Journal of American Studies, **44** (2010), e29. doi:10.1017/S0021875810000605

Emilio Gentile, *God's Democracy: American Religion after September 11* (Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 2008, £27.95). Pp. 205. ISBN 978 0 3133 5336 9.

Emilio Gentile has gained an impressive reputation as a historian of the sacralization of politics in Italy. In *God's Democracy* he turns his attention to American religion after 11 September, drawing on a historical narrative that encompasses civil religion, divine providence and manifest destiny. The book has been superbly translated by Jennifer Pudney and Suzanne Janus and reads like a novel. Originally written in Italian, and first published in 2006, the book has in this version been updated to March 2008, although most of the action is focussed on the three years following the attacks on Washington, DC and New York.

The book begins by providing a politico-religious background to 11 September, before contextualizing 9/11 in terms of shock, vulnerability, fear and anger as a framework to explain Bush's response. Gentile compares these events with the tragedy of the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 in which 250,000 people died. In both events believers were left asking, where is God? This serves as a platform to reprise arguments about whether God was judging America, merely absent or even in the midst of the suffering before Bush seizes the mantle of theologian-in-chief, supported by the religious right. Gentile provides background on the faith of George W. Bush and emphasizes the continuity of religious tradition in the White House dating back to Eisenhower.

The author provides a detailed background on presidential theology dating back to the Founding Fathers before describing how the President fashioned a theological justification for going to war against Afghanistan. The Bush Doctrine and the Axis of Evil speech are set in the context of a sacred, imperial America emerging from the culture wars of the 1990s and responding to the call of manifest destiny. Gentile explains how Bush utilized civil religion to combine the foundational myths of virtuous empire and blessed nation which provided the narrative for the Bush wars. It is not until the final chapter, however, that the author finally brings his charge against Bush that under his tenure the United States has transformed ecumenical, tolerant and inclusive civil religion into "partisan, exclusive, and intolerant religion" (143).

God's Democracy is an enjoyable, well-written read and sets the events of 11 September in a religious context effectively. However, in providing such a broad field of enquiry reliant overwhelmingly on secondary sources the author adds little to what is already available, albeit that it is particularly well packaged for a general readership. The failure to distinguish between the different Christian groupings referred to is particularly frustrating. The greater weakness, though, is in the central argument that Bush's presidency in the aftermath of 11 September transformed American civil religion into a narrow sectarian political religion dominated by the Republican Party. Those religious actors pressing for such a position were frequently frustrated by Bush's unwillingness to acquiesce. Civil religion is alive and well and likely to grow even stronger under the Obama presidency.

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