

# Investigating the Civil Religious Phenomenon in America: A Content Analysis of HBO's *The Newsroom*

**Matthew J. McMartin<sup>1</sup>**

## **Introduction**

Aspects of academic discourse concerning civil religious phenomena consider whether religion is necessary for political action, social integration and shared values in modern Western societies. The discourse in these debates focuses on the line separating religion between private and public spheres in the shared moral understandings of modern national States. This type of scholarship investigates the blurring of faith, religion and values in the complex dynamic of public life. For this investigation of a particular instance of a civil religious phenomenon in America, triangulation of data will be analysed from content in HBO's *The Newsroom*, the Pew Research Centre's (PRC) demographic studies, and the Public Religion Research Institute's (PRRI) surveys. The investigation will discuss whether attempts to provide the civil state with a moral justification result in having morality founded on religion, specifically Christianity, in America. The aim is to identify points where notions generally regarded as Christian may be reformulated into secular sites for meaning making and identity construction. The research question developed seeks to determine how social constructions and conceptions underpin the promotion of implicitly Christian ideas in the discursive fields that mediate civil religion as an alternative way in which to negotiate faith and values. By analysing the televisual text of *The Newsroom* the question is whether the concept of America as a civil religion is presented through the medium of political melodrama and whether Christianity plays some

---

<sup>1</sup> Matthew J. McMartin completed an Honours degree in Studies in Religion at the University of Sydney.

role in modern structures. The narratives and characters in *The Newsroom* bring ethical dilemmas of the public and private distinction of Christianity into American homes. The aim is to examine whether these dilemmas reflect a broader concern of individualism and religion in modern structures. The purpose is to investigate how statements, propositions and repeating patterns of ideas, which reference traditional Christianity, are a shared organising factor in sets of transcendent ideals by which modern American society is assessed, rationalised and socially integrated.

### ***The Newsroom (2012-2014)***

The content to be assessed includes *The Newsroom*, an American television political drama series created and predominately written by Aaron Sorkin. Its premiere show aired on 24 June 2012 and its final episode aired on 14 December 2014. The series contained twenty-five episodes over three seasons. A manifest content analysis observes that the series chronicles a behind the scenes view of the people who produce a fictional cable news program called the Atlantis Cable News Channel.<sup>2</sup> The series is set in the recent past and tracks real news events. The focus is on the network anchor Will McEvoy, the executive producer Mackenzie McHale, the newsroom staff and their boss Charlie Skinner. The series follows the characters as they attempt a civilising mission to do the news well in contemporary America in the face of corporate and commercial obstacles. Each episode is built around a major news event from the recent past, which acts as background for the drama and provides a sense of familiar realism for the audience.<sup>3</sup> The characters follow “rational and moral guidelines, in a biting criticism of our popular press and a clever blurring of art and reality”.<sup>4</sup> In this way the news team of Atlantis Cable News attempts to create a news show that reports the news in an ethical way. The series opens with popular

---

<sup>2</sup> ‘The Newsroom’, *The Official Website for the HBO Series*, at [www.hbo.com/the-newsroom](http://www.hbo.com/the-newsroom). Accessed 20/10/2015.

<sup>3</sup> ‘The Newsroom’, *The Official Website for the HBO Series*, at [www.hbo.com/the-newsroom](http://www.hbo.com/the-newsroom). Accessed 20/10/2015.

<sup>4</sup> ‘The Newsroom (TV Series 2012-2014)’, *IMDB*, at <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1870479>. Accessed 20/10/2015.

news anchor Will McEvoy being interviewed with other panellists on a college campus and responds to a student question “Why is America the greatest country” by answering “We’re not”. He goes on to say, “we used to be”.<sup>5</sup> He laments that the country has fallen in the world’s view because the country no longer cares about its initial founding values, rites, freedoms and concerns for humanity.

### **Pew and the Public Religion Research Institute**

Other content assessed was The Pew Research Centre’s comprehensive *Global Religious Landscape* demographic study of more than twenty-three countries and a survey of thirty five thousand people.<sup>6</sup> The demographic study was based on analysis of censuses, surveys and population registers. The final materials were sourced from the Public Religion Research Institute a non-profit, non-partisan organisation dedicated to research at the intersection of religion, values and public life. It is an independent research organisation concerned with the changing religious landscape and its part in shaping American politics. Its survey of one thousand and seven Americans from fifty States on 14 June 2015 measured public views on patriotism; what makes someone truly American; America’s moral standing; and discrimination against Christians in America.<sup>7</sup>

### **Triangulation**

Triangulation involves using multiple data sources in an investigation to produce understanding and to ensure that a comprehensive account is developed. This is because a single method in investigating civil religious forms may not adequately shed light on the phenomena.<sup>8</sup> The weakness in this method for both corroborating findings and as a test for

---

<sup>5</sup> Aaron Sorkin, ‘We Just Decided To’, *The Newsroom: Season One*, director Greg Mottola (HBO, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> ‘America’s Changing Religious Landscape’, *Pew Research Centre*, at [www.pewforum.org-2015/05/12-america’s-changing-religious-landscape](http://www.pewforum.org-2015/05/12-america’s-changing-religious-landscape). Accessed 20/10/2015.

<sup>7</sup> ‘June 2015 PRRI/RNS: Religion News Survey’, *Public Religion Research Institute*, at [www.publicreligion.org/research/2015/06](http://www.publicreligion.org/research/2015/06). Accessed 20/10/2015.

<sup>8</sup> N. K. Denzin, *Sociological Methods* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1978), p. 12.

validity is that it assumes that one method is compensating for another.<sup>9</sup> However, by using multiple methods it may assist facilitating a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of civil religion in America. The purpose of different methods analysing different data collection is to elucidate complementary aspects of the same phenomenon.

For Chad Nelson and Robert Woods, in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, content analysis is a form of textual analysis, which is used to describe and explain characteristics of messages embedded in texts.<sup>10</sup> This type of analysis is useful for investigating historical and cultural insights into a particular instance of data, form or content. In this way independent measurement processes confirm manifest propositions, or reduce any uncertainty to latent interpretations of the data's receptivity to its intended audience.<sup>11</sup> This type of research moves beyond the visible surface content to interpretations that imply something about the data's nature. Content analysis is defined as a "research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from meaningful texts to the contexts of their use."<sup>12</sup> This research technique is adequate for describing and systematically analysing the content of television programs such as *The Newsroom*.<sup>13</sup> This is significant for the study of messages that already exist in televisual form, demographic studies and surveys.

The selection of content analysis for this research project entailed specific texts, mentioned in the introduction, spanning 2010-2015 that generated content categories on civil religion, Christianity and public life. The content categories will be utilised to evaluate religion in

---

<sup>9</sup> J. W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 1998), p. 81.

<sup>10</sup> Chad Nelson and Robert H. Woods, 'Content Analysis', in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, eds Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 109.

<sup>11</sup> Nelson and Woods, 'Content Analysis', p. 112.

<sup>12</sup> K. H. Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to its Methodology* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 1980), p. 18.

<sup>13</sup> W. P. Vogt, *Dictionary of Statistics and Methodology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Los Angeles: Sage Publications: California, 2005), p. 59.

the notion of civil religion in America.<sup>14</sup> The function of this content analysis is to investigate a particular instance of a civil religious form and to make inferences from the texts as to the contexts of their use in social constructions of the public and private dimensions of Christianity in America.

There are claims in some scholarship that religion in the West is “bound to abdicate to the force of rationality and at length to retreat to a private sphere set apart from politics”.<sup>15</sup> These claims argue that religion serves a merely private function and plays no role in secular politics. However, contrary to this position is the notion of a civil religion that claims that Christianity is still a “force for collective action, social integration and politics even in modern American society”.<sup>16</sup> The notion of a civil religion, in the tradition of Durkheim, presumes that religion continues to inform and influence modern civil structures.<sup>17</sup> Robert Bellah, as part of this academic discourse considers “that society rests upon moral religious understanding.”<sup>18</sup> He suggests that even where prevailing religious symbol systems are rejected, the solutions of individuals and groups to fundamental problems of orientation and identity may be viewed as religious.<sup>19</sup> In this way the relationship between religion and politics in terms of legitimisation is defined as “whether existing political authority is moral and right or whether it violates higher religious duties”.<sup>20</sup> He asserts that the moral justification of the civil nation contains a set of transcendent ideals, which affects both social integration and the negotiation of values, faith and morality.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Robert N. Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 168.

<sup>15</sup> I. Furseth and P. Repstad, ‘Religion in the Public Sphere’, in *An Introduction to the Sociology of Religion*, ed., I. Furseth (London: Ashgate, 2006), p. 99.

<sup>16</sup> Robert N. Bellah, *Varieties of Civil Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Furseth and Repstad, ‘Religion in the Public Sphere’, p. 100.

<sup>18</sup> Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p. ix.

<sup>19</sup> Robert N. Bellah, ‘Civil Religion in America’, *Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, vol. 96, no. 1 (1967), p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Bellah, *Beyond Belief*, p. 172.

<sup>21</sup> Bellah, *Beyond Belief*, p. 172.

## *The Civil Religious Phenomenon in America*

In HBO's *The Newsroom* discourse on both America as a Christian nation and civil religious morality find expression in the political drama. Through narrative and emotional sentiments of the characters the televisual text echoes religious and moral predicaments.<sup>22</sup> The overarching thematic and repeating patterns of ideas become a site for orientating cultural identity. The televisual text functions as a discursive space for constituting the meaning making and identity construction of both the individual and a community of shared values.<sup>23</sup> The content of the series becomes a discursive field that mediates contemporary issues of faith, values and public piety.

Public piety in this context concerns measuring Christianity and individualism as the dominant cultural value in America. Individualism in this conception is seen as a belief in the sacredness of the individual.<sup>24</sup> This framework repeats ideas about how to preserve or create a morally coherent life from the "web of moral understandings and commitments that link people together in the community".<sup>25</sup> From this approach a modern culture is not just one of private religion and sacred fulfilment in the private domain.<sup>26</sup> It is fundamentally a culture of alternative ways of providing modern societies with identity and meaning.<sup>27</sup> This is because even though the processes of modernisation imply that social and cultural spheres are no longer dominated by traditional religion, "civil religion emerges as an alternative way in which modern worldviews are provided with an understanding of responsibility to a higher moral order".<sup>28</sup> These concerns are echoed in the opening background conversation of episode one of *The Newsroom* where the accusation of a lack of faith in American individualism is directed at another character and her automatic response is to deny

---

<sup>22</sup> Diane Winston, 'Introduction', in *Small Screen, Big Picture: Television and Lived Religion*, ed. Diane Winston (Texas: Baylor University Press, 2009), p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Winston, 'Introduction', p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Robert N. Bellah, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), p. 334.

<sup>25</sup> See Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, p. 335.

<sup>26</sup> Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 219.

<sup>27</sup> Bellah, *Beyond Belief*, p. 168.

<sup>28</sup> Bellah, *Beyond Belief*, p. 168.

having a lack of faith in individualism.<sup>29</sup> From this perspective in the notion of individualism there is a dynamic tension between public politics, shared values and private religion.

Within this dynamic tension the triangulation of data revealed points at which views of faith, values and identity generated a consistency of findings as complementary aspects of the same phenomenon. The interpretation of findings generated was (1) a general prevalence of people to identify with religious groups and specifically Christianity in America. (2) Implicit evidence to suggest civil religion in America in the changing religious landscape. This aspect links with notions that religion reinforces private and public American identity. (3) Notions of America as a Christian nation.

An interpretation of the Pew Research Centre findings generated suggests a general prevalence of people to identify with religious groups. The study estimated that worldwide more than eight in ten people identify with a religious group and that there are 5.8 billion religiously affiliated adults and children around the globe representing eighty-four percent of the 2010 world population of 6.9 billion.<sup>30</sup> It also estimated that 2.2 billion people or thirty-two percent of the world's population identify with Christianity.<sup>31</sup>

An interpretation of the Public Religion Research Institute findings suggests a general prevalence of people to identify with religious groups and specifically in America fifty-two percent say that being Christian is an important part of being truly American. The consistency of a general prevalence of people to identify with a religious group is consistent with the content analysis of *The Newsroom*, which will be discussed in subsequent sections.

---

<sup>29</sup> Aaron Sorkin, 'We Just Decided To', *The Newsroom: Season One*, director Greg Mottola (HBO, 2014).

<sup>30</sup> 'America's Changing Religious Landscape', *Pew Research Centre*, at [www.pewforum.org-2015/05/12-america's-changing-religious-landscape](http://www.pewforum.org-2015/05/12-america's-changing-religious-landscape). Accessed 20/10/2015.

<sup>31</sup> 'America's Changing Religious Landscape', *Pew Research Centre*, at [www.pewforum.org-2015/05/12-america's-changing-religious-landscape](http://www.pewforum.org-2015/05/12-america's-changing-religious-landscape). Accessed 20/10/2015.

## *The Civil Religious Phenomenon in America*

In studies of the changing religious landscape in America an interpretation of the findings support conceptions that civil religion is fundamentally a culture of alternative ways of providing modern societies with identity and meaning. The PRC estimates that the Christian share of the population is declining while the number of American adults who do not identify with any religion is growing.<sup>32</sup> Between 2007 and 2014 mainline Christianity fell from seventy eight percent to seventy percent. The PRRI estimates that sixty two percent of Americans believe God has granted the country a special role in human history; sixty-nine percent say that believing in God is essential to a truly American identity and fifty-two percent say that being a Christian is an important part of being truly American.<sup>33</sup>

*The Newsroom* presents audiences with social and cultural spheres, which the show's characters suggest are dominated by traditional religion. The narratives explore an emerging civil religion as an alternative way in which modern worldviews are potentially provided with a higher moral order. In the words of Will McEvoy in the show's final episode discussing his deceased boss Charlie Skinner: "His religion was decency".<sup>34</sup> The statement identifies a point at which religious notions may be reformulated into secular sites for meaning making and identity construction. It illustrates how social constructions underpin higher ideals and an alternative way in which to negotiate faith and values. An appeal to higher ideals is a recurring thematic as the show navigates and negotiates a civil religious form by juxtaposing its ideals against presumptions that America was founded as Christian nation; civil rights require traditional religious belief; the first amendment of the U.S. Constitution does not protect against religious

---

<sup>32</sup> 'Public Sees Religious Influence Waning', *Pew Research Centre*, at [www.pewforum.org/2014/22/public-sees-religious-influence-waning](http://www.pewforum.org/2014/22/public-sees-religious-influence-waning). Accessed 20/10/2015.

<sup>33</sup> 'June 2015 PRRI/RNS: Religion News Survey', *Public Religion Research Institute*, at [www.publicreligion.org/research/2015/06](http://www.publicreligion.org/research/2015/06). Accessed 20/10/2015.

<sup>34</sup> Aaron Sorkin, 'What Kind of Day has it been', *The Newsroom: Season Three*, director Alan Poul (HBO, 2015).

tyranny;<sup>35</sup> there is no firewall between Christianity and government;<sup>36</sup> and that there is no clear separation between politics and religion.

An interpretation of the findings generated suggests complementary aspects of notions that America was founded as a Christian nation. The PRC findings on the composition of the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress were that ninety-two percent of the members were Christian, which is composed of fifty-seven percent Protestant and thirty-two percent Catholic and the remainder other Christians.<sup>37</sup> It also estimated that seventy-one percent of the public thinks religion has lost influence in American life and that religious waning is a bad thing. In this way the American public wants religion to play a role in American politics. The PRRI directed specific questions addressing this aspect and its results estimated that thirty-five percent of the public believe contemporary America is a Christian nation. Fourteen percent believe America never was a Christian nation. Forty-five percent believe that America once was a Christian nation, but it is not anymore. Of those who believe this sixty-one percent believe the change is a bad thing. These notions were reflected in episode three of *The Newsroom* aptly titled *The 112<sup>th</sup> Congress*. It explored how the American public wants religion to play a role in American politics and raised concerns about the percentage of Christians that comprise congress.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> *The Constitution of the United States*, Amendment I: *congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.*

<sup>36</sup> Aaron Sorkin, 'One Step Too Far', *The Newsroom: Season Two*, director Julian Farino (HBO, 2014).

<sup>37</sup> 'Faith on the Hill: The Religious Composition of the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress', *Pew Research Centre*, at [www.pewforum.org/2015/01/05-faith-on-the-hill-the-religious-composition-of-the-114<sup>th</sup>-congress](http://www.pewforum.org/2015/01/05-faith-on-the-hill-the-religious-composition-of-the-114th-congress). Accessed 20/10/2015.

<sup>38</sup> Aaron Sorkin, 'The 112<sup>th</sup> Congress', *The Newsroom: Season One*, director Greg Mottola (HBO, 2014).

### **Cultural Identity**

The triangulation of data from the surveys and the characters and narrative of *The Newsroom* becomes a site for the orientation of cultural identity and appeals to higher ideals.<sup>39</sup> The data functions as content that mediates the contemporary emergence of modern worldviews as it expresses alternative moral understandings. It challenges to some extent views that even though the American Constitution not only avoids references to God, but also forbids the establishment of a State religion, how some Americans say that contemporary America is a Christian nation and conceive of the nation in religious terms.<sup>40</sup> It also contributes to explanations of not only how religion influences America's unique political culture, but also the idea that believing in God is essential to a truly American identity.<sup>41</sup>

Robert Bellah, in *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, argues that American individualism can lead to despotism, and that individualism can actually threaten freedom.<sup>42</sup> This notion is echoed in *The Newsroom* where Will McEvoy argues that by blurring the distinction between public and private there are problems:

The Republican Tea Party was a middle class party responding to bad trends, co-opted by the radical right, which has in turn enslaved the republican middle. The Tea Party is being radicalised and their original organising principles obliterated. When you blur the distinction between public and private there are problems. The second amendment of the U. S. Constitution<sup>43</sup> is to protect from tyrannical government and if congress keeps going the way it is the public will seek second amendment remedies.<sup>44</sup>

Rather than rampant individualism as a new form of despotism the inference from the text is that the blurring of religion in public life will

---

<sup>39</sup> Winston, 'Introduction', p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> 'June 2015 PRRI/RNS: Religion News Survey', *Public Religion Research Institute*, at [www.publicreligion.org/research/2015/06](http://www.publicreligion.org/research/2015/06). Accessed 20/10/2015.

<sup>41</sup> 'June 2015 PRRI/RNS: Religion News Survey', *Public Religion Research Institute*, at [www.publicreligion.org/research/2015/06](http://www.publicreligion.org/research/2015/06). Accessed 20/10/2015.

<sup>42</sup> See Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, p. 209ff.

<sup>43</sup> *The Constitution of the United States*, Amendment II: *A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a Free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.* The notion of a free state is fundamental to a nation's scheme of ordered liberty given that self-defense was a basic right recognised by many legal systems from ancient times to the present. Individual self-defense is a central component of the Second Amendment right. Refer to *District of Columbia v Heller*, 554 U. S. 570 (2008).

<sup>44</sup> Aaron Sorkin, 'The 112<sup>th</sup> Congress', *The Newsroom: Season One*, director Greg Mottola (HBO, 2014).

lead to a religious form of despotism and is a threat to freedom itself. In this way it could be argued that from the televisual text to the context of its use *The Newsroom* is contextualising a church and state relation in contemporary America.

Embedded in the meaning of the text is a situation where there is one official religion of the nation in the form of a confessional State.<sup>45</sup> This link is made in episode ten in news anchor Will McEvoy's attack on Republican values in the context of blurring politics and religion. In addressing Republican values he reports:

According to Republican values to be Christian is to be pro-America, non-Christian anti-American. During Tea Party rallies and campaign speeches we have been told that America was founded as a Christian nation and that if the Founding Fathers were here today they would tell us so. This is a perversion of history. It is an example of how radical fundamentalism asserts that the Constitution established a Christian nation and that the absolute separation of church and state is not and never was intended to be the American model or platitudes of what America stands for. Republican values include ideological purity; compromise as weakness; a fundamentalist belief in scriptural literalism; denying science; unmoved by facts; undeterred by new information; hostile fear of progress; a demonisation of education; a need to control women's bodies; serve xenophobia; tribal mentality; intolerance of dissent; and pathological hatred of U.S. government. They can call themselves the Tea Party, Conservatives, Republicans; but Republicans shouldn't call them that. We should call them what they are, 'The American Taliban', and the American Taliban cannot survive if Dorothy Cooper is allowed to vote.<sup>46</sup>

In an interpretation that implies something about *The Newsroom's* textual nature is the inference that church and state in America is a confessional State. In other words, that it is a nation State which contains one "dominant religion having ecclesiastical authority over secular power and its religious leaders seeking to shape the world according to their interpretation of God's plan".<sup>47</sup> The reference to Republicans as 'The American Taliban' is in reference to attempts to

---

<sup>45</sup> Furseth and Repstad, 'Religion in the Public Sphere', p. 102.

<sup>46</sup> Aaron Sorkin, 'The Greater Fool', *The Newsroom: Season One*, director Greg Mottola (HBO, 2014).

<sup>47</sup> John Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 264.

build such States in Afghanistan during the Taliban regime.<sup>48</sup> In this way individualism and the blurring of the private and public spheres in modern societies are contextualised in the televisual text of the show. It suggests that modern constructions rest upon moral religious understandings and posits that the prevailing structure in America is Christianity as public religion being the shared organising principle in American identity and political life.

According to Christopher Hartney in *Secularisation: New Historical Perspectives*: “Older patterns of thought that remain with us mutate for new circumstances. These patterns of thinking and of doing, whilst transformed, nevertheless remain religious.”<sup>49</sup> These patterns of thinking in the ethical dilemmas contextualising public religion, whilst advocating the separation of religion from politics nevertheless draw inspiration from religious presuppositions. The news members of the fictional Atlantis News Cable implicitly assert that society rests upon moral religious understanding. Even where the news members reject the prevailing religious blurring of religion in public life the solutions of the news crew individually and as a group to fundamental problems of orientation and identity may be viewed as a civil religious form. Examples are frequently played out during the series. One example is Maggie’s concern that political candidate Michelle Bachmann claims that God told her to run for President, that God spoke directly to her and is implicitly claiming she is a prophet.<sup>50</sup> Maggie’s rejection of religion in public life was stated as:

She is insulting my family, congregation and faith implying that Christians are imbeciles who will believe anything while reducing God to a party hack who endorses political candidates. It is the first time since Moses that God has given direct instructions to someone other than his son. If she knows what God wants I am voting for her. I am not

---

<sup>48</sup> Esposito, *The Islamic Threat*, p. 264.

<sup>49</sup> Christopher Hartney, ‘States of Ultimacy and the Cult of the Dead Soldier: The Anzac Tradition, the Secularisation Paradigm, the Charisma of Materiality, and Civic Religion as it is Embodied in the Australian War Memorial Canberra’, in *Secularisation: New Historical Perspectives*, ed. Christopher Hartney (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), p. 215.

<sup>50</sup> Aaron Sorkin, ‘The Blackout Part One: Tragedy Porn’, *The Newsroom: Season One*, director Lesli Glatter (HBO, 2014).

attacking Christians. I am defending them. I am standing up for millions of Christians tired of being represented by having our identity stolen.<sup>51</sup>

Other examples include Mackenzie's claims to a miracle in episodes eight and nine; claims to being on the side of the angels throughout the series by different characters; Images of Jesus Christ, the phrase 'He who sings prays twice' in the halls of the Julliard School and the character Will McEvoy packing up a Holy Bible when leaving jail; Mackenzie and Will being married by a Catholic priest; and Will McEvoy's ambiguous claim at the end of the series that he has faith.

## **Conclusion**

The latent inference from content analysis of the ethical and religious dilemmas reflected in the televisual political melodrama of HBO's *The Newsroom* concern the concepts of civil religion and the blurring of Christianity and politics in America. The triangulation of data showed that civil religious forms reformulate Christian notions in connection with shared values and moral justification in negotiating individualism, social integration and legitimacy. The investigation of an emerging alternative to traditional religion illustrated to some extent the promotion of Christian ideas in the discursive fields that mediate contemporary issues of faith and values in modern structures. The portrait drawn by the data reflected the points at which the statements, propositions and repeated patterns of ideas converged in generally affirmed secular sites of meaning making and identity construction. Embedded in the meaningful texts was the mediating differentiation between traditional Christianity in public life and the reformulation of Christian moral understandings to legitimise the civil religion of the State. It was argued that analysis of content in *The Newsroom*, Public Religion Research Institute and Pew Research Centre that intersect with religion and politics asserted not only the notion that non-separation of church and state is a threat to civil society, but also the notion that civil religion in America consists of a set of transcendent ideals by which society is judged, integrated and legitimised. In this way through

---

<sup>51</sup> Aaron Sorkin, 'The Blackout Part One: Tragedy Porn', *The Newsroom: Season One*, director Lesli Glatter (HBO, 2014).

## *The Civil Religious Phenomenon in America*

televisual text such as *The Newsroom* a particular instance of a civil religious form explains how religion continues to play a role in modern structures. It suggested to some extent how concerns with claims to morality, American identity construction and the blurred distinction between public and private spheres articulate traditional religious sources. In other words by investigating the civil religious phenomenon in America the content analysis of HBO's *The Newsroom* strongly suggests the influence and reformation of Christian notions in Western secular structures.