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REQUIEM FOR MEMORIAL DAY: DISSENT IN THE REDEEMER NATION

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OBSERVERS OF RELIGION IN AMERICAN LIFE HAVE POINTED TO THE EXISTENCE of a ritual cult of the dead in Memorial Day. This analysis came first in the studies of social anthropologist William Lloyd Warner as part of the fifth volume of his Yankee City series. In *The Living and the Dead* and then in *The Family of God*[1] Warner set the tone and the schema for the interpretations of such scholars as Robert Bellah and Conrad Cherry.[2] According to these students of the American scene, the Memorial Day rites of American towns constituted sacred collective representations and a modern cult of the dead. Based on a system of sacred beliefs and enacted in dramatic rituals, the Memorial Day practices related the living to considerations which transcended their ordinary existence. The cult put into organized form those sentiments about death which almost everyone in the community shared.

What were these sentiments? Basically, they were generalized fears of death which the mundane social reassurances the culture provided did not efface completely: fear of the death of fellow men and women, of loved ones, ultimately of oneself. To dissolve these fears, common action on a common problem was needed; and at hand in the existing cult of Memorial Day was

[1]*The Living and the Dead* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1959) and *The Family of God* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1961).

[2]Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus*, 96, 1 (Winter 1967), 1–19; Conrad Cherry, "Two American Sacred Ceremonies: Their Implications for the Study of Religion in America," *American Quarterly*, 21 (Winter 1969), 739–54, and Conrad Cherry, ed., *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971).

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an ideal vehicle for the dramatic expression of unity. For in the rites of the 30th of May, the unifiers and integrators of the community were the dead themselves.

The graves of the soldier dead provided visible emblems which brought together the activities of separate and even antagonistic groups in the community. Those killed in battle fighting for their country were understood to have made a voluntary sacrifice on the altar of patriotism. The message for the living was the need and obligation to sacrifice their individual purposes for the good of the community, symbolized in the concept of America. The fear of death was overcome because death had been given a higher meaning, and the continuance of the community guaranteed a species of immortality.

Warner analyzed the sacred symbolic behavior associated with Memorial Day structurally to show that there were four distinct phases in the annual pattern. These four phases pinpointed moments in a process of increasing convergence. Gradually, multiple events were fused into a single unit in which the many became one and all the living united in the community of the dead.[3] At the climactic point in the annual cycle came the Memorial Day parade. The separate community groups marched to the public cemetery, the single, enclosed and consecrated spot. As a great receptacle, the cemetery received and unified them all, and in their turn the celebrants symbolically incorporated its full spiritual power.

From a structural perspective, the analysis is persuasive. But from a historical perspective, which seeks to discern the effects of the passage of time and the pressure of events on religious structures, the analysis is annually becoming less convincing. This is so not because it has failed to illuminate the religious meaning in a national, communal event but because the collective character of the event itself has been eroding.

Hints from popular organs of American life suggest that the Memorial Day cult is receding and for many has become a memory more than a fact. While the ideology associated with the two world wars reinforced the sense of the sacrificial meaning attached to the death of American soldiers, the argument seemed weaker when applied to the Korean War, weakest of all when applied to the war in Indochina. In the early fifties, there were public rumblings that all was not well with the Memorial Day observance. The Pittsburgh *Sun-Telegraph* in 1953 urged a revival of the "old American custom of being Americans openly." The editor recalled a "time, not too long ago, when the folks of almost every American community gathered each Memorial Day, generally at their own cemetery, to join in a simple program of reverence and patriotism in memory of their soldier dead. What

[3] *The Family of God*, pp. 218–47, esp. pp. 245–47.

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has become of these American days of oratory, of patriotism, of parades and flying flags?"[4]

In 1955, the *New York Times* could invoke the name of Abraham Lincoln in its Memorial Day editorial which found death "for the sake of a fuller life" to be "redeeming."[5] By the 100th anniversary of the beginning of the Civil War in 1961, however, the *Times* acknowledged the Memorial Day commemoration to have become "a rather formalized sort of day." Worse still, it lamented: "The centennial has become desecrated with fiestas and souvenir hats and ashtrays, and sometimes it seems as if the nation is celebrating the war instead of mourning its outbreak."[6]

Throughout the sixties, the limp quality of Memorial Day ceremonies continued to be deplored. The Fond du Lac (Wisconsin) *Commonwealth Reporter,* for instance, pointed its editorial finger at the Fond du Lac citizenry in these terms: "The Military Band marched in because it was a part of the ceremonial. But the attendance by the rest of the participants in the parade was pathetic. There were a few men in uniform. Some of the participants in the parade were paid regular drill fees." The editorial acknowledged that Fond du Lac was not atypical. There were "hundreds of communities across the country" who shared the record of non-participation.[7]

In 1968, the *New York Times* published its shortest Memorial Day editorial to date, a total of twelve lines, and three years later columnist James Reston shared his thoughts with *Times* readers. "Memorial Day is supposed to be a time of remembrance for the Americans who died in our nine major wars. . . . Modern man is not very good at remembering. He is obviously and naturally more interested in himself and his own time. This is particularly true of the Americans, who have feeble memories, and this is not all bad."[8]

A small article in the *Times* the following year noted the cancellation of the 104th annual Memorial Day Parade in Cincinnati because of lack of interest. "All we had in the parade last year was the mayor and about 30 people," Otis Writer, president of the Memorial Day Parade Association, was quoted as saying.[9] And in 1973 the editorial staff of the *Times* was silent on the meaning of Memorial Day, itself expressing a lack of interest.

[4]Inserted by Representative Edward Martin of Pennsylvania, in 83rd Cong., 1st sess., May 28, 1953, *Congressional Record,* App., pp. 3024–25.

[5]May 30, 1955, p. 12.

[6]May 30, 1961, p. 16.

[7]May 3, 1967, inserted by Representative Steiger of Wisconsin, in 90th Cong., 1st sess., May 25, 1967, pp. 14174–75.

[8]"Memorial Day, 1971," *New York Times,* May 30, 1971, sec. 4, p. 13.

[9]"Veterans' Parade Canceled," *New York Times,* May 4, 1972, p. 91.

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In sum, the pattern suggested is one of gradually increasing apathy toward the modern cult of the dead. The dissent on the part of the "silent majority" is certainly not an active one: there are no strikes, lobbies or protest marches against Memorial Day. Instead, repudiation of the cult is passive and negative, and for this reason it could be characterized more accurately if less grammatically as dis-sentiment than open dissent.

At any rate, the gradual transvaluation of Memorial Day in America is a significant case of the effect of the action of history upon a particular religious structure. Within this framework, there are a number of possibilities for more specific interpretation. There is, first of all, the question of historical causality: why the change in American attitudes toward the ritual? Secondly, there are broader questions of the meaning of the change, and these seem to be religious questions, or, more precisely, questions asked of the meaning of history from the perspective of a concern for religion.

Let us begin with the more historical search for reasons for the change. And let us begin with the beginning—the origin of Memorial Day. While the birth of the contemporary observance in the aftermath of the Civil War has been noted by analysts and editorializers, not enough attention has been paid to the relationship between the apocalyptic quality of the moment and the new religious structure. Memorial Day was born in an atmosphere still heady with the wine of national rupture and millennial expectations of renewal. The rupture is apparent in the two separate accounts of the beginnings of the ceremony. There is a Northern theory and a Southern theory. According to the former, Memorial Day began in 1868 with General Orders No. 11 of General John A. Logan, then commander-in-chief of the Grand Army of the Republic. General Logan ordered a day set aside as a time for strewing flowers or otherwise decorating the graves of those who died in defense of their country. Southerners, however, cited Columbus, Mississippi, where on April 25, 1866 the women of the community, while decorating the graves of Confederate dead, decorated the graves of Union soldiers as well. During the 1940s, Congressman John E. Rankin of Mississippi was fond of entertaining his colleagues with an article from the *Mississippi Index* of April 25, 1866 to sustain the case.[10]

If the rupture was traumatically deep, the expectation of millennial renewal emerging from the cataclysm was no less intense. In his book *Redeemer Nation,* Ernest Lee Tuveson has amply documented the atmosphere of fever-pitch anticipation which accompanied "the ennobling

[10]78th Cong., 1st sess., May 28, 1943, *Congressional Record,* App., p. 2657. Rankin repeated his remarks in 1945 and 1947.

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war."[11] Tuveson quoted the Walt Whitman of 1865 who wrote:

> The earth, restive, confronts a new era, perhaps a general divine war,
> No one knows what will happen next, such portents fill the days and nights;
> Years prophetical! the space ahead as I walk, as I vainly try to pierce
> it is full of phantoms,
> Unborn deeds, things soon to be, project their shapes around me,
> This incredible rush and heat, this strange ecstatic fever of dreams. . . .[12]

Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic," first published in February 1862, sounded the same apocalyptic trumpet:

> 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.[13]

In this 19th century Day of the Lord a chosen nation must sacrifice its treasured sons: "As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free." Abraham Lincoln, the Redeemer President, was only the first among equals in a Redeemer Nation rallying in obedience to the mysterious directives of a Providence which had chosen it out of all the earth. Tuveson writes:

> The salient fact is that the apocalyptic vision of the Civil War was far more than a spontaneous response to a great crisis by a nation of Bible-readers, who naturally saw it as a moral conflict. It seemed to fit exactly into a pattern long established, and seemed to confirm the validity of that pattern. Thus it was more than just another war about a moral issue, even if a great one; it was *the* crisis of mankind, even if only one nation was involved.[14]

In this context, Memorial Day grew up as a solemn celebration in a sacred time. It was an *anamnesis*; that is, a remembering in which the present melted away and the participants relived the pivotal time of the crisis. The memorial was no longer a memorial; the time of God's marching was—all over again. Death became supremely meaningful because the death of the rememberers was caught up into the death of those who had fought on the Lord's side in his awful Day of Judgment.

The *anamnesis* proved particularly effective when there were "Old Vets" present, the survivors of the Grand Army of the Republic which had fought in the Apocalypse. Significantly, the periodical accounts which remember past Memorial Days with nostalgia refer pointedly to the members of the

[11] *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 187–214.

[12] Walt Whitman, "Years of the Modern," quoted in Tuveson, p. 188.

[13] Quoted in Tuveson, p. 197.

[14] Tuveson, pp. 195–96.

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G.A.R. For instance, the *Saturday Evening Post* of June 2, 1968 recalled that, "There was a time when Memorial Day meant more than it does today." The editorial described the parade of bygone years and continued, "A number of Civil War veterans still lived in the town. Most of them rode in open cars, but half a dozen were spry enough to walk."[15] In an article in *American Heritage,* Robert Merrill Dewey recounted the gradual thinning in one New England town of the ranks of the Grand Army of the Republic until in 1944 the last "Old Vet" died. An important year in Dewey's recollection was 1910. At this time so few in the town could make the mile-long walk to the cemetery that these venerables from the Civil War were carried in the open autos of the day, while at a meeting of the Western Massachusetts Grand Army Association, "Though the Veterans came from Springfield, Holyoke, Northampton, Greenfield, North Adams, Turners Falls, Shelburne Falls, Orange, Amherst, and many other western Massachusetts towns, there were present hardly more than two hundred."[16]

Dewey's observations lead directly to the issue of the second, third and fourth generations. The problem was similar to that faced by the Puritans of the second and third generations in New England when fewer conversion experiences and consequent declining church membership led to the enactment of the Halfway Covenant. The fervor of the first generation which lived through Grand and Awful Events was untranslatable. In the case of the aftermath of the Civil War, the death of more and more of the eyewitnesses was compounded by the fact that, as the world went on, it became more and more questionable whether the millennium had really begun. The crises of two world wars perhaps recaptured some of the sense of millennial destiny for the Redeemer Nation. Tuveson certainly suggests that this was so, observing that "the belief in national apotheosis had become fixed in the national mind, having entered the sacrosanct area of credal conviction; it has persisted despite many subsequent disappointments and disillusionments, and the halo of manifest millennial destiny around the head of Columbia is not wholly gone even yet."[17]

Tuveson does not go on to assess the effect of the Vietnam War on the dream of the millennium. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to enter into the discussion in these broad terms, it is possible to limit its remarks to the effect of the Vietnam War on the Memorial Day observance. It is a commonplace that the American civil community has been fragmented over the question of the war. The rites of Memorial Day could not unify that community because there was no agreement on the meaning of the war and therefore on the sacrificial quality of the death of American soldiers.

[15]"The Meaning of Memorial Day," *Saturday Evening Post,* 235 (June 2, 1962), 80.
[16]"The Old Vets," *American Heritage,* 22 (Apr. 1971), 54–57, 108.
[17]Tuveson, p. 205.

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Chicago's *Suburban Economist* stated the problem which Vietnam posed for the Memorial Day rites in 1970: "With the nation badly split over Viet Nam war policies, it is likely that the real meaning and purpose of Memorial Day will be lost this year amidst the fiery orations of speakers and demonstrators representing the several points of view."[18]

More than that, there has been a gradual identification of Memorial Day with right-wing causes and ideologies. "Those honored dead were not cowards who dodged drafts or burned draft cards, nor were they all volunteers," wrote George T. Nickolas of Davenport, Iowa.[19] In the same year (1969), one member of the House of Representatives cited the brave who had died in the nation's wars and then continued: "But today . . . there is an undercurrent of cowardly talk and action by another type of 'youth' which denigrates all we have accomplished and all that our fallen heroes have sacrificed. Rather than take up their places in the swamps, forests, and highlands of Vietnam to defend what is right and honorable, the campus cowards tear down the institutions at home."[20] When Americans began to line up as pro- or anti-war, it was natural for the defenders of the war to adopt a martial sacred ceremony as their own. Some still found transcendent meaning and purpose in the war, but a large and vocal minority did not. So the fading of the apocalyptic fervor of the Beginning Time was compounded by the inability of later generations who had not lived through the experience to reproduce it and then by a new movement in history, the Vietnam War, which seemed to end forever the agreement of the American civil community on the transcendent meaning of war.

Let us turn now to our second area of questioning, the area we have broadly defined as "religious," in that it probes, from a number of perspectives, the religious implications of the decline of the gods in the Memorial Day observance. Here I will isolate four possibilities for interpretation and finally attempt some evaluation.

The first possibility is a favored American response to change and its problems. The American symbol system is in crisis, the argument runs, because while previously Americans had a great communal vehicle for dealing with death, now the new Israel has been fractured and each person alone must carry the burden of his or her anxiety in the face of death. Family and friends may help to some extent, but their reassurances can never assuage the terror with the message of transcendence which the assembled community could offer. The argument is in fact a jeremiad; it responds with woe

[18]May 27, 1970, inserted by Representative Edward J. Derwinski of Illinois, in 91st Cong., 2nd sess., June 1, 1970, *Congressional Record,* p. 17747.

[19]Quoted by Representitive Fred Schwengel, 91st Cong., 1st sess., May 28, 1969. *Congressional Record,* p. 14269.

[20]Remarks of Representative Saylor, 91st Cong., 1st sess., June 2, 1969, p. 14464.

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and lamentation to the description of a historical condition. It shows at least that Tuveson is right and some form of the millennial sense is still with America's latter-day Puritans.

A second possibility of interpretation begins with the other great religious tradition which since the 18th century era of revolution has been part of American life in the printed texts of the academy and in the political rhetoric of the rulers. The Enlightenment tradition which the Founding Fathers appropriated to their own uses included the affirmation of a God who stood outside the historical arena and by his eternity grounded and guaranteed the *novus ordo saeclorum* which the Revolution was meant to bring about. Hannah Arendt has argued persuasively for the need felt by the men of the Revolution to establish their fundamental law—their constitution—on a transcendent absolute which would empower without acting, for "an absolute Immortality might guarantee, if not immortality, then at least some permanence and stability to the republic."[21]

From the discipline of history of religions comes further clarification of the Divine Absolute identified by Arendt. Both Raffaele Pettazzoni and Mircea Eliade have investigated the religious structure of high gods in diverse cultural contexts.[22] Pettazzoni has carefully distinguished between the "all-knowing" god who searches the heart, scrutinizes the conscience, and willingly intervenes in the public life of nations, and the *deus otiosus* who forms and fashions the earth and then recedes to an isolated station beyond the fray. The former deity does not create but instead acts in history. The latter is a "lazy" creator who *must* be inactive lest his power prove too overwhelming for his handiwork and, like the bull in the proverbial china shop, destroy it utterly. In Pettazzoni's words, the difference was "most pronounced between the 'inactive' character of certain Creators, who having finished their creation retire to an inaccessibly far region, and the highly dynamic nature of those all-seeing deities who, keeping a check on everything that men do, intervene to smite sinners with the weapons of the weather, deluges or what not."[23]

The God who grounded political reality for the Founding Fathers qualifies as a *deus otiosus* in that he is a noninterfering foundation for the new order of things. Moreover, if we pursue Pettazzoni's discussion further,

[21] *On Revolution* (1963; New York: Viking, 1965), p. 185.

[22] The argument here is based on *one understanding* of deity which the founders held and promulgated in their task of establishing an independent state; e.g., the reference in the Declaration of Independence to the "Laws of Nature" and "Nature's God." It does not deny that in private utterances and writings the men of the Revolution also expressed their religious intuitions in the more traditional language of Providence.

[23] Raffaele Pettazzoni, *The All-knowing God: Researches into Early Religion and Culture*, trans. by H. J. Rose (London: Methuen, 1956), pp. 24–25. Pettazzoni follows Gerardus van der Leeuw in this distinction.

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we find that he has already identified an openness in the Judaeo-Christian tradition to just such a deity. For Yahweh, high god of the Judaeo-Christians, was for Pettazzoni a case of synthesis: that is, both the "lazy" creator and the interfering god of history were combined in his character. It would be possible then for Yahweh to manifest the differing sides of his uniqueness at different moments in the historical process. He *could* witness his activity in American millennialism and his passivity in the American Enlightenment. Since, as Eliade has observed, there is a correlation between a people's perception of a god and their own behavior toward him,[24] it is conceivably as natural for Americans to turn away from the divine apocalypse and associated sacrificial death as it is for them to glory in both. As Yahweh can recede, so can his responding people.

There is a third possibility for interpretation which complements the insights which the thought of historians of religions has suggested. An analysis from the perspective of social anthropology can illuminate the social conditions under which certain forms of religious belief are likely to occur. This is the theme of Mary Douglas' discussion in *Natural Symbols*. Douglas' concern was specifically with what she termed the "anti-ritualism" of the present, and throughout her work she tried to establish the social and cultural conditions which, at different points in space and time, could result in alienation. For Douglas: "The whole history of ideas would be reviewed in the light of the power of social structures to generate symbols of their own. These symbols deceivingly present themselves as spiritual truths unconnected with fleshly processes of conception."[25] To uncover these "fleshly processes" Douglas constructed a formula for classifying human social relationships which she thought would apply equally to primitives or sophisticated industrial city-dwellers. Basic to this device were the concepts of grid and group. Grid referred to "rules which relate one person to others on an ego-centered basis." Group meant the communal experience of the bounded social unit. Using this measure, Douglas found that "when the social group grips its members in tight communal bonds, the religion is ritualist; when this grip is relaxed, ritualism declines. And with this shift of forms, a shift in doctrines appears." So-called "secular man" was "no modern development" but appeared "when group boundaries are weak and ego-focussed grid is strong."[26] Douglas substantiated this theory with a consideration of the religious practices of groups so varied as the aboriginal and "secular" Pygmies and the civilized and avidly ritualistic Bog Irish.

[24]Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. by Rosemary Sheed (New York: Meridian, 1963), p. 50. (Originally published as *Traité d'histoire des Religions*, Paris, 1949.)

[25]Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 151.

[26]Ibid., pp. viii, 13–14, 139.

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It is interesting to note that sociologist Thomas Luckmann has described modern industrial society in terms which agree with Douglas' analysis. While Luckmann assigned the cause of the phenomenon to secularization, he stressed that with the disintegration of a traditional sacred cosmos the individual was forced to construct alone both personal identity and individual systems of "ultimate" significance.

> In comparison to traditional social orders, the primary public institutions no longer significantly contribute to the formation of individual consciousness and personality, despite the massive performance control exerted by their functionally rational 'mechanisms.' Personal identity becomes, essentially, a private phenomenon. . . . From the interstices of the social structures that resulted from institutional segmentation emerged what may be called a 'private sphere.' The 'liberation' of individual consciousness from the social structure and the 'freedom' in the 'private sphere' provide the basis for the somewhat illusory sense of autonomy which characterizes the typical person in modern society.[27]

It is not difficult to see low group, high grid in this characterization.

Applying these insights to the phenomenon of the declining Memorial Day enthusiasm of modern America, we can now understand the dis-sentiment as the gradual natural byproduct of a social system which with growing completeness puts its premium on the ego-centered individual while conceiving group boundaries as fluid and unconfining. As with the analysis from the history of religions, we are given a description which stresses the naturalness of what is going on, now from a sociological rather than a purely religious perspective.

A fourth and, for this paper, final possibility for interpreting the gradual demise of Memorial Day comes from the structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss.[28] Lévi-Strauss is helpful in two ways. First of all, his discussion of the basic structure of myth as the juxtaposition and reconciliation of sets of binary oppositions can be extended, as Victor Turner has done,[29] to the myth acted out in ritual. Secondly, his understanding of the interaction between synchrony (structure) and diachrony (history) expands and amplifies our theme of the gradual transvaluation of Memorial Day

[27]Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 77–114. (Originally published as *Das Problem der Religion in der Modernen Gesellschaft*, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1963.) Quotation p. 97.

[28]I have based my discussion here on Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Story of Asdiwal," trans. by Nicholas Mann, in Edmund Leach, ed., *The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism* (London: Tavistock, 1967), pp. 1–46, and Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1966). ("The Story of Asdiwal" first appeared in French in 1958–59; *The Savage Mind*, in 1962.)

[29]Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969).

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under the impress of historical events. This aspect of the thought of Lévi-Strauss, in fact, brings the paper full circle.

In the first case, if we re-examine the contemporary critique of Memorial Day observances as reflected in our sources, we find that it is two-sided. Part of the criticism is focused on the phenomenon we have highlighted thus far: people are simply indifferent to the significance of Memorial Day and its ritual observance. The other part of the criticism is directed at the levity with which people celebrate Memorial Day: they go on picnics rather than marching in parades to the cemetery.

As early as 1943, Representative Ed Rowe of Ohio complained that "too many people accept this day as a time for jollification or self-comfort."[30] By the sixties, the pattern had intensified, as one *New York Times* feature illustrated. "Thousands of persons watched Memorial Day ceremonies and parades in Manhattan, the Bronx, Brooklyn and surburban areas. More thousands went to the beaches: Jones Beach reported 90,000, and Coney Island had about 800,000, according to a police estimate."[31] And in the halls of Congress Senator Mike Mansfield told his colleagues, "The Memorial Day holiday has become a time of exodus from place and pressure, even though it began as a day of quiet homage to those who paid the cost of war with their lives."[32]

Using the Lévi-Strauss analysis of binary oppositions, it is possible to see a pattern in the dramatic myth of the Memorial Day ritual. The myth-ritual commemorates death and its transcendent meaning in the context of national sacrifice. The opposite of sacrificial death is self-indulgent life, and the grand exodus to beach and picnic easily qualifies as a form of the same. What this means is that, from the perspective of structural anthropology, the hitherto denounced picnic is elevated to the position of playing a central role in the cult of the dead. It is the necessary counterbalance to the serious and solemn consideration which Memorial Day demands. Parade and picnic together achieve a reconciliation of the conflicting claims of life and death. Each makes the other more meaningful. Far from being a casualty in the crisis of the symbol system, the picnicgoer is a species of *homo religiosus*.

Turning now to Lévi-Strauss' discussion of synchrony and diachrony, we find that he has suggested that neither is finally triumphant when there is a confrontation between the two. Rather, certain adjustments are made which enable the structure to be maintained on a diminishing scale while change progresses and transforms. Such an interpretation is applicable to

[30]Representative Ed Rowe, in remarks inserted in 78th Cong., 1st sess., June 3, 1943, *Congressional Record,* App., p. 2775.

[31]Philip Benjamin, "Holiday is Quiet throughout City," *New York Times,* May 31, 1962, p. 16.

[32]Remarks of Senator Mike Mansfield, 91st Cong., 1st sess., May 29, 1969, *Congressional Record,* p. 14331.

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the phenomenon of erosion in the Memorial Day cult in America. Instead of a complete disavowal of the celebration on the collective level, there has been a gradual lessening of adherence to the cult on the part of individuals. Meanwhile, community officials (the high priests) and their rhetoric (the sacred language) have continued to be part of the ceremony. Thus, the cult has managed to function much in the nature of an electronic—or shall we say, symbolic—transformer, enabling communal dissociation to occur with relative ease while the sacred forms and sounds maintain a muted synchronic integrity. We are dealing here with what Martin Marty, following certain sociologists, has called a transformed symbol.[33]

The four avenues of interpretation which we have followed have been attempts from different disciplines and perspectives to discern the meaning for religion of the declining Memorial Day cult. It remains to synthesize and evaluate the results they have supplied.

The first avenue—that the American symbol system is in crisis—supplied the answer of crisis to the question of meaning. Probably it is the most likely to be dismissed by religion scholars recently emancipated from the millennial dream. Yet it deserves serious consideration because behind the answer of crisis is a good question and behind the question a respectable assumption. The assumption is that some form of collective expression of human anxiety over death must be present in a society. The question is, if the cult of Memorial Day is declining, then where is the collective expression of death going? In the centuries preceding the Civil War, small towns and communities across the land could share the burden of meaning-making. In the present, the mobility of American life has greatly reduced the possibilities for such collective action. We have already discussed the situation in terms of Douglas' grid and group. So the answer of crisis is really an answer of "nowhere" to the question of where the collective expression of death is going. That is precisely why there is a crisis.

If we do not accept the answer of crisis, we may still pursue the question in search of alternative answers. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore such alternatives completely, but it may be suggested briefly that the individual expression of a meaning for death may have gone collective in generalized funeral customs. A number of exposés have berated the American funeral industry because of the increasing amounts of American wealth which are literally poured into the ground,[34] but what these exposés

[33]Martin E. Marty, *The Modern Schism: Three Paths to the Secular* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 102–8. Marty discusses his sociological sources in a bibliographical note on p. 172.

[34]See, for instance, Ruth Mulvey Harmer, *The High Cost of Dying* (New York: Collier Books, 1963); Jessica Mitford, *The American Way of Death* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1963); Leroy Bowman, *The American Funeral: A Study in Guilt, Extravagance, and Sublimity* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1959).

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have ignored is the ideological system which the funeral industry reflects and may have helped to create. In this shared American ideology of death, embalming and cosmetic beautification of the corpse as well as a dictionary of euphemisms such as "slumber room," "casket" and "memorial garden," all point to a message which collectively alleviates anxiety. Death is "everlasting life," and the meaning of "everlasting life" is "eternal youth." "Everlasting life" and "eternal youth" are of course not the same as either the Greek symbol of immortality of the soul or the Christian symbol of resurrection of the body through the power of the Almighty. "Everlasting life" and "eternal youth" cancel out the sting of death by affirming a life which continues in bodily and material terms.

If we consider the other three avenues of interpretation of the declining Memorial Day cult—those from the history of religions, from social anthropology and from structural anthropology—we find a common ground. While the answer of crisis assumed the collective expression of death, the other three answers might be said to mitigate the assumption. In different forms, they all seem to propound a wax-and-wane theory: sometimes people are more overtly "religious"; sometimes they are less so. It is natural to have a collective representation; it is equally natural under certain conditions for it to recede. When Yahweh enters his otiose phase, social conditions which stress an ego-focused grid and a loose sense of group are likely to be operative. The dramatic myth of the ritual will preserve its binary character, but it will do so as a transformed and transforming symbol while history erodes structure.

Taken together, the three models of interpretation are complementary, and they are persuasive as heuristic models for analytical understanding. While it might be overly dramatic to characterize Americans as singing a requiem for Memorial Day, they are already quietly inscribing its epitaph. And far from being apocalyptic, their dis-sentiment seems to be an ordinary cultural event.[35]

[35]A condensed version of this paper was presented before the American Society of Church History in San Francisco, December 1973. I would like to express my gratitude to Ms. Linda Krantz, reference librarian at Wright State University, for her research assistance.

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