

New 'Political Religions' section: Vision & Introduction

'Religion cannot disappear from the world, it can only transform itself'

- Saint-Simon

What is "political religion"?

'Political Religion' is a hybrid discipline situated at the nexus of religious, social, historical, cultural, and ideological studies. It is the study of how, responding to the tradition-eroding conditions of globalizing modernity, religions can be melded into secular ideological forces and secular ideologies synthesised into 'sacred' causes, often experienced by their protagonists with the intensity of an absolute belief. This enables political religions to either support an existing status quo, or to become a powerful force for psychological, ideological, social, and political change. In their transformative role, political religions can be peaceful and gradualistic, or so violent as to appear more geared to wanton destruction than innovation. They can either mobilise entire communities in spectacular displays of ritualised, aestheticised politics, both spontaneous and highly orchestrated, or be the work of practically invisible 'groupuscules' or 'lone-wolf terrorists' bent on fighting a war against a world considered unjust or decadent to the point of martyrdom. They can be the politicised, secularised manifestations of metaphysical religions, whether orthodox, sectarian, or 'new'. They may also express themselves as the attempted realisation of 'temporalised utopias': attempts at collective redemption through the rebirth of the nation (fascism) or classless society (communism) that actually undertakes to regenerate time itself. Finally, they can be integral components of familiar episodes from modern history that have recently re-emerged as discernible movements, or can be so contemporary that the human sciences are only beginning to transmute the chaotic 'events' they are unleashing into scholarly investigation and rational analysis.

International and interdisciplinary remit of *Compass: Political Religions*

Compass: Political Religions (CPR), the Political Religion section of *Religion Compass*, is simultaneously diverse and truly global in scope yet also forensically specialised in its focus. *CPR* embraces the major twentieth century **political religions**, such as Communism, Fascism, Nazism, as well as more neglected cases, like Iraqi Baa'thism and the Khmer Rouge. Its remit of expertise on which to draw for survey articles also extends to **politicised religions**, such as Islamism or Hindu nationalism, the theocratic politics of Iran, or the role of Christianity and Judaism in sustaining **civil religions** in places like the United States and Israel. Further, *CPR* is consciously interdisciplinary in its coverage, drawing on history, literature and the arts, theology, philosophy, and the social and political sciences to map the multifaceted history and unfolding dynamics of various kinds of political religion.

What will *Compass: Political Religion* achieve?

By commissioning survey essays from both leading experts and up-and-coming researchers, *Compass: Political Religions* will equip advanced students, lecturers, researchers, research institutes, and policy-makers with the conceptual debates, specialist insights, and historical contexts so vital to making sense of the interplay of modern religions and radical politics. In the coming years, this will increasingly establish a diverse resource able to be directed toward major historical events from the 20th century onward, or alternatively, shedding light on contemporary events displaying the characteristics of 'sacralised politics'. Often, these events and their related movements have only been recently recognised as ideological and social forces which form central constituents of modern history and current affairs. In order to engage with relevant political and cultural developments as they happen, *CPR* will also be making regular contributions to Religion Compass Exchanges, a forum where experts are encouraged to write more journalistically on issues relating to religion. In short, *CPR* will bring the dynamic synergies between religion and politics, which are proving so decisive in shaping the modern world, into sharper and more accessible focus.