

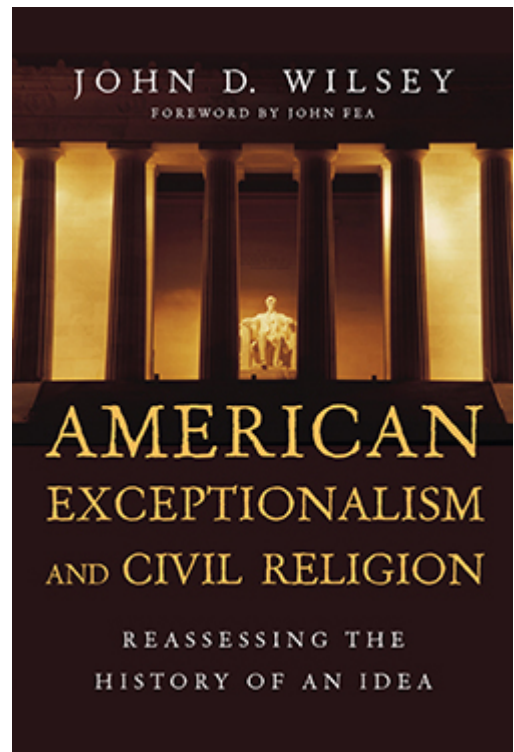
# Review: American Exceptionalism and Civil Religion

August 1, 2016

***American Exceptionalism and Civil Religion: Reassessing the History of an Idea***

By John D. Wilsey (IVP Academic)

According to a 2010 Gallup poll, cited in the book's introduction, 80 percent of Americans believe America possess "a unique character" that makes it "the greatest country in the world." How should a Christian view these claims? Can American Exceptionalism and the Christian faith coexist? Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary professor John D. Wilsey attempts to answer these questions in *American Exceptionalism and Civil Religion*.



Wilsey differentiates between two competing ideas of American Exceptionalism—closed and open. The first is based in an idea of American superiority and choosiness; the second is based on the high standards set forth in the nation's founding. The former is incompatible with Christianity; the later provides a model for Christian civic engagement, he says. Wilsey

distinguishes between these two as he traces the historical development and the theology of American Exceptionalism.

Readers looking for a Christian approach to civic engagement will find much to appreciate in Wilsey's work. His theology of American Civil Religion is unique and well-written, and his suggestions for a new model of American Exceptionalism are creative and hopeful. Although not all readers will agree with Wilsey, his book provides a helpful ground to think both critically and optimistically about the American worldview.

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