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Article

Mourning, Memorials, and Religion: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on the Park51 Controversy

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Abstract: This article summarizes a version of the "mourning religion" thesis—derived from the work of Peter Homans and further developed and advanced by William Parsons, Diane Jonte-Pace, and Susan Henking—and then demonstrates how this thesis can shed light on the Park51 controversy. We argue that the Park51 controversy represents a case of incomplete cultural mourning of an aspect of American civil religion that manifests itself in melancholic rage by means of protests, threats to burn the Qur'an (as well as actual burnings of the Qur'an), and vandalism of mosques around the United States. We explore various losses—military, economic, and symbolic—and note that these losses remain ambiguous, therefore preventing closure and productive mourning. The fact that a permanent memorial still has not been built at Ground Zero reflects, and perhaps exacerbates, this incomplete cultural mourning. Also, the fact that Freedom Tower, the building to replace the Twin Towers, is to be 1776 feet tall reflects that the losses related to 9/11 are connected to American civil religion, as 1776 is a sacred year in American history. Setting aside the ethics and the politics related to this controversy, we attempt here to understand this controversy from a psychoanalytic perspective.

Keywords: Peter Homans; William Parsons; mourning religion thesis; psychoanalysis; psychology of religion; American Civil Religion; Vietnam Wall; 9/11; Ground Zero; Freedom Tower

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1. Introduction

This article is an extended version of a paper that Nathan Carlin delivered at the national meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) in October 2010. The paper was a part of a panel organized by Ruqayya Khan, who invited Carlin to provide a psychology of religion perspective on the Park51 controversy and, specifically, to address how the dynamics of mourning, memorials, and religion might intersect with the controversy (a video of this panel is available on the website of the AAR). We begin by providing a brief overview of the Park51 controversy. We then summarize our theoretical perspective and apply this perspective to the Park51 controversy. We argue that the Park51 controversy represents a case of incomplete cultural mourning of an aspect of American civil religion that manifests itself in melancholic rage by means of protests; threats to burn the Qur'an (as well as actual burnings of the Qur'an); and vandalism of mosques across the United States. We attempt to make sense of a very complex cultural episode that ought to be viewed from a variety of perspectives, and what we offer here is a psychoanalytic perspective—one way of understanding the Park51 controversy.

2. The Park51 Controversy: A Brief Overview and a Note on Sources

There are hundreds of articles on the Park51 controversy. We began our search by reading the Wikipedia page on the controversy [1], and we used this website to direct us to primary sources related to the controversy (we cite primary sources—that is, media articles about the controversy—in this article). We also collected articles about the controversy by reading the news after we had been invited to write on the subject. And, finally, we asked a research assistant to collect articles for us from both liberal and conservative media sources, such as *The New York Times* and *Fox News*.

The basic facts about the Park51 project are well known and can be found in a number of media sources. Park51 is the name for a community project that includes plans to build an Islamic Community Center at 45–51 Park Place in lower Manhattan [1]. "Park51," then, refers to the physical address of the project. The Park51 project was previously called "Cordoba House," but this name, stirred up a great deal of controversy because some suggested that this name championed Muslim superiority over or domination of Christians, as "Cordoba," these critics felt, alludes to Muslim rule in medieval Spain. So the project was renamed. But the renaming occurred after the Park51 project had gained widespread recognition in the media under the misnomer "Ground Zero Mosque," despite the fact that the Park51 project is neither simply a mosque nor is it being constructed at Ground Zero. The building, in fact, is located about two blocks from the former site of the World Trade Center. Many also have pointed out that the building has remained abandoned ever since the 9/11 attacks, and that, before this, it used to house retail stores. The controversy, then, centers on the location of the building, its name, and its symbolism.

The public face of the Park51 project is Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, along with his wife Daisy Khan, while the space is being developed by Sharif El-Gamal of Soho Properties. Projected designs for the new space indicate that it will be thirteen stories. Modeled after local Jewish community centers in Manhattan, according to the project's website, the design includes plans for recreation and fitness facilities, an auditorium, a culinary school, educational programs, a childcare program, arts and culture

programs, a library, an art studio, a prayer space, and a September 11th memorial [1]. The leaders of the Park51 project have noted that the aim of the project is to serve as a source of cultural, social, and recreational programs for the lower Manhattan community, and it envisions itself as a non-sectarian establishment that would be open to people from all faith perspectives [2].

Despite its community-oriented stance, over the last year-and-a-half (but largely in the months surrounding the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks), the Park51 project has come to find itself at the center of an increasingly vocal public debate. Much of the dispute, as noted, centers on the location of the building, though the debate certainly has wider implications for the cultural position of Muslims in the United States. Critics of the Park51 project cited insensitivity to the 9/11 victims as among the first and foremost reasons for their opposition to the proposed building plans, and, by May 2010, newspapers had come to identify the proposed construction site as a "mosque" that would be located "steps from Ground Zero" [3]. These critics felt that the construction of this "Ground Zero Mosque" was too close to the 9/11 site, serving, inappropriately, as a monument to the very Islam that some felt was to blame for the 9/11 attacks. This symbolism was simply seen as offensive. Some, such as *The Wall Street Journal*'s William McGurn, went so far as to draw an analogy between the Park51 project and the Carmelite covenant at Auschwitz that Pope John Paul II eventually ordered closed [4]. McGurn cites the "grace and wisdom" of the Pope's decision about "another hallowed site on whose grounds innocents were also murdered" [4]. He argues that the Park51 project should draw a lesson from the case of Auschwitz and "appreciate why some American feelings are rubbed raw by the idea of a mosque at a place where Islamic terrorists killed more than 2,700 innocent people" [4]. Family members of victims of the 9/11 attacks were invited to meetings with the Park51 planners and developers, and many expressed their displeasure at "[having] to go down to a memorial where [our children] died on 9/11 and look at a mosque" [4].

Many national and local political leaders supported these views, the most quoted statements being issued from Sarah Palin and Newt Gingrich. Palin called on "peaceful New Yorkers" to condemn the project, while Gingrich claimed that the Park51 project is "an assertion of Islamist triumphalism," and that "there should be no mosque near Ground Zero in New York so long as there are no churches or synagogues in Saudi Arabia" [5].

Amidst protests and fervent opposition [6], the Park51 project has also garnered a significant amount of support, including from public figures such as former President Bill Clinton, who remarked, "[W]e've all forgotten: There were a lot of Muslims killed on 9/11" [7]. President Barack Obama weighed in on the issue by upholding commitment to religious freedom as a core American value and constitutional right but withheld comment on "the wisdom" of proceeding forward with the project [8]. The project's most vocal support came from Michael Bloomberg, Mayor of New York City, who gave a defense of the project on the basis of mutual respect and tolerance [9]. Still others argued that many Americans fail to distinguish between the actions of extremists and terrorists on the one hand, and the peaceful ways of the vast majority of American Muslims on the other hand, and this leads to discrimination and Islamophobia [10].

Various polls were conducted that came to show that most Manhattanites supported the Park51 project, including, and especially, communities in the areas around Ground Zero [11]. Several 9/11 family members, as will be noted below, also came forward to express support for the project. It also should be noted that Imam Feisal and other board and organization members also have spent

considerable efforts toward clarifying and communicating plans for the Park51 project in interviews, op-eds, town hall meetings, and so on, and supporters of the project have cited Imam Feisal's "moderate" and "outreaching" version of Islam as a refreshing alternative to what many experience as a generally rigid and insular Muslim American community.

Reactions to Park51 have not been limited to New York City; numerous protests and demonstrations have emerged around the country concerning the building of mosques [12]. And a number of mosques have been vandalized as well [13]. One particular form of protest was the "Qur'an Burning Day," organized by Pastor Terry Jones in Florida. Jones's idea was to burn 200 Qur'ans on September 11, 2010, but he decided to back down from his plan [14], though, later, as we were finalizing this article, Jones did go through with a burning on a much smaller scale [15]. In recent months, the Park51 project has not been in the news nearly as much as it had been, though recent developments include the appointment of Imam Abdallah Adhami as senior religious advisor for the Islamic Community Center. This appointment marks a kind of distancing from Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, who has become somewhat of a controversial figure and has come under the scrutiny of non-Muslims and Muslims alike [16].

We have provided a very brief overview of the Park51 controversy to date. This debate, of course, will continue to unfold, and we expect that the protests will reemerge as the 10th anniversary of 9/11 approaches. Our purpose here was to provide some context for our discussion. Having followed the trajectory of the debate over the last year, we are tempted to view it with a certain amount of cynicism and hesitation, given the fact that (1) the clamor was most prominent around the anniversary of 9/11, which also directly preceded U. S. midterm elections; (2) there exists division within the Muslim American community over support for the project, which strongly cautions against viewing American Muslims as a monolith; (3) among opposition to the Park51 project, some groups seemed to have acted more aggressively than others—these groups, then, are not monoliths either; and (4) much of what we "know" about the Park51 controversy is derived from journalistic sources—not sociological and ethnographic sources—and such sources have inherent limitations. In any case, setting aside these issues, important as they are, in this article we focus on emotion and attempt to understand the Park51 controversy from a psychoanalytic perspective at a cultural level based on the best sources available to date, realizing how complicated the hermeneutical issues are in this cultural episode.

3. The "Mourning Religion" Thesis

We now want to turn to our theoretical perspective. In June 2010, one of the authors (NC) guest-edited an issue of *Pastoral Psychology* (Volume 59, Number 3) that focused on *Mourning Religion*, an edited volume by William Parsons, Diane-Jonte Pace, and Susan Henking [17]. This volume put forward a theoretical perspective called the "mourning religion" thesis, which derives from the work of Peter Homans [18,19]. Drawing from various thinkers, but most deeply from Freud, Homans postulated a relationship between loss and creativity, and that the link between the two is mourning. He argued, for instance, that the creation of psychoanalysis was born out of the loss of a common culture and shared meanings, particularly Judeo-Christian, in the West, and that the creation of psychoanalysis can be seen as an act of mourning both for Freud and for western culture [20]. The *Mourning Religion* volume refined and extended Homans's basic insights—as found in his monograph

The Ability to Mourn [21] and in his edited volume *Symbolic Loss* [22]—by applying these insights to Religious Studies as a discipline. This volume [17] was also the subject of a panel at the national meeting of the American Academy of Religion in 2008. This volume [17], then, has been, and continues to be, the focus of considerable attention in the field of psychology of religion.

What is the mourning religion thesis? One can describe the mourning religion thesis in various ways, and one version of the mourning religion thesis can be described as follows. People who study religion professionally are often if not always drawn to the study of religion out of some religious conviction of their own. However, during the course of their study and also by means of some personal life experience of loss that is connected to religion in some way, students of religion become disappointed or disillusioned with religion, and they subsequently "mourn religion" in various ways, often by means of their scholarship. In other words, Religious Studies scholars separate or individuate themselves from their religious loss, and they subsequently create new meaning that is often outside of the realm of their former or current religious tradition. The new meaning that they create is usually in the form of articles and books; books and articles become, as it were, personal memorials for individual scholars. For some scholars, reading and writing take the place of fasting and prayer. The mourning religion thesis suggests that these scholars are still religious but in unconventional ways. This version of the mourning religion thesis, then, attempts to examine the relationship between the personal experience and public theory of Religious Studies scholars in light of mourning. (The description of the mourning religion thesis outlined in this paragraph was taken, in a slightly adapted form, from Nathan Carlin's oral defense of his dissertation; see [23].)

One way this theory can be "tested" is by means of case studies. Homans applied the theory to Sigmund Freud, C. G. Jung, and Max Weber. Parsons, to cite another example, applied the theory to history of religions scholar Jeffrey Kripal, demonstrating a link between Kripal's current scholarship on mysticism and his disillusionment with the Roman Catholicism of his youth—Kripal quite literally left the monastery for the academy [24]. In so doing Kripal began to argue for a "gnostic" approach to the study of religion, an approach that lies somewhere between faith and reason [25]. Parsons views such creativity as a form of mourning in Religious Studies, a way of working-through one's de-idealization of religion—in Kripal's case, Roman Catholicism. The mourning religion thesis would seem to be further corroborated in Kripal's life by viewing his current work on the paranormal as a development of his own "gnostic" intellectual and spiritual journey [26]. In a review of *Mourning Religion*, Jacob Belzen applauded this idiographic approach and called for more such studies to further validate the theory [27]. (For another example of an application of this idiographic approach, see [28].)

Another way to think about the mourning religion thesis would be to think about cultural situations as case studies. Levi Smith's essay in Homans's edited volume on symbolic loss, for example, examines the role of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall (Vietnam Wall) in America's cultural mourning of the Vietnam War [29]. The Vietnam War, Smith argued, constituted a highly ambiguous loss for American culture because there is little agreement about what the war meant, whether we—i.e., the United States—should have been there at all, and what we have learned since then [29]. The only thing that seems clear is that we did not accomplish our objectives, that we lost, and that many lives were lost. The Vietnam Wall, Smith argued, is a good memorial in that it is in tune with this ambiguity and, therefore, has been able to function as a site of mourning for a wide variety of mourners, no matter their particular political persuasion or position about the war because the meaning

of the memorial is not clear [29]. No obvious political message is being advocated there, just as the meaning of the war is not clear—and this ambiguity of the Vietnam Wall was intentional [29, pp. 105-107].

In terms of Homans's thesis, the Vietnam Wall represents an artistic and cultural response to the various losses that the United States experienced related to the Vietnam War. The Vietnam Wall clarified, visually, part of this loss—thousands upon thousands of young American lives—by listing the names of the lost on the Vietnam Wall and, therefore, aided in the mourning process. Beyond the memorial in Washington, DC, a half-scale replica of the Vietnam Wall titled "The Wall that Heals" is part of a traveling exhibit that tours cities and towns throughout the United States in an effort to "[spread] the Memorial's healing legacy to millions" and "thus [allow] the healing process to begin" [30]. But neither the Vietnam Wall nor this replica could complete the cultural work of mourning because the nature of the losses related to the Vietnam War for the United States have not been fully recognized or understood. This is why, Parsons suggested to us in a conversation, there seem to be more movies about the Vietnam War than any other war. It is, Parsons suggested, as though we need to keep returning to this loss to re-work it and to re-present it in order to make meaning of it and to complete the work of mourning.

In this article, we attempt to understand the Park51 controversy as a cultural case study, not unlike the previous discussion of the Vietnam Wall. We believe this approach is all the more justified given the parallels that government officials, political scientists, and the media have recently drawn between the United States' involvement in the current war in Afghanistan and the Vietnam War. For example, in 2009, a *Newsweek* article highlighted the analogy in an article titled "Obama's Vietnam" [31], and, in the same year, a *New York Times* Op-Ed asked, "Could Afghanistan become Obama's Vietnam?" [32]. Indeed, there has been no shortage of articles on this comparison [33, 34]. In any case, although the analogy may be cited as inexact [34], we believe the larger cultural sentiment derives from a similar place of ambivalence and uncertainty, one that is usefully understood through the lens of mourning.

4. Applying the Mourning Religion Thesis to the Park51 Controversy: A Cultural Case Study

We now want to apply the mourning religion thesis to the Park51 controversy. We welcome this opportunity because, as Parsons, Jonte-Pace, and Henking write in the introduction of *Mourning Religion*, they hope that the mourning religion thesis would be applied to explore issues within various religious traditions, such as Islam and fundamentalism, which, to date, no one has done [17]. There are a number of papers that explore links between nationalism, American identity, and 9/11 from a psychological perspective, such as those presented at a recent panel at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, titled "After 9/11: Psychological and Religious Reflections on Terror and Anxiety" [35]. But no one has applied this theory to American civil religion. In these reflections, we argue, as noted, that the Park51 controversy represents a case of incomplete cultural mourning of an aspect of American civil religion that manifests itself in melancholic rage. We'll unpack this thesis by addressing three central questions: *What is the loss? Who is doing the "mourning"? And how is "mourning" manifesting itself?*

4.1. What is the Loss?

America suffered three primary acute losses on September 11, 2001, and these three acute losses subsequently became chronic. The first acute loss was a sense of safety provided by military power and national security. Thousands of innocent lives were lost [36]. The attacks on 9/11 represented what has been called the worst terrorist attack in American history, launching a new discourse of "a post-9/11 world" [37]. Whatever this rhetoric might mean, it certainly entails the idea that the world is dangerous, and that we need to stand guard—which is to say, we are not as safe as we used to be. To quote Thomas Kean and Lee Hamilton in their public statement on the release of the 9/11 Commission Report:

> Put simply, the United States is presented with one of the great security challenges in our history. We have struck blows against the terrorists since 9/11. We have prevented attacks on the homeland. We believe we are safer today than we were on 9/11—but we are not safe. [38, p. 2]

Indeed, one gets the impression that, as a society, we no longer feel safe, and that it is unlikely that we will ever recover the sense of safety that we once had, despite heightened security procedures at airports and other such measures [39]. Some, too, wonder if we are giving up our civil liberties in the name of some supposed security [40]. In any case, it seems inevitable, sadly, that there will be another 9/11 someday, or some other such national tragedy, and one fears that it will be even more deadly next time. It is as though the safety provided by military power and national security, a sense that our military and our intelligence is the best in the world and that it can accomplish anything and protect us from everything, was lost, acutely, on 9/11, but this loss became chronic as the "war on terror" continued with no clear sense of victory, either in Afghanistan or Iraq, despite the capture of Saddam Hussein, who, according to former Vice President Dick Cheney, was later found to have no connections to 9/11 [41]. We have been at war for nearly ten years now, and it seems that we are no closer to victory now than when we first began. De-idealization seems to be found at every turn.

Writing shortly after Operation Desert Storm—that is, the First Gulf War—psychologist of religion Donald Capps [42] observed that the attack on Baghdad was a "peak experience" for American society. He writes, "as President [H. W.] Bush declared during and after the war, Desert Storm buoyed the spirits of Americans after the debacle of Vietnam," because Americans were able to elevate their narcissism by means of observing their technological superiority [42, p. 163]. "Desert Storm," Capps suggests, "was the peak experience of national empowerment" [42, p. 163]. The fact that we are withdrawing our troops now from the Second Gulf War—former President George W. Bush's war—with no clear sense of victory only reinforces the sense that our military cannot do everything. American military power, it seems, is not what it used to be. Our spirits, this time around, have not been buoyed—no "mission accomplished."

The second acute loss was our economic security. It was, after all, the World Trade Center that was the primary target on 9/11. And the American economy, one should not forget, suffered immediately after 9/11 [43]. But despite the recovery from the initial economic shock, a significant amount of anxiety has remained in the air, an anxiety related to the long term changes that derive from economic globalization as well as the decline of certain traditional sectors of the American economy, such as manufacturing [44]. It has become clear that just as our military cannot protect us, our economy cannot

either. The two pillars that had marked America as the unchallenged superpower of the world—military might and economic stability—came crumbling down with the two towers of the World Trade Center on 9/11. And in recent years our economic stability has been further undermined by forces within America's own borders, such as the lack of economic regulation, particularly with regard to sub-prime housing loans, that led to a financial meltdown [45]. The American economy, it seems, is not what it used to be (as in the 1980s), and many speculate (and worry) about the rising strength of China [46].

The third acute loss was symbolic. On 9/11, America lost the defining feature of the New York City skyline: the Twin Towers. The Twin Towers stood as an iconic structure, ranking among the most significant economic centers across, and tallest buildings in, the world. If New York City is the face of America, destroying the towers was like cutting off the nose of America, or, given the phallic nature of the towers, the destruction of the towers can be viewed as symbolic castration, as some psychoanalytic commentator must have noted by now. Indeed, protesters to and critics of the Park51 project have called the plans to build the community center in close proximity to Ground Zero a "slap in the face" [47].

4.2. The Mourning of American Civil Religion

What is being mourned here, partially, is the viability of a central aspect of American civil religion—namely, that America is not as powerful as we have idealized it to be. But what, though, do we mean by American civil religion? Civil religion is a sanctification of the nation-state, where the nation-state becomes the focus of, or is related to, the object of one's devotion or faith [48]. Robert Bellah, who coined the term "civil religion" [48] began his career in Japanese Studies, one reviewer pointed out to us, and Bellah argued, this reviewer also noted, that Shinto has functioned as the civil religion of Japan. In a similar vein, Protestant Christianity is intimately related to American civil religion, where sentiments such as "In God We Trust," however vague, still seem to refer to the God of Christianity, as evidenced by the fact that Christian—not Jewish, Muslim, or other—holidays are nationally recognized, even if in a somewhat secularized manner with phrases such as "Happy Holidays" in place of "Merry Christmas."

Following Bellah's logic [48], one can observe that American civil religion has its own myths (such as George Washington and the cherry tree), rituals (such as the Pledge of the Allegiance), sacred songs (such as the national anthem), sacred days (such as the 4th of July), saints (such as Abraham Lincoln or "Honest Abe"), sacred places (such as the White House and the Alamo), sacred texts (such as the Constitution and the Bill of Rights), and sacred history (such as the War of Independence and World War II)—as well as its own sins (such as slavery and Watergate). Faith, in American civil religion, takes the form of patriotism—an idealization of the nation-state.

A key component of this patriotism has been a belief in superiority and in progress—a belief that America has become and will continue to be the uncontested, but not the unchallenged, superpower of the world, and that this superpower can give us safety and security, and that all of this has been, as it were, God's will [49]. The three losses related to 9/11 have challenged this idealization of America. There has been, by necessity, a cultural de-idealization of American power in terms of the military and the economy, a loss that is bluntly reflected in the gap in the New York City skyline. The loss here is,

as Freud put it, "the loss of some abstraction . . . such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on" [50, p. 243]. America, we suggest, experienced such a loss on and after 9/11—one that we are far from working-through.

4.3. Who is Doing the "Mourning"?

The first answer to the question *"Who is doing the mourning?"* is those who lost loved ones on 9/11—that is, the family members and friends of the victims. Some of them, as noted, have spoken out on this controversy, stating that it is insensitive and offensive to them that a mosque would be built so close to Ground Zero [51].

The second answer to *Who is doing the "mourning"?* is that some New Yorkers have been offended by the building plans as well, even if they did not personally lose a family member or friend. The attack on their city is, to some extent, a personal attack to the extent that they identify with their city [52].

And the third answer to the question *Who is doing the "mourning"?* is Americans with a certain kind of patriotism, a kind of patriotism that has been described in the work of psychologist of religion Ryan LaMothe [49]. This patriotism appears to remain more or less unaffected by the fact that there were no weapons of mass destruction found in Iraq [53], and it is a kind of patriotism that, apparently, was not disillusioned by the scandals at Abu Ghraib [54] or, more recently, by the number of civilian deaths in Afghanistan [55]. There is, moreover, a competitive spirit in this patriotism: America is believed to be, or is supposed to be, the strongest, the richest, the freest, the smartest, the most-hardworking, and most morally pure nation on the planet. America, in this point-of-view, is, as Morone has observed, a city on the hill, a light to the nations, God's chosen people [56]. And the fact that "the enemy"—Islam, in this case, and to these patriots—could, as it were, complete their own "monument" before America has completed its memorial at Ground Zero offends the competitive spirit of such patriots, though, also in the spirit of competition, these patriots do not want mosques to be built at all, not just near Ground Zero, but anywhere in the country. Muslims, it seems, are the new Soviets in this brand of patriotism, which is why many Americans, it seems, cannot distinguish between Islam and radical Islam—Soviets are Soviets, Muslims are Muslims, the enemy is the enemy.

The focus of our analysis will be on the kind of patriots described above and their inability to mourn. One might also wonder how American Muslims mourn 9/11, and what role the Park51 project plays in their mourning. Our analysis, however, is more about understanding American civil religion than understanding Islam in America. We would welcome, to be sure, further reflection on these other aspects of mourning.

4.4. How is "Mourning" Manifesting Itself?

We suggest that the Park51 controversy is an expression of a kind of mourning resulting from the de-idealization of American civil religion particularly with regard to American military and economic power. What we have here is not so much a mourning *of* American civil religion but, rather, *a melancholic holding onto* American civil religion—that is to say, this is a case of incomplete mourning, perhaps, even, a case of cultural pathology.

A few definitions and applications are in order to unpack and to demonstrate this thesis. What is the difference between mourning and melancholia? Grief is an emotional response to a loss, and mourning is the process of working-through the loss [57]. Melancholia, however, is an emotional state, or a psychodynamic situation, in which one is unable to mourn completely or at all [58]. One distinction that Freud [50] makes is that situations giving rise to melancholia are more ambiguous than those that give rise to mourning. If, for example, a family member is living in a persistent vegetative state, this living in limbo is, usually, much harder on the family than if the person had died [59; cf. 60], and, as one peer reviewer of this article pointed out, the limbo experiences of persistent vegetative states have generated some of the most influential, and difficult, cases in bioethics, such as the case of Karen Ann Quinlan. It is the ambiguity of "Is our loved one dead or alive?" that complicates grief. In recent counseling literature, these situations, following Boss, are referred to as "ambiguous loss" [58]. Or, as Freud put it, "[M]elancholia contains something more than normal mourning. In melancholia the relation to the object is no simple one; it is complicated by the conflict due to ambivalence" [50, p. 256].

We suggest that 9/11 represents an ambiguous loss for America, and that America, at this point in time, is not so much engaging in mourning but, rather, experiencing melancholia. In support of this view, we offer these two observations:

1. we are still in limbo [60] with regard to the three losses that we mentioned above, as
    a. the United States is still engaged in an ambiguous war in Afghanistan, and some wonder if we will be able to achieve any kind of meaningful victory there, not unlike Vietnam;
    b. while the economy has recovered in recent years, the United States is still in a recession, and our political and economic situation, both domestically and globally, remains unstable, most recently in relation to our response to political upheaval in various countries in the Middle East, as well as with regard to the tsunami that has devastated some parts of Japan; and
    c. the World Trade Center has not been rebuilt; and
2. a permanent memorial has not been completed at Ground Zero, so the wound has not, as it were, been able to close.

It is striking that 9/11 memorials have been established in other places—at the Pentagon, for example [61]—but these memorials have not been able to do the cultural work of mourning that will be required of the memorial that will be at the site of Ground Zero.

Freud [50] also distinguished between mourning and melancholia in terms of their psychodynamics. In mourning, one gives up (de-cathects) one's love object, experiences grief on account of this loss, engages in mourning practices in some form, and then redirects one's love energies (libido) toward a new love object—this is the basic process of mourning, though it is not, to be sure, simply linear. In melancholia, however, one does not give up one's love object but, rather, internalizes the love object, and the rage that one feels toward the love object becomes directed toward the self. This rage subsequently manifests itself in the symptoms of melancholia. To quote Freud:

> If the love for the object—a love which cannot be given up though the object itself is given up—takes refuge in narcissistic identification, then . . . hate comes into operation on this substitutive

> object, abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from its suffering. The self-tormenting in melancholia, which is without doubt enjoyable, signifies . . . a satisfaction of trends of sadism and hate which relate to an object, and which have been turned around upon the subject's own self. [50, p. 251]

The symptoms of melancholia that Freud observed in his patients—such as sleeplessness, depleted energy, loss of appetite, feelings of worthlessness, loss of interest in the outside world—are a manifestation of rage directed toward the love object that has become internalized. In other words, in melancholia rage becomes directed (displaced) toward the self.

We suggest that Freud's comments about melancholia are relevant to the Park51 controversy. If we are right that the losses that we mentioned above are related to American civil religion, and if this object—this ideal—is not given up but is nevertheless to some extent lost, then one would expect a certain amount of rage to manifest itself in some way related to the loss. We observe such cultural rage manifesting itself in two primary ways:

1. rather than directing rage toward symbols related to the loss of military and economic power, cultural rage has been directed toward:

    a. American Muslims involved with the Park51 project by means of protests;

    b. American Muslims building mosques and community centers in other parts of the United States by means of harassment; and

    c. numerous mosques in the United States by means of vandalism; and

2. Muslims across the world by means of threats to burn the Qur'an, as well as actual burnings.

In other words, because the various losses that we have mentioned with regard to American civil religion have not been worked-through or even necessarily acknowledged, let alone accepted, we suggest that the protests regarding the building of the Islamic Community Center at Park51 and the protests regarding the building of mosques in other places, as well as the vandalism of various mosques across the country, can be viewed as an expression of cultural melancholic rage.

This rage, we suggest, is the result of the de-idealization of American civil religion, and we believe that it has been displaced onto American Muslims. One could hold the view that this is, in a sense, a kind of self-directed rage, since much of the rage is being directed at American citizens, that is, American Muslims. However, this rage is also other-directed in that American Muslims, like other minorities, are often treated *de facto* as second-class citizens or as not "real" Americans. In this sense, this expression of rage reflects an externalization of rage. According to Freud's logic in "Mourning and Melancholia" [50], one might expect, then, that this rage, in the long run, could wear itself out and, therefore, be therapeutic for the culture. But the problem with this point of view, in this case, is that the loss continues to be denied if American Muslims remain the target of this cultural expression of rage. A more appropriate expression of rage would seem to be protests against the various military engagements that we now find ourselves in—such protests are quite regular in Washington, D.C.—and protests against the various ways policy makers take economic stands, for example, by limiting or eliminating the power of labor unions (see, for example, the recent protests in Wisconsin [62]). Whatever one thinks about our wars and our budgets, these protests—those in Washington, D.C and

those in Wisconsin—are more closely related to the losses that we have described and, therefore, would seem to be more therapeutic for our culture, according to Freud's logic.

Another option for release, as Capps has argued in a various places [63], is humor. If humor can be directed at the love object, this can go a long way in externalizing rage in safe and productive ways [64]. This kind of release, we suggest, occurs when comedians, such as Jon Stewart on *The Daily Show*, playfully criticize America with jokes—jokes that are pointed directly at American civil religion, and, for this very reason, are effective, psychologically speaking, for the culture. This suggests that comedians play an important role in the psychological health of groups and cultures.

5. Conclusions

It is striking that various commentators have claimed that Ground Zero is "sacred ground" [65]. It is as though the very act of sacrifice makes something sacred. In this case, in the realm of American civil religion, the lives lost on 9/11 simply could not be lost—their lives had to become sacrifices if their deaths were to have any meaning, and, therefore, the ground also becomes hallowed. Religion and sacrifice, it seems, go hand-in-hand, as both are attempting to make death meaningful, as Berger suggests [66]. Religion, that is to say, turns death into sacrifice. And the idea of making death into a sacrifice and ground into sacred space is a way of making meaning out of loss—this is why Ground Zero has become a sacred space for American civil religion.

Yet the wound itself has remained sacred in this case, as no memorial has been erected to contain the emotions that continue to bleed out from the site. But it is not, to be sure, as though one could just build a monument to push ahead the mourning—the culture needs to be ready to mourn. We do not know how long this will take, or even what such mourning will look like, or even what it should look like. (One peer reviewer of this article suggested to us that adding the names of the victims lost on or because of 9/11 to the future memorial could be helpful for the mourning process of 9/11, just as adding the names of those lost to the Vietnam War to the Vietnam Wall has been helpful in the mourning process of the Vietnam War. This reviewer also noted that there might be some kind of analogy possible between the Vietnam Wall and the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem along the lines of the mourning religion thesis; this analogy, it seems to us, is worth pursuing, though we do not have space to pursue it here). But, in any case, we look forward to the day when Muslims are no longer viewed as enemies, a day when Christians and Muslims in this country can love one another, can protest together, and can laugh together. This, we believe, will be one sign that a productive mourning has taken place.

Mark R. Cohen has claimed that "The presence of . . . mosques like the one planned near Ground Zero, which will be an educational center as well as a place of prayer, is one good way of transcending . . . ignorance" [67]. While this sentiment may be true, and this is, perhaps, what we all hope for, it does not explain the controversy. We think our colleagues on the panel in which this paper was originally delivered are correct in identifying political theatre and Islamophobia as key factors in this controversy. We also think, however, that cultural mourning plays a role, which is why it seems that "transcending ignorance" may be premature, and why this debate must pay attention to the emotions at hand, that is, the non-rational forces that are at work here.

In other words, and to quote Akbar Ahmed:

> I don't think the Muslim leadership has fully appreciated the impact of 9/11 on America. They assume Americans have forgotten 9/11 and even, in a profound way, forgiven 9/11, and that has not happened. The wounds remain largely open . . . and when wounds are raw, an episode like constructing a house of worship—even one protected by the Constitution, protected by law—becomes like salt in the wounds [68].

One could disagree with Akbar's indictment of Muslim leadership, but our citation of him here is simply to ground our perspective not in reason but in emotion. While this controversy can and should be viewed through other lenses, such as law and history, this controversy cannot be understood without attention to emotion. People want something more than context, politics, and ethics when interpreting events such as these—they want to know *why* these events happen, and this "why" often has a psychological core to the question. Cultural situations such as the Park51 controversy cry out for psychological analysis, perspectives that psychology of religion can offer.

In these reflections, we have tried to provide a perspective on understanding this "salt in the wound." We have suggested that the Park51 controversy can be understood as a cultural melancholic reaction of rage, which manifested itself in protests with regard to the building of mosques, especially the one in Park51, threats to burn the Qur'an (as well as an actual burning), and vandalism of existing mosques. These expressions of rage are externalizations of the internal cultural rage—rage over the disappointment, disillusionment, and de-idealization of American military and economic power, the very material of American civil religion, of which certain patriots are both proud and ashamed. The immediate response after the 9/11 attacks resulted in a resurgence of American civil religion—churches were full, flags were hung high [69]—but, in time, American civil religion would face de-idealization. Rather than mourning this loss, however, it seems that these patriots held on even more tightly, denying the loss and manifesting an inability to mourn and, it now seems, an inability to live with the loss—an inability to live with insecurity.

Nearly ten years after 9/11, one cannot help but take stock of where we've been, and what we've accomplished. The fact that the World Trade Center has not been rebuilt and the fact that a permanent memorial has not been established at Ground Zero would add, in the minds of some, insult to injury if a mosque were built in the neighborhood. It is as though the very idea of the proposed Islamic Community Center serves as a reminder of the various losses that America experienced on 9/11 and during the following decade. And it is as though the Islamic Community Center threatens to fill the gap in the New York City skyline, if only symbolically. Some kind of closure is needed, but it is not precisely clear yet what kind of closure is needed because it is not clear what we would or should be mourning: the literal losses incurred on 9/11—some 3,000 lives, a few planes, and a few buildings—or the losses that run a bit deeper in our cultural psyche—the security and safety that we have so cherished and, therefore, a portion of our self-regard? In any case, in terms of the mourning religion thesis, there has not been an individuation from the various losses that we have mentioned and, therefore, no new meaning has been created, *other than making the loss itself sacred*. The plans to build Freedom Tower, the building to replace the Twin Towers, seem significant in this regard, as Freedom Tower will be 1776 feet tall—the most sacred year in American civil religion. These very plans seem to further corroborate the mourning religion thesis and its usefulness for understanding civil religion.

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