

When “Civil Religion” Becomes “Political Religion”: The Special Case of Great Britain

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Abstract

Recently there has been a renewed interest in the study of ‘civil religion’ from a comparative perspective. Some literature developed around the concept tends to present civil religion as a universally applicable theory. This study agrees that the theory of civil religion is, in fact, a universally valid theory since every functioning society needs a type of religion or civil religion. The article further argues, however, that every society has its own unique set of local, ethnic, historical, socio-political, and religious characteristics that make it different from other societies in certain important respects. Therefore, any civil religion that emerges in one society may differ in form and content from other societies however much they may have in common. This article aims to prove this by analysing the special case of Great Britain.

Key Words: Civil Religion, Great Britain, Coronation, Queen, Armistice Day, Nationalism, Political Religion

Öz

“Sivil Din” “Politik Din”e Dönüşünce: Büyük Britanya Örneği

Sivil din tartışmaları etrafında gelişen literatürün önemli bir kısmının, kavramı evrenselleştirerek her toplum için geçerli bir teori olarak ele alma eğilimde olduğu anlaşılıyor. Buna göre her fonksiyonel toplum sivil din veya sivil din-benzeri bir oluşuma ihtiyaç duyar. Bu çalışma sivil din kavramının her fonksiyonel toplumda farklı form ve içerikle de olsa var olduğu tezine katılmakla birlikte, “toplumların kendi biricik tarihsel tecrübeleri, din-kültür ilişkileri ve demografik yapıları, her toplumun kendi karakterini temsil eden evrenselliğe direnen bir sivil din yaratmasını kaçınılmaz kılar” tezini sosyal gerçeklikle daha fazla örtüşen bir tez olarak görmektedir. Makale, söz konusu tezi Büyük Britanya örneği üzerinden analiz etmeyi hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar Kavramlar: Sivil Din, Büyük Britanya, Taç giyme Töreni, Kraliçe, Ateşkes Günü, Milliyetçilik, Siyasi Din

Background of the Problem

In 1967 the American sociologist Robert Bellah wrote the essay “Civil Religion in America.” This essay was a starting point for the research and discussion of the theory of civil religion and attempted to “identify the actual tenets of civil religion.”¹ Bellah states that “few have realized that there actually exists alongside of and rather clearly differentiated from the churches an elaborate and well-institutionalized civil religion in America.”² For Bellah and for many sociologists of the time, civil religion was neither an institutional religion nor was it just an aspect of nationalism; it was a ‘religion’ that combined both aspects that could be seen to be upheld by all citizens of a nation, “an institutionalized collection of sacred beliefs about the American nation.”³

Taken originally from the work of Rousseau and Durkheim, civil religion in America became evident to Bellah and Casanova in modern day America and was illustrated by the inaugural speeches given by Presidents of the United States of America. Whilst acknowledging the appearance of the terms ‘God’ for example in the speech given by John F. Kennedy in 1961 “I have sworn before you and Almighty God the same solemn oath our forebears prescribed nearly a century and three quarters ago,”⁴ Bellah notes that the reference does not refer to any particular God belonging to a religious tradition but that of a civil God, a ‘God of America.’ Civil religion in America therefore incorporates nationalism but also includes religiously orientated elements “that the great majority of Americans share.”⁵

Is civil religion, as developed by Bellah, a universally applicable theory to explain the nature of the relationship between religion, politics, and culture in any given society? Can it be reflected amongst all countries whose history of the relations between religion and state have been different as not all countries are disconnected from church and state as is the case in the US?

¹ Gail Gehrig, “The American Civil Religion Debate: A Source for Theory Construction,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 20:1 (1981), p.57.

² Robert Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 96:1 (1967), p.1.

³ Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” p.2.

⁴ Mike Purdy, “JFK’s Religion as Reflected in His Inaugural Address,” <http://presidentialhistory.com/2015/04/jfks-religion-as-reflected-in-his-inaugural-address.html> (07.06.2017).

⁵ Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” p.3.

It is this point which makes, for instance, Great Britain a special case worth of investigation since the state in Great Britain is different merely because the head of State, the monarch, is also supreme head of the Church of England. If this the case, then where does that leave civil religion amongst its citizens? This essay will show the existence of civil religion in the special case that is Great Britain in which civil and religious partners share a civil religion rather than forming a completely new group. By looking at Great Britain’s history briefly, its monarchy, the effects of the media and examples of civil religion in contemporary Great Britain, this essay will show evidence of a unique type of civil religion that exists despite claims that it cannot exist because of its links between church and state.

Civil Religion as a Theory

The idea of civil religion was set out by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in 1762. In his publication *The Social Contract* he showed how a spiritual and moral basis is essential for any modern society. Calling civil religion “social cement” he explains in his book the dogmas of civil religion “the existence of God, the life to come, the reward of virtue and the punishment of vice and the exclusion of religious intolerance.”⁶ For Rousseau the concept of civil religion was important for their contemporary enlightenment revolutionaries as it made civil religion a “sensible thing for leaders to create and encourage.”⁷ This can be seen to be taken on by various American leaders when rallying for election, support or social change, a conjuring up of public spirit and unity. However, although Rousseau’s theory of civil religion was the first, the findings of Rousseau’s “intellectual heir,”⁸ Emile Durkheim was equally influential in the findings of modern day civil religion. In his publication *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim notes that in a society, a collective group of people together will form a ‘civil’ religion, common to all citizens although he never uses the expression ‘civil religion.’ Unlike with Rousseau, Durkheim believes that civil religion is not just a tool that leaders conjure up; but that is in fact an “emergent property of social life itself;”⁹ something that is necessary for a civil and stable society stating that “men who feel themselves united, partially by bonds of blood, but still more

⁶ Jean J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1947), pp.123-124.

⁷ Phillip Hammond, “Pluralism and Law in the Formation of American Civil Religion,” in: Robert Bellah and P. Hammond (eds.), *Varieties of Civil Religion* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), p.138.

⁸ Hammond, “Pluralism and Law.”, p.138.

⁹ Hammond, “Pluralism and Law.”, p.138.

by a community of interest and tradition, assemble and become conscious of their moral unity.”¹⁰ Clearly, Durkheim is opting for an element that would make it possible to unite citizens around a common goal through a type of belief system, consisted of symbols and rituals, which are the basis of every functioning society. Here the truthfulness or falsity, or, rather, usefulness of these rituals and symbols are measured not against their essentiality but their functionality.

We witness Bellah embodying the view of Durkheim and Rousseau, the most influential figures in his concept of civil religion, pointing out the existence of civil religion in American society by concretizing the theory.¹¹ In this context, civil religion in America makes itself felt on various themes such as presidency, citizenship, religion, national holidays, important figures in the American history, God, and holy times and places. The meaning and significance attributed to these phenomena emanate from a variety of religious, cultural, mythological, and national sentiments. Case in point is George Washington who was elevated to sainthood and portrayed as God’s instrument and even as a demigod, a process called *apotheosis*. In life and death, he has been seen as ‘the deliverer of America,’ ‘the American Moses,’ like the Jewish Moses who delivered his people from bondage in Egypt and led them to the ‘Promised Land.’¹²

The concept of civil religion is a useful tool, or even an ideal type, for Bellah to discover the meaning, significance, and function of certain symbols and rituals in the United States and elsewhere. Although expecting to find the same concept with the same form and content in different societies would be an ontological, epistemological and methodological problem, civil religion in different societies can be investigated by discovering its unique representations for each society in their unique historical, cultural, national, and religious contexts for which Britain serves as a striking case.

Civil Religion: The Special Case of Great Britain

The quasi-religious, semi-nationalistic sense of a civil religion has become evident in countries such as America in which the head of state (the president) holds no religious affiliation *de jure*. The idea of ‘believing without belonging’ to a religion, but belonging and believing in a state religion,

¹⁰ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Swain (New York: Free Press, 1961), p.62.

¹¹ Kemal Ataman, *Ulus Olmanın Kutsal Temeli: Sivil Din* (Ankara: Sentez Yayıncılık, 2014), pp.53-54.

¹² Ataman, *Sivil Din*, p.69.

that of civil religion, can easily be achieved in America’s growing pluralistic and diverse society because matters of a religious denominative God are left to private institutions rather than affiliating themselves with the state. It is therefore why the special position of Britain is unique and deserves closer examination. A country that shares its importance and allegiance to both the church and the state cannot possibly be compared to a country such as America that does not. This does not, however, deprive Great Britain of having its own, unique civil religion.

Unlike Great Britain, America’s civil religion is “structurally differentiated from both the political community and the religious community.”¹³ Since Great Britain does not have this obvious differentiation, its civil religion can, at times, be harder to notice. Great Britain’s civil religion lends itself more to a ‘Constantinian’ mould of civil religion whereby religion can co-exist with politics and the state where there is a matter of choice for the people. For Constantine’s citizens, Christianity was not enforced, but it was tolerated. Although the two models are not entirely the same because Great Britain’s monarch is in fact the head of the Church of England, similarities can be drawn between the two societies. It is this marriage of the two, the borrowing from both traditions that makes up Great Britain’s civil religion, and what makes it so unique in its makeup.

Great Britain’s modern day position of church and state does not lend itself to the medieval sense of the word, where matters of politics were also matters of the church as Great Britain has its own separate political system. It also is differentiated from the old model because the monarch, although technically head of the Church of England, lends his/her authority for most of the time to a team of elected ecclesia, headed by the Archbishop of Canterbury. His/her role can therefore be seen a more representational and removes religion from its more dominant role in the medieval courts.

The position of the British Royal Family is particularly important when investigating the state of civil religion in Great Britain for they “convey a sense of Britishness”¹⁴ amongst the nation. The Queen’s role with the church and the state means that her position can be representational for all: for a religious believer, for a secularist or for neither. Many of the British people

¹³ Gail Gehrig, *American Civil Religion: An Assessment* (Connecticut: Society for the Scientific Study of Religion Monograph Series, 1979), p.88.

¹⁴ Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (London: Blackwell, 1994), p.86.

seem to have consoled themselves that Great Britain's distinctiveness resides, both in the past and in the present, in its monarchy and the Royal Family as one commentator puts it:

Its existence means safety, stability and continued national prestige: it promises religious sanction and moral leadership; it is 'above party' focus for group identification; it means gaiety, excitement and the satisfaction of ceremonial pageantry; it is an important, and perhaps increasingly important, symbol of national prestige.¹⁵

As already illustrated before, the position of civil religion in Great Britain is hard to define or immediately pinpoint in society; it rather hides itself in society yet unites it throughout certain times in a year. The 'neutral' position of civil religion means it can encapsulate and include any person of any religious and ethnic background or political belief as long as he/she is ready to accept and respect the common symbols, dates, figures, values related to society, and ceremonial practices and respect the "Britishness" of the Britons. This seems to be the most common theme that can be observed in any civil religion. Seen from this perspective, it can be argued that although no two 'civil religions' are alike, there are enough similarities among them to use the same label as they are externalized and objectified in various societies.

The best and possibly only way of explaining and defining British civil religion is by showing examples as to where it is highlighted in society. For almost all countries, memorials held to the fallen in battle nearly all show a glimpse of civil religion that exists. A memorial that is neither religious, in the ordinary sense of the word, nor related to the state takes place, attended by those citizens who belong to one, both or neither institution. This common group, gathered together makes up the members of a civil religion to be counted as a member or believer of British civil religion.

In Great Britain, the 11th November marks Armistice Day and the following Sunday marks Remembrance Sunday; a day in Great Britain that fulfills a plethora of needs – "to recollect those who have died in the service of their country, to remember their families and to celebrate their lives."¹⁶ This service may take place in a church and yet they are regarded as civil events, "inasmuch as the stories they commemorate are not so much about

¹⁵ Paul Ward, *Britishness Since 1870* (London: Routledge, 2004), p.31.

¹⁶ Duncan B. Forrester, *Encounter with God* (London: Clarke International, 2004), p.217.

what it means to be a church-member, but rather about what it means to be a British citizen."¹⁷ It is a festival, a commemoration that religious people can partake in with their non-Christian neighbors as sharers of the same civil religion. It is here where civil and confessional religion overlap with each other and quite happily too. Examples such as this show Great Britain's unique civil religion and a happiness to share and borrow experiences from both aspects; religious and state, both aspects that the monarch encompasses. The act of civil religious remembrance still happens when Britain remembers soldiers who die in modern warfare for example in Iraq and Afghanistan. As many soldiers who died returned, there were street-filled processions of the coffin before going to the funeral. Here too, we can see how a sense of civil religion becomes more evident in Great Britain, with ceremonies and memorials combining both religion and state, together forming a union and respecting each other.

Civil religion in Great Britain can also be seen when matters of controversy or debate stop either the church or the state from exercising power although they may have the right to do so. Out of this controversy generally comes a middle way, or to put it in Aquinas's terms, a 'golden mean,' this golden mean for many British people is where civil religion sits. Examples of such happenings can be seen in the controversy that appeared over the type of memorial/service of thanksgiving that should occur to remember the end of the Falkland's war in 1982. The state wanted a more nationalistic service of celebration over Great Britain's victory over the Argentinians. However, the church, in particular the Dean of St. Paul's did not wish, and did not permit, a service of such nationalistic nature deeming that "the loss of life on both sides was not something to give thanks for."¹⁸ This created a sense of conflict between the church and the state. It meant that the state "could not always assume that they had a 'tame' church in the Church of England"¹⁹ and the Church of England could not assume that they had overall say of the nation. What made the issue even more sensitive and controversial for some church leaders, was that there were Christians on both sides who lost their lives for their respective countries; namely England and Argentina. How could the church celebrate the deaths of its 'coreligionist ene-

¹⁷ Andrew Shanks, *God and Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.30.

¹⁸ Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945*, p.87.

¹⁹ Robert Boccock, "Religion in Modern Britain," in: Robert Boccock and Kenneth Thompson (eds.), *Religion and Ideology: A Reader* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p.213.

mies' in a secular war between the two nations? For Grace Davie and Robert Boccock, as mentioned above, "it represented a fragmentation of the Church and state relationship."²⁰ Grace Davie goes even further and argues that "it was a powerful example of the Church challenging the state rather than legitimating its activities."²¹ Lawson believes that this interpretation is "overstating the significance of the events as the issue was only of short-term importance, and it was largely a controversy due to misinterpretation and mistaken perceptions of what was expected."²² We disagree with Lawson in that, this case was not an isolated incident; there have been plenty of similar examples where Church and state collided over similar issues.²³ For the purpose of this paper and conversation, however, we agree with Lawson that this particular event was a short-term importance because it is out of this crisis that the sphere of the civil religion emerged and be made visible. Together both Church and State were able to find a middle way by holding a church service of remembrance whilst having remembrances outside of the church too. The civil religion therefore in Great Britain can be seen as different from the American state that Bellah describes, as its structure is not different, it is not a completely separate religion, it is an accumulation of the two, two extremes that are shared and respected by a whole society regardless of religion or political views. One might argue that the British civil religion is closer to the state in Great Britain than it is the case in the US. This, of course is, a valid assessment to certain extent. However, a more nuanced analysis seems to suggest that the British civil religion emerges at the intersection of religion and state.

This controversy did, however, bring to the service some demanding questions in regard to the need and the future of civil religion in Great Britain. What if the church-going statistics continued to decline? It would seem that if this were the case then civil religion would no longer become the median of two representational stances of the monarch and civil religion, in the way that it exists in Britain would cease to exist. Without the strength of the church, would services of remembrance hold no religious dimension? In order to address this question we then must ask ourselves the fundamental question: Is Rousseau's political interpretation of civil religion correct or is

²⁰ Tom Lawson, *God and War: The Church of England and Armed Conflict in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 2016), p.185.

²¹ Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945*, p.87.

²² Lawson, *God and War*, p.185.

²³ For a detailed study of the subject-matter, see Boccock, "Religion in Modern Britain."

the Durkheimian sociological interpretation? For Rousseau civil religion was needed and invented by politicians to create a sense of unity and belonging to a nation, a man-made term. For Durkheim however, civil religion is spontaneously formed, through no individual political agent, but by the public themselves, arguing that it is an “emergent property of social life itself.”²⁴ In other words, for Rousseau, a type of religion, preferably “civil,” is needed for a functioning state; if there was none, then it had to be created as he himself did in *The Social Contract*. For Durkheim, on the other hand, in order for a society to function properly, it too has to have a religion, which creates a “collective consciousness” or common morality to keep members of any given society united.²⁵ If it were a political aspect of propaganda then civil religion would find it hard to manifest itself amongst the special case, that is Great Britain, because of the relationship between the church and the state. It therefore seems that the Durkheimian model fits better with the British model; a civil religion emerging out of a society naturally rather than it being implemented. However, the fact that every citizen is expected to take part in and show respect to public and state ceremonies, symbols, and institutions make the subject matter more sophisticated than it appears.

Another example of the unique case and the existence of civil religion in Great Britain is shown during a monarch’s coronation. As we have previously mentioned, the monarch is both head of the state and of the Church of England and so it is with his/her coronation that both aspects, both groups, are brought together and co-exist under the same umbrella of civil religion for this particular ceremony. The Coronation is both a religious and a state event; happening in Westminster Abbey and also being important for and attended by the state officials. It was however in 1953 that sociologists began to ask questions as to the nature of the service and to whom it was serving; they debated “whether or not the Coronation was designed to reflect the construction of an underlying unity in British society.”²⁶ Parallels were again drawn between whether the model in Great Britain was more similar to Rousseau’s political theory or Durkheim’s sociological theory but in the end, the decision was unanimous, whichever model was being used by the coronation “there could be no doubt that the creators of this particular example of

²⁴ Hammond, “Pluralism and Law in the Formation of American Civil Religion,” p.138.

²⁵ Ataman, *Sivil Din*, pp.48-54.

²⁶ Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945*, p.87.

civil religion were all ‘on the same side’.”²⁷ It can be clearly noted that events and “rituals focusing on the royal family form a central component of a British civil religion”²⁸ and it is because of that, that Great Britain’s state of civil religion is different from the civil religion of any other country especially America’s.

One of the stark differences between the civil religion of America and Great Britain is that, in America, when the new President is inaugurated, the ceremony does not take place in a religious building but at the United States Congress in Washington. Yet, as Bellah notes, the term ‘god,’ which has a vague meaning or multiple meanings, appears strongly in almost every inaugural address. This non-denominational God, the nationalistic God of civil religion does not appear so much in British culture, which is another difference between British and American civil religions. Whether it is because of the state relationship with the church or the founding principles of the two countries were a bit complicated and different (Britain mainly on Christian and later on liberal values and principles; America on freedom of religious choice and on the Enlightenment values), the matter remains that the two deistic aspects of both civil societies are different and incomparable. This Church presence at civil ceremonies in Britain such as a coronation or in more recent times the Queen’s Golden Jubilee, adds a sacred aspect to the civil religious community. British citizens can appreciate privately what an event such as a coronation can mean for them privately; but members of Britain’s civil religion, its citizens, celebrate the occasion’s public outcome with a sense of unity.

The unity presented in society between the church, the state and the community are constantly being re-enforced through the medium of the media. Its role, “particularly of television in the post-war period is crucial in this reinforcement.”²⁹ Through broadcastings of events such as coronations and other civil events that may previously seemed merely religious, the monarchy’s activity was transformed into publically “something sacred as well as something national.”³⁰ With the use of broadcasting, national pride

²⁷ The Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II was another interesting religio-sociological controversy about another civic ritual event. See Boccock, “Religion in Modern Britain,” pp.214-217; Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945*, p.87.

²⁸ Anne Rowbottom, “Following the Queen: The Place of the Royal Family in the Context of Royal Visits and Civil Religion,” *Sociological Research Online* 7:2 (2002), p.1.

²⁹ Rowbottom, “Following the Queen”, p.1.

³⁰ Rowbottom, “Following the Queen”, p.1.

and more importantly a state of civil religion has become more evident in Great Britain. 20th and 21th century British citizens were able to ‘take part’ in events civilly rather than just being aware of events. All could observe memorial services, national church-based events, jubilees, remembrances and national celebrations.

But as the British society has moved into an era, where some say that the British citizens as a society are becoming more secular, a view mostly projected onto them by the media, some believe that the media are forgetting Great Britain’s special relationship with religion and are trying to ignore it. In an article published after The Royal Wedding of Prince William and Catherine Middleton, *Guardian* journalist Roger Chaplin published an article in which he stated that “It may or may not be true that religion has become largely insignificant in British society, but there is no neutral or objective standpoint from which to reach that judgement.”³¹ He went on to ask the following question: “Will the media dare to have a serious discussion about whether religion is losing its ground in British society?”³² Chaplin’s comments came in response to claims from religious people who felt that the media ignored the religious significance of the wedding service, the “rich theological content of the hymns and scripture reading”³³ and the Bishop of London’s homily in which he had not referred to the wedding as a ‘royal wedding’ but as a “Christian event in which marriage is seen as established and sustained by God.”³⁴ Citing the rich theological content of the hymns and scripture reading, he proceeded to offer a brief summary of the bishop of London’s homily which had spoken of the wedding not as a royal or a celebrity marriage but – as one might expect from an Anglican bishop – as a Christian event in which marriage is seen as established and sustained by God. Chaplin’s overall point was not that the media had forgotten to include any religious significance but it was about the ‘religious illiteracy’³⁵ of the media, that it is they that are *telling* Great Britain that the churchgoing numbers are declining. But something interesting and significant that this day did show was that both the church and the state *needed* civil religion. There

³¹ Jonathan Chaplin, “Religion, Royalty and the Media,” *The Guardian*, May 1, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2011/may/01/christianity-royal-wedding> (05.05.2017).

³² Chaplin, “Religion, Royalty and the Media.”

³³ Chaplin, “Religion, Royalty and the Media.”

³⁴ Chaplin, “Religion, Royalty and the Media.”

³⁵ Chaplin, “Religion, Royalty and the Media.”

could not have been a more evident occasion at which British civil religion was obvious. For many British people, the day signified proof that the church still “remains the spiritual hub of the nation.”³⁶ For opponents it questioned the need for such a ‘robustly orthodox’ religious service in today’s society. One thing was made clear though; made clear by both the media and the British public that this public display of Britishness made visible the existence and prominence of British civil religion.

Despite claims by the media and much of the British public that civil religion did not exist in Britain, the royal wedding along with other ceremonial events unique to British society proved its existence. Watched by one third of the world on the television, one million people on the streets and had more hits on Google than Jefferson, Jesus or Justin Bieber, the Royal Wedding showed a sense of unity that could not call itself for religious purposes and neither for state purposes. Whether it was good or bad is beside the point, but it looked as though it was a sense of patriotism and love for a country that could only fall under the umbrella of a civil religion.

It had been reiterated by the media and by sceptics that as pluralism, migration and secularism increase in the world, civil religion will diminish too, which reminds us of the positivist scientific paradigm of the Nineteenth Century. However, from such recent events as the Royal Wedding, Falkland crisis, and the recent tragic bombings one can only state the opposite. Contrary to common belief then, religion is not disappearing; neither is civil religion. Although all these factors mentioned above have potential to contribute to make Britain a more plural and diverse country where civil religion can serve as the one common ground that all citizens share, recent developments have led people to question whether this potential will ever be realized. To make things even worse, the Prime minister of England, Ms. May, declared, willingly or unwillingly, in one of her tweets that “I’m clear: if human rights laws get in the way of tackling extremism and terrorism, we will change those laws to keep British people safe.” This statement no doubt alarmed many of the ‘non-British believers’ of the British civil religion, finding it to be contrary to the democratic liberal values of the British culture.

³⁶ Chaplin, “Religion, Royalty and the Media.”

Whatever we may say about the negative or positive function of civil religion of all sorts, one thing seems to be common to all: it provides its believers with a sense of identity and solidarity, which can be read as a positive function of civil religion, any religion. On the other hand, if identity, similarity, and sameness is overemphasized, civil religion can assume a new ideological meaning and serve as a manipulative tool, a type of religion of politics, in the hands of far-right politicians to justify their exclusionary policies towards the ‘Other.’ At this point it would be appropriate to refer to the distinction made by Gentile between ‘civil religion’ and ‘political religion.’ For Gentile, to certain extent, civil religion may contain the forms of sacralization of political system. However, it guarantees a plurality of ideas, free competition in the exercise of power, and the ability of the governed to dismiss their governments through peaceful and constitutional methods.³⁷ Political religion, on the other hand, is the sacralization of a political system founded upon an unchallengeable monopoly of power, ideological monism, and the obligatory and functional subordination of individual and the collectivity to its code of commandments.³⁸ Thus, while civil religion is pluralistic in the sense that, it respects individual freedom, allows other ideologies and cultures to exist as long as they do not pose a threat to its very system; political religion is exclusivist, invasive, and intolerant, wishing to permeate every aspect of the lives of the citizens and of societies. Supposedly, civil religion is represented by the British and American societies whereas political religion by the Hitler’s Germany, Mussolini’s Italy, and Franco’s Spain. Obviously drawing precise lines between political and civil religion is an arduous task and maybe an impossibility; but we have enough intellectual and ethical tools to recognize when civil religion becomes a revised version of a political religion even in the so-called advanced democratic societies as evidenced by the recent events in the US and Great Britain. Unfortunately, this is what we have been experiencing today in Europe, the United States of America, and elsewhere.

Conclusion

Now if we can go back to our original discussion on the British civil religion, we can say that once a country united over a denominational religion as seen in previous Royal courts, Great Britain now unifies over the events

³⁷ Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p.xv.

³⁸ Gentile, *Politics as Religion*, p.xv.

that have relevance to British public. It is important to note however, that Britain's civil religion did not emerge from politicians or presidents as many say happened in America, it does not hold a separate structure and is not necessarily a new created 'religion'. The special case of Britain's civil religion must be observed through its moments of civil celebration and commemoration instead.

When looking at civil religion, it is not only important to looking at its past and its present but also its future. It is unlikely that pluralism and population growth will phase out civil religion because the members of a civil religion in a society may belong ideally to a different race, faith or political group. However, because of Great Britain's specific position, with its monarch being both head of the Church of England and of the State, if one extreme that civil religion sits between (church and state) gets stronger than the other; then it is possible that this balance and common ground between the two will also break down.

It can therefore be seen how Great Britain's civil religion is revealed, not needing to be a political tool of conjuring up support from a crown or to win votes; civil religion in Great Britain holds a unique structure different from America or other countries as its monarch is both head of the Church of England and head of the State. Thus the civil religion observed in Britain is not so much a denominational religion but more of an "alloy formed by blending religion with nationalism"³⁹ to put it in the world of sociologist Stjepan Meštrović. British civil religion is not evident at all times in the daily lives of Britons; but it becomes prominent during a national celebration as in all forms of civil religion. But it is at these celebrations that it soon becomes clear that civil religion must be *of* the people not a political tool, as has been the case, alas, as the recent events have proven, that was invented.

Although the analysis presented in this article sheds some light on the nature and function of civil religion in various societies, the question that puts every ideology, political system, and religious tradition into a deep conceptual and theoretical crisis, as formulated by Timothy Beal, still remains: "How can a nation or society achieve a sense of unity and identity without eradicating differences and enforcing homogeneity, religious or otherwise?"⁴⁰ The question is not only a socio-political, cultural or religious chal-

³⁹ Stjepan G. Meštrović et al., *The Road from Paradise: Prospects for Democracy in Eastern Europe* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1993), p.125.

⁴⁰ Timothy Beal, *Religion in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.9.

lenge. More than anything else, it is a moral challenge and dilemma that every society must acknowledge, confront, and attempt to overcome.

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