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Introduction: Revisiting Civil Religion from an Aesthetic Point of View

Abstract:

This special issue enquires into aesthetic ways of newly creating or re-shaping and re-presenting civil religion and its central characters, symbols, or figures. Normally, civil religion addresses value-orientation and social integration. In addition to these features, the papers make the aesthetic performance of civil religion the subject of discussion. The reason for taking this path is the altered aesthetic circumstances of highly mediatised and consumerist societies. Before this backdrop, images, literary figurations, movie sequences, and brands in media, public and national discourse are examined in various case studies from Italy, Finland, the UK, France, the former GDR, and Switzerland. At the same time, the negotiation and aesthetic plausibility of aesthetic styles, pragmatic power, and particular media logics are evaluated. The concept of civil religion deserves this closer re-definition also with respect to past and recent (post-)secularisation and non-religion discourses. Hopefully, this multi-layered analysis of aesthetics and aesthetic pragmatics of civil religion will shed some light on the persistent appropriateness of the ‘civil religion’ concept and its capacity to be introduced into various methodological contexts in combination with the aesthetic perspective.

Key words: civil religion, aesthetics, political religion, pluralism, normative orders

“The central matter to study is, therefore, not *whether* the religious has any significance, but rather *how* it manifests itself—in *which way* it is significant.”¹

1. Introduction

This introductory citation gives a reason why the aesthetic approach imposes itself and especially why there is a need to re-examine the concept of civil religion, as political, legal, and cultural contexts do not cease to change and civil religion conceptually relates to them. This

¹ Carsten Bagge Laustsen, “Studying Politics and Religion: How to Distinguish Religious Politics, Civil Religion, Political Religion, and Political Theology,” *Journal of Religion in Europe* 6/4 (2013) 428–463, at 431.

issue contributes to the debate of civil religion with a proposal to employ civil religion tentatively to investigate for Europe the discourse of ‘civil religion,’ civil society, public religion, and the church-state relationship. The originality resides in this widening of the relevant normative field and with the perspective that and how respective normativities are negotiated, implemented, promoted, and fight in an uphill battle through aesthetic operations. The relationship between religion and politics is so multi-layered that it is debatable whether civil religion or any other concept alone is apt to do the job. That is why political theory propounds several concepts for these relations, from political theology to political religion. ‘Civil religion’ is again becoming increasingly popular, as, with migration, the pluralism of societies intensifies and the question imposes itself to what extent shared values are relevant for political stability and cultural integration. Or, viewed from the other side: normative presuppositions become aware and obvious. The more popular and media-based the discourse becomes, the more the concept of civil religion shrinks to the shared-values function. This is a regretful limitation, as there is so much more potential in this concept at the interface of politics, religion and civil life, and societies—for example, what Robert N. Bellah claims as the prophetic function: civil religion can be seen as a highly moral and transcendent point of view from which the state may be questioned.²

This special issue chooses a very particular direction of examination insofar as it decides to enquire into aesthetic ways of newly creating or re-shaping and re-presenting civil religion and its central characters, symbols, or rituals in specific contexts. It therefore shifts the examination from the shared-value angle to the how-powerful-is-shared-aesthetics angle. It is less about high social theory and what should be and more about the efficient mechanisms of

² Heike Bungert & Jana Wolf, “Die Debatte um ‘Zivilreligion’ in transnationaler Perspektive,” *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 7/3 (2010) 1–4, at 3. <http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/16126041-Bungert-Weiss-3-2010> (accessed 1 March 2017).

binding, steering, and moving people, investigated with a fine-grained cultural aesthetic theory. Traditionally, civil religion addresses the political order, value-orientation, and social integration within more or less stable national frontiers. In addition to these features, the papers here make aesthetic performance the topic of discussion, as well as the impact these performances have on the classification and interpretation of phenomena as civil religious (see Kirsch on socialist realism). The reasons for taking this aesthetic pathway are manifold: there are new advances in the methodology and theory of aesthetics of religion, and the aesthetic circumstances of highly mediatised and consumerist societies have incisively changed over the past decades.³

Against this backdrop, this special issue “The Aesthetics of Civil Religion” addresses images, literary figurations, movie sequences, and brands in media, novels, and public and national discourses in case studies across Europe, from Italy (Jenny Ponzio, Baldassare Scolari), Finland (Jerro Kyyrö), Great Britain (Laurens de Rooij), the former German Democratic Republic (Anja Kirsch), France and beyond (Valerio Severino), and Switzerland and beyond (Michael Ulrich). The authors consider, with this innovative focus on Europe, the persuasive force of aesthetic styles, the pragmatic power of aesthetic performance, the regulation of affects, conceptualisations of political aesthetic theories, and the political instrumental use of civil religion through aesthetic forms, particularly through (new and social) media logics.

2. Historical Conceptual Lineages

³ On method and theory, see Alexandra Grieser, “Aesthetics,” in: Robert Segal & Kocku von Stuckrad (eds.), *Vocabulary for the Study of Religion* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2016), vol. 1, 14–23.

The concept of ‘civil religion’ goes back 250 years and therefore deserves this refined re-definition. Preconfigured by John Locke as a Christian common sense, as well as by Immanuel Kant’s “moral community [*ethisches Gemeinwesen*],” it was first used by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762) who thought of civil religion as legitimising the state authority, binding people to a society, and motivating a dutiful citizenry. Since then the discourse has varied widely across countries and across disciplines such as philosophy, constitutional law, history, history of religion, political sciences, sociology, theology, American studies, etc. These discourses can be further distinguished by how deeply they delve into contemporaneous political discussions and take a stance therein. Some important and recurring debatable and controversial complexes in the discussion of civil religion can be made out, some being classical and some quite new.

The question of the micro or macro entrenchment of civil religion is a bifurcated pathway from the beginning. In early theory building, the role of social integration was ascribed to the dominant religion fusing with the political order. This formulation indicates that, in this tradition, religion is seen to be more than its parts (e.g., Jean Jacques Rousseau, Auguste Comte, Emil Durkheim). The opposite opinion is that religion is only meaningful for individuals and is therefore inherently undetermined, as argued by Alexis de Tocqueville and Max Weber.⁴ In the light of present conflicts, it is hard to imagine religions as stabilising forces, and, for Rousseau, this was the reason for demanding a reductive form of civil religion including belief in god, eternal life, reward of the just and punishment of the evil, and belief in the constitution.⁵ It is civil religion in this sense that Robert N. Bellah sees as being realised in American history. This

⁴ Inger Furseth, “Civil Religion,” in: Robert Segal & Kocku von Stuckrad (eds.), *Vocabulary for the Study of Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), vol. 1, 241–245.

⁵ This affirmative use of civil religion distinguishes the concept from that of political religion, which serves for a comparison of dictatorships. See Armin Pfahl-Traubner, “‘Politische Religion’ und ‘Zivilreligion,’” in: Antonius Liedhegener, Andreas Tunger-Zanetti, & Stepan Wirz (eds.), *Religion, Wirtschaft, Politik. Forschungszugänge zu einem aktuellen transdisziplinären Feld* (Zürich: Pano, 2011), 223–249, at 223.

unabated argument in recent discussions is in the Durkheimian tradition and concerns American civil religion in the very specific context of the formative phases of the United States of America, from the Declaration of Independence in 1776 to the Civil War and some later events and only from there draws lines until the second half of twentieth century. It refers to the pledges from the Jewish and Christian tradition that were circulating during this time and helping to interpret the upheavals: the Exodus from the old world, sacrifice and rebirth, the chosen people, a people as a covenant under a transcendent moral order.⁶

From the European perspective, it is astonishing that a concept developed in respect of a very specific formative phase of US-American history has attained such widespread success. Even more astonishingly, the American ‘solution’ of that time differs significantly from the continental understanding of the state’s task. In the US-American wars of independence, the state incorporates the colonial power that propelled the radical religious ancestors from the ‘old world.’ The state, imagined as the state apparatus in American English, is in tension with a society that is not included in the meaning of ‘state.’ Civil religion must be understood against this backdrop of a state power that is to be forced back and the individual (pioneer) whose rights of liberty and for guns are to be expanded instead. By contrast, Europe’s bourgeois societies acknowledge that their liberty rights are realised and guaranteed through state power. “Die derzeit gerade in Deutschland intensiven Diskussionen über ‘ethische’ Richtlinien der Politik erscheinen dann als die diskursive Form einer solchen politischen Herrschaft der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft über sich selbst.”⁷ The bourgeois societies in the European tradition see the state

⁶ Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus* 96/1 (1967), 1–21. For a critical analysis on these discursive patterns and the application to the North American indigenes, see Ulrike Brunotte, “Religion und Kolonialismus,” in: Hans G. Kippenberg, Jörg Rüpke, & Kocku von Stuckrad (eds.), *Europäische Religionsgeschichte. Ein mehrfacher Pluralismus*. 2 vols. (Stuttgart: V&R/UTB 2009), vol. 1, 339–370.

⁷ “The current intensive discussions in Germany on ‘ethical’ guidelines in politics then appear as the discursive form of such political self-government by the bourgeois citizens.” See Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, “Notwendiges

and its political processes as a form of self-realisation and not as something that needs to be kept at a distance in order to preserve one's personal freedom. In the German discussion of civil religion, the philosopher Herrmann Lübbe's understanding is prominent, and has been amended, for instance, by the judge of the supreme constitutional court, Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde.⁸ The question of whether the state depends on political conditions it cannot guarantee is answered with a clear yes. This understanding of civil religion is a religion based on the state, which is said to need the individual's moral substance and the religion's founding beliefs for its own legitimisation. In this view it is civil religion's function of legitimisation that is in the foreground, rather than social integration, as with Bellah.⁹

3. 'Civil religion'—Still a Useful Category for European History of Religion?

Recent secularisation, non-religion, and "(un)believing" discourses beg the question of whether the concept of civil religion is still meaningful or to which use it should be limited.¹⁰ Is it still

Übel? Donald Trumps Erfolg liegt am besonderen Staatsverständnis der Amerikaner," *DIE ZEIT* 21, 12 May 2016, 38. Translation by author.

⁸ Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, *Staat, Gesellschaft, Freiheit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1976), 60.

⁹ For a recent reception, see a special journal issue that puts the question the other way around—asking whether religions rely on political conditions that they cannot guarantee on their own. See Karsten Lehmann & Ulf Plessentin (eds.), *Inverser Böckenförde - Leben Religionen von politischen Voraussetzungen, die sie selbst nicht garantieren können?/Inverted Böckenförde – Do Religions Depend on Political Conditions They Cannot Guarantee?* Special issue of *Religion – Staat – Gesellschaft* 13.1 (2012), 7–170. For his constitutionalism and a partial translation of his work, see also Mirjam Künkler & Tine Stein (eds.), *Constitutional and Political Theory: Selected Writings by Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde*, intro. and annotations by idem (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016), vol. 1.

¹⁰ On "(un)believing discourses," see Jörg Stolz et al., *(Un)Believing in Modern Society: Religion, Spirituality, and*

convenient to investigate such complex dynamics of change within modern societies and on a global scale? In Europe, the concept gained actuality around 2004 with the discussion on the preamble to the Convention of the European Union, including the question whether God or transcendent powers should be addressed. In the end, the countries each made their own decision concerning this question: from omitting the civil religious reference to naming the Christian god. Even if civil religion is a regular reference in specific public discourses, this need not mean that it has a high degree of relevance in other contexts or that it has a social impact. Lately, with de-secularisation, post-secularism, or the “triumphalist”¹¹ God is back statement, alternative models of the presence of religion have appeared within the field traditionally designated by civil religion.¹² With regard to secular societies, the debate takes place in a mostly secular discourse. It is about whether functional understandings of religion are not more fruitful than essentialist ones and whether religion is beneficial for societies. A paradox emerges when today’s civil religion is said to be deeply rooted within ‘Christian-Judaeo theism,’ while at the same time the concept is simultaneously applied in the context of contemporary European pluralism involving not only secular positions, but also many other religions with quite diverging convictions and value systems.¹³ Despite the religion part of the name, civil religion need not be supported by a society’s religion but can be filled out by an ideology like “race

Religious-Secular Competition (London: Routledge, 2016).

¹¹ On the ‘God is back’ statement, see the critical discussion in Titus Hjelm, “Understanding the New Visibility of Religion: Religion as Problem and Utility,” *Journal of Religion in Europe* 7/2 (2014) 203–222, at 203.

¹² Some claim, e.g., in this vein, the comeback of religion as a (Catholic) “third project of modernity,” after nihilism and hedonism and instead of a merely postmodern phenomenon. See Bernhard Giesen, “Die Religionsfreiheit und das dritte Projekt der Moderne” in: Gerhard Besier (ed.), *Die Religionsfreiheit und das Staat-Kirche-Verhältnis in Europa und den USA*. Special issue of *Religion – Staat – Gesellschaft* 14/1 (2013), 97–108.

¹³ Andreas Nix, *Zivilreligion und Aufklärung: Der zivilreligiöse Strang der Aufklärung und die Frage nach einer europäischen Zivilreligion*. *Region – Nation – Europa* 71 (Münster: LIT 2012).

superiority,” nationalism (see Severino), political ideology (normally discussed as political religion; see Kirsch), or the cultural ideology of consumerism (see Ulrich). ‘Religion’ in ‘civil religion,’ in this sense, is used in a functionalist way, only denoting the force that unites a people on a valuative and emotional level, sometimes alluding to intangible and separated (‘sacred’) values. Today, new concepts to grasp this functional position or the normative structures of regimes are being developed. ‘Normative orders’ and ‘legitimising narratives’ are among them, the latter examining the relation between two distinguishable social practices of (rational) legitimisation and story-telling.¹⁴

These new normative players have appeared on the stage and offer their specific distracting and tempting aesthetics in turn. Civil religion is widely understood as an informal ideology that may become visible at state ceremonies, as in the entanglement of the UK government with the Church of England, or in award-giving ceremonies that honour civil engagement.¹⁵ But, mainly civil religion can be said to be culturally dispersed and to determine political decisions and societal sensitivities.

Civil religion may also gain in urgency when it is used as a term to demark the most controversial field of European debates at the present time: what is at stake with this classical term is secular liberalism as such. Can there still be a convincing and binding civil code and

¹⁴ On ‘legitimizing narratives,’ see Alexandra Grieser, “Erzählte Gemeinschaft: Zur Multi-Funktionalität kollektiver Narrative und der dynamischen Rolle von Religion,” in: Gabriele Brahier & Dirk Johannsen (eds.), *Konstruktionsgeschichten: Narrationsbezogene Ansätze in der Religionsforschung* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2013), 319–333. On ‘normative orders,’ see, e.g., the DFG research cluster “Normative Orders” at the University of Frankfurt: Rainer Forst & Klaus Günter, “Die Herausbildung normativer Ordnungen: Zur Idee eines interdisziplinären Forschungsprogramms,” *Normative Orders Working Papers* 1 (2010). www.normativorders.net (accessed 30 May 2016).

¹⁵ Regarding the former example, see Norman Bonney, “The Sacred State: Religion, Ritual and Power in the United Kingdom,” in: Titus Hjelm (ed.), *Is God Back? Reconsidering the New Visibility of Religion* (London, etc.: Bloomsbury, 2015), 118–131.

resource of symbols, rituals, and values? What might an alternative to secular liberalism look like? Can a line still be drawn between the civil and the religious—not in all cases, but in respect of this issue? Or is an opposing force gaining ground with post-secularism and its altered boundary-drawing between the religious and the secular? This opposition seems to arise from several sides: from political theologies, such as the extreme Christian right with its Eurabia-conspiracy theory or Islamist Jihadism, and from multiculturalism with its pluralism of partly incompatible trajectories. With the variety of liberal democracies, global migration streams, shared European institutions, and increasingly transnational legal institutions, the historic proximity of civil religion to dominant ethnic national mentalities is massively decreasing in plausibility. One may ask whether over time a European civil religion has emerged beyond national identities. At the moment, a heuristic might be found in the negative development of strong anti-European feelings, as in anti-Euro movements, Grexit, Brexit, and the state indebtedness crisis. According to the quantitative findings of Annette Schnabel, religion and national identity correlate in Europe.¹⁶ This is most obvious with Protestant and Catholic denominations, less so with Orthodox, and seems to be independent from the centrality of beliefs in individual lives. In countries with a supportive relation between state and main religion, this religion tends to be more closely correlated with the ethnic national identity and to exert an inclusive effect. With the shrinking homogeneity of societies, religions tend to bring forth their tendencies for exclusivity. Other normative orders, or the subdomain of rationalities within functionally differentiated societies, may then take over as civil religion. That is the point of the recent phrasing of the “secular sacred.”¹⁷ Those people describing themselves as secular or non-religious, in the sense of being indifferent to and independent of religious categories,

¹⁶ Annette Schnabel, “Religious Cleavages and National Identity in European Civil Societies,” in: Titus Hjelm (ed.), *Is God Back? Reconsidering the New Visibility of Religion* (London, etc.: Bloomsbury, 2015), 46–64.

¹⁷ Kim Knott & Elizabeth Poole, *Media Portrayals of Religion and the Secular Sacred: Representation and Change*. AHRC/ESRC Religion and Society Series (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

follow ceremonies and values that are structurally set apart.¹⁸ Adaptation to religious diversity need not be accompanied by secularisation, but, as the Church of England in the United Kingdom proves, it can play a significant part in governance and “state cult.”¹⁹ It is frequently doubted whether negotiations over civil religion, or the essentialising of civil religion by claiming a necessary functional space for it within liberal societies (as ‘post-secularism’ does), map the real processes that lead to this abstract term.

In sum, we can say that the civil religion dispositive regardless of whether conceptually useful or not is still used today in political discourse. In this sense, it can be regarded as fulfilling the important task for European countries of putting ethical decisions back on the agenda and enabling discussions in academia under this label.

4. Aesthetics of Civil Religion: On Brand Cults, Martyrs, and National Media Production

The aim of this issue is to provide a better understanding of the uncontrollable dynamics of the civil religion discourse. It shows the huge importance of blending civil religion with an aesthetics approach. For it is not only, and perhaps not even foremost, rational reasoning and consensus as in Juergen Habermas’, John Rawls’, and others’ theories, but dimensions of aesthetic, ‘lived,’ and non-institutionalised belief systems and affect governance and symbolic economies that are crucial for such an understanding. The reader may judge for herself whether this multi-layered analysis of aesthetics and aesthetic pragmatics of civil religion can shed new

¹⁸ Kim Knott, “The Secular Sacred: In-between or both/and?,” in: Abby Day, Giselle Vincett, & Christopher Cotter (eds.), *Social Identities Between the Sacred and the Secular*. AHRC/ESRC Religion and Society Series (Farnham: Ashgate 2013), 145–160.

¹⁹ Bonney, “The Sacred State,” 119.

light on the persistence of the ‘civil religion’ concept and its capacity to adapt to various contexts thanks to the aesthetic perspective. All the articles in this issue elaborate on the question of how civil religion is realised in each regional and historical setting and how it is performed aesthetically. The specific theoretical approaches and their sources are different, as one could imagine: they range from movies to public print and television media discourses to literary novels and the public representation of symbols and mainly span a time frame from the 1960s to the present, some starting even earlier in Napoleonic times (e.g., see Severino). They all define their concept of aesthetics from case to case, informed by literary aesthetics, media content analysis or product aesthetics, ritual theory, semiotics and reader-response theory, or a combination of these. Although all the articles in this volume deal with cases from European history of religion, which differs in many regards from the case of America, some authors take Bellah as their starting point and proceed to take up informing and critical positions in the understanding of civil religion, such as Elisabeth Poole or Marcela Cristi et al. Beyond a social functionalist concept and beyond Bellah’s religious concept, civil religion means much more.

The roll call as a mourning ritual, examined by Severino, is the proclamation of fallen soldiers’ names and a responsive chorus by the crowd as a way of stating that those dead are still present. This telling example from European history of religion demonstrates the buoyant transfer of aesthetics and core elements of civil religion in between societal subsystems: the roll call started out as a military ritual using aesthetics from (Christian) liturgy and later became a political enactment, even creating a specific urban memorial architecture for this purpose, with the Memorial at Ground Zero as one of the latest sad witnesses. What makes these aesthetics so attractive is that they appear in diverse performative and material realisations, from “Napoleonic ritualism, fascist and socialist religiosity and post-Vietnam American patriotism” (see Severino). In his comparative study, Severino takes civil religion as an aesthetic performance of imagined communities through which they become tangible communities.

Jere Kyyrö looks into the battle surrounding cinematic representations since the year

2000 and the media reception of the famous and highly ambivalent figure of Finnish national hero Marshal Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim (1867–1951). He discusses not the films as such, but rather media maker strategies according to Bourdieuan field theory and how media logics and aesthetics expand to other fields like politics, civil society, and art by the process of mediatisation. Media strategies are aesthetically and economically motivated. Therefore, competition strongly drives the aesthetic representation of the national symbol. This analysis is interesting as it comes from the angle of secular media houses and their attempt at making their re-interpretation of a collective national monumental figure plausible.

Scolari's contribution on "martyrs in public space" follows a discourse-analytical approach to the aesthetics and performativity of martyrs' representations, especially the case of the Italian politician Aldo Moro, his kidnapping and assassination in 1978, and the subsequent struggle to interpret the event: should a state negotiate with blackmailers; how much is a human life worth; who is responsible for the consequences of political decisions? Scolari uses this case to elaborate the aesthetic topicality of the martyr in a specific modern civil religious discourse. Martyrs de-legitimise the status quo of the reigning order inasmuch as they become intangible (sacred) signs through their sacrificial death.

Ponzo compares religious processions with political processions in Italian post-World-War-II novels. According to her narratological concept of civil religion, "stories" have taken the place of myths and tales. We learn not to think of these political and religious ceremonies as distinct spheres. Religion in Italy is an agent that Ponzo addresses as the non-subjectivity of the people. Together with the strong emotive and passionate element, she tends to see this as one of the components of the "irrationalist" side of this indigenous nationalist civil religion following Bellah's work on Italian civil religion.

In a remarkable shift, Kirsch draws back from the long-standing debate on socialism as civil religion, which too often only describes socialism as religious, and instead takes a narratological point of departure. She asks how the master narrative of the former German

Democratic Republic, “socialism will triumph,” was aesthetically implemented and realised. She reconstructs the literary aesthetics of socialist realism which can then be compared to other (religious/literary) aesthetics. She unfolds a set of narrative patterns that in form, but not in content, as she emphasises, can be compared to narratives in religion. This structural approach considers formal textual elements, like emplotments and the reader’s interaction with and experiencing of texts, rather than assuming a set meaning. Thus, aesthetic performance and efficiency of reading become dimensions of aesthetic analysis of the social practice of socialist literature.

De Rooij chooses a current case from Great Britain’s news media, which utilises aesthetics and emotions that are closely linked to produce a conflictual relation between the inherited civil religion and supposedly Islamic values. In the light of news media’s strategies of framing, selecting, narrating, and stressing, de Rooij convincingly demonstrates how aesthetic features are related to the recipients’ own world, for instance by mentioning clothes and how this fulfils the goal of delegitimising “Islam in Britain” vis-à-vis the inherited civil religion by means of a biased commonplace de-valuation of Islamic aesthetics.

Several articles touch on the *economisation* of societies since the 1960s as a severely altered framework that deeply changes the meaning of civil religion, both in terms of historical fact and on a conceptual level. Ulrich convincingly spells out the marketing of a global enterprise’s product line as a modern promise of a happy lifestyle. He stands in the line of thought of Benjamin Barber who sees Jihadists, on the one hand, and a capitalist McWorld, on the other, as the poles of civil religion today. Ulrich considers the functional overlap of consumer culture and civil religion, with the case of a consumerist aesthetic performance as world-making. Consumerism as a cultural ideology is examined as a candidate for civil religion in the sense of a binding principle. Consumerism, as he argues, supports the growth of liberal nations and therefore fulfils an essential political aim of neo-liberalism. And, in an even stronger claim, consumption—private as well as state consumption—builds up debts that bind

debtors together in a community of fate. In Ulrich's example, the Nespresso Company is successful in producing an intensive aesthetic experience that melts together sensory perceptions of taste, vision, and touch in specially designed cup editions.

5. Conclusion: Civil Religion—Also an Aesthetic Normative Order in Europe

The articles reveal multiple aesthetic conditions and ways of realising and legitimising civil religion in the sense of normative orders of societies. A recurring feature some think limits the analytical use of civil religion is its emptiness. But from an aesthetic point of view, on the contrary, this is its potential: under-determined civil religion is open to uncountable operations of meaning-making in a way the ritual of the roll call or the figure of the martyr nicely demonstrate. In the digital era, performances are repeatable any number of times, and by this iconic over-representation they either add factuality or let their reference appear inflationary and deprived of significance. Our task is to describe the aesthetic legitimisation strategies applied in respect of the contents of civil religion in Europe.

The concept of an aesthetic normativity is suggested here as a literary and economic concept, as mediatised in many ways, and as a political concept. The idea of *literary aesthetics* is realised in novels or cinematic narratives around central symbols and 'heroes' and through sensorial forms such as the procession, the raising up of hands, the demonstration of precious objects, or bodily co-presence in a crowd of people shoulder to shoulder, as in Polish unionist Solidarnos (see Severino) or in Corpus Christi processions (see Ponzio). In all these dynamics, norm entrepreneurs have to consider aesthetic laws if they want to regulate civil religion, in the sense that they—one thinks of media outlets—determine what counts as acceptable or unacceptable religious practice (de Rooij). Like Ulrich, de Rooij and Kyyrö also discuss the relation between civil religion and the dynamics of economically driven media interests, which

massively influence contents. This context of consumerist culture is telling, and some scholars treat consumerism and capitalism as civil religions.²⁰ There are many ways of aestheticising civil religion. The branding and displaying of national and political affinity through accessories is one. Alexandra Preitschopf discusses consumer goods such as witness-shirts with pro-Palestinian slogans displayed at rallies in her work on the pro-Palestinian political demonstrations in France during the Gaza war in 2014.²¹ Here, too, public negotiation of values and the taking up of solidary positions is entangled with the aesthetic as well as the consumerist display of those values.

The dense aesthetic intermodality of civil religion through various domain-specific aesthetics should be highlighted in future research, because it is by stressing this intermodal force of civil religion that important features can be described, as the articles demonstrate. Aesthetics is a theoretical endeavour that interlinks the segments of society put apart for other reasons in social theory of functional differentiation.²² For many of today's research interests, this functional laying apart is not helpful and can be overcome by paying attention to aesthetics. This includes describing the implementation—embodied, habitual, or strategic—of emotions, triggering of sensations, formalised action, and mediated meanings. Aesthetic patterns typically wander about. Their inner logic derives characteristically from aesthetic rules like

²⁰ Anthony Santoro, "Unsilent Partners: Sports Stadiums and Their Appropriation and Use of Sacred Space," in: Jan Stievernann, Philip Goff, & Detlef Junker (eds.), *Religion and the Marketplace in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 240–266.

²¹ Alexandra Preitschopf, "'Nous sommes tous des Palestiniens' – Palästina-Solidarität, Antizionismus und Antisemitismus im Zuge der Pro-Gaza-Proteste 2014 in Frankreich," in: Helga Embacher (ed.), *Der Gaza-Krieg 2014 und sein Widerhall in Europa: Pro-Palästina-Demonstrationen und Antisemitismus-Debatten*. Special issue of *Chilufim: Zeitschrift für Jüdische Kulturgeschichte* 18/1 (2015), 39–104.

²² See Reckwitz's criticism of the negligence of emotion and aesthetics in sociological theory in Andreas Reckwitz, "Affective Spaces: A Praxeological Outlook," *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice* 16/2 (2012) 241–258.

beauty, symmetry, intense emotionality or its contrary, deviance, attractiveness, blunt emotionality, praxeological contexts, to name just a few. *Gestalt* theory, art theory, cognitive psychology, and aesthetics of religion may reveal much more. Those aesthetic regularities, cognitive tendencies, and canonisations of aesthetic codes—always in slight change or turmoil—are the primary object of interest. While the sociological understanding of civil religion emphasises its social integration, the aesthetic understanding shows how integration is attained in a way that is both powerful and sensorial.

In conclusion, we may remark that civil religion bears all the conceptual difficulties and open ends of the broad cultural-studies understanding of religion. Nevertheless, normativity is a powerful force in political debates, and awareness of aesthetic implementation strategies is crucial for scholarly research.

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