

*Logos and Ethos*  
**The Civil Religion in the Political Philosophy of  
Jean-Jacques Rousseau**

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This article explores the concept of civil religion from the perspective of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. It starts with a discussion of the essence of sovereignty as the implementation of general will, which, the author explains, is manifested in the obedience of the laws. The article then discusses the way in which, in Rousseau's view, institutional mechanisms work and thereupon explores how he envisaged the role of religion in the constitution of states and concludes with explaining the meaning of civil religion in his thought.

**Keywords:** civil religion, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, sovereignty, general will.

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**Sovereignty Is the Exercise of the General Will**

In Rousseau's political concept, the government of society envisages the existence of a common good. "The general will alone can direct the State according to the object for which it was instituted, i.e., the common good" (Rousseau 1964, II:3). The social body is sovereign. Sovereignty is the exercise of the general will, and this is why sovereignty cannot be alienated. The sovereign is a collective entity that cannot represent anyone but himself. Power can be transmitted but not the will. The particular will wants the particular good and generates privilege, while the general will by its own nature wants the general good, i.e. the common good: it assumes and determines equality. Sovereignty is indivisible for the same reason that it is inalienable (Rousseau 1964, II:3). Indeed, should sovereignty be divisible, the will into which it would break down would express itself in separate bodies and therefore the social body would be destroyed.

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One should not confuse the act of sovereignty, that is a law, with the particular applications of this law. The general will can never be wrong, but this does not mean that all of the people's resolutions are right: "Our will is always for our own good, but we do not always see what that is" (Rousseau 1964, II:3). The general will must not be confused with the will of all individuals, i.e. the summation of particular wills. If society is formed by associations, then the will of each association is general with respect to its members, but particular with respect to the State. Quoting Machiavelli, Rousseau condemns the existence of partial societies that can hamper the clear enunciation of the general will. "It is essential, if the general will is to be able to express itself, that there should be no partial society within the State, and that each citizen should think only his own thoughts" (Rousseau 1964, II:3). Should it be impossible to eliminate partial societies, however, it would be necessary to increase their number while keeping them all equal. This would prevent any one of these associations from becoming so large as to outsize the others, because then the general will would disappear and only one particular will would prevail. Rousseau refers to the paralysis of the government's actions caused by organized minorities capable of encroaching on the sovereignty of the general will.

Rousseau clearly defines the assumption that, in judging the legitimacy of the obligations that we have towards the social body, we must adopt the rule of *reciprocity*. By complying with these obligations, we are doing nothing more than executing our own will, thus benefiting ourselves as well as others. Since the social pact founds the convention between the social body and each one of its members, i.e. the act of sovereignty, associations can never be considered parties to the social contract. Montesquieu recommends the preservation of intermediate bodies as a guarantee against despotism. On the contrary, Rousseau maintains that the existence of separate bodies whose action is independent from the principle of reciprocity and whose will is not coincident with the general will, is in contrast with the organicistic interpretation of the State as a *moral person*. Between the sovereign and its members there is that reciprocity that represents the only guarantee for preservation and justice. "If the State is a moral person whose life is in the union of its members, and if the most important of its cares is the care for its own preservation, it must have a universal and compelling force, in order to move and dispose each part as may be most advantageous to the whole" (Rousseau 1964, II:4). We have obligations with the social body only because they are reciprocal and we are certain that it is impossible to work for others without simultaneously working for

ourselves. Obligatoriness is the consequence of reciprocity. Where reciprocity is lacking, as in the case of despotism, private individuals are not in obligation but only forced, and their obedience to the sovereign is due as long as the constriction lasts and they manage to escape from the dominion of force. One must always start from the new concept of sovereignty inaugurated by Rousseau. Rousseau poses the question: what is an act of sovereignty? “It is not a convention between a superior and an inferior, writes Rousseau, but a convention between the body and each of its members. It is legitimate, because based on the social contract, and equitable, because common to all; useful, because it can have no other object than the general good, and stable, because it is guaranteed by the public force and the supreme power. So long as the subjects have to submit only to conventions of this sort, they obey no-one but their own will; and to ask how far the respective rights of the Sovereign and the citizens extend, is to ask up to what point the latter can enter into undertakings with themselves, each with all, and all with each” (Rousseau 1964, II:4). The same principle of reciprocity explains why under certain conditions the social body is authorised to dispose of the life of each one of its members. The purpose of the social contract is the preservation of all of society’s members. The right to risk one’s life to preserve it is objective and natural. Thus, “he who wishes to preserve his life at others’ expense should also, when it is necessary, be ready to give it up for their sake” (Rousseau 1964, II:5). The death penalty inflicted on criminals can be justified in the same manner: “It is in order that we may not fall victims to an assassin that we consent to die if we ourselves turn assassins” (Rousseau 1964, II:5). From this viewpoint, therefore, a state enemy is not only the political terrorist who aims at destabilizing the existing order, but also any common criminal. In Rousseau, however, the legitimization of the death penalty acquires the sense of an argument *ad absurdum*: if all of the conditions of equality and reciprocity are met, the constitution of a society can exclude the renunciation of its members’ association as entirely irrational since, under the contract, each member also commits himself/herself to accept being declared an outlaw and an outcast should he/she violate those laws that are the expression of the general will. Rousseau also makes it clear that the death penalty is an extreme and exceptional measure, since it is preferable to keep the criminal alive if this can be done without risk.

The social contract is the society’s birth certificate. The law confers movement and will to the social body. The law is the act by means of which the people deliberate for all of the people. The general will of the sovereign body deliberates and expresses this deliberation

through laws. This is why the object of a law is always general (Rousseau 1964, II:6).

### **Obedience of the Laws, Expression of the General Will**

The legislator's task is a very difficult one, because he must also change human nature, "transform each individual, who is by himself a complete and solitary whole, into part of a greater whole from which he in a manner receives his life and being" (Rousseau 1964, II:7). The natural condition of man not yet touched by reflection and by social relations is perfect, but a long process of random changes has moved him away from that primitive condition. Once this phase of disorder and immorality in which social relationships and history have made man corrupt in every aspect of his existence, the social contract must ensure the permanence of man in a *third stage*, in which society is constituted in such a way as to abolish the relations and conditions of injustice that deny the very nature of man. For this reason, the legislator, the founder of society, is an architect. Individuals have to become organic elements of a building; rough stone, to use a Masonic term, must become squared stone and obey the laws of the whole. According to the contract, only the general will can obligate the individual, and one can never be sure that a particular will is in conformity with the general will until it has been submitted to the free vote of the people. This is why no law obligates a private individual unless it is the expression of the general will (Rousseau 1964, II:7). In this way, the architectural metaphor is added to the organicistic one.

The legislator may not appeal to force or to reason. This is why at all times he had to resort to a transcendent authority, attributing his wisdom to the gods. The aim was to promote the free obedience of the peoples to the laws of the state as if they were binding laws of nature. Is the pact of association therefore not enough to found a state? On the one hand, Rousseau attributes to the contract the power of legitimacy and of coercion that comes from its rationality characters, primarily the absolutely clear principle of reciprocity. On the other, Rousseau contradicts his own abstraction from history, geography, religion, the nature of the people, and reconsiders all these aspects as decisive in the establishment and preservation of the state<sup>2</sup>. In the *Social*

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2. According to Roberto Gatti Rousseau strives to harmonize the universal principles of political right with the history of peoples, rejecting any abstract and utopian conception (Gatti 2005, 31). The harmonization of universalism and contextualism, logos and ethos, reason and history, however, is possible only if the universal principles dictated by reason may be adopted or rediscovered by each people without giving up completely to its own unique way of being. The declination of the principles of political right in different human societies, which should ensure the peace and order within states and

*Contract*, two objectives seem to overlap: on the one hand the definition of model of just state that disregards the *historical conditions* of inequality that occurred in the relations between men, and on the other the comprehension of the conditions that have *historically* allowed the states to progress and therefore are recommended as measures that the legislator and the politician in general are urged to take on in the exercise of their duty. It is clear that this second objective forces to review as abstract and ahistorical the condition that Rousseau sets as the basis of the contract, i.e. that which requires every private individual to divest himself/herself of any right, demanding “the total alienation of each associate, together with all his rights, to the whole community” (Rousseau 1964, I:6).

There are peoples whose customs are incompatible with the application of good laws. This would require that first the customs of the peoples be corrected. But “most peoples, like most men, are docile only in youth; as they grow old they become incorrigible. When once customs have become established and prejudices inveterate, it is dangerous and useless to attempt their reformation; the people, like the foolish and cowardly patients who rave at the sight of the doctor, can no longer bear that any one should lay hands on its faults to remedy them (Rousseau 1964, II:8). Does this mean that there are peoples who are refractory to good laws and to the social contract itself? On the one side the *logos*, on the other the *ethos*. On the one hand, the abstract universality of the *logos*, of reason that perfectly sees the conditions under which the association pact would result in a just society of free and equal members; on the other, the idiosyncrasies and peculiarities of the *ethos*, in which the notion of right and wrong does not derive from a rational universal rule, but is justified in accordance to tradition and custom. In the *Social Contract* these two dimensions are juxtaposed and mostly refractory to a convincing synthesis. Here we can only observe that this conflict crosses through the entire tradition of the Western world.

### **How Institutional Mechanisms Work**

Rousseau admits that the laws must adjust to the people’s nature, but that there are general rules that recommend an extension of the State far from the extremes. There are natural limits to the extension of a State, just like there are bounds to the stature of men. The social tie relaxes when the number of components of this society is extended

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between them, is the challenge that people today need to commit to win: if the principles are universal and inalienable, none will never reject them in the name of freedom, which is one of these principles.

beyond a given limit (Rousseau 1964, II:9). Another decisive factor is density, because there must be the right relation between the land and the number of inhabitants it can maintain. The ultimate goal of a legislative system is represented by liberty and equality. The power of legislation must always fight to favour and preserve that equality that the power of things instead tends to destroy. Very few peoples are fit for receiving laws. A fit subject for legislation is the people which, “already bound by some unity of origin, interest or convention, has never yet felt the real yoke of law; one that has neither customs nor superstitions deeply ingrained, one which stands in no fear of being overwhelmed by sudden invasion; one which, without entering into its neighbours’ quarrels, can resist each of them single-handed, or get the help of one to repel another; one in which every member may be known by every other, and there is no need to lay on any man burdens too heavy for one man to bear; one which can do without other peoples, and without which all others can do; one which is neither rich nor poor, but self-sufficient; and, lastly, one which unites the consistency of an ancient people with the docility of a new one. Legislation is made difficult less by what it is necessary to build up than by what has to be destroyed; and what makes success so rare is the impossibility of finding natural simplicity together with social requirements” (Rousseau 1964, II:10).

According to Rousseau, in Europe the one country that is still a fit subject for legislation is Corsica, where one still finds the conditions most similar to those requested by the social contract. There the synthesis between *logos* and *ethos* is easy because the *ethos* is in accordance with nature and reason. Since the Corsicans are essentially free and equal, the good laws in Corsica surely will take root easily. Thus the social contract envisages the existence of moral qualities in the affiliates, who therefore would make it *superfluous*, while its introduction in absence of the moral requisites would make it *ineffective*. The *logos* indicates the method for constructing a just society, and the *ethos* teaches how to recognise its existence where a happy combination of various factors (climatic, numeric, anthropologic, cultural, etc.) have made it feasible even before any conscious action of constitutional engineering.

Democracy, aristocracy and monarchy are the three forms of government that have *increasing* power: this power peaks with monarchy. Since the number of magistrates must be in inverse proportion to the number of citizens so as to make sure that the greater power of the government matches the greater number of citizens to be governed, the democratic government is most suited for smaller states and the monarchy for larger ones. Rousseau writes: “I just proved that

the government grows remiss in proportion as the number of the magistrates increases; and I previously proved that, the more numerous the people, the greater should be the repressive force. From this it follows that the relation of the magistrates to the government should vary inversely to the relation of the subjects to the Sovereign; that is to say, the larger the State, the more should the government be tightened, so that the number of the rulers diminish in proportion to the increase of that of the people” (Rousseau 1964, III:2) Starting from the ratio “sovereign people: government = government: subject people,” one sees how the middle term, the government, must undergo an increase corresponding to the increase in the people as subjects (fourth term). Since a greater number of subjects requires greater force on the part of the executive power, and since the force of the government is inversely proportional to the number of its members, one must conclude that the number of members of the government must decrease in proportion to the increase of the people as subjects.

Here too, however, next to the *logos* one must consider the *ethos* as well, and next to the general proportional relations the power relationships and the specific conditions. In a monarchy, the distance between the prince and the people is too great. Rousseau therefore is bound to recognise the need for intermediate orders, such as the nobility, which instead are the ruin of a small state where the relationship between prince and subjects tends to one, thus increasing the number of private individuals involved in the public administration of a democratic government. In abstract, therefore, the proper functioning of a state would seem to depend on the compliance with given numerical ratios, although in actual fact this is not the case. The relationship between the type of government and the country that adopts it is a further example of the importance the *ethos* takes on, in Rousseau’s political philosophy, for the identification of the just society. “Liberty, Rousseau writes, not being a fruit of all climates, is not within the reach of all peoples” (Rousseau 1964, III:8).

### **The Contrast between Logos and Ethos**

There is a fundamental difference between free states and monarchies. In the former everything is done in the interest of the common good, while in the latter public power increases only to the detriment of private individuals. “Instead of governing subjects to make them happy, despotism makes them wretched in order to govern them” (Rousseau 1964, III:8). There are natural causes that allow to establish the form of government that is imposed by the force of the climate itself. This is one of Montesquieu’s principles, shared by Rousseau, that anyhow seems diametrically opposed to the general principle of

the Geneva-born philosopher, that dictates the necessary and sufficient conditions for the constitution of every society by means of a pact among equals. Political freedom is the obedience to the acts of sovereignty, to the laws that are the expression of the general will: this is what the *logos* teaches us. But the *ethos* warns us that there are peoples incapable of political freedom, because they do not enjoy the climatic, geographical, physical and demographic conditions that allow them to be free. Seen from the deterministic viewpoint, the set of physical characters and spirit dispositions acquired in the course of history by the various peoples removes all significance from the model of a just society proposed by reason, because in a deterministic vision of the relationship between freedom and climate, between government and character of the inhabitants of a given geographic area, the inevitable conclusion is that the peoples already have all of the freedom they are capable of and the best government they are capable of expressing. This is how Rousseau is capable of proposing a radical change in the concept of sovereignty (contract, general will) in order to overthrow despotism and the injustices of empirical societies, and then go on to reconfirm in a conservatory sense these same societies as depository of a kind of freedom and of justice already perfectly complete in their peculiar manner of being, in the peculiar diversities of their objective conditions. One may say, then, that by enunciating a *logos* without *ethos* Rousseau is poised to contradict himself with his very same abstraction, by recognising the possibility of an *ethos* without *logos*.

A similar transfer is present in his concept of the religion of the heart in the vicar's profession of faith: first he enunciates the natural and universal religion, without dogmas and without institutions, that which places man in direct relationship with God, and then he urges everyone to remain integrally faithful to one's own religion even when it comes to performing its exterior rites. Political freedom, like the religion of the heart, is simultaneously a condition of perfect exercise of a faculty that excludes all existing societies as imperfect (just as the religion of the heart excludes or demotes all of the revealed religions) and a characteristic that each state has in relation to the particular conditions of its extension, inhabitants, soil and climate. Much in the same way, the religion of the heart on the one side puts itself forward as the authentic religion compared to all revealed religions, and on the other is the religion that, presupposed in the cult of every institutional religion, gives it validity and legitimacy.

### **The Role of Religion in the Constitution of the State**

Rousseau observes that "at first men had no kings save the gods, and



no government save theocracy” (Rousseau 1964, IV:8). In the beginning, God was at the head of every political society, which means that there were as many gods as there were populations. In the pagan world, each State had its own cult and its own gods. “Having its own cult as well as its own government, it made no distinction between its gods and its laws” (Rousseau 1964, IV:8). Rousseau does not explain the process that led to this theocratic society. The scapegoat thesis could fill this gap. In this way, from the anthropologic viewpoint of the mimetic theory, the god that guides the people is the expelled and sacralised victim. Each society is governed by the god that, after having been expelled as the filthy victim, is then venerated as a beneficent and sustaining force. In this way, the lineage of the divinity would be one with the formation of the social body.

The ancient Romans had to combat the divinities of their enemies, as Rousseau reminds us, precisely because they were the substitutes of their respective peoples. In Rousseau’s interpretation, Jesus breaches the identity of the theological, political and juridical system typical of pagan peoples. Thus, Jesus breaches the unity of the state because Christians recognise themselves as part of a spiritual realm that is totally separate from the state of which they are citizens and they obey the laws of the state only in a hypocritical and superficial manner. The realm of the other world, however, has become the most violent despotic realm of this world. The double power within the state has caused perpetual conflict in jurisdiction, and this has made any kind of good political constitution in Christian states impossible (Rousseau 1964, IV:8). The prophet Mohammed wisely reconstituted the lost unity of the two powers by identifying anew the theological with the political and the juridical systems. Rousseau thought it a good thing, albeit without influent consequences, that the kings of England established themselves as heads of the Church, just like the Russian czars. Rousseau could also have mentioned the Byzantine emperor, who gave orders to the patriarch. It is impossible to speak of a Christian republic without falling into a contradiction of terms. The citizens of a republic must be active, brave, intolerant of any form of slavery or oppression, while Christianity requires servitude and dependence as supreme virtues (Rousseau 1964, IV:8). Not only is Christianity incompatible with a state of free citizens, but it is even useful to a tyrannical government. To prosper, in fact, a tyrannical government must count on the submission of subjects who, being Christian, have based their conduct on resigned submission as a rule. According to Rousseau, while Christians are excellent subjects of a tyrannical government they could never be citizens of a republican government. Since it is impossible to eliminate Christianity, that has

become so successful worldwide precisely by making universal the separation between civil and religious power, one must see under which conditions it is possible for the social contract, in a historical context that has changed deeply with respect to ancient paganism, to be compatible with the exercise of any kind of religion on the citizens' part. The principle adopted by Rousseau is that "the subjects owe the Sovereign an account of their opinions only to such an extent as they matter to the community. Now, it matters very much to the community that each citizen should have a religion. That will make him love his duty; but the dogmas of that religion concern the State and its members only so far as they have reference to morality and to the duties which he who professes them is bound to do to others" (Rousseau 1964, IV:8). The sovereign has no right to be informed about the opinion of each individual as regards the afterworld. All he can expect is that each individual be a good citizen in this one. Rousseau here conceives the sovereign as being the *social body*, coherently with the assumptions and consequences of the pact. This means that each individual undertakes to respect the general will, namely his own will, as a condition for citizenship. Rousseau therefore concludes that there must be a profession of a purely civil faith established by the sovereign and that necessarily is accepted and made own by individuals as parts of the sovereign social body. No one can call himself a citizen of a state if he does not believe intimately in the dogmas of civil religion and does not enact them. The sovereign should put to death anyone who, after publicly recognising these dogmas, behaves contrary to them.

So what are these few and simple dogmas making up the contents of civil religion? They are: "The existence of a mighty, intelligent and beneficent Divinity, possessed of foresight and providence, the life to come, the happiness of the just, the punishment of the wicked, the sanctity of the social contract and the laws" (Rousseau 1964, IV:8). Next to these positive dogmas, there is only one negative one, intolerance, possessed by the cults that Rousseau rejects. The state cannot admit any intolerant religion because its presence would mean that the sovereign is no longer such and would turn him into a minister of the priests. In a historical context in which a comeback of the national religions (capable of guaranteeing greater unity and cohesion of the state) is unthinkable, Rousseau inherits from Locke's *A Letter Concerning Toleration* the precept to tolerate only those religions that tolerate other religions (Locke 2005). Each citizen, as such, *must* believe in the fundamental dogmas under which he is obligated as a citizen, but *may* believe in a religion as long as its dogmas are not in contrast with those of civil religion. For this reason, the Roman

Catholic church that predicates *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* (= *no salvation outside the Church*) must be forbidden, penalty the dissolution of the state. This leaves us with two problems.

One might ask to what extent the civil religion differs from the religion of the heart of the *Profession of Faith of a Savoyard Vicar* (Rousseau 1969, IV:1998) as concerns the dogmas in which each individual believes. For the part by which they do not coincide, one can conclude that Rousseau, in Book IV of *The Social Contract*, enumerates not three but four types of religion: the religion of man, the religion of the citizen, the religion of the priest and the civil religion. The second problem regards the possibility of a theocratic Christian government. This possibility is excluded by the philosopher although, however, it might ensure the unity of man with himself that is a feature of the religion of the citizen. The answer to the second question could be this: if a Christian theocratic state were to be created, it would no longer be Christian, and it would have no relation to the Gospels that Rousseau considers *the source of the religion of man*.

According to Rousseau “no State has ever been founded without a religious basis” (Rousseau 1964, IV:8). This statement appears comprehensible only in the light of the scapegoat theory: the unity of the state is founded on a social bond that has its remote origins in the founding assassination and its basis in the sacrifice that periodically refreshes its effect. The genealogy of the Archaic Sacred coincides with the origins of society: the victim expelled via the founding assassination is then deified and venerated for the benefit it has brought (Girard 1980). The justification of the collective bond proposed by Rousseau appears to be coherent with the genealogy of the sacred proposed by René Girard’s scapegoat anthropology. Jesus came to reveal the scapegoat mechanism and to defuse the horrible mechanism of the lynching of an innocent victim. Following the unveiling of the Gospels, the expulsion of an innocent victim can no longer work in the constitution of a society, precisely because the scapegoat mechanism has been definitely revealed and therefore dismantled (Girard 1983; 1987; Tugnoli 2002).

Rousseau himself uses an expression that one may consider revealing of his sacrificial conception of divinity when he states that the religion of the citizen “is good in that it unites the divine cult with love of the laws, and, making country the object of the citizens’ adoration, teaches them that service done to the State is service done to its tutelary god” (Rousseau 1964, IV:8). The scapegoat theory consequentially clarifies this statement, in that the unity of the state is

founded on a social bond that has its origins in the founding assassination and in the sacrifice that periodically refreshes its effect.

Following the religion of the citizen and that of the priest, the third type is that of the religion of man. This is none other than the religion of the heart. In the *Profession of Faith of a Savoyard Vicar*, Rousseau gives us its general outline. The religion of man is not revealed by other men, but appears within the conscience of each individual as the set of principles that are taught in every religion and that regard the existence of God and the freedom of man. The religion of man has no dogmas. One could say it is the religion of religions. Religions are good when God is served in the right manner, because the essential cult is that of the heart. This is why it is not good to change religion. One should stay with the religion of one's childhood. At the same time, Rousseau prefers the Gospel: "The holiness of the Gospel speaks to my heart" (Rousseau 1998, 85), even though he does not believe in the incarnation. In Rousseau's mind, Jesus is divine but not God.

### **The Meaning of Civil Religion**

Rousseau views the social contract as the necessary precondition capable of ensuring a balance between freedom and equality, virtue and individual interests, individual will and general will. Initially, Rousseau intended that the application of the principles exposed in the *Social Contract* should necessarily lead to an orderly and harmonised society. As we know, however, in 1761, after finishing the *Social Contract* project, Rousseau added a final chapter dedicated to civil religion based on the already mentioned principles, that are worth recalling: *The existence of a mighty, intelligent and beneficent Divinity, possessed of foresight and providence, the life to come, the happiness of the just, the punishment of the wicked, the sanctity of the social contract and the laws*. In addition to the positive dogmas, civil religion should consider a negative dogma, *intolerance*. Like John Locke before him, he states that an intolerant religion cannot be tolerated. Each citizen is totally free as regards his religious and metaphysical convictions, but is called to formally observe the common convictions of civil religion. Without this – even only exterior – compliance with the dogmas of civil religion, the society shall tend to dissolve or fall into widespread individualism and endemic conflictuality. Without civil religion, not even the contract would work. The doors would open to a flood of disorder, violence and the unhappiness of men.

One could ask whether the religion of man, that in the *Social Contract* is defined as "the purely internal cult of the supreme God" (Rousseau 1964, IV:8), coincides with the Profession of Faith of the

Vicar and whether these two ideas or types of religion are equivalent or not to the general form of every religion possible that Rousseau in the *Social Contract* describes as civil religion (Forni Rosa 2012). Firstly, if the civil religion were the same as the religion of man, why would Rousseau have made a distinction between them? Civil religion requires an external, public and visible cult that is not required by the religion of man. Civil religion can do without the internal cult, just as the religion of man can do without the external cult. Civil religion shares universality with the *Savoyard Vicar's profession of faith*, but an important difference consists in the fact that the first plays a precise political role, since the citizen's perfect integration with the state would be impossible without compliance with the dogmas of civil religion, while the Vicar's Profession of Faith would remain standing even if there were only one human being left on Earth. Civil religion is the formal condition of validity of all the religions that citizens are still free to worship. Civil religion substantially ensures compliance with the laws of the state, which is fundamental in ensuring the citizens' compliance with the contract and all that ensues from it. Civil religion, therefore, is the antidote to disobedience to the laws of the state that can be fomented by the religion of the priest. Is it not true that the Christian is exhorted to violate the laws of the state when they clash with the teachings of the Church? Pagan religion, in which the divinities and the laws of the state coincide, ensures perfect unity but cannot be brought back in state. Conversely, Christianity, that breaks up this unity, needs an antidote or compensation that allows for maximum freedom of the internal cult and at the same time imposes as a dogma the sanctity of the pact, the last of the positive dogmas of civil religion. The religion of man and the religion proposed by the Vicar have the same features: validity is given only to the internal cult, to the relationship of man with God and moral duties. It is the true Christian faith, which Rousseau praises as "the pure and simple religion of the Gospel" (Rousseau 1964, IV:8). The religion of man and the profession of the Vicar, however, remain valid in a purely individual dimension, in the hope of personal salvation in the afterlife.

Adhering to the Christian religion weakens and ultimately annuls obedience to the laws of the state and faith in the sanctity of the pact. On a political level, Rousseau harbors no doubts about the superiority of the religion of the citizen as being the basis for obedience to the laws of the state. With the civil religion, Rousseau attempts to mend the tear caused by Christianity in men's consciences, in order to at least formally overcome the dualism of the priest's religion that preaches contempt for this world and disengagement from politics. The religion of the citizen does but have one defect, Rousseau admits, consisting in

the deification of the state and in the blind participation in superstitious cults and ceremonies, hence the justification of intolerance and of the war declared on those peoples who have different cults. Civil religion is the religion of the citizen purged of any form of intolerance, idolatry, superstition and illiberality. Each individual, in fact, maintains the right and freedom to worship any religion in private as long as he shows his compliance with the civil religion that envisages a purely external form of cult and profession of faith.

On the other side of the scale that balances freedom of thought and cult, to which Rousseau obviously excludes any limitations, is the necessary element that each state implement a moral code, namely a “civil profession of faith,” as Rousseau calls it in his *Letter to Voltaire*, that is not exactly a religion but a code or general scheme that all religions should follow. Any religions not complying with this code represented by the civil religion would be banished and every citizen would be free to have as his sole religion the code itself (Rousseau 1969, 1073; 2004). On the other hand, the dogmas of the civil religion must not be referred to an actual religion but, as Rousseau underlines in another passage, must be intended as “sentiments of sociability, without which it is impossible to be a good citizen or a faithful subject” (Rousseau 1964, 468). They are needed solely to keep in check the practical behaviour of subjects, since the sovereign body has no interest in or competence for the afterlife, is not concerned about the citizens’ lives in the other world, as long as they remain good citizens in this one. Society requires that each citizen shows his respect for the religion’s dogmas, that is to say for society itself, for its laws and for the values all citizens must prove they believe in with their public and visible behaviour. Civil religion is the bulwark protecting the sanctity of the pact, the inviolability of the social contract. The pact is natural and necessary and therefore inviolable because it is universal. But moral principles are primary and inviolable as well, and must also be recognised as universal. The *ethos* of historical religions must be kept under control by using the *logos* of a universal code that unifies politics and religion, without reaching the abuse of a religion of state imposed by force that suffocates every need for rational and free research.

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