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North vs. South or New Jerusalem vs. New Troy: Founding Myths and Competing Visions of the American Regime

One of the best-known American founding myths is that of New Jerusalem – presenting an 'American experiment' in terms of building 'a city upon a hill.' This myth originated in New England and reflected Puritans' highly moralistic and, to a great extent, utopian disposition of thinking about political and social community. What is often forgotten is the fact that the southern colonies developed their own myth – that of New Troy – which differed substantially from its northern counterpart with respect to the basic convictions concerning the nature, as well as the role and functions, of political order. The present paper discusses and compares both founding myths, and goes further to argue that these myths reflect substantial differences in mentality between Americans living in the two regions, and resulted in the development of incompatible sets of political beliefs and aspirations. While the northern myth favored the disposition to judge an existing social and political order by moral standards and thus fostered constant reforms and changes, the southern myth strengthened the conservative attitude of accepting and defending traditional institutions and mores. These differences contributed to the rise of mutual misunderstanding and animosity, which, accompanied by political and economic factors, made reaching a consensus in 1860 extremely difficult, if not impossible.

The Civil War was the most dramatic event in American history. Nearly eight decades after the adoption of the Constitution, which attempted to establish "a more perfect Union" and "insure domestic Tranquility," the United States faced an internal military conflict between its own states which threatened the existence of the Union. For many decades, the question of slavery was presented not only as central but almost the only important source of the conflict. With time, historians began to stress the importance of other factors, such as different patterns of economic development, social structure, and incompatible political interests. Still, the role of

the cultural distinctness of both regions seems to be neglected. The mores and habits of the northern Yankee differed substantially from that of both the southern gentleman and yeoman. So did their worldviews. These differences did not amount to the most current questions and lifestyles, but were rooted already in colonial times. The present paper argues that northern and southern states were founded on different principles and aspirations, and also on different motivations. These differences are perhaps best embodied in some of the American founding myths – representing two different visions of the state and political community. This is why studying them can help us to understand the substantial differences between the southern and northern mentality, which made reaching a compromise in 1860 so difficult, if not impossible.

New Jerusalem

"For wee must Consider that wee shall be as a Citty upon a hill. The eies of all people are uppon Us" (Winthrop 23). These famous words from John Winthrop's sermon given on board of *Arbella* are perhaps the best exemplification of Puritans' way of thinking about the colonization of America. They were inspired with a sense of a holy duty. Winthrop's words not only expressed the majority's way of thinking. They also set standards for future actions; standards that had to be met if Puritans wanted to increase their chances of survival in the New World. America was to be the *terra nova*, an example of purity and true piety for the corrupted old world.[1]

From the very beginning, the idea of a covenant with God emerged, according to which God ordained the Puritan community in New England with a mission. The sense of this mission was, of course, the strongest among the clergy, and in the beginning it was perceived mostly in religious terms – as the regeneration of a true faith. This was the moment when the concept of New Jerusalem emerged and America became New Zion, where the New Israel was to build a *city upon a hill*. The Pilgrims' journey to America was presented in terms of the Chosen People's journey to the Promised Land (John Winthrop, symbolically, became the equivalent of Moses). The journey across the Atlantic Ocean, thanks to the biblical imagination of the Puritans, resembled the Jewish *Exodus*. The New World was to be a place of regeneration for all of humanity. Thus, the decision to leave Europe marked the beginning of a new millennium. It resulted in the myth of a New Beginning – starting the history of mankind all over again, but also preparing the ground for the second coming of Christ.

The foundations for these utopian concepts had already been set in the sixteenth century. As Stanisław Filipowicz recalls, both Morus and Bacon located their perfect societies behind the seas, in some mythical distance. The journey to this place symbolizes reincarnation. In classical utopias, space plays a quasi-magical role – it allows for metamorphosis. Against this intellectual background, the discovery of America stimulated the imaginations of those who hoped for a better social and political order. Suddenly, it appeared that there was, indeed, some other, remote,

[1] For more on the myth of America as the New World offering a New Beginning, see Robertson 29, 34-36.

"new" world (38). Utopian temptation could take a new – but also, this time, very real and concrete – shape.

Puritan religiousness, combined with optimistic enlightenment philosophy, resulted in the idea of a new man – *homo Americanus*, embodied by the figure of American Adam – who establishes a new society. To become an American, then, is to become a new man. De Crèvercoeur remarked in his famous *Letters from an American Farmer*: "The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions" (120). "And by the same token," explains Martin Evans, "he must also renounce his old ideas and opinions" (76). There is no possibility of saving any substantial connection with the past, which is identified with the old, corrupted world of European monarchies and religious intolerance. The new man, American Adam, is a man of new faith. "By becoming an American he is able to regain his lost innocence, to cancel the effects of the Fall and live out the rest of his life free of the overwhelming burden of sinfulness and corruption which the Puritans summed up in the phrase 'Original Sin'" (Evans 76-77).[2] Thus, Puritans were convinced that in America the act of creation would be, so to speak, repeated. The people would liberate themselves from the stigma of original sin; the covenant with God would be renewed. "Thus stands the cause betweene God and us," explained Winthrop. "We are entered into Convenant with him for this worke" (23).[3] It was obvious that the Puritans' aim, in this situation, was to build a society radically different from all others – known from the past and the present. Thanks to God's direct help, Puritans would be able to establish a new Paradise, and, in consequence, bring closer the second coming of Christ.

The vision of God's Kingdom coming took a very concrete shape in the middle of the eighteenth century. In his apologetic text published in 1742, Jonathan Edwards, one of the most important figures of the Great Awakening, foresaw that the millennium would have its beginning in America. In the summer of 1743, seventy pastors from New England signed a common statement titled *The Testimony and Advice of an Assembly of Pastors,* in which they informed people that everything seemed to

[2] In his study of nineteenth-century American literature, Richard Lewis also observes that the "American myth" was a manifestation of America's innocence and hope, and the very word 'innocence' was a key term in the moral vocabulary of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, as well as their followers and imitators. See Lewis 7.

[3] Obviously, breaking a covenant with God has dire results. "Now if the Lord shall please to heare us, and bring us in peace to the place wee desire – says Winthrop – then hath hee ratified this Convenant and sealed our Commission, [and] will expect a strict performance of the Articles contained in it; but if we shall neglect the observation of these Articles which are the ends wee have propounded […] the Lord will surely breake out in wrathe against us: be revenged of such a perjured people and make us knowe the price of breache of such a convenant" (Winthrop 23). In order to avoid incurring God's wrath, the Puritans sought to maintain perfect order in their society. Even the smallest sins were punished harshly by courts; no one was allowed to live alone for fear that he or she would succumb to the temptation of sin; parents were to instruct their children and servants diligently in the Word of God; church attendance was mandatory; marriage was required. These conventions and institutions molded an extremely stable and well-structured society in New England, a stark contrast with the unstable and loosely-bound society of the early British colonies in the Chesapeake Bay region, such as Jamestown.

confirm the hopes of those who were waiting for God's Kingdom and the Day of Last Judgment (Hatch 32).

This millenarian, moralistic disposition was, to a great extent, transferred onto the American Revolution, which was presented by some of the New England clergy in terms of a necessary regeneration. They claimed that God was watching over American colonists and protecting them from the tyrant (namely, King George III). America was presented as the last mainstay of freedom on Earth and it was colonists' duty, with reference to posterity, to defend the sacred rights of liberty. The struggle of Americans for liberty was described in terms of the cosmic struggle of God against the anti-Christ and forces of evil. By establishing their identity on biblical patterns, New Englanders gained confidence that in their conflict with the English Crown they represented the highest will of God. In a sermon given in January 1776, the Reverend Samuel Sherwood – estimating their chances for victory – without any hesitation claimed that "we have incontestable evidence, that God Almighty, with all the powers of heaven, are on our side. Great numbers of angels, no doubt, are encamping round our coast, for our defence and protection. Michael stands ready, with all the artillery of heaven, to encounter the [British] dragon, and to vanquish this black host" (46). According to Sherwood, Great Britain represented the "anti-Christian tyranny;" her attack on colonists was the last great effort of the forces of evil. The victory of New Israel will mark the beginning of new times of glory – a republican millennium.

Against this background it is not difficult to understand why the Founding Fathers were convinced that they were inaugurating a new era – *Novus Ordo Seclorum*. Thomas Paine expressed this revolutionary exultation by writing: "We have it in our power to begin the world over again. A situation, similar to the present, hath not happened since the days of Noah until now. The birthday of a new world is at hand […]" (120). The year 1776 was to mark the beginning of something completely new. They believed that the great reincarnation had become a fact, and that they had managed to transgress the limits of historical time – identified with decay and disintegration. They were convinced that the new government which would be built by them with God's assistance would never perish from the surface of the Earth.[4]

References to the myth of America as New Jerusalem were present throughout the Revolution and shortly afterwards. Biblical language was harnessed for the purpose of criticizing the king and English government. John Rudgers contrasted America – "the land of Providence" – with England – the modern Babylon. According to George Duffiled, with the Declaration of Independence the "American Zion became reality." John Huntington, in his pamphlet written in 1781, suggested that the republic of Israel was "a confederacy of thirteen states, or, if one prefers, tribes." Samuel Langdon went even further in drawing the parallels between America and Israel by publishing a work in 1788 titled *The Republic of the Izraelites as Example to the American States* (all qtd. in Żyro 24).

At the same time, the American Revolution and the process of building the new state was perceived as an occasion for a great regeneration and purification of the human character. Already in 1775, Samuel Adams perceived the political crisis in relations with the Crown as a "golden opportunity of recovering the Virtue and

[4] For more on this subject, see Mooney 24-25. For a comprehensive discussion of the millenarian mood of revolutionary New England, see Hatch.

reforming the Manners of our Country" (Maier 33). We must remember that a republic is, in the tradition of political thought, defined as a regime based on the virtue of its citizens. This is why John Adams, on the eve of the announcement of the *Declaration of Independence*, wrote in a letter to his wife that "the new Governments we are assuming in every Part, will require a Purification from our Vices, and of an augmentation of our Virtues" (Adams 685).[5] As Filipowicz claims, Americans remembered well the ancient lesson of political wisdom according to which virtue must be the safeguard of a republican order. This is why they treated the revolution, which was to give birth to a republic, as a crusade against their own weakness. Samuel Adams claimed that it would be a great occasion to restore Virtue's glitter and reform mores. The revolution was understood as an act of moral regeneration (191, 196).

The war of independence was also described in terms of the purification of the social organism by cutting off antagonists and losers (namely: loyalists). In a perfect state established with God's blessing, there was no place for the weak and disbelievers. Skepticism and a lack of enthusiasm were treated by Puritans with great suspicion. Those who showed toughness and devotion to the sacred mission, on the other hand, would enter an era of happiness, beyond time and history. In 1771, Philip Freneau wrote in his poem *The Rising Glory of America*:

> A New Jerusalem, sent down from heaven,
> Shall grace our happy earth-perhaps this land,
> Whose ample breast shall then receive, tho' late,
> Myriads of saints, with their immortal king,
> To live and reign on earth a thousand years,
> Thence call'd Millennium. […] (47)

This strongly religious language and sense of a mission dominating among northern Puritans were transferred onto the sphere of politics and its understanding. John Jay, writing about the beauty and opulence of the New World, attributed them to Providence – which holds Americans under its protection. It was also a stroke of Providence that "it has been pleased to give this one connected country to one united people" (32). Thus, America was an exceptional state, one that had not yet existed on the Earth. The touch of God's will and plan seemed to be obvious. "This country and this people seem to have been made for each other, and it appears as if it was the design of Providence that an inheritance so proper and convenient for a band of brethren, united to each other by the strongest ties, should never be split into a number of unsocial, jealous, and alien sovereignties" (32). Alexander Hamilton went even further in a pompous description of the New Beginning. In his view, America was the state which would change the course of time, and inaugurate an era of equality in foreign and commercial relationships throughout the world. It would restore a hierarchy of values consistent with the principle of justice, and would put an end to the dishonorable superiority of Europe which imposed its dominance on the world through

[5] In the same spirit, in October 1778 the Continental Congress called on several states "to take the most effectual measures" for the encouragement of good morals and virtues, and thus recommended "the suppressing of theatrical entertainments, horse racing, gaming, and such other diversions as are productive of idleness, dissipation, and a general depravity of principles and manners" (Rahe 213-214).

violence and injustice. He wrote with indignation about the "arrogant pretensions of the European," and announced the time of just revindication. "It belongs to us," he spoke to his fellow citizens, "to vindicate the honor of the human race" (85).

Thus, the American state was to be an example for the world not only in terms of the religiousness of its citizens, but also in terms of the perfect social and political order. Both aspects were, in any case, strictly connected. The political and social order of first the American colonies and then the American Union was to reflect God's plan. The prominent belief was that human reason should be harnessed to the task of discovering the hidden intention of the Creator. America was to be the first state in the history of mankind where the principles of perfect justice and freedom were to be fully realized. This sense of historical mission was nowhere manifested as strongly as among the Framers of the Constitution. Alexander Hamilton, opening the ratification debate, wrote in the *Federalist no. 1*:

> It has been frequently remarked that it seems to have been reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force. If there be any truth in the remark, the crisis at which we are arrived may with propriety be regarded as the era in which that decision is to be made; and a wrong election of the part we shall act may, in this view, deserve to be considered as the general misfortune of mankind (27).[6]

Thus, the success or failure of American lawgivers was to be the success or failure of all of mankind. Once again, Americans had to answer the challenge of deciding about the faith of humanity. Their mission was of a universal character. What was at stake was the question of securing liberty – or at least proving the possibility of such – for all people, whenever and wherever they lived.

According to many scholars, the person who most fully embodied this sense of the mission that America was obliged to fulfill, based on the myth of America as New Jerusalem, was Abraham Lincoln. And nothing is more illustrative for this thesis than the opening of his famous *Gettysburg Address*, which states: "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal" (163). The foregoing phrase had a very serious impact on the shape of the American political tradition. First of all, it identified the beginning of the American nation with the Declaration of Independence (Lincoln made his statement in 1863). Secondly, it suggested that America had been founded on and "dedicated to" a certain universal principle (of equality of men). Thus, the American regime from the very beginning had a teleological character: it was founded in order to realize a certain high principle. Making this principle (or "proposition") reality was its founding *telos*. The sixteenth president made securing the universal equality of men America's most fundamental program that had to be enacted. In other words, it was the role of the United States of America to realize God's plan of creating "all men equal." The American republic

[6] An echo of this conviction can be found in Herman Melville's *White Jacket*, where he wrote: "And we Americans are the peculiar, chosen people – the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of liberties of the world" (Melville 184).

was to correct the imperfection of earthly social and political orders which stood in sharp contradiction to the Creator's intentions.[7] The more direct purpose of Lincoln's statement was to give additional legitimacy to the military effort of the Union fighting against the slavery of the South. By making this statement at a military cemetery – at the site of one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War – he attributed some additional meaning to their death. They were no longer soldiers fighting in a military conflict between two rival sides with different political, economic and social interests. They became soldiers realizing God's mission. In light of his speech, the conflict between the North and South became (exactly as in the case of the war of independence) a representation of the cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil. Thus, the Civil War became not merely a struggle for preserving the Union, but an event which would give to the nation "a new birth of freedom" (Lincoln 163).

What has been said above finds its confirmation in an analysis of Lincoln's political rhetoric. It was Edmund Wilson who first observed that "so many of the sixteenth president's speeches were curiously 'full of appeals to the Deity'" (qtd. in McClellan 47). According to Melvin Bradford, Lincoln used a biblical style in his addresses as a tool thanks to which he could assume "the role of a Joshua, whose authority is such that he need only speak the commands of the Lord for it to be obeyed" (Bradford 1979: 190). In other words, Lincoln was striking the pose of a prophet, an envoy of God.[8] And, as we all know, one does not discuss or argue with a prophet (just as one does not discuss with God himself). Men simply follow him, because it is God who speaks through his mouth. Using his rhetoric, the sixteenth president blurred the distinction between a religious community (which America always has been) and a divine state. Through his rhetoric, he assumed that a state may be an instrument of implementing the revealed truth on Earth, and that there is, in fact, no substantial difference between politics and building God's city. *The Gettysburg Address* remains the best (although not the only) example of this moralistic, religious rhetoric. Lincoln's strategy in the first sentence of the address was to "lift beyond discourse, away from political and into the 'moral' order, what stands in the Declaration. […] The world of the epideictic, of 'four score and seven' (versus 'eighty-seven') or 'our fathers,' is an ultra-prescriptive realm which claims God for a sponsor and a sanction from outside time for what is done

[7] It is noteworthy that the gnostic character of the northern political myth is also visible in its universal language and message. And, as Leo Strauss observes, "the acceptance of any universal or abstract principles has necessarily a revolutionary, disturbing, unsettling effect as far as thought is concerned […]. For the recognition of universal principles forces man to judge the established order, or what is actual here and now, in the light of the natural or rational order; and what is actual here and now is more likely than not to fall short of the universal and unchangeable norm" (13).

[8] According to Jeffrey Hart, we can even talk about the peculiar "divinization of presidency" that has prevailed in popular culture. He speaks about "a kind of presidential analogue of the Trinity." It seems unquestionable that George Washington occupies in it the place of God the Father. And who is the Second Person? "Who else but Lincoln himself, the *suffering* president, suffering and dying for the nation's political original sin, slavery." The Third Person of that Trinity would be represented by John F. Kennedy (xix–xx). Marshall DeRosa, in turn, writes about the figure of 'Father Abraham' (Lincoln). "Perceived as their American Moses leading them out of slavery into the promised land of freedom, emancipated African Americans initially made the biblical connection" (DeRosa 109).

within it" (Bradford 1979: 190-191). Lincoln gave to his vision of the American experiment the form of an unquestionable model – sanctioned (or rather sacred) in the very act of founding. Since "liberty and equality are hieratically marked as 'brought forth' by 'fathers,' their doctrinal status as emulsible elements in a settled, blessed, patriarchal, and republican solution are thus certified with finality" (Bradford 1979: 191). The Biblical rhetoric of the *Gettysburg Address* continues to the end of the speech.

According to Bradford, the religious language present in Lincoln's speech embodies the specific mood of Puritan New England, which could be described as "a sense of having been 'called out' for (and into) a special covenant with God, an awareness of a 'mission among the Gentiles'" (1979: 195). Despite certain minor modifications, the faith in the chosen status of New England was still very strong in the middle of the nineteenth century. In light of the foregoing interpretation, Lincoln's rhetoric was another incarnation of New England Puritans' disposition to describe political and social reality in millenarian (or even gnostic) terms. What had to be done was a radical transformation of reality, which – at its present state – did not match God's perfect plan. This is why Americans needed a New Jerusalem, a New Beginning, or – as in the case of Lincoln – a "second founding" or "new act of founding" – "which would transcend the work of the actual founding fathers and return the nation to its first principle" (Kendall 30). It is noteworthy that the foregoing attitude, although based on religious convictions, had a direct political translation. As John Gray points out, Puritans represented what is called a 'postmillenarism' – the conviction that human efforts may trigger the coming of a new, perfect world. In opposition to 'premillenarists,' who claimed that Christ himself would initiate a new millennium, Puritans believed that Jesus would return to rule an already established new world. And this establishment would be the result of both God's will and human efforts (41). Thus, efforts to transform the existing reality into a more perfect social and political order had the highest religious sanction. Lincoln's quasi-prophetic rhetoric is a great illustration of this conviction.

Summing up, the messianic disposition of Puritans in the early colonial period was brought by Lincoln into American politics of the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1868, shortly after Lincoln's assassination, Edward M. Stanton uttered, after reading the *Gettysburg Address* to a political audience: "That is the voice of God speaking through the lips of Abraham Lincoln. […] You hear the voice of Father Abraham tonight. Did he die in vain?" (qtd. in Bradford 1979: 50). As we know from the Bible, God rarely speaks to people without some serious reason. His reason when he used "Father Abraham" as a spokesman was to entrust the Chosen people living in America with another mission: the mission of establishing a perfect social order based on universal equality. The task of building a New Jerusalem – a city upon a hill – had to be taken up once again.

New Troy

Against this background, let us now discuss the alternative – and, without any doubt, much less known – founding myth: the one that was developed in the South. And it is not difficult to guess that it differed substantially from its northern counterpart – as Southerners differed substantially from New Englanders. "The Southern

people," state the authors of the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, "have had characteristic assumptions, values and attitudes apart from other Americans" (Wilson and Ferris 583). The differences resulted from many social and cultural factors, but also from geographical (or, environmental) ones. "The early South differed from the northern colonies in physical environment. […] The first settlers in Virginia were charmed by the sights and smells of the new land. Observers focused on the climate as a key factor in the region" (583). In such circumstances, the vision of the South as Arcadia was developed. "If Puritans established New England to be a City on a Hill, the early southerners portrayed their area as a new Garden of Eden" (583).

This vision was strengthened by the agrarian model of economy that started to develop in the southern colonies from the very beginning. Also, the ideas of the French physiocrats, adopting Xenophont's phrase, according to which "agriculture is the mother of all other arts," influenced the Southern mind of the colonial era (Żyro 50). The idea that the cultivation of land is the highest form of human activity quickly spread among Southerners, who, in turn, based their own vision of an ideal man on this idea. Only permanent and close contact with soil guaranteed the perpetuation of moral health. Whereas Puritans stressed the importance of strong religious institutions and norms supervising the moral conduct of men, Southerners placed a bet on the beneficial influence of agricultural life on people's mores and characters. Their vision of an agrarian republic was based on two characteristics: modesty (virtue understood as moderation) and devotion to the public good. The commercial type of social organization – that developed in the North – was, in their view, counter-effective to those virtues. First, as it was inevitably connected with making money, it evoked luxury and corruption. Second, the rules of liberal, commercial economy are based on self-interest and competition rather than devotion to the common good.

The vision of Arcadia, glorifying the agrarian way of life, was strictly connected with the myth of the South as a New Troy and Captain John Smith as an American Aeneas. However, what is crucial here is to understand that by making reference to Troy, in fact, southerners were referring to the tradition of Republican Rome. As we know from Greek and Roman mythology, Aeneas is a direct link between the Greek and Roman worlds. Being one of the very few defenders of Troy who survived the defeat and pillage of the city by the victorious Greeks, he managed to get to the shores of Italy and is perceived as the pre-founder of Rome and the forefather of the Latins.[9] Thus, as Rome was (at least in the realm of mythology) a New Troy, so was the South. But while being the New Troy, it was at the same time the new incarnation of Rome. By making references to Troy, southerners posed on those who revived Roman republican tradition in America. This myth of New Troy stimulated, to a great extent, the imagination of southern authors in the colonial era. Both poets and prose writers reached willingly for Virgil's *Aeneid* in order to draw parallels between the adventures of the hero and the journey of Captain Smith to America.[10]

[9] According to the Roman historian Sallustius, the city of Rome was founded and inhabited in the beginning by Trojans, who came to the place as nomads, led by Aeneas. See Kubiak 1997: 559. For more on Aeneas's role in founding Rome, see Krawczuk 112-134. Also see Arendt 80-82, 196.

[10] For a discussion of the presence and role of the figure of Aeneas in early southern literature, see Bradford 1979: 172-175.

And, as Gilbert M. Cuthbertson points out, we should not underestimate the role of literature in constructing political myths. "They are situated at a point where politics meets literature and art. The epics and epic heroes perform definite political functions, which introduce myth as a construct in political theory" (Cuthbertson 159).

Obviously, references to Rome were nothing exceptional in the early American political tradition.[11] Nevertheless, there are certain reasons for which identification with ancient Rome was especially cherished by southerners. Principally, it was because of the fact that early Rome was an agrarian republic. As many historians claim, the ancient Romans were very keen on agriculture. Zygmunt Kubiak writes in his history of the Greeks and Romans that in the early years of the Roman republic, its statesmen almost never allowed two main tools to drop from their hands – the sword and the plough. Many Roman family names – including Cicero – had agricultural origins. Even the greatest leaders cultivated soil with their own hands (according to tradition, Lucius Cincinnatus, one of the greatest military leaders in Roman history, was called to become the leader of the Roman army while he was ploughing a field). These people treated sowing crops as seriously as making war (Kubiak 2003: 263-265). Thus, a typical citizen of the early Roman republic (around the 5th century B.C.) was both a farmer and soldier at the same time. This image perfectly fitted the image of southern farmers – yeomen, whom Thomas Jefferson regarded as "the backbone of every great people, the producers of the real wealth, the guardians of manly independence" (Parrington 346). Southerners, exactly like their Roman forefathers, treated agriculture with the highest regard and perceived it as the occupation contributing to moral perfection. One of the best illustrations of this thesis is John Taylor's *Arator* – a discourse in which political and economic deliberations are accompanied by practical remarks on subjects such as ploughing, draining, manuring, cultivation of crops, and orcharding. "Taylor," explains Bradford, "is like Cato […] in treating advice on farming as a species of moral instruction. To tell a man how best to raise hogs or grow wheat or manage his servants – and to tell him that these occupations are those which the gods chose as best suited to test our stewardship – is to contribute to his moral being" (Bradford 1977: 37).

Usually, when we think about the social structure of the antebellum South, we think of rich, aristocratic planters and slave-owners. However, this image is historically inaccurate. It was the yeomen – small farmers, owning the land they cultivated, with no, or just a few, slaves − who constituted the lion's share of southerners (Owsley vi, 7, 134-139).[12] These people worked personally in a field they owned. According to Bradford, the common vision of southern culture as dominated and shaped by great land-owning slaveholders is wrong. In fact, large plantations were, in his view, commercial enterprises, and as such should be treated as an anomaly in the southern agrarian landscape and as a symptom of the degeneration of original

[11] It is enough to look at the political nicknames of the Founders: John Adams used to sign documents as Brutus, Washington as Scaevola (although he was also called Cincinnatus of Mount Vernon), and the authors of the *Federalist Papers* assumed the name Publius.

[12] It is noteworthy that around the year 1860 only 25% of the white population in the South owned slaves. More than half of them owned fewer than 5 slaves, while more than 50% of all slaves belonged to only 12% of slaveholders. Moreover, the tendency was to further the concentration of slaves in the hands of fewer and fewer owners (Wawrzyczek, Sheehan 274). The general conclusion of Owsley's study is similar.

southern agrarian republicanism.[13] Economically, Southern plantations were much closer to commercial enterprises prevailing in the industrial and commercial North than to family farms owned by yeomen. This fact was even reflected during state conventions in 1860 when most of the great plantation owners voted *against* the secession while yeomen unanimously supported it (and after the secession constituted the core of the Confederate Army). Summing up, they were small and middle landowners (often owning no, or just a few, slaves) who shaped the political, social and cultural climate of the Old South. What was characteristic about them was that they (in great majority) owned the land they cultivated. This gave them economic independence, which translated into a sense of honor and self-esteem. According to Bradford, "nowhere [but in the South] was personal pride so generally spread through all levels of a diverse population, personal affront so certain to bring retaliation" (Bradford 1985: 139). It would be a great oversimplification, however, to believe that honor was for southerners only a pose and manifested itself in a penchant for dueling. It constituted, to a great extent, their identity – also political. As Bertram Wyatt-Brown points out, "it was upon this basis that John C. Calhoun and others came to admire Periclean Greeks, devoted as the ancients were to *timē* (honor), democracy, republicanism, and small-community autonomy. In the Greek city-states 'the passionate drive to show one's self in measuring against others,' said Hannah Arendt, was the actual basis for politics" (187).

Summing up, the roman ideal of the citizen-soldier was very vivid in the South before the Civil War. Yeomen cherished greatly their status of independent, free man, working with their own hands in the field, always ready (but also able) to take up arms in the case of necessity. The level of readiness to protect their region against external threat – embodied by Yankees from the North – was very high among them. All of this, combined with a sense of honor (raised to a level that was almost absurd), resulted in the very low readiness to compromise in 1860. For Southern yeomen, yielding to abolitionists' pressure concerning slavery would be equal to public humiliation. "Reputation is everything," said James Henry Hammond. "Everything with me depends upon the estimation in which I am held," confessed secessionist thinker Beverley Tucker (qtd. in Wyatt-Brown 188-189). "Personal reputation for character, valor, and integrity," explained Wyatt-Brown, "did not end there. Individual self-regard encompassed wider spheres. As a result, the southerner took as personal insult the criticism leveled at slave society as a whole" (189).

Returning to the myth of the South as a New Troy, we must notice that it differed substantially from its northern counterpart with regard to its attitude toward the past and the future. As has already been mentioned, Puritans establishing colonies in New England presented their efforts in terms of the New Beginning. The myth of New Jerusalem was based on the idea of a radical break with the past and the corruption of the old world. This was not the case in southern colonies. Southerners

[13] Exactly in the same fashion, many Roman historians living around the 1st century B.C. lamented the degeneration of farming culture in the late republic. After the second Punic War, traditional farms were replaced by great *latifundia* devoted to breeding sheep and cattle – which was economically more profitable than growing crops. As a result, starting from the turn of the 1st century A.D., Rome started to suffer a shortage of cereal, which then had to be imported – a thing unthinkable in the times of the early republic. See Kubiak 2003: 316-317. Also see Kirk 104-105.

perceived their region in terms of continuation and reincarnation rather than a completely "new founding." "The plantation of Virginia," explains Bradford,

> will be new in the sense of extension or re-creation – as Rome was a fresh but minimally different Troy, made out of the residue from a particular stream of history and for the sake of its perpetuation. […] Allen Tate, in looking back on over 350 years of Southern life, has spoken of an informing principle or impulse standing behind the full body of that record, a Graeco-Troyan myth. And the analogy to Aeneas does, for essentially conservative men, assuredly summarize their desire to have by migration a better share in the manner of life they already know and love. (1979: 172)[14]

What is important in the above quote is, obviously, not the question of the historical verification of the southern myth of New Troy, but the very belief in the continuation of life "already known and loved." What was at stake here was not building something new or inventing some revolutionary formula for the social and political order. Quite the opposite. The American colonies, according to southerners, were to be continuations of the old, noble republican tradition – stretching back through the English seventeenth-century republicanism of the Old Whigs, all the way to republican Rome.

In the South, the theme of being depositors of the fundamental virtues of Western civilization survived the defeat in the Civil War, and was taken up again in the first half of the twentieth century by the Nashville Agrarians, who – according to Bradford – are

> unique in being native American heirs of a fundamental inheritance we share from the dominant stream of Western history. Or, more particularly, in being conscious inheritors. In them, intellect and will, Athens and Jerusalem are well met. But also Troy: in Latin, *pietas*. Like their ancestors of the "founding," these Southerners knew themselves as part of a continuity, as holding in trust a deposition older than 1776, with roots in republican Rome and in the England of the great common lawyers. (1985: 72)

"But the significance of an earlier South's fondness for seeing itself inside the pattern of a Graeco-Trojan myth," observes Bradford, "comes clear only when this tendency is viewed over against its American alternative – the myth of a new Jerusalem" (1979: 173). According to him, the South, with its "non-millenarian cultural aspirations," remained at variance with what, at a certain moment in American history, became the dominant national pattern – the Northern myth of New Jerusalem (174). The Southern scholar summarized the difference between the two regions as follows:

> New England's "city on a hill" carried with it the implications of a journey forward in time carried on by way of a journey in space. The godly commonwealth was to be a centerpiece for concluding history, for ushering in the thousand-year reign of the Saints predicted in

[14] It is noteworthy that Arendt analyzes Roman political tradition exactly in the same terms, writing that the Romans had derived their political existence from Troy's defeat, which resulted, in turn, in the founding of a new city on foreign land. However, "it was not about something new, something that nobody heard of, but about re-founding of the old, creating a new fatherland and home for *penates* – Trojan gods of the hearth, which Eneas had saved just before he escaped with his father and son through the sea to Latium" (196).

> the Book of Revelation and presided over by Christ the King. New Englanders were an elect armed from on high with the power and authority to hurry up his beneficent apocalypse. The Southern dream, despite its allegiance to the memory of Eden, reminded inside the history – looking back toward what Leo Marx called the "cultivated garden," the best of the gifts of this life available after Fall, if pursued with prudence, energy, honor, and regard for a wise prescription. It involved no new and special revelation, no adepts' magic, and has been perhaps a bit too homely and commonplace to inspire the notice of our more idealistic national historians. (174)

What we can read from the above quote is the sharp juxtaposition between the Puritan, gnostic and *teleocratic* North and the conservative, orthodox and *nomocratic* South. These two cultures, Bradford seems to claim, were incompatible. The Civil War was, in fact, a clash of different cultures.[15] The two regions represented completely different models of political community and subscribed to different philosophies of history. The South represented an organic community, growing slowly in time and using "the lamp of experience" to illuminate the mysteries of everyday life. Its political values and symbols – expressed in social order – were, to a great extent, inherited. Obvious modifications – necessary because of different geographical and social circumstances – were introduced in the course of prudential choices, and were a matter of practical wisdom rather than theoretical, abstract divagations. Southerners did not try (or even aspire) to build a completely new, perfect state. Neither did they want to realize some higher, God-given, aim. Their attitude toward reality was that of orthodoxy – it assumed the acceptance of human imperfection and, in consequence, imperfection of human states (including such pitiful phenomena as poverty, injustice, etc.). Southerners, in contrast to New England Puritans, never believed in the possibility of repeating the act of creation that would result in the birth of a New Man – liberated from the consequences of Original Sin. Instead of constructing a Utopia, they focused on fulfilling everyday duties and work – with the hidden assumption that by doing this they attribute some meaning to their earthly existence and contribute to the glory of the Creator. Thus, in a southerner's vision, society was not established for any specific, godly purpose. Living according to established law is, in such a vision, an end in itself. Pretensions to realize any "higher ends" are dismissed in such a community as unjustified (and even as a manifestation of *hubris*). This is why Bradford describes the Southern regime as *nomocratic* – "in which members are not partners or colleagues in an enterprise with a common interest to promote or protect, but are instead related in terms of a practice, a common way" (1990: 140).

Against this background, the North represented a *teleocratic* regime, organized around the idea that a political community is bounded by some fundamental aim (*telos*) and should do everything to realize it. Lincoln's famous words from his *Gettysburg Address*, according to which the American nation was founded on and "dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal," reveal their deep meaning exactly in this light.

It should be stressed that the Southern myth of New Troy, although present already in colonial times, grew even stronger after the Civil War, which had left in

[15] Bradford, following Richard Beale Davis's magisterial *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South, 1585-1763*, even claimed that "the South had a civilization markedly different from that of New England" (1990: 117).

Southerners' mentality a sense of defeat and national tragedy, but also pride resulting from their military effort which had quickly transformed into the glorification of heroism. The dedicatory poem which P. S. Worsley inscribed in a copy of his rendering of *The Iliad* and then, after Appomattox, sent to Robert E. Lee, is the perfect illustration:

Thy Troy is fallen, thy dear land
Is marred beneath the spoiler's heel.
I cannot trust my trembling hand
To write the things I feel.
* * *
Ah, realm of tombs! –but let us hear
This blazon to the last of times!
No nation rose so white and pure
Or fell so pure of crimes.
* * *
An angel's heart, an angel's mouth,
Not Homer's, could alone for me Hymn
well the great Confederate South,
Virginia first, and Lee. (qtd. in Bradford 1979: 173)

The war enriched Southerners' imagination with a tragic vision of the world which was completely unknown for other Americans. The parallel to conquered and burned Troy was very attractive for the defeated citizens of the Confederacy. The ruthlessness of General Sherman's troops implementing his concept of "scorched earth" resembled, in the eyes of Southerners, the cruelty of Achaeans, who – according to Virgil's *Aeneid* – showed mercy neither for women nor children in captured Troy.

This sense of tragedy, of being defeated and conquered, as well as the very memory of the Civil War, was sustained the longest in the South and found its embodiment in southern literature (Kopcewicz, Sienicka 274). Let us take, as an example, a poem by Allen Tate (a famous Nashville Agrarian) with the telling title *Aeneas at Washington*. It begins with a vivid description of the slaughter of the Trojans:

I myself saw furious with blood
Neoptolemus, at his side the black Atridae,
Hecuba and the hundred daughters, Priam
Cut down, his filth drenching the holy fires

Then we see the image of Aeneas, who, with his elderly father on his back (exactly as Virgil described it in *The Aeneid*), leaves the ashes of the city and begins his trip to a "new world":

That was a time when civilization
Run by the few fell to the many, and
Crashed to the shout of men, the clang of arms:
Cold victualing I seized, I hoisted up
The old man my father upon my back,
In the smoke made by sea for a new world

It is important to notice in the figure of Aeneas not just a refugee, escaping from burned Troy, but also a depositor of the virtues and values of a destroyed civilization. This brings us close to the previously mentioned concept of the South as the embodiment of classical Western culture. Finally, the poem ends with a reflective thought on the meaning of the South's defeat – compared here to buried Troy:

I stood in the rain, far from home at nightfall
By the Potomac, the great Dome lit the water,
The city my blood had built I knew no more
While screech-owl whistled his new delight
Consecutively dark.
    Struck in the wet mire
Four thousand leagues from the ninth buried city
I thought of Troy, what we had built her for (Tate 68-69).

Conclusion

The analysis of American founding myths – although constituting an interesting end in itself – can play an important role in our attempts to understand some important cultural and mental (as opposed to strictly political and economic) sources of the Civil War. The Southern founding myth strengthened the conservative disposition. It focused on legitimizing the existing social system rather than projecting a new one. Finally, it provided an attitude of orthodoxy – that is fulfilling one's everyday duties ("cultivating a garden") without thinking about any alternative, possibly utopian, regimes. This is why Southerners understood politics as *nomocratic* – as an activity based on respecting existing institutional and legal frameworks.

At the same time, Northerners preferred a *teleocratic* vision of politics – as organized around the highest *telos* which should be realized. This vision found its embodiment in the concept of "a city upon a hill," New Jerusalem, a perfect state realizing a perfect vision of social order. In contrast to the southern, conservative myth of New Troy, New Englanders adopted a quite utopian version of the mythical legitimacy of their order. And utopian myths, as Cuthbertson reminds us, "portray society as-it-is-not-but-might-be" (190). Hidden aspiration for never-ending change and perfection is their constitutive characteristic.

It seems that the conflict between North and South had much more (than its early historians were ready to admit) to do with the substantial cultural differences and incompatible worldviews of the two regions' citizens. Their mentality, vision of political community, and, finally, their understanding of the role of the state were very distant and, to some degree, even contradictory. Combined with obvious political and economic differences, they led to a military conflict – the memory of which is probably still strong among some of the people living in *Dixie* and displaying in front of their houses (as well as in the cabins of their trucks) Confederate flags.

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