

*"I believe there is a reason that history has matched this nation with this time. America strives to be tolerant and just.... We fight, not to impose our will, but to defend ourselves and extend the blessings of freedom.*

*We cannot know all that lies ahead. Yet we do know that God has placed us together in this moment, to grieve together, to stand together, to serve each other and our country. And the duty we have been given -- defending America and our freedom -- is also a privilege we share. We're prepared for this journey. And our prayer tonight is that God will see us through, and keep us worthy.*

*Tomorrow is September the 12th. A milestone is passed, and a mission goes on. Be confident. Our country is strong. And our cause is even larger than our country. Ours is the cause of human dignity: freedom guided by conscience, and guarded by peace. This ideal of America is the hope of all mankind. That hope drew millions to this harbor. That hope still lights our way. And the light shines in the darkness. And the darkness will not overcome it."*

**(George W. Bush's Adress to the Nation on Sept. 11 Anniversary 2002 at Ellis Island)**

1. Introduction to the topic:

The concept of American "civil religion" is at its core the religious reverence which is given to the political sphere. On the one hand, it is a strong religious dimension in political communication itself, such as the frequent reference to God and to biblical stories as regards to the origin of the American nation in public speeches of leading politicians, and especially in presidential inaugural addresses. On the other hand, it manifests itself as sacralization of the political in the worship of political symbols and documents of the USA, and in the orchestration and ritualization of national ceremonies. The conceptual matrix, on which civil religion is based, expresses itself in particular value systems, such as that political actions must be in accord with Christian principles, that the nation as a whole is answerable to God, and that the flag is holy. The system of political symbols in the United States thus boasts in its entirety a definite analogy to the symbolism of the established Church: functionally, bible and constitution, crucifix and flag, sacred shrine and military cemetery, martyr and founding father are all equivalent.

American civil religion is a phenomenon that neither has a specific church affiliation, nor is it a discrete established entity; it is a frame that leans -- partially, if at all -- towards a religious value system. Theoretically, as civil religion is an all-encompassing consensus of values between disparate groups of American society, it functions as the motor of social cohesion and provider of identity.

In spite of the institutional independence of civil religion and the categorical separation of church and state, political and religious ideas and ideals are bound together more tightly in the USA than in any other part of the industrialized world. For this reason, the concept of civil religion can only be understood in the specifically American context of Puritanism. The once purely Protestant belief in the special election of America by God -- similar to the biblical model of ancient Israel -- has long constituted a part of the national consciousness for all denominations. The roots of civil religion, which has become a purely secular ideology in the mean time, are to be found in the puritan colonies of the 17th century.

## 2. Focus and method of the dissertation:

Civil religion has fulfilled two functions since the attacks of September 11th: it has helped mobilize various social strata for the offensive in Afghanistan. Moreover, the renewed focus on national identity and the search for comfort in religion has joined Americans together -- seemingly across party and racial boundaries.

In that politicians and the media have appealed to civil-religious values ("freedom," and "justice" were central categories), they have generated a readiness for sacrifice that created tolerance for the deployment (and possible loss) of American soldiers. Civil-religious rhetoric and symbolism -- used by the political administration and extensively amplified by the American media -- has activated a national self-consciousness which had apparently been suppressed by other values since the end of the cold war. In this context, Robert Bellah, architect of the concept of civil religion, had already proclaimed that there had been a decline in civil-religious attitudes in favor of hedonistic and consumerist values. After the collapse of communism the identification with the "American nation" seemed to be less and less important, even though the USA had nonetheless celebrated the diminishing civil religion with regular rituals (such as President's Day, Veterans' Day, Memorial Day, and of course the 4th of July.)

This dissertation will show that the situation of national crisis has allowed a reservoir of religiously imprinted patriotism to be resurrected, and through this resurrection the readiness for sacrifice has been amplified. On the basis of civil-religious speeches and rituals in the political system, as well as the supporting commentary of the media, this development will be analyzed along with its functional mechanisms.

What remains to be decided is whether and how far the central perspectives of civil religion have changed since Tuesday, September 11, 2001. A comparison with political actions from other national crises in America's history (such as Pearl Harbor and the assassination of John F. Kennedy) is thus essential.

The demonstrative unity of all religions and parties, as displayed in joint memorial services and political speeches since September 11, will be questioned. From the examination of minority newspapers we shall see whether African-Americans share the central civil-religious values, and whether the expressions of their reactions to the attacks can be similarly categorized, or whether they take on quite another form of national self-consciousness. If ethnic minorities can also identify with civil-religious rhetoric after the attacks, the critique of the phenomenon -- that a multi-ethnic country like the USA can not be integrated by the concept of 'nation' -- would be refuted. Critics such as Helmut Dubiel have doubted whether the integrative strength of religious patriotism originally postulated by Bellah could actually integrate such a heterogenous country.

The theory of civil religion has been cast aside by academia: the number of empirical studies was already beyond its peak at the end of the 70's. At this time, there are no new analyses. Even Bellah, the originator of the concept, had moved away from the concept in the late 70's and turned towards communitarianism. Nonetheless, the reaction to September 11 show the unwavering presence of civil religion.