

“God has favored our undertakings”

American Civil Religion

Political significance and global aspirations in contemporary national politics in view of theories of civil religion.

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“God has favored our undertakings”

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¹ The reverse side of the Great Seal of the United States. The common translation of the motto ‘annuit coeptis’ is: He approves or has approved of the undertakings.

In memoriam

Kjell Garfield Andersen

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“God has favored our undertakings”. *American Civil Religion. Political significance and global aspirations in contemporary national politics in view of theories of civil religion.*

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Abstract

This thesis is an attempt at a broader understanding of the civil religion phenomenon and some of the different manifestations civil religion can take on. By studying American civil religion in light of the theories of Robert N. Bellah, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Giovanni Gentile, the dimensions of civil religion are explored – the social, cultural, political and nationalistic dimension. It explains American civil religion's historical development, and the elements of civil religion found in American Foreign Policy. In the search to shed light on the question of what role, if any, civil religion plays in contemporary American national politics, National Security Strategies of three different administrations are analyzed. To exemplify a possible usage of civil religion discourse quotes from speeches of the three presidents representing them have been added. It also explores the use of the American civil religion discourse and the use of religion in political rhetoric in the strategy documents. The thesis is structured around Bellah's concept of civil religion as he discussed its American manifestation in his initial formulation in the article *Civil Religion in America* (1967). This thesis questions his view that civil religion can create value consensus and cohesion in a heterogeneous society such as the contemporary American. It also problematizes the view that it is differentiated from church and state by asking who the carriers of civil religion are and what upholds it, as there is no civil religion orthodoxy. Civil religion manifests in different forms. These manifestations can all be seen as part of the continuum of civil religion's dual intellectual heritage in the works of Rousseau and Durkheim. The three theories also represent three different forms of political systems – democracy, and authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, and can therefore shed light on what Bellah called the “the religio-political problem” – strategies of reconciling these two powers.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction and motivation

The first years of the 21st century have seen religion and in particular political religion gaining influence in the wake of globalization and nationalistic responses to globalization. Along with political religion, civil religion is one such form of secular religion. The varying manifestations of civil religion are connected to the question of the structural differentiation of society. With modernity religion was privatized and no longer the overarching structure of Western society. Generalized value systems as a “secular canopy”, to use Peter Berger’s metaphor, took its place. Above all, this differentiation presupposed a separation of political and religious roles (Luhmann 1985:13). Now, globalization has privatized its replacement. A second privatization of the sacred realm has taken place, in the form of a separation of the virtues of national existentialism between the political and the private.

From early on in the civil religion debates² the secularization thesis was part of the discussion and an evolutionary view of civil religion’s development in a straight, irreversible line, was advanced. Civil religion may have developed from archaic, undifferentiated forms to modern, fully differentiated forms, but it does also have a tendency to irrupt and oscillate between a more civil and a more political form, depending on the particular historical and political circumstances (Cristi 2001:152). Civil religion may have an overt political component, while political religion may have many cultural components (2001:229). The relationship between the two forms of secular religion is inherently dialectical, and so is their relationship to the political order. The sharp distinction between the ideal-types of civil religion, the priestly and prophetic form, is, however, drawn for analytical purposes. But whichever form civil religion has, it is important to understand that it is an integral part of everyday political life (Bennett 1979:111). Sociologists have not only failed to understand the extraordinary political resonance of Rousseau’s doctrine, Marcela Cristi contends, but have also failed to address the issue of whether civil religion is distinguishable from political religion (Cristi 2001:236). Rather than being a spontaneous cultural phenomenon characteristic of Robert N. Bellah’s portrayal, civil religion may in some instances be the product of deliberate intervention, planning, and manipulation (2001:136).

² The civil religion debates were sparked by Robert N. Bellah’s article *Civil Religion in America* published in 1967, and started fading after the 1976 Bicentennial observance, but lasted until about 1987 (Mathisen 1989:129, 140).

American civil religion is by many scholars considered to be the paradigmatic case of civil religion because of its level of development. The idea that the most fully differentiated civil religions rely neither on church nor state was suggested by Bellah in his initial formulation, and advanced by Coleman (1969) and Hammond (1980). For Bellah the concept of civil religion is not a philosophical construction, but an empirical entity obvious from both politics and public sentiment in the United States. Although it has been disputed, Bellah's original article *Civil Religion in America* (1967) has been seminal to the study of religion. In the sociological study of religion, however, there is still no agreement on the universality or applicability of the thesis, but it is used as a comparative concept to describe religious belief, where ethnicity or nation plays a more prominent role than it does in conventional religion (Hvithamar 2009:109).

Thematic focus

Through three theories of civil religion this thesis explores what Bellah called the “the religio-political problem”. “In no society”, Bellah states, “can religion and politics ignore each other” (Bellah 1980:vii). The two powers must take a stance toward one another. Bridging the gap between the two powers can be one of civil religion's functions in order to create national consensus, which it seems was one of Bellah's major concerns. This thesis is an attempt at a broad understanding of the civil religion phenomenon and how it borders on other secular religions, i.e. political religion and nationalism. It gives a short outline of American civil religion's historical development and aspects of the civil religion discourse in American Foreign Policy. Few researchers today seem to question the political aspects of civil religion as there is not much literature on the subject, and the research that does exist seems fragmentary. National Security Strategies, which constitute the material of this thesis, show politically motivated uses of American civil religion as they are political documents. Studying these documents is therefore interesting, and the analysis sheds light on contemporary use of the civil religion discourse by politicians. Elements of civil religion found in the documents are used as analytical categories. To exemplify the usage of American civil religion discourse and religious political rhetoric, quotes from speeches of the three presidents representing the documents have been included.

The thesis is structured around Bellah's concept of civil religion, as the main theory, as his essay was a discussion of its American manifestation. His perspectives on the subject are widened by drawing in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's theory of civil religion. Rousseau coined

the term Bellah decided to use when describing the religious dimension of his own culture. Though Bellah's understanding of religion was inspired by Emile Durkheim he still chose, as he says, "to follow Rousseau" (Bellah 1973:xxxv). What could his reasons for this choice have been? Bellah does not, to my knowledge, state this explicitly, but he does hint at a possible answer.

Civil religion is multidimensional and manifests in different forms. The third and last theory is Giovanni Gentile's, who authored what became the Fascist doctrine. These three theories allow me to explore the different functions and dimensions of civil religion – the cultural/social, political and nationalistic dimensions – and where relevant, discuss how they bear on American civil religion. The three theories also represent three different forms of political system – democracy, authoritarian democracy, and totalitarian regime.

As will be repeatedly stated throughout this thesis because many scholars have argued for it, among them Bellah, civil religion by origin and design is based on a search for consensus. It is meant to counterbalance the influence of sectarian or confessional faiths, which, in a pluralistic society, tend to divide people rather than to foster unity and consensus (Bulman 1991:538). According to Raymond Bulman for example, civil religion is almost a necessary corollary of American democratic pluralism. But, civil religion is not *by definition* an integrative force. Religious pluralism, different world views, and social and ethnic heterogeneity make this possibility very unlikely. However, it may be a binding glue for a large number of people, or sectors of the population. Also, the degree of freedom granted to those who do not subscribe to the tenets of faith is an important element that should be taken into account. The ratio of externally imposed force to voluntary compliance may be taken as an index for identifying the type of civil religion (Cristi 2001:233). It was Rousseau's view that the state should promote a national religion because society is more harmonious if everyone shares the same religion. If Martin Wählberg's rendering of Rousseau is correct, the coercive means that Rousseau considered necessary to achieve social harmony can be seen in light of his belief in the corrupting effect that society and culture has on humans, (Wählberg 2011:9). In today's international, political climate statesmen introduce new demands on civic loyalty and national cohesion, where new forms of enemy imagery are legitimated by reference to the need for securitization of the state. The identities that unite people in existentialist, trans-empirical terms spring from a complex web of national, transnational, religious, cultural, and mythical origins (Hedetoft 2009:264).

Throughout this thesis civil religion is understood as an analytical category, an academic abstract construction. It is therefore understood in purely etic terms, as an outsider's term.

The research questions asked in this thesis are to what extent the civil religion discourse and themes of civil religion are used by the political elite in contemporary United States, and if civil religion's symbols and symbolic practices can be seen as a political resource. What is American civil religion? With no civil religion orthodoxy, does it rely neither on church nor state to be upheld, as some scholars argue? Who are the carriers of civil religion? What role does it play in contemporary national politics, and to what extent does the discourse have global perspectives?

My motivation to examine the functions and forms of civil religion and to ask these questions mainly stems from a general interest in religion and politics, but also in the seemingly paradox concerning the contemporary use of official, religious, political rhetoric in a secular state. To try to locate the sources of this public religion has also been a goal of this thesis. Marcela Cristi's monograph *From Civil to Political Religion* (2001) has been especially inspirational in my attempt to search for an understanding of the complex civil religion phenomenon and its political dimension.

The conflicted nature of civil religion

The dialectical relation between civil religion and political religion can be approached as a tension between spontaneous and enforced values, beliefs, and ideas. This same dialectical tension exists *within* each type of civil religion as well as *between* them. The content of any civil religion is not given. Like reasons of other sorts it is open to contestation, or rebuttal, and it is over time negotiated and re-negotiated. Political actors for example, alone or in groups, include among their partial interests, attachments to symbols and symbolic practices (Johnson 2000:415). The possibility therefore exists of the less than smooth co-existence of multiple civil religions within a nation-state and of rival images of the future, each perhaps associated with a particular group (Cristi 2001:235). Civil religion accordingly has different social, historical, religious, and political determinants.

Interestingly, the use of the civil religion discourse and rhetoric in my choice of strategies is quite different and is connected to conflicting interests in politics that divide the contemporary American society. There is a tension between civil religion and religious nationalism. This tension roughly connects to that of the prophetic and priestly form, or

liberal and illiberal renditions of religious politics, which again follows the fault-lines between liberalism and republicanism. The uneasy compromise between the two political ideologies³ was also of concern to Bellah ([1975] 1992:182). These two opposing forms can be seen as linked to a thin and inclusive liberal form of national identity or a thick and exclusive conservative form. With the change in the presidential administration in 2009, there was a distinct change in the usage of civil religion discourse after several decades with an administration that used religious nationalism. Barack Obama's ideas on religion and politics are very much in keeping with America's civil religion tradition and entail a rejection of exclusive religious nationalism. His political campaign showed a more sophisticated understanding of religion and readily invoked its own religious themes (Hibbard 2010:240). These perspectives are returned to throughout the thesis.

1.2 Theoretical perspectives

The concept of civil religion has been widely accepted in sociology. Four decades have passed since the publication of Robert N. Bellah's article *Civil Religion in America*, but the notion of civil religion remains ambiguous and the term difficult to define. Russell E. Richey and Donald G. Jones, who participated in the civil religion debate in the 1970's, made a five point typology in order to decipher its meanings: folk religion, transcendent universal religion of the nation, religious nationalism, democratic faith, and protestant civic piety (Richey and Jones 1974:14-17). The important debate about the civil religion phenomenon was started by Bellah classifying American patriotism as 'civil religion' (Marvin and Ingle 1996:767 n.1). In an effort to avoid the controversies connected with the term Bellah later called it 'the biblical and republican traditions' and 'the public church' (Bellah 1992:x, xii). This wide range of meaning attributed to the concept of civil religion illustrates the complexity of the subject. It is also indicative of the various forms of expression that civil religion can take on.

The German sociologist Niklas Luhmann states in *The Differentiation of Society* that the analysis of society as a functionally differentiated system requires a detailed study of each of its single subsystems, where religion is considered one of these functional subsystems (Luhmann 1982:xii, 231). In such a society Luhmann sees religion primarily concerned with the maintenance of institutionalized cultural patterns. A predominant assumption is that civil religion is a necessary integrative cultural element in every society, at least in modern

³ Ideology in this thesis is understood as formal systems of thought that benefit a particular group or class of people, but where the ideas themselves are presented as universally valid or true. These thought systems are ideas or principles intended to reorder collective experience, to regulate political understandings, and to mobilize support and collective action (Williams 1996:374, 371). Catholicism, Liberalism, and Fascism are examples.

societies, where it is discernable from other such elements. Civil religion integrates society by offering a set of values, norms, beliefs and attitudes common to its members. By them the society is sacralized, that is, their substance is comprehended in a transcendent way (Flere 2009:215). Thereby society attains a transcendent mission, while its political authority attains a charismatic dimension. Luhmann argues that religion is supposed to work as an integrative factor on the social level and as a motivational factor on the level of individuals. At both levels it supplies the meaning of meaning, a meaningful “ultimate reality”. All symbols and values that operate at this highest level of last resources can be qualified as religion according to Luhmann (Luhmann 1985:5).

The concept of ‘civil religion’ describes a phenomenon where the nation is a focal point of sacralisation. It has always been linked to issues of national cohesion, and to legitimate and control the use of political power in a society (Richardson 1974:163). Civil religion’s primary function is to create and maintain social order. It is this function that differentiates civil religion from other kinds of religion (Cristi and Dawson 2007:280). Some scholars maintain that civil religion is a *sui generis* hybrid of religion and national communality, which has proved its usefulness in the sociology of religion for the analysis of a range of diverse empirical cases where the nation or its people are linked to something transcendental (Hvithamar and Warburg 2009:5). This is why the concept is intricately intertwined with nationalism. Like ‘transcendence’ in conventional religion, it is conceived as something *given*, an almighty power of creation and/or interference from outside (Luhmann 1985:16).

Williams and Demarath on the other hand, have considered civil religion as a cultural interpretive resource, a discursive tool for connecting morality and policy (Coles 2002:403). Yet other scholars, such as Bennett (1975, 1979), Kokosalakis (1985), Williams (1996), Cristi and Dawson (2007), and Hedetoft (2009), hold that civil religion also manifests itself as ‘ideology’, as an imposed and manufactured political resource. Marcela Cristi opines that these forms, the cultural and the political, are not opposites; they are part of a continuum of possibilities for the public expression of religion (Cristi 2009:49). They have their origin in civil religion’s dual intellectual heritage in the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Emile Durkheim.

The civil religion thesis proposes that a religious form exists for the unity of citizens of even highly differentiated, heterogeneous societies (McGuire 2002:202). Civil religion’s beliefs, rituals, and symbols relate a person’s role as citizen and his or her society’s place in space, time, and history to the conditions of ultimate existence and meaning (Coleman

1970:69). When civil religion is seen as a social and cultural integrative force it can function as an expression of national cohesion. This would however, necessitate an inclusive national identity and religious tolerance in a pluralistic society (Hibbard 2010:178, 15), which can transcend the boundaries of ethnicity, denomination, and religion. Civil religion *can* therefore be both a uniting and dividing force (Hvithamar and Warburg 2009:14). This religious form includes rituals by which members commemorate significant national events and renew their commitment to the society, and as such provides a link between citizens, their nation and a transcendent realm. A publicly institutionalized civil religion, then, must remain as symbolically open or empty as possible in order not to exclude or discriminate significant groups in society who could not share in over-specific symbols (Bellah 1974:258), such as religious or national minorities. This openness is possible as long as no public theology is institutionalized as a civil religious orthodoxy. As such, civil religion has a public form, but its meaning is created privately. According to the American historian of religion Martin Marty, a construct as loose as civil religion can be used to fill different needs at different times (Marty 1974:142). This is a point that will be highlighted in this thesis through the theories presented and the different manifestations to be explained and discussed.

Both civil religion and political religion belong to the more general category of *secular religion*, describing a more or less developed system of beliefs, myths, rituals, and symbols that create an aura of sacredness around an entity belonging to this world and turn it into a cult and an object of worship and devotion (Gentile 2006:1). Any human activity from science to history, from entertainment to sport can be invested with “secular sacredness” and become the object of a secular cult. The term ‘secular religion’ was explicitly adopted during the 19th and 20th centuries to define ideologies and ideals intended to replace traditional metaphysical religion with new humanist concepts that created a cult of humanity, history, nation, and society. The concept of a secular religion was in use in the 1930s as a term defining the political cults totalitarian regimes created, as the last chapter in this thesis will describe and discuss in relation to Fascist religion.

In contemporary societies there are in theory three forms under which civil religion exists: Continued un-differentiation with either the church or the state acting as sponsoring agent of civil religion; a monopoly status for civil religion under the form of secular nationalism; differentiated civil religion (Coleman 1970:69). Civil religion, however, is not always or usually clearly differentiated either from the church or the state, as this thesis will try to problematize.

1.3 Terms and definitions

Where the key terms used in this thesis are concerned, definitions are in abundance, and comes from several disciplines. For clarification purposes as several of them are more or less related, definitions have been included in the introduction in order to state from which scholars I have borrowed them and explain my own understanding of them. To facilitate the reading of the thesis the concepts are presented below.

Religion

As a point of departure for this thesis I have chosen sociologist Émile Durkheim's definition of religion. 'A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and surrounded by prohibitions – beliefs and practices that unite its adherents in a single moral community called a church' (Durkheim 2001:46). Religion viewed in this way performs the function of the social integration of society, and of solidarity and national identity. It was the durkheimian notion of religion that was the underlying premise in Bellah's article "Civil Religion in America" (Bellah 1967:19 n. 1). As the founder of scientific sociology and one of the classical figures of social thought, it was Durkheim's many uses of the word "society" and its many levels of meaning that intrigued Bellah. In Durkheim's thought it is not identical with "the group of individuals that compose it and their dwelling place". Above all it is a composition of ideas, beliefs and sentiments of all sorts which realize themselves through individuals, and foremost of these ideas is the moral ideal which is its principal *raison d'être* (1973:ix).

Deism

Deism was a rationalistic and intellectual theological movement in the 15th and 16th century in Western Europe. Deists claimed that a monotheistic faith in God had to be based on reason. Deism is characterized by the notion that God is the intelligent and purposeful creator of the universe, but has since been a distant Being and does not play an active role in the course of the history of humankind (Preus 1996:33). Its strategy is to incorporate claims, values, and data from one's own religion (usually Christianity) into a wider, generic, or allegedly universal theological wisdom (1996:54). Rooted in this tradition on an abstract and generalized level, is the explanation that all religions are manifestations of a universal religious sense, or more or less adequate "manifestations of the sacred" (1996:xx). Deistic thought was influential with the Founding Fathers in America as both Benjamin Franklin and

Thomas Jefferson were deists. As a later chapter will show, Jean-Jacques Rousseau was a European proponent of deism.

Civil religion

According to Robert N. Bellah, 'civil religion' "refers to that religious dimension found in the life of every people, through which it interprets its historical experience in the light of transcendent reality" (Bellah 1975:3). This religious dimension, which is without a formal creed, is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols and rituals, and is institutionalized in a collectivity (1967:4, 8, 15). It exists alongside of and rather clearly differentiated from churches, and borrows selectively from conventional religion (1967:1, 13). Understood in this way civil religion is derivative. It takes established religious symbols, language, and rituals and gives them new or slightly different interpretations. Civil religion thus borrows from the sacred to give meaning to the secular. This definition covers the social aspects of civil religion, but leaves aside its political dimension, which I consider essential for an understanding of, in my case, American civil religion. These commonly-accepted religious sentiments, concepts, and symbols can be used by the state for its own purposes and its own self-understanding. Civil religion is concerned with both the social *and* the political order.

As there is a close affinity between the notion of civil religion and nationalism, civil religion can also be stimulated and informed by *patriotism*. Patriotism is understood as love of one's country, often profoundly self-sacrificing love, or zeal in the defense of the interests of one's country (Anderson 2006:141). In combination with civil religion patriotism leads it in the direction of religious nationalism. Patriotism as such does not necessitate a program of action.

Nationalism and globalization

Nationalism is a complex term that contains many elements. The political scientist Anthony D. Smith has defined 'nationalism' as 'a form of official and politicized culture based on authenticity, in principle open to all members of the community or nation state's citizens, that seeks to mobilize the citizens to love their nation, observe its laws and defend their homeland' (Smith 2003:53, 183). It is a form of 'political religion' that seeks to promote core ideals such as national identity, autonomy, and territorial unity in a close, sacred community (2003:46, 199). Of even greater significance to nationalists is the conviction of national destiny, where history demands and provides a unique national destiny (2003:56, 49). Italian historian Emilio

Gentile develops this further when he claims that nationalism became the most universal manifestation of sacralization of politics in the contemporary world and merged with a wide variety of ideologies and cultural and religious traditions (Gentile 2006:xvii).

Contemporary nationalisms are changing due to the ever-increasing process of globalization which challenges the idea that the nation should be the center of gravity for the loyalty and fervor of citizens (Hvithamar and Warburg 2009:7). Globalization is a construct that describes the modern world undergoing an increase of scale, which is leading to an unprecedented global interdependency among peoples and nations. According to Hvithamar and Warburg the process of globalization began to accelerate around 1870. Contemporary globalization is to an unprecedented extent a multidimensional phenomenon with several independent developments operating in combination. Because of its profound economic, cultural, and political impact, globalization threatens to empty the nation-state of its traditional functions, including its control over the economy and its citizens as subjects of national law (2009:8). Since civil religion of a democratic state in many ways is a symbolic representation of citizen communality, globalization challenges civil religion in its traditional form centered on the nation-state.

Religious nationalism

The historian of religion Torkel Brekke has identified two major forms of religious nationalism: Ideological-religious and ethno-religious nationalism (Brekke 2002:89). In addition to the sacred characteristics of the nation – a community in possession of its own territory and distinguished by its own history and destiny - (Smith 2003:196), for religious nationalism religion is the core of the nation, the entity binding the individuals together as a people. The national identity presupposes belonging to this religion, as expressed in *ethno-religious nationalism*. Another important characteristic is that religious nationalism often wishes to influence and change the nation's politics in such a way that it is in accordance with its own intended Divine destiny, as expressed in *ideological-religious nationalism*. The two forms are not mutually excluding. It is possible for both forms to be present at the same time.

Political religion

The last concept I need to define is political religion, which according to Gentile is 'the sacralization of a political system founded on an unchallengeable monopoly of power,

ideological monism, and the obligatory and unconditional subordination of the individual and the collectivity to its code of commandments' (Gentile 2006:xv). Gramsci has reflected that political control requires both consent and coercion (Cristi 2001:238). The term and his definition have been included here because other scholars, for example Smith, Cristi, Dawson, also use the term and it will be used in this thesis. Cristi uses the term to denote ideological manifestations of civil religion (Cristi 2001). To clarify, Gentile's concept of political religion does not correspond to 'civil religion'. His understanding of American civil religion will be explained in the chapter on this topic.

Chapter 2. American Civil Religion and Foreign Policy

In the first section of this chapter I give a presentation of the historical development of American civil religion, and features particular to it. In the last section the role a few important themes from civil religion play in American foreign policy is discussed.

2.1 Introduction

Americans have interpreted their history essentially in religious terms, and as having religious meaning. From the colonists arrival in the 17th century they saw themselves as a “people” in the classical and biblical sense of the word, and built their colony on utopian millennial expectations. John Winthrop’s sermon in 1630 and Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address in 1863 are classic expressions of American civil religion, giving voice to the idea that Americans have a special place in history as a people chosen by God to fulfill His will and serve as an example to the rest of the world. The opening words of John Winthrop’s sermon *A Modell of Christian Charity*, defines the meaning of the new venture the colonists were participating in:

Thus stands the cause betweene God and us. Wee are entered into Covenant with him for this worke, wee have taken out a Commission, the Lord hath given us leave to draw our owne Articles, wee have professed to enterprise these Accions upon these and these ends, wee have hereupon besought him of favour and blessing⁴.

Winthrop was the leader of a movement for a “total society” in which church and state, though different, were closely connected and in which Christianity informed the political as well as the religious structure. The founding generation was intently aware of the suffering caused by religious persecutions, and the founding fathers therefore had a strong commitment

⁴ From John Winthrop’s sermon *A Model of Christian Charity*.
<http://religiousfreedom.lib.virginia.edu/sacred/charity.html> [Accessed June 03. 2014]

to religious liberty. The dissenters who fled Europe to resettle in America conceived themselves as founding a “New Israel” devoid of the corruption of the European world. For the colonists America was to be a beacon among nations⁵, a shining example of God’s purpose, and the “trustee” of the blessings of liberty and prosperity for all.

2.2 The roots and development of American civil religion

For several centuries before the American Revolution the history of the Roman republic had figured prominently in European political theory, and in the late 18th century the history of Roman liberty served as an archetype for the new republic. At a deeper level, the Roman attribute that preoccupied the imagination of the founders was republican virtue, especially as it was interpreted by Montesquieu, one of the most influential thinkers for Americans at the time (Bellah 1992:23-24). For a republic, and especially in its democratic form, the principle of social life is virtue, meaning the citizenry’s will or motivation to obey the laws and to see that justice is done, stemming from the will and ability of the people to act on behalf of the greater community. The spirit of this virtue finds its beginnings in citizens’ participation in governance and takes the form of a kind of action that expresses willingness: initiative. This was to be one of the strands of thought that strongly influenced when American civil religion⁶ started to take form during the War for Independence, which lasted from 1775 to 1783. It resulted in one of the few successful revolutions in the modern world and the installment of a revolutionary new political order. Civil religion developed further after the Civil War from 1861 to 1865. The messianic hope that was generated by the success of the revolution was nurtured by the defeat of slavery in the Civil War (Bellah 1980:168). Commenting on the historical development of American civil religion in the 19th century, Gentile underlines that the construction of the American nation took place alongside the development of civil religion through the exaltation of the American people who had been elected by God and the mission he gave them to seek the welfare of all humankind (Gentile 2006:23). The belief that the United States’ mission came from God was consolidated and popularized through presidential

⁵ The type of nation that developed in the United States is usually considered a “political nation”, where the framework of the state and the political processes formed a national community, also in a more cultural sense (Østerud 1994:20). The nation was built both through a uniting culture policy and the community of citizenry. The point of departure for the political nation is an elite culture into which the people have to be educated. This form of nation is in contrast to an ethnic-cultural understanding of the term.

⁶ The notion of civil religion is traced to antiquity, to Greek and Roman city states’ cult of local gods and the religious foundation and dimension of civil ceremonies, collective values and traditions. Eschatological salvation was a central preoccupation of the late Hellenistic period. In imperial Rome a variety of ideologies was tolerated, with the critical test or proof being expression of allegiance to the imperial cult (Cristi 2001:141).

speeches, sermons, historical accounts, literature, and school education. It became the last and fundamental myth of American civil religion (Bellah 1992:36-60). Democracy as laid out in the Constitution was regarded as confirmation of the belief that the American people had been called by God to carry out great deeds for the good of all humanity; in the words of writer Herman Melville it was 'the political Messiah'.

The faith in God or the Almighty as expressed in symbols and political rituals of the American nation is a manifestation of a religious belief that does not correspond to any conventional religion. As a system of beliefs, values, myths, rituals, and symbols it confers an aura of sanctity on the United States as a political entity, and on the country's institutions, history, and destiny in the world. The roots of civil religion derive from Puritan and Christian traditions. For more than a century it displayed the unmistakable imprint of Puritanism and the biblical tradition, and being strongly social and collective, it stressed communitarian ideals, charity, and civic virtue. However, Protestantism had decisive hegemony in the shaping of civil religion as it was the product of people with a distinct Anglo-Protestant culture (Huntington 2004:339). For almost four centuries the culture of the founding settlers has been the central and lasting component of American identity. The elite's religious and political principles, its customs and social relations, its standards of morality and taste, have been, and in basic ways still, are dominant despite the nation's cultural diversity.

Part of the American experience from very early in its history was also Enlightenment thinker John Locke, who was the strongest influence in American political ideology in the early 18th century. His version of utilitarian individualism was accepted because it was seen as "softer" (Cristi 2001:53). The utilitarian tradition believed in a neutral state in which individuals would be allowed to pursue the maximization of their self-interest and the product would be public and private prosperity. According to Bellah, this idea that society could be based on a mere coagulation of individual interests, that the pursuit of private vice could result in public virtue, was a radically new idea (Bellah 1992:27), that was at odds with the biblical tradition. The harshness of the contrast of these traditions was obscured, though never obliterated, and the harmonization of them was only possible, when religion had been "corrupted" by utilitarian individualism. That happened when civil religion replaced traditional Protestantism, and religion ceased to be an effective link to virtue, charity or community and instead became a means for self-interest (1980:169-70).

American civil religion then was the result of religious, ideological, and political syncretism, to which Protestantism, The Enlightenment, and republicanism all contributed. It was a public religion that mixed together elements from the biblical theology of Puritanism,

the rationalist deism of the Enlightenment, and the beliefs, myths, and symbols emerging from the growing patriotism of the new republic. The myth of rebirth was to be found in American culture from the beginning of the republic, not only as an ideal projected toward implementation in the future, but as an actual reality existing in the conscience, values, and principles of the new American society (Gentile 2006:22-23).

Even though civil religion derived and made use of beliefs, values, myths, symbols, and rituals directly and indirectly from these religious traditions, civil religion was able to confer a sacred aura on political institutions without subordinating the state to the church, and without establishing a polemical or antagonistic relationship with churches and traditional religions (Gentile 2006:xvi). It exists side by side with biblical religions and does not replace them. Civil religion and Christianity are, accordingly, divided in function: Civil religion is appropriate to actions in the official public sphere, and Christianity and other religions are granted full liberty in the sphere of personal piety and voluntary social actions. This ‘institutionalized’ set of beliefs about the nation, provides a sense of cohesion and solidarity, especially in times of profound national crisis. On the other hand, as I will argue in chapter 5, this form of differentiation does cause a dichotomy between civil religion and Christianity.

2.3 Rituals, myths and symbols of American civil religion

Many civil ceremonies in the United States have a marked religious quality. Thanksgiving Day, Memorial Day, Fourth of July, and presidential inaugurations, together with more minor celebrations, all celebrate national values and national unity. Also, the public school system serves as a particularly important context for the cultic celebration of civil rituals.

The durkheimian social perspective of religion lies behind Bellah’s notion that these celebrations provide an annual *ritual calendar* by which civil religion structures American social life (Bellah 1967:11). A ritual can be characterized as ‘culturally defined behavioral patterns’ (Gilhus and Mikaelsson 2001:123). It refers to the recurring stylized enactment of mundane concerns in the context of clear mythological symbols and explanations (Bennett 1979:109 n.8). Furthermore, the emphasis in rituals on repetition, illustration, and exemplary behavior assists participants in making meaningful connections between sacred principles and immediate life events (Bennett 1979:114). Also, rituals cannot be decoded without a cultural key, and their meaning can therefore only be understood by knowing about their historical, cultural and socio-political context (Hedetoft 2009:256). One of the defining criteria of important rituals in civil religion is that they not only provide an arena in which to introduce

high symbolic needs and goals, but they also become powerful symbols in themselves (Bennett 1975:92). For Durkheim, the very constitution of society is a religious phenomenon, and the power that people attribute to things deemed sacred is actually derived from their participation in the collective consciousness and effervescence of social life (Cristi and Dawson 2007:270). Religion emerges naturally from the group and serves to further strengthen its collective identity. Rites are, above all, the means by which the social group periodically reaffirms itself (Durkheim [1912] 2001:287). However, sacredness is attributed to things, it is not intrinsic to them. In this context sacralization is understood as attributing an ultimate meaning and importance, as well as a sense of permanence to whatever is held sacred.

In the American civil religion there are *national shrines* such as the memorials in Washington D.C., the Capitol itself, the birthplaces of key presidents, war memorials, and other “sacred” places to which Americans can make pilgrimages. It is not their age or even historical significance but their ability to symbolize the transcendence of the nation as a “people” that inspires awe and reverence. Similarly, there are *sacred objects* of the civil religion. The symbol that predominates over all other symbols is the flag and it is very central to national identity (Huntington 2004:126). It is the ritual instrument of group cohesion in American civil religion (Marvin and Ingle 1999:2). The national anthem is a salute to the flag, and Americans have a holiday, Flag Day, to honor their flag. Scholars have pointed out that the flag became essentially a religious symbol. It was revered and central to all public and many private ceremonies. During the nationalist era, many states passed laws prohibiting the “desecration of the flag”, reflecting its quasi-religious status for Americans (Huntington 2004:127). Certain acts cannot be performed except in its presence, and elaborate rules govern what may touch it and how devotees must behave in its presence. The sanctity of national symbols is protected by treating them gesturally as sacred (Marvin and Ingle 1996:771). The Christian Bible is probably also a sacred object, not because of its content but because it signifies an appeal to God as the ultimate arbiter of truth and justice (McGuire 2002:202).

All national shrines and sacred objects are symbols, which work in different ways to condense, produce, or invite meaning. Anything can by definition be a symbol, i.e., a vehicle for cultural meaning - things and abstractions, nouns and verbs, single items and whole events (Ortner 2008:153). In all cultural systems certain symbolic units which formulate meaning, are “key” or “core” symbols (2008:152). In the study of meaning systems, Sherry Ortner has proposed a way of subdividing and ordering sets of symbols in terms of their ways of functioning in relation to cultural thought and action. One of her categories is *summarizing*

symbols, which are seen as summing up, expressing, representing for the participants in an emotionally powerful and relatively undifferentiated way, what the system means to them (2008:154). This category is essentially the category of sacred symbols in the broadest sense, and includes all those items which are objects of reverence and/or catalysts of emotion. The flag, as with the American flag, is one such symbol. Cultures consist of intersubjectively shared symbols that actors invest with meaning and deploy in ritual, tradition, and other modes of symbolic action. Symbols are by definition multivocal, and therefore ambiguous, not simply in the sense that they can and do embody multiple meanings, but in the sense that actors can invest the same symbol with divergent, indeed conflicting, meanings (Johnson 2000:409). Symbolic forms constitute the shared, public dimension of culture. Deployed in cultural practices of various sorts, they structure the way people think about social life. The *scope* of a symbol consists in the range of social contexts to which relevant actors consider it to have more or less direct relevance. Its *force* refers to its centrality or marginality in the lives of relevant actors, to the psychological grip it exercises over them (2000:409).

Civil religion also has its *saints*. Abraham Lincoln is an historic figure who particularly symbolizes the civil religion. His actions and speeches contributed to the articulation of that religion in a time of crisis, the Civil War, when the theme of death, sacrifice and rebirth entered civil religion, symbolized in the life and martyrdom of Lincoln. Nowhere is this more vividly stated than in Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, one of his greatest public statements, and an example of the American oratory tradition, infused with biblical imagery. The last half of his rather short address the words of Lincoln are these, expressed in a classic form of Puritan style:

The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth⁷.

⁷ <http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/gettysburg.htm> [Accessed March 31. 2014]

Other “saints” include key presidents such as Washington, Jefferson, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Kennedy, and military heroes such as MacArthur and Theodore Roosevelt. Although these shrines, saints, and ceremonies are not conventionally religious, they are still set apart as special and not to be profaned.

The *myths* of American civil religion constitute a strong blend of biblical imagery and nationalist sentiments. Rites, rituals and symbols are associated with national heroes, national accomplishments, and national historical events (Cristi 2001:220). Important myths that will be explained and discussed in different chapters of this thesis where appropriate are the myth of origin, the myth of chosen-ness as a nation and people, the myth of mission and destiny, and finally, the myth of rebirth. Myths and symbolic language serve to simplify complex situations. Eliade’s perhaps most important point about myth is that myth is regarded as a sacred story, and hence a “true history”, because it deals with realities (Eliade [1957] 1994:59). They compress meaning into emotional, semi-articulate concepts which do not easily yield to the unravelling of component parts, logical elements, and alternative conceptualizations (Bennett 1975:93). Myth seeks to transfigure reality so that it provides moral and spiritual meaning to individuals or societies, and they express a given culture’s conception of the world and humans place in it.

2.4 Forms of American civil religion

The division of spheres of relevance between civil religion and traditional religion, the public and the private sphere, is particularly important in the United States, where religious pluralism is both a valued feature of sociopolitical life and a barrier to achieving a common world view. By having a civil religion for the public sphere and a diversity of particular religion in the private sphere, the social structure has cohesion with the sense of individual freedom of choice. The success of this division is, however, problematic according to sociologist Meredith McGuire (McGuire 2002:203), and will be discussed further in the analysis.

In 1974 the prominent historian of American religion Martin Marty identified two main forms of American civil religion. The debate over the malignant and benign nature of civil religion has led to the development of two strands of dichotomous typologies in the study of American civil religion (Coles 2002:406). One strand classifies civil religion rhetoric as either conservative or liberal, roughly corresponding to Marty’s distinction between a “priestly” and a “prophetic” version of civil religion (Marty 1974: 144-45). The priestly form will normally be celebrative, affirmative, and culture-binding. In the divine scheme of things

America is a chosen nation. Under this construct the nation itself is celebrated and imbued with sacred significance, sanctifying the economic order, legitimating the system and actions of government, and sees the American way of life as unique and desirable (Coles 2002:407). Historically it has also been used to legitimate intolerance for example in relation to patriotism. The prophetic form, by contrast, de-emphasizes the chosen nation concept, and sees the nation as blessed. It will tend to be dialectical about civil religion, with a predisposition toward the judgmental. Its rhetors stress global issues, peace and justice, and acting on behalf of all nations. The shared religious principles provide both a 'cultural legitimation' of the nation and a basic 'standard of judgment' for criticizing and seeking the perfection of the nation. Both versions are very much a part of American thought and rhetoric, but they are clearly in conflict. A prophetic version of American civil religion reminds Americans that they will be held accountable before God for their actions and of the higher ideals that the nation must strive to meet, as President Obama does repeatedly in the National Security Strategy 2010 and in his remarks at the National Defense University in May 2013. The priestly version frequently devolves to nationalistic sentiments or identifies God's will with the nation's people, as President George Bush did in 1992 when he used religious imagery to legitimate the U.S. war against Iraq. To a group of Christian radio and television station officials he said: "I want to thank you for helping America, as Christ ordained, to be a light unto the world" (quoted in McGuire 2002:204). Another example are the words "under God" in the Pledge of allegiance, which can be understood as a proclamation of the nation as God's instrument or a reminder of God's judgment.

America's religious heritage is also a source of conflict, and has given rise to two competing visions of the nation that are considered to correspond with these two forms of civil religion. These visions involve very different conceptions about the nature and use of American power. The secular vision of American nationalism is premised on a liberal or modernist understanding of religion and an inclusive national identity, commonly serving a prophetic function in American politics and has been invoked to constrain the exercise of temporal power (Hibbard 2010:178). The alternative vision rejects the secular tradition, seeing the United States as an explicitly Christian nation, has commonly provided a priestly affirmation for government policy and a license for action taken on behalf of the nation. The more overtly Christian vision of religious nationalism, on the other hand, has tended to conflate religious purpose with that of the state or of a particular party. American power – military, political, or economic – is consequently portrayed as benign precisely because it is associated with divine purpose. In its more benign moments, the transcendent elements of

American nationalism have served as a civil religion that provides faith and meaning to public life, in line with Bellah's concept of civil religion and will be discussed in chapter 4. At other times, Protestant Christianity has informed a more exclusive and aggressive religious nationalism, as I will discuss in chapter 5.

The conservative and liberal factions in contemporary American politics can be considered as having created two different civil religions. But Bellah disagrees to this, and recognizes that American civil religion may have a different relationship to the republican and liberal traditions of American political life. He states that there may be several "public theologies but only one civil religion" (cited in Cristi and Dawson 2007:275).

Because the terms 'conservative' and 'liberal' have other political meanings, I will use the terms 'priestly' and 'prophetic' in this thesis. The second typology speaks specifically to the myth of *Manifest Destiny*, which in scholarly literature is divided into two forms of mission – usually 'mission by example' and 'mission by intervention' or expansion (Coles 2002:407), and will be explained in the last section of this chapter.

2.5 Civil religion as cultural resource

Two perspectives can be used to explain the socio-political significance of religion in general: religion as 'culture' and religion as 'ideology'. These perspectives can also be seen as the two forms civil religion manifests itself in, that of the Durkheimian view as culture, which was Bellah's position, and the Rousseauian as ideology (Cristi and Dawson 2007:276). These forms should not be seen as extreme opposites, but rather as definable endpoints of a continuum of mixed possibilities. The culturalist approach focuses on individuals' values and beliefs, and presupposes an "implicit" definition of culture (Cristi 2001:224). Civil religion as culture has a taken-for-granted character and 'givenness' that stems from being born into, or being part of a particular community. It provides a world view or the ethos of a nation or a collectivity, and is supposedly rooted in mutually meaningful rituals and symbols that cement national or group unity. Like conventional religion, it helps to establish a clear sense of what is as well as what ought to be (2001:225).

For Bellah civil religion serves as a carrier of national identity. Narratives of cultural heritage and memory are especially suitable for tending to the element of continuity and coherence belonging to identity. They function as structuring principles for both individual and collective historical experiences, and contribute both to personal and collective identity. Heritage can be seen as an aggregation of myths, values and inheritances determined and

defined by the needs of societies in the present (McDowell 2008:37). Heritage and commemoration concern peoples' relationship to the past and its significance for the present, and how this relationship is interpreted and tended to. Heritage is also a highly political process, malleable to the needs of power and often subject to contestation, which lays the contents of the term open to re-negotiation.

The production of religious symbols, narratives and practices is not exclusive to the religious sector of society. Religious processes are always interwoven with other cultural and social processes. An important perspective in this connection is that culture includes religion, and that religion can be considered a subgroup of culture (Gilhus 2009:22). According to James Beckford it is fruitful to conceptualize religion as a cultural form or resource in advanced industrialized societies rather than a social institution because it has come adrift from its former points of anchorage (Beckford 1989:171). But religion remains a potent cultural resource which may act as a vehicle of change, challenge, or conservation as it can be combined with virtually any other set of ideas or values (1989:170, 172). The chance that religion will be controversial is increased by the fact that it may be used by people having little or no connection with formal religious organizations.

Civil religion in this form of society says Beckford, is best thought of as a symbolic resource employed by politicians independently of religious organizations (Beckford 1989:171). If civil religion is thought of as a cultural resource available for selective use, rather than as a fixed institutional entity, it may be that this *same* civil religion is also a significant source of cultural conflict (McGuire 2002:205). If this hypothesis is accurate says McGuire, it suggests that civil religion loses much of its capacity to accomplish solidarity, especially a cohesion that transcends divisions of ethnicity, region, and particular religions. What symbolic power remains may be highly susceptible to political manipulation and commercialization. The Rousseauan viewpoint, in which political leaders consciously exploit and/or manipulate traditional religious symbols achieve political goals has seldom been explored (Cristi 2001:73). McGuire's observation illustrates different ways of using civil religion as a political resource, as in the example of Presidents Bush and Obama mentioned above, and will be exemplified in the chapter on the source material and discussed in the analysis.

2.6 The sacralization of politics

According to Gentile American civil religion is the first historical example of a political religion in the modern era, and a form of sacralization of politics which occurred after the political realm gained independence from traditional religion – as happened in America already in 1776 (Gentile 2006:xiv). Historically, the sacralization of politics in this form commenced with the birth of modern democracy, and its origins are democratic, republican and patriotic (2006:xvi). When a political entity such as a nation⁸ is transformed into a sacred entity, it becomes transcendent, unchallengeable, and intangible. As such, it becomes the core of an elaborate system of beliefs, myths, values, commandments, rituals, and symbols, and consequently an object of faith, reverence, veneration, loyalty, and devotion, for which, if necessary, people are willing to sacrifice their lives. The nation, state, or society is one of the most potent repositories of symbols in the modern world, and can often replace religious institutions in the minds of people (Marty 1974:140). For Gentile ‘civil religion’ is the conceptual category that contains the forms of sacralization of a political system that guarantee 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 (Gentile 2006:xv). Civil religion therefore respects individual freedom, coexists with other ideologies, and does not impose obligatory and unconditional support for its commandments. However, Gentile is also clear about the fact that civil religion is not just an innocent and useful instrument for creating social harmony. In particular circumstances civil religion may take on invasive, intolerant, and exclusive attitudes and forms of behavior, in spite of existing within a democratic system, as happened in Fascist Italy and in Nazi Germany in the 1920s and -30s.

The exclusive and intolerant form of civil religion has for the politics of the last few decades been interpreted as religious nationalism by the American political scientist Scott W. Hibbard (Hibbard 2010:208-09). According to him the ideological polarization of the world community during the Cold War became, after the fall of communism, a polarization of civil religion and ideological religious nationalism. It is a fact that civil religion is stimulated in times of crisis and national anxiety, such as the Cold War or the attacks of September 11th 2001 (Canipe 2003:321). Cristi holds that during “unsettled” cultural periods, a radical rethinking of existence takes place, and innovative methods of constructing, defining, or understanding reality emerge (Cristi 2001:228). Ideologies come to play an essential role in organizing social experience, and through styles or strategies of action, competing groups try

⁸ Other political entities that can be transformed into a sacred entity are state, race, class, party and movement.

to gain influence. This I take to be connected to what Marty maintains gives civil religion an ‘episodic character’ because it is used to fulfil different purposes at different times (Marty 1974:142-43). Civil religion is a cluster of episodes he says, which come and go, recede back to invisibility after making their appearance (1974:141). Its nationalistic tendencies may be attenuated or aggravated in response to national and historical conditions, and the civil religious discourse may be appropriated by politically powerful individuals (Cristi 2009:72). This will make it surface from time to time in periodic outbursts of patriotic passion in response to a real or imagined threat to American security (Canipe 2003:306). Patriotism in addition to politics then, in given historical contexts causes the interchange between the two forms of American civil religion. As will become apparent through the source material and analysis, political administrations focus differently on civil religion.

2.7 American Foreign Policy

The situation for the United States with the final collapse of the communist bloc in 1991 was that of becoming the world’s only superpower. The first of the national security strategies in my selection, which span the period 1993-2010, was authored soon after this happened. According to Zbigniew Brzezinski⁹ writing in 1997, after this event, America stands supreme in the four decisive domains of global power: militarily, economically, technologically and culturally – all of which gives the United States the political clout that no other state comes close to matching (Brzezinski 1997:24). It is the combination of all four that makes America the only comprehensive global superpower. At the same time, this period was a time of war of intervention, first in the Persian Gulf, then in Kosovo as the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia escalated, and later in the 2000s in Afghanistan and Iraq. In an increasingly globalized world, and therefore of nations’ rising interdependence, the rhetoric advocated in the strategies chosen for this thesis, is one of deploying America’s financial, diplomatic, and military resources to stand up for peace and security. Promoting global prosperity, and advancing democracy and human rights around the globe are goals part of the strategies, as are strengthening alliances and adapting them to meet emerging challenges. Furthermore, cultural dominance is an important facet of American power, though it has been underappreciated according to Brzezinski. American mass culture, from popular music to lifestyle, eating habits and clothing is increasingly imitated worldwide. Also, advanced

⁹ Zbigniew Brzezinski is an American political scientist, geo-strategist, and statesman who served as a counselor to President Lyndon B. Johnson from 1966 to 1968 and held the position of United States National Security Advisor to President Jimmy Carter from 1977 to 1981.

American education has a strong appeal and draws a substantial number of foreign students to the country.

How American global power is exercised through the global system has its basis in the domestic American experience of the pluralistic character of both society and political system, which involves a complex structure of interlocking institutions and procedures, designed to generate consensus and obscure asymmetries (Brzezinski 1997:24, 27). For example, public opinion polls conducted in 1995 and 1996 indicated a general public preference for “sharing” global power with others, rather than for its monopolistic exercise (1997:25). Because of these domestic factors, the American global system emphasizes the technique of co-optation, and it likewise relies heavily on the indirect exercise of influence on dependent foreign elites, while drawing much benefit from the appeal of its democratic principles and institutions. As the imitation of American ways gradually pervades the world Brzezinski claims, it creates a more congenial setting for the exercise of the indirect and seemingly consensual American hegemony. American global supremacy is buttressed by an elaborate non-hierarchical system of alliances and coalitions that literally span the globe, where America stands at the center. In this interlocking universe power is exercised through continuous bargaining, dialogue, diffusion, and quest for formal consensus, even though that power originates ultimately from a single source, namely, Washington, D.C. (1997:28). Much of this global system emerged during the Cold War, as part of America’s effort to contain its global rival, the Soviet Union, producing a new international order¹⁰ ready for application once the rival faltered.

Themes of civil religion in foreign policy

Religion has always been a central feature of American politics, and religion – particularly Protestant Christianity – remains firmly rooted in American nationalism and culture (Hibbard 2010:177). Debates over the proper role of religion in the public sphere defined the American experience from the outset, and have recurred periodically over the past two centuries. A nation is more than the land it encompasses, the number or kind of people residing in it, or the economy it generates. Rather, it is an “imagined community” constructed through selectively

¹⁰ The basic features of this order consists of a collective security system (NATO, the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty for example); regional economic cooperation (NAFTA, APEC) and specialized global cooperative institutions (the World Bank, IMF, WTO); procedures that emphasize consensual decision making, even if dominated by the United States; a preference for democratic membership within key alliances; and a rudimentary global constitutional and judicial structure (ranging from the World Court to a special tribunal to try war crimes in the former Yugoslavia) (Brzezinski 1997:28-29).

remembered and embellished events, myths of origin, heroic stories, and proclaimed values (Anderson 2006:6). These transcendent symbols constitute the nation's civil religion, which can be seen as a cultural interpretive resource, as was explained in the previous section, a discursive tool for connecting morality and policy. In foreign interventions, practical interests, such as securing oil supplies and military bases or building NATO, are often insufficient to arouse public compliance or active support for a risky military action, but apparent truths conveyed in civil religion themes serve to dress those interests in transcendent clothing. This is particularly necessary for war actions, where the potential for sacrifice must be outweighed by an emotive appeal to sympathy, justice, duty, and mission (Coles 2002:404). Such a policy requires pragmatic consideration, but legitimacy of such a policy is inherently a moral task. Most presidents choose to employ transcendent discursive frameworks to limit political fallout by embedding the action in strategic and moral justification and using the opportunity to build a vision and identity for the country by weaving each war into the historical and mythological tapestries of America.

Civil religious themes have long been integral to public discourse, especially the themes of mission and destiny, best known in the form of Manifest Destiny¹¹. They articulate the country's status, roles, and policies in relation to the world community. Part of this discourse is the belief in America's superior nature and that Americans are a chosen people with a unique destiny in the world. This messianic understanding, blurring religion and nationalism into an amorphous "idea of America", is drawn from the religious idealism of Puritan origin and is evident in the tendency to associate democracy with Divine Providence¹² (Hibbard 2010:177). The chosen nation concept gave rise to, and is itself encapsulated in, "civil millennialism", a concept in which the United States is perceived as the agent of God's activity (Coles 2002:408). That concept became a political doctrine in the 1800s, hence moralizing international relations. Because Manifest Destiny relies on the chosen nation story for its foundation, it can be understood as a "myth of origin" (2002:411). The myth of origin bonds human beings to their roots at the psychological, sociological, and ontological levels, and it is always expressed concretely in terms of specific powers of origin, such as the soil, the blood line, and the social group (Bulman 1991:526). The origin, in all cases, is perceived

¹¹ The political doctrine of Manifest Destiny was first used by democrats to justify the war against Mexico, and the spokesmen for it considered expansion not only wise but obvious (manifest) and unavoidable (destiny). The term as such was created by John L. O'Sullivan, and was first published in his article "Annexation" in the July/August issue of *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* in 1845.

¹² Relying on these tenets, Presidents Polk and Tyler added more than 800 million acres of Mexican land to the United States in the mid-1800s through war and confiscation. Later in the century, again relying overtly on the doctrine in the Spanish-American war, President McKinley annexed in one status or another, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Hawaii, and part of Samoa (Coles 2002:404).

as Holy. As a term, Manifest Destiny today connotes arrogance and racism and is rarely invoked, but it has remained embedded in America's civil religion as a resilient and robust narrative useful for justifying war, intervening on behalf of a ubiquitous national interest, and restoring America's self-image of exceptionalism (Coles 2002:405). Several themes of mission have prevailed, but two themes of importance in this context are a divine mission to establish a democratic system that would serve as an example to the rest of the world (that is, the chosen nation theme) and a mission to lead other states toward freedom (2002:407). The first theme focuses on the nature of "being". According to this theme, America is a providentially chosen nation, chosen to be exemplary among the world's nations for its moral and political uniqueness. Its mission was to be an example to the rest of the world. In today's secular terms, this exemplary status is often expressed as "American exceptionalism" or the "American experiment". The second theme emphasizes action. Based upon the belief that America was chosen for its exceptional social and democratic order, Manifest Destiny summoned the United States to act as a redeemer nation, exerting its good influence upon other nations, through their adoption of American ways or by their incorporation into America (2002:408).

Roberta Coles argues that these two rhetorical themes of Manifest Destiny, that of 'mission by example' and 'mission by intervention', feed upon one another to such an extent as to be virtually one, particularly if intervention is defined more broadly than just war (Coles 2002:408). Manifest Destiny is not mission by intervention alone; the intervention embodies, and would not exist without, mission by example. It is her contention that they remain useful in political discourse through periods of foreign conflict. In analyzing the discourses of two presidents, George H. W. Bush as he prepared for and executed the 1991 Persian Gulf War and Bill Clinton as he approached and implemented a military campaign in Kosovo, Coles found were replete with the tenets of Manifest Destiny though neither ever invoked the term itself (2002:405). Coles argues that Bush presented a largely priestly form of civil religion, while Clinton leaned more to a pastoral and nearly prophetic form. Her work also suggests that while Manifest Destiny is an enduring myth, it may be changing to suit the globalizing world economy (2002:406). The possibility of a changing myth can be seen in relation to Bellah's proposal of a more universal civil religion in the future.

3. Material and methodology

3.1 Introduction

The documents to be presented in this chapter form the basis of the thesis and its analysis, and consist primarily of the *National Security Strategies*¹³ (NSS) for 1993, 1999 and 2010 representing three different presidential periods. The two strategy documents from the George W. Bush administration for 2002 and 2006 have purposely been left out, mainly because much has been written by scholars and students alike¹⁴ about the role of religion during this period, its use of religious rhetoric, and Bush Jr.'s expression of civil religion¹⁵. But the choice of documents was also made in order to keep within the limits of a master thesis and to concentrate on depth rather than breadth in the analysis. Speeches given at National Prayer Breakfasts by the presidents of the three administrations, Presidents George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, have been included to shed light on the strategy documents, as the events are an arena where civil religion is expressed. Lastly, part of the material are President George H. W. Bush's address before a Joint Session of Congress September 11th 1990 and his address to the United Nations General Assembly September 23rd 1991, President Bill Clinton's first inaugural address and his State of the Union in 2000, and President Barack Obama's remarks at the National Defense University May 23rd 2013. They represent different types of presidential speeches held for differing audiences. Though quotes from other speeches could have been chosen, they are especially interesting for the subject of this thesis and the questions asked as they express religion and themes of civil religion in significantly different ways that directly relates to the inherently conflicted nature of American civil religion. In total, the documents and speeches are examples of political expressions of religion and use of religious symbols, and show the continuity and variants of American civil religion and its significance for contemporary national politics.

¹³ All the National Security Strategy documents from 1987 to the present are available online <http://nssarchive.us>.

¹⁴ See for example Svendsen, Kristin, *Religious Rhetoric in American Foreign Policy*, master thesis, University of Bergen, 2004, analyzing the National Security Strategy for 2002.

¹⁵ The attacks of September 11 2001 caused a revival of American civil religion, which was attempted to be transformed from a common American cause into something more like a political religion. Civil religion was no longer an inclusive faith uniting all Americans under a single spiritual umbrella, but a partisan creed that could be used as a weapon against those Americans who were not prepared to enlist in the Cause of Bush. This has possibly been most extensively analyzed by Emilio Gentile in *God's Democracy. American Religion after September 11*, 2008. See also Coles, Roberta, "Manifest Destiny adapted for 1990's War Discourse", 2002, pgs. 422-23.

The methodology to be applied to these official documents will be text analysis, and elements of civil religion found form the focal point of the analysis. The documents will be analyzed in relation to theories of civil religion through three theoreticians. The late American sociologist Robert N. Bellah is internationally known for his theory and understanding of civil religion. Jean-Jaques Rousseau was the first to refer to the concept of civil religion, but it was Bellah who applied it to the contemporary situation in his first article about the subject, “Civil Religion in America”. According to Bellah, ‘civil religion’ “refers to that religious dimension found I think in the life of every people, through which it interprets its historical experience in the light of transcendent reality” (Bellah 1975:3). Also, this public religious dimension is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols and rituals (Bellah 1967:4). The two other theoreticians considered in this thesis are Jean-Jaques Rousseau, and the Italian philosopher Giovanni Gentile, who was Mussolini’s Minister of Education.

The analysis and following discussions are meant as a contribution to the still ongoing debate about American civil religion, notably whether there is such a thing as a common set of values and ideas in the American contemporary society that fits this description, and if it still plays a significant role in citizens’ collective consciousness. What holds a society together is an important question, and the role of the state in forging strategies to create social cohesion will be addressed in this thesis. Within the Sociology of religion it is only in recent research that civil religion as a political resource has been discussed, an issue bearing on the question of legitimation of the state (Cristi 2001, 2009). Democratic societies employ the machinery of the state to encourage patriotism and national solidarity, and in the United States both Republicans and Democrats use the civil religious discourse to frame their political visions. Recent research in the field comes from American, Canadian, Slovenian and Danish scholars: Scott W. Hibbard, Marcela Cristi, Lorne Dawson, Sergej Flere, Annika Hvithamar and Margit Warburg to name a few, but also from the contemporary Italian historian Emilio Gentile.

3.2 The documents and speeches constituting the source material

The three National Security Strategy documents have been chosen to illustrate the connection between American civil religion and contemporary politics in the United States. They all contain references to religion. The documents cover three different administrations of both political parties and a time span of two decades. The choice of these documents as material for my analysis has been made in order to try to uncover differences in the political use of

civil religion between various administrations, and to see whether civil religion is emphasized by all or one president and his administration. What is interesting to note is that not all strategy documents have elements of civil religion included in them, and only the strategy document for 2010 is elaborate in the use of elements of civil religion. Likewise, the choice of speeches which I analyze here, allow me to check for other elements of civil religion and to assess the importance of context. The tension between the priestly and prophetic understandings of American civil religion inherently in it is an aspect informing this thesis (Marty 1974, Canipe 2003). Within the last three decades of national politics, which roughly covers the timespan of my source material, scholars have identified a dichotomy between civil religion and religious nationalism (Hibbard 2010, Canipe 2003). This dichotomy corresponds with the tension between the understandings of civil religion and is identifiable in several of the documents and speeches, most clearly in the words of Bush and Obama. The roots of this tension are to be found in the founding documents' political ideologies of republicanism and liberalism according to Robert N. Bellah writing decades earlier, two political ideologies which he considered antithetical (Bellah 1967, 1992). An issue that greatly concerned Bellah was the possible instrumental use of civil religion.

The presidential speeches from the National Prayer Breakfasts were chosen as examples of the presidents differing attitudes to religion. My selection of presidential quotes from different events during the two decades comes from Bush's remarks in 1991, Clinton's in 1993 and 1995, and Obama's in 2012 and 2013.

3.3 The National Security Strategy documents

The National Security Strategy is a report that lays out a strategic approach for advancing American interests, including security and economic measures, and an assessment of the international order, all with the view of supporting national values and the security challenges at the time of writing¹⁶.

The National Security Council is the President's principal forum for considering national security and foreign policy matters with his senior advisors and cabinet officials¹⁷. The National Security Strategy is prepared periodically for Congress by the Executive Branch which outlines the major national security concerns and how it plans to deal with them. The

¹⁶ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/homeland-security> [Accessed February 26, 2014]

¹⁷ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/nsc> [Accessed February 26, 2014]

Executive Branch¹⁸ consists of the President, Vice President, Cabinet consisting of 15 executive departments, independent federal agencies and members of the armed forces, employing more than 4 million Americans. The report is their strategic vision, and legitimizes the government's requests to Congress for resources¹⁹.

Congress consists of the House of Representatives and the Senate, forming the Legislative Branch of government. As Congress and the Executive Branch need a common understanding of the strategic environment, the administration's intent with the report is for future dialogue necessary to reach a common understanding. In content the document is purposely general in contrast to the National Military Strategy (NMS) in the concerns it addresses. It's implementation relies on elaborating guidance provided in other supporting documents, including the NMS. The overall concern is to create a stable world situation.

It is important to bear in mind that the documents I analyze are written in specific political contexts and periods of national and foreign policy. They therefore vary in content, but at the same time they are also similar in character²⁰. The concerns they address have a differing focus on the main issues, according to which issues are the most important at the time of writing for the administration and American interests. However, many themes are repeated. These similarities concern appeals to the nation's fundamental and enduring values, the ambition of shaping the future of the world and the mandate for global leadership. Likewise, the appeal to have faith in the nation is a common trait. All three documents also express contextual or general themes of transition, transformation or renewal, that is already underway or is about to take effect and that will improve the national and world situation and contribute to a new era or world order. Also, the theme of the globalization of certain American values considered universal and therefore to be viewed as the basis of shared interests, is present in all three documents. The theme of the world's interconnectedness is emphasized in both documents and speeches.

As stated, the National Security Strategy document is primarily written for Congress, in other words for fellow Americans part of the political elite. But it is also written to communicate with select domestic audiences, such as political supporters seeking Presidential recognition of their issues²¹. In addition, being an official, open document, readily available

¹⁸ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/our-government/executive-branch> [Accessed February 27. 2014]

¹⁹ Oversight of the executive branch is an important Congressional check.

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/our-government/legislative-branch> [Accessed February 27. 2014]

²⁰ According to NSS for 1988 there is a remarkable consistency over time when the United States' policies are viewed in historical perspectives. The core interests and objectives of the nation have changed little since World War II. NSS 1988, p. 1.

²¹ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/our-government/executive-branch> [Accessed February 27. 2014]

online, the strategic vision can also be communicated to foreign governments and constituencies, and to the public at large. The appeal to the American public to read the document was spelled out by President Ronald Reagan in the final words of the Preface to National Security Strategy for 1988:

...we must never forget that freedom is never really free; it is the most costly thing in the world. And freedom is never paid for in a lump sum. Installments come due in every generation. All any one of us can do is offer the generations that follow a chance for freedom. In the final analysis, this is the assurance that our National Security Strategy seeks to provide. I commend its reading to all Americans.
President Ronald Reagan, January 1988²²

3.4 The National Prayer Breakfast events

The National Prayer Breakfast is a yearly event held in Washington D. C. meant to be a forum for the political, social, and business elite to assemble and build relationships across divides of race, religion, and politics. The event has since its beginning in 1953 been hosted by members of Congress and organized by the Fellowship Foundation²³. It is attended by some 3500 guests including international invitees from over 100 countries, and every American president since Dwight D. Eisenhower has participated in the event, thereby playing an active part in giving the political realm a religious dimension. It is an event when politicians publicly acknowledge the importance of prayer and faith, and is today one of the arenas where civil religion is expressed.

3.5 President George H. W. Bush and his administration 1989-1993

The National Security Strategy for 1993 with 21 pages in total was written by President George H. W. Bush and his administration and published in January 1993. Formulated in the aftermath of the breakup of the communist bloc and the destruction of the Berlin Wall 1989-1991²⁴, the message of historic transformation is strongly emphasized. Along with the end of the 20th century as being the beginning of an “Age of Democratic Peace” (NSS 1993:ii), the

²² NSS 1988, p. V.

²³ The initiative to establish the event was taken by the Fellowship Foundation, also called the International Foundation, a non-profit Christian organization serving leaders, among others. The members of Congress hosting the event belong to prayer groups in both the Senate and the House of Representatives, who take turns inviting people from every state and many nations to this special time of fellowship and prayer together. <http://thefellowshipfoundation.org/activities.html> [Accessed May 19, 2014]

²⁴ In the autumn of 1988 Mikhail Gorbachev travelled to New York to deliver an historic address to the UN General Assembly. The Cold War was over, he proclaimed. Communism had failed in its seventy-year battle against the global capitalist system. A year later the Berlin Wall came down, and three years after that, the Soviet Union collapsed (Hertz 2002:32)

stated overriding goal is of an enduring democratic peace based on shared values in an interdependent world. In addition to stating the perceived national security challenges of the time, what President Bush and his administration expressed it was seeking was an enduring global faith in America based on the values that defines the Nation – freedom, compassion, justice, opportunity, the rule of law and hope. They stressed the American mandate for global leadership.

The expressed vision for the future was of a world no longer divided, but a community of independent and interdependent nations joined together by shared values (NSS 1993:21). This last point highlights the question which informs the thesis, the “civil religion of the world” and the possible ambition of United States governments to forge such a ‘religion’ into being through their influence in international institutions such as the United Nations and NATO. This question will be discussed in a separate part of the thesis. All the above-mentioned points from the strategy document are political in content and context and do not in any significant way relate to Bellah’s definition of American civil religion. Even though it conveys a strong emphasis on faith in the Nation and its leadership and values, it lacks any appeal to a transcendent reality. On the other hand the administration considered the times ‘a summons to national greatness’ and expressed a laudatory self-congratulation for the ideology on which their victory for the Cold War was based – democracy²⁵, which can be interpreted as expressions of American patriotism or glorification of the nation. It further claims:

No other nation has the same combination of moral, cultural, political, economic, and military credibility. No other has won such confidence, respect, and trust. No other has the same potential and indeed responsibility for world leadership (NSS 1993:21).

3.6. Speeches by President George H. W. Bush

When President George H. W. Bush addressed a Joint Session of Congress about the Persian Gulf Crisis and the Federal Budget in 1990 he acknowledged it as an extraordinary occasion for a possible radical transformation to take place in the administration’s contemplating to declare war on Iraq. According to Bush this was a transformation American leaders had been planning for and had as an objective, a move toward an historic period of cooperation. In his own words:

²⁵ Most Americans are unaware of the fact that neither the *Declaration of Independence* nor the *Constitution* states explicitly that the United States is a democracy. The same is true of all thirteen of the original state constitutions created after the Revolution (Graeber 2013:154).

...Out of these troubled times, our fifth objective - - a new world order - - can emerge: a new era - - freer from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice, and more secure in the quest for peace... A hundred generations have searched for this elusive path to peace, while a thousand wars raged across the span of human endeavor. Today that new world is struggling to be born, a world quite different from the one we've known. A world where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle. A world in which nations recognize the shared responsibility for freedom and justice...this crisis today could shape the future for generations to come²⁶.

Towards the end of his speech, President Bush stated that the new world order was a dream. At the time, the ensuing Gulf war in 1991 was legitimized and explained as a defense of principle and this dream. In other words, the transformation toward the dream of the new world order was to come about through war. The 'new world order'²⁷ is here understood as a one-world ideology. A year later in an Address to a Session of the United Nations General Assembly Bush elaborated on the theme with these words:

Finally, you may wonder about America's role in the new world that I have described. Let me assure you, the United States has no intention of striving for a Pax Americana. However, we will remain engaged. We will not retreat and pull back into isolationism. We will offer friendship and leadership. And in short, we seek a Pax Universalis built upon shared responsibilities and aspirations....Inspire future generations to praise and venerate you, to say, "On the ruins of conflict, these brave men and women built an era of peace and understanding. They inaugurated a new world order, an order worth preserving for the ages"²⁸.

The remarks by President Bush at the prayer breakfast held in 1991 were more conventionally religious. He stated the fundamental importance of faith in God as a transcendent power to reckon with for the nation, and the meaning this gives to America and its people. He said:

You know, America is a nation founded under God. And from our very beginnings we have relied upon His strength and guidance in war and in peace²⁹.

²⁶ http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public_papers.php?id=2217&year=1990&month=9 [Accessed September 16, 2013]

²⁷ I am aware of the conspiracy theory connected to the concept of a «New World Order» and the motto on the reverse side of the Great American Seal, «Novus Ordo Seclorum», which translates «New Order of the Ages», not «New World Order». This is not an issue that will be touched upon in this thesis.

²⁸ http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public_papers.php?id=3415&year=&month= [Accessed march 20, 2014]

²⁹ <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PPP-1991-book1/pdf/PPP-1991-book1-doc-pg85-2.pdf> [Accessed September 19, 2013]

This public emphasis on religious faith puts explicit demands on the American president, which President Bush emphasized in the same speech with these words:

I have learned what I suppose every President has learned, and that is that one cannot be President of our country without faith in God and without knowing with certainty that we are one nation under God.

3.7 President Bill Clinton and his administration 1993-2001

The perspectives of President Bill Clinton and his administration's national strategy document for 1999 was looking toward the 21st century, at a time of rapid globalization and nations increasing interdependence. It was published in December of that year, and with 49 pages in total it is therefore more detailed than the previous document. It also reminds readers of changes in the past decade, with the extraordinary movement of nations away from repressive governance toward democratic and publicly accountable institutions. How the nation was and could be affected by events in other parts of the world seems a major concern, stating that America must lead in the world to protect their people at home and their way of life. The importance of promoting democracy, human rights, religious freedom and economic reform abroad is stated several times in the document, all necessary to build a truly global economy. It stated that:

In some circumstances our nation may act because our values demand it. Examples include responding to natural and manmade disasters: promoting human rights and seeking to halt gross violations of those rights.... The spread of democracy and respect for the rule of law helps to create a world community more hospitable to US values and interests (NSS 1999:2).

This administration also stated the importance of working through international institutions towards the goal of broadening the community of free-market democracies. Shaping the international environment in this way was what the United States' international leadership was founded on, and this strategy of homogenizing the world community with their political ideology can again be seen in relation to the question of a 'civil religion of the world'. There is otherwise no direct correspondence to Bellah's understanding of civil religion in the strategy. Again, the statements are strictly political in character.

3.8. Speeches by President Bill Clinton

The inauguration of the president of the United States is a ceremonial event marking the commencement of a new four-year term of a president. The day a presidential inauguration occurs is known as "Inauguration Day", and the inauguration element mandated by the Constitution is that the president make an oath or affirmation before that person can "enter on the Execution" of the office of the presidency³⁰. Over the years, various traditions have arisen that have expanded the inauguration from a simple oath-taking ceremony to a day-long event, including parades, speeches, and balls. A president's inauguration is an important ritual for the nation as for American civil religion, as it reaffirms among other things, the religious legitimization of the highest political authority (Bellah 1967:4). In addition to the founding documents being the core texts of American civil religion, the first four presidents' and some former president's inaugural addresses are also very important. At such a solemn occasion, President Clinton in his first inaugural address in 1993 seems to have been well aware of the national historical experience that is expressed through civil religion and the footsteps he was about to follow in, as his opening words to the American people were these:

Today we celebrate the mystery of American renewal. This ceremony is held in the depth of winter, but by the words we speak and the faces we show the world, we force the spring, a spring reborn in the world's oldest democracy that brings forth the vision and courage to reinvent America. When our Founders boldly declared America's independence to the world and our purposes to the Almighty, they knew that America, to endure, would have to change; not change for change's sake but change to preserve America's ideals: life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness. Though we marched to the music of our time, our mission is timeless. Each generation of Americans must define what it means to be an American³¹.

In this quote the language Clinton chose is heavily derivative from the Bible. The vocabulary is based on scriptural notions of renewal and rebirth, and the call is for courage and idealism of biblical proportions (Linder 1996:743). There is also the traditional inclusion of the Almighty in the scheme of things and a reference to national mission. The theme of renewal has in this thesis been found to be an element of civil religion, and seems to have been of great importance during his two presidencies as he chose to highlight it again seven years later

³⁰ Presidential Inaugurations Past and Present: A Look at the History Behind the Pomp and Circumstance.
<http://2002-2009-fpc.state.gov/40871.htm> [Accessed May 19. 2014]

³¹ <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=46366> [Accessed March 03. 2014]

in his State of the Union address in the last year of his presidency in 2000, thereby reminding his audience that no nation is ever static and of the fundamental role of change:

After 224 years, the American Revolution continues. We remain a new nation. And as long as our dreams outweigh our memories, America will be forever young. That is our destiny. And this is our moment³².

Bill Clinton's first speech as president at the National Prayer Breakfast in February 1993 drew attention to one of civil religions core texts, namely a former president's inaugural address, a famous phrase of President John F. Kennedy. Clinton made a comparison between the Bible and a speech by the former Democratic president, stating that we need our faith as a source of challenge because

... if we read the Scriptures carefully, it teaches us that all of us must try to live by what we believe or, in more conventional terms, to live out the admonition of President Kennedy that here on Earth God's work must truly be our own³³.

In his speech at the 1995 National Prayer Breakfast President Clinton used the symbol of God more expressively but in a strikingly generic sense sounding almost as the repentant sinner he would later become after the Lewinsky case.

We are here because we are all the children of God, because we know we have all fallen short of God's glory, because we know that no matter how much power we have, we have it but for a moment. And in the end, we can only exercise it well if we see ourselves as servants, not sovereigns³⁴.

3.9 President Barack Obama and his administration 2009-

The last security strategy document to be described, and also the latest, is that of President Barack Obama's administration from 2010 which distinguishes itself in my selection of strategies through its choice of language, metaphors, and argumentation, but in political

³² <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=58708> [Accessed March 03. 2014]

³³ <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/sa/?pid=46711> [Accessed September 18. 2013]

³⁴ <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PPP-1995-book1/pdf/PPP-1995-book1-doc-pg144-2.pdf> [Accessed September 19. 2013]

content it features many of the same arguments and aspects of national and foreign policy. It was published in May of that year and with a total of 52 pages is the most detailed and elaborate in argumentation. America's commitment to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law as sources of strength and influence is stated several times, and likewise the goal of shaping the international order. However, in addition it clearly states that the intention is "not to build an empire, but to shape a world in which more individuals and nations could determine their own destiny and live with the peace and dignity that they deserve"³⁵. But on the other hand the document stresses the need for America to shape changes rather than being shaped by them. It states concern for democratic development which has stalled in recent years. In relation to the question of a future "civil religion of the world", this strategy document strongly emphasizes that "in order for collective action to be mobilized, the polarization that persists across region, race and religion will need to be replaced by a galvanizing sense of shared interests (NSS 2010:13).

The strategy document acknowledges the fact that some methods employed in the pursuit of national security have compromised the values they promote, and it calls for a strategy of national renewal. This I take as indirect criticism of President George W. Bush's war on terrorism and the use of undemocratic methods³⁶. It claims that America's moral leadership is principally grounded in the power of her example.

Compared to earlier, in 2010 globalization had accelerated on an unprecedented scale, but is now clearly seen as a common good for all nations, as well as a possible threat. The document was written almost a decade after the attacks of September 11 2001, after a time of national economic crisis and continued wars overseas. The pathos of the document seems more solemn and the tone more urgent than the other security strategies. It has more powerful historical and moral perspectives that specifically harken back to the time of the founding of the republic, giving it a mythical and emotional dimension associated with Bellah's civil religion.

The religiously toned and nationally important metaphors or rhetorical *topoi* chosen by the authors of the Obama administration's 2010 document beg the question whether they were used because of and in view of the national crisis, trying to create room for the president to handle the crisis by referring to the historical legitimation of the American political system

³⁵ NSS 2010, "Overview of National Security Strategy".

³⁶ This does not mean that fundamental national values are not compromised by the Obama administration. Covert warfare in more than 100 countries and the use of drones in targeted assassinations has escalated on an unprecedented scale during Obama's presidency, in contrast for example to the value of rule of law. See Mazzetti, Mark *The Way of the Knife*, 2013, and Scahill, Jeremy *Dirty Wars. The World is a Battlefield*, 2013.

and hence his American presidency. In times of major national crisis the need for a civil religion is more urgent to remind both citizens and the political elite of their common roots and shared destiny.

3.10 Speeches by President Barack Obama

In President Obama's speech at the National Defense University 23rd May 2013, he expressed himself very much in line with the strategy document of his administration and echoes the speeches quoted from above, when he chose to highlight an element of American civil religion of fundamental value to the nation. The founding documents of the American nation are the two most sacred texts of American civil religion (Bellah 1967:6), and Obama begins his speech by stating that these documents bind the nation together and have so for over two centuries. They are part of the nation's cohesion creating unity as one people. He ends his speech by calling on the necessity of "staying true to the values of our founding and by using our constitutional compass"³⁷. In this speech as in the National Security Strategy 2010, the nation's fundamental values were acknowledged by referring to their historical origins, which can be interpreted as reiteration of the need for staying true to them. This statement can also be seen in light of the call for national renewal, as a call to return to the values of their founding documents. But it can also be seen as a renewal of the faith in the nation. The President also reminded his listeners of the high price of sacrifice that must be paid for freedom, pointing to the nation's war for independence and the sacrifices made in gaining it.

According to Bellah, the words and acts of the founding fathers, especially the first few presidents, shaped the form and tone of civil religion as it has been maintained ever since (Bellah 1967:7). From both the strategy document and the speech referred to above it is evident that President Obama is a proponent of the continuity of this element of civil religion. However, also in the context of a politically difficult period both nationally and on the world scene, he chose to draw attention from his readers and audience by using elements of civil religion which lie deep in the American tradition, and thereby highlighting the urgency of his message. This theme is present in President Clinton's inaugural address, but to a lesser degree than Obama. In addition, Obama also drew attention to other elements of civil religion, presented towards the end of this chapter.

³⁷<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/23/remarks-president-national-defense-university>
[Accessed June 11. 2013]

When President Obama held his speech at the National Prayer Breakfast in 2012 he expressed his own personal faith and praising its function as glue that holds the nation together.

... I have fallen on my knees with great regularity since that moment – asking God for guidance not just in my personal life and my Christian walk, but in the life of this nation and in the values that hold us together and keep us strong. I know that He will guide us. He always has, and He always will...³⁸

His belief in the American nation as a community of citizens was expressed, not by referring to God or religion, but by stressing the collective aspect of society:

...But part of that belief comes from my faith in the idea that I am my brother's keeper and I am my sister's keeper; that as a country, we rise and fall together. I'm not an island. I'm not alone in my success. I succeed because others succeed with me.

At the National Prayer Breakfast in 2013 the president, in expressing these same sentiments, also acknowledged the pluralistic makeup of the American society and at the same time reminding his audience of Americans' faith in the nation, as the common faith of all Americans. Thereby Obama made a clear reference to American civil religion.

As Christians, we place our faith in the nail-scarred hands of Jesus Christ. But so many other Americans also know the close embrace of faith -- Muslims and Jews, Hindus and Sikhs. And all Americans -- whether religious or secular -- have a deep and abiding faith in this nation³⁹.

The perspectives in the above quotations from Obama's views on American civil religion are mirrored in the closing words of the National Security Strategy 2010: "We continue to draw strength from those founding documents that established the creed that binds us together".

³⁸<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/02/02/remarks-president-national-prayer-breakfast>
[Accessed April 26, 2013]

³⁹<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/02/07/remarks-president-national-prayer-breakfast>
[Accessed 27. 2013]

3.11 Elements of civil religion

The elements of civil religion that have been found in the documents, primarily in the National Security Strategy 2010 and president's speeches, will be used as categories for the analysis. The five elements presented below constitute the most important tenets of belief of American civil religion, and correspond to a large extent with those identified by Bellah. On the other hand, there are symbols and rituals of civil religion highlighted by him that do not occur in my source material. I will also argue that the element of sacrifice is connected to war as well as national rituals. The following elements have been found:

- The founding documents
- God as symbol
- America as a beacon
- The hope of transformation
- Sacrifice as necessity

3.12 Methodology

The methodology to be applied to the official documents is text analysis. As no texts exist in a void it is therefore important to have a fundamental knowledge of critical text analysis. They will always be part of a greater context. It is not only the contents of the text that is important, but also the meaning behind the published text. Text analysis as a method can have different goals according to which answers are sought. In order to give the material more depth it is important in the analysis to discuss the information the material gives and to place it in a context. For this work discourse analysis becomes an important tool. The term 'discourse' means to "run her and there" or to "run around", and points thereby to something in motion, a form of conversation (Olsen 2006:51). Historian of religion Torjer A. Olsen states that discourse is often equated with exchanges of opinions or discussions. Discourse analysis is not a firm and uniform system with a strict set of methodological rules. In many ways it is on a level between theory and method, giving leads for both (2006:65). Because of this discourse analysis can seem fluid. It is therefore important to adapt it according to researcher, material and research questions asked.

When discourse is understood as conversation or speech it is more than both monologue and dialogue, more than both the one speaker and the two conversing. Linguistic and cultural context belong to discourses, and other more or less external factors that work as

leads for the conversation. Discourses are never “ideal”, nor firm. They carry with them and are marked by power and volatility (Olsen 2006:52). They can concern a particular theme, and also consist of several lesser discourses about lesser and related themes. Another significant trait of the term discourse is that it contains belonging to certain social relations. Discourse describes the language being used in a specific milieu or connected to certain actions or incidents. As language is an important dimension of discourses this closely connects to meaning. The primary function of language is meaning creation. This function can be expanded from meaning production to exchanges of opinions, and discourse can thereby be understood as ‘human meaning production through social interaction’ (2006:54). As religion is an important component of many peoples universe of meaning, this way of viewing language and the discourse term is fruitful in connection with religious studies.

The strands and elements of civil religion found in my source material are part of the long tradition of civil religious discourse in America from the perspective of the political elite, who has written the documents and held the speeches. My investigation concerns what role this discourse plays in these official documents. The analysis sheds light on whether the continuity of this discourse plays an active part in contemporary American national politics and the nation’s self-understanding. To what extent does this discourse have global perspectives?

Chapter 4. Bellah's concept of civil religion

This chapter starts with a presentation of Bellah's concept of civil religion, with a focus on how it was laid out in his original article, before discussing the social dimension of American civil religion, and then turning attention to the analysis of the elements of civil religion found in the source material. At the end of the chapter is a short discussion of Bellah's proposal of a future civil religion of the world, with an example from contemporary Norwegian politics.

4.1 Introduction

When the American sociologist Robert N. Bellah, renowned for his work within the sociology of religion, was asked to write an essay for *Daedalus* in 1965 on the theme of religion in American public life, he based it on inspiration from giving a series of lectures in Japanese universities on the subject during his year as a Fulbright scholar (Bellah 1992:vii-viii). He was well aware of the lack of academic research on the subject and the controversial nature of it, when he published his article two years later as *Civil Religion in America*. The public religious dimension of his own culture that he had identified and analyzed he called 'civil religion', understood as a heritage of moral and religious experience⁴⁰, from which according to Bellah, the Americans still had much to learn (1967:19). His argument was based on the sociological idea that all politically organized societies have some sort of civil religion (1974:257), and that every community is based on a sense of the sacred and requires a context of higher meaning (1974:270). As later mentioned by James A. Mathisen, academically, American history and American religion were not Bellah's specialties, East Asia was (Mathisen 1989:130). Bellah later stated that, "I was induced, rather reluctantly, into writing the piece" (Bellah 1992:viii). However, Bellah did have a longstanding interest in the subject.

Bellah had no way of foreseeing the long lasting and sometimes heated academic debates the article would spark. The debates mainly concerned the relevance of the concept of civil religion and especially the American context, and difficulties in defining the term. Since the publication, the concept of civil religion has become one of the most widely used ideas in the sociology of religion. As time passed comparative studies were to shed light on different

⁴⁰ The most substantial statement that Robert Bellah made about American civil religion was in his monograph *The Broken Covenant. American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* in 1975, publishing lectures given in 1973 at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati (Bellah 1992:ix).

forms and expressions of civil religion. The contemporary research on the subject seems to be a continuation of these debates, with Bellah's article the pivotal point of reference.

In choosing the term 'civil religion' Bellah revitalized a term coined and introduced by philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau in 1762 in his work *The Social Contract*. Differences in the two theories of civil religion will be explained and discussed in the analysis.

4.2 Civil religion as heritage

It seems that the main object for Bellah with his original article is to analyze the continuity of civil religion in America, and to impart his findings and draw attention to this specific side of religiosity in the American public realm. The notion of civil religion has for him utility as an analytical tool for understanding something that exists in American society (Bellah 1974:257). The most central tenet of this belief is according to Bellah, that the nation is not an ultimate end in itself but stands under transcendent judgment and has value only insofar as it realizes a "higher law" (1974:255). Considering the central beliefs and practices of American civil religion as a heritage of moral and religious experience of the American people, he adopts a normative stance regarding its function and meaning. Civil religion for Bellah becomes a transcendental religion rendering prophetic judgment on the nation (Jones and Richey 1974:16). In Bellah's analysis American civil religion has symbolic content, solemn rituals, religious figures, and historical events are invested with a sacred reverence.

Bellah is concerned with civil religion's historical development and explains how different symbols and rituals became incorporated, as described in chapter 3. The form civil religion takes largely depends upon specific historical circumstances. As a cultural phenomenon, civil religion only gradually takes on a fixed form and becomes institutionalized. Bellah claims that American civil religion is a part of the American experience and has been molded in times of trial (Bellah 1992:1). The great national events – the War for Independence and the Civil War - involved the national self-understanding so deeply as to require expression in civil religion, and raised the deepest questions of national meaning. They resulted in sacred places for commemorating national trauma and the words and acts of the founding fathers shaped the form and tone of American civil religion as it has been maintained since then (Bellah 1967:7). Their words in inaugurals and addresses have become sacred texts of civil religion. In Bellah's view civil religion contributed to the unity and collective identity of Americans as a national community (1967:4).

Part of this civil religious heritage, are also the inherited values and beliefs. The communal ethic that from the beginning was inherent in the tradition had at the time of his writing long since eroded according to Bellah. The Puritan and republican commitment to the common good, with a deeply felt concern for the lesser brother, as a counterbalance to individual self-reliance and independence, are concerns equally part of the heritage (Bellah 1974:262). The tone and urgency of Bellah's article convey a concern for loss of ethical purpose and republican virtue that haunted political life (Bellah 1992:183). American institutions were facing a crisis of legitimation in the wake of the social and cultural disturbances of the 1960s and the Nixon years⁴¹. As a sociologist, value systems are at the core of Bellah's sociology, and his work on civil religion displays a high degree of continuity with normative functionalist analyses of value systems and modernization in industrial society (Beckford 1989:69). For Bellah, civil religion is a resource for morally judging the nation, as will be explained further in this chapter.

4.3 The religious dimension of the political sphere

A focal point of the article is how civil religion relates to political society. Using evidence from inaugural addresses Bellah observes that civil religion provides a religious legitimation to political authority. He claims that the whole American political process, since the earliest days of republic, has been rooted in biblical religious symbols and has been imbued with transcendental quality (Cristi 2001:52). At the same time Bellah (1976) has argued that there is an internal tension in this creed, driven by what he calls 'two structures of interpretation', the biblical and utilitarian traditions (Cristi and Dawson 2007:274). Both of these traditions have been cultural sources that have nourished American identity and self-understanding, but their messages diverge and compete for dominance. This tension, connected to the two forms of civil religion, is not explicitly stated or discussed in his original article, but seems to underlie his argumentation about his view on contemporary civil religion. In later works Bellah elaborated his views on the subject, a point I will return to in the analysis of the next chapter.

A continuous theme in American civil religion has been that God has led his people to establish a new sort of social order and political system that shall be a light to all nations (Bellah 1967:8). An example of expression of this theme is to be found in President Lyndon B. Johnson's inaugural address 22nd November 1963:

⁴¹ These disturbances involved the civil rights movement and its attendant riots, the domestic conflict over the Vietnam War, the student rebellions, and the Watergate scandal (Cristi and Dawson 2007:273).

They came here - the exile and the stranger, brave but frightened – to find a place where a man could be his own man. They made a covenant with this land. Conceived in justice, written in liberty, bound in union, it was meant one day to inspire the hopes of all mankind; and it binds us still. If we keep its terms, we shall flourish (Quoted in Bellah 1967:8).

A president's inauguration is an important ceremonial ceremony in American civil religion. On such solemn occasions references to God are almost invariably found in the pronouncements of American presidents. It is not without interest Bellah observes, that the first time the actual word God was used by a president was 5th March 1821 by Monroe in his second inaugural. By earlier presidents God was referred to as "that Almighty Being who rules the universe", "Great Author of every public and private good", "Invisible Hand", "benign Parent of the Human Race", "that Being in whose hands we are", "Patron of Order", "Fountain of Justice", or "Providence" (1967:19 n. 3). The reference to God Bellah found, was another important theme of civil religion, and it is also present in the *Declaration of Independence*, which is one of American civil religion's two most "sacred" texts. This theme can be exemplified by the concluding words in President John F. Kennedy's inaugural address 20th January 1961:

Finally, whether you are citizens of America or of the world, ask of us the same high standards of strength and sacrifice that we shall ask of you. With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own. (Quoted in Bellah 1967:1-2).

Kennedy's reference to God was not to a god of any particular religion, and although he was a Christian, it was not a personal religious sentiment he expressed, which is not in a direct way relevant to the conduct of public office. His reference was to the concept of a non-distinct or general idea of God. Though the God of American civil religion is somewhat deist in character, God is nonetheless actively interested and involved in history, with a special concern for America, as explained in chapter 3.

Bellah observed that civil religion was independent of religious and political institutions, and at the same time, not in competition with either church or state (Cristi 2001:1-2). The principle of separation of church and state in America guarantees the freedom

of religious belief and association and at the same time clearly segregates the religious sphere, which is considered to be essentially private, from the political sphere. But this separation does not deny the political realm a religious dimension. While American civil religion included many Christian symbols and themes, it was ‘neither sectarian nor in any specific sense Christian’ (Bellah 1967:8). There are certain common elements of religious orientation that the majority of Americans share and that have played a crucial role in the development of American institutions, says Bellah. He argues that these shared elements still provide a religious dimension to the whole fabric of American life, including the political sphere (1967:3-4). These common elements helped to form and build civil religion, and since elements were borrowed selectively from conventional religion, they could form a coherent system where traits of diverse denominations exist side by side without causing any conflict. From its beginning there was an implicit but clear cut division between civil religion and normative, institutional Christianity. In order to explain the emergence of civil religion in America, Bellah points out that under the doctrine of religious liberty an exceptionally wide sphere of personal piety was left to the churches. Another fundamental trait of American civil religion, and equally deep-set in American politics is the tradition of presidents professing a personal Christian faith. This tradition enables them to use the word *God* in the ways described above and that are part of the God symbolism. According to Bellah, to elect a chief magistrate of the country with another faith than Christianity, or conceivably Judaism, would have consequences for civil religion (1967:15).

The oath of office that presidents swear is ‘before the people and Almighty God’ as prescribed by the founding fathers, and includes the acceptance of the obligation to uphold the Constitution. In American political theory sovereignty rests with the people, of course, but implicitly and often explicitly, the ultimate sovereignty has been attributed to God (Bellah 1967:4). Following this line of reasoning the will of the people is not itself the criterion of right and wrong. There is a higher criterion that the will of the people can be judged by, as the will of the people is fallible. The president’s obligation extends to the higher criterion – the will, and judgment, of God. The appeal to God as ‘the Supreme Judge’ is also present in the Declaration of Independence, where it is stated that the nation will be judged ‘for the rectitude of our intentions’⁴². What this means Bellah argues, is that political life is not only provided a religious dimension, but also a transcendent goal for the political process (1967:4). In stating this, he is thinking about the political machinery in theological terms (Cristi 2001:115).

⁴² http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html [Accessed April 02. 2014]

Politics is approached as if ultimate moral and religious issues are at stake. This is also implied in Kennedy's final words that "here on earth God's work must truly be our own". According to Bellah this religious mind set is a theme that lies deep in the American tradition, and the existence of this highest level religious symbolism in political life justifies the assertion that there is a civil religion in America (Bellah 1992:175). Civil religion is in a sense marginal, though very securely institutionalized. It is marginal in that it has no official support in the legal and constitutional order but is nevertheless a part of it. Behind president's great gestures and proclamations there is no orthodox interpretation, no government-supported schools of civil theology, no censor with power to forbid what does not conform (1992:46). In a neutral deistic language the cold external forms of civil religion can be filled with warm inner life, appropriated and impressed into the imaginative life of the people (1992:45). The meaning, the inner meaning, is left to private interpretation. It is precisely this dynamic combination of public form and private meaning Bellah says, that makes the American civil religion so difficult to understand and analyze.

4.4 Civil religion at the time of Bellah

When Bellah wrote his article he emphasized the fact that civil religion was still very much alive. The political context of the time - "America's third time of trial" as he calls the years of the Vietnam War⁴³ - seems also to have spurred him on, and to question whether this international crisis would contribute to a major new set of symbolic forms to American civil religion. Just a few years earlier the theme of sacrifice had been re-enacted in connection with the funeral of their assassinated president, John F. Kennedy. But he also gave an illustration of how civil religion had served to mobilize support for the attainment of national goals, when President Johnson went before Congress to ask for a strong voting-rights bill. In concluding his speech Johnson said:

Above the pyramid on the great seal of the United States is says in Latin,
"God has favored our undertaking"⁴⁴.

God will not favor everything that we do. It is rather our duty to divine his will. I cannot help but believe that He truly understands and that he really favors the undertaking that we begin here tonight (Quoted in Bella 1967:13-14).

⁴³ The Vietnam War, also called the Second Indochina War, was a proxy war and lasted from December 1956 to April 1975.

⁴⁴ The common translation of the motto 'annuit coeptis' on the reverse side of the Great Seal of the United States is: He approves/has approved of the undertakings.

Like all religions, civil religion has suffered various distortions (1967:12), such as the misconception of civil religion being synonymous with worship of the nation. Religion and morality and politics are not the same things, and confusing them can lead to distortions. But cutting all links can lead to even worse distortions. The concept of civil religion points to the fact that some links between them seem to exist in all societies. At its best civil religion would be realized in a situation where politics operates within a set of moral norms and both politics and morality are open to transcendent judgment (1974:271). However, Bellah was also concerned about the fact that civil religion had not only been invoked in favor of worthy causes, even though it had been involved in the most pressing moral and political issues. The defenders of slavery before the Civil War rejected the thinking of the Declaration of Independence, but civil religion exercised long-term pressure for a humane solution to slavery, Bellah says. The theme of American Israel was used, almost from the beginning, as a justification for the treatment of the Indians⁴⁵, which can be linked to the idea of manifest destiny⁴⁶ used to legitimate several other adventures in imperialism, as explained in chapter 2.

It remains to be seen Bellah says, how relevant civil religion can become for Americans' role in the world at large, and whether American foreign policy can effectually stand for the revolutionary beliefs for which their forebears stood (1967:15). America's self-understanding, he asserts, is firmly grounded in a civil religion that endorses a belief in the existence of a God whose laws serve as evaluative standard for judging the nation (Bellah 1967:12). At the time of his writing (the Vietnam War) civil religion was in need – as any living faith – of continual reformation, of being measured by universal standards.

For Bellah American civil religion articulates the profoundest commitments of the Western religious and philosophical tradition and the common beliefs of ordinary Americans (Bellah 1967:15-16). In summing up his outlook he explains further:

Behind the civil religion at every point lie Biblical archetypes: Exodus, Chosen People, Promised Land, New Jerusalem, Sacrificial Death and Rebirth. But it is also genuinely American and genuinely new. It has its own prophets and its own martyrs, its own sacred events and sacred places, its own solemn rituals and symbols. It is concerned that America be a society as perfectly in accord with the will of God as men can make it, and a light to all the nations (Bellah 1967:18).

⁴⁵ It is only in the last two decades within the discipline of Genocide Studies that this treatment has been called by its correct term, genocide. Adam Jones, 2006, p. 72-76, *Genocide. A Comprehensive Introduction*.

⁴⁶ The political doctrine of Manifest Destiny was first used by democrats to justify the war against Mexico, and the spokesmen for it considered expansion not only wise but obvious (manifest) and unavoidable (destiny). The term as such was created by John L. O'Sullivan, and was first published in his article "Annexation" in the July/August issue of *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* in 1845.

Americans have from the beginning been aware of the significance their republican experiment and its impact on the entire world (1967:16). At the time of writing Bellah was considering what the consequences of this time of trial would be for civil religion, and the role it could play for the world community in the future.

4.5 Analysis

As we have seen, in Bellah's view, American civil religion represents a set of "sacred beliefs" about the nation, which provides Americans with a sense of cohesion, especially in times of profound national crisis, such as revolution and war. It is perceived as a spontaneous common civic faith capable of sustaining a pluralistic culture by overriding its religious, ethnic, and social diversity, and it is assumed to foster unity and consensus. The primary function of civil religion is to generate powerful symbols of national solidarity and encourage Americans to achieve national aspirations and goals. Alongside the social and national aspects of civil religion, the political aspects follow in tandem. It is not a doctrinal faith, but more accurately a public theology that celebrates democracy through the history of the nation (Cristi and Dawson 2007:451), and it is symbolically framed in the founding documents of the United States. Even though American civil religion lacks a formal creed it operates through various institutions and branches of government. The most important vehicles of it are presidents' inaugurations and political speeches, and the public-school system (Bellah 1967:11, Cristi and Dawson 2007:272). Phillip Hammond, who analyzed the American legal system, contended that it has uniquely functioned as a vehicle of civil religion (Hammond 1980:146, 161). In the political realm therefore, it is the president and his administration at any given time that are responsible for the continuity of civil religion by choosing to invoke its elements in political speeches and official documents. Presidents play an active role in the continuation of elements and in creating new ones through actions and speeches.

The social dimension of civil religion

In the following I will discuss the most important aspects of the social dimension of civil religion prominent in Bellah's article. Though he was not blind to its political aspects, he did not address them directly in his original article on civil religion. This fact seems to have added ambiguity to his notion of civil religion (Cristi 2001:4). Bellah was inspired by the French

sociologist Émile Durkheim, and although Durkheim never used the term ‘civil religion’, it was his notion that every group has a religious dimension that formed a basic premise for Bellah. The socially integrative ability of religion – providing unity, solidarity, cohesion, consensus – seen as its primary function was the main focus. Durkheim believes a well function society to be united by a voluntary, spontaneous, and non-coercive expression of collective identity, which is embodied in a set of beliefs and practices. In his conception, as long as individuals join together to form groups there will always be some common faith between them (Cristi and Dawson 2007:270). Viewed in this way civil religion becomes an overarching structure of values and beliefs for the nation and its citizens beyond denominational barriers, a social construction of reality and “sacred canopy” much in line with Peter Berger’s theory of religion (Bellah 1974:256). This will however, only function as long as the canopy remains monopolistic and competing interpretations are absent (Riesebrodt and Konieczny 2005:131). In the development of American civil religion this has been the role of Protestantism at the cost of other worldviews present in the nation, as I will discuss later in the analysis.

America was founded as a Protestant society (Huntington 2004:62). To what extent then can civil religion serve as a common source in a pluralistic society such as the contemporary American? Some scholars (Coleman 1969, Bellah 1980) maintain that civil religion is general enough to embrace all religions and peoples and yet specific enough to provide a clear statement of the role and destiny of every American as a citizen and of the nation in relation to questions of ultimate meaning and existence (Cristi 2009:70). As explained in chapter 3, this is an issue that McGuire has addressed in later research. Bellah did not problematize the social aspects of civil religion in his article. He conceptualizes civil religion, like Durkheim, as a cultural given. This enables him to acknowledge that in ‘reifying and giving a name to something that, though pervasive enough when you look at it, has gone on only *semiconsciously*’ (Bellah 1967:12; my emphasis). Civil religion as culture exists at the threshold of consciousness, and is only vaguely perceived from time to time by members of society as self-conscious behavior. One reason for this aspect of American civil religion lies in the public school system being a vehicle of civil religion. It plays the very important role of socializing Americans from childhood into ceremonials and rituals, and instilling the social behavioral patterns of Americans, which confirm membership in the culture.

As a cultural system, religion provides clear guidelines for what is as well as what ought to be (Cristi 2001:224). This is for example apparent in schoolchildren's commonly reciting the Pledge of allegiance⁴⁷ at the beginning of each school day:

“I pledge allegiance
to the flag
of the United States of America,
and to the Republic for which it stands:
one Nation under God,
indivisible,
With Liberty and Justice for all”.

The Pledge of allegiance is an important feature of American civil religion, and it is an expression of fealty and loyalty that functions as a short ritual of civil religion⁴⁸. It was written so that patriotic education could begin in public schools, as part of the movement in the 1890's⁴⁹ to reawaken simple Americanism and nationalistic feeling (Canipe 2003:310). Americans are taught to respect and to venerate their forebears and the institution which they designed and developed (Huntington 2004:125). According to Peter Berger's dialectic understanding of the interaction between individuals and society, society is a human product and objective reality, but likewise, humans are a product of society. He claims that religion is a result of humans' thinking, needs, and activity, and that this activity arises because humans seek meaning and have a need for creating it (Berger 1993:90). In Berger's view religion is a meaning system, and a tool for legitimation and probability structures. It is through fostering and education that the objective becomes internalized in the conscience, and thereby part of the subjective reality. Also, the many celebrations of civil religion's ritual calendar, as

⁴⁷ The Pledge of allegiance was written by Baptist minister Francis Bellamy in 1892, and has been revised several times between 1892 and 1954, when the words 'under God' were added to become the final version. The public school flag ceremony was originally part of the Columbus Day observances (Canipe 2003:310). Challenges or objections to it are related to rights to freedom of religion. Today all but five states give time for the pledge to be recited.

In June 2002, the question of God and the Pledge resurfaced again when Judge Alfred T. Goodwin and the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the presence of the phrase "under God" represented an unconstitutional endorsement of religion (Canipe 2003:308).

⁴⁸ Numerous countries have adopted the American way of asking naturalized citizens, even non-citizens with temporary or permanent residence permits, to take oaths of allegiance to their new political community in formalized ritual events (Hedetoft 2009:265).

⁴⁹ The late 19th century was a period of great innovation in American national identity. Most patriotic practices, organizations, and symbols familiar today date from or became institutionalized at that time (Huntington 2004:119).

identified by Bellah of course play a significant role in socializing citizens into it, for example Memorial Day, which all the symbols of civil religion focus and fuse on (Coleman 1970:75-76).

One ritual on this calendar not mentioned by Bellah is the long-term tradition of the annual National Prayer Breakfast, which may be seen as a ritual of civil religion, even if it only involves a small and specific fraction of the population. It was started in 1953 to create understanding and unity across denominational divides and between political opponents, as a coming together of the political, social, and business elite – identifying as children of God. The quote from President Obama’s remarks at the event in 2013, contains the same understanding of the social function of religion as that of Bellah, as a truly uniting and overarching force. Obama stated that

...It says something about us – as a nation and as a people – that every year, for 61 years now, this great prayerful tradition has endured. It says something about us that every year, in times of triumph and in tragedy, in calm and in crisis, we come together, not as Democrats or Republicans, but as brothers and sisters, and as children of God. Every year, in the midst of all our busy and noisy lives, we set aside one morning to gather as one community, united in prayer.

President Barack Obama, National Prayer Breakfast February 7th 2013⁵⁰

Even though the official linkages between religion and the state are minimized, there is still a considerable informal religiosity in American political life, for example congressional prayer breakfasts, and an entire set of beliefs and practices related to civil religion (McGuire 2002:261). Sometimes a country declares itself to be a secular state, but there is one particular religion that plays a significant role in affairs of state (Barker 2009:236). According to Coleman, with the constitutionally founded separation of church and state and the religious system therefore is differentiated, controlled neither by church nor state, both actively compete in elaborating civil religion’s symbol system (Coleman 1970:75). This contention is in opposition to Bellah’s view, who considers that civil religion exists independently from conventional religion. But at the same time he concedes that civil religion borrows language and symbols mainly from one conventional religion, that of Protestant Christianity. According to Bellah, this happens ‘in such a way that the average American sees no conflict between the two’ (Bellah 1967:13). However, Canipe has stated that this poses challenges to the integrity

⁵⁰<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/02/07/remarks-president-national-prayer-breakfast>
[Accessed April 27. 2013]

of the Christian message, especially from civil religion's priestly form which is more prone to use for patriotic purposes imbuing civil religion with idolatrous tendencies (Canipe 2003:307). The distinctions between the god of civil religion and the God of the Christian faith often disappear in the heat of patriotic fervor. As explained in chapter 3 the priestly interpretation claims that the United States enjoys a unique relationship with God, and with that relationship comes a special blessing and an outpouring of God's favor (2003:309 n. 15). The words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance for example, poses a challenge for Christians. What does it mean to say "under God"? To believers who consider the third commandment's prohibition against taking God's name in vain to be binding, this can be troublesome indeed. Others contend that President Eisenhower, who was the commander in chief when the words were implemented in 1954, was correct when he described the words as simply 'reaffirming the transcendence of religious faith in America's heritage and future' (Huntington 2004:81-82).

Despite the notion of civil religion being a "sacred canopy" for the nation, it grew out of a religion that belonged to some and not all members of this nation. Contemporary American civil religion does not always embrace and did not include the history, values, and experiences of minority groups. This point has been made by Charles H. Long, who said that civil religion, whether "consciously or unconsciously had served as an ideological tool to enhance, justify, and render sacred the history of European immigrants in this land" (Long 1974:212). When Bellah interpreted the Civil War as a vindication of the unity of the American nation, he might just as well have interpreted it as an event in which the bi-national character of the state was destroyed. According to Herbert Richardson American civil religion has primarily been a justification of the winning side for the Civil War and historical development since that time. After the Civil War a fusion of the power of two previously separate and competing social groups created a complex national-political ideology, or civil religion (Richardson 1974:168). It was the Protestant religion and culture of the victors of the war, the Yankee northerners that laid the foundation for further development of American civil religion. They became the dominant nation that the state identified its interests with, and that vigorously suppressed other nations and cultural groups. According to Cristi, civil religion like secular ideologies of different kinds, may attempt to force group identity on minorities and to legitimize an existing political order, by injecting a transcendental dimension or a religious gloss on the justification (Cristi 2001:3). This kind of manifestation Cristi calls political religion, which will be discussed in the next chapter on Rousseau's civil religion.

In the final decades of the 19th century, faith in democracy was at the center of civil religion, but at the same time racism in various forms was a component that underlay civil religion since the birth of the United States (Gentile 2006:24). The nation was at the time glorified as a great imperial power. The myth of a people chosen by God to carry out a mission of salvation for all mankind became extraordinarily popular in the second half of the 19th century. This myth was used to justify wars of conquest and expansion by the republic, identified with faith in the doctrine of “Manifest Destiny”, as explained in chapter 2. It is important in this context to make a distinction between cultural and political nationalism. The former refers to loyalty or devotion of one’s nation and cultural traditions. The latter politicizes the sense of national consciousness (Cristi 2009:70 n 9). It is territorial and exclusionary and it requires active participation of the state. It exalts the nation above all others, and places primary emphasis on promotion of its culture and interests as opposed to that of other nations or supranational groups. As defined and understood by Cristi, this form of nationalism is in accordance with the American geostrategic imperatives laid out by Brzezinski in 1997 and described in chapter 2. The notion of American primacy is also apparent in all the security strategies of my source material, and will be discussed in the next two chapters in relation to American civil religion’s political and nationalistic dimensions.

Elements of civil religion

As the elements of civil religion which Bellah describes as heritage are found in the source material, the following analysis is structured around these elements. It is important to bear in mind that there is no institutionalized civil religious orthodoxy. A variety of interpretations, even a cumulative tradition of interpretation, is therefore not inconsistent with the openness of civil religious transcendence (Bellah 1974:259).

In a globalizing world there is a general trend to dismiss the role of religion and tradition however, and to downplay the importance of national identities and the persistence of civil religion in a ‘post-national’ global order. With the rapid development of globalization the boundaries of nations have become increasingly porous and the loyalties of populations are being transferred to supranational or subnational collectivities (Smith 2003:1). At the end of this chapter I will discuss how this bears on Bellah’s concept of a ‘civil religion of the world’.

First element: The founding documents

The founding documents, the *Declaration of Independence* and the *Constitution*, are the core texts of American civil religion. Together they form the sacred foundation for the American nation, stating the values and ideals of its political system, and giving ultimate significance to its historical experience. They function as a fundamental source of national identity, and keep alive the sacred memories of how the nation was territorialized and formed.

The political ideas contained in these documents are profoundly different, republicanism and liberalism, and a simple division can be along these lines. The republican moment emerged first, out of the revolutionary struggle and crystalized in the Declaration of Independence, whereas the liberal moment emerged second, during a complex working out of interests in the new nation, and crystalized in the Constitution (Bellah 1992:172-73). From its beginning the American governance has been a mixture of the republican and liberal regimes and has never been a pure type of either. The principles and values of the creed inherent in the documents, understood as political ideology, are liberty, equality, democracy, civil rights, nondiscrimination, and rule of law, and are markers of how to organize the society (Huntington 2004:338). The *Declaration of Independence* and the *Constitution* are the foundation of the new social order that was ‘to be a light unto all nations’, as stated by Winthrop in his sermon⁵¹. According to Samuel P. Huntington these values were the source of the American creed: a social *ethos* and political creed (2004:67). This creed is the secular credo of “the nation with the soul of a church”⁵² – a nation where the civil and the religious seem to coalesce in perfect harmony. The soul of a church is not located only in its theological dogmas. For the American nation the soul is defined by common history, traditions, culture, heroes and villains, victories and defeats, enshrined in its ‘mystic chords of memory’ (2004:339).

When President Obama in both the National Security Strategy 2010 and his speech at the National Defense University 2013 invokes the importance of staying true to these values because they are “the creed that binds the nation together” (NSS 2010:52), it seems to be his agenda to remind his audience of them because over the last decades they have not been the ‘guiding compass’ of the nation that they once were. Obama’s words can therefore be seen as a call for returning to them, to create renewed faith in the nation. The documents are sacred and hold binding commitments, and it is by them that the political elite and citizens will be

⁵¹ From John Winthrop’s sermon *A Model of Christian Charity*.

<http://religiousfreedom.lib.virginia.edu/sacred/charity.html> [Accessed June 03, 2014]

⁵² The famous phrase “the nation with the soul of a church” was coined by G. K. Chesterton’s, after having advanced the idea that the United States was the only nation founded on a creed (cited in Mead 1974:45).

judged, as stated in the Declaration of Independence. For Bellah any coherent and viable society rests on a common set of moral and religious understandings (Bellah 1992:xvi). These understandings produce both a basic cultural legitimation for a society which serves as a standard of judgment for criticism of a society seen as deviating too far from them. The way Obama invokes faith in the nation is closely related to Marty's prophetic form of civil religion (Marty 1974:144-45), and can be seen as an indirect criticism of the nation in its present state. This breach of values was also an issue for Bellah writing several decades earlier during 'America's third time of trial'. As he later stated, American politics in the 1960's represented for him a breach in the continuity of American civil religion (Bellah 1980:167).

One of these values present in civil religion according to Bellah, is the *central symbol of democracy* (Bellah 1967:14). Civil religion, through narrative and collective ritual, plays a fundamental role by creating a moral and affective consensus for democratic participation. Even though the term 'democracy' is not used in the founding documents, it is inherent in them. When this political ideal was reinvented in the late 18th century it was the Greek translation of the term, 'rule by the people' that, understood as 'majority rule'⁵³, was inscribed into the Declaration of Independence when the founding fathers stated that "governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed"⁵⁴. The Constitution of 1787⁵⁵ lays the groundwork for representative democracy in giving each state representation in proportion to its population, however, the founders were also concerned about the tension between democracy and liberty, as majority rule could be seen as tyrannical. The fundamental importance of the value of democracy is expressed in all strategy documents in many different ways. The American form of representative democracy was the new social order by which it was to be an example to be followed by the world community.

If Bellah's analysis of civil religion is viewed from the point of view of Berger's theory of the function of religion we may say that the founding documents are the sources of the 'sacred canopy' of civil religion for the American nation. This understanding of the social function of civil religion is in accordance with Obama's invocation of this element as the source of the nation's creed and cohesion.

⁵³ According to Amartya Sen democracy must not be identified with majority rule because it has more complex demands, which include voting, respect for voting results and legal entitlements, protection of liberties and freedoms, and guaranteeing free discussion and uncensored distribution of news and fair comment (Sen 1999:6).

⁵⁴ http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html [Accessed April 02. 2014]

⁵⁵ http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html [Accessed April 02. 2014]

Second element: God as symbol

Of principal importance in American civil religion is faith in God. America is a nation founded ‘under God’, a statement which is also part of the Pledge of allegiance. The Declaration of Independence has several central references to God, while the Constitution has none at all. God in the founding documents is not a God of any particular religion, but carries the notion of belief in a transcendent force, and therefore covers all faiths of this pluralistic nation. As in the motto “In God we trust”, the ultimate sovereignty has been attributed to God (Bellah 1967:4). The symbol of God is referred to in a neutral, deistic language. According to Bellah the God of American civil religion refers to the concept of God, and is not only rather ‘unitarian’, but also austere, related to order, law, and right, not to salvation and love (1967:7). This central symbol is present in almost all the quoted speeches from the National Prayer Breakfast, and in President Clinton’s inaugural address, though he uses the term ‘the Almighty’, which has also been common practice. Two words do not appear in civil religion statements and ceremonies. They are ‘Jesus Christ’, so as not to offend and to secure neutrality. As Huntington has stated, “while the American Creed is Protestantism without God, the American civil religion is Christianity without Christ” (Huntington 2004:106). On the other hand, there is a tension between the priestly and prophetic mode of invoking this element. Marty (1974) has challenged the uncritical manner in which God’s name has often been used to serve political ends in the United States, which poses a challenge for Christians and others. When invoked in this way theological symbols are used to describe politics, making God represent an ideological device, as an icon of democracy that lends transcendent significance to the American system of government (Canipe 2003:318).

From the very beginning Americans have relied upon God’s strength and guidance, as Bush stated in the quote from the prayer breakfast in 1991⁵⁶. The same tenet of belief is expressed more poetically by Obama in the quotation from his remarks at the prayer breakfast in 2012. God of American civil religion in his words plays an active role in the life of the nation through guidance and ‘holding Americans together and keeping them strong’. As stated by both presidents, this has always been so. God’s role in the nation’s life is part of the sedimentation of historical experience. But Americans must also actively “do God’s work on earth”, as famously phrased by Kennedy and referred to by Clinton in his remarks at the prayer breakfast in 1993⁵⁷. This is part of the traditional obligation, not just for American

⁵⁶ <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PPP-1991-book1/pdf/PPP-1991-book1-doc-pg85-2.pdf> [Accessed September 19, 2013]

⁵⁷ <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/sa/?pid=46711> [Accessed September 18, 2013]

presidents but Americans should carry out God's will on earth collectively and individually. It was the motivating spirit of those who founded the nation, and it has been present in every generation since according to Bellah (Bellah 1967:5).

To be an American president without faith in God is not possible, as clearly stated by President Bush at the 1991 prayer breakfast⁵⁸. But according to Bellah, faith in a vague idea of God is not enough for an American president. So far it has been and must be a personal Christian belief in God, as mentioned above. This faith is expressed in the presidential inauguration rituals where the president addresses the core texts of civil religion, but the invocation of the symbol of God is by necessity representative of all presidents to a greater or lesser degree, and is representative of the three presidents in my selection.

Third element: America as a beacon

During the 19th century civil religion developed through the exaltation of the American people as chosen by God, and the mission God gave them was to seek the welfare of all humankind. The belief that the United States' mission came from God was consolidated and popularized through presidential speeches, sermons, historical accounts, literature, and school education (Gentile 2006:23). According to Bellah it became the last and fundamental myth of American civil religion, but the notion that Americans are an especially choice and chosen people can be found from the earliest times (Bellah 1992:36-60). Democracy in the United States was confirmation that the American people had been called by God to carry out great deeds for the good of all humanity (Gentile 2006:23). How do these perspectives and this development bear on use of civil religion rhetoric in the security strategies of the last three decades?

The element of America as an exemplary society is highlighted several times and in different ways in the National Security Strategy 2010, both in calling upon America as a moral example, the light of its example burning bright, and as a beacon to the peoples of the world (NSS 2010:2, 10, 36). It also concerns moral leadership being grounded in the power of America's example. According to the tenets of belief in civil religion as presented by Bellah the historical origins of American religion is closely linked to the Puritans, who as religious refugees had rejected the old world to resettle and establish a new social order in freedom on the East coast of America. This new order developed into the world's first democratic republic. The meaning of the phrase 'America as a beacon' comes from puritan preacher John Winthrop's sermon to his fellow colonists in 1630 in Massachusetts Bay Colony while still

⁵⁸ <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PPP-1991-book1/pdf/PPP-1991-book1-doc-pg85-2.pdf> [Accessed September 19, 2013]

onboard ship, where he states that the people of the republic-to-be “shall be as a city upon a hill” (Bellah 1974:267). Very often only these words are quoted from his sermon, which constitute only half the sentence that was part of an expression of a communal ethic. In this way it loses its actual meaning. Winthrop’s whole argument is as follows:

“for wee must consider that wee shall be as a city upon a hill, the eies of all people are uppon us; soe that if wee shall deale falsely with our god in this worke wee have undertaken and soe cause him to withdrawe his present help from us, we shall shame the faces of many of gods worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into Curses upon us till wee be consumed out of the good land wither wee are going”⁵⁹.

Their new social order was a political system which had to succeed in its experiment because “the eies of all people” were upon them. As I interpret the strategy document 2010, this need to succeed is one of the most important themes, where America’s moral leadership is considered grounded in its example. But it is a statement that will only be credible and valid if it is also grounded through policies and actions, in the fundamental values of the founding documents. Its importance also bears on the previous presidential administration causing America’s moral example to become tarnished. Without adhering to them it is not possible to maintain the status of ‘beacon’ or moral example, as the nation will deviate off course from what is thought to be its destiny – to be a light unto the peoples of the world from their ‘city upon a hill’. Many scholars have taken this concept to be the point of departure of Manifest Destiny’s ‘mission by example’, defined by some to passively be the moral duty to model spiritual and political virtue (Coles 2002:415-16). But the early Puritans foreign adventure was not passive. It was in itself an extreme act of intervention and expansion, which according to Coles, many have failed to recognize (2002:420). Their crossing of the Atlantic Ocean and settling in an already inhabited continent involved danger, genocide, and subjugation of the rights of the indigenous people. Mythically forgetting these facets of the city on the hill and ignoring those processes in the building of the example, turns the birth of America into an immaculate conception.

The message in this quote from Winthrop’s sermon seems to underlie the urgency of President Obama’s statements of staying true to the values of the founding documents, and can again be taken as an indirect critique of the former president, George W. Bush and his two

⁵⁹ From John Winthrop’s sermon *A Model of Christian Charity*.
<http://religiousfreedom.lib.virginia.edu/sacred/charity.html> [Accessed June 03. 2014]

administrations' undermining of some of these values. This is also in contrast to the way the historical heritage is invoked by the George H. W. Bush administration, which seems to take the mandate for global leadership for granted as it is "ordained by Christ" (McGuire 2002:204), as mentioned in chapter 2. A central tenet of the foreign policy of this Bush administration (1989-1993) was that America's global leadership will automatically create a global faith in America, *without* any call to moral principles. It is used in this way throughout the security strategy for 1993, which is not in accordance with the civil religious tradition. As this statement shows America will sometimes be construed not as striving to understand and follow God's will, but as being the incarnation of that will (Cristi 2001:115). However, it can also be interpreted as an example of the "priestly" form of civil religion according to Marty (Marty 1974:144-45), which is affirmative, with the purpose of being culture-binding. As I understand Bellah he considered this form a distorted example of the civil religious heritage (Bellah 1992:xii).

Fourth element: The hope of transformation

The theme of transformation whether referred to as renewal; a new world order; a new era; or of reshaping of the world order, is stated and repeated many times in all the documents and some of the speeches I analyze here. Although the theme is expressed in the context of distinctively different forms of civil religion pursued by the three administrations, a transformation is understood as a great improvement of the world situation, mostly facilitated by war or other social upheaval and therefore involving sacrifice. This element is strongly connected to the Christian hope of eschatological salvation. Along with the hope of resurrection comes the expectation of radical renewal: a new world order and the kingdom of God.

In the security strategy for 1993 of the Bush administration the context in which it is written is very important in order to fully understand why the theme of transformation permeates this document. Because of recent events of historic proportions with the fall of communism, which created hope of a world community of democratic nations, creating world peace was the main theme of the document. The theme of radical transformation was elaborated by President Bush in his speech three years earlier, in which he considers the outcome of this new world situation – a new world order – as their "fifth objective" which

they had been planning for and dreamt of⁶⁰. The way this dream of a new world order is described, it closely connects to the utopian millennial expectations that America according to Bellah, was built on from the very beginnings of the republic's democratic experiment (Bellah 1992:xvi, 177). The dream of a new world order with a one-world ideology, in which all nations are democratic is the eschatological salvation for the world, and with that its ultimate and final renewal. According to Bellah, such an eschatological hope has been present in American civil religion from the beginning (Bellah 1967:18). On the other hand, Bush's address to a Joint Session of Congress in 1990 about the Persian Gulf Crisis also concerns persuading Congress to give resources for a new war. The radical transformation that President Bush argues for, is to be achieved by declaring war on Iraq, and therefor also carries the high price of sacrifice. In her analysis of political discourse and the use of civil religion rhetoric, Coles concludes that Bush uses themes integral to Manifest Destiny to fight the war (Coles 2002:419). When mission by intervention is posed as a responsibility of fortunate nations, as Bush does, it also frames American military action as a moral imperative. It narrows the range of alternatives and pricks the conscience of the nation, rendering intervention a must (2002:415). Combining the reality of politics with a sense of obligation creates a sense of duty to the collective.

Presidents are, as we have seen from Bellah's theory, transmitters of civil religion. The theme of transformation is renewed with each new presidency. Each presidential inauguration is a manifestation of "the mystery of American renewal", as President Clinton expressed this in his first inaugural address. But the hope is not only of renewal. Clinton highlights the need for president's and administration's "courage to reinvent America", and the fundamental role of change in preserving America's ideals. In the quote from his speech in 2000, which seems more nationalistic in tone, the element of transformation is given a timeless quality in the form of dreams⁶¹. America's destiny is to be a nation "forever young" with renewed dreams of transformation.

As discussed above, President Obama's strategy in document and speeches calls for national renewal, not in the form of transformation toward something new, but a return to fundamental national values of the founding documents. These statements can be interpreted as examples of the prophetic form of civil religion, seeking the perfection of the nation by reprimanding it. The fact that the nation had strayed away from its 'constitutional compass'

⁶⁰ http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public_papers.php?id=2217&year1990&month=9 [Accessed September 16, 2013]

⁶¹ <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=58708> [Accessed March 03, 2014]

was also Bellah's main grievance. Bellah's original article is in itself an example of the prophetic form of civil religion, judging the nation for its breaches. To Robert Bellah civil religion is a heritage of *moral* and *religious* experience. The political elite at the time of his writing had in the face of moral ambiguity used civil religion instrumentally, and as I interpret it, this constitutes his main critique in the article (Bellah 1967:19). He insisted that civil religion be treated as viable religion, with religious and ethical integrity, and demanded that its prophetic sides be acknowledged and cultured. It was this side of civil religion that for Bellah⁶² made possible renewal, national self-criticism, and ultimately, the creation of a new ethic that would correct the criticized breaches (Richey and Jones 1974:14).

Fifth element: Sacrifice as necessity

The state as societal authority and ultimate arbiter, can and will legitimately issue demands on members of the community (subjects or citizens) for loyalty, obedience, sacrifice, self-abnegation, devotion, belief and trust built on the morality of community and cultural togetherness (Hedetoft 2009:254). The most common forms and methods to impose and enact these virtues are practical and symbolic existentialism in ritualized form. Its highest manifestation is personal death in an ulterior cause and for the greater good in national wars, with the prototype of this person being the almost allegorical figure of the citizen soldier. Civil religions have often become sources of understanding and justification for the considered use of violence and the shedding of blood (Bennett 1979:124). Examples of religiously inspired rituals in this context are factual practices and rituals of militarism and war, cults of the Unknown Soldier, and the inauguration of public monuments in honor of heroic acts carried out in wartime and "beyond the call of duty" (Hedetoft 2009:259). The cult of the fallen was the first universal, liturgical manifestation of the sacralization of politics in the 20th century, and it was an impetus to the sanctification of the nation (Gentile 1996:17). Those who fight on behalf of the community to save it from destruction are venerated in the national holidays of both Memorial Day and Veterans Day. The theme of sacrifice runs like a red thread through American civil religion and my selected source material, though more subtly in some documents than others. As Bellah explained in his article, war is intricately intertwined with the development of American civil religion.

⁶² According to Richey and Jones, Robert Bellah's essay belongs to what was termed 'prophetic sociology' during the civil religion debate, and Robert Bellah was acknowledged as a prophet in his own religion (Richey and Jones 1974:14).

The element of sacrifice is present in these public rituals, and symbols such as the Arlington National Cemetery and the Lincoln Memorial. It is also present in presidents' declaring war on another nation, as discussed above. In the quote from President Reagan's Preface to the security strategy for 1988 he reminds his readers of the price to be paid for freedom (NSS 1988:V), just as Obama did in his speech in May 2013⁶³. For both presidents the sacrifice that is called for in the wars conducted by US forces in foreign countries is compared to the war fought for independence and the sacrifices made in gaining it. At the same time, by invoking the nation's historical success and democratic foundation, the presidents inculcate in their audiences and readers the necessity to contribute and be willing to sacrifice their lives for higher goals⁶⁴. For Bellah, on the other hand, it was also important to remind his readers of the sacrifice of America's "martyred presidents", Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy. More profound still have been the sacrifices of the Native Americans and Afro-Americans for the establishment of the republic.

Sacrifice also carries the hope of rebirth. In Biblical archetypes death and sacrifice are closely connected to rebirth, which is a tenet of belief present in two of President Bush's speeches quoted in chapter 3. The myth of rebirth has had a pivotal role in all civil and political religions (Gentile 2006:22). In American culture from the very beginning of the republic, rebirth was not only an ideal projected toward implementation in the future, but also an actual reality existing in the conscience, values, and principles of the new American society: With liberty and equality immigrants from Europe acquired a new dignity as citizens.

Rebirth is an archetype that has connotations to the myth of the Phoenix bird⁶⁵, which fulfilled an important function with respect to the meaning of human existence. In all the variations of the phoenix myth three constant elements are to be found, and the important element in this context is that by dying the bird obtains new life (Van den Broek 1972:10). The Phoenix bird was used as motif by the Church Fathers as a symbol of resurrection and

⁶³ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/23/remarks-president-national-defense-university>
[Accessed June 11. 2013]

⁶⁴ The sacrality of national attachment is, due to globalization and trans-nationality, currently in jeopardy. When dead American soldiers are returned to the United States from Iraq or Afghanistan, it happens secretly, under the cover of darkness. This is an important indication that traditional forms of both heroism and martyrdom for the national cause are ailing (Hedetoft 2009:263). The cause of this development is the disaggregation between the idealism of sacrificial nationhood and its perceived non-existent political and moral reality. American civic religious values have been denuded of their reality correlate according to Hedetoft.

⁶⁵ The origins of the Phoenix bird, which is its Greek name, has been thought to be found in the Egyptian sun cult in Heliopolis, where the *benu* bird was worshiped as a manifestation of Re or Osiris and considered a symbol of reincarnation. Later research in which the oldest text where the phoenix has symbolic meaning is included, suggests that it derives from the culture complex of Western Asia, dominated by Mesopotamia (Van den Broek 1972:10). With the many variations of the myth, the Phoenix could symbolize renewal in general as well as the sun, Time, the Empire, consecration, resurrection, life in the heavenly Paradise, Christ, Mary, virginity, the exceptional man, and certain aspects of Christian life (Van den Broek 1972:9).

eternal life, and is present in early Christian grave sculpture as a symbol of hope of victory over death (1972:423-464). According to the myth the phoenix transforms itself radically by burning itself up in its nest, which is ignited by the sun, and from the decaying remains a new, young bird arises from the ashes (1972:146). Likewise, out of the ashes of war “a new world order will struggle to be born” and the perfection of the world order will come about “on the ruins of conflict”⁶⁶. The strong message from President Bush in his quoted speeches is hope for peace and democracy for all mankind. The *New world order* will grow out of the debris of war, which is also connected to the element of transformation. In line with the motto on the reverse side of the Great Seal, “an order worth preserving for the ages”, it is for the young and coming generations that the sacrifices of today are seen as necessary. The necessity of war to fight tyranny is part of the American historical experience and political thinking. The theme of rebirth is also present in Clinton’s inaugural address with the words “a spring reborn in the world’s oldest democracy” with the inauguration of a new president. As Bellah has explained, “at a time of momentous political transition, solemn religious symbolism – for example the inauguration of an American president – by reference to what does not change helps to make change tolerable” (Bellah quoted in Coleman 1970:69).

Civil religion of the world

At the end of his original article Bellah envisions the eventual emergence of a world civil religion necessary for the attainment of a viable and coherent world order. In order to survive, he argues, the world community must have a ‘global concord’ because military, economic, and environmental problems demand it (Bellah 1980:xiv). He also alludes to the world community’s need of a genuine ‘trans-national sovereignty’, which would require the ‘incorporation of vital international symbolism into civil religion, or perhaps...it would result in American civil religion becoming simply one part of a new civil religion of the world’ (1967:18). True to his American heritage, he does assign a “noble mission” to American civil religion and a special place for it in the world order (Cristi 2001:197). Since American civil religion for Bellah is not the worship of the American nation, any archaic claims to their own special righteousness or messianic mission would only further the process of global disintegration (Bellah 1980:xiv). But this universal civil religion could be accepted as a fulfillment, not a denial, of American civil religion, as it would ‘transcend’ yet ‘include’ American ethical commitments and values (1980:xiv). Seen in this way, it would become part

⁶⁶ http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public_papers.php?id=3415&year=&month= [Accessed March 20, 2014]

of a global cultural resource. Such an outcome has been the eschatological hope in American civil religion from the beginning according to Bellah.

It is possible that Bellah also with respect to the idea of *an international religion* was inspired by Emile Durkheim and his concept of a ‘religion of humanity’ from his article “Individualism and the Intellectuals” from 1898 (Durkheim [1898] 1973:48). This is where his ideas on the subject are mainly to be found, and it is included in Bellah’s work *Emile Durkheim on Morality and Society* from 1973. One of Durkheim’s key concerns is to understand and explain the morality required to restore national cohesion (Cristi 2009:54). In his view, moral rules are essential for creating social solidarity, and compulsory universal education is deemed as the best means to achieve this. Only moral individualism is “the system of beliefs which can ensure the moral unity of the country” (Durkheim 1973:50). Moreover, Durkheim assigns a fundamental role to education in the inculcation of patriotism, which he defined as “the ideas and feelings as a whole which bind the individual to a certain state” (Cristi 2001:191). He comes to see national rituals, ceremonies and symbols as key components of the new integrative system replacing Christianity. But as a witness to the consequences of Germany’s nationalism, Durkheim becomes convinced of the need to reconcile national patriotism with world patriotism. In patriotism he sees the civil religion of modern society (Wallace 1977:287). However, the role he assigns to education and the state in creating patriotic citizens shows that social integration is not so spontaneous after all. Certain sentiments necessary for the social order require reinforcement, not only through rituals, but through education. The idea of a national (moral) community has to be inculcated, taught, and transmitted from generation to generation (Cristi 2001:195).

Although Durkheim never used the term ‘civil religion’, he envisioned a universal religion capable of embracing, or even substituting all other religions⁶⁷. Durkheim also calls this new religion ‘cult of man’, where the sacred increasingly is located in the individual, the human person as carrier of inalienable rights, and dignity. Durkheim says

“Consequently, nothing remains which men can love and honor in common if not man himself. That is how man has become a god for man and why he can no longer create other gods without lying to himself. And since each of us incarnates something of humanity, each individual consciousness contains something divine and thus finds

⁶⁷ Also Rousseau envisioned something like a universal civil religion. In *A Discourse on Political Economy* he advocates the idea of a universal general will: the great city of the world becomes the body politic, whose general law is the law of nature, and of which the different states and people are individual members (Rousseau [1762] 1997:7).

itself marked with a character which renders it sacred and inviolable to others. Therein lies all individualism; and that is what makes it a necessary doctrine” (Durkheim [1898] 1973:52).

He argued that all civilized nations must have as a “primary object the realization of humanity” which places human interests above national interests (Wallace 1977:288). Durkheim affirms simultaneously the love for humanity (the human ideal) with the love for one’s country (the national ideal), in his attempt to reconcile allegiance to a particular nation-state with the requisite of universality. He remains convinced that modern, atomic individuals need a common religion, and locates this common faith in the need for greater justice and sympathy for humanity (Cristi 2009:63).

Both Durkheim and Bellah envision an international religion as a universal and powerful integrative force that can ensure consensus, and as such they are in line with Berger’s notion of religion as a ‘sacred canopy’. Both propositions seem to be outcomes of searches for a remedy for social pathologies. In Durkheim’s view, to create an harmonious society a common conscience is needed, even in the most advanced society, and “since the state is the organ of consciousness of society, it must have a relation to that common conscience which is at the same time moral and religious” (Bellah 1973:xxxv). To this view Bellah concurs, however, they seem to differ over the role the state is to play in this. Because Durkheim brings in the religion of humanity and the cult of the individual as the highest moral ideal of society, his humanistic religion is not entirely fused with the state – it transcends the state. Bellah clearly states that when it comes to the state’s need to be intimately related to the deepest level of value consensus in society, he followed Rousseau in calling it civil religion (Bellah 1973:xxxv). Concerning the role of the state, then, in creating societal value consensus through a *state civil religion*, Bellah is in accordance with Rousseau, at least when writing in 1973.

Durkheim is vague about the structural details for this new religion, apart from stating that on a national level it is the state’s responsibility to organize the cult and to ensure its regular working and development (1973:xxxv). At the same time his concept has a close affinity with thinking that later developed into the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As human society has evolved, men have become aware that there are universal values. For Bellah as for Durkheim, these universal values need to be implemented through international institutions or by a transnational sovereignty in order to achieve the deepest level of value

consensus. This makes Bellah's concept of a world civil religion more political in scope than his interpretation of American civil religion.

The United States has often been named a self-appointed guardian of world-wide democracy, especially from the Cold War onwards. Because of national values and interests American politicians consider it necessary to act in order to spread the political system of free-market democracy and transform the world community into a one-world ideology by disseminating the American creed. The mandate for global leadership is legitimized by the same values that define the nation. Some of these values are considered universal and should therefore have a global impact. But this cannot be achieved without an enduring global faith in the leadership of the American nation and unless America embodies its values. These aspects of American foreign policy are clearly outlined in all three national security strategies analyzed here, and connect directly to elements of civil religion, especially "America as a beacon" and "The hope of transformation", but also the values embedded in the founding documents.

Of the three presidents represented in my source material Clinton distinguishes himself through his civil religion leadership, which was both traditional and universalist, as a pastor more than prophet or priest. These are forms of civil religion were explained in chapter 2 and will be explained further in the next chapter. In 1993, for the first time in American history, a president was expressly universalist in the scope of his civil religion rhetoric and vision in his inaugural speech (Linder 1996:743). In so doing, Clinton gave the impression that he wanted to be the political pastor of the world, revealing that he was conscious of his global congregation. In the middle of his remarks he outlined his view of America's world mission in a globalized world and described his vision for a world community of civil faith:

To renew America, we must meet the challenges abroad as well as at home. There is no longer clear division between what is foreign and what is domestic – the world economy, the world environment, the world AIDS crisis, the world arms race – they affect us all. Today, as an old order passes, the new world is more free, but less stable. Communism's collapse has called forth old animosities and new dangers. Clearly America must continue to lead the world we did so much to make. While America rebuilds at home, we will not shrink from challenges, nor fail to seize the opportunities of this world. Together with our friends and allies, we will work to shape change, lest it engulf us⁶⁸.

⁶⁸ <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=46366> [Accessed March 03. 2014]

From the many speeches Linder has studied, he concludes that Clinton's civil religion rhetoric reveals that he wants to include the whole world in his spiritual embrace and he longs for the whole world to look to him for guidance (1996:749). Clinton apparently sees himself as the universal pastor of a worldwide civil religion.

The impact of Clinton's vision can be seen in a concrete example from the Norwegian domestic context, of implementing a ritual from American civil religion's calendar. Rituals do not just arise spontaneously; they are created and can be mobilized for political or ideological purposes (Aldridge 2013:149). In 2010 the Norwegian government agreed to implement a new day of commemoration coinciding with Norway's Independence Day from Nazi-Germany 8th May, to honor veterans who participated in the II World War as well as those who have participated in more recent international NATO and UN operations, for example Lebanon, Afghanistan, and Libya. This made Independence Day a day of commemorating all wars Norway has participated in and those who have served in them ("Den nye NATO-festen", Klassekampen 8th May 2013). The first Norwegian Veterans' Day commemoration was held in 2011. Earlier, Independence Day the 8th of May strictly concerned the II World War, but the purpose of the new commemoration day is to make the contribution of *all* Norwegian war veterans visible, which is in keeping with how the federal Holiday Veterans' Day is celebrated in the United States. The controversial question is why the 8th of May was chosen for this celebration. Those who oppose the new content of Independence Day argue that this change militarizes the original commemoration. Others maintain that it is preposterous to celebrate participation in various NATO-operations on this same day as they are offensive wars ("Ville ikke bli feiret 8. Mai", Klassekampen 10th May 2013). Also, this celebrative mix can be linked to the question of legitimation for military operations in which Norway participates in such a way that 8th of May becomes a celebration of the Norwegian security policy and foreign policy.

Chapter 5. Rousseau's Civil Religion

This chapter gives a presentation of Rousseau's theory, followed by an analysis of political aspects of American civil religion and where relevant, how these bear on Rousseau's concept of civil religion.

5.1 Introduction

Among the works of philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (1712-1778) major constructive political writings, is *The Social Contract* from 1762, sometimes said to represent "utopian" political thought. It is concerned with the structure of political legitimacy, and its main theme is that of popular sovereignty. In the middle of the Enlightenment-period⁶⁹ when Rousseau was writing, other authors and philosophers, especially in France, acclaimed science, progress and the belief in humankind. Rousseau had a contradictory view, and achieved world fame by claiming that progress has a corrupting effect on humans and that their social dealings in themselves are the source of all evil (Wählberg 2011:10). But this did not prevent him from sharing many of the French enlightenment thinkers' ideas. Rousseau was passionately concerned about freedom, democracy, and equality. It was also in the same era that a spiritualization of the nation began to take place. Nationalism arose around the time of the French Revolution, for which Rousseau's authorship became an ideological foundation. Modern European nations were being formed, as well as ideas of national constitutions, national parliaments, obligatory school education for the whole population, and national armies (Hvithamar 2009:112). It was also in the same era that a spiritualization of the nation began to take place, at the same time as religion appeared to be losing its legitimating capacity. When Rousseau introduced the term 'civil religion' it was in the cultural context of the traditional authority of the church being replaced by reason and science. Believing that there is an unquestionable affinity between religion and political stability (Cristi 2001:21), Rousseau defined the basic forms of a civil and reason-based religion, which integrated and supported the coherence of society. Civil religion was detached from any particular religious belief or organized church, and was to be designed and controlled by the state. Rousseau had a critical approach to the power dominance of the Catholic Church (Wählberg 2011:10). His discussion of Christianity in the chapter on civil religion significantly contributed to the

⁶⁹ The period of the Enlightenment is considered to have lasted from about 1700 to 1789.

condemnation of the Social Contract. Though Rousseau was persecuted and his thinking stigmatized in his time, his ideas of democracy were influential in the development of modern democracy. After Rousseau's work was published in his home city of Geneva in 1762 the book was condemned by both ecclesiastical and civil authorities, publicly burned and warrants issued for the author's arrest. Part of Rousseau's antagonistic views against Christianity seems to stem from the historical experience of the Wars of Religion that raged in Europe the century before when institutional religion had been used to create conflict and war.

In order to fully understand Rousseau's views on religion in general and civil religion in particular, it is necessary to give a short presentation of his views on legitimate political rule and social order.

5.2. The legitimate social order

Jean-Jaques Rousseau is the philosopher who introduces the idea that humans are by nature good, but are perverted by society and culture, in contrast to all other philosophers of his time (Wählberg 2011:9). His philosophy describes a historical decline and sketches a timeline from a prehistoric golden era to a corrupted present. For Rousseau the golden era in terms of a national religion seems to lie in the Greek and Roman city-states, as he seeks to recreate their custom and devise collective festivals that will infuse a feeling of moral unity and absolute love of fatherland in citizens (Gentile 1996:2). Most important is the achievement of political unity through uniting political and religious power.

In Rousseau's view legitimate political rule is not based directly on either a divine or a natural title to rule, but must be ratified by the consent of the ruled. Rousseau's most general statement of what constitutes a legitimate civil order is

... a form of association that will defend and protect the person and goods of each associate with the full common force, and by means of which each, uniting with all, nevertheless obey[s] only himself and remain[s] as free as before (Rousseau [1762] 1997:49-50).

The associates (i.e. members of society; citizens) constitute a civil or political society by pooling all of their resources, their forces, capacities, goods and rights. A recurring argument throughout the Social Contract is that the main goal of political rule is to secure the highest level of freedom and equality for all individuals in society (Wählberg 2011:118). It is a society of equals: All members have the same rights, no one is above anyone else (2011:108).

The social contract entails that each man place the society – and hence themselves – under the guidance of its – and hence their – *general will* (Gourevitch 1997:xvii). Here lies what may be called Rousseau's faith: His faith in the intrinsic goodness of collective consensus: The general will wills the general good, and is the will of the members as citizens concerned with the general conditions of their communal life which they can affect with their actions. It represents an impersonal average from which all individual considerations are eliminated to become that which is common for the highest possible number of members (i.e. the general notion of "man") (Wählberg 2011:115). Because of this it becomes the authentic expression of perfect justice and an infallible general will.

The defining feature of Rousseau's political teaching is freedom under self-imposed laws: by being a party to the social contract, each one is a member of the sovereign (i.e. political society); the sovereign's will is the general will; the general will declares itself through laws; to obey the law is therefore only to obey oneself: and "obedience to the law one has prescribed oneself is freedom" (Rousseau [1762] 1997:54). The sovereign imposes the laws. Since the sovereign is the people assembled, the laws are self-imposed, and since they are reciprocal, no one is outside or above them. Any member, who refuses to obey the general will, will be forced to by the totality of members. The point for Rousseau is not that everyone shall subject oneself to the will of another. The goal for the social contract is for all to subject himself to a public will that takes all members of society into consideration (Wählberg 2011:113). Rousseau sometimes also calls a society a "people". Becoming a party to the social contract is not a onetime historical event, but the constantly renewed recognition of themselves as members of a common political or civil society (Rousseau 1997:121). To become a party to it is to become *civil-ized* in the original sense of the term (Gourevitch 1997:xviii).

One of the fundamental tasks of the state is to be the *educating state*. It is its mission to assume the role of guardian of morality and religion, and to form virtuous citizens (Gentile 1996:2). The most general organizing principle of his political thought is the dichotomy man/citizen, which corresponds to the alternative ethics/politics, or more formally, natural right/political right. In the words of Rousseau:

We conceive of the general society in terms of our particular societies, the establishment of small Republics leads us to think of the large one, and we do not properly begin to become men until after having been Citizens (Rousseau [1762] 1997:158).

One important reason for regarding Rousseau as preeminently a political thinker is precisely this central tenet of his moral psychology, that we are moral agents by virtue of being citizens, or at least members of societies; we are not moral agents first who then may or may not become political agents (Gourevitch 1997:xiv-xv). According to Rousseau, the best form of government is elective aristocracy or wisely tempered democracy because it combines the strictest requirement of legitimate political rule, election, with the most natural claim to rule, wisdom in the service of the common good (Rousseau 1997:93). Every government is provisional and the sovereign people therefore may call it to accounts and renew its mandate. The two dangers that for Rousseau threaten his separation of popular sovereignty and government is that firstly, the sovereign (people) may usurp the role of government by retaining executive and administrative functions and render it ineffective, or alternatively, the government may encroach upon the sovereignty and gradually usurp it, leading to totalitarianism (1997:62, 117). The first is characteristic of pure or direct democracy, the second of absolute monarchy, and Rousseau therefore rejects both forms of government (Gourevitch 1997:xxiv). Rousseau's political doctrine is another reason why the Social Contract was condemned by both the Genevan and French political authorities.

5.3 Rousseau's forms of religion

For Rousseau religion is a branch of what he calls "political right" because the parties to the social contract will not regard an apparently foundation-less, self-validating pact as binding: "No State has ever been founded without Religion serving as its base" (Rousseau [1762] 1997:146). The problem therefore arises how to reconcile the claims of popular sovereignty with the claims of religion. With the idea of civil religion Rousseau tried to separate the concept of religion from the institution of the powerful Catholic Church. This separation relies on the distinction between citizens' allegiance to the political realm and to the spiritual realm, and in so doing Rousseau radically disjoined being a citizen from being a man.

Rousseau distinguishes three varieties of religion – religion of man, the religion of the citizen, and the religion of the priest – and rejects all existing forms of institutional religion as they are not conducive to a "good polity" (Cristi 2001:20). *The religion of man* is a private, inwardly directed religion, a pure and simple religion of the Gospel (Barker 2009:237). It has none of the external trappings (e.g. rituals and symbols) normally associated with religious practices and institutions. The followers of this religion do not seek this-worldly rewards, but

desire only to live good, honest lives, accepting whatever God's providence bestows on them in the hope of being received into paradise in the next life. Despite their willingness to fulfil their civil duties the religion of man cannot provide the moral basis for society Rousseau concludes. By distancing themselves from the political, the religion of man removes one of the principal means of holding a society together (2009:238). Followers of the religion of man will be unconcerned with the fortunes of the state, Rousseau warns. Although these followers might make obedient soldiers prepared to serve their country, they are soldiers "without the passion for victory; they know better how to die than how to conquer" (Rousseau [1762] 1997:148-49).

The religion of the citizen is not susceptible to the weaknesses that Rousseau sees in the religion of man. From a political perspective it is a theocracy, and from a social perspective it might be described as a type of national or even nationalistic religion. Its key characteristic is that it is established in a single country, with its own Gods and titular patrons, and regards everything outside the nation which adheres to it as infidel, alien, barbarous; it extends the rights and duties of man only as far as its own altars (Rousseau [1762] 1997:146). Historically, Rousseau classifies for example the ancient Greek and Roman civic cults as this type of religion (1997:143). The fact that each state had its own cult and government that drew no distinction between its Gods and its laws, between the theological and political spheres these forms of paganism did not create wars centering on religion. The theocratic nature of this religion is approved by Rousseau as it makes the homeland the object of citizens' adoration and teaches them that service of the state is service of the tutelary God. It is a theological system of patriotism; to die for one's country is to become a martyr, and to break its laws is to be impious (Barker 2009:239). However, Rousseau does not unequivocally support this form of religion as it is not based on what he considers true worship of God, and because it invites exclusivity and intolerance.

The religion of the priest is described by Rousseau as giving men "two legislative orders, two rulers, two homelands. It puts them under two contradictory obligations and prevents their being at the same time both churchmen and citizens" (Rousseau [1762] 1997:144). By introducing the concept of another Kingdom (the Kingdom of God in Heaven) and by drawing a sharp distinction between the theological and political, the religion of the priest undermines the concept of the state as a single unity, and thereby makes any kind of good polity impossible in Christian states, where men have never known whether they ought to obey the civil ruler or the priest (Barker 2009:239-40). In arguing for a republic's necessity

of a civil religion other than Christianity, which he assumes to be divisive and therefore can destroy social unity, Rousseau wrote that

Christianity is a wholly spiritual religion, exclusively concerned with the things of Heaven; the Christians fatherland is not of this world...suppose your Christian republic confronting Sparta or Rome; the pious Christians will be beaten, crushed, and destroyed... But I am mistaken in speaking of a Christian republic; each one of these terms excludes the other. Christianity preaches nothing but servitude and dependence. Its spirit is too favorable to tyranny for tyranny not always to profit from it. True Christians are made to be slaves: they know it and are hardly moved by it; this brief life has too little value in their eyes (Rousseau 1997:148-49).

In addressing the politico-religious problem Rousseau starts out with two basic assumptions. The first is that the state needs a religious foundation, and the second that the Christian law not only weakens, but harms the constitution of the state. Religion is politically indispensable for the stability of the state because religion provides a source of transcendent morality, and grants that the authority of the state is perceived as ordained by God. Civic duties become moral obligations. Rousseau's solution to the incompatibility of Christianity and the state is not a call to return to paganism, but instead, civil religion, the creation of a new religious belief made useful for politics, and a necessary element of the modern polity. What he proposes is a type of social religion that avoids the negative excesses of the 'religion of the citizen', while retaining its more positive functions.

5.3.1 Civil religion

In chapter 8, Book 4 of the Social Contract Rousseau outlines how he envisions the articles of civil religion, simple and few in number, without explanation or commentary. First is the existence of a powerful, intelligent, beneficent, prescient, and provident Deity, second the belief in a life to come and the reward of virtue and the punishment of vice; the sanctity of the social contract and the laws; and the prohibition of religious intolerance (Rousseau [1762] 1997:150-51). It is a purely professional faith, with its articles fixed by society's political body, the Sovereign, not precisely as dogmas of religion, but as sentiments of sociability, without which it is impossible to be either a good citizen or a loyal subject.

All other religious opinions are outside the cognizance of the state and may freely be held by citizens so long as their dogmas do not contain anything contrary to state laws and the duties of the citizen (Rousseau [1762] 1997:151). It matters to the state Rousseau insists "that each citizen have a religion which makes him love his duties". To solve the problem between

personal religious faith and civil religion Rousseau makes a sharp distinction between belief and conduct. The Sovereign, Rousseau claims, after fixing the articles of civic faith, cannot compel anyone to believe them. Nevertheless anyone who does not believe them may be exiled, and anyone who after having acknowledged these articles behaves as if not believing them may be punished with the death penalty as an enemy of the state (1997:150). In accordance with Rousseau's distinction between belief and conduct, the only evidence of one's not believing them is one's failure publicly to acknowledge them, that is, how one acts (Gourevitch 1997:xxvii).

Religious intolerance, Rousseau states, is something that belongs to the religions he rejects. All religions which themselves tolerate others, must be tolerated. Being a dissident of civil religion is not an option, however, as that person will be considered an antisocial being. Inculcating a sense of civic duty and obedience to the state is the task of state education. The educating state must

give the life-force of the nation to all, and direct their opinions and tastes to the point where these are infused with patriotism by inclination, passion, and necessity...Every true republican imbibes love of country, that is, of the laws and liberty, with his mother's milk. His whole being is in this love; he sees only his fatherland, he lives for it alone; no sooner alone than he is nothing; no sooner without his fatherland he is no longer, and if not dead, he is worse than dead (Rousseau quoted in Gentile 1996:2).

From Rousseau's standpoint, civil religion will define a common morality and help maintain a sense of community among members of society. It will inspire the feelings conducive to civic virtue, affirming and fomenting those sentiments that motivate individuals to respect and uphold the social contract and its laws. However, as explained above, Rousseau leaves no doubt that civil must be imposed. This does not happen automatically, but must be politically construed.

A nation-state without religion for Rousseau was unthinkable, because the moral unity of the citizenry and the dedication of the individual to the common good could only be based on religious faith (Gentile 1996:2). By concentrating on the people's religion, its morals, its distinctive way of life, the lawgiver seeks to embed as deeply as possible habits, tastes, dispositions for what the community esteems, so that it might become its "fundamental laws". While nationalism in the sense of honoring and serving one's nation (a civil religion) is a positive position, an exclusive national religion (that of the citizen) for Rousseau, is not (Barker 2009:240-41). A civil religion with a civil profession of faith is able to foster

sentiments of sociability or citizenship as an allegiance to the political realm according to Rousseau. By decreeing “the sanctity of the social contract and the law”, Rousseau transforms civic responsibility into a spiritual duty, and as such it is intended as a kind of surrogate religion (Cristi 2001:22-23). In Rousseau’s view, conceiving civil religion thus enables him to reconcile the functions of civil religion as a bulwark against religious conflict, demanding loyalty to the state and creating unity within it⁷⁰.

5.4 Analysis

As we have seen, the term ‘civil religion’ refers to a public morality regulated by the state. From Rousseau’s point of view religion is politically indispensable as the base on which the state is legitimately anchored, and civil religion is his proposed solution to reconcile the social, political, and theological powers to create political stability. Rousseau holds that from a political standpoint, all conventional religions are inadequate for the needs of the modern democratic state, with citizens no longer bonded by traditional religious links. In Rousseau’s view, the social order of equal citizens is a ‘sacred right’, which is the basis of all other rights (Rousseau [1762] 1997:41). This right does not come from nature. Rather, it must be founded on conventions and expressed in a contract. Civil religion is a central element of the conventions needed to guarantee social order since it is essential in fostering social discipline and binding individuals to the state. Rousseau advocates a state religion comprising a simple set of civic-religious dogmas that every citizen must subscribe to, on pain of exile or death. At the same time he fears that loosening the bonds between Christianity and politics might threaten the traditional sources of political legitimacy (Cristi and Dawson 2007: 269).

Rousseau conceives civil religion in purely instrumental fashion, as a fundamental prerequisite for government, consciously designed and encouraged by political leaders. It is intended to exert strong control over the citizenry and serves as a tool to further political purposes. Despite Rousseau’s democratic intentions, this type of civil religion appears to be closely associated with particular unstable political situations, or with authoritarian and despotic regimes (Cristi 2001:12). This implies that civil religion has the potential to be used

⁷⁰ The Rousseauian type of civil religion flourished at the height of the French Revolution, when Robespierre and other Jacobin leaders imposed the Religion of the Supreme Being on France to replace Christianity (Cristi and Dawson 2007:270). The glorification of the nation, patriotism, and civic virtue were imposed and maintained through a civil religion and a series of rituals and ceremonies devoted to encourage worship of France and the goddess Reason (Cristi 2001:144).

politically and imposed on rather than based on the citizens. At any given time it is the nature of the state that determines the shape and character of civil religion.

The political dimension of American civil religion

Since Rousseau's theory, unlike Bellah's, is not in any direct or official way connected to American civil religion, I will in this section discuss political aspects of American civil religion not brought to attention by Bellah, notably the notion of power. In the literature on civil religion Cristi contends, the notion of power is absent. By not paying attention to the Rousseauan view of civil religion, experts have made virtually no attempts to see power as an essential element, perhaps the leading force of civil religion (Cristi 2001:114-15).

Cristi and Dawson argue that civil religion is concerned with both the social *and* the political order. It is their contention that failure to recognize the distinction between civil religion as 'culture' and as 'ideology' has produced an over-simplified understanding of civil religion, limiting its utility as an analytical tool (Cristi and Dawson 2007:276). Cristi claims that Bellah's concept of civil religion is especially difficult to apply in cases where the state seeks to use civil religion as a political tool to further policies or programs (Cristi 2001:3).

In some instances, such as nationalism, civil religion may be a result of strong emotional commitment to political ideals that are elevated to a position of transcendence consonant with religious beliefs, yet without any specific reference to traditional religious systems (Cristi and Dawson 2007:269). The political form of civil religion is concerned with political order. It neither sacralizes society nor endows culture with religious meaning. Instead, the political order itself is sacralized and is identified as requiring unconditional commitment and loyalty. Conceptualizing civil religion as 'ideology' is in accordance with the Rousseauan "political" approach. This approach enables researchers to address the possibility that civil religion can exist, even in democratic states, as a consciously orchestrated and state-controlled political phenomenon (Cristi 2001:9). It is clear that modern industrial states are no strangers to civil religion in its Rousseauan form according to Cristi and Dawson, but due to the influence of Bellah's famous essay, this is a reality that has been overlooked in the literature on civil religion (Cristi and Dawson 2007:283).

The indispensability of religion

It is one of the oldest of sociological generalizations Bellah says, that any coherent and viable society rests on a common set of moral understandings about good and bad, right and wrong

in the realm of individual and social action (Bellah 1992:xvi). It is also held that these common moral understandings must in turn have their basis in a common set of religious understandings that provide a picture of the universe so that the moral understandings make sense. Such moral and religious understandings produce both a basic cultural legitimation and a standard of judgment. Rousseau, as explained earlier in this chapter, was convinced that religion is the very foundation of the state. Even though politics are shaped by material factors, religion creates collective identities and provides a moral framework for calls to political action. Consequently, religion has important bearing on the realm of politics because it is uniquely able to sanctify any political agenda or to stigmatize alternative ideas and policies outside the bounds of acceptability (Hibbard 2010:26). It is also important because it imbues political action with moral or spiritual meaning, and is central to the issue of legitimacy.

In his original article, Bellah acknowledges that the term ‘civil religion’ is Rousseau’s. Without discussing Rousseau’s concept he very briefly touches upon its dogmas before he goes on to say that he is not arguing for a particular influence of Rousseau on the American founding fathers, but states that “similar ideas were to be found among Americans in the cultural climate of the late 18th century” (Bellah 1967:5). In quoting both Franklin and Washington, Bellah considers the utilitarian attitude to religion to be quite explicit in their speeches, and claims that there is every reason to believe that religion played a constitutive role in the thought of the early American statesmen. The appeal to religion by political actors is typically intended to underline their concern for the common good of the community and hence as consistent with God’s will (Hibbard 2010:32). “Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity” Washington says, “Religion and Morality are indispensable supports” (cited in Bellah 1967:6). With religion providing a source of transcendent morality to the American Constitution, the authority of the state is perceived as if ordained by God, a higher criterion for sovereignty than either state or people. Civil religion, thus, becomes normative (Cristi 2001:117). As shown in chapter 3, this is in line with President Bush’s usage of the priestly mode of civil religion. The political utility of religion in American is a point that Huntington (2004) also asserts. Huntington states that “Jefferson, Paine and other Deists or nonbelievers felt it necessary to invoke religion to justify the Revolution”, because a nation defined only by political ideology is fragile (Huntington 2004:83, 338). American revolutionaries were also convinced that no democracy would be able to survive without a common faith inspired by civic virtues and by loyalty and devotion to the fatherland, because it would continuously be threatened by the selfishness of individuals (Gentile 2006:19-20).

According to Gentile, American civil religion was created to consecrate the legitimacy of democracy and subordinate particular interests to the common good. This is very much in keeping with Rousseau's civil religion, which he considered indispensable to the moral consolidation of political unity. Also in line with Rousseau is Abraham Lincoln's definition of reverence for the laws handed down by the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution as the "political religion of the nation" (Gentile 2006:2). Both the Rousseauian and the American concept of civil religion concerns the problem of legitimacy of the socio-political order, as legitimation falls within the realm of religion. It frames the question of whether an existing political authority is moral and right or whether it violates higher religious duties (Bellah 1980:viii). This is connected to the covenantal injunction of the American civil religious heritage and the imperative of exercising power with moral restraint, which is the second half of Winthrop's statement (Hibbard 2010:218). For the settlers of the "city up on a hill" there is a corresponding burden placed on the community to live up to the ideals and commandments of God. On the other hand, legitimation always involves the justification of power (Kokosalakis 1985:371).

Reconciling political and religious power is an issue that seems to have preoccupied President Dwight Eisenhower (1953-1961) in a speech he gave as President-Elect, which many scholars refer to (Marty 1959, Berger 1961, Bellah 1967, Mead 1974, Bennett 1975). But the much-quoted phrase "Our government makes no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith – and I don't care what it is" is often taken out of context and the original meaning therefore becomes distorted. Bellah also quotes this sentence and connects it to an indication that "American religion is considered vaguely to be a good thing", but that Eisenhower's statement is "a complete negation of any real religion" (Bellah 1967:3). The section of the speech containing the sentence is as follows:

And this is how they [the Founding Fathers in 1776] explained those: 'we hold that all men are endowed by their Creator...' not by the accident of their birth, not by the color of their skins or by anything else, but 'all men are endowed by their Creator.' In other words, our form of government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply-felt religious faith, and I don't care what it is. With us of course it is the Judeo-Christian concept, but it must be a religion with all men created equal⁷¹ (quoted in Henry 1981:41).

⁷¹ The quote is taken from «Remarks by President-Elect Dwight D. Eisenhower» held at the Freedom Foundation December 22nd 1952 (Henry 1981:39).

It is not clear from the sources what Eisenhower exactly meant by this sentence. Referring to the country's historical past, what Eisenhower said was that the American form of government since 1776 has been based on Judeo-Christian moral values, and that these were important deep-set religious roots of their democracy. What has been left out, also in the quote above, is that these were thoughts he had during a conversation with the Soviet marshal Zhukov when contemplating whether he vis-à-vis the marshal could appeal to religion. The marshal, he knew, "had been taken over by Bolshevik religion, and had lived it since he was 14. Religion Zhukov had been taught was the opiate of the people" (Henry 1981:41). Some commentators have argued that the single sentence from this speech shows that Eisenhower favored a generic, watered-down religion, but Henry concludes that the "I don't care what it is" line meant that Eisenhower was embracing religious tolerance and was including other religious possibilities, such as a Buddhist democracy (1981:41). It is also possible that Eisenhower with this line was thinking of the communist ideology as the religious foundation of the Soviet state, and was comparing the two. In relation to the same speech, Eisenhower is also quoted in making a person testimonial: "I am the most intensely religious man I know [...] That does not mean I adhere to any sect. A democracy cannot exist without a religious base. I believe in democracy" (Eisenhower cited in Bennett 1975:81). However, when taken out of context, it is also possible to interpret this line as referring to citizens' faiths, whichever they may be, so long as they hold the criteria of being "a religion with all men created equal". America, on the other hand, was founded on values of a particular religion, based in a deeply felt religious faith. This view of public and private religion is much in line with Rousseau's theory of civil religion. In the religiously pluralistic and culturally diverse American society a common civil religion was perhaps needed to bridge internal differences and tensions (Cristi 2001:124). Civil religion according to both Rousseau and Bellah is postulated to aid in bonding people together despite their differences. Popular as the idea of a broad universal consensus has been, it no longer holds ground. An uneasy coexistence of splintered groups differing in race, ethnicity, economic position, and religion is what one finds in America today, sociologists contend, to a certain extent due to individualism, liberalism, and utilitarianism, which has diminished if not destroyed the basis of a common life and consensus (2001:128).

The 'wall of separation' between church and state

As has been stated in previous chapters, civil religion is by many scholars considered to be independent of both church and state. Some also claim that church and state compete over the creation of civil religion's symbols and rituals because it is independent. Cristi, however, questions the idea that American civil religion is differentiated (Cristi 2001:9).

The principle of religious liberty is embodied in the First Amendment of the Constitution, and is a guarantee of religious freedom in the private sphere. What this principle was meant to secure was equality of all religious sects in relation to civil authority (Mead 1974:46). No state religion or church was to have official monopoly. According to Bellah, the 'wall of separation' clearly segregates the religious sphere, which is considered to be private, from the political sphere (Bellah 1967:3). By creating a 'wall of separation' between church and state the founding fathers created a social dilemma from which the American tradition of civil religion has grown (Cristi and Dawson 2007:267). With this 'wall' national moral values could not be monopolized by any specific church and this allowed a different 'civil' religion to emerge (Mead 1974:66). The state promoted the ideal of religious freedom and the new nation assumed the traditional function of "the church". A country, according to its constitution, may have no established religion, yet its "National Church" is recognized as being of special importance and able to exert some considerable, if unofficial, influence on the political scene (Barker 2009:236). During civil religion's development as has been shown, the Protestant churches, the religion of the elite was allowed dominance, making the Protestant faith the religion of the American nation. Bellah seems to treat this as an unofficial fact and part of common knowledge. Barker maintains that "it is an indication of the effectiveness and specificity of American civil religion that those whose private (but publicly known) beliefs lie outside the national sacred canopy are extremely unlikely to be elected President" (2009:243). If this is so, can civil religion be regarded as independent and differentiated? These perspectives on the differentiation of civil religion can be problematized further.

That civil religion is independent from both church and state seems to be a view attributed to Bellah and those scholars who followed him. In his original article Bellah states that civil religion is "clearly differentiated from the churches" (Bellah 1967:1), but he does not, explicitly or implicitly claim that it is also differentiated from the state. Placed in the Durkheimian tradition, Bellah is concerned about the different functions of civil religion. But as we saw in the last section of the previous chapter, he considers societal value consensus of

great importance. This consensus is to be created by the state by means of a civil religion. As mentioned in the previous chapter, he identifies the public school system as one of the most important providers of a context for the cultic celebration of civic rituals (1967:11). The public school system not only provides structural support to preserve the culture, but functions as a direct institutionalization of American civil religion (Cristi 2001:132). The idea of a national (moral) community has to be inculcated, taught and transmitted from generation to generation. The public education system is directly linked to government, and it is essential in socializing each new generation into the civil religion. Certain sentiments necessary for the social order require reinforcements, not only through civil religion, but also through a strong educating state. A religiously consensual political culture is implemented and cultivated in the school system. This means that the state uses civil religion to socialize children and students to the dominant norms and values of American society, and to foster or speed integration of students into the wider society.

American civil religion resides not only in the education system, but in the legal system as well, as also stated earlier. Both institutions are its “major civil agents”. The law has played a significant role in the development of American civil religion (Hammond 1980:141). It explicitly designates the range of lifestyles and ethical norms that are deemed to be socially acceptable in American culture (Cristi 2001:133). Because the courts in America “interpret” the law and identify “duties” and “aspirations”, moral issues have a tendency to be transformed into legal issues, and vice versa (2001:62). The American legal tradition is closely connected with the political machinery, so much so that it has been conventionally identified as a branch of the government (2001:133). What this shows is that civil religion is deeply bound up with the educational, political, and legal interests of American society. Hence civil religion is effectively a part of the state. It is not inconsistent for a liberal state to promote a particular religion, so long as the justification is not its intrinsic value (Kymlica 2002:344). This view is connected to the idea of liberal neutrality that says that the state should not rank the intrinsic merits of different conceptions of the good life. A state, based on state neutrality, could therefore promote a national religion, not because it is the true religion, but because society is more harmonious if everyone shares the same religion, which was Rousseau’s view.

To a certain extent ideologies need to be inscribed into collective memories and taught to group members (Cristi 2001:228). Civil religion as culture is internalized through socialization and education, and is an integrate part of life from early childhood securing a certain level of conformity. For Rousseau educating citizens in civil religion is an issue of

utmost importance, which can be seen in light of his view of culture and society's corrupting tendencies. In order to achieve political stability, he demanded unconditional commitment of members to the Social Contract. When it comes to questions of spirituality, Rousseau is very tolerant, but concerning civic ones he is utterly intolerant. Also Rousseau's civil religion has its point of departure in cultural dogmas and established sacred laws, which is a resource of citizens' religion, morals, tastes, habits, and customs (Rousseau [1762] 1997:81). Deeply embedding cultural values in the dogmas become the means to secure social cohesion. A serious problem, however, is that the dogmas of civil religion cannot be changed, for Rousseau refers to the civil creed as "though it was some sort of a priori condition of society itself" (Cristi 2001:26). Citizens are forced to accept all dogmas of civil religion for fear of banishment or death. Nonbelievers are automatically exiled. In a true Rousseauan sense, civil religion is essentially a coercive political device.

According to Cristi, the Rousseauan version of civil religion is fundamental to an understanding of why civil religion may be consciously used in democratic societies for political ends (Cristi 2001:7). Cristi claims that the emergence of civil religion, as Rousseau understood it, is not a phenomenon peculiar to authoritarian regimes or to developing nations. The Bellah tradition neither considers the possibility that the state (or its political and intellectual leaders), may shape the direction of civil religion, nor does it confront the likelihood that civil religion or religious beliefs may help legitimize the domination of the most powerful cultural or social group (2001:8). In other words, the idea that the state may use civil religion politically is absent from the traditional theories and models of civil religion.

American civil religion as political resource

It is important to understand that a civil religion is an integral part of everyday political life. It is central to the production of citizens' understanding about dilemmas of civil life and to the construction of appropriate public and private actions to help resolve those dilemmas (Bennett 1979:111). Ideas do not exist independently, nor do they operate in a vacuum. They are produced, and used, to promote and legitimate particular social or political visions. Likewise, all cultural phenomena, such as civil religion, do not just happen; they are "produced". Children learn about it in school. They are exposed to it in direct and indirect ways through civic rituals. Resources, planning, time and effort, money, lobbying, legislation, and professional expertise are all required to maintain it (Cristi 2001:122). The sacred, which is deeply conditioned by the social location in which it appears, is "produced" or socially

constructed (2001:114), and so is its public manifestation. In the view of Marty, American civil religion is the creation of an intellectual or academic elite (Marty 1974:141). Given the fact that political figures are, to a large extent, the official interpreters of civil religion, any civil religion may be used for political ends (Cristi 2001:88). As a political tool, civil religion may be invoked to legitimate and justify political power, and enables instrumental manipulation of religion (Hibbard 2010:245).

The “balloon-strings” of civil religion, to use Hammond’s metaphor, can be held by political leaders (Hammond 1980:71). As has been explained in previous chapters, American politicians, government officials, and civil servants have been favorable to religion. Because they do not have to compete politically with churches, politicians can draw their language, imagery, and symbols unashamedly from religious ideology. Political leaders frequently use solemn occasions and public forums for the transmission of civil religion’s themes. As discussed in previous chapters, form and elements of civil religion are chosen from the cultural heritage to fit the historical context and occasion. Bellah shows by way of analyzing inaugural addresses how politicians carry the burden of American self-interpretation. He refers, in particular, to references to God made by public officials and political authorities, and to the “active” role God plays in American political life (Cristi 2001:6). Leaders have access to official political and religious symbols and to the structural conveyances of the political platform. This means that leaders can transmit, activate, and manipulate religious symbols for their political ends (Bennett 1975:88). Political institutions and public rituals may become agencies for public indoctrination rather than means of exploring principled public sentiment (Bennett 1979:129), and civil religious ideology may be used to support and legitimize, structures and relations of political power (Kokosalakis 1985:371). Because power is always embedded in a meaningful symbolic context, it must be legitimized within a symbolic cultural and value laden frame of reference (1985:368). For Bellah, as for many other scholars, this framework has been presidential inaugural addresses in their study of the content and form of civil religion, as we saw in the previous chapter. Others have analyzed political discourse during times of conflict and have found that civil religion can be used as a set of maxims to legitimate presidential authority and policies, to justify intervention in other countries (Coles 2002:420).

Civil religion as a political phenomenon, like conventional religion, is an organizing principle for collective action clothed in the universalist language of God’s will and transcendent justice (Williams 1996:374). When the language of civil religion shifts from talk about the promise *to* America (from a transcendent deity) to the promise *of* America, and

national self-transcendence, this signals a transition to a priestly civil religion Marty contends. Such a civil religion will have as its main priest the president, since he alone stands at the head of the nation and has the greatest potential for invoking symbols of power (Marty 1974:151, 146). Symbolic forms provide actors with extrinsic sources of information in a broad sense of imparting views of how the world actually is, how it operates – the sorts of entities it contains, and how those entities can be expected to behave (Johnson 2000:409). Symbolic forms establish the focal categories of social and political interaction and, thereby, establish parameters on belief formation. They nourish the imagination of social and political actors, and exert force over actors by commanding their attention and capturing their imagination (2000:410). Symbols and cultural practices are not self-animating. Social and political actors engage in symbolic action when they deploy symbolic forms in the effort to impose some conceptual order on otherwise indeterminate processes of social and political interaction (2000:412). Because symbolic force discriminates it has distributional consequences. It forecloses and discloses social and political possibilities. This makes it an irresistible, powerful political resource. Actors engaged in the symbolic action typically seek less to invent new symbols than to creatively contest and recast the meanings invested in existing symbolic forms.

How do these understandings of religion, politics and power in relation to civil religion, compare to what was found in the source material? In chapter 2, I explained Marty's two forms of civil religion and how he uses them, and gave examples from statements and speeches of two of the presidents, Presidents Bush and Obama, with further examples given in the analysis of chapter 4. From these examples it seems clear that Bush was mainly using the priestly mode, while Obama is primarily a user of the prophetic one. A president in the priestly role makes America the ultimate reference point. He leads his citizenry in affirming and celebrating the nation, and reminds them of the sacred national mission, while at the same time glorifying and praising his political flock (Linder 1996:735). In the role of prophet a president assesses the nation's actions in relation to transcendent values and calls upon people to make sacrifices in times of crisis and to repent of their corporate sins when their behavior falls short of the national ideals. These forms of civil religion and corresponding presidential roles have given Linder, who has studied presidential civil religion rhetoric extensively, occasion to expand the roles with pastor, and assign it to President Clinton, among others (1996:742-43). As national pastor the president provides spiritual inspiration to the people by affirming American core values, urging them to appropriate those values, and by comforting them in their afflictions. When leading the nation in the public faith presidents can use any

one of these civil religious roles to fit the message and context, and some also switch between two roles.

State-imposed vs state-supported civil religion

In the following short comparison I distinguish between two forms of civil religion in terms of state-imposed and state-supported civil religion, Rousseau's form and American civil religion respectively. From what has been discussed above it is clear that American civil religion has some traits in common with Rousseau's civil religion, and it is not unlikely that at the time of the founding of the republic Americans were influenced by Rousseau's thoughts or similar thinking.

In both cases a sharp distinction is made between religion in the public and private sphere, and at the same time religion is thought indispensable for the political order as well as the stability in a secular state. The Rousseauian form of civil religion is created and dictated by the state, for the state, and is in reality a political religion, which serves the function as cult of the civic community. It is imposed from the top down, without "explanation or comment", and is especially designed to guarantee citizens' loyalty to a contingent political order. Its purpose is the enforcement of civic responsibility, essential for the maintenance of social stability and the common good. Rousseau's notion of citizenship entails patriotism, and citizens' obligation to be religiously disposed to "love their civic duties". Likewise, American civil religion is to a great extent also created, promoted and upheld by political institutions and leaders. In addition it is institutionalized through the educational and legal systems. With the creation of American civil religion a new kind of believer emerged, the "good citizen" of the liberal state. Seen from a societal level, civil religion is instilled in citizens and, to a certain extent, required of them⁷² (Cristi 2001:231). However, given that Protestant values and ethics are forced upon the nation as a whole⁷³ by way of a *national* civil religion, it is possible to argue that American civil religion does demand conformity. Rousseau, on the other hand,

⁷² To what extent Americans adhere to civil religion and its ritual calendar is beyond the scope of this thesis to answer or discuss. A quantitative survey would be necessary to map out whether it is a cross-cultural phenomenon or followed by the white Protestant majority only. In my reading for this thesis I have not found a survey that specifically answers questions of belief related to civil religion. What role, if any, conformity plays in this context is for future research to answer. It may be that locally, social stigma of not adhering is a consequence, if not officially. What seems beyond doubt is that civil religious ceremonies and rituals are of great importance to America's military families.

⁷³ An actual policy of the United States has been that, historically, for example decisions about the boundaries of state governments, and the timing of their admission into the federation, were deliberately made to ensure that anglophones would be a majority within each of the fifty states of the American federation (Kymlica 2002:346). This helped establish the dominance of English, and with it the Protestant religion and culture, throughout the territory of the United States.

sanctions and punishes non-conformity. But, unlike Rousseau's civil religion, American civil religion is not static. It follows an historic development, with new elements and symbols being incorporated along its course, not fixed once and for all. Any particular culture and the symbols and practices that comprise it are contingent in the historical and continuing sense that they could have been different. This contingency is inherent, insofar as all cultures are both socially constructed and strategically contested (Johnson 2000:414).

As we saw in the previous chapter, Bellah argues that there is a conception of God involved in the civil religion, but that this God concept is certainly non-sectarian and often ambiguous in nature (Bellah 1967:7-8). Moreover, it is an instrumental God which is called upon for blessing, watchfulness, moral sanctification, and security in secular matters (Bennett 1975:81). The god of civil religion is in a sense "owned" by the political system. Lance Bennett finds that this god is very similar to what Rousseau identified as the deity of his civil religion. Rousseau proclaims that of its few dogmas, the existence of a powerful, wise, and benevolent divinity, who foresees and provides, is one of them. This divinity is the agent of ultimate security in the society who may appear through the medium of leadership as "lawgiver", the explainer of principles, revealer of truth about actions, the protective grace, or the voice of history (1975:81). One factor in political religion, then, is the presence of a divinity. Also, some generalized dogma or political ethos that transcends explicit ideologies, procedural rules, and attitudes as referents of faith is need in order for the non-ideological citizen to acquire and profess a grounding for faith in the system (1975:81-82). In Rousseau's analysis the articles of the profession of faith are found to be abstract and general. American civil religion, as we have seen, is the lowest common denominator of all conventional religions, and is therefore almost without dogma. This "lowest common denominator" phenomenon leads to a conviction of consensus, and a break-down in the moral, normative, and definitional boundaries between public and private life (1975:82).

In accordance with republican virtue sacrifice for the greater good is emphasized as a duty and necessity, and is a trait of both forms of civil religion. In this context ritualism, the civic sacrality of nationalism and its forms and expressions of faith and attachment are important. The dramatization of collective memory and enactment of the past in the present causes repetition of rituals to create a suspension of time. Rituals like state funerals, the commemoration of dead soldiers and heroic deeds, royal parades and the singing of national anthems have the capacity to override reason while appealing to directly to emotional responses of a sentimental, nostalgic, pitiful, proud or jubilant nature (Hedetoft 2009:256). These rituals in other words, appeal to empathy, catharsis and identification. This is also why

rituals are able to combine the realm of the profane with that of sacrality and faith, and thus imaginaries of life and death, fatality and eternity. This is in part because myths and ritualism imbue earthly problems and processes with a higher inscrutable purpose, and partly because ritualism, by its very form, orchestrates and enacts the elements of self-abnegation, lack of free will, subjection under a collective order and affective attachment, which national allegiance and religious conviction have in common (2009:257).

Civil religion of the type Rousseau advocates is not difficult to find according to Cristi. It serves to make religiously based beliefs, values and ideas operative in a secular society, but also provides the political order and civil society with a sacred character. Civil religions of the Rousseuan type may appear under different forms and varieties, such as theocracies, political messianism, sacred authoritarianism, totalitarianism, and secular or religious nationalism (Cristi 2001:142). In the United States an exclusive vision of *religious nationalism* emerged in the 1980's and 1990's, a form of civil religion that earlier was marginalized, but had, since the founding of the republic, remained enormously influential (Hibbard 2010:179). This is not to argue that the religious nationalism of this period can be equated with Rousseau's type of civil religion, as it for example is not coercive. But according to Hibbard, it is a conservative or illiberal rendering of religion. The change in orientation of state elites began with Richard Nixon in 1968 and continued with Republican presidential candidates and other party operatives through the George W. Bush era, until the 2008 presidential election (2010:179, 208). The shift in civil religion can be traced in longstanding debates over the proper role of religion in public life, but was also very much a part of the anti-leftist discourse and the Cold War dynamics, when ideological religious nationalism was seen as a bulwark against the threat to their own form of political system from socialism and leftist ideologies (2010:246). With Obama as president the liberal form of civil religion⁷⁴, which is ecumenical, inclusive, and consistent with secular norms, has been resurrected. Since this development is particularly prominent in civil religion discourse of the presidents in my source material, I will in the following pages explain how important issues for the Republican Party related to religious nationalism, were used by George Bush Sr.

The question that informs Scott Hibbard's comparative study of three secular states is why conservative or illiberal renderings of religion have been so common and effective. He

⁷⁴ The tensions between inclusive and exclusive conceptions of both faith and nation were embodied in the *culture wars* of the 1990's. It also reflected the continuing effort by political operatives to polarize the American electorate for partisan gain. It was in this context that the liberal-conservative divide took on strong religious overtones, as republican Party activists invoked conservative religion to claim the mantle of God and Country as their own (Hibbard 2010:17).

claims the answer is found in three interrelated issues. As has been explained in this thesis, religion is an essential part of the construction of collective identity in addition to providing a moral framework for interpreting modern politics and articulating collective purpose, it provides an important basis of social solidarity and political mobilization. The primary focus of Hibbard's study are state actors and political operatives' consistent manipulation of such identities and that they, more so in recent years, have found utility in promoting a theologically conservative interpretation of religion as a basis of populist legitimacy (Hibbard 2010:xii). State actors have long used civil religion in its priestly function, to sanctify political power and to imbue relationships of dominance with an aura of legitimate authority, with the intent of situating an ephemeral set of power relations within a broader, and enduring, moral framework (2010:7). The ultimate goal is reached by linking narrow political interests of a particular group with a broader vision of moral, national, and religious purpose, Hibbard says. This kind of strategy closely connects with William's definition of 'ideology' referred to in chapter 1, which in his view is "formal systems of thought that benefit a particular group or class of people, but where the ideas themselves are presented as universally valid or true, as being the common good" (Williams 1996:374). These thought systems are ideas or principles intended among other things, to regulate political understandings, and to mobilize support. In other words, this form of use of the civil religion tradition can be understood as ideological or political. This was also an issue that concerned Bellah writing several decades earlier than Hibbard. He argued that civil religious symbolism was more and more co-opted by ultraconservatives, and that a revival of public philosophy was needed to make their central tradition understandable in a nonreactionary way (Bellah 1980:xiv).

A central feature of the Republican strategy was the denigration of liberal norms as misguided and immoral. Liberal conceptions of religion and society were characterized as culturally inauthentic, as were such key features of the open society as dissent and tolerance of diversity (Hibbard 2010:208-09). This strategy also relied on the obfuscation of such issues as poverty, the loss of American industry, and the costs of an expansive foreign policy. This kind of right-wing populism and polarizing cultural politics was an odd fit for George H. W. Bush, as he was a pragmatic centrist, the son of a prominent and wealthy Republican family. But Bush refashioned his image by taking a strong stand on key social issues. A key feature of the 1988 Bush campaign was the demonization of liberalism and tolerance as un-American. His Democrat opponent Dukakis was portrayed as unpatriotic and culturally out of step with ordinary Americans for not requiring that public school children recite the Pledge of Allegiance. In a speech in the 1992 campaign President Bush held himself out as the nation's

“moral compass” in a period when “our whole Judeo-Christian tradition” was under siege (2010:223). Bush also spoke of “promoting religion as a force for good in our society” and allowing the “faith of our fathers back into [our] schools”. The Republican Party platform explicitly acknowledged a belief in God and gave primacy to disputed issues such as abortion, school prayer, and opposition to gay rights. In addition to being a form of ideological-religious nationalism, the few quotes here give the impression of concern for American culture and the right kind of religious tradition, and can therefore also be interpreted as ethno-religious. In other words, a combination of the two forms of religious nationalism.

In sum, the Republican instrumental use of religion and culture to mobilize populist sentiments for political goals – and to distract the electorate from economic considerations – had been effective for a number of decades. But there were contradictions inherent in the strategy that ultimately bred its own demise. The ideological fusion of God, flag, and country may have been useful in marketing the administrations’ policies, but especially towards the end of this period, it set the stage for a kind of imperial overreach (Hibbard 2010:242). Among the conservative base of the electorate Bush was not considered authentic, and his efforts to invoke culture war issues came off as disingenuous according to Hibbard (2010:241).

Chapter 6. Giovanni Gentile's political theology and fascist doctrine

The first part of this chapter gives a presentation of Gentile's political theology after a short introduction to the historical developments that influenced his thinking, before turning to the analysis and the nationalistic dimension of American civil religion.

6.1 Introduction

The Italian philosopher Giovanni Gentile (1875-1944) is renowned for his philosophical thought and his investigations into the history of philosophy, his pedagogical ideas, and his interpretation of the Italian cultural tradition. When Gentile on invitation from Benito Mussolini in October 1922 became Minister of Public Instruction in his first cabinet, he had largely completed his theoretical work (Turi 1998:914). Immediately upon his resignation from his ministerial post in 1924, he served as president of the "Commission of Fifteen", and subsequently the "Commission of Eighteen", devoted to the constitutional reform that followed the accession of Fascism⁷⁵ to power. It was as scientific director that Gentile later was charged by Mussolini to write the first part of the official *Dottrina del fascismo*, while supervising the publication of the *Enciclopedia Italiana* (Gregor 2001:3). This first part of the *Dottrina* was a summary statement of the neo-Hegelian philosophy Gentile had formulated that he called *Actualism* or *Actual Idealism*. Thereby the formal relationship between his philosophy and Fascism was established. Gentile converted to Fascism in 1923, and was the chief theologian of the new state, at least until the 1930s. Of his contemporary intellectuals, Giovanni Gentile played a prominent role in the organization of culture during the fascist regime.

In order to better understand the influential role in Gentile's thought of the preceding historical developments and intellectual currents in Italy, the following is a short account of

⁷⁵ The term 'fascism' is derived from the word *fascēs*, Etruscan in origin, meaning 'a bound bundle of wooden rods', which was an emblem of ancient Rome symbolizing power connected to the Lictor's axe and the cult of the Lictor (Toschi 2013:1). Lictors were (body)guards and the fasces were carried by them.

what seem to have been the most important influences in his political theology, before going on to present his theory.

6.2 Historical developments and influences

At the beginning of the 20th century, the new religion that was created to convert the masses to nationalism and actively involve the cult of the fatherland was based on the idealism of Giovanni Gentile⁷⁶ (Gentile 1996:13-14). It was designed to replace a Catholicism in decline and to become the new faith of modern Italians. Gentile's conception of life was strongly influenced by the mysticism of nationalist Giuseppe Mazzini. As Gentile states, idealism was the very substance of the teachings of Mazzini and he considered him a national prophet⁷⁷ (Gentile 2002:5, 60). Mazzini provided much of the political legitimization behind the *Risorgimento*, a national movement for reunification of the Italian peoples and a period of cultural assertion and rebellion. It was a process that lasted from about 1815 to 1871 that led to the establishment of the unitary Italian state in 1861. One of the central problems of the new nation-state had from the very beginnings of the *Risorgimento* been how to construct a religion of the state (Gentile 1996:2). Once the political unity had been achieved, a moral and ideal unity of the masses had to be created, and for the task of moral consolidation religion was indispensable for political unity (1996:6). Also, during this period the myths of the civil religions of the *Risorgimento* were syncretized with "Roman pride", creating a new political theology that celebrated the dogma of the nation⁷⁸ (1996:17). Through the sacralization of the nation, the search for a civic religion was initiated by rivalry and conflict between "civic" and "traditional" religion, the Roman Catholic Church, and it moved decisively toward a political religion, an absolutist cult in which the fatherland became a living divinity⁷⁹. The new

⁷⁶ The idealism of Benedetto Croce, an intellectual friend of Gentile, also contributed to this new religion. Croce commenced a philosophical program at the University of Naples that started off with the course "The Rebirth of Idealism". Together with Gentile they both influenced Mussolini in the development of his philosophical thinking (Gregor 2001:1, 59). The two men joined in a shared battle for cultural and civic renewal in Italy until 1924 when Croce declared his antifascist sentiments and the political break between them occurred (Turi 1998:914, 916).

⁷⁷ Only with the First World War did Gentile include Mazzini among the "prophets" of Italian unity, emphasizing his "religious" faith in the nation and toning down his democratic ideals (Turi 1998:926).

⁷⁸ The major force in the construction of a "patriotic religion" in this period was poet and politician Gabriele D'Annunzio. Drawing freely from Christian tradition, classical mythology, and the cult of the trenches he elaborated a refined politico-religious rhetoric that became part of the mythology of revolutionary nationalism produced by the war (Gentile 1996:17). New material for this religion came from the mythical experience of war: dedication to the nation, the mystical connotations of blood and sacrifice, and the "communion" of comradeship, which is combined with Christian symbolism of death and resurrection.

⁷⁹ The impetus for this new faith came from the Far East through the founder of the nationalist movement, Enrico Corradini, who greatly admired the "religion of heroes and nature" he found in Japan. Worshiping nature,

religion was to be one that fused the individual and the nation into a collective unit, drawing its life-force from heroes and from the blood of those who sacrificed themselves to the ideal of national ascension toward greatness. The purpose of intervention in the First World War was not to fight for material gains, but *the redemption of Italy*, and the nation's entry into the war was initiated by a "directive minority" (Gregor 2002:ix-x, italics in original). It was necessary according to Gentile, in order to finally unite the peoples of the Italic peninsula into a single nation through the shedding of blood (Gentile 2002:2). Only in this way could a "true nation" be created, valued by others and of consequence in the world, finally participating in the making of history. In Gentile's view the Risorgimento came about through the work of a few intellectuals that became the agents of the history of an epoch (2002:4-5). They considered life a mission and the seriousness of their conviction gave it a religious character. They realized the forces available to them, discerning the implications of convictions and translated ideas into action. Following Mazzini's motto "thought and action", this elite succeeded in infusing both rulers and populace with their convictions.

These were important intellectual currents and historical developments that influenced Gentile and constitute the background for his further exposition of his political theology that became the *Dottrina del fascismo*. As will be explained, Gentile supplied Fascism with its justificatory rationale that informed Fascism's antidemocratic convictions. It was Gentile who defined the relationship between the individual, any association of individuals, and the political state. It was he who made obedience, work, and sacrifice, the ethic of a national community in developmental rebellion against what he took to be the hegemonic impostures of imperialism from the "Great Powers"⁸⁰ (Gregor 2001:xiii). In his political philosophy Gentile argued that the nation had to consciously create for itself an international 'personality that would be valued in the world' (2001:29). Gentile's Actual Idealism was, in part, a reaction to his time and his circumstances.

heroes, and the Emperor, the Japanese had devised a rite of self-adoration. "Japan is the God of Japan. The strength this people draws from religion is a strength drawn from its own bowels; its heroes are great men from the past, nature and the fatherland. It becomes auto-adoration" (cited in Gentile 1996:14). Shinto, the indigenous religion to Japan, was the state religion from 1868 to 1945 (Cristi 2001:142). State Shinto has been identified as a civil religion, or a religion of Japanese nationalism.

⁸⁰ It seems important for James Gregor to stress that fascism expressed the doctrine of a less-developed, status-deprived country's reaction against all the weight of the 19th and 20th century. Gregor is convinced that Gentile's emphasis on voluntarism, obedience, self-realization, the identification of the individual with the state, charismatic leadership and the role of elites in development, are all elements of the reactive nationalism of less-developed nations in their confrontation with those more developed (Gregor 2001:xiv).

6.3 Gentile's political theology

From the viewpoint of the history of culture, Gentile examines the as yet unresolved tension between religion and philosophy (which also means between the church and the state) (Turi 1998:925). One essential component of the Italian cultural tradition is the Catholic religion. Gentile is aware that the religious problem has obvious practical implications both for the relations between church and state and for the public school curriculum, which is intimately connected with those relations. He argues that the state, in which man celebrates his political nature, is responsible for the establishment of an educational program which reflects the general interests of the nation (1998:927). Later, during the fascist regime, the project of teaching Italians the new faith and molding them into "modern Romans" was undertaken (Gentile 1996:79).

In delivering an address in 1943 on his own religion, Gentile states his "open profession of faith", and that he is a Catholic Christian, fundamentally respecting and recognizing all the main points of traditional religion as valid (Spirito 1954:121-22). According to Ugo Spirito the whole of Gentile's philosophy hinges on the principle of a spiritual religion, and through the course of his life his Catholicism becomes idealism and actualism (1954:126). However, Catholicism is among Fascists considered the "religion of the fathers", a creation and component of the traditions of the Italian race, which can be syncretically absorbed into the Fascist religion and thereby become a constituent and inseparable part of Italian identity (Gentile 1996:74-75). The ideal of a fascist religion draws its inspiration from Roman religion, which sacralized political order in the cult of the state, only allowing other cults to the extent that these were not in conflict with the state religion. It is mainly to legitimize its totalitarian aspirations and to create a new religion of the state that the myth of Romanity, born of the "mystery of Roman continuity", especially through celebrations of the lictorial cult, enters into fascist culture (1996:75, 77). For Gentile this form of syncretism⁸¹ enables recombining the cult of "Rome-as-a-State" with "Rome-as-a-Church".

The most important role of philosophers in Gentile's view is to unify thought and action, and central to his philosophical and pedagogical thought is the intimate connection between practice and theory (Turi 1998:921, 924). For him idealism is a faith in an ideal reality that must be sought. It is a conception of life and must progress and transform itself incessantly in order to conform to a superior law that acts upon souls with the force of the

⁸¹ Syncretism in this context is understood as a process of religious synthesis by intentional adaption. It is imposed from the top down, to control the direction of religious synthesis (Stewart and Shaw 1994:11). This is in contrast to understanding the term as limited to the domain of religious or ritual phenomena, where elements of two different historical 'traditions' interact or combine (1994:9).

soul's own convictions, making it possible to transcend the limits of the present (Gentile 2002:5). The intellectual environment of the time makes Gentile recognize that part of his obligation is to determine how philosophy might serve the collective interest of an emergent nation. In his exposition, Gentile seeks to establish a direct continuity between the efforts of the Risorgimento and Fascism (Gregor 2002:x). This enables him to construct upon the developments of the preceding century. However, the Mazzinian ideas that Gentile is influenced by are "Mazzinian" only in so far as his ideas are interpreted by him.

6.3.1 The Mazzinian influence

The religious and idealistic conception of life that formed the basis of the national patriotic conscience of the Risorgimento dominated and governed the spirit of Italians until its exhaustion as an historic movement and it was the source of the moral influence it exercised (Gentile 2002:7). The entire Risorgimento was Mazzinian, not only in terms of political forces in act, but in all forms of spiritual life the influence of Mazzinianism matured independently of his writings and made a notable contribution to the sacralization of politics. Gentile developed the view that patriotism, like all other virtues, has its origin in religion (Gentile 2002:10).

In Giuseppe Mazzini's belief system it is not possible to separate that which is merely political from his religious and metaphysical convictions, his ethical intuitions, and moral enjoinders (Gentile 2002:21). Mazzini inculcates into many the conviction that only that thought which expressed itself in action is real thought. Viewing life as a mission, the individual has a law, a goal, through which the individual's proper value is discovered, and for which sacrifice is necessary (2002:5). Convinced that life is not what it is, but what it ought to be; and only that life is worthy of being lived which is as is as it ought to be, with all its duties and difficulties, always requiring efforts of the will, abnegation, and a disposition to suffer in order to make possible the good (Gentile 2002:6). For Mazzini the notion of a "patriotic religion" is the very essence of the national revolution. In his view a religious revolution has to precede the political one, because only religious thinking can transform both men's tendencies by defining them and temper their acts (Gentile 1996:4).

6.3.2 The sacralization of politics

In Mazzinian convictions Gentile sees philosophical idealism, a call to national mission, a consuming morality, a seriousness of purpose, religiosity, anti-individualism, totalitarian

unity, an invocation of selfless duty, and the centrality of the state (Gregor 2002:xi). The state is not only the educator of the masses, but the creator of a nation that expresses the moral unity of the people. It is from its religiosity that Gentile derives the totalitarian character of his doctrine, which is the expression of a politics not to be distinguished from morality, from religion, or from all concepts of life (Gentile 1996:58). Giovanni Gentile notes that the state controlled religion “for its own objectives, and in this respect governs it, as the state at any given moment is able to contradict religion, especially regarding peace and war” (Gentile cited in Gentile 1996:69). Gentile’s interpretation of the dynamics of social change is one he shares with significant social thinkers of his time. He is convinced that

“history is not made by heroes nor by masses; but by heroes who sense the inarticulate, yet powerful, impulses that move masses. [In the making of history] the masses find a person who succeeds in making explicit their obscure moral sentiments. The moral universe is that of the multitudes; and multitudes are governed and energized by an idea whose precise features reveal themselves to give form and life to history” (Gentile quoted in Gregor 2002:ix-x).

6.3.2.1 The Ethical state

Gentile’s views on ethics are consistent with the rest of his philosophy, and, as Spirito states, he shows that all forms of thought resolve into philosophical activity. However, according to Gentile the frequently drawn distinction between ethics and metaphysics must be dropped because ethics should not be defined as the ideal in opposition to the real. He states that the problems of ethics are bound up with the question of value. In the characteristic doctrine of Gentile the concept of act is the only one which can be reconciled with the concept of value, because it is the only one which allows for a certain intuition of freedom (Burdwood Evans 1929:205). It therefore follows that ideals are valuable because they influence the acts of men. They are real in influencing those acts, and their value is due to this reality (1929:206). True reality is identical with value; it is the union of being what ought to be. This reality, Gentile says, can be found only in the mind. To think is, therefore, a moral responsibility, and to use one’s every resource of reason a moral duty (1929:215).

An important part of Gentile’s theology drawn from Mazzini is the sanctity of the nation, which manifests itself in the State, giving reason to glorification of the State (Gentile 2002:52-53). From Gentile’s (and Fascism’s) point of view the national State is the result of spiritual action, and it is therefore an entirely spiritual creation (2002:28). Placing the state at

the center of gravity, as the foundation of every individual value and right, it forms an inseparable and necessary synthesis of the terms “state” and “individual” (2002:25). Each citizen feels the general interest as his own, and wills therefore as might the general will, becoming a concentrated national consciousness (2002:55). What determinates the State is not something that is delivered by history in any given context. According to Gentile

the State is within us, mature, alive and of necessity living and growing and expanding and elevating itself in dignity, and conscious of itself and of its high duties and grand goals to which it is called, in our will, in our thought, and in our passions (Gentile 2002:27).

Both individual and State develop. The relationship that every citizen shares with the State is so intimate that the State exists only in so far as it is made to exist by the citizen. The true State is an institution animated by an unshakeable superior and dominant will (2002:35). Gentile considers the State an autonomous personality that has its own value and its own ends, subordinating to itself every existence and individual interest, to recognize them only as realizations of the State, as consciousness, and as will (2002:34). In order to will it is necessary to have consciousness of that which one wills, of ends and of means (2002:54). Considering the State as a person implies moral activity, and in Gentile’s theology it has an absolute moral value. The state, therefore, is an ethical substance (2002:54). As that moral substance, its function is to render all other functions valuable. By coinciding with the State, all other functions attain absolute value. This ideal nation comes about by incarnating and revealing itself in, and to, few individuals, or in a single individual, a process that the multitudes are unknowing of (2002:35).

The authority of the State is not subject to negotiation or compromise, or to be divided with other moral or religious principles that might interfere in citizens’ consciousness (Gentile 2002:31). The consciousness that actuates the reality of the State is consciousness in its totality, with all the elements of which it is the product. Morality and religion must be fused and absorbed in the State, but they must be subordinate to its laws. Within the new laws every right is sacred, because every right is considered a duty (2002:40-41). It is a duty of the citizen to himself, because it is a duty to the Fatherland. When the laws of the Fatherland demand it, the life of the citizen must be sacrificed.

6.4 Symbols, myths, and rituals

The creation of a state liturgy is a direct consequence of the conviction that feeling, not reason, dominates among the masses, and that only an appeal to feelings, through myths that give a shape to their desires and incite them to action, will enable a political organization to utilize their energy to achieve its own aims. The loyalty of the masses is indispensable for the consolidation of the regime's power, and above all, vital to the creation of the totalitarian state. Realizing that the relationship between governors and the governed cannot be reduced to domination, the state has to seek citizens' participation through the organization and formation of a collective spiritual unity (Gentile 1996:82). In this view of mass politics myth plays a vital role, and a concept of political mythology is developed, interpreting myth principally as an image and symbol capable of producing feeling, enthusiasm, and the will to act. Gentile justifies the use of dogmatic formulas by arguing that they create myths, and build consensus and blind loyalty (1996:83). Myths are therefore considered powerful and indispensable engines of political actions. But to be able to attract men, a myth must always refer to their needs and demands.

When these thoughts, ideas and ideals are manifested in fascism's sacralization of the idea of the nation, it was from the beginning accompanied by a broad use of ritual and symbolism. They are manifest in national celebrations, such as the regime's anniversaries, the triumphs of the "revolution", the cult of the fallen, the lictorial cult, the glorification of heroes, the consecration of symbols, and the appearances of *Il Duce*, the leader of the state. Countless other ceremonies, assemblies, parades, exhibitions, and special pilgrimages reproduce the annual cycle of the mass rites of the regime (1996:ix). The inauguration of a monument, a new "sacred space" in the community, is an occasion for celebrating patriotic rituals. The climax of the cult of the nation comes with the choice of the tomb of the Unknown Soldier and his entombment beneath the *Altar of the Fatherland*⁸² (1996:18). These monuments play a notable role in preparing for the official institution of a national liturgy concerning the myth of the Great War and the "resurrection" of the fatherland. The Duce is surrounded in an aura of myth Giovanni Gentile states, almost a person chosen by the Deity, infallible, an instrument employed by Providence to create a new civilization (Gentile 2002:32). To Gentile, the Duce is a privileged spirit, in whom thought has become flesh – the

⁸² This inauguration took place in Rome's Piazza Venezia 4th November 1921, with the conveyance of his body to the capital, and he was given a state funeral. The same date is the anniversary of Italy's victory in the First World War. The construction of the monument, Altar of the Fatherland, was started in 1885 to honor the first king of a unified Italy, Victor Emmanuel, and it was completed in 1925.

living incarnation of the “Fascist idea” (Gentile 1996:140). The great assemblies consecrate the union of the people with the government and the Duce. Along with the myth of the Duce, the myth of Rome is the most pervasive belief in the Fascist symbolic universe (1996:76). The lictorial cult was revitalized, with the Fascist emblem being the classical symbol of the Roman fasces combined with the Lictor’s axe, but in this context the axe is not metaphorical; it is real and a real threat⁸³ (Toschi 2013). But the mainspring of all Fascist ritual is the myth of a totalitarian community, a people united in a single faith. ‘Faith’ assumes an inherent value as the one egalitarian principle to bridge the gulf of social and economic differences, to morally unite all Italians and create “collective harmony” (Gentile 1996:100-01). *The black shirt* becomes the symbol of this egalitarianism. The *squadra*, the fascist militia organization, was not only an armed body, but a group linked together by a common faith, by comradeship, by a sense of *communion*, and where fascist “religious feeling” primarily developed (1996:25).

6.4 Analysis

What we have seen in this presentation is that Fascist religion was a manifestation of the sacralization of politics. It was the only secular religion institutionalized by the state, and can be seen as the search for a “national religion”. Like conventional religions, it reproduced their typical structure as articulated in faith, myth, ritual, and communion. A national liturgy was elaborated that corresponded to its myths, rites, and symbols, considered a necessary condition for inculcating and sustaining a collective faith. By sacralizing the state and spreading a political cult of the masses, fascism aimed at creating a virile and virtuous citizenry that dedicated body and soul to the nation (Gentile 1996:159). Like conventional religions it defined the meaning of life and the purpose of being. The public school system played a major role in propagating the faith through teaching material and by constant liturgical observance to celebrate the rites of the nation and the revolution.

Fascism was not an association of believers Gentile states. It was a party of action, an idea, that indicated a goal, showing the way to be followed with resolute will, and because it anticipated the construction of the new State, that will was revolutionary (Gentile 2002:18). The uniting factor for the early stages of Fascism was the common experience of faith –

⁸³ The Lictor’s axe in Rome was the instrument of execution, of death sentences issued by the magistrates of the empire.

interventionism and war – lived through in a state of exhilaration and vitalism (Gentile 1996:20). That experience was transformed into a conviction that they had a mission to regenerate the nation in defense and affirmation of their patriotic idealism. During the regime, Fascism was the religion of the state, and it was used at every level in propaganda and by all ranks in the hierarchy. In the development of Fascism many intellectual currents contributed to its articulation. Futurism⁸⁴ was one such current (Gregor 2001:xiii). Another was National Syndicalism⁸⁵, as was Giovanni Gentile’s philosophy *Actualism*. But Fascism’s syncretic mix borrowed rituals and tenets of belief freely from Catholicism and nationalism. Roman religion was retrieved and some of its symbols were revitalized. Fascism welcomed different orientations, but none of these could aspire to be the authentic interpretation of the faith (Gentile 1996:60). However, both in theory and practice they all converged toward the sacralization of the state. For Fascists, their political religion was to become the secular salvation for the nation.

The nationalistic dimension of civil religion

Nationalism is a civil, political religion (Hedetoft 2009:253). In an abstract sense it is the necessary idealism of the self-created state (2009:254). All nationalisms involve a state ideology, a sacralization of the national culture, a spiritual core and an ideology that justifies it (Mead 1974:59). It is also important in this context to point to the ambiguous role that nationalism plays. At the basis of any nationalism lies the discovery of the nation. However, nationalism’s role is partly as the creator and inventor of the nation; partly as a product of the nation (Skarpeteig 1996:226). As explained in chapter 2, the nation, when it is seen as one of the most powerful “repositories of symbols”, comes to have religious significance, and can even “replace religious institutions” in the collective consciousness of the people (Marty 1974:140). Like conventional religions, nationalism has its myths, dogmas and rituals. They explain and dramatize the origins, guiding principles, rules of order, and destiny of a political culture (Bennett 1979:109). It has a god – the “god of a chosen people”. In order for national-

⁸⁴ Italian Futurists advocated for the modernization of the country, and in order to have any impact on immediate political, economic, and social issues and the course of events, they gave themselves over to Fascism, with some of their first agitators becoming the intellectual and organizational leaders of Fascism (Gregor 1979:241). As anti-traditionalists they wanted the population to become infused with the new religiosity of commitment to technology and productivity. But only war in their view would produce the new consciousness, the necessary racial pride that would make Italians new men for the modern epoch (1979:199).

⁸⁵ It was out of Sorellian syndicalism that the thought and political method of Fascism emerged, especially taken from its moral and mystic tendencies (Gentile 2002:58-59). The French philosopher Georges Sorel wanted to revise Marxism by stressing the revolutionary action. According to Sorel violence can be a legitimate expression of the revolutionary creative force.

ism to manifest itself, it needs to grow out of a raw material of common myths, memories and traditions. Attempts at creating nationalism from random myths and constructed common traits will not succeed (Skarpeteig 1996:228). In order to create a feeling of unity in citizens it is necessary to highlight elements from earlier culture, to transform them and define them as national. It is not sufficient to build the nation politically. When the nation state is formed by gradually integrating the citizenry into a cultural community, the political understanding of the nation is foundational. Under these circumstances symbols such as flag, national anthem, common territory, and common historical memories are emphasized (1996:231).

Most modern societies have within their ethnic makeup groups that do not share common historical pasts or common values. The history that civil religion interprets and represents is often the history of the dominant culture, as explained in the analysis in chapter 4. In order to retain a degree of autonomy in pursuing their own objectives, each group competes for social power either against the state or against each other. Any civil religion, at any stage of its evolution, may encourage and foster nationalist tendencies, dominating the language, rhetoric, ideals, values, and beliefs of the discourse of any civil religion. The symbols of civil religion are vulnerable to manipulation. Popular patriotic sentiments may be exploited for political ends. Civil religion therefore may vary in its political, religious, or nationalistic intensity, depending on a society's particular history and social and political circumstances (Cristi 2001:220). Civil religion's nationalist tendencies may be attenuated or aggravated in response to particular national or international crises. These tendencies may also be dependent on a particular political regime and the use of civil religious discourse by politically powerful individuals (2001:219).

American civil religion as nationalistic resource

American civil religion is the celebration of the nation's culture and way of life. As we have seen in previous chapters, the myths of American civil religion constitute a strong blend of biblical imagery and nationalist sentiments. In McGuire's view the concept of civil religion applies to many features of U.S. religion as it is linked with America as a nation (McGuire 2002:202). Rituals and symbols are associated with national heroes, national accomplishments, and national historical events. Marvin and Ingle claim that nationalism is the most powerful religion in the United States (Marvin and Ingle 1996:767). America's religious self-understanding and America's republican and democratic self-understanding are inseparable parts of their nationalism. Political convictions of the American creed have provided the

rationale of American identity. Huntington argues that American nationalism is, in some ways more “intellectualized”, less emotional and less irrational than in most other nations since political ideas and principles are at the basis of its definition (Huntington 1981:29). “Destroy the political system”, he warns, “and you will destroy the basis of community, eliminating the nation” (1981:30). This reasoning is in line with a political understanding of the nation⁸⁶, as mentioned in chapter 2, which can lay claim to popular support on the basis of political institutions within the geographical territory they cover (Skarpeteig 1996:216). The founding of the state preceded the formation of the nation. Americanism implies adherence to concrete political values. This is the reason why “to be an American is an ideal”. It is important to note here that Huntington directly links the American creed (i.e. civil religion) with nationalism.

On the other hand, as a result of religious freedom, no religion could claim to function as ‘the church’, as explained in the previous chapter, therefore the nation came more and more to have this function (Mead 1974:66). Most students of civil religion seem to have taken the position advanced by Mead, that civil religion in America is not to be equated with crass American nationalism (Cristi 2001:212). This is also the stance taken by American scholars, in particular, despite evidence indicating that civil religion provides an ideological framework for nationalism (Cristi 2009:68). They have been anxious to separate civil religion from self-serving nationalism. Bellah sees American civil religion as a concept that is unique to the Americans rather than as a concept that characterizes the American kind of nationalism. He repeatedly claims that American civil religion is not idolatry of the nation. Bellah has though, recognized that it is not always “a good thing” (Bellah 1974:257). He argues that misuse of civil religion occurs when the gap between the nation and its ideals is closed, so that the dimension of transcendence is lost. But as Richardson notes, misuse is generated by the very structure of civil religion itself and from the way it operates (Richardson 1974:164). From his point of view, “the pretensions of American nationalism, the national self-idolization”, are not civil religion’s pathology, error, or malfunctioning; they are the unavoidable manifestations of civil religion itself (Jones and Richey 1974:11). In other words, this would mean that the idolatry of the nation is a natural expression or an inevitable aspect of any civil religion (Cristi 2001:213).

Linking conventional religion with nationalism is not a novel idea. Scientists have long been aware of the alliance between national consciousness and religion, and of the close

⁸⁶ The political nation concept has its origin in Roman use of the term. It was originally used for the politically privileged, but it was revolutionized with the idea of popular sovereignty in the American colonies in the 1770s, among other places (Skarpeteig 1996:215-16). The notion of *the people* as holders of political rights, and carriers of sovereignty, made them into a nation.

connection between nationalist and religious movements. Civil religion in the United States tends to ascribe sacred meanings to secular symbols and national myths. Quasi-religious claims, both implicit and explicit, are made about American national character, about the validity of the nation's actions, and its place in history and in the world. All these claims are important elements of *cultural* nationalism. These elements provide the most fundamental assumptions about the nation and its political order, and by which they are legitimated. In this way, national and religious sentiments are fused and nationalism itself turns into a "religion or substitute religion" (Cristi 2009:70). In the final analysis Cristi argues, it is hard to distinguish civil religion, at least in its cultural form, from cultural nationalism. Both forms describe ideologies for which the idea of the nation is sanctified. As belief systems, both provide identity, meaning and purpose for the collectivity, and define the way the group conceives of itself, its historic past and future aspirations. They both attempt to mobilize feelings of collective belonging and civic loyalty, and provide the essential definition of who the chosen ones are (2009:72). However, Hvithamar contends that scholars of nationalism often do not take into account the transcendent value that civil religion endows the relationship between society and individual with (Hvithamar 2009:105).

As has been discussed in previous chapters, these are in short the cultural perspectives of civil religion that are acknowledged by all scholars in the literature on the subject. However, Cristi argues that as a phenomenon civil religion is neither just civil, nor just religious, but also essentially political. How does her understanding of civil religion relate to *political* nationalism? How does this form of nationalism bear on the thesis' source material? In the analysis of chapter 4 Cristi's distinction between cultural and political nationalism was explained. To recall, political nationalism politicizes the sense of national consciousness. It is territorial and exclusionary and it requires the active participation of the state (Cristi 2009:70 n.9). Furthermore, it exalts the nation above all others, and it places primary emphasis on promotion of its culture and interests. Cristi further states that in her view Berger's reflection⁸⁷ that the process of secularization in America has produced a "political religion that resembles more a national ideology than a transcendent religion" seems quite correct (Cristi 2001:220). The view in this quote from Berger is in line with Huntington's claim above that at the core of American nationalism is their political system and political values, and a political concept of the nation. Importantly therefore, American civil religion can be seen as more strongly connected to the political than the cultural form of civil religion.

⁸⁷ This quote from Peter Berger is taken from his book *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies* (1961). Unfortunately his work has not been available to me while writing this thesis.

Reviewing the elements of civil religion found in the source material it is clear that most of them are fundamentally political, where only one, the symbol of God, can be seen to not be. Also, Brzezinski's account of American primacy, as presented in chapter 2 about American Foreign Policy, seems to be a clear expression of political nationalism.

Chapter 7. Concluding remarks

In this thesis we have seen, through theories and empirical examples that civil religion manifests in different ways, with its dimensions emphasized according to historical and political circumstances. Civil religion can be seen as a framework for the interpretation of these circumstances. These manifestations can all be seen as part of the continuum of civil religion's dual intellectual heritage in the works of Rousseau and Durkheim. It is highly unlikely that a pure form of civil religion ever will be found. Either type can turn into the other. In the most literal sense, all civil religions are partially mixed. They have borrowed symbols, rituals, and elements of liturgy from conventional religion, especially Christianity, and from nationalism. The political or civil character of civil religion is primarily determined by its particular structural location, either to the side of the state or to the side of society. This depends, in turn, on the nature and structure of the state, the national religious environment or culture, and the relations between political and religious authorities (Cristi 2001:233-34).

Political religions are anchored in specific ideologies, and the role of the state is fundamental. The state and its political officials become guardians of the most fundamental values and needs of the society. These values and needs are in turn raised to the status of "transcendental beliefs". The religious factor is more markedly embedded in the sacralization of a particular political order, program, or leader. The Fascist form of political religion moved in the footsteps of the French Revolution, probably without realizing it Emilio Gentile states (Gentile 1996:96), and it bears a strong resemblance with Rousseau's theory of civil religion. Inspired by the notion of regeneration of the masses, the concept of the state as educator, the sacred nature of the fatherland, the myth of the "New Man", and the "passion for unity" his theory was translated into a modern totalitarianism. Fascist religion was created by the elite, and Fascists also sought to make schools a means to reinforce unity through the propagation of the faith. A civil religion in its Rousseauan form implies on the societal level, a conscious, rational manipulation of the myths of the nation for political aims. Civil religion in its ideological form is imposed, from the top down, "without explanation or comment" as Rousseau advocated. How to instill citizens' healthy love of one's country and to create unity were issues of major concern to him, as we have seen, and in order to ensure it, nonconformity to the civil religion was to be sanctioned by the state. Sanctioning for failing to conform was a constant threat in Fascism.

Values and symbols do not lead a relatively autonomous existence; they are immersed in the arena of everyday conflicts and political struggles. They are important vehicles for the expression of group interests and aspirations (Cristi 2001:241). They are also of crucial importance for the mobilization and sustenance of collective action. The values of the American creed have clearly expressed white, Anglo-Saxon values from their religion and culture – the values of the dominant group in America. This means that either as a dominant culture or as a dominant ideology, civil religion does not successfully incorporate all social groups and segments of society. At the core of American civil religion are the political system and its values. It concerns all who reside within the nation's territory, and can be seen as a "secular canopy" for the nation. The political dimension of civil religion, i.e. how politics contributes *to* civil religion, is an issue seldom touched upon by scholars. It seems to be taken for granted, or considered as a given. The point of departure for America was the constitution of the political nation, and over time, the state and the political processes formed the framework for the formation of the national community. Citizens have to be educated to the elite culture of a political nation. Bellah himself has recognized this fact. There is a necessity, built into the American republican tradition, "not only for the assertion of high ethical and spiritual commitments, but also for molding, socializing, and educating the citizens in those ethical and spiritual beliefs so that they are internalized as republican virtue" (Bellah 1992:180). The analysis presented here questions Bellah's notion of a well-established American civil religion that expresses the religious self-definition of the American people as a whole. Civil religion cannot and does not mobilize the entire nation on behalf of socially approved tasks and responsibilities. In the building of nations, the question of selective historic memory is important as it determines how successful the process of collective remembering that which unites, but forgetting that which can split the nation, will be. For those of public offices who had the task of conscious nation building through identity-forming symbols and institutions, this was a concern. Initially, civil religion in the American context was, as Marty has recognized, created by an intellectual elite. As Bellah himself has acknowledged, states need to create a deep level of value consensus in society. Civil religion is a means to achieve this.

Contrary to arguments found in the literature, the alleged structural differentiation of American civil religion is also questioned in this thesis. Through the courts, educational system, media, and the political system civil religion has an institutional basis or a set of carriers that provide organized and ritualized reinforcement of ethical standards. If this proposition is accepted, then civil religion can never be totally differentiated – it can never

constitute a symbol system separated from political institutions - what Bellah called the “religio-political problem”. American civil religion seems to have more or less the same affinity with the Durkheimian tradition as with the Rousseauan, apart from the coercive means for sanctioning dissidents.

Lastly, it is clear from the material presented in this thesis that the American civil religion tradition and discourse are used by presidents in documents communicating policy to the public as well as in speeches of everyday politics. At times of national crisis the use of civil religion in political rhetoric intensifies. Therefore it must be of great significance as a reservoir of national historical experience and a resource for communicating with citizens. Civil Religions global perspectives are there, but in its initial stages. However, with an increased speed in globalization this can change quickly.

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