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Dear Colleague:

George Santayana resigned from Harvard in 1912. He sent his academic regalia to his former student Horace Kallen who was appointed to the philosophy faculty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. An accompanying note says: "They are not very ceremonious at Wisconsin, but you might some day find it convenient" (John McCormick, George Santayana, p. 210). Now, isn't that interesting? We are still not very ceremonious at Wisconsin. We have no time for frills. We are too sophisticated to indulge in theatricals. Or, on second thought, are we simply a bit clodhopperish? (Santayana thinks Wisconsin professors "presentable" and her students as good as those at Harvard).

Has ritual declined in our modern age? Yet one of the greatest state-and-religious rituals ever put on earth occurred on June 2, 1953. I refer, of course, to the coronation of Elizabeth II. The organizers threw everything they knew into the works: the feudal element of homage to the sovereign by members of the aristocracy; the imperial Roman element in the donning of the tunic of the emperors; the ancient claim of the kings of Israel to divine authority in the repetition by Archbishop Fisher of the Old Testament anointing of King Solomon; and the use of the sacred oil, which was entrusted to St. Thomas Aquinas by the Virgin Mary. The hardnosed political commentator Henry Fairlie (of The New Republic) felt that he was witnessing--as had three hundred million others--something that "one should never see--the terrible prescriptions by which a society holds itself together." As for social scientists, well, the distinguished American sociologist Edward Shils described the queen, at the moment of her anointing, as "a frail creature who has to be brought into contact with the divine and thus transformed into a Queen." The occasion itself was deemed "a great act of national communion" (Sociological Review, December 1953). (See John Pearson, The Selling of the Royal Family, p. 66). The transformation from Cinderella to beautiful girl, from frog to prince, from mortal to immortal--that's what we all want, isn't it? At the University, students are transformed, after running through the gauntlet of registration and exams, into sophisticated scholars. But can this be done altogether without ceremony? I wonder whether Professor Kallen has ever had occasion to use Santayana's cap and gown.

Best wishes,

J. Fu