

CIVIL RELIGION AS A GENERALIZED RELIGION SPREAD IN THE USA

The situation in the USA, the country that is viewed as a kind of a 'melting pot', demands certain ideas and activities aimed at unification, consolidation and cooperation of all forces of the society. Thus from time to time there appear in this country new theories and approaches that fulfill these functions. Among a recent one there is the *civil religion treated as a generalized religion*. It is based on mythological mentality and works thanks to stereotypes widely spread in the country and abroad. Civil religion views its functions in unifying and consolidating the population of the country as a nation. According to researchers in this field (for example Robert Wuthnow, Leroy S. Rouner, Mark Hamilton, James Davison Hunter, Karen Armstrong, and Les Hardy) it is the American nation that carries out God's will on Earth. As an additional function they name the legitimating of power. The civil religion

compares two social spheres in people's life: religion and politics. Inauguration speeches of American Presidents are good examples of this combination. Everybody of just elected candidates at the post of President alluded at the name of God in their inauguration speeches.

Protestantism is the basis of civil religion. The body of civil religion consists of many different aspects, which construct the total object of social life. One of them is the fact that American churches (especially protestant ones) start to lose their institutional character being transformed into a kind of clubs on interest, in which people gather to meet friends, to discuss different problems, each club having their own rules. *The second* aspect is nationalistic character of civil religion (*civil religion is a religion of nationalism*). It combines different features of these two social phenomena. As any religion civil religion demonstrates such features of religion as the power to compel believers to die, some sacrificial rituals, symbols. As nationalism civil religion has procedures of unifying and identifying. For example, civil religion like Christianity or Muslim has sacrificial death ritual that displays in sacrifice of soldiers' death. On the other hand, civil religion has some features of nationalism: national symbols (President), holidays, national ideology. And main instrument that provide all ideas of civil religion is Mass Media. Today American civil religion develops in two ways. *Civil religion* has become "*deeply divided*". Religious conservatives offer their own version. Their leaders argue that America's vitality rests on "*a distinct relation to God*" (it was created by Founding Fathers who were deeply influenced by Judeo-Christian values); the United States is "*not a perfect nation, but it is without doubt the greatest and most influential nation in the world*", etc. Religious liberal portrays the nation in a different light ("*this is no longer 'one nation under God'*"). They focus on humanity worldwide (under which they understand civil rights, international justice and ecology) just as the ideas of peace and justice. Both liberals and conservatives have a vision of "*where the USA should be heading*" (the conservative vision seems to embody what Max Weber termed the "priestly" function of religion, while the liberal vision expresses religion's "prophetic" function).