. So I first narrate some American stories to highlight dimensions of the American Dream, then introduce aspects of the robust Christian doctrine of hope as seen through chapters in the Christian Story.

I began with the doggerel of Ernest Thayer. Consider a more literary poetic image:

*History says: Don't hope
On this side of the grave.*

Seamus Heaney could have been thinking here of baseball — indeed specifically about the Red Sox, or about life itself (which is almost the same thing) — as the stanza continues:

*But then, once in a lifetime
The longed-for tidal wave
Of justice can rise up,
And hope and history rhyme.¹²*

There is something deeply embedded in the American soul — something that springs eternally within the human breast, we might say — that clings to possibilities, yearns for brighter tomorrows, sees horizons as the beginning of beyond, cherishes hope. Against all realistic readings of the past, fending off myths of once-and-no-more Golden Ages, Americans yearn for the new-and-improved, the possible over the probable. Americans dream for the day when hope and history rhyme.

2. A People of Promise: The American Tendency

It is undoubtedly a common characteristic across centuries and cultures that human beings cherish visions of a better day and a better world. If this is a basic human instinct, it is within Western culture that it arguably attained the status of cultural dogma. The stunning advances in scientific understanding and its technological applications produced the Enlightenment or modern sensibility that assumed the inevitability of progress.

This optimistic vision, though it must be understood within the larger context of modernity and its pretensions, has flourished even more luxuriantly in American than European soil. Paraphrasing Ivan Doig, America began as hope, the direction off the ends of the docks of Europe. The common European phrase *novus mundus*, the New World, became freighted with meanings far beyond the original notion of a previously unknown land. The New World and its promise sometimes expressed a narrowly individualized ambition, sometimes a broadly religious and inclusive humanitarianism, but always the confidence, to quote the most brilliant phrase-maker in the American political universe, Abraham Lincoln, that we are the last best hope of earth.¹³

As Doig's image suggests, it is not just a parochial American conceit. To ask a jarring variation on a favorite question of pundits: Why do they love us? Why do people from all over the world continue to flock to the United States in historic numbers?¹⁴ What pulls them to America? Like their forebears — like most of *our* forebears — they envision a future that can be better. They imagine new possibilities. They accept the invitation of the American Promise.

To unfold the nature of the persistent hope embedded in the American psyche, one must listen to its many names. It is the American Dream. It is the Myth of Progress. It is the Cult of Success. It is God's New Israel — the Nation with the Soul of a Church. It is the People of Plenty. It is the Redeemer Nation. It is Horatio Alger's rags-to-riches dime-novels. It is Franklin's "Republic, if you can keep it," Jefferson's Agrarian Utopia, Polk's Manifest Destiny, Lincoln's Last Best Hope, FDR's New Deal, Kennedy's New Frontier, Johnson's Great Society, Reagan's Morning in America.¹⁵ It was there in the greed and grand desperate yearnings of the earliest settlers, and resurfaces even in the sense of betrayal undergirding the alienation of jaded postmoderns today.

It is the hope, the faith, the gamble, that America is, if not the Promised Land,¹⁶ a Land of Promise. It is a complex of expectations, base and grand, multiple in character, expressed in different ways at different times by different groups under different labels. But always it has been the story of a people who saw themselves as the People of Promise.

Now it is certainly true that, as the hard immigrant experience illustrates, the possibilities did not always pan out. Indeed, the notion of promise carries at least three meanings, what Thomas Edwards and Carlos Schwantes identify as "literal, symbolic and ironic."¹⁷ For those whose dreams have come true, the idea of Promise seems joyfully apt. For many others, it serves as myth and metaphor, both attraction and rationalization for a kind of half-blind faith in the future. For many more — enslaved Africans and dispossessed Indians, bilked newcomers, and bankrupted farmers — it grates, a bitter taunt and mocking epitaph.

It is also true that for many Americans, the global cataclysms of the 20th century forced the replacement of the 19th century optimistic belief in progress with a grimly pervasive anxiety. For some the notion of being the People of Promise has become, in the 21st century, a kind of psychological denial, a whistling through the graveyard. The expectant quest for "opportunity" has given way to an angry claim to "entitlement."

And yet the Promise endures.

From the mixed motives of a Columbus to the expansive rhetoric of global democratizers like the current president, Americans cling to the future as fix or fulfillment of the present, and for certain far better than the past.

Hence the analysis which follows chooses, from many possible candidates, eight emblematic episodes spanning American nationhood, stories that shed light on different aspects of the Promise and suggest how and why Americans chose to project a bright future out of particular circumstances. I bracket these eight episodes with two iconic sermons.

Prologue: A sermon about possibilities, 1630

Their tall hats, moral earnestness, and consuming vision for a better world still cast a shadow over the land. They were the notorious Puritans, those misunderstood Christian Spartans who, oddly were not “puritanical.” Though they feared the wrath of God’s judgment, they celebrated the joy of God’s blessings (including rum and sex, by the way). What they were, simply, was ruthlessly clear and honest about their God. What we must remember about the American Puritans is not so much their obsessive self-examination, nor their idiosyncratic understanding of covenant and election, but their carefully tempered hope, under a sovereign and gracious God, *for what, on earth as it is in heaven, might be*.

Thus folk memory has retained only selectively the purport of the Puritan sermon preached by Governor John Winthrop en route to Massachusetts in 1630. “A Modell of Christian Charity,” reprinted in every anthology of Americana,¹⁸ sounded the American Dream in its earliest metaphor: “We shall be as a city on a hill.” No matter that the phrase was a direct quotation of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount,¹⁹ no matter that it was couched in a context of contingency and caution, Americans have claimed for their self-image both the urbanity and the elevation of the metaphor. Grand city at the top of the heap? Yep — that’s us.

Let us probe the fuller context of Winthrop’s memorable phrase.²⁰ Winthrop began with a proposition. Characteristically it is a proposition about God, not America. “God Almighty,” he declaimed, “in his most holy and wise providence” so orders human affairs that some folk are high-born, some low. Why such differences? Among other explanations, it is so that “every man might have need of other, and from hence they might be all knit more nearly together in the bond of brotherly affection.” This was no platitude; Winthrop insisted “that every man afford his help to another in every want or distress.” Then the challenge to his fellow émigrés: “We are a company professing ourselves fellow members of Christ;” therefore the colonizing endeavor “is by a mutual consent through a special overruling providence.” Why? “To improve our lives, to do more service to the Lord . . . that ourselves and posterity may be the better preserved from the common corruptions of this evil world.” To accomplish this mission requires that everyone “bring into familiar and constant practice” all the moral precepts of Scripture. “Now the only way . . . is to follow the counsel of Micah, to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God.” If the prophet is obeyed, “we shall find that the God of Israel is among us,” and those who come after will seek to follow our example, for (here it comes) “we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us; so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work . . . we shall shame the faces of many of God’s worthy servants.” Winthrop ended by posing the alternatives Moses gave to the Israelites: “Beloved there is now set before us life and good, death and evil. . . . Therefore let us choose life.” Success is not assured, but if God chooses to bless, we will bear great responsibility for those less fortunate.

Much good could come to those who do God’s will in the New World, Winthrop predicted, even as he warned of the shame that would follow faithlessness. The American promise developed as an elaboration on Winthrop’s sermon about possibilities, though often with Winthrop’s warnings forgotten.

The Great Seal: The promise of providential favor

Fourth of July, 1776. The unanimous vote was tallied, the text of a Declaration of Independence adopted, the die cast, a nation born.

One can imagine the gavel pounding over the huzzahs of the delegates: “Gentlemen, GENTLEMEN! Begging your pardon; you will come back to order, sirs, we are not yet adjourned.” The president of

the Continental Congress pointed out one more matter of business to keep them in that hot Philadelphia chamber on America's natal day. A nation must have an emblem. The delegates pondered what to do.

Now it is a cardinal rule of organizations that those who do good work suffer the consequences: Completed assignments beget further assignments. And so it was that the three luminaries who had brought in the draft Declaration — the august and aged Dr. Franklin of the host city, the stout and tireless Mr. Adams of radical Massachusetts, and the shy man of letters Mr. Jefferson of the South's Virginia — were called back to service “to be a committee to bring in a device for a seal of the United States of America.”²¹ The threesome thereby exemplified the validity of yet another truism, the Peter Principle: Capable workers get promoted to the level of their incompetence. The great men were in over their heads.

As with the late literary chore, the Declaration, Franklin and Adams passed the buck to Jefferson, asking the Virginian to cobble a design from quite different initial ideas each had proposed. Jefferson, brilliant architect of documents and dwellings but not of logos, wisely hired a Swiss scholar named Pierre Eugène Du Simitière to do the job. Further hands chipped in; gradually, over six years and a succession of committees, the Great Seal — a coat of arms for the new nation — took shape. The result, finally adopted in 1782, is something seen every day — on the dollar bill. Its odd iconic figures — a blend of snooty heraldry, period neoclassicism, and Masonic cultic symbolism²² — will be familiar to anyone who has viewed last year's film “National Treasure” (alias “Indiana Jones and the Lost da Vinci Code”).²³

Through the tortuous design process two important elements from Du Simitière's design survived: The motto *e pluribus unum* and that strange symbol atop the unfinished pyramid, the “Eye of Providence.” Their juxtaposition is significant.

As David Hackett Fischer details in a fascinating new book, in the Revolutionary era Americans crafted an array of visual symbols of liberty. Most were intended to symbolize the *common* cause through some kind of “unitary symbol” — a Liberty Tree, a serpent, a classical goddess. But some Americans sought to devise an “emblem of diversity” to reflect America's regional and ethnic pluralism. To capture that dimension in the seal, Du Simitière borrowed a well-known phrase, Latin for “out of many one” from a popular magazine. It was an inspired idea, received “with high enthusiasm.”²⁴ It highlighted the new nation's multiethnic landscape but more importantly its strategic architecture.²⁵

To the founders, the American Republic was a grand experiment of uncertain prospect. To solve the vexing conundrum of how to preserve liberty by keeping power in balance between the extremes of too little (anarchy) and too much (tyranny), they invented a republican government on a federal model. In a republic, those exercising power serve as representatives of a free people freely chosen.²⁶ Because power corrupts unless carefully circumscribed, republican government builds in accountability. One such check on the abuse of power is the federal principle: distributing authority between central and constituent units, one “federal” out of many state governments. One out of many, *e pluribus unum* — a brilliant concept. But vulnerable in implementation, they believed — vulnerable to threats both foreign and domestic. History offered little hope for the long-term survival of republics.

How then could they dare if their experiment faced likely failure? How could they expect that the “more perfect union” offered in the Constitution of 1787 would last long enough to “secure the blessings of liberty” not only to themselves but to “posterity”? How could they claim an American promise? Their venture hinged not only on sustaining unity in the face of great diversity, but on the continuing benevolence of an all-seeing Providence. That seemed like a reasonable prospect. That so many regions and ethnicities, so many sects and opinions, could co-exist and thrive in this federal republic seemed, well, providential. Thus Du Simitière's Eye of Providence was a welcome symbol, enhanced when Charles Thomson added another motto: *annuit coeptis* — “He [God] has favored our undertakings.”

And therein lies the first component of the American Promise — the Promise of Providential Favor. God has directly provided the good things that we enjoy, Americans told themselves, and such providential blessing should doubtless continue. As Thomson's official report to Congress proclaimed: "The Eye . . . and Motto allude to the many signal interpositions of providence in favor of the American cause."²⁷ While John Winthrop's cautions had not been forgotten, it was his vision of a society enjoying the Lord's blessing that clearly dominated the thinking of American revolutionaries.²⁸ Indeed, they could dare to adopt one more motto, evidence of a near-millennial vision of providential favor: *novus ordo seclorum* — "a new order of the ages."

Their concept of providential purpose and enabling derived from colonial roots, and in turn from England. The Puritan origins are well known, thanks to Winthrop's famous sermon. But other colonies and other religious traditions shared the conceit. The Jesuit Andrew White claimed divine superintendence over the settling of Maryland, a colony designed to sow "the seeds of religion and piety." John Rolfe, credited with introducing tobacco cultivation into Jamestown, believed the English settlers were "marked and chosen by the finger of God." His fellow Virginian William Box wrote of "God's infinite providence" in bringing relief during the colony's early starving time."²⁹ When Rolfe sought to take Pocahontas to wife, he intended, he proclaimed, that "all the world may truly say: This is the work of God, and it is marvelous in our eyes."³⁰

The revolutionary generation, inheriting this sensibility, echoed the belief in providence in many ways. Consider, for instance, the popular tune "Chester," by William Billings. Its sturdy melody matches its robust lyric:

*Let tyrants shake their iron rod,
And Slav'ry clank her galling chains.
We fear them not, we trust in God,
New England's God forever reigns.
When God inspired us for the fight,
Their ranks were broke, their lines were forced . . .
What grateful off'ring shall we bring,
What shall we render to the Lord?
Loud hallelujahs let us sing,
And praise his name on ev'ry chord!*

The assumption of God's favor has sustained Americans in moments both devout and skeptical, both dark and flush. Billings' verses ascribe American victory to God's help. But how reliably would God deliver? Is divine favor contingent, or can it perhaps be taken as a given? Answers vary, because expressions of the promise of Providential favor spans a broad range of sentiments, some humble, some quite presumptuous.

The simplest response, as with Billings, is sheer *gratitude* for the divine provision without assuming anything about the future. At its best this attitude leads to a sense of duty: to whom much is given, much is required.

A subtler articulation may be called "*contingent expectation*." It harkens back to Winthrop's sermon and the Puritan worldview of covenant.³¹ God's blessings come only as God's people remain faithful. Thus on occasions, in distinctive American cadences, prophetic voices explain hard times at hand or warn of hard times to come in terms of evident moral failings. Though no deity be invoked, these judgments — known as "jeremiads" — carry unmistakably religious overtones.³² How dare we break faith with the covenant? How long will we flout the duties incumbent upon a people blessed by God? How perilous to risk forfeit of the Divine favor! Such ritual calls to national repentance make sense, Edmund Morgan believes, because of the jeremiad's "prophetic assurance of a bright future, not God's anger but His special love for His special people, not pessimism but optimism."³³ In America, our harshest self-criticisms are the code words for our most spacious self-congratulations. Probing beneath the surface of American social criticism and calls for reform, one can discern this plea to keep faith with the covenant in order to preserve providential favor.

An extension to the covenant idea of contingent expectation is a more gratuitous assertion that America constitutes a *new chosen people* — God's New Israel. The "theme of American destiny under God" as a new Elect, declares Conrad Cherry, is "a motivating American mythology." The claim "that America has been providentially chosen for a special destiny has deep roots in the American past."³⁴

Extending the logic — and the presumption — one step further leads to a riskier claim that America must serve as God's *designated agent*. It is one thing to humbly affirm a sense of stewardship that leads to compassionate service to the less-favored at home and abroad. It is quite another to believe that inevitably America's actions accomplish God's purposes for human history. But in fact at certain times Americans have so presumed upon the Deity as to claim an *irrevocable* favor, as if the obligations all fall on God to deliver a Manifest Destiny.³⁵

Lastly, Americans from Jonathan Edwards to Thomas Paine to Francis Fukuyama have envisioned America as the herald, perhaps even the fulfillment, of a coming Golden Age, the apocalyptic millennium of Christian tradition.³⁶ Paine's famous pamphlet *Common Sense* mined Scripture to contend that God's triumph was at hand in the cause of America. Break the ties with England, Paine declared, and "the birthday of a new world is at hand."³⁷ This ultimate equation of providential design and American destiny, "a singularly American union of reform and political principles," has been called *Christian republicanism* and *civic millennialism*.³⁸ Whether literal or figurative, it assumed America would become, in fact as in aspiration, the initiator of a New Order of the Ages.

It is evident that an honest, humble affirmation of God's blessing can by stages shade into an arrogant civil religion, a generalized and genial invocation of a compliant Deity favorably disposed toward America.³⁹ America itself — or "Americanism" — can even be construed as a religion. So asserted Stanley Hauer who was recently on this campus; so declares Yale's David Gelernter in a recent essay. Richard Neuhaus, while dismissing such critiques as hyperventilating, rightly says any such veneration of America "is, not to put too fine a point on it, idolatry."⁴⁰ Richard Hughes warns of an "absolutized" myth of America as a Chosen Nation.⁴¹ Perhaps the best recent corrective to this tendency is offered by Patrick Deneen, who argues that belief in providence, rightly understood, leads not to arrogance and aggrandizement but humble prudence. Commenting on the cultural critic Christopher Lasch, who once wrote that "belief is a burden, not a self-righteous claim to some privileged moral status," Deneen rightly affirms that "real religious belief forces the religious penitent to acknowledge human dependence and weakness, and to regard temptations toward mastery as a form of sinful and hubristic pride."⁴²

Have we any examples of this less expansive, more chastened public statement of the Promise of Providential Favor? We do — in a surprising context. Abraham Lincoln, near the end of America's great Apocalypse, the Civil War, uniquely expressed two crucial cautions. For most of his life, even in an apparently skeptical youth, Lincoln held to a doctrine of necessity that affirmed the workings of providence in human affairs. For Lincoln, however, the belief was precautionary, not presumptuous, because it ultimately rested in the mysteries of the Divine will. Thus as an outspoken believer in providence, Lincoln nevertheless raised the possibility, in his celebrated second inaugural, that the havoc of war came as judgment meted out by a righteous God to the North no less than the South. And he concluded with a call not to vengeance but to mercy.

In short, in the most powerful, most theological, and finally most reverent example of his magnificent rhetoric, Lincoln gave the highest expression to how providential favor might be best understood. For these sober reflections, Mark Noll ranks Lincoln as a theologian better than any of his day.⁴³ So let us listen carefully to this supremely humble expression of the Promise of Providential Favor:

Both parties deprecated war; but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive; and the other would accept war rather than let it perish. And the war came ... Neither party expected for the war, the magnitude, or the duration, which it has already attained ... Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may

seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes ... If we shall suppose that American Slavery is one of those offences which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South, this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offence came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope — fervently do we pray — that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether."

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan — to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.⁴⁴

We shall return to Mr. Lincoln shortly.

The Northwest Ordinance: The promise of mastery over nature

Thomas Hutchins, newly appointed geographer to the young United States, sighted his sextant, took a compass bearing, drove a stake at river's edge, then dispatched several sturdy axe-wielding men due west. When a swath opened, two other men began unfolding a 22-yard-long surveyor's chain. Stretched taut, it marked one-eightieth of a mile. Hutchins re-checked his compass. The lead chain-man drove a tally peg. The rear man folded up the chain, trudged to the new mark, and the chain was laid out again.

Thus began in 1785, at the point where the southwestward-flowing Ohio River intersected the western boundary of Pennsylvania, the Seven Ranges survey. Congress had passed an ordinance instituting a new system for managing the lands west of the original 13 states. Before land could be sold, it must be surveyed; unlike traditional boundary demarcations, the American West would be laid out in a vast grid, parceled into 6-mile square "townships" further divided into 36 individual square-mile "sections." Hutchins assignment was to survey the first seven miles westward, the "Geographer's Line," then return to the mile markers and survey "range lines" southward back to the Ohio River. That first triangle of land would eventually be replicated on a continental scale, checker-boarding the vast interior domain in a pattern any air traveler today can plainly see. The sheer audacity of reducing the landscape to an arbitrary geometry illustrated the Promise of Mastery over Nature.

Thomas Jefferson played a key role in the process, not least in inventing and advocating the grid. He actually devised a whole new decimal system of coinage and measures that would have made the U.S. "metric" before the French invented the metric system. In addition to advocating decimal fractions of the dollar ("dismes" and cents), which caught on, Jefferson created decimal *lengths*, which did not. His proposed "American mile," calculated as one minute (i.e., $\frac{1}{60}$ th of a degree) of the earth's surface, or 6,086.4 English feet, would be subdivided into 10 "furlongs," 100 "chains," and 1,000 "paces." My height — thank you, Mr. Jefferson — would be about 95-hundredths of a pace.

But Jefferson left for France before his plan could be enacted, and Congress reverted to English measures based on an older and arguably easier system of squares rather than decimals. That Hutchins' survey was based on the surveyor's chain, and thus on traditional English standards, explains why metric distances will never be adopted in the United States. Rather, we're married to a system of squares, each six miles, or 480 chains, on a side, readily divisible in one's head into halves, quarters, and so on. It's also divisible by six and six again, yielding (*voilà!*) a square mile.

Each square mile, then, equals 6,400 square chains, or 640 acres, still easily divisible into smaller squares — down to a quarter-quarter section, or 40 acres. That's the size of a standard farmer's field, the — “back forty” of American colloquialism. Don't even think of figuring that in hectares!⁴⁵

It took an embarrassingly long two years to survey the Seven Ranges — and at that the measurements were botched. By then, 1787, new legislation, the famous Northwest Ordinance, was enacted, adding two interesting developments to the earlier principle of survey-before-sale. The first was a prescribed process for turning western lands into functioning, co-equal states. When an area, known as “unorganized territory,” reached a certain population, it could be granted “territorial” status, eligible for an elected legislature, an appointed governor, and a non-voting delegate to Congress. Further growth would result in admission to the union as a full-fledged state.

It was, not to play with the pun too much, a revolutionary idea. An American state could now “grow up around an entirely American structure of government and an American set of principles.”⁴⁶ More significantly, an American family could leave the privileges and immunities of its home state and nation, buy a mathematically delineated parcel of land in the Ohio country, and expect that in due time all the constitutional guarantees and rights left behind would be regained. The ordinance set in motion the westward land rush that made the United States a continental nation.

If the legislation ensured the integration of West and East, it also instigated a division between North and South. The ordinance banned slavery to the north of the Ohio River, though not to the south.⁴⁷ So there would actually be two wests, one slave, one free, and finally a great civil war to settle the question once for all.

In addition to the survey system, the statehood process, and the slavery issue, there was a fourth and deeper importance to the several ordinances for the West. They represented the grand vision of Enlightenment science that engineering could achieve mastery over nature. No matter whether the actual terrain was mountainous or flat, fertile or barren, a swamp or a desert, a square mile was a square mile, so boundaries could ignore natural features altogether.

The confidence that nature could be improved was a reflection of the Enlightenment worldview, an enduring American genius and conceit, and the harbinger of stunning achievements in bending the landscape to human desire. Americans proceeded to carve canals through uplands, bridge wide waterways, lace the land with iron rails, dam mighty rivers, sink deep mineshafts, and denude the land of trees. They strung wires across a continent, dug a “path between the seas”⁴⁸ in Panama, unlocked the mysteries of the atom, landed men on the moon,⁴⁹ and mapped the human genome. “The difficult we do at once, the impossible takes a little longer,” was their credo.

They even imagined they could harness the weather. In the late 19th century, immigrants to the arid Great Plains were assured that “rain follows the plow” — break the sod, and the exposed earth will attract precipitation. Lately we may not be so bold, but we still take inordinate interest in the weather. In fact, it could be argued that one more example of the continuing American fascination with mastery of nature is the Weather Channel.⁵⁰ We may not control it, but we can predict its patterns. Knowledge constitutes a certain kind of mastery.

Even more grandly, Americans also, against the wisdom of the ancients, further believed they could invent a system of government that could manage *human* nature.

The American experiment itself, a quintessentially enlightened endeavor, was therefore an expression of mastery over nature. As they trumpeted in that other Great Seal motto, Americans believed they had inaugurated a *novus ordo seclorum*, a new order of the ages. They expected “to begin the world anew.”⁵¹ That ambition, that presumption, that hubris, if you will, carried with it both possibility and ambiguity: “These were truly creative people,” writes the distinguished historian Bernard Bailyn appreciatively, yet their magnificent invention of an enduring federal republic was fraught with “inconsistencies, logical dilemmas, and unresolved problems.”⁵² Thus it is mere justice that America's most

quintessentially Enlightened man, Thomas Jefferson, was as conflicted, paradoxical, maddeningly unfathomable, and flawed a genius as ever played upon the stage of history.⁵³ And it is *more* justice that Jefferson's intellectual and political brilliance helped birth the Northwest Ordinance.

In many ways the 18th-century Enlightenment mindset survives; in other ways it is long gone, chastened by the calamities of the 20th and 21st centuries. The enlightened (or modern⁵⁴) mind in America has above all been marked by a supreme confidence largely in eclipse today, caught as we are in the muck of postmodern irony, doubt, and self-absorption.

Yet many Americans dare to dream still. They continue to use words like “development” and “improvement” to describe the imposition of human construction, both architectural and institutional, on the land. The result is a magnificent technology and a transformed environment. We enjoy the benefits and endure the costs to this day. Subtly distinct from the impulse to *civilize* nature, an impulse to which we now turn, this drive to devise technical systems, no matter the costs or frustrating side effects, constitutes the continuing Promise of Mastery over Nature.

Louisiana Territory: The promise of taming the wild

The most consequential single event in American history between the ratification of the Constitution and the outbreak of Civil War occurred one April in Paris. At midnight in the garden of Rue Trudon, a quiet conversation expanded the promise of America, along with its geography, to continental proportions.

“There is on the globe one single spot,” wrote President Thomas Jefferson to his ambassador in Paris in 1802, “the possessor of which is our natural and habitual enemy. It is New Orleans. . . .” Lovers of jazz and Mardi Gras might be pleasantly surprised at the hyperbole, but Jefferson had more substantive concerns in mind. The young United States enjoyed a western boundary on the Mississippi River, and settlers had for several decades been pouring through the Appalachian gaps into the Ohio River country. To prosper, these farmers needed to ship their produce downstream to the Gulf of Mexico and on to markets in the West Indies and beyond. But Spain controlled the port at the river's mouth.

Or did they? Jefferson had no qualms about the compliant Spanish. But rumors had surfaced, apparently now confirmed though Spain's flag still flew in the *Vieux Carre*, that the imperious First Consul of France, Napoleon Bonaparte, had bullied Spain into secretly transferring the vast Louisiana territory, anchored by the port of New Orleans, to France. As Jefferson saw it, a great threat to American economic and military security loomed at America's back door. The prospect reversed some long-held convictions, beginning with his visceral fear of the British and longstanding admiration for the French.

Thus his melodramatic letter continued with an even more stunning statement. “The day that France takes possession of New Orleans, . . . from that moment, we must marry ourselves to the British fleet and nation.”⁵⁵

Say *what*? The author of that nasty bill of indictment against George III, the Declaration of Independence, had penned a line like that? *What was he thinking?*

Actually, he was thinking quite shrewdly. The letter addressed to Minister Robert Livingston was entrusted to the confidential care of Pierre Du Pont, founder of the great chemical company that still bears his name. DuPont, a trusted friend of the president, was on his way back to France. He would personally hand the letter to Livingston. But that's not all he would do. For Jefferson deliberately left the letter unsealed. DuPont would read the inflammatory words and, as he knew Jefferson intended, pass them on to Napoleon as if he had purloined a great state secret.

This deft exercise of Machiavellian bravado — and some agreeable converging circumstances — had the calculated effect. On April 12, 1803, Napoleon's representative ushered Livingston into the garden and made the stunning offer to sell not just New Orleans, but the entire Louisiana Territory. Livingston, however, had neither authority nor money to accept. He gulped and said yes. Jefferson heard the news and fretted. He was a strict constructionist. He had neither congressional sanction

nor constitutional justification. And no money. He gulped and said yes. At a stroke, Thomas Jefferson had doubled the size of the United States of America.⁵⁶

Americans now had a vast new wilderness to subdue. And one more dimension had been added to the American Dream. The new Louisiana Territory brought into sharp relief the Promise of Taming the Wild.

Jefferson himself itemized the dimensions of that process in a congratulatory message to Congress after the treaty's ratification and funding authorization:

*On this important acquisition, so favorable to the immediate interests of our Western citizens, so auspicious to the peace and security of the nation in general, which adds to our country territories so extensive and fertile and to our citizens new brethren to partake of the blessings of freedom and self-government, I offer Congress and our country my sincere congratulations.*⁵⁷

Jefferson's message signaled that the United States sought to harness the West for four reasons: political, strategic, economic, and idealistic. In each case that meant perceiving both threats and opportunities, then bringing the institutions of American civilization to bear. Americans thus faced west with a fourfold task: (1) to incorporate new domains into a representative political system; (2) to preempt potential external threats on the borderlands; (3) to harness the resources of a rich wilderness to productive and profitable ends; and (4) to assimilate alien peoples into the American system of freedom and equality.⁵⁸

These four honorably intended goals first came into play in the follow-up exploring expedition of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. Bicentennial commemorations of the storied Corps of Discovery have called attention to its multiple purposes, especially the enlargement of the boundaries of the United States, relations with tribal peoples, and the encounter with a vast and varied environment. Here Nation met Nature⁵⁹: a young and experimental republic brought the promise of civilized society to uncharted tracts and unassimilated peoples by balancing opportunity and order, rights and duties, liberty and law. American energies offered the promise of harnessing the landscapes and resources of those tracts, first through the survey grids, then through systematic exploring and mapping, then through entrepreneurial activity within the constraints of federal land law.

Yet Jefferson's fourfold agenda seemed to run at cross-purposes to the American folk outlook. Indeed, two images of the West compete in the American soul. The first is often associated with the romantic Jefferson and his idealizing of the independent yeoman farmer.⁶⁰ It comes out in slogan and saga and song. The West of the mountain man, the prospector, the lone cowpoke, the solitary pioneer, even the outlaw, is the Wild West of big sky country, virgin land, the Golden State, the Marlboro Man. This West suggests unlimited vistas and unrestrained opportunities, escape and ease. This West sings of wide open spaces.

. . . I don't like fences; don't fence me in.

Oh, Susanna, . . .

I'm bound for Californy with my banjo on my knee.

. . . Out on the range I'll be found,

Tumbling along with the tumbling tumbleweeds.

Away, I'm bound away,

Cross the wide Missouri.

No longer the slave of ambition

I laugh at the world and its shams

As I think of my pleasant condition,

Surrounded by acres of clams.

The West is new, and free, and wild, and ripe for the plucking.⁶¹ The last song refers specifically to our own Pacific Northwest, which quickly became the latest in a succession of American regions

touted (by boosters and land speculators, of course, but also by wide-eyed explorers and pioneers) as a new Eden. First extolling the region's natural beauty and bounty, celebrants inferred far more: "the prodigality of nature . . . seemed to imply a similar boundlessness of opportunity."⁶² Such is the most familiar portrait of the West.

But the second image reverses the first, and bears more similarity to reality. It reflects the pragmatic Jefferson we have met in his summation of the Purchase. It is not so much the West as a place of the new but as a place of *renewal*. It is the West as a raw land needing to be developed, a wild place to be tamed, a savage place to be civilized.⁶³ It is a West destined to be made in the likeness of the East. It is the West conjured up by Europeans from the time of earliest contact. "The displacement of savagery by civilization," asserts Walter McDougall, was a key "spirit in which the English embarked on colonial enterprise."⁶⁴

This attitude reflected deeply embedded instincts going back to medieval Europe. Three particular components merit elaboration: what I term a *geographic psychology*, a *distinctive legality*, and a *paternalistic ethnology*. The first is the concept of "the wild." Feudal Europe was carved up into little tracts held and worked by a fixed peasant populace. Their little world of hovel and field, nestled in the shadow of manor or town, was *ordered*, bounded, tended, safe. The adjacent road or river was a dangerous but defensible corridor connecting such enclaves of security. All else beyond was *Die Wild* — The Wild — where lurked wild beasts and wild men. Indeed, those humble folk recounted horrible stories — of Hansel and Gretel, of Little Red Riding Hood — to ensure their children would be too petrified to venture into the woods. The faithful overlaid this terror of the wild with a religious anathema: Wilderness was the biblical place of wandering and temptation. So what did Europeans find on their arrival in eastern America? A continental wood — a wilderness to be tamed, inhabited by natives to be feared. Secondly, the settlers held to a *distinctive legality*: namely, the concept of "real estate." In the culture of feudal Europe, it was land and land alone, in law and custom, that was the basis for wealth and security; the land was real property, *real estate*. Thus ownership, confirmed by a title deed, conferred not just wealth and standing, but a grip on reality. Again the contrast could not be more stark. Native Americans saw land as we might see air. Land was supernaturally provided for *use*, not sale or ownership; it belonged to the Indian who lived upon it, who claimed territorial privilege, so to speak, who might grant its use, but never sell. Land was not commodity, but commonality. Finally, Euro-Americans had long since developed a *paternalistic ethnology*. From earliest colonial days they had viewed the Indian, in a kind of half-compliment, as savage but civilizable. Indians in their current condition, whites felt, were gentle, noble, but degraded primitives.⁶⁵ Yet that residual nobility held great promise that the Indians could and would change — as a later reformer earnestly put it — from an American Indian to an Indian-American.

Of course, the Indian people weren't buying it. To most tribal folk the notion of becoming "civilized" was ludicrous. Who would wish to be so confined in dress and lodging, so cavalier in harvesting a bounteous nature? The trade beads and blankets, the guns and other metal objects, even perhaps the religion, might be embraced, but what kind of poor soul would work so hard to farm when he could fish or hunt? *Who would wish to descend to such a degraded level of existence as "civilization"?* As the Lakota Standing Bear once said:

*We did not think of the great open plains, the beautiful rolling hills, and winding streams as wild. Only to the white man was nature a wilderness, and . . . the land infested with wild animals and savage people. To us it was tame. . . . When the very animals of the forest began fleeing from his approach, then it was for us that the Wild West began.*⁶⁶

As a legacy from their forebears, Americans see promise in Taming the Wild. It was a spirit that targeted Indian people, to be sure, but it was more. It was a desire to bring order, predictability, and security to an unknown and uncontrolled domain. It celebrated bustling cities rising above the fruited plain, where only purple mountain majesties had been.

Hence Jefferson celebrated not wildness but a future under the liberating discipline of cultivation — both literal and metaphorical. It was not the romantic Jefferson, but the Jefferson who jettisoned his own constitutional scruples, for the sake of the larger purpose of advancing civilization, who best symbolizes the impulse of Taming the Wild. And so the song that best expresses America's real vision for the West is not the cowboy melodies but the lofty poetry of Katharine Lee Bates, inspired by the prospect from atop Pike's Peak:

*Oh beautiful for pilgrim feet, whose stern impassioned stress
A thoroughfare for freedom beat across the wilderness!
America! America! God mend thine every flaw,
Confirm thy soul in self-control; thy liberty in law!
O beautiful for patriot dream that sees beyond the years
Thine alabaster cities gleam, undimmed by human tears!
America! America!! God shed his grace on thee
And crown thy good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea!*

To express awe and delight in the wild, but then to tame it — that is the American promise.

Lincoln: The promise of freedom

In the dark of a winter evening late in the Civil War, the president of the United States put in a dutiful appearance at the annual gathering of the Christian Commission, a ministry to war prisoners on both sides. He slipped in just in time to hear a familiar tune sung by a Union chaplain recently released from a Confederate prison. The melody was “John Brown’s Body,” the familiar abolitionist marching anthem of a Massachusetts regiment. But the words were new . . .

*Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord . . .
Glory, glory, Hallelujah!*

Through five stanzas the president sat transfixed, his sad eyes filling with tears. “Sing it again!” he shouted when Chaplain McCabe finished. McCabe called up two comrades; together they reprised Julia Ward Howe’s sermon song of freedom.

A grateful president grasped McCabe’s hand: “That was the best singing I ever heard.”⁶⁷

Precisely two years earlier, *The Atlantic Monthly* had published the verses penned by Mrs. Howe. She had visited the encampments in and around Washington, had heard the 12th Massachusetts singing their own ballad.⁶⁸ Inspired one early morning by recollections of her camp visits, she quickly wrote out the stirring stanzas that the *Atlantic* would entitle “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.”

In between Howe’s epiphany and McCabe’s rendition, the war had changed. In measured steps, always alert to the necessity of retaining the loyalty of four slave states — Maryland, Delaware, Kentucky, and Missouri — in the Union, forever tinkering with various schemes to compensate slave owners and set up emancipated blacks in a place of their own, Lincoln moved firmly toward eradicating slavery — an evil he had always hated. He would come to embody the American Promise of Freedom.⁶⁹

Less than a year into the war President Lincoln had determined to end slavery in the rebel states. This decision fit his lifelong identity as a northern Whig — a believer in government-assisted economic opportunity for ordinary people. Freedom for Lincoln the pre-war politician meant freedom to sell and thus to reap the reward for one’s labor. This commitment reflected a firm moral vision, Richard Carwardine argues, “an ethical stance” centered on “a belief in meritocracy.” His “hopes for the poor” depended on “the nation’s economic development and material advance . . . nurtured by an interventionist, forward-looking government.”⁷⁰ A system of free labor, uncontaminated by slavery, Lincoln once wrote, “is the just, and generous, and proper system, which opens the way to all — gives hope to all, and consequent energy, and progress, and improvement of condition to all.”⁷¹

Despite his lawyer's scruples about property rights, Lincoln in late 1861 cautiously broached the idea of government-compensated emancipation (the first president to go so far) and by the following April had signed a bill emancipating three thousand District of Columbia slaves. Praise from moderates as well as radicals showed that "the tectonic plates of public opinion" were shifting.⁷²

After the September standoff at Antietam, Lincoln felt he had a favorable enough military situation to publish a preliminary proclamation. Areas still in rebellion on New Year's Day, he announced, faced the emancipation of all their slaves as a military measure. Although Democrats capitalized on the negative reaction, winning 35 House seats in the fall elections, Lincoln wrote a steadfast and pointed message to Congress in December.

The physical domain of the United States, he began, "is well adapted to be the home of our national family; and it is not well adapted for two, or more." (One may be forgiven a secondary reading of the sentence as a reference to the brotherhood of black and white, though clearly Lincoln meant North and South.) That reality will endure even as our own generation — the bringers of our present "strife" — must pass. Slavery is the occasion of that strife; "without slavery the rebellion could never have existed; without slavery it could not continue." And so in "mutual concession we should harmonize, and act together," designing a "compromise among the friends of the Union." The mollifying olive branch extended to his critics, Lincoln then brandished the iron rod. "Emancipation would shorten the war." Matter of factly, Lincoln made freedom for the slave not just a tactic but a purpose. And then the challenge to leaders facing the "fiery trial" of war: "we cannot escape history. . . . We know how to save the Union." How then, Mr. Lincoln? "We — even we here — hold the power, and bear the responsibility. In *giving* freedom to the *slave*, we *assure* freedom to the *free*." And the world watches us choose, Lincoln concluded. "We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last, best hope of earth." Follow freedom, and "the world will forever applaud, and God must forever bless."⁷³

"Emancipation," comments Carwardine, "would, through the nobility of the action and the liberty it secured for those in bondage, itself become an essential element of that larger freedom of all Americans."⁷⁴

On New Year's Day, on schedule, Lincoln quietly signed the final Emancipation. He proceeded to authorize enlistment of African-American soldiers. Once reelected, he would throw his support to a constitutional amendment guaranteeing the total abolition of slavery. And less than a year after the Emancipation Proclamation, while the war yet raged and many remained in bondage, Lincoln would utter his most memorable sentences about freedom and equality, about "a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." Our failure to fulfill the ideals embedded in the founding documents and given life by Lincoln should not keep us from hearing his call "that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom. . . ."⁷⁵

So Lincoln stood for freedom: What precisely might that mean? As David Hackett Fischer shows, Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn" offers one answer. Fischer points out that the "*language* of liberty and freedom was unique to the Western world," that English is the only tongue to use both words, and that Americans blended the two into interchangeable concepts with differing shades of meaning. Etymologically, the Latin *libertas* conveyed liberation and individual autonomy, while the root of the German *frei* (also the root of "friend") evoked belonging to a tight-knit group — your kin and friends — enjoying natural rights. In inheriting both concepts, Americans have "deliberately and consciously invented" representations — textual and visual — that highlight particular meanings for particular times.⁷⁶

Mrs. Howe was one such inventor; the Civil War was one of those times.

Fischer provocatively analyzes the stanzas of the "Battle Hymn" as a Puritan sermon, consistent with Howe's heritage, on the prophetic words of judgment in Isaiah 63. I want to go a step further to suggest that they also be read as evocations of different meanings of freedom. First is the high

freedom of first principles, Divine Truth, echoing Jefferson's "self-evident truths" in the Declaration of Independence:

*Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword;
His truth is marching on.*

As sermon, the initial stanza properly points first to an omnipotent and righteous God on high. Then we drop our gaze to a guilty race, all enslaved in moral bondage.

*I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps;
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps;
I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps;
His day is marching on.*

Ah, but then comes the grace greater than the sin, offering liberation.

*I have read a fiery gospel writ in burnished rows of steel;
"As ye deal with my contemners, so with you My Grace shall deal";
Let the Hero born of woman, crush the serpent with His heel;
Our God is marching on.*

And by that grace the redeemed of God are summoned into the free company of the friends of God, and to "dedication to God's work in the world":

*He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment-seat;
Oh! be swift, my soul, to answer Him, be jubilant, my feet!
Our God is marching on.*

And all because of Christ, whose example we must now follow, freely sacrificing our freedom that others might go free.

*In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea;
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me;
As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
While God is marching on.*

"Here was a song," concludes Fischer, almost redundantly, "that transformed an idea of freedom into a vision of divine purpose, human suffering, and inevitable triumph."⁷⁷

To the song would be added the art and the image. Painting and sculpture celebrated emancipation with robust images of African Americans, most notably Augustus St. Gaudens' bronze depiction of Colonel Robert Shaw's black regiment, the 54th Massachusetts.⁷⁸ And the gangly, melancholic, homely Lincoln would become perhaps the greatest pictorial representation of his own dearest cause — in life as well as in death. "All the world recognized the image of Abraham Lincoln and associated it with the cause of freedom and union."⁷⁹

More particularly, to the boys in the Union Army, their president, in Carwardine's words, "became a powerful virtual presence." (Often enough the tall sad man in the tall black hat was a *real* presence, touring the camps, reviewing regiments drilling in the Federal City, visiting the wounded in hospital wards.) To a degree we cannot today fathom, they loved him. And they loved the ideals — the quintessentially American principles — he stood for. To their minds, he became "the embodiment of the nation's cause." In their letters back home they sold that cause, even after — perhaps *especially* after — the war for the Union became the war against slavery.⁸⁰ "Every day I have a more religious feeling," one soldier wrote his wife, "that this war is a crusade for the good of mankind."⁸¹

Carwardine, a British scholar, has the iconic American just right, I think. Lincoln "used the power at his disposal to redefine the Union's explicit purposes to embrace liberty, and even equality, for all."⁸²

His persistence was majestic, his timing exquisite. Soldiers in the field, “responding to the trumpet call of a wrathful, judgmental God,” Carwardine concludes, “were engaged in a millennial struggle for both national and religious salvation.”⁸³

But remarkably, their president did not embrace their crusading response.

William Miller points out that Lincoln resisted the kind of religiously charged martial ardor that the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” evokes. Not for Lincoln a call to holy war; not for Lincoln an ascription of Southern dead to divine judgment. “It is rather for us the living,” he would say in his Second Inaugural, quoted earlier, “to bind up the nation’s wounds” (for Lincoln, southerners had never really left the Union).⁸⁴

Lincoln’s anthem would instead be a slow dirge in a minor key, with every thudding drumbeat hard-felt, yet the promise of something better as the final theme. Lincoln’s ambition was to be “the humble instrument in the hands of the Almighty,” and of, yes, “this, his almost chosen people.”⁸⁵

On April 14, 1865 — precisely 140 years ago tonight — Lincoln fell to an assassin’s bullet. His death sealed the connection: Henceforth the martyred Father Abraham, grown to the heroic dimensions of the Daniel Chester French sculpture in the temple called the Lincoln Memorial, would live as America’s finest reminder of the Promise of Freedom. Or, in the words of Secretary of War Edwin Stanton as his president expired, “Now he belongs to the ages.”⁸⁶

The White City: The promise of an urban Eden

As a young historian from the University of Wisconsin prepared his paper for the annual meeting of the American Historical Association, he reflected on a recent Census Bureau pronouncement that, as of the 1890 enumeration, no longer could a distinct frontier line be traced across the American West. The safety valve of free Western land no longer beckoned, it seemed.

Frederick Jackson Turner took this startling revelation seriously. Environment shaped values and institutions, he believed, and it was the frontier experience, the progressive occupation of new lands at the edge of civilization, that created the distinctively democratic, entrepreneurial, open, and free spirit that shaped the American character.

Turner’s presentation, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” gripped an audience far beyond his professional colleagues. His “Frontier Hypothesis” would dominate the historical imagination in the United States for the next half-century. And therein lies an extraordinary irony. Turner made his scholarly argument for the importance of the West just as the Old West was disappearing. He helped craft an enduring lore and symbol that would permeate American popular culture and consciousness. The Western motif came to dominate stage, screen, and song, mass-produced pulp fiction and conscientious historic preservation. Yet the 20th century would not be an era of farm and frontier, but of city and suburb.

Indeed, Jackson presented his famous paper in Chicago — in the midst of a great World’s Fair that held out the Promise of an *Urban Eden*.⁸⁷

It was the World’s Columbian Exposition, then, not the West, that represented America’s vision for the future in 1893. To grasp this, think about one of the most famous evocations of the mythic West — the Rodgers and Hammerstein Broadway show “Oklahoma.” The rural, frontier nostalgia drips from “Oh, What a Beautiful Morning” and “The Surrey With the Fringe on Top.” But the real emblematic song, of course, is “Everything’s Up to Date in Kansas City.”

Here’s another irony. The frontier itself had in fact been settled in towns. Jamestown and Plymouth, Philadelphia and Charleston, Boonesboro and Louisville, St. Louis and Omaha, Cheyenne and Denver, San Francisco and Seattle — these were the outposts of westward pioneering. Settlers founded towns. The Revolution ignited in towns. Homesteaders and miners needed towns for supplies,

markets, and transportation nodes. And Americans loved and hated their urban centers with equal intensity.⁸⁸

Perhaps the most quintessentially American urban showcase was the Windy City, Chicago, especially on the occasion of its great World's Fair, known popularly for its distinctive architecture as the White City. "Sell the farm, but come see this fair," wrote Hamlin Garland. The exposition hosted in Chicago may have been America's most expansive and influential spectacle ever.

The Chicago fair was an over-the-top extravaganza in an age when fairs were immensely popular attractions. In a very real sense it was a coming-out party for the United States, a Bunyanesque Yankee brag. George Ferris's great wheel, for example, was intentionally constructed to be taller than the Eiffel Tower, built for the Paris World's Fair just four years before. It could carry over 2,000 riders at a time. Exhibit after exhibit celebrated human — especially American — achievements in technology, exploration, transportation, technology, and the arts.

But it was not just the individual exhibits that captivated fairgoers, as varied and fascinating as they were. Rather it was the Fair as a whole. Three aspects are worth noting. First, the fairgrounds constituted a carefully planned and architecturally coherent city. Located on marshlands south of the Loop's sweaty congestion and penetrating stench, the fair was planned by Daniel Burnham and his associates as an oasis of order and uplift amidst the cacophony and corruption of a great industrial metropolis. All the buildings were designed in a massive Romanesque, faux-marble style, organized into logical clusters, and painted a softening, righteous white. The grounds boasted an array of placid lagoons, elegant landscaping, and carefully situated heroic statuary. This was a vision of what a great city could be if only expert planners and creative designers could take charge.

Secondly, the whole fair was powered, as if with a hidden hand, by the new technology of electricity. An earlier great fair, Philadelphia's 1876 Centennial Exposition, had drawn its motive energy from a single gigantic steam engine, its brawny, brightly painted metal frame at the center of the main hall, dwarfing the gaping visitors below. But the White City's generators were in a separate building, the power they provided unobtrusive. And lovely. At night the white buildings were bathed in ethereal light, glowing monuments to both science and art. It was breathtaking.

The third element turned out to be subversive. Halfway between north and south boundaries was an east-west plaza known aptly as the Midway Plaisance. Here could be found all manner of diversions, from the lofty Ferris Wheel to buildings exhibiting exotic Asian and African societies to tempting eateries. Here too could be found (gentlemen only, please) the Arabian Nights pavilion featuring the belly dancer, "Little Egypt," doing the "Hootchy-Kootchy."

Needless to say, fair visitors in proper Victorian costume dutifully oohed and ahed at the magnificent major exhibit buildings, then hurried to the Midway for the real fun. Alan Trachtenberg has described the fair as a "pedagogy." It was intended to teach order and planning, cultivate aesthetic sensibility, and foster veneration for modern science (and thereby reassure the world that Chicago wasn't as raw and raucous as its reputation).⁸⁹

It's purpose was uplifting the masses. Instead, it ended up "amusing the million."⁹⁰ Exercising their democratic instincts, Americans flocked to the fair, then flocked to the Midway, refusing to be tutored.

Nevertheless, the White City launched the "City Beautiful" movement among urban planners, and even among the wider public encouraged thoughts that the city could be a kind of garden. This was the Promise of an Urban Eden.

But as it worked out, forces already at work were redefining that Urban Eden into something distinctively American: suburbia. "Streetcar suburbs" (think Seattle's Fremont or Ballard districts), strung out along tentacles of track stretching from the central city to outlying open space, were already luring the middle classes to homes outside downtowns. In these new neighborhoods they could have a little bit of country in their city, and a little bit of city in their country.⁹¹

The suburban ideal — the real urban Eden — would mature with the automobile. Low-density communities, separation of home from work, a commute to the job, a safe and ordered home surrounded by an English-manor-aping ornamental lawn, with nearby opportunities for both culture and amusement: These were the ultimate benefits of the Promise of an American Eden. Unwittingly, the White City heralded a vision brought to fruition after the Second World War by Bill Levitt, the Henry Ford of mass-produced suburban tract housing. Today more Americans live in such *Suburban Edens* than reside in either city or countryside. Not Turner's West nor Burnham's White City, but Levittown and its thousands of clones across the continent became the successor to the lost safety valve of the frontier, and the fulfillment of an intensely personal dimension of the American Promise.

I think Professor Turner would understand.

Imperial War: The promise of democracy's expansion

Robert Britton, private, Company A, First Washington Infantry, shivered in the February chill. From the blackness across the creek, volleys of fire erupted. Instinctively he and his comrades ducked lower, squinting at the "incessant flash" of rifle fire that now lit up the Philippine night. The incoming rounds started to find flesh. "Hospital man!" screamed the sergeant cowering nearby. Then softly: "Me next, then you, Britton."⁹²

Dark grayed to earliest twilight, early dawn to morning sun. The order to counterattack came, and Britton's squad leapt out of their trenches, splashed across the creek and drove against the Filipino skirmishers, who quickly melted into the countryside. In a giant perimeter encircling Manila, sister American regiments advanced in concert with the same result. It was 1898. The Philippine-American War, as it is now known,⁹³ had begun. America was about to become an empire.

What was the Washington National Guard doing in the Philippine Islands? The simple and probably befuddling answer is that they were there because they had volunteered to fight the Spanish in order to free Cuba. A more substantive explanation requires an understanding of the convergence of both global and domestic trends in the 1890s that awakened the Promise of Democracy's Expansion.

The story of America is the story of the enlargement — both literal and conceptual — of the American domain. It is the story of how a great migration from Europe to North America, at once escape and invasion, developed into a cultural inclination to project American influence around the world. Jefferson, as we have seen, envisioned the continent as a great Empire for Liberty. His successors merely enlarged the scope a bit. In the phrase of Walter McDougall, the Promised Land was becoming a Crusader State, "called to save the world."⁹⁴

Britton had volunteered along with his National Guard unit at President William McKinley's call. For complicated reasons both noble and base, the United States had declared war on Spain, disgusted with the measures the Spanish were taking to suppress an insurgency in their Caribbean colony. As the American Army gathered in Florida, preparing for the expedition to Cuba, the administration determined to attack Spain wherever it was vulnerable, so Commodore George Dewey's Naval squadron was ordered to capture Manila, the capital of Spain's *Pacific* colony. McKinley then diverted some of the volunteers to occupy Manila while he decided what to do with the archipelago. When the United States decided to take over the islands, Philippine nationalists, who at first had greeted the Americans as liberators, turned against them. It took several years of bloody guerrilla fighting before the Filipino resistance could be crushed.

At that point, American colonial rule began, with the explicit object of training the Filipinos for their eventual self-government — finally granted, as promised, at the end of the Second World War.⁹⁵

It all seems mystifying and even un-American, but in many ways it was a consistent extension of American ideals to extend democratic freedoms. It assumed that the American system was exportable, that other people would benefit, and therefore it was our duty to help them. It further rested on a bedrock belief, not unreasonable, that in this, the great age of European imperialism, the United

States must strategically join the scramble for empire, not least because subject peoples might do better under American than, say, German rule.

At its core, however, imperial war constituted something new — the spirit of activist Progressivism writ on a global scale, a “belief that American power, guided by a secular and religious spirit of service, could remake foreign societies” as readily as it was remaking its own.⁹⁶ We shall “establish liberty and justice and good government in our new possessions,” proclaimed McKinley; “our sense of justice will not abate under tropic suns in distant seas.”⁹⁷ The parallel is not so much to Iraq or Vietnam, but to Bosnia and Kosovo. Americans, while debating the methods, have long embraced “nation-building” and its undergirding assumption, the Promise of Democracy’s Expansion.

The Ad Biz: The promise of entitlement

You deserve a break today. Grab for the gusto. Test drive the ultimate driving machine. You’ll wonder where the yellow went, when you brush your teeth with Pepsodent. Tastes great! Less filling! Coke adds life. Come alive: You’re in the Pepsi generation. I’d walk a mile for a Camel. Where’s the beef? It’s what’s for dinner. It’s not just for breakfast any more. It’s 99 and 44 one-hundredths percent pure. Plop, plop, fizz, fizz: Oh, what a relief it is!

Jingles and slogans inescapably imprint themselves on our individual and collective consciousness, to the point of parody and political requisition. That, of course, is the point. Advertising agencies, themselves a big business, have for nearly a century honed techniques of imprinting the output of American business on the cortex of American consumers. (Not coincidentally are product names called “brands,” recalling the fiery imprint on a steer’s flank.) In marketing the American dream, advertising has cultivated a distinct set of expectations. The relentless weight of incessant ads not only testifies to the modern American miracle Daniel Boorstin calls “a democracy of things,” and Jenna Joselit more particularly describes as a “Ademocracy of beauty,”⁹⁸ it has, more importantly, created a sense that we deserve what is advertised, because we should get what we are due. Robert Samuelson rightly calls our time the Age of Entitlement.⁹⁹

Historians identify the 1920s as the time when a flood of consumer goods became widely available.¹⁰⁰ As the goods proliferated, so did the advertising of those goods. The democracy of things was also a democracy of desire. Stimulating that desire, especially after a bumpy reconversion from the regimentation and restrictions of the First World War, was the burgeoning advertising business.

Few broad social trends spring suddenly upon us, of course. Timothy Breen has recently argued — very provocatively and persuasively — that a mid-18th century consumer revolution undergirded the political mobilization that made the American Revolution possible. “What we encounter long before Thomas Jefferson penned the Declaration of Independence is ordinary Americans busily pursuing happiness,” observes Breen.¹⁰¹ The myriad of goods that preoccupy our choices and clutter our closets — these still define tangibly what most Americans really mean by inalienable rights.

But from the 1920s on, advertising has so focused and channeled this instinct that Americans have come to harbor a sense of *deserving* material well-being. Where once America may have described itself as the Land of Opportunity, by the mid-20th century, especially after the privations of a depression and another war, America had become the Land of Entitlement. Americans believed they had earned the right not just to a lifestyle rich in material comforts, but to protection from uncertainty and want, not just the pursuit of happiness, but its guarantee. Advertisers accordingly reinforced those expectations: go for the gold, grab for the gusto.

Indeed if necessary the ad biz would invent something new to worry about, which, as luck would have it, their product could fix. Lifebuoy soap copywriters revealed a hitherto unknown threat called B.O. (explained in fine print as “body odor”), then showed the girl reversing her humiliating danceless social life by bathing with Lifebuoy, while murmuring sweet sighs to *my staunchest ally* “Lifebuoy. It ended “B.O.” (That was “B.O. experience #331,” by the way.¹⁰²)

Advertising created this world of instant solutions by appealing simultaneously to several basic instincts, especially an unholy trinity of status, stuff, and, yes, sex. The messages could subtly shift over the decades, however.

Status messages in the 1920s invited upward mobility. Buy this product and be like the Beautiful People. Like the Arrow Shirt Man, the rich have Style, and you can rise in society enough to ape them. The “newest after-dark Arrow,” suggests one print ad’s copy, is “the smartest and most comfortable dress shirt Arrow ever made.” You may not make it into the true “upper crust,” but if you wear that shirt, “The Hawk,” you might gain a “secure foothold on some elevated rung of the social ladder.”¹⁰³

Intriguingly, after the Second World War, the lure changed its tune. Now it was be like everybody else. Nothing in the “fatuous” ads of the 1950s, scoffs Thomas Frank, “deviates even slightly from the Cold War orthodoxy of prosperity, progress and consumer satisfaction.” He shows an Oldsmobile ad that is as neat a vision of consensus order as one will find anywhere in American culture: Norman Rockwell landscape, patriotic colonial architecture, confident man, fawning wife, mirthful children, jolly firemen and reassuring reminders of the jet-age military.¹⁰⁴

But then came another switch. Rather suddenly, toward the end of the 1950s, it was *don’t* be like anyone else: be yourself, be different, Be Cool. (Or, be just like everyone else who’s trying to be different.) Cool was, according to a brilliant series of print ads, driving a VW Beetle.¹⁰⁵ Even the King of Cool, Elvis Presley, was the product of shrewd marketing.¹⁰⁶

In each case it was buying the stuff that got you the style. The stuff offered even more than fashion, of course: it promised comfortable homes and a satisfied family, miracle technology and affordable luxury. And as the ad men early insinuated, the stuff could apparently get you sex too. One evocative 1926 Chesterfield ad has the girl looking back dreamily at her beau, lighting up. “*Blow some my way,*” she murmurs. *That* line awakened a few hormones.¹⁰⁷ The ad men have been refining their pitch to the hormones ever since.

Yet more deeply than the sex, the stuff and the style was the ultimate appeal — *security*. By design, advertising plays upon ambition and greed. More subtly, it often does so by deliberately amplifying anxiety. You not only deserve to get what you want, you deserve to be protected from what you fear, like uncoolness, or an ill-fitting shirt, or B.O. You are *entitled* to nothing less.

The generation that endured depression and war came to expect reassuring words from the government — words like social security and “national security.” Product advertising quickly parroted the reassurances: What the government *couldn’t* guarantee, consumer products and services could. You are entitled to nothing less.

Here’s how it works. The key to entitlement is empowerment. Ads preach that the antidote to anxiety, and the key to entitlement, is control. The key to control is choice.¹⁰⁸ The key to choice is an unlimited variety of things to buy. Baskin-Robbins, how dare you limit my flavor options to 31! *Where is the Pumpkin-Raisin Mousse Swirl you were selling last month?!*

Unrestricted choices promise unlimited solutions to all the problems anyone might fret about. That’s security. It’s but our due. *You deserve a break today*: that’s the way the Ad Biz sells the Promise of Entitlement.¹⁰⁹

Jackie Robinson: The promise of inclusion

Rosa Parks wasn’t the first.

In 1944, an African American got on a bus at Fort Hood, Texas. The driver ordered him to the back “where the colored people belong”; he refused. A court-martial followed. The charges: insubordination, disturbing the peace, drunkenness, and other offenses.

Some details. The driver was a civilian; the African American, an Army officer. He had gained appointment to Officer Candidate School thanks to the intercession of the great boxer Joe Lewis. Himself a

star collegiate athlete, he was not unknown. He had learned that the Army had ordered military bases desegregated, but also that the policy had not prevented the killing of a black soldier in North Carolina who refused to move to the back of the bus. So he had already raised official eyebrows with protests over discrimination against black soldiers.

Fortunately, the officer's military counsel presented a compelling case, and the court completely acquitted him. Other than as a sad illustration of racial attitudes during World War II, this incident would normally have disappeared from the historical record.

Except that the defendant was Lieutenant Jack Roosevelt Robinson.

Jackie Robinson later wrote that from this experience he "had learned that I was in two wars."¹¹⁰ After the first war ended with the Axis defeat, he would become the pioneer warrior of the second. For it was the integration of major league baseball in 1947, I am persuaded, that both inaugurated the modern civil rights movement and confirmed the American Promise of Inclusion.¹¹¹

The justly celebrated tale of Robinson "breaking the color line" risks both over-congratulation and under-appreciation. It took 10 years before all major league teams had fielded black players. Robinson suffered a variety of abuses, retired early, suffered family tragedy, and died relatively young. Black front office and managerial jobs have come slowly. And recently the proportion of African-American major leaguers has actually declined. Yet Robinson's storied athleticism, regal pride, ferocious competitiveness, and unshakable dignity made Branch Rickey's initiative succeed beyond all reasonable expectation. The legendary Dodger general manager had carefully combed the Negro Leagues for a player who could excel on the field but also hold up under the predictable abuse. In the married, college-educated Robinson, Rickey found (the hackneyed phrase fits here) a true role model and pioneer. Jackie Robinson not only forced America to reckon with its prejudices, he made it possible for the American promise of inclusion to become truly inclusive.

In so doing, he wrought a social revolution, incomplete though it may be. That's because in breaking baseball's color line, Robinson embodied the same fire and steel as he had back at Fort Hood. "To Robinson," Jules Tygiel points out, "integration always embodied equal participation in, rather than total submission to, American culture." Tygiel concludes with this elegant summary:

*The attack against segregation, in baseball and in society, constituted an experiment in every sense of the word, and its outcome remained uncertain. Jackie Robinson and Branch Rickey, however, launched their experiment with one fundamental and, at the time, revolutionary premise: that all Americans inhabit this nation together and that the key to our future prosperity and happiness rests on the elimination of all obstacles to full participation.*¹¹²

In one sense, it was the immigrant dream come home. To most who have come to its shores from elsewhere, America, in image and often enough in reality, has represented possibility, opportunity, "the pursuit of happiness." Even shanghaied derelicts or transported convicts could cherish notions of hope. Even desperate refugees torn unwillingly from their Cuban or Vietnamese or Sudanese homelands could imagine a better future. But for one group of immigrants — the most populous among 18th-century newcomers — it was not an American dream but a sustained nightmare of hopelessness and dehumanization, an incomprehensible prospect of lifelong, indeed hereditary, coercion. For Africans, sold and resold as chattel (the word means "property" but rhymes, tellingly, with "cattle"), America, as Nathan Huggins has eloquently written, was where Africans "would be instruments of others' opportunity." Even more insidiously than Native Americans, they were incorporated but not included. So, observes Huggins, "while they would become Americans like the others — in some ways, more than others — that exclusion from 'the dream' would make all the difference in the world."¹¹³

The condition of enslavement was only part of the insult. Africans had enslaved Africans, after all. That they were property, that they could not dream that their children would rise, that they were branded by skin pigmentation as not fully human — all added to the horrible stigma of being African

in America. Yes, Mr. Lincoln had accomplished the end of their legal bondage, but even in “nominal freedom”¹¹⁴ they endured continued exclusion.

And yet.

And yet. Slave or free, from the quarters in Carolina to the segregated streets of 1920s Harlem, African Americans created a culture. And yet. Slave or free, African Americans absorbed aspects of the master culture while subtly forcing reciprocal adaptations. And yet. When possible breakthroughs toward inclusion came, African Americans seized them as their destiny and due.

In so doing, they gave America new exemplars of the dream, new evidence for the promise of inclusion. To the nameless generations of slaves who heroically (I choose the term emphatically) carved out enclaves of human dignity amid their desperation could be added a name none could forget: Jack Roosevelt Robinson.

Baseball self-consciously had long seen itself, not unfairly, as an American icon and instrument of inclusion. By the 1930s, major league baseball well symbolized the mythic melting pot for whites named DiMaggio, Greenberg, Musial. Now baseball led a reluctant America into fulfilling its Promise of Inclusion more fully and justly.

Epilogue: A sermon about possibilities, 1963

It took baseball 10 years to integrate. It took the nation considerably longer. As late as 1963, nearly a decade after the Supreme Court banned segregated schools, fully a century after the Emancipation Proclamation, the dream of equality for African Americans was a dream still deferred.

But the Baptist pastor from Montgomery who had led the bus boycott after Rosa Parks refused to yield her seat stood on the Lincoln Memorial steps and proclaimed:

I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. . . .

I have a dream today! I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; “and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.”

*This is our hope, and this is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. . . . With this faith, we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.*¹¹⁵

It was another landmark sermon about possibilities, preached not only to thousands on the mall but to millions more in the decades since.

If we're honest about the 40-plus years since King's great speech, the American Promise often functioned as a pipe dream, even a cruel hoax. But that reality remains unacceptable. Think for a moment about how revelations of corruption and exploitation still seem so bold and shocking. Think how eager, even gleeful, historians seem to be to demonstrate how sordid, hypocritical, exploitative, or prejudiced Americans' past behavior has been. Resonate with Walter McDougall's judgment that America's uniquely free society leads to America's unique frustration: We “are freer than other peoples to pursue happiness and yet are no happier for it. Therein lies the source of America's disappointment. Only free people can disappoint and be disappointed. . . .” Ponder the satisfaction we harbor when another American hero gets cut down to size, whether Thomas Jefferson or William Jefferson Clinton.¹¹⁶

Why, I must ask, are we surprised at these revelations of wickedness, witlessness, and woe? Why should we expect anything different?

Oh, but we do. We expect more. We Americans, even the most self-flagellant among us, cling to the promise. In short, we are surprised, I think, because we still believe that America is *better* — or ought to be.

Let me offer a possibly inflammatory example. In the highly controversial American war of my own college years, the war in Vietnam, I never understood why American antiwar critics condemned — rightly — the killing of dozens at My Lai, but fell silent when hundreds of corpses were dug up at Hue. It couldn't be, could it, that the antiwar movement was as ethnocentric, as captivated by the American promise, as the war's supporters?¹¹⁷

The promise rests on a moral vision; failure to realize the promise therefore smacks of moral betrayal. Our reach exceeds our grasp. The Promise endures, but erodes.

And so I now turn to the glorious mystery of the Christian story and its exalted vision of hope. Though the American Promise cannot, I submit, bear the weight we have placed upon it, the yoke is easy and the burden light for the One who incarnates an ultimate hope. There *is* a more excellent way.

3. The People of Hope: The Biblical Possibility

Forty years after, what do we make of the Reverend King's sermon evocation of the hope that springs eternal? He sounded a call to hope for a race so long oppressed: Was he naive? Was he cynically or tactically turning the rhetoric of proud white hopes against shameful white hypocrisy? Was he quintessentially American in appealing to the Promise? Or was he sounding religious — yes, Puritan — sentiments that, like Winthrop's, incorporated not just hopes but implicit warnings? Was he, in short, being Christian in his response to the American Dream?

One thing self-appointed postmoderns insist on is a recognition that we all come to our conclusions out of our respective stories. We all have particular perspectives.¹¹⁸ To the credit of that postmodern sensibility, its attentiveness to many voices allows a scholar who is a follower of Jesus to dare to offer a Christian perspective. Specifically, it is now time to scrutinize these dimensions of the American Dream from the standpoint of an ancient religious faith daily energized by its own wild and brawny assertions of hope.

What hath Jerusalem to say to Athens, Georgia? Or to New York, or New Haven, or Seattle? From the standpoint of biblical faith, the anchor for the learning that goes on at Seattle Pacific University, what can be said of the American Promise? Is "A People of Hope" a biblical possibility?

As I have detailed, the American story is indeed a story of great promise; of grand dreams held both individually and collectively. Ever since Amerigo Vespucci coined the phrase "New World" the idea of America has been freighted with expectations of Possibility. New notions can flourish here. New ideas can be imagined here. New prospects can open here. New beginnings can happen here. Here old worlds can be renewed.

There is another land. And another Promise. It is an ancient, not a modern, land and Promise — recounted in an ancient, not a modern, story. It points us toward a different understanding of history. The Christian story, like the American story, is a story of great hope. Though much of America's self-image as a people of promise traces back to Christian aspirations, the original version must be recovered. So we turn now to a different set of chapters, episodes in the Christian story, episodes that amend the sense of possibility cherished by the people of America into a sense of empowering expectation claimed by the people of God.

To recover that story, to gently disentangle it from the story of the American land and promise, offers the possibility of clarifying a different vision. It is a vision respectful, even complimentary, to the American sense of promise, but ultimately counter-cultural. It is a vision that allows the unfolding of

the human story to harbor prospects of a New World, a better time, a more perfect union, but finally chooses a more excellent way.

As I have illuminated the character of Americans as a self-identified people of promise through a chronological narrative comprising eight emblematic episodes, so I now turn to another narrative to explore another community, a people of hope. Their self-identity also stems from a Story, the Christian story. I likewise probe this story in eight “chapters.”¹¹⁹

I do so with profound, even abashed, awareness that I share Alexander Hall, but precious little expertise or credentials, with my distinguished colleagues in the School of Theology. I have learned much from them — most of which can be summed up in the ready acknowledgment that I have much yet to learn from them. So receive this journey through the Christian Story as a humble and preliminary, indeed brief and suggestive (I hope not glib or superficial) venture into theology.

My expertise as a historian, however, does accredit me to think in terms of narrative through time. The Christian Story is a kind of linear narrative, as yet unfinished, stretching from the moment of creation to a future moment of new creation. The Christian Story — James Fowler calls it the Christian Classic — unfolds in eight identifiable segments: Creation, Fall, Promise, Covenant, Incarnation, Redemption, Mission, Consummation.¹²⁰

Creation: The hope for purpose

“In the beginning God created.” With that simple sentence the Christian Scriptures and Christian Story begin. With that profound sentence the idea of hope can begin. Put differently, the Christian story begins, like the Creed, with God, Maker of heaven and earth. In God’s creative work we find hope — the Hope for Purpose.

The Genesis narratives point to many readings, but certainly very prominent must be the so-called “Creation mandates.” First comes the instruction to be fruitful and increase, then to subdue and have dominion over the earth.¹²¹ Next comes the directive to till and tend the Garden.¹²² Then, in the account of Cain’s murder of Abel, comes a rhetorical question the implicit answer to which I take to be a further command. “Am I my brother’s keeper?” asks Cain; all of Scripture thereafter demands an affirmative answer.¹²³ Based on these texts, I think we can summarize human purpose as twofold: earth-keeping and brother-keeping, or *custody* and *community*.

We are called first to take custody of the created order. This purpose implies both a distinctive *identity* (we are “apart from” nature) and a clear *identification* with the biosphere (we are “a part of” nature).¹²⁴ To embrace the first without the second is to be tempted to exploit the earth for selfish gain; to embrace the second without the first is to descend into unfruitful mysticism. The psalmist has it right: Humans, bearing the Creator’s image, are, though dwarfed by the majesty of the universe, exalted, crowned with glory and honor, that is designated and gifted to be the Creator’s viceroy, above and over all nature, thus called to govern with the same self-giving redemptive grace that characterizes the Creator.¹²⁵

We hold custody of the earth. We are stewards of nature, called to protect and sustain, and also to elaborate and embellish. We are keepers of the Garden.

But secondly, that custody must be exercised in relationships, in community — first within the family unit of husband and wife, parent and offspring, but by extension with the whole family of humanity. This purpose implies the possibility of both *intimacy*, within a framework of mutual commitment, and *sufficiency*, within a framework of mutual contributions — or, to use biblical language, both *agape* and *shalom*. To embrace the first is to feed a starving soul; to embrace the second is to feed a hungry world. The psalmist has it right:

*Happy is the one
whose hope is in the LORD his God,
the maker of heaven and earth,*

*the sea, and everything in them;
the LORD, Who remains faithful forever.
He upholds the cause of the oppressed
and gives food to the hungry.
The LORD sets prisoners free,
the LORD gives sight to the blind,
the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down,
the LORD loves the righteous.
The LORD watches over the alien
and sustains the fatherless and the widow.¹²⁶*

We belong to a human community. We belong to families, called to nurture progeny. We are stewards of culture, called to protect and sustain, and also to elaborate and embellish. We are keepers of our brothers and sisters.

Grasping the implications of living as created ones who bear the Creator's image provides meaning to life. Indeed, it *vindicates* life. Human labor becomes not mere aimless struggle but directed striving. Ponder, for example, the vignette wherein Adam reviews and names the animals:¹²⁷ Adam's work comprises both inquiry and imagination, and thereby justifies both art and science. The hope for purpose is a *directed* hope.

The Creation Story grants the hope of purpose. To know the story is to know the hope for meaning in life; to know such purpose is to have a directed hope.

Fall: The hope of restoration

The story quickly takes an ugly turn. The snake taunts; the humans succumb; judgment gavel down. What was the essence of the offense? The Genesis text reports a threefold lure: The forbidden fruit was pleasant to see, attractive as food, and a means to wisdom. Let us label these respectively greed, sensual appetite, and arrogance.¹²⁸ More profoundly, the plucking of the fruit constituted a grab for autonomy: "You will be like God himself," insinuated the snake. The humans willfully rejected God's order in creation, seeking to be like God. (How dumb! They were already made in God's likeness.)

What was the nature of the penalty? A twofold sentence on the rebels: Henceforth the creation would not readily yield its produce to God's human viceroys, and what was once fulfilling productivity — procreation and creative work — became ordeal and toil. More broadly, the lust for autonomy was, horribly, granted; in the wake of banishment from the Garden came humanity's alienation not only from the Creator but also from each other, as demonstrated in Cain's murder of his brother Abel. In the Fall, Creation was deranged, and Community destroyed.¹²⁹

The story just as quickly returns to hope. In the midst of judgment, God projects a coming restoration, the promissory note for which is a covering for the now-shameful nakedness of man and woman. Grasping the symbolic significance, Adam, under sentence of death, names his wife "Life."¹³⁰ In the acts and promises of God, Adam finds remarkable grounds for living in hope. The perfect order of Eden shall be regained, Creator and creature reconciled. The New Testament epistle of Peter will later record the admonition to be ready respectfully to give a reason for the hope within.¹³¹ As with Adam, the hope of restoration is just such a *grounded* hope.

The Christian story grants hope for restored intimacy with God — and also with each other. Take heart: The Holy Descendent of the woman named "Life" suffered death "so that by dying he might break the power of him who had death at his command, that is, the devil."¹³² To know the story is to know the hope that alienation shall be overcome; to know of restoration is to have a grounded hope.

Promise: The hope of peoplehood

The story continues. The Fall does not void God's Creation purpose. Restoration shall come. But how?

God takes the initiative to call out a people to be known as God's own. These chosen ones will carry forward the redemptive process that will, "in the fullness of time," bring the Anointed of God, the Messiah, the God-with-us who is "a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."¹³³

Writer Bette Howland offers a re-telling of the ancient account:

*The Lord Most High is the Creator of life; fruitfulness is His blessing, barrenness His curse. Yet He casts Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden, with its trees of every kind, and the Tree of Life; He sends Abraham away from Haran in the fertile crescent, watered by rivers that flow from Eden; He destroys the cities of the plain of the Jordan, once a vision of God's gardens. He could have chosen any place He wanted — was not all the land before Him? — and He chose this. A land cursed by barrenness and blessed by the Promise.*¹³⁴

The land serves as metaphor for the people, the future special folk who are the point of God's call and promise to Abraham. "I will make you into a great nation," declares Yahweh, but also "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."¹³⁵ In setting apart as a distinct people the progeny of Abraham, God concurrently proclaims the inclusiveness of that special status. To Abraham's descendants and eventually to all comes the hope of peoplehood.

New Testament writers elaborate on the Promise. In particular, it is for "those with faith who share the blessing with faithful Abraham."¹³⁶ That blessing is pictured as a royal adoption that confers the full rights of heirs. Alternatively, it is described as the privilege of access to God through the priestly work of Christ, which will lead to an ultimate Sabbath rest. To be God's people is to enter God's shalom: that is an exhilarating "hope . . . an anchor for the soul, firm and secure."¹³⁷

Let us celebrate the *plurality* of these texts. It is not just that I as an individual can enter the presence of the Almighty. It is that I join a family, a nation, a temple, a community, "a people claimed by God for his own."¹³⁸ I am somebody — because I, along with a host of others, have been claimed by Somebody. Together, we *belong*. The hope of peoplehood is a *shared* hope.

The Christian story grants the hope of inclusion in a special company. To know the story is to know the hope of peoplehood; to know such exalted status is to enjoy a shared hope.

Covenant: The hope of deliverance

If a central theme of the Old Testament is reiteration of the promise, another, it strikes me, is that of *rescue*. The God who promises demonstrates his power to fulfill those pledges in acts of deliverance. I discern at least two ways¹³⁹ of narrating rescue: first as a release from enslavement, second as a redemption from prostitution. The supreme example of rescue from bondage is the Exodus, from which comes the account of the covenant relationship God through Moses establishes with Israel. But equally powerful are prophetic imprecations against the spiritual adultery of Israel, linked to merciful reclaiming of the defiled bride to purity and full status. Hosea is a gripping example; so is the Jeremiah text: "I have loved you with an everlasting love . . . you will be rebuilt, O Virgin Israel."¹⁴⁰

These two vivid images resonate with accounts of individual and collective cries to God that result in merciful rescue. David's story and David's psalms hold out the possibility to each of us that our present plight — our enslaving addictions, defiling moral compromises, paralyzing anxieties, faithless betrayals — need not remain our future prospect. One such exultation reads this way:

*A horse is a vain hope for deliverance . . .
But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him,
on those whose hope is in his unfailing love,*

*to deliver them from death
and keep them alive in famine.
We wait in hope for the LORD;
he is our help and our shield . . .
May your unfailing love rest upon us, O LORD,
even as we put our hope in you.¹⁴¹*

The stories of rescue by a covenant-keeping God breathe hope for us today. The hope of deliverance is an *existential* hope.

The Christian story grants the hope of rescue from the desperate circumstances of life. To know the story is to know this hope of deliverance; to grasp such a possibility is to have an existential hope.

*Incarnation: The hope of an advocate
Behold the wonderful exchange our Lord with us doth make:
Lo, he assumes our flesh and blood;
We of his heav'n partake.*

This old Christmas carol captures the essence of the great mystery of the enfleshment of God — the Incarnation. The sovereign Lord became the servant Christ; the Word became flesh. It is the central event of the Christian story, the hinge of all history.

This may be the place to stress that from the Christian (and Jewish) perspective, history is not cyclical, but linear. In many traditional cultures, human experience, understood as an inference from the natural world, is analogous to the rhythms of the seasons and the stars. But in Judeo-Christian thought, history proceeds in a line from an origin to a climax to a destination. The analogy, grasped by revelation from the Creator, is to a journey (like Abraham's from Ur or the Israelites from Egypt). So for Christians the Incarnation is the defining moment, the focal event, the reference point, the narrative climax — the dramatic midpoint of God's story en route to God's eschatological triumph.

I recall my father recounting the tale of his return from the Pacific after the Japanese surrender in 1945. He told how he and his comrades felt their hearts leap when they sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge. Almost home! There would be weeks of out-processing and cross-country troop trains, but his reunion with my mother was in sight. So it is in the Grand Narrative: The coming of Jesus in that Bethlehem birth means we're almost home.

It is a powerful catalyst to hope.

Of all the many ways one might explore how the Incarnation fosters hope, I choose to follow the author to the Hebrews in stressing that in Jesus, humanity finds a long-sought Advocate — one who *understands* and who therefore can intercede for us. We have Someone on our side.

Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil — and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin.¹⁴²

In the Incarnation of God in Christ comes the assurance that our Savior truly understands us. He has shared in our essence — our humanity with its susceptibility to pain and death. He has shared in our experience — the moral and psychological stress of temptation. He thereby vindicates our humanness: His identification with us means that we, as humans, gain our identity in Him.

In fact, if you don't believe in the humanity of Jesus, you're a heretic, says the first epistle of John.¹⁴³ But if you grasp the import of the Incarnation, you know the hope of having your own personal advocate, one who comes between you and God to plead on your behalf. The hope of an advocate is a *mediated* hope.

The Christian Story grants the hope of an advocate. To know the story is to know that One who stands for you; to know Him is to have a mediated hope.

Redemption: The hope of salvation

If the Incarnation is the centerpiece of history, the redemptive death and resurrection of Jesus gives it its meaning. It is all well and good for Jesus to empathize with us, it is quite another to save us. The Christian family around the world annually marks these events, as we have done again recently, with sober reflection on Good Friday and exuberant joy on Easter Sunday. The story is retold, the good news re-emphasized, the inclusive embrace of Jesus re-extended. And it sounds little different from Peter's explanation at Pentecost: Human authorities put Jesus to death; "God raised him to life again," so be "certain that God has made this same Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."¹⁴⁴ Such is the Christ-follower's hope of salvation.

Salvation is a past accomplishment, on the cross, a present consolation, in the indwelling Spirit of God, and a future realization, in the very presence of God. Salvation therefore brings a sense of security in three dimensions, one past, one present, one future: the security of forgiveness, the security of status, and the security of inheritance.

At the core of the human psyche is the weight of guilt, for we believe in justice — and dread it. But by God's grace in Christ "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins."¹⁴⁵ So we don't get justice, we get mercy. That which alienates us from our Maker and from our fellow humans is removed.

And there's more. The Promise is fulfilled, a new status gained: Once no people, now the people of God, once estranged, now full citizens, once orphaned, now adopted as sons and daughters of God, once spiritually dead, now enlivened by the Spirit within.¹⁴⁶

And there's more. Reborn "into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ," we are guaranteed an eternal "inheritance . . . kept in heaven," and privileged to "know the hope to which [God] has called [us], the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power."¹⁴⁷ The hope of salvation — past, present, and future — is a *secure* hope.

It is a hope re-enacted regularly in the ritual of the Lord's Supper, the Eucharistic meal that recalls the redemptive acts of Christ, celebrates the present unity and exalted status of the people of God, and points toward that future day when the "faith shall be sight" and the inheritance claimed.

The Christian Story grants the hope of salvation. To know the story is to know forgiveness and status and future glory; to know that disposition of past, present, and future is to have a secure hope.

Mission: The hope of vocation

Peter's sermon at Pentecost began a new and as yet unfinished chapter of the Story. That the fisherman should preach on that occasion was anticipated in Peter's so-called Great Confession recorded in Matthew's gospel.¹⁴⁸ Jesus responded with a somewhat cryptic comment: "On this rock I will build my church." The saying has received a range of readings, but what seems uncontroversial about the statement is that the church is what Jesus is building, and thus is irresistible. And it is "elliptical; it

revolves around two foci — one an invitation and the other a commission.”¹⁴⁹ The invitation can be said to be twofold, with the commission following from the invitation, namely, the church is called out to be holy, called together to be family, and sent out to do mercy. To be the church is to gather but then to scatter,¹⁵⁰ to offer worship but also to do mission — and thereby embrace the hope of vocation.

Seattle Pacific University seeks to inculcate a sense of vocation or calling in its students. It’s a thoroughly biblical emphasis: “as God has called you, live up to your calling.”¹⁵¹ No artificial separation between sacred and secular parts of their lives is permitted followers of Jesus. Wherever we are, we are the church. Put differently, in a phrase perhaps familiar to some of you: Our overarching vocation, however we might define the particulars of our respective pursuits, is to engage our culture with the transforming gospel of Christ.¹⁵² The hope of vocation is an *engaged* hope.

How shall this vocation be fulfilled? Think of the great triad of Christian virtues — of faith, hope, and love — linked at least five times in the New Testament.¹⁵³ Christ’s gospel is not just a doctrine to be affirmed, but a lifestyle to be practiced. The working out of vocation looks like this: Faith for Christ-followers leads to hope; thus fortified, they can and must engage their world with acts of love. Experiencing that love, a despairing, wounded world can find hope, and thus be welcomed into saving faith.

The Christian story grants the hope of vocation. To know the story is to hear the call; to *heed* the call is to have an engaged hope.

Consummation: The hope of a new heaven and new earth

We demand justice, I have said, but we dread it; we yearn instead for mercy and grace. But justice is still essential. Justice makes meaningful both mercy and holiness. Without an absolute standard of what is good and right, justice dissolves into mere wish-fulfillment. Without personal acts of compassion to spare the guilty of deserved desserts, justice freezes into remorseless karma. The final chapter of the Christian story holds out ultimate hope, for justice is served and reconciliation completed in the context of both righteousness and grace, with the arrival of a new heaven and a new earth.

Hence the still-startling juxtaposition of texts from the Second Psalm and the Revelation that form the conclusion to the second act of Handel’s Messiah:

Why do the nations so furiously rage together? . . .

The Kingdoms of this world have become the Kingdom of our God and of his Christ.

And He shall reign forever and ever: Hallelujah!

Classically the church of Christ has hailed and heralded the time of the end as “The Blessed Hope.” It rings from the conclusion of the Creed: “I believe in . . . the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.” That is, the hope of a new heaven and earth centers on blamelessness before God in the day of accounting, the expectation that our death-doomed mortal bodies will be raised, and the confidence that resurrection shall usher us into new life forever in the presence of God our Maker and Reconciler.¹⁵⁴

As C.S. Lewis so brilliantly explored in his glorious sermon, “The Weight of Glory,” our destiny is glory. The word, Lewis explained, carries two meanings: recognition and brightness. “Glory” captures some of the meaning of a new heaven and earth: “the promise of glory . . . means good report with God . . . and welcome into the heart of things.” The glory in store is both God’s “accolade” and the experience of God’s direct splendor.¹⁵⁵ God’s grand design, exults the apostle, is “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”¹⁵⁶

All the hopes of the story I have charted culminate in this glory: in full restoration of the order of creation — both in nature and in human relationships, in deliverance into the full rest of God, in achievement of full justice and vindication and salvation. And we dare believe it because Jesus said it (“I am the resurrection and the life”) and Jesus did it (“Christ was raised to life — the first fruits of

the harvest of the dead").¹⁵⁷ The first crocus is up; we know the rest are soon to sprout! The hope of a new heaven and a new earth is a resurrection hope.

The Christian story grants the hope of a new heaven and a new earth. To know the story is to know the hope of full justice and glory to come; to yearn for such life is to have a *resurrection* hope.

4. Becoming the People of Hope: The Community Responsibility

Let's recapitulate as we conclude. Let's do so in a very focused way, with a specific question in mind: What deep-seated human yearnings spawned and sustained the American Dream?

Perhaps the first was a need to feel special, to believe that the ordeal of uprooting and relocating was part of some larger, meaningful Design. For this yearning there was the Promise of Divine Favor. But is this really a people of worthy promise, who presume upon God's favor by identifying it with their own national vision? Better to recount the story of creation in the Creator's image, and live in the hope of a purpose, a directed hope.

A second yearning was somehow to balance a desire for space and nature with a desire to be at the hub of social and economic activity, and also to merge conflicting desires for beauty and pleasure, for uplift and abandon. Taken together, it's a yearning for the suburban ideal, the Promise of an Urban Eden. But is this really a people of worthy promise, who in quest of an urban paradise substitute harmonious architecture or indulgent diversion or a spacious lawn for true community? Better to recount the story of the fall with its anticipation of reconciliation of Creator and creation, and live in the hope of restoration to the City of God, a grounded hope.

Third was a desire by those at the margins to claim the privileges of the insider, the quest to break out of the stigmas of class or race or parentage, the hunger to belong. For these folk there was the Promise of Inclusion. But is this really a people of worthy promise, who have been as likely to draw boundaries as to welcome? Better to recount the story of a promised new collective identity, and live in the hope of peoplehood, a shared hope.

Fourth, for both the successful and the marginal an impulse has persisted to escape the confines of current circumstance, to find release from impoverishment or helplessness or victimhood or literal bondage. For those in chains, metaphorical or literal, there has been the Promise of Freedom. But is this really a people of worthy promise, whose differing visions of freedom can only be reconciled in blood? Better to recount the story of repeated rescues by a gracious covenant-making, covenant-keeping God, and live in the hope of imminent deliverance, an existential hope.

Next is that schoolyard instinct for fair treatment, for reward commensurate with effort. For those defining justice in this self-referential way, there has been the Promise of Entitlement. But is this really a people of worthy promise, who presume that all the goods in the market are their due, their deserved cure for anxiety and unfulfilled desire? Better to recount the story of an Incarnate God who took on time and flesh and mortality, and live in the hope of an Advocate who pleads on our behalf, a mediated hope.

Sixthly, Americans oscillate between a spirit of adventure and a wish for security. Forced to choose, most opt for the safety net, wanting fears of the dark unknown assuaged, risks minimized, landscapes ordered and bounded. For them, there is the Promise of Taming the Wild. But is this really a people of worthy promise, who require order and productivity at the expense of untamed people and places? Better to recount the story of a Nazarene who paid once for all the blood-price for our redemption, and live in the hope of salvation, a secure hope.

I don't mean to paint an unrelieved picture of selfishness, for Americans at their best have demonstrated a generous and expansive spirit toward other peoples. Believing they enjoy the best system of ordering human affairs, they embrace the Promise of Democracy's Expansion. But is this really a

people of worthy promise, who assume other cultures will model their political system on ours? Better to recount the story of a universal and apostolic people of God, called out from yet sent into the world, and live in the hope of vocation, an engaged hope.

Finally, an instinct to control rather than to be controlled has gripped the American soul, coupled with a confidence in technical solutions that foster such control. Got a problem? Yankee ingenuity will fix it. Environments and institutions are malleable. Such is the Promise of Mastery over Nature. But is this really a people of worthy promise, who bend the earth to their design? Better to recount the story of a coming day of glorious consummation, and live in the hope of rising to greet a new heaven and a new earth, a resurrection hope.

Good, I say, to be part of the noble heritage of a People of Promise. Better, I say, to be a part of a Community of Hope.

The American promise fosters the hope that springs eternal but all too often gives us joyless Mudvilles. The Christian gospel, on the other hand, offers Eternal Hope; that is, it inverts the American sequence of hopes sprung up and dashed. The dark afternoon of the cross precedes the bright dawn of resurrection day.

What then is the means to transform dreams of promise into bedrock hope? The instrument of transmitting God's word of hope is God's people. Among the people of promise dwells a community of hope. God's people must engage their culture first as people of the cross, people of weakness, people of humility, chastened by the realities of human frailty and failure. But then God's people, having mourned since Friday, can shout on Sunday, can be people of the empty tomb, people of power, people of brawny hope.

And thereby they may be people of transformation.

Though an academic lecture need not — perhaps should not — end in a homily, it nevertheless seems timely to raise a question of ourselves: How can the people of a university, a university claiming to engage our society as a counter-cultural grace-filled community, become that people of hope? I offer no glib formulas, no altar calls, only some frameworks for considering such a question.

The first framework is the concept of *becoming*. Over a quarter-century ago it was my privilege to stand in this place as the fourth Weter lecturer. I presented some partially formed thoughts on doing history in a Christian context, centered on “becoming” as a rallying concept for integrating distinct fields of learning in a holistic curriculum. That is, as humans locked into time, we participate in the “becomingness” of things, a notion that can apply in a variety of disciplinary contexts, and lead to exploration of Christian dimensions of the disciplines.¹⁵⁸

Years ago I heard the late evangelical statesman Vernon Grounds offer the challenge: “Become what you are!” His point was that the followers of Jesus enjoy a certain identity “in Christ,” which their lives should increasingly demonstrate. Something of that juxtaposition of “already there” and “still in process” was occurring at Seattle Pacific even as I presented that early Weter lecture. *Seattle Pacific College* had recently renamed itself *Seattle Pacific University* — a move quite contested at the time. The argument that our structure and diverse programs already constituted us a University carried the day. But no sooner had we become what we already were, we told ourselves that we must become what we now were. We must mature into a true and full-bodied University.

With allowances for multiple meanings for “university,” I think Seattle Pacific has offered an example of what Grounds asked for. We have become what we are.

And now we are poised to do it again: to grow into a vision of excellence that our President has laid before us: We are already in some real ways, and now aspire to be in other ways, a premier national Christian University that prepares skilled and exemplary graduates, nurtured within a community marked by grace and wisdom, to engage the culture with the transforming gospel of Christ.

Is there room, in our new becoming, to grow into a special kind of University community — a community of hope?

A second framework relates to our collective identity — our peoplehood. Here I primarily speak of faculty and staff, the permanent members of this academic community, but I do not exclude students, though their time here is brief and essentially apprenticeship-like.

In what sense may we become a people?

It is commonplace to protest that this is a university and not a church. But the distinction is tedious and potentially misleading. For the Church is not our respective congregations where we weekly gather for corporate worship. The Church is the family of God living the faith in and for the culture — wherever they are *between* Sundays.

Seattle Pacific is not a church. But Seattle Pacific's people are the Church, the people of God in strategic vocation as one manifestation of the Church in mission in the world. More formally, the Christian University is an arm of the Church, an educational extension and intellectual partner of congregations of Christians who look to us to shape their thinking and equip their youth.

Is there opportunity, in our sustained being, to grow into a special kind of people — a people doing hope?

A third framework for application is the notion of hope itself. I've tried to suggest some dimensions that I humbly commend for explicit and intentional incorporation into our curricula and otherwise. It is already the direct charge of the sophomore Common Curriculum course to explore the sources of hope in a desperate and despairing world. I find students very responsive to this emphasis; I respectfully commend it to all my colleagues.

Is there willingness, throughout our multifaceted curricula, to model a special kind of calling — a calling of hope?

In sum, might we become a community of hope, a people doing hope, a university modeling a vocation of hope?

If so, then even when Casey fails us in the clutch, even when the American Dream falters and the American Promise falls short, there will be joy in Mudville.

If so, then we shall dare to sing afresh the Isaac Watts rendering of the 90th Psalm:

*O God, our help in ages past
Our hope for years to come:
Be thou our guide while life shall last,
And our eternal home.*

If so, we shall hear afresh the blessing of the apostle:

For everything that was written in the past [the whole Christian story!] was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . May the God of hope fill you with great joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵⁹

Notes

¹ The *Sporting News* archives preserves the text: Ernest Lawrence Thayer, "Casey at the Bat: A Song of the Republic, Sung in 1888," www.sportingnews.com/archives/baseball/94640.html (7 April 2005).

² Jacques Barzun, *God's Country and Mine* (1954), excerpted in *Baseball: A Literary Anthology*, ed Nicholas Dawidoff (NY: The Library of America, 2002), pp 256-257; see also *Baseball as America: Seeing Ourselves Through Our National Game* (Washington DC: National Geographic Society, 2002).

³ I confess this line is shamelessly stolen from Scott Cline, Seattle's city archivist.

⁴ *Reader's Digest*, March 2005, pp 93-99.

⁵ Around me as I write are many examples. An exam recently read, sitting here ready for pick-up, contains this line in response to a question about the American West: A recent personal move west "embodied a break from benumbing family and social constraints, a chance at adventure and exploration into new physical terrain, and an opportunity to forge a new identity": "Dale Journeyman" (pseudo.), final exam, History 5600, submitted January 2005, 6. A catalog over there lists a new survey text by William Rorabaugh et al, *America's Promise: A Concise History of the United States* (2 vols; Rowman and Littlefield, 2004). Just at hand is a lavish brochure touting the fifth edition of John Faragher et al, *Out of Many: A History of the United States* (Upper Saddle River NJ: Prentice Hall, 2005?), with the line "The Great American Promise is the Out of Many Promise." Closer to home and heart is that coffee-table book on the shelf: William H. Goetzmann, *Looking at the Land of Promise: Pioneer Images of the Pacific Northwest* (Pullman WA: Washington State University Press, 1988).

⁶ Lerner, *America as a Civilization* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 23-24.

⁷ Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965 reprint of 1911 edition), ed. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.

⁸ The exhibit traces four possibilities: the promise of land and abundance, the promise of progress and opportunity, the promise of freedom and independence, and the promise of equality and democracy. In each case artifact and text show how the promise has been clouded. America promises more, but class divisions pit abundance against equality. Industrialization, whose promise was eagerly embraced by "owners, mechanics, and operatives," accentuated class divisions, leading to frustration instead of fulfillment. European Jews immigrated in pursuit of "the promise of a new life"; through hard work, useful skills, a measure of good luck and characteristic community solidarity their quest found fulfillment, but in the process changed America. For African Americans, on the other hand, hopes for freedom became merely "a promise deferred." Author's personal notes of "Communities in a Changing Nation: The Promise of 19th-Century America" exhibit, 22 December 2004.

⁹ "F.D. Roosevelt's First Inaugural Address," March 3, 1933; "Roosevelt's Message Asking for War Against Japan," December 8, 1941; both in *Documents of American History*, ed. H.S. Commager (9th ed; Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice Hall, 1973), 240.

¹⁰ George W. Bush, quoted in *The Seattle Times*, June 6, 2004, 1.

¹¹ He adds, "We have produced categories to separate ourselves from one another but have nonetheless shared enough to call ourselves a people." Countryman, *Americans: A Collision of Histories* (NY: Hill and Wang, 1996), xvi-xvii.

¹² Heaney, "History and Hope," from *The Cure at Troy*. I am grateful to SPU Professor Greg Wolfe and other colleagues for identifying the source of these lines quoted by a guest speaker, Tom Vander Ark, in fall 2004. Thanks too to colleague Kevin Bolding for catching an allusion to the phrase in the U2 song "Peace on Earth."

¹³ Doig, *Winter Brothers: A Season at the Edge of America* (NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 4-5; the famous Lincoln phrase is from his annual message to Congress, December 1, 1862, available in *This Fiery Trial: The Speeches and Writings of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. William Gienapp (NY: Oxford, 2002), 150.

¹⁴ Although the relative proportion of immigrants has not reached levels of the early 20th century, immigrants exceeded 9 million in the decade of the 1990s, topping the previous 10-year record set in 1900-1910. Currently the foreign-born population in the United States hovers around 10 percent, numbers unknown since the heyday of Ellis Island. James West Davidson et al, *Nation of Nations: A Narrative History of the American Republic* (5th ed.; Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 1105, A-34.

¹⁵ These aspects are explored by, among others, Mark E. Neely Jr., *The Last Best Hope of Earth: Abraham Lincoln and the Promise of America* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1993); Sidney Mead, *The Nation With the Soul of a Church* (NY: Harper and Row, 1975); Ernest Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); David Potter, *People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954); two who, with quite different emphases, trace successive expressions of the Dream are Walter McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter With the World Since 1776* (Boston: Harper-Collins, 1997) and Richard Hughes, *Myths America Lives By* (Urbana: Univ of Illinois Press, 2003).

¹⁶ Although McDougall, as hinted in his title, is one among many who would go so far as to say Americans indeed saw their country, or its social and political systems, as The Promised Land.

¹⁷ As a card-carrying Seattleite, I applaud that these friends and fellow Pacific Northwest historians here refer not to America in general but to its "most livable" region: G. Thomas Edwards and Carlos A. Schwantes, "The Pacific Northwest as Promised Land: An Introduction," in *Experiences in a Promised Land*, ed. Edwards and Schwantes (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986).

¹⁸ For instance, Conrad Cherry, ed. *God's New Israel* (rev.ed.; Chapel Hill: Univ of North Carolina Press, 1998), 37-41; or Jack B. Greene, ed., *Settlements to Society, 1607-1763: A Documentary History of Colonial America* (NY: Norton, 1975), 66-68.

¹⁹ Matthew 5:14

²⁰ I follow the text in Cherry, but have modernized spelling and capitalization.

²¹ Quoted in David Hackett Fischer, *Liberty and Freedom: A Visual History of America's Founding Ideas* (NY: Oxford, 2005), 132-133. See also the official State Department account at www.state.gov/www/publications/great_seal.pdf (accessed April 11, 2005), and another site whose authorship is unclear (a schoolteacher's creation, perhaps?): www.greatseal.com (April 11, 2005).

²² Gordon S. Wood, *The American Revolution: A History* (NY: The Modern Library, 2002), 96-99, explains that the seal's symbolism was just one example of an outpouring of classical borrowings that reflected the "bombastic" dream that the infant United States was "destined to bring about a new flowering in the arts and sciences . . . a 'republic of letters.'" The revolutionary generation, enthralled to invent a new nation with a new kind of government, appropriated these neoclassical themes in many ways. Examples include town names (Troy, Syracuse), literary genres (the epic poem), formal architecture (Jefferson's Virginia state capitol), and Latin or Latinized words and phrases (state mottoes, Robert Gray's ship *Columbia Rediviva* for which the great river is named). A treasure hunt among the heraldic elements of the seal is fascinating and fun. Find war and peace: the arrows and olive branch in respective talons. Find elements picked up in the concurrently developed flag design: the constellation of 13 stars and the stripes (vertical, not horizontal) of the shield. Find the number 13, as in original states: 13 stars, arrows, leaves on the olive branch, tiers on the pyramid. Wood, ed., *The Rising Glory of America* (New York: George Braziller, 1971). On the eagle, see Fischer, *Liberty and Freedom*, 145-151; on the stars, 152-166.

²³ While the movie's breathless plot is fanciful, the Freemasonry connection may not be: See Walter McDougall, *Freedom Just Around the Corner: A New American History, 1585-1828* (NY: HarperCollins, 2004) and Stephen C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730-1840* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1996); or, the connection may be overblown: See Edward L. King, "The Great Seal," (n.d.) www.masonicinfo.com/greatseal.htm (April 9, 2005), an anti-anti-masonry site; and Richard S. Patterson and Richardson Dougall, *The Eagle and the Shield: A History of the Great Seal of the United States* (Washington: U.S. Dept. of State, Govt. Printing Office, 1976), 529.

²⁴ Here Fischer draws on his own earlier path-breaking work, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (NY: Oxford, 1989). His four cultures are New England Puritans from East Anglia, middle-state Quakers from the Midlands, southern Cavaliers from England's south and southwest country, and bordermen (both European and Scottish) out on the frontier. Fischer's types are pithily summarized by McDougall, *Freedom Just Around the Corner*, 142-155.

²⁵ In fact the heraldic description of the *obverse* (i.e., front, with the eagle and shield) explains that the shield with its vertical stripes represents the states "joined in one solid compact entire. . . . The motto alludes to this union." Moreover, as mentioned above, the motif of 13 recurs. Charles Thomson, "Remarks and Explanation" [about the great seal's final design], adopted by the Continental Congress, June 20, 1782, text in State Department's Web publication cited above, 6.

²⁶ The literature on republicanism is immense and contested. In *American Revolution*, Wood continues his three-decade commitment to explicating republican ideas; Timothy Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (NY: Oxford, 2004), 447-451 represents historians who think social and economic developments better explain the events of the Revolutionary Era. Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (NY: Oxford, 2002), 447-451, offers a recent review in an appendix; I summarized the "Republican Synthesis" up to the mid-1980s in "America as a Culture (I): Some Emerging Lines of Analysis," *Journal of American Culture*, 11 (Spring 1988), 2-3.

²⁷ Thomson, "Remarks and Explanation," 6. Congressional adoption of this report constituted approval of the seal's final design.

²⁸ Richard Hughes offers a somewhat different perspective on the iconography of the great seal, placing it in the context of a millennial vision: Hughes, *Myths*, 100-101.

²⁹ White and Rolfe quoted in Conrad Cherry, ed., *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny* (rev ed; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 25-26; Box, "God's Providence in Virginia," in *Manifest Destiny and The Imperialism Question*, ed. Charles L. Sanford (NY: John Wiley, 1974), 19.

³⁰ Rolfe to Governor Thomas Dall, 1614, in John Demos, ed., *Remarkable Providences 1600-1760* (NY: George Braziller, 1972): 258-263.

³¹ Accessible sources for the idea of covenant include George Marsden, *Religion and American Culture* (2d ed.; Fort Worth TX: Harcourt, 2001), 22-23, 52; Hughes, *Myths*.

³² Unlike with ancient Israel, we find little of lament in American letters, few instances of a sense of God's abandonment — even in the culture of the American South. (The great exception, of course, is in the songs and stories of the African American and Native American.) Rather we hear the jeremiad, the shrill warning of impending judgment unless the nation turns from its wicked ways. Mark Noll has shown that many who supported the Revolution simultaneously explained it as deserved chastisement. Timothy Breen fails to pick up on this aspect of American self-criticism about "luxury" that resulted in boycotts of British goods. Compare Noll, *Christians in the American Revolution* (Grand Rapids MI: Christian University Press, 1977), 80-102, and Noll, *America's God*, 82-83, with Breen, *Marketplace of Revolution*.

³³ Edmund S. Morgan, *The Genuine Article* (NY: Norton, 2004), 36. Morgan here is reflecting on the classic study by Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1978).

³⁴ Cherry, preface and introduction to *God's New Israel*, ed. Cherry, ix, 1.

³⁵ Frederick Merk, in *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation* (NY: Knopf, 1963), esp. 261–266, persuasively argues that Manifest Destiny, in its specific applications in the 1840s and 1890s, “misrepresented the nation.” In most other eras, he claims (261), Americans were driven by a sense of mission, a “truer expression of the national spirit” whose “language was that of dedication — dedication to the enduring values of American civilization.” Merk was reacting to the older classic study: Albert K. Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny: A Study of Expansion in American History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1935), still worth consulting.

³⁶ Edwards, “The Latter Day Glory Is Probably to Begin in America,” in *God's New Israel*, ed. Cherry, 54–58; Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (NY: Free Press, 1992). Obviously, in Fukuyama explicit religious underpinnings are absent, but I think he perpetuates the “millennialist” impulse.

³⁷ Quoted Noll, *America's God*, 84, who wryly observes that if Paine's radically skeptical *Age of Reason* had preceded the apparently Bible-honoring *Common Sense*, “the quarrel with Britain may have taken a different course . . . and the allegiance of Christian believers to republican liberty might not have been so thoroughly cemented.”

³⁸ Noll, *America's God*, 73–92 (quote: 87). See also Hughes, *Myths*; Lois Banner, “Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of an Interpretation,” *Journal of American History*, 60 (June 1973), 23–41; Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation*; Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1977); Ruth H. Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756–1800* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

³⁹ Marsden, *Religion in American Culture*, 51–53; the pioneer was Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1955); the popularizer of the phrase was Robert Bellah; see e.g., *Varieties of Civil Religion* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980).

⁴⁰ Hauerwas remark in response to a question at a meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society, Seattle Pacific University, 4 March 2005; Gelernter cited by Richard Neuhaus, “America as Religion,” *First Things*, April 2005, 57–58.

⁴¹ Hughes, *Myths*, 193.

⁴² Deneen, “Christopher Lasch and the Limits of Hope,” *First Things*, Dec 2004, 29–30.

⁴³ “Lincoln's concept of providence,” writes Noll, “combined the convention of his age with a much more primordial vision” combining “confidence in providence with humble agnosticism about its purposes” — that is, that human wisdom cannot necessarily divine God's intent: Noll, *America's God*, 430–431. A brilliant treatment of the address is Ronald White, *Lincoln's Greatest Speech* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 2002). The larger religious currents during the war are interpreted by James H. Morehead, *American Apocalypse: Yankee Protestants and the Civil War, 1860–1869* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978).

⁴⁴ Second Inaugural Address, March 4, 1865, in William E. Gienapp, ed., *This Fiery Trial: The Speeches and Writings of Abraham Lincoln* (NY: Oxford, 2002), 220–221.

⁴⁵ Andro Linklater, *Measuring America: How the United States Was Shaped by the Greatest Land Sale in History* (NY: Plume, 2002), 67–82.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁴⁷ Did Jefferson also influence the antislavery provision? Many scholars thought so, but Robert Berkhofer presented an authoritative corrective in “Jefferson, the Ordinance of 1784, and the Origins of the American Territorial System,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 29 (April 1972), 231–262, recently corroborated by Roger G. Kennedy, *Mr. Jefferson's Lost Cause: Land, Farmers, Slavery, and the Louisiana Purchase* (NY: Oxford, 2003), 249–251.

⁴⁸ David McCullough, *The Path Between the Seas: The Creation of the Panama Canal* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1977).

⁴⁹ Prompting an archetypal mantra one heard throughout the 1970s and beyond: “If we can put a man on the moon, why can't we . . . ?”

⁵⁰ Weather information — both supply and demand — has mushroomed in the last decade. In daily newspapers, column inches devoted to the weather have jumped tenfold; airtime during local news has doubled. Why? Frank Nevius suggests that weather's stardom can be explained by its “predictability” (both in the relative accuracy and the standardized format of the weather segment), its very local focus, and its immediate usefulness. One survey showed that a third of weather consumers were practically minded nibblers (Do I need a coat?), another quarter were “planners” (How will the weather affect my flight, my work, my weekend?) and fully 40 percent were “weather-engaged” (Give me every detail you can come up with). Nevius, “Sensational Weather,” unpublished paper presented to the Popular Culture Association, San Diego, March 25, 2005.

⁵¹ Bernard Bailyn, *To Begin the World Anew: The Genius and Ambiguities of the American Founders* (NY: Knopf, 2003). Richard Hofstadter earlier captured this insistent American modernity in the phrase “the first post-feudal nation,” that is, boasting a “wholly post-Protestant, post-nationalist, post-capitalist history.” Hofstadter, *America at 1750: A Social Portrait* (NY: Knopf, 1971), xii. Along the same lines see also Seymour Martin Lipset, *The First New Nation: The United States in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (NY: Basic Books, 1963).

⁵² Bailyn, *To Begin the World*, 1.

⁵³ Ibid, 44–47.

⁵⁴ Often, and not unfairly, common usage substitutes the shorthand term “modernity” for “Enlightenment.” See Appendix 1 for an explication of “pre-modern,” “modern,” and “postmodern.”

⁵⁵ Quoted in Jon Kukla, *A Wilderness So Immense: The Louisiana Purchase and the Destiny of America* (NY: Knopf, 2003), 230–232.

⁵⁶ Relying on such sources as *Annals of the Congress of the United States: Debates and Proceedings*. . . (Washington: Gales & Seaton, 1852), Seventh Congress, Second Session, and Eighth Congress, First Session; Dumas Malone, ed., *Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Pierre Samuel duPont de Nemours* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1930); *State Papers and Correspondence Bearing Upon the Purchase of the Territory of Louisiana* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903), I considered this episode long ago: William Woodward, “One Step . . . One Giant Leap: The Louisiana Purchase Debates as Prototype of the Issues of American Expansion,” unpublished paper, 1970, and “The Louisiana Purchase: Prospectus for a New Synthesis,” unpublished paper, 1971. More recent studies have broadened and sharpened but not substantially altered my understanding of the significance: The standard account is Alexander DeConde, *This Affair of Louisiana* (NY: Scribner, 1976); marking the bicentennial of the purchase are Kukla, *A Wilderness so Immense*, richly contextual with appendices reprinting the treaty texts, and Kennedy, *Mr Jefferson’s Lost Cause*, insightfully provocative about the consequences.

⁵⁷ Jefferson to the Senate and House of Representatives, January 16, 1804, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, ed. James D. Richardson (20 vols.; [Washington DC]: Government. Printing Office, 1896–99), I, 355.

⁵⁸ It can be argued that at least three of the four went unfulfilled. While voters displeased with the outcomes of recent presidential elections may demur, I think it fair to say that political incorporation has succeeded. But as to “the new brethren”: While French and Spanish denizens of Louisiana didn’t do too badly, native peoples across the continent, as well as descendants of the Mexicans taken into the United States in the 1840s, still await full justice. Most now recognize the costs of exploiting the West’s resources. And although until recently Americans could claim to have achieved secure borders, with the terrorist attack of September 2001, “homeland security” was breached for the first time since 1814. In fact, I am persuaded that much of American expansion can be explained by a preoccupation with external security, stemming from the legacy of the 18th-century wars with France, Britain, and “their” Indian allies. Unfolding that interpretation is beyond the scope of my analysis here. My doctoral dissertation offered a primitive version of the expansion-for-security thesis: Woodward, “America Meets China, 1839–1846: Politics, Expansion, and the Formal Beginnings of Sino-American Relations,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Georgetown University, 1974, 1–24.

⁵⁹ Mark Spence, “Bioregions and Nation-States: Lessons From Lewis and Clark in the Oregon Country,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 103 (Winter 2002), 428–431. On the notion of “Nature’s Nation,” see Hughes, *Myths*, chapter 2, and the source for that chapter’s title, Perry Miller, *Nature’s Nation* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967). Scholarly attention to the Corps of Discovery has remedied past omissions of the native peoples from accounts of the trek (part of Jefferson’s directive): see especially James P. Ronda, *Lewis and Clark Among the Indians*, (Bic. ed.; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

⁶⁰ Roger Kennedy, *Mr. Jefferson’s Lost Cause*, 73. Kennedy, 11–13 and passim, argues explicitly that the Louisiana Purchase was what undermined the Jeffersonian agrarian ideal and paved the way for a slave-based plantation system instead.

⁶¹ The classic study is Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950); see also John Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique* (Bowling Green OH: Bowling Green University Press, 1971), and Robert Athearn, *The Mythic West in the Twentieth Century* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986). The mythic West was a real West to several generations of historians who followed the lead of the redoubtable Frederick Jackson Turner (discussed below). The last quarter century has seen a full frontal attack on Turner’s frontier — perhaps an over-correction, but a needed one. Two classic summaries of the New Western History are Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (NY: Norton, 1987); and Limerick, Clyde A. Milner II and Charles E. Rankin, *Trails: Toward a New Western History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991); a recent and convenient summary is Limerick’s essay, “Layer Upon Layer of Memory in the American West,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 3, 2000, B4–B7.

⁶² Edwards and Schwantes, “Pacific Northwest as Promised Land,” xiv. It is telling that pioneers at one point referred to Seattle as “New-York Alki,” or “New York by and by,” at first “derisively,” according to Murray Morgan, eventually as a grandiose booster dream. The latter flavor is preserved both in the point of land where Seattle’s original settlers located and in the Washington state motto on its great seal, which originated in earliest territorial days. An 1854 *Olympia Pioneer* description notes that the then territorial seal pictures “the city of the future in perspective; and in the center, the goddess of hope and her anchor.” Quoted on a card distributed by the Washington Secretary of State’s office as a sesquicentennial souvenir, 2003, based on historical information made available at www.secstate.wa.gov/history/. See also Morgan, *Skid Road* (1st illus; ed.; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), 19.

⁶³ I once explored the distinction between “new” and “renewed”: Woodward, “America as a Culture (II): A Fourfold Heritage?,” *Journal of American Culture*, 11 (Spring 1988), 19–22.

⁶⁴ McDougall, *Freedom*, 37.

⁶⁵ Without in any way minimizing the ugliness of the language of “savagery,” it must be remembered that the notion carries a connotation not extended to Africans: Savages *could* be civilized and incorporated into an ordered republican society.

⁶⁶ I copied this quotation years ago from a display board — I think in Cody, Wyoming.

⁶⁷ Geoffrey Perret, *Lincoln's War: The Untold Story of America's Greatest President as Commander in Chief* (NY: Random House, 2004), 375, narrates the tale as if Lincoln had not yet heard Howe's verses. I'm skeptical.

⁶⁸ Perry, *Conceived in Liberty: Joshua Chamberlain, William Oates and the American Civil War* (NY: Viking, 1997), 150–151, ascribes authorship of “John Brown's Body” to the 12th's commander, son of the great orator and politico Daniel Webster; Fischer, *Liberty and Freedom*, 331, citing a separate source, infers the lyric actually joshed a different John Brown, but as it became popular it came to be associated with the fanatical abolitionist of Harper's Ferry fame.

⁶⁹ Cynical moderns, looking back through the Civil Rights movement, back through a shameful century of African-American non-freedom, have labored earnestly to make Lincoln a reluctant emancipator at best, a racist hypocrite at worst. It doesn't work. Recent scholarship convincingly demonstrates that Lincoln meant what he said and believed in what he did. The tide of recent Lincoln books is stunning in both quantity and quality. The consensus, resting on extensive evidence and careful, critical reflection, vindicates Lincoln's iconic reputation as morally motivated Great Emancipator. Like another “Great American,” Washington, and unlike, say, Jefferson, the heroic Lincoln wears remarkably well. Important works not specifically cited elsewhere in these notes include Ronald C. White, *The Eloquent President: A Portrait of Lincoln Through His Words* (NY: Random House, 2005); Allen C. Guelzo, *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 2004); William E. Gienapp, *Abraham Lincoln and Civil War America: A Biography* (NY: Oxford, 2002); Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln, Redeemer President* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1999); David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1995); Garry Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1992).

⁷⁰ Carwardine, *Lincoln* (Harlow, Essex, England: Pearson Longman, 2003), 11.

⁷¹ Message to Congress, December 3, 1861, quoted in Neely, *Last Best Hope*, 104. Lincoln's return to politics, after a hiatus devoted to his law practice, was prompted by Senator Stephen Douglas's bill to allow slavery in the new territory of Kansas; the ensuing Kansas controversy not only brought Lincoln back to prominence, it wrecked the Whig party and led to the creation of the Republican Party (which Lincoln subsequently joined) — a party devoted to the ideology of free labor: See Carwardine, *Lincoln*, 11–40. The authoritative study of the Free Labor ideology is Eric Foner, *Free Labor, Free Soil, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (NY: Oxford, 1970).

⁷² Carwardine, *Lincoln*, 201–204. Throughout this discussion I closely follow Carwardine's incisive analysis, 198–220, which rightly concludes (219), after acknowledging Lincoln's early professions that the war was fought to save the Union, not end slavery: “Over 16 months, by increments, Lincoln had moved . . . to declare the advancing Union forces the liberators of millions in bondage. . . . [t]his fundamental reformulating of objectives occurred . . . because he took initiatives, bringing to bear a strong political will, a radar system acutely sensitive to public opinion and a gift for timing.”

⁷³ Message to Congress, Dec 1, 1862, conveniently available in Gienapp, ed., *This Fiery Trial*, 143–150. Some have cringed at the “last, best hope” flourish, but William Lee Miller, *Lincoln's Virtues: An Ethical Biography* (NY: Knopf, 2002), 464, dismisses the criticism, showing how the context of the phrase is a call to do right by choosing freedom for the slave.

⁷⁴ Carwardine, *Lincoln*, 216.

⁷⁵ Address at the dedication of the national cemetery at Gettysburg, November 19, 1863, in Gienapp, ed., *This Fiery Trial*, 184.

⁷⁶ Fischer, *Liberty and Freedom*, 4–15, emphasis added. In distinguishing the two concepts, and their origins in the quite different contexts of the Mediterranean and Northern Europe, Fischer contrasts ideas of liberation and independence in the Roman context to those of being connected to a tribe of free folk who enjoyed the “rights of belonging.” He concludes (5) that the original meanings of freedom and liberty were not merely different but opposed. Americans claim both!

⁷⁷ Ibid., 331.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 340. This of course is the same regiment featured in the acclaimed 1989 film “Glory.”

⁷⁹ Lincoln may have been the first politician to carefully cultivate a visual image as a tool of political power. Fischer offers a fascinating comparison of deliberately staged campaign and presidential images: *ibid.*, 342–348. See also Carwardine, *Lincoln*, 258–259.

⁸⁰ Carwardine, *Lincoln*, 277–279.

⁸¹ Quoted *ibid.*, 279.

⁸² Ibid., 192.

⁸³ Ibid., 277.

⁸⁴ Second Inaugural Address, March 4, 1865, in Gienapp, ed., *This Fiery Trial*, 220–221; “Reflections on Two War Presidents [Polk and Lincoln],” Appendix 1 to Miller, *Lincoln's Virtues*, 463. That “to Lincoln, it was always one nation, not two,” is a commonplace: e.g., Perry, *Conceived in Liberty*, 150.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Miller, *Lincoln's Virtues*, 463–464. Miller points out that this, in an impromptu speech in February 1861 en route to his inauguration, was Lincoln's only known usage of the chosen people phrase, “and his addition of the modifier ‘almost’ changes the phrase fundamentally.”

⁸⁶ Among many who have pondered “The Martyr and the Myth,” Richard Current, *The Lincoln Nobody Knows* (NY: Hill and Wang, 1958), was an able pioneer (Stanton quote: 275).

⁸⁷ A classic introduction to the Frontier Hypothesis may be found in Ray Allen Billington and Martin Ridge, *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier* (5th ed; NY: Macmillan, 1982), chapter 1. The standard biography is also by Billington, *Frederick Jackson Turner: Historian, Scholar, Teacher* (NY: Oxford, 1973).

⁸⁸ Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979); Richard C. Wade, *The Urban Frontier: The Rise of Western Cities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959); William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (NY: Norton, 1991).

⁸⁹ Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (NY: Hill and Wang, 1982), 208–234. The fair has been well-studied; among the best accounts are Stanley Applebaum, *The Chicago's World Fair of 1893: A Photographic Record* (NY: Dover Publications, 1980); Arnold Lewis, *An Early Encounter With Tomorrow: Europeans, Chicago's Loop, and the World's Columbian Exposition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); R. Reid Badger, *The Great American Fair: The World's Columbian Exposition and American Culture* (Chicago: N. Hall, 1979); David F. Burg, *Chicago's White City of 1893* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1976); Justus D. Doenecke, "Myths, Machines, and Markets: The Columbian Exposition of 1893," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 6 (1972): 535–549; John E. Findling, *Chicago's Great World's Fairs* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1994); James Gilbert, *Perfect Cities: Chicago's Utopias of 1893* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991); J.H. Hirschl, "The Great White City," *American Heritage*, 11 (1960): 8ff; Donald L. Miller, *City of the Century: The Epic of Chicago and the Making of America* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1996); R. Muccigrosso, *Celebrating the New World: Chicago's Columbian Exposition of 1893* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993); R. Rydell, "The World's Columbian Exposition of 1893: Racist Underpinnings of a Utopian Artifact," in *Journal of American Culture* 1 (1978): 253–75; W.H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

⁹⁰ John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (NY: Hill & Wang, 1978).

⁹¹ Sam Bass Warner Jr., *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston* (Cambridge: MIT and Harvard University Press, 1962); Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (NY: Oxford, 1985), especially 6; see also Robert Fishman: *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (NY: Basic Books, 1987), and Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820–2000* (NY: Random House, 2003).

⁹² William Woodward, "Prelude to a Pacific Century: The Washington National Guard in the Philippines, 1899," *Columbia* 13 (Winter 1999–2000), 6–13; Robert Britton Diary, February 5, 1898, Military History Institute collection, Carlisle Barracks PA.

⁹³ Officially it is called the Philippine Insurrection, which is not inaccurate, but recent historians have preferred a designation that conveys more of an equivalency in the conflict.

⁹⁴ McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*, 1–12, 101–121 (quote: 5). McDougall, to oversimplify a compelling analysis, distinguishes what he calls "Old Testament" and "New Testament" clusters of principles, "competing conceptions of what is both moral and realistic" undergirding America's relations with the external world. The former bore out "our original image of America as a Promised Land, a New Israel, set apart for liberty under God." The latter, "far less coherent," imagined a duty to "nurture democracy and economic growth" beyond U.S. shores. His distinction echoes Conrad Cherry's observation that the "New Israel" self-image could lead to two different postures toward the world: either exemplar and beacon by force of example, or appointed agent "to spread abroad the fundamental principles" of the American charter documents. Compare McDougall, 5, 9, with Cherry, ed., *God's New Israel*, 20.

⁹⁵ Among the most helpful sources, though reflecting divergent views, are Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (NY: Basic Books, 2002); Brian McAllister Linn, *The Philippine War, 1898–1902* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000); Linn, *The U.S. Army and Counterinsurgency in the Philippine War, 1899–1902* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989); Stuart Creighton Miller, *"Benevolent Assimilation": The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899–1903* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); David Trask, *The War With Spain in 1898* (NY: Macmillan, 1981); Richard Welch, *Response to Imperialism: The United States and the Philippine American War, 1899–1902* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); John Morgan Gates, *Schoolbooks and Krags: The United States Army in the Philippines, 1898–1902* (Westport CN: Greenwood Press, 1973); Graham A. Cosmos, *An Army for Empire: The United States Army in the Spanish-American War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1971); H. Wayne Morgan, *America's Road to Empire: The War With Spain and Overseas Expansion* (NY: Wiley, 1965).

⁹⁶ McDougall, *Promised Land*, 120.

⁹⁷ Quoted *ibid*, 119.

⁹⁸ Daniel Boorstin, *The Americans: The Democratic Experience* (NY: Random House, 1973), 353 and *passim*; Jenna Weissman Joselit, *A Perfect Fit: Clothes, Character, and the Promise of America* (NY: Henry Holt, 2001), 4.

⁹⁹ Robert J. Samuelson, *The Good Life and Its Discontents: The American Dream in the Age of Entitlement, 1945–1995* (NY: Vintage Books, 1997). A similarly evocative title is offered by Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920–1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

¹⁰⁰ George E. Mowry and Blaine A. Brownell, *The Urban Nation: 1920–1980* (rev. ed.; NY: Hill and Wang, 1981).

¹⁰¹ He goes so far as to argue that it was the collective buying of stuff that made possible the "invention of identity." Individual Americans otherwise separated by diverse location and self-description — including class and gender — came to see themselves and trust each other as fellow aggrieved consumers. Breen, *Marketplace of Revolution*, xi–29 (quotes: 29 and 7).

¹⁰² Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 114. Another study points out that "ready-to-wear [clothing] transformed the American woman into the best-dressed average woman in the world." Joselit, *Perfect Fit*, 3.

¹⁰³ Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 200–201.

¹⁰⁴ Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 47–48 and plate #1 opposite 86.

¹⁰⁵ Frank, *Conquest of Cool*, 60–69 and plates #3 and #4 opposite 86.

¹⁰⁶ Presley was really not an iconoclastic pioneer, the Pied Piper of adolescent rebellion of fond angry memory. “It was part of the Presley legend,” explains Will Friedwald, “that he was anointed to instigate the generation gap.” But in fact that was a reflection not of “the music itself but the marketing.” Arguing that Elvis was a “crooner” in the tradition of Jolson, Crosby, and Sinatra, Friedwald claims that John Lennon’s famous tribute (“before Elvis there was nothing”) is “just plain wrong,” indeed exactly backwards. “After Elvis, there was nothing.” “Elvis Today,” *American Heritage* 56 (Feb–Mar 2005), 22–28.

¹⁰⁷ Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 97.

¹⁰⁸ And the seduction of choice is, once again, nothing new. Breen points out that “the key element” of the consumer revolution back in the 18th century was what might best be termed the *invention* of choice. No less than the consumption culture of today, “British imports offered American colonists genuine alternatives.” Breen, *Marketplace of Revolution*, xvii.

¹⁰⁹ Citing figures from the Association for National Advertisers, a correspondent quips: “Money spent in one year on advertising to the American public: \$278 billion. Convincing just one person he needs *your* credit card: priceless.” Thanks to Will Woodward, “Re: draft of my lecture,” personal email message, April 11, 2005. The saga continues, of course, and extends far beyond hawking products; of particular relevance to a Christian university might be James B. Twitchell, *Branded Nation: The Marketing of Megachurch, College, Inc, and Museum World* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 2004); more notorious is Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* (NY: Perennial, 2002). A new twist on the larger context of the ad biz, that one of the greatest marketers of the 20th century spawned (one might say was the Hidden Persuader of) the counterculture itself, is offered by Douglass Brode, *From Walt to Woodstock: How Disney Created the Counterculture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004). If Brode is right, Disney’s legacy to Dylan fits the culture of entitlement in that the Baby Boomer generation was America’s first fully entitled — and thus fully frustrated — generation. No wonder we boomers rebelled: We (being us) deserved more!

¹¹⁰ Jules Tygiel, “The Court-Martial of Jackie Robinson,” *American Heritage* 35 (Aug–Sep 1984): 34–39; Tygiel, *Baseball’s Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy* (exp. ed.; NY: Oxford, 1997): 59–60. Other essential works on Robinson include Jackie Robinson as told to Alfred Duckett, *I Never Had It Made* (NY: Putnam, 1972); Roger Kahn, *The Boys of Summer* (NY: New American Library, 1973), 352–373, 400–402; John C. Chalberg, *Rickey and Robinson: The Preacher, The Players, and America’s Game* (Wheeling IL: Harlan Davidson, 2000); Joseph Dorinson and Joram Warmund, eds., *Jackie Robinson: Race, Sports, and the American Dream* (Armonk NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998); Tygiel, ed., *The Jackie Robinson Reader: Perspectives on an American Hero* (NY: Dutton, 1997).

¹¹¹ Robinson might have been celebrated for breaking the color line in another sport on an earlier occasion. His 1939 UCLA football team — which featured three African-American players — nearly forced a national race issue. Had they beaten rather than tied USC, they would have hosted the Rose Bowl. The opponent was slated to be powerful Tennessee, who may have refused the bowl bid because of UCLA’s black players, thus launching the integration issue and Robinson into the national spotlight before the war. So speculates Lane Demas, “The Black Bruins: Integrated Football at UCLA, 1939–1942,” unpublished paper presented at the Popular Culture Association meeting, San Diego, March 24, 2005.

¹¹² Tygiel, *Baseball’s Great Experiment*, 349–350, 354.

¹¹³ Huggins, *Black Odyssey; The African-American Ordeal in Slavery* (2d ed; NY: Vintage, 1990), pp. 84–85.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, ch 7.

¹¹⁵ “Martin Luther King Jr.: ‘I Have a Dream’” is available, among other places, at www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/lhaveadream.htm (April 11, 2005).

¹¹⁶ It is a bit unsettling, though finally not implausible, that the first volume of McDougall’s projected trilogy announces that it will portray Americans as “hustlers,” in both positive and negative meanings of the word: *Freedom Just Around the Corner*, 1–16 (quote:16).

¹¹⁷ The same ironic shared values among pro- and antiwar factions was evident back in 1898: Both held to an American mission, but one thought it fulfilled in empire, the other thought it betrayed by empire. Yet the underlying assumptions were identical.

¹¹⁸ The danger here, of course, is that we are left with ridiculous infinite regress: You say my assertions are only my perspective, but I can reply that your claim about my perspective is merely your perspective, and so it goes. Just as modern confidence in objectivity needs the corrective of pluralism, postmodern cant about multivalent perspectivalism (or whatever) needs the corrective of the canons of scholarship. But that’s an analysis and argument for another day.

¹¹⁹ For an alternative and abbreviated telling of the Story, see Appendix 2.

¹²⁰ One of the earliest shapers of my thinking about the Story was Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1985). That debt acknowledged, I here follow the lead of Gabriel Fackre, *The Christian Story: A Narrative Interpretation of Basic Christian Doctrine* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1984), although I separate out “Promise” from “Covenant” (preferring Paul to the Galatians over Fackre here) and divide Fackre’s “Jesus Christ” into “Incarnation” and “Redemption.” Likewise relying on Fackre is James W. Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Development and Christian Faith* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), 77–84, who prefers “Christian Classic,” following David Tracy, because, as he explains, “a classic is an expression of the human spirit that seems to gather into a fitting unity something that is fundamental, recurring, and universal in our experience.” It therefore “stands the test of time.” The *Christian* classic is the particular religious narration underpinning Christian faith.

¹²¹ Genesis 1:28. Quotations are to the New International Version, unless otherwise indicated.

¹²² Genesis 2:15.

¹²³ Genesis 4:9.

¹²⁴ I am indebted to my former colleague Loren Wilkinson, Seattle Pacific’s first Weter Lecturer (1975), for pointing out — many years ago — this distinction in precisely this phrasing.

¹²⁵ Psalm 8.

¹²⁶ Psalm 146:5–9.

¹²⁷ Genesis 2:19–20.

¹²⁸ Genesis 3:5–6. The three vices recur in the temptation of Jesus (Matthew 4:3–10; Luke 4:3–12) and the warning of 1 John 2:16; Richard Foster, more boldly, lists them as *Money, Sex, and Power: The Challenge of the Disciplined Life* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985).

¹²⁹ It is instructive to link these two with William H. McNeill’s paradigm of a history driven by two kinds of predatory attacks: “microparasitism” (disease caused by microorganisms) and “macroparasitism” (exploitation and conquest caused by other humans). McNeill explores these parallel drivers in *Plagues and Peoples* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1976) and *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society since A.D. 1000* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), summarized in *The Great Frontier: Freedom and Hierarchy in Modern Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

¹³⁰ For this insight as well as others related to Creation and Fall, I acknowledge that my thinking has been decisively formed by Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis*, trans. David G. Preston (Downers Grove IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1984).

¹³¹ 1 Peter 3:15.

¹³² Hebrews 2:14 (REB).

¹³³ Galatians 4:4; Luke 2:32.

¹³⁴ Howland, “Retelling Genesis,” *First Things*, December 2003, 22–23.

¹³⁵ Genesis 12: 1–3.

¹³⁶ Galatians 3:9, 14.

¹³⁷ Compare Galatians 3:18, 29, 4:6–7; Romans 8:14–17; Ephesians 1:45, 2:11–19; Hebrews 4:1, 11, 14–16, 6:11–19; 1 Peter 2:9–10.

¹³⁸ 1 Peter 2:9 (REB); compare Ephesians 2:18–21.

¹³⁹ My colleague Frank Spina, professor of Old Testament, might insist that a third is the welcome to the outsider. Frank Anthony Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider: Exclusion and Inclusion in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2005).

¹⁴⁰ Jeremiah 31:3–4; compare especially with Hosea 2:14–17, 19–20.

¹⁴¹ Psalm 33:17–22.

¹⁴² Hebrews 2:11–18, 4:14–15. See also 1 John 2:1.

¹⁴³ 1 John 1:1, 4:1–3.

¹⁴⁴ Acts 2:23–36.

¹⁴⁵ Ephesians 1:7.

¹⁴⁶ Compare 1 Peter 2:9–10; Ephesians 1:3–5, 2:5–7, 11–19; Romans 8:9–17.

¹⁴⁷ 1 Peter 1:3–4; Ephesians 1:18–19; compare Titus 3:5–7.

¹⁴⁸ Matthew 16:13–19

¹⁴⁹ Richard C. Halverson, *How I Changed My Thinking About the Church* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1972), 27. I recall Dr. Halverson, then my pastor at Fourth Presbyterian Church in Bethesda, Maryland, later chaplain of the U.S. Senate, making the comment about Peter’s confession on several occasions. I credit him for changing my thinking about the church. Halverson subsequently developed his insights from the confession text in *The Living Body: The Church Christ Is Building* (Gresham OR: Vision House, 1994), esp. 19–42.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 101–107; also Halverson, *Between Sundays* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1965).

¹⁵¹ Ephesians 4:1

¹⁵² Mission statement of Seattle Pacific University, available in the *SPU Undergraduate Catalog* or at www.spu.edu/info/informationaboutspu.html (April 11, 2005).

¹⁵³ Most familiarly in 1 Corinthians 13:13; but also in Galatians 5:1, 5–6; Col. 1:3–6; 1 Thessalonians. 1:2–3, 5:8.

¹⁵⁴ Compare Ephesians 1:20–21 with 2:5–7 to observe that just as Jesus was raised, enthroned, and exalted, so shall his followers be.

¹⁵⁵ Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, ed. Walter Hooper (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1975, 1980), 30–38.

¹⁵⁶ Colossians 1:27.

¹⁵⁷ John 11:25; 1 Corinthians 15:20 (REB)

¹⁵⁸ William Woodward, *Becoming: A Historian’s Prospectus for Integrated Learning*, 1978 Winifred E. Weter Faculty Lecture (Seattle: SPU, 1978).

¹⁵⁹ Romans 15:4–6, 13

APPENDIX 1: From Pre-Modern to Postmodern

As a historian, I explain the postmodern by contrasting it with “modern” and “pre-modern.”

Most of human history was pre-modern. From time out of mind, worlds both material and immaterial were regarded as shot through with awe-inducing inscrutability. The deepest realities were unknowable. Therefore life was unexplainable. So life was unpredictable. The *pre-modern* sensibility was premised on *mystery*. It thus played out, of necessity, in community (one’s own folk, living and dead — one’s village, tribe, clan, kingdom, plus all one’s ancestors). The community was the only knowable kind of reality, the only consolation in an unexplainable universe. And one’s community somehow sought to unshroud the mystery by reaching up to a Higher Power — the spirits, the Sun, the One, Nirvana, Allah, or the God who reaches down in self-revealing grace: Yahweh of Israel.

The Bible understands the pre-modern world: Read Job about the mystery of evil afflicting the good.

Mystery’s vice was fear, its antidote faith.

With the scientific revolution, the unknowable became knowable, the unexplainable explained, the future predictable, even engineerable. The poet Alexander Pope wrote, “Nature and Nature’s Laws lay hid in night:/God said, let Newton be! and all was light.” With Isaac Newton’s laws of gravitation and other discoveries, *mystery* yielded to *mastery*. All was potentially knowable; all that was knowable was malleable; all that was malleable could be bent to the purpose of engineering Progress. Human advancement would follow two interlocking trajectories toward a predictably better future: increased mastery of nature (i.e., technology) and increased mastery of the self (freedom — defined as autonomous individualism manifest in unfettered choice). The modern sensibility is premised on mastery. So it gives up on community to embrace individual autonomy — the highest conceivable benefit of Progress.

The Bible understands the modern world: Read about the Tower of Babel and the arrogant plan to build to the skies, to make a great name, to master the earth.

Mastery’s vice is pride, its antidote love.

And so modernity fashioned laws of explanation and prediction, rooted in a pretense of detached and objective science. But the modern god of science crashed head-on into another law — Murphy’s. The disasters and devastations, the murders and shattered utopias of the 20th century humbled modernity’s dreams. Thereupon jaded moderns — they of the elbow jab and knowing wink — to salvage some shard of dignity while conceding defeat, retreated into ironic distance and a bemused play-the-game detachment, and invented what they pretentiously proclaimed as postmodernism. There is no truth; every story is as valid as the next; it’s all about power; all we can do is be tolerant of everybody and everybody’s alternative lifestyle. (One recent writer¹ sniffs that it’s “just modernism on life-support.”) This giving up on mastery to preserve individualism takes the form not of striving but satire, not of imagination but irony, not of engineering but (so there!) *deconstruction*. Mastery was a pipe dream, so we are left with naught but *mockery* of those fools who still strive, imagine, build.

The Bible understands the postmodern world: Read about Pontius Pilate, the craven politician who asks “What is truth?” and washes his hands of responsibility while he commits the judicial murder of an innocent man, and so makes mockery of the Good and the Right.

Mockery’s vice is sloth; its antidote hope.

Mystery, mastery, mockery, illustrated by Job and his friends, by Babel, by Pilate. They breed fear, pride, sloth. They are answered by faith, and love, and hope.

That’s the real world of Truth and Righteousness.

APPENDIX 2: The Christian Story — An Alternative Version

Let me offer an alternative version of the whole Christian story, this couched in terms of successive acts of creation. Begin with the assertion in the first chapter of Genesis:

1. God made humans in the image of God.

Now reflect on the text in the story of the Fall (Gen 3) where the serpent asserts: “You will not die; you will be like gods.” The act of disobedience committed by Eve and Adam stemmed from a preposterous presumption: Eating the fruit would make them godlike. How sad! How stupid! They already were like God!

So this first recorded sin must be understood as arrogating to humanity the ambition to be deity. That suggests a heading for a second step:

2. Humans made humans in the image of God.

The third step can be inferred from the account of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11), read through the lens of the first chapter of Romans. Human cultures, discovering that humans make poor gods, invent powers and divinities that transcend the here and now. But they can ground these yearnings for the ultimate only in what they know. So:

3. Humans made gods in the image of humans.

At this point the God of the Universe stepped back into the picture. Observing the futile efforts of human creatures to reach beyond their circumstances, God said, “No, no, NO! Here, let me show you.” And the Creator God became enfleshed in the person of Jesus, incarnate God entering biology and history, who “took on the status of a slave [and] became human . . . and then died a selfless, obedient death.”² The ending of life — the mark and destiny of all mortal humanity — became the lot of the immortal God in Christ. Put differently, it is mystery of mysteries:

4. God made God in the image of humans.

But the story does not end with death, nor even with resurrection and exaltation. For now a purpose for humanity is revealed anew. “As I am lifted up,” said Jesus, “I will attract everyone to me.”³ Since “Christ has been raised up,” reasons the apostle, he is therefore “the first in a long legacy of those who are going to leave the cemeteries.”⁴ In fact, those chosen ones of God have a predetermined destiny: They are “to be conformed to the likeness of [God’s] Son.”⁵ Do you recognize the completion of the cycle?

5. God is making humans anew in the image of God Incarnate.

That is the extended significance of the doctrine of creation. That is another synopsis of the Christian Story. That is the bedrock explanation for Christian hope.

¹A.J. Conyers (“Can Postmodernism be Used as a Template for Christian Theology?” *Christian Scholar’s Review*, Spring 2004), 298.

²Phil. 2:7-8 (*The Message* paraphrase).

³John 12:32 (*The Message* paraphrase).

⁴1 Cor 15:20 (*The Message* paraphrase)

⁵Rom. 8:29



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