You may have missed it in the run-up to the election, but one of the most anticipated video games of the fall was released. No, not “Halo 4” for the Xbox, but “Assassin’s Creed 3,” which actually is the fifth game in the series.

In these games, the main character spends a lot of his time climbing up buildings, running across roofs and leaping the gaps between them. And what buildings they are! Set in medieval Jerusalem and Damascus as well as Renaissance Venice, Rome and Constantinople, the games are based on detailed 3-D photos of the historic buildings in these cities. It is quite an experience to scale the wall of the Blue Mosque’s minaret, to leap across the parapets of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, and to crawl spider-like up the Pantheon’s ceiling in Rome -- even if only in a video game.

“Assassins Creed 3” represents a significant change from previous games. The action takes place during America’s Revolutionary War, and the main character’s initial goal is to protect George Washington from assassination attempts. Along the way, he takes part in the Boston Tea Party, works with Paul Revere and appears in numerous events of the Revolution. This is historical fiction reshaped quite smartly as an interactive video game.

The new story line takes the action out of the urban settings of the previous games and places it in the countryside (think “Red Dead Redemption”). Most of the climbing takes place in trees, on cliffs and on boulder piles left by glaciers. When buildings are involved, they rarely rise higher than two or three stories.

But the biggest change actually happens with the role of religion in the story. It has essentially disappeared. Only the Native Americans are shown doing or saying anything even vaguely religious, and that is quickly passed over. The towns contain churches, but they are largely ignored -- although the Old North Church of Paul Revere fame gets attention.

By contrast, the plots and the settings of the previous games were steeped in religion.

The first “Assassin’s Creed” takes place during the Crusades, with Christian and Muslim armies in great battles. The main plot features two shadowy groups, the Assassins and the Templars, both of which have secret mystical and religious leanings that allow them to position members on both sides of the war. Many of the key buildings are religious shrines, mosques and churches, standing alongside castles and other fortifications.

The next two games, AC2 and AC Brotherhood, take place in Renaissance Italy, with the plot featuring conflict within Christianity. The struggle between the Templars and Assassins ultimately rises to involve the papacy and “Brotherhood’s” move to Rome, enabling the play to encompass the many churches and other religious buildings of Rome, as well as ancient structures such as the Forum and the Coliseum.

The fourth “Assassin’s Creed” game, known as “Revelations,” occurs in Constantinople (i.e., Istanbul) a few years after its fall to Muslim armies. The fights between the Templars and Assassins happen against the background of dynastic struggles within the ruling Ottoman family. But religion remains an important component of the game’s physical setting, with action taking place in the Hagia Sophia church (by then converted to a mosque), Istanbul’s famous Blue Mosque, as well as many lesser known mosques.

The continual presence of religion in the first four “Assassin’s Creed” games makes its absence in “Assassins’ Creed 3” quite striking. Eighteenth-century America was filled with a variety of Christian groups, from Congregationalists and Presbyterians to Quakers and Anglicans and even a few Jews and Catholics -- to say nothing of the Deism of many colonial leaders. Although the Revolution was political, it had deep theological underpinnings.

While I applaud this game’s role-playing opportunity, which gives its players ring-side seats at the American Revolution, I am disappointed that its recreation of historical realism is missing a key component of the society.

Why would the game’s creators make such a radical change, given their approach to previous games? I can only guess, but I suggest two reasons.

On the one hand, the different Christian groups came to America for religious freedom; that freedom revealed the differences and vitriolic disagreements among them. To present a realistic picture, the game would need to show difference, rather than the unity with which the country faced the British.

On the other hand, current debates over the role of religion in today’s American culture would have latched onto any display of religion at the time of the nation’s founding and used it to their own advantage. These present-day cultural fights over the role of religion inspired the game’s creators to avoid controversy altogether and edit out the religious circumstances of the time.

(Note: Thanks to Conor McCracken-Flesher for his gaming expertise.)

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