

2003 Hans Sigrist Prize



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One of the main subjects of my research, phenomenon related to the funds of the Hans Sigrist Prize, is civil religion and political religion, as manifestations of a new relationship between politics and the sacred. In the modern age, politics, after conquering its institutional autonomy towards traditional religion, has often acquired the aura of sacredness up to the point of asserting, in an exclusive and complete way, the prerogative to define the meaning and the fundamental goal of humane existence on earth. Here is the source of the sacralization of politics, as I defined it. Sacralization of politics occurs all the time a political entity, for instance, the nation, the State, the race, the class, the party, assume the characteristics of a sacred entity, that is, of a supreme power, indisputable and untouchable, which becomes the object of faith and devotion, up to the sacrifice of life. In my theory, I stress the distinction between «political religion»

and «civil religion» as manifestation of the sacralization of politics.

Political religion is a form of the sacralization of politics of an exclusive and integralist character. It rejects coexistence with other political ideologies and movements, denies the autonomy of the individual with respect to the collective, prescribes the obligatory observance of its commandments and participation in its political cult, and sanctifies violence as a legitimate arm of struggle against enemies and as an instrument of regeneration. It adopts a hostile attitude toward traditional religions, seeks to eliminate them, or seek to establish with them a relationship of symbiotic coexistence, in the sense that the political religion aim at incorporating traditional religion within its own system of beliefs and myths, assigning it a subordinate and auxiliary role.

Civil religion is a form of sacralization of a collective political entity that is not iden-

tified with the ideology of a particular political movement, affirms the separation of Church and State, and, though postulating the existence of a deistically conceived supernatural being, coexists with traditional religious institutions without identifying itself with any one particular religious confession, presents itself as a civic creed above parties and confessions, recognizes broad autonomy for the individual with regard to the sanctified collectivity and generally appeals to spontaneous consensus for observing the commandments of public ethics and the collective liturgy.

The majority of civil and political religions are transient in nature, or at least have appeared so up to now. However, I believe that the springs from which beliefs and myths flow to confer a sacred nature on politics are unlikely to dry up, though it is impossible to foresee in what ways new civil and political religions could be formed or what the outcomes could be.

Awarding a scholar of political religions the Hans Sigrist Prize 2003 was in the

twentieth century a considerable contribute to increasing the interest in this theme which continues being the topic of numerous publications and important international conferences throughout 2004. While taking part to these meetings, I have always met with a great interest in my analysis of civil religion and political religion in the history of the Twentieth century and of the modern world. This has given me the possibility to go deep into my study of sacralization of politics by comparing it to other interpretations and considering constructive criticism of scholars of other disciplines. Besides, in the course of 2004, thanks to the funds of the Hans Sigrist Prize, I have been able to go on with my research in this field, having the possibility to work in France, the United States and Israel. At present, my studies proceed in two main directions, that is, analysis of sacralization of politics during the Great War and American civil religion in the light of the terrorist attack of the 11th September 2001.

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