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Robert N. Bellah's Civil Religion as an Approach to the Religious Diversity

Harda Armayanto*

Zahrah Salim**

Religious diversity is frequently a barrier to interreligious relations. This is due to the fact that religious diversity usually leads to disputes and conflicts. As a result, many scholars offered proper approach to managing this diversity. Robert N. Bellah is popularly known with his idea of Civil Religion. This study aims to explain the concept of Civil Religion as proposed by Bellah then analyzing the implementation of his ideas for managing religious diversity. This study employs qualitative methodology through library research to collect the data. Thus, the data is analyzed by adopting descriptive and critical analysis methods. The findings revealed that Civil Religion in Bellah's view is a set of religious beliefs that the basis and foundation for the identity and self-understanding of the United States as a nation and people. Second, Civil Religion places religion and belief under the state constitution in managing religious diversity. Third, Civil Religion is part of the understanding of religious pluralism, and even though it is a new religion, it has become the main reference for all human behavior.

Keyword: Civil, religion, Robert N. Bellah, religious, diversity.

Introduction

It is a fact that there are various religions, including beliefs. This diversity then has an impact on inter-religious relations. Conflict and peace are two words that are always tied to the plurality of religions and the relations of their people. Thereafter, efforts to create peace are formulated and conceptualized by many groups. One of them is civil religion, conceptualized by Robert N. Bellah.

The concept of Civil Religion was first raised by a French philosopher named Jean Jacques Rousseau in his book entitled Social

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Contract and Discourses.¹ Rousseau offered Civil Religion as an antithesis to three forms of religion that he perceived as faulty in their relationship to the state. Those three types of religion: *la religion de l'homme* (man's religion), *la religion du citoyen* (citizen's religion), and *une troisième sorte de religion* (a third kind of religion). The first religion keeps its members out of politics and government, contributing nothing to a country's grandeur. The second is theocratic, which teaches that defending one's homeland is synonymous with defending God. It is exclusive and totalitarian, causing one nation to wage war against another. The third religion bears no name. In effect, its adherents must be loyal to religion over the state. They believe that obeying the state entails succumbing to the tyrant.²

However, Robert N. Bellah was more recognized and famous than Rousseau. Because the definitions and concepts offered by Bellah are more practical, they are readily accepted and even believed by the public, especially Americans.³ Robert N. Bellah's ideas about Civil Religion are contained in an article published under the title "Civil Religion in America" published in the winter of 1967.³ Since then, Civil Religion has become famous and popular.

Robert N. Bellah defines Civil Religion as the dimension of public religion that is expressed as shared beliefs in the form of symbols and rituals.⁴ But Bellah places other religions beneath his Civil Religion. He expressed this statement in his article as follows: "*I am not all convinced that the leaders of the churches have consistently represented a higher level of religious insight than the spokesmen of the civil religion*".⁵ Bellah's statement is based on an assumption that traditional religions often cause problems and conflicts. For that reason, Bellah thinks Civil Religion is the right solution to create harmony and unite nations.⁶

Bellah's claim is worth testing because the concept of Civil Religion proposed is similar to or at least part of the notion of religious pluralism,

¹ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, (United States: Oxford University Press Inc. New York, 1999), pp. 158-168.

² Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, p. 158.

³ Robert N. Bellah, "Religion in America" in *Daedalus*, Vol. 96 No. 1 (*The MIT Press*, FOR, Winter, 1967), 1-21. See also: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20027022>

⁴ Robert N. Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Essays of Religion in a Post-Traditional World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 171.

⁵ Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America" in *Daedalus*, 109.

⁶ Martin E. Marty, *Religion & Republic: The American Circumstance*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), pp. 78-80.

which is also used to view religious diversity.¹ Anis Malik Thoha calls Civil Religion a new religion.² Because it has become the main reference for all human action and behavior.³ This means that in the case of Civil Religion good-bad, right-wrong, *ḥaq-bāṭil*, and permissible-not, are no longer based on religious teachings, but on the agreement of state leaders and politicians in power.

Thus, the values of truth and goodness become very relative. This is certainly one of the characteristics of the Western worldview.⁴ For example, that same-sex attraction is normal/natural. Then, since normality in the western worldview is subjective and relative, the negative stigma toward the LGBT community, such as mental disorders, abnormal behavior, or people with transmitted diseases, is also relative. As Paul Bennet argues that the abnormal stigma attached to the LGBT community is socially defined. Even Thomas S. Szasz views the concept of abnormalities or mental disorders as just a myth.⁵

At this point, civil religion values will almost certainly cause conflict with religious values. This is because religion considers LGBT as a form of sin and deviant behavior. Furthermore, the purpose of Civil Religion in fostering diversity is questionable. Because, as Bellah explains⁶, if the measure of Civil Religion directly depends on the expression of shared beliefs, how about the fact that each belief has a different truth claim - even if they tend to collide?

On that basis, researchers believe it is critical to clarify what exactly Robert N. Bellah's conception of Civil Religion is. Can Civil Religion truly manage religious diversity to be implemented in all countries?

¹ See, Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi *et al*, *Pluralisme Agama*, (Ed) Harda Armayanto, (Ponorogo: Centre for Islamic and Occidental Studies [CIOS] & Program Studi Agama-Agama, Fakultas Ushuluddin Universitas Darussalam Gontor, 2022).

² Anis Malik Thoha, *Tren Pluralisme Agama*, (Jakarta: Perspektif, 2005), 5.

³ Anis Malik Thoha, *Tren Pluralisme Agama*, p. 155.

⁴ Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, "Liberalisasi Pemikiran Islam: Gerakan Bersama Missionaris, Orientalis dan Kolonialis" in *Jurnal Tsaqafah*, Vol. 5. No.1, 2. The West here refers to a way of seeing rather than a geographical location or region. In *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin*, S. M. N. al Attas explains that Western civilization is a hybrid of ancient Greek and Roman civilizations that have been adapted to the cultural elements of European nations, particularly Germany, England, and France. The Greeks provided the basic principles of philosophy, art, education, and knowledge; the Romans provided the principles of law and constitution." See: S.M.N al-Attas, *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin*, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 2000), 164-165.

⁵ Thomas S. Szasz, *Myth of Mental Illness: Foundations of a Theory of Personal Conduct* (New York: HarperCollins, 1974), p. 262.

⁶ Robert N. Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Essays of Religion in a Post-Traditional World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 171.

13 What is Islam's perspective on the concept of Civil Religion? Therefore, researchers are interested in researching "Robert N. Bellah's Civil Religion as an Approach to Religious Diversity".

33 Biography of Robert N Bellah

Robert Neely Bellah was born on February 23, 1927, in Altus, Oklahoma. He died on July 30, 2013 in Oakland, California at the hospital due to complications after heart surgery.¹ Bellah died at 86 and left his two daughters, Jennifer Bellah Maguire and Hally Bella-Guther.² His father was a letter publisher and newspaper editor who died by suicide when Bellah was three years old.³ 30 His mother, Lilian, later moved the family to Los Angeles. Robert and his wife Melanie Bellah's eldest daughter is known to have committed suicide in 1973, while their third daughter died at the age of 17 in 1967 in a car accident.⁴

Bellah is a sociologist from the United States who discusses changes in modern religious practice and offers innovative solutions and procedures for reconciling traditional societies with social change.⁵ Bellah is a Harvard University graduate student who received his B.A. *summa cum laude* in social anthropology in 1950.⁶ Bellah's thesis, "*Apache Kinship System*," was awarded the *Phi Beta Kappa Prize* at the time.⁷

29 His academic journey continued until he earned his doctorate. Bellah received his Ph.D. in sociology and Eastern languages from the same university in 1955, and his doctoral dissertation, "*Religion and Society in Tokugawa Japan*," was published in 1957. During this time, he met

¹ Yasmin Anwar, *Robert Bellah, Preeminent American Sociologist of Religion Dies at 86*, in *UC Berkeley News*, 1st August 2013. See:

<https://news.berkeley.edu/2013/08/01/robert-bellah-obit/>, accessed, 15th of March 2023.

² Elaine Woo, "Robert N. Bellah Dies at 86; UC Berkeley Sociologist" in *Los Angeles Times*, Retrieved August 27, (2013), p. 63.

³ Read: Daniel Horowitz, *The Anxieties of Affluence: Critiques of American Consumer Culture, 1939–1979*, (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005).

⁴ Read: Matteo Bortolini, *The Anthem Companion to Robert N. Bellah*, (New York: Anthem Press, 2019).

⁵ Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-change>, accessed on 20th September, 2022.

⁶ Richard Wood, "Bellah, Robert Neely (1927–)" in John R. In Shook, (ed.), *The Dictionary of Modern American Philosophers*, Vol. 1. (Bristol, England: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005), 182. See also: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-change>, accessed on 20th September, 2022.

⁷ Robert N Bellah & Steven M. Tipton, (Eds), "Bibliography of Works by Robert N. Bellah", in *The Robert Bellah Reader*, (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2006), 523. doi:10.1215/9780822388135-034

Talcott Parsons, the leading sociologist who succeeded Max Weber's ideas, for the first time through David Aberle, an American anthropologist and former student of Parsons.¹ Parsons was especially taken with Bellah's concept of civil religion.² From 1947 to 1949,³ Bellah was a member of the US communist party after graduating from Harvard. Bellah was officially appointed to the John Reed Club, a Marxist studies organization.

In 1957, Bellah began teaching at Harvard University after completing a two-year postdoctoral fellowship in Islamic studies at McGill University in Montreal. Bellah became Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley, ten years later, beginning in 1967 and retiring in 1997.⁴ Bellah was later called the Elliott Professor Emeritus of Sociology this year.

Bellah's most exciting and influential works are *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World* (1970). In this book Bellah attempts to apply economic theory to a culture, at the same time *Varieties of Religion* (1980) illustrates Bellah's belief that the 'Civil Religion' inherent in a country's education and legal system should be encouraged by its openness and tolerance. Another popular work, *Habits of the Heart* (1985) explains the relationship between religion and American culture.⁵ Bellah's other works are, *The Broken Covenant*, *The new Religious Consciousness*, *Uncivil Religion*, and *The Robert Bellah Reader* (2006).

Bellah received the National Humanities Medal in 2000. The United States president awarded this honor to him in appreciation of his strengthening the value of community in American society. According to the president, Bellah is a leading sociologist and educator who has helped to raise public awareness of the core beliefs of democratic institutions and protect us from the dangers of uncontrolled individualism.⁶

In September 2011, Harvard University Press's Belknap Press published Bellah's book *Religion in Human Revolution: From the*

¹ Matteo Bortolini, "Before Civil Religion: On Robert Bellah's Forgotten Encounters with America, 1955–1965" in *Sociologica*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 2010, 7. doi:10.2383/33646

² Bernhard Giesen & Daniel Šuber, "Bellah, Robert N," in George Ritzer (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Social Theory*. Vol. 1, (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2005), p. 49.

³ Robert N. Bellah, "McCarthyism at Harvard" (The New York Review of Books. Vol. 52, No. 2. (2005).

⁴ Hartford Institute for Religion Research, "A Brief Biography of Robert N. Bellah," Biography, n.d, accessed September 20, 2022, <http://www.robertbellah.com/biography.html>.

⁵ William Form and Nico Wilterdink, "Social Change," Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed September 20, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-change>.

⁶ William Form and Nico Wilterdink, "Social Change,"

Paleolithic to the Axial Age.¹ In summary, Bellah explains the biological and cultural origins of religion, and their interaction. Jürgen Habermas, a sociologist and philosopher, described Bellah's book as "a great book" on one occasion. This is because it was written by a leading social theorist who successfully assimilated a wide range of literature, including biology, anthropology, and history.² His most recent book received the American Sociological Association's Distinguished Book award in the Sociology of Religion category.

From Religious Conflict to Approach the Religious Diversity

Civil religion emerged in America at the proposal of Robert N. Bellah in 1960. This concept is expected to unite Americans over the differences that occur in its ritual practice. Bellah then mentioned that despite using symbols in certain religions, each religion still operates independently.³ In another explanation, Robert Nisbet states "*Civil Religion is the religious or quasi-religious regard for certain civic values and traditions*".⁴ The emergence of the concept of Civil Religion is based on the goal that this concept can solve conflicts where the biggest trigger is the diversity of religions and differences in beliefs embraced by the people in each country.

In another explanation, civil religion emerged due to the current wave of political and social revolutions from liberal democracy, as well as political pluralism since the 18th century in the West. In the same period, atheistic communism spread in the East, endangered human religious life and

¹ Jack Miles, (2013) "Review of Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age by Robert N. Bellah and The Axial Age and Its Consequences" (Ed.) Robert N. Bellah and Hans Joas in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 81, No. 3, 2013, 853. doi:10.1093/jaarel/lft045

² Original text: "*This great book is the intellectual harvest of the rich academic life of a leading social theorist who has assimilated a vast range of biological, anthropological, and historical literature in the pursuit of a breath-taking project. Robert Bellah first searches for the roots of ritual and myth in the natural evolution of our species and then follows with the social evolution of religion up to the Axial Age. In the second part of his book, he succeeds in a unique comparison of the origins of the handful of surviving world-religions, including Greek philosophy. In this field, I do not know of an equally ambitious and comprehensive study*". See also; <http://www.hartfordinstitute.org/bellah/religioninhumanevolution.html>, accessed on 12th of March 2023.

³ Lucas Swaine, *Civil Religion Philosophical Concept*. For further information, see: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/civil-religion> accessed 2nd of March 2023.

⁴ Robert Nisbet, "Civil Religion," in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, (ed) Mircea Eliade, Vol. 3, 524-527.

contributing to the "*religious disorientation*".¹ This problem is worsened by the inability of traditional religions, such as Christianity and Judaism, to play a role as the bonds of society and nation.²

Then, at the same time, the political revolution laid new foundations in the social system in the form of "nation-state" nationalism. This nationalism is then accompanied by characteristics such as religion. That is, symbols (such as the flag), myths (such as national heroes and the American Promised Land), sacred texts (such as legislative texts and government ministers' speeches), and nationalism rituals (national anthem, flag gratitude) all replace religion in the hearts of the public.³

As a result of the aforementioned religious orientation crisis, people easily turn to nationalism. In the same context, discard any belief in traditional religion that is considered outdated. Because it divides the country more than it unites it.⁴ Furthermore, although at the beginning of its emergence, the concept of Civil Religion was designed for the good of America, with the background mentioned above, it turned out that many other countries adopted this concept, spreading far beyond Bellah's expectations. In the introduction to his book, he says: "*the term "civil religion" has spread far beyond any coherent concept, or at least beyond anything I ever meant*".⁵

Civil Religion, according to Bellah, is present as a mediator and remedy for those who are intoxicated by their religion.⁶ As a result, Bellah offers Civil Religion approaches to religious diversity and conflicts in a country. However, the application of Civil Religion in some countries outside of America is not as Bellah promised, because Civil Religion was designed for America, and its application in other countries is likely to be ineffective. This is because many religious values diverge and cannot be equated with the phenomena that occur in America.⁷ The approach applied by Civil Religion to manage diversity is

¹ Robert Nisbet, "Civil Religion, p. 524.

² Martin E. Marty, *Religion & Republic: The American Circumstance*, pp. 79-80.

³ Anis Malik Thoha, *Tren Pluralisme Agama*. (Jakarta: INSISTS, 2021), p. 217.

⁴ Martin E. Marty, *Religion & Republic: The American Circumstance*, pp. 79-80.

⁵ Robert N. Bellah dan Philip E. Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion*, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1980), p. 3.

⁶ The term religion as opium was popularized by a German sociologist named Karl Marx with the title "*the opium of the people or opium of the masses*". This statement means that religion has reconstructed humans as being easily deceived by their society. Robert S. Ellwood and Gregory D. Alles, *The Encyclopaedia of World Religions*, (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008), pp. 160-161.

⁷ This difference in perspective for each religion is known as a *truth claim*. Which is mean, each religion has its own set of truth claims. Harda Armayanto, "Meninjau

as follows:

To Eliminate Religious Truth Claims and Cultivation of Religious Neutral Concept

Bellah's solution on behalf of Civil Religion is nothing more than a new style of Pluralism discourse. Because Civil Religion encourages American society to prioritize nationalism over theological understandings of traditional religion. This is intended as a pretext for achieving state unity and resolving religious conflicts. Anis Malik Thoha describes the pretext for unity as a synthesis of the essential elements of all religions. It is written in his book: "*Kemudian berangkat dari prinsip "netral agama" dan keyakinan akan kebutuhan agama yang selalu hidup di lubuk hati manusia, kaum pluralis—intelektual maupun politisi—menciptakan "agama baru" yang terbuka, dan mungkin bisa dinamakan "Agama Pluralis" atau "Agama Sipil", dengan berbagai pengertiannya tersebut di atas tadi, dan merupakan campuran dari "unsur-unsur utama semua agama" sebagaimana yang menjadi obsesi Benjamin Franklin.*"¹

The concept of civil religion was born in America from its inception. As a result, it is widely accepted that American worldview founded on a pluralistic and rational culture, is at the root of this concept. According to Donald G. Jones, the American worldview became the belief shared by most of the population because civil religion was born in America. Civil religion is also known as national religion or the American national religion in this context.²

If this occurs, the existence of such beliefs and statements is perfectly reasonable and logical. Given that in a pluralistic and multicultural government, it is unjustified for one belief or group to be more prominent than others or to wield power over others. If you pay attention, you will notice that this type of belief is closely related to the understanding of the sophists who relativize truth.³ Every value contains

Ulang Upaya Merukunl... Umat dengan Pluralisme Agama" in *Pluralisme Agama*, (Harda Armayanto, (Ponorogo: Centre for Islamic and Occidental Studies [CIOS] & Program Studi Agama-Agama, Fakultas Ushuluddin Universitas Darussalam Gontor. (2022), p. 96.

¹ Anis Malik Thoha, *Tren Pluralisme Agama*, (Jakarta: INSISTS, 2021), p. 218.

² Donald G. Jones, *American Civil Religion*, (Cambridge: Edwin Millen Press, Januari 1990), p. 1398.

³ Sophist is an epithet for someone who loves wisdom. In ancient Greek culture, pre-Socrates, the word Sophist was used as a synonym for philosopher, professor or teacher. But in the 5th century AD, the term morphed into a movement of itinerant

that truth.¹ Thus, the only one with the right and authority to regulate, control, supervise, and dominate a nation or society is the political or religious pluralism system, which is realized through the passage of laws and other state regulations.²

Furthermore, the pluralist government drafted laws and state regulations as the foundation of the national religious discourse. The next step was to embed the concept of "neutral religion" into the hearts of the people. Religion is an inevitable belief and need for humans so they create a new religion that is rational and open to all Americans. Anis Malik Thoha refers to this religious spirit as 'pluralist religion' which is then famously known as 'Civil Religion'. This term civil religion can be called a new religion with the main elements of all religions.³

In addition to advancing the concept of "*neutral religion*", People are required to abandon truth claims, which is one of the pluralist approaches that is considered very appropriate and suitable to be used as a solution. or (*Truth Claim*)⁴ where one religion dominates state power to regulate religious life, society, nation, and state.⁵ This is an attitude that all religious people should have, just like a Muslim who considers Islam is the only true religion.⁶ In contrast, Bellah believes that if a society with a religious plural system has a conflict, the church will not be able to resolve the conflict even though the conflict comes from different church groups. Thus, the institution of law is needed to resolve fix it.⁷

teachers who taught for money, by arguing and rhetoric. See, ³⁶ Bertrand Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1945), p. 73.

¹ Relativism is an understanding that holds the principle if truth is neither absolute nor relative. What is seen as truth by one person does not necessarily apply to others. According to this understanding, truth is determined by who is the actor, because each individual is influenced by history, culture, and psychology. This viewpoint was developed by Protagoras, who is best known for the phrase ⁶⁵ "man is measure of all things". ⁴⁵ Simon Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, (UK: Oxford University Press, 2008)

⁴ Anis Malik Thoha, *Tren Pluralisme Agama*. (Jakarta: INSISTS, 2021), p. 218.

⁴ Anis Malik Thoha, *Tren Pluralisme Agama*, p. 218.

⁴ Harda Armayanto, "Meninjau Ulang Upaya Merukunkan Umat dengan Pluralisme Agama" in *Pluralisme Agama* (Ed) Harda Armayanto, p. 96.

⁵ Mochamad Parmudi, "Civil Religion di Indonesia" in *Jurnal Sosiologi Walisongo* (JSW). Vol 2, No 1 (2018) ⁴⁹ Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo, Semarang, pp. 52-53

⁶ *Li 'Imrān*: 19

⁷ Robert N. Bellah dan Philip E. Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion*. Beragam Bentuk Agama Sipil in *Beragam Bentuk Kekuasaan Politik, Kultural, Ekonomi & Sosial*. *Translated by*: Imam Khoiri *et al.* IRCiSoD, (Jogjakarta 2003), p. 211.

To Place Religion under Government Authority

Unfortunately, the phenomenon of religious pluralism does not only move as a concept or tolerance movement. However, this concept has moved even into regulations in a country through a government that has the power and authority over a country. In this case Harda Armayanto explains some of the concepts of religious pluralism that have been successfully incorporated into state regulations, under the pretext of creating religious harmony, including: (1) Giving full support to LGBTQ++ groups, from concept to practice, (2) Legalizing interfaith marriages, under the pretext of tolerance and the doctrine that love does not look at one's beliefs (3) The issue and elimination of the concept of apostasy in Islam, because the concept of apostasy is very contrary to the concept of freedom of religion written in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 256.¹

The regulations mentioned above implemented by pluralists are only a tiny component of the many concepts of religious pluralism. This explains why there are numerous efforts by pluralists to incorporate their ideas into state regulations as a means of addressing religious diversity. with various forms and covers, including "Civil Religion". Thus, to paraphrase Anis Malik Thoha, Civil Religion is a new concept and approach that was undoubtedly conceived in the womb of Pluralism.²

Pluralism is an existing concept that is always interesting to discuss and research. Pluralism has always been a hot topic among pastors, communities, politicians, scholars, students, and others for five reasons. First and foremost, all religions teach and spread good and peace in human life. Second, the discourse of plurality, tolerance, and inclusiveness is a religious discourse. Third, there is friction and a gap between a community's religious existence and religious life. Fourth, the concept of exclusivism and religious tolerance must be strengthened. Fifth, every nation requires solutions and efforts to overcome problems related to harmony and peace.³

Bellah asserts that issues affecting the community are completely resolved and handled by Civil Religion or the country's civil system. However, when it comes to personal matters, Civil Religion guarantees and gives its people the freedom to handle and resolve these matters

¹ Harda Armayanto, "Meninjau Ulang Upaya Merukunkan Umat dengan Pluralisme Agama" in *Pluralisme Agama*. (Ed) Harda Armayanto, pp. 112-121.

² Anis Malik Thoha, *Pluralisme Agama*. (Jakarta: INSISTS, 2021), p. 215.

³ Agus Salim Nst, "The Role of Civil Religion Forming Civil Society Through Practicing Religious", *Jurnal Ushuluddin*, Vol. 23 No. 2. Fakultas Ushuluddin UIN Suska Riau (2015), p. 202.

according to the provisions of their religion and the traditions in which they believe.¹

Bellah's ideas above certainly did not escape his observations of the phenomena that occurred in the American government. One of Bellah's most important objects of study regarding the Civil Religion he initiated was what was exemplified by President J.F. Kennedy, a Catholic Christian. The results of Bellah's observations, Kennedy never once said anything that showed that he was a Catholic, either in official presidential speeches or other official events. According to Bellah, Kennedy did this because these things were purely based on his personal beliefs and the relationship between him and the church he believed in. Where all matters of his religion are considered to have no connection with public affairs in his authority as president. So Kennedy always used the word "God" in a neutral sense, so that it could be accepted by everyone, with any religious background without exception.²

This increases public acceptance of Civil Religion, beginning with the behavior and attitudes of American leaders and presidents toward their religion and progressing to public trust in the solutions offered by Civil Religion itself. so that gradually American citizens turn from their religion to a religion that guarantees the harmony and unity of American citizens and the state. With truth relativism embedded in their hearts, Americans think pluralistically, relativist, that either their religion or the Civil Religion offered by Bellah is equally valid and leads to goodness, so there is no harm in leaving their religion.

Thus, what Bellah believes suggests that both civil religion and the traditional religions practiced by the American people at that time, have the same degree of truth. Here, the pluralism and relativism of reality become apparent and seem to be one of the characteristics of civil religion. Where whatever the belief, both lead to the same single truth.

To Westernize Religious Thought

Civil religion was used and practiced in America, and it is undeniably still in use in many other countries. However, if the emergence of Civil Religion is observed in detail and carefully, it is evidence of America's inability to overcome the differences and diversity of its people, so it is appropriate if the concept of Civil Religion is said to be part of westernization.³ As a

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Robert N. Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World*, p. 103.

2

Robert N. Bellah, *Beyond Belief*, p. 170.

4

Anis Malik Thoha, *Tren Pluralisme Agama*, (Jakarta: INSISTIS, 2021), p. 230. The term Westernization was coined after the Crusades to denote the expansion of the white man's empire throughout the world. The main objectives were colonization,

3

result, many countries want to apply Civil Religion to their respective countries. However, because this concept was created for American interests, its application in other countries is ineffective, causing people to question the effectiveness of the solutions offered by Civil Religion.

Civil religion is believed to be able to develop in a country where there are many religions, such as Indonesia.¹ For example, Pancasila in Indonesia is considered a manifestation and actual depiction of the existence of Civil Religion, for instance, in the first principle which reads 'Belief in God Almighty'. One of Indonesia's pluralist Muslim figures, Nurcholish Madjid, clarified this, who said that Indonesians who believe in Civil Religion consider Pancasila as the philosophical basis for Indonesian pluralism.² Thus, the pluralistic condition of Indonesia is supposed to represent civil religion itself.

However, seeing that most of Indonesia's population is Muslim or mono-loyalty believers, Civil Religion is certainly difficult to accept or believe. So, the form of the concept of Civil Religion in Indonesia will get a big problem.³ given the many conclusions that say that Civil Religion rivals' traditional religions that are likely to replace their position.⁴ Thus, bright spot that makes Civil Religion difficult to accept and even problematic in Indonesia. It is a fact that the majority of the religious population in Indonesia can be said to hold fast to and be seriously loyal to their religion so that the doctrine of the relativity of truth is reluctant to lodge in their hearts and minds.

To Nationalize Religious Thinking

Regarding plurality, another approach besides the Civil Religion

³ Christianization (evangelization), the search for markets, the supply of raw materials, the search for a new world and the fulfillment of the need for labor. Serge Latouche, *The Westernization of the World: The Significance, Scope and Limits of the Drive towards Global Uniformity*, trans. Rosemary Morris, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996),

¹⁷ J. Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, "Liberalisasi Pemikiran Islam: Gerakan Bersama Missionaris, Orientalis dan Kolonialis" in *Jurnal Tsaqafah*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1430, p. 12.

¹ Agus Salim Nst, "The Role of Civil Religion Forming Civil Society through Practicing Religious Comment", in *Jurnal Ushuluddin* Vol. 23 No. 2. Fakultas Ushuluddin UIN Suska Riau (2015), p. 202.

² Nurcholis Madjid, "Islam dan Negara Islam Indonesia: Pengalaman Indonesia Mencari Titik-Temu Bagi Masyarakat Majemuk" in Nurcholis Madjid, *Islam Agama Kemanusiaan: Membangun Tradisi dan Visi Baru Islam Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1995), p. 7.

³ Agus Salim Nst, "The Role of Civil Religion Forming Civil Society through Practicing Religious Comment", in *Jurnal Ushuluddin* Vol. 23 No. 2. Fakultas Ushuluddin UIN Suska Riau (2015), p. 229.

⁴ Agus Salim Nst, "The Role of Civil Religion.....", p. 217.

approach is nationalism. Many new terms emerge, then matched to describe the concept of Civil Religion. One of the most intriguing and eye-catching quotes comes from George C. Bedell et al., who state that Civil Religion is the "A New Kind of National Religiousness". Civil religion is a new way of viewing national religiosity and diversity.

So, while it is referred to as a new style in religiosity and religiosity, the nature of civil religion, which tends to lean toward nationalism, is not entirely novel because it is limited to the excitement and passion of a country's population in defending its country. That this Civil Religion is only limited to a strong sense of nationalism. A prominent approach related to the label of the term 'nationalism' that performed by the institution can be found in the following: (1) the abolition of slavery, (2) the enforcement of democracy, (3) the struggle to liberate America, and (4) the laws that are compiled to achieve an orderly population and religious people in accordance with the state's values and regulations.²

Another approach to nationalism is introducing and building the concept of a rational and adaptable Civil Religion god for a country's entire population. In Civil Religion, the god is associated with order, law, and rights to ensure harmony because it is certain, visible, and can be felt by all its inhabitants without exception. The two have something in common compared to traditional religious concepts such as Catholicism, which teaches salvation and love. Americans will achieve political prosperity if they incorporate the concept of the Civil Religion god into the fabric of their country.³

New Religion with old Concept

One of the factors that prompted Rousseau and Bellah to advocate for the concept of Civil Religion was his observation of an inter-religious harmony conflict in his country, Bellah's observation shows that there is a theological problem in his concept, for which he believed there was no solution. Then there was a point of view that might be a solution, namely, positioning religion as a servant of the state or the state as a servant of

¹ George C. Bedell, *et al.*, *Religion in America*. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. 1975), p. 21.

² Ahmad Sahidah, "Agama Sipil di Amerika Serikat: Telaah Terhadap Gagasan dan Peran Robert N. Bellah", in *SIMULACRA*, Vol 2. No 1. Juni (2019). Program Pascasarjana, Universitas Nurul Jadid, Paiton, Probolinggo, p. 17.

³ Robert N. Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 175.

religion.¹ It is hoped that there will be no more soul divisions as a Christian and a citizen.

The preceding viewpoint leads Bellah to believe that religious separation from the state cannot be fully realized. Bellah refers to the religious dimension as 'American Civil Religion'² because it cannot be denied that it exists alongside a country's political power. This clarifies and proves that a country with a pluralistic system or culture will automatically and certainly give birth to a new religion that acts as a "*a host culture*".³ This view was later also believed by Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, that in a pluralistic culture and tradition there would be a common religion, which is rational and believed to be a "*national religion*".⁴

This view seems logical, when viewed from a plural and multicultural society. Because, from such a model of society, it is impossible to justify the existence of one particular group or religion controlling other religions and groups. On that basis, then Bellah believes that civil religion is the only one that can solve the problem of the relationship between religion and politics, as Bellah wrote:

"American civil religion with its tradition of openness, tolerance, and ethical commitment might make a contribution to a world civil religion that would transcend and include it... It is time to raise our insights to consider the relation of religion and politics in a global order of civility and justice".⁵

Furthermore, Civil Religion has been described as a "common religion" that focuses on the salvation of the community and society in general, as opposed to a church religion that focuses solely on the salvation of individuals.⁶ So it is not surprising that the concept of Civil Religion was recognized and welcomed by the American people as a constitution that could be trusted and fought for together, without conflict. In this regard Crapsey writes:

"We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare, and secure the

¹ Robert N. Bellah dan Philip E. Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion*, (Harper & Row, San Fransisco, 1980), p. 6.

² Robert N. Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World*, (London: University of California Press, Ltd, 1991), p. 171.

³ Anis Malik Thoha, *Tren Pluralisme Agama*, (Jakarta: INSISTS, 2021), p. 222.

⁴ Donald G. Jones, "Civil and Public Religion", p. 1398.

⁵ Robert N. Bellah dan Philip E. Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion*, p. xiv

⁶ Algernon Sidney Crapsey, *Religion and Politics*, (USA: Thomas Whittaker, Harvard University, 1905), p. 306.

blessings of liberty to ourselves and our children, do ordain and establish this constitution for the United States of America”¹

Thus the concept of Civil Religion and its elements are created in accordance with Bellah's opinion, having its prophets, priests and heroes, namely state officials and leaders and people who died while defending the state, as well as having its events and sacred places and rituals.² The above phenomenon shows that Civil Religion has gone further than what we understand as a concept. Civil Religion creates the elements and laws a 'Religion' should have. Then, voicing to people its existence as a 'Religion' is not limited to a merely concept. Will Herberg, an American sociologist, supports this conclusion with his idea that American Civil Religion has made national life a god, state values a religion, and national history a penance. "*national life is apotheosized, national values are religionized, and national history is experienced as... a redemptive history*".³

Although the above phenomenon suggests that Civil Religion is a new religion, another conclusion contradicts this. According to Olaf Schuman, Civil Religion is not a source of religion for a person understand his identity and social obligations to his country. Religion is the source of human experience and guidance, and civil religion should not contribute to or be empowered as a substitute for religion. Civil Religion is not a super religion that can be used to compete with existing religions.⁴

Civil Religion and Claim of Universality

After a long debate, Civil Religion was eventually applied by Americans in their country to resolve religious conflicts in their country. However, it cannot be denied that this concept was heard and eventually spread to other countries, making them interested in trying the same thing, assuming that their countries had the same fate as America. However, unfortunately, the things they believe in are inversely proportional to the results and facts that occur.

Furthermore, in Anis Malik Thoha's observation, civil religion shows the inability of the West and America to overcome differences and diversity. Civil religion is considered a Western disposition that wants to

¹ | gernon Sidney Crapsey, *Religion and Politics*, p. 306.

² | Robert N. Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World*, London: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 176-183.

³ | Anis Malik Thoha, *Tren Pluralisme Agama*. (Jakarta: INSISTS, 2021), p. 224.

⁴ | Olaf Schuman, "Bellah dan Wacana 'civil religion' di Indonesia" in the preface; Robert N. Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Esai-Esai tentang Agama di Dunia Modern*. Edisi Bahasa Indonesia, (Jakarta: Paramadina 2000).

look superior "superiority complex". Thus, it can also be said that civil religion is one part of the Americanization or westernization process.¹

Before discussing Civil Religion in other countries, researchers discovered a gap that makes it doubtful even for the originator himself, Bellah, who stated that Civil Religion is less needed or should not exist in America if it departs from a liberal political viewpoint.² However, from a republican perspective, Civil Religion is critical to integrating its citizens into an active community. Unfortunately, the Civil Religion that has been institutionalized in America cannot encounter some of the religious needs of the indigenous peoples of the American republic.³ As a result, it is possible to conclude that the existence of Civil Religion in America is ineffective and cannot fully serve as a solution.

One of the differences between American civil religion and other countries' civil religions, according to Robert N. Bellah in his book *Varieties of Civil Religion*, is that American civil religion is completely separate from the church and the state.⁴ It has its own legs, so its application in other countries will be different. Consider the implementation of Civil Religion in Japan. Japan holds that humans are not created equal, and its society is also very attached to the natural cosmos' rules, so Japanese Civil Religion seems to be easily manipulated. One of the main examples of this deliberate manipulation is the Modern Japanese Civil Religion, which is based on a modern power system and a strong ideological influence that makes the Shinto state only one part of it.⁵ The Japanese people cannot separate themselves from Shinto.

Because Shinto was already deeply embedded in the hearts of the Japanese people, it was difficult for the concept of Civil Religion to develop and be accepted by the Japanese, so Civil Religion in Japan did not last long. The phenomenon above demonstrates the flaws in the concept of Civil Religion itself. Furthermore, "Paganism" is another term for Civil Religion. So, for a society whose majority adheres to beliefs that do not question the existence of overlapping religions within themselves, such as Americans, Civil Religion is not a big problem, and its existence can be accepted in America, but for a country whose people adhere to the opposite, Civil

¹ Anis Malik Thoha, *Tren Pluralisme Agama*, p. 230.

² San Fransisco: Harper & Row, 1980), p. 74.

³ Robert N. Bellah dan Philip E. Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion*, p. 74.

⁴ Robert N. Bellah dan Philip E. Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion*. Beragam Bentuk Agama Sipil in Beragam Bentuk Kekuasaan Politik, Kultural, Ekonomi & Sosial. Translated by: Imam Khoiri *et al.* (Jogjakarta: IRCiSoD, 2003), p. 55.

⁵ Robert N. Bellah dan Philip E. Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion*, pp. 61-62.

Religion will be a big problem.¹

Civil Religion from Religious Conflict Claim to Other Conflicts

With all of the debate and the long journey of Civil Religion and its promise as a solution to the conflicts that frequently occur against religious people, researchers see that the birth of Civil Religion is not only vulnerable and doubtful, but its presence is not what is expected. The expectation that Civil Religion can be used to resolve religious conflicts is inversely proportional to the fact that it will inevitably result in new conflicts.

The aforementioned can be evidenced by the idea that exclusive Civil Religion cannot serve as a stabilizing force that plays an important role in uniting the nation. On the contrary, Civil Religion is the key to unfolding oppression, division and instability, as Frederick Mark Gediks said in *American Civil Religion: An Idea Whose Time is Past*.² Apart from that, Rosseau asserts that theological propositions of Civil Religion may be false, making the concept of civil religion appear fragile and doubtful. Furthermore, Rosseau stated that Civil Religion risks increasing belief, superstition, and intolerance in state politics.³

The pluralism brought by the civil religion also appears to be promising, but in reality, it is just a deception undertaken by government leaders and the originator himself, which is unfortunately accepted and even resembled regarding mostly by important figures around the world. Nurcholish Madjid is one of them, and he believes that pluralism must be understood as part of the lasting contribution of diversity to the bond of unity. Pluralism is a necessity that must be practiced in order for mankind to be saved and free.⁴

According to Madjid's opinion, pluralism is a law and is even believed to be *sunatullah*, in which humans created by God are required to constantly interact positively with each other for the good of human life in the world.⁵ To realize the above-mentioned positive interactions, religious people are required not only to respect the existence of other people's religions, but also to interact harmoniously and positively with

¹ Anis Malik Thoha, *Tren Pluralisme Agama*, (Jakarta: INSISTS, 2021), p. 231.

² Frederick Mark Gediks, *American Civil Religion: An Idea Whose Time is Past*. *Geo. Wash. Int'l l. Rev. Brigham Young University Law School*, vol. 41, p. 900.

³ Lucas Swaine, *Civil Religion Philosophical Concept*. For further information, see: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/civil-religion> accessed 2nd of March 2023.

⁴ Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam Agama Kemanusiaan; Membangun Tradisi dan Visi Baru Islam Indonesia*. (Jakarta: Paramadina. 1995), p. 7.

⁵ Agus Salim Nst, "The Role of Civil Religion Forming Civil Society Through Practicing Religious Comment". *Jurnal Ushuluddin* Vol. 23 No. 2. Fakultas Ushuluddin UIN Suska Riau (2015), p. 203.

other religious people; thus, the concept of pluralism is assumed.

Apart from that, the Civil Religion concept that leans toward the separation of religion from the state, or what is known as the "wall of separation," is essentially very dangerous, even though it appears very promising and offers clear solutions, in reality, this concept of separation creates more difficulties than it solves problems and conflicts that arise. Bellah even emphasizes the importance of remembering that the phrase "separation of church and state" has no legal justification.¹ The phenomenon of separation of church and state discussed above demonstrates that the concept of civil religion has begun to be questioned.²⁵

Then, one of the most prominent conflicts resulting from the concept of civil religion is that it only favors a few groups, making it incompatible with other groups or religious adherents. For instance, legalizing LGBTQ++ in a country where this regulation is inconsistent with Islamic law. The aforementioned phenomenon is one of many civil religion's prejudices toward a single group. Civil Religion adapted some of its symbols and rituals from the country's dominant traditional religion, which was thought to provide the social glue that would unite the community. However, the outcomes did not conform to expectations.

Conclusion

This research ultimately concluded that, *first*, Bellah's civil religion is a set of religious beliefs that form the basis of the identity and self-understanding of the United States as a nation and people.²⁵ *Second*, in dealing with religious diversity, civil religion places religion/belief under the state constitution. That is, religion and its teachings must comply with the laws or regulations of the state in which the religion is situated.¹ *Third*, civil religion is proved as part of the notion of religious pluralism; and even to a certain extent, by considering its position as the main reference for all human behavior, it is entirely a new religion. From this, it is evident that civil religion was born into a secular-liberal Western paradigm that is hence not compatible with the Islamic paradigm. Therefore, the approach civil religion employed in managing religious diversity is not appropriate from the perspective of Islamic teachings.¹ For, to Islam, the management of religious diversity must still be based on the values and teachings of Islam itself; while to civil religions, this management can be carried out by making human goodness and truth the main standard. Taking this fact

² Robert N. Bellah dan Philip E. Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion*. Beragam Bentuk Agama Sipil in Beragam Bentuk Kekuasaan Politik, Kultural, Ekonomi & Sosial. Diterjemahkan oleh: Imam Khoiri *et al.* (Jogjakarta: IRCiSoD, 2003), p. 29.

into account, instead of creating peace, the concept of civil religion actually creates conflicts in society, especially among Muslim people.

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