

Article

Mediatization of Beliefs: The Adventism from “Morning Star” to the Public Sphere

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Abstract: This article examines “the material becoming-forces of symbolic forms” mobilized by the Adventist beliefs in the public sphere of the United States of America during the 19th century. Particularly, the article focuses on the “transformation” of the prophetic letter’s secret of the Bible into “communicative action”, which is both civil and religious. The article aims to test the strengths and the weaknesses of Adventism’s symbolic function in the paradigmatic myth of the State, on the assumption that, in the creation of spiritual meaning in the present world, Adventism is an external referent to social transformation. Theoretical and exploratory in nature, this article also seeks to broaden the understanding of an atypical religion—“without particular religion”—through the old and the new media theory and research program of mediatization.

Keywords: Adventism; civil religion; Freemasonry; mediatization; populism

1. Introduction

This article examines “the material becoming-forces of symbolic forms” (Debray 1994, p. 17)—“the material and institutional conditions of the symbolic transmission of culture and the reproduction of society” (Vandenbergh 2007, p. 26) and key issues in mediation and mediatization studies—which have been mobilized by the Adventist beliefs in the public sphere of the United States of America during the 19th century. Particularly, the article focuses on the “transformation” of the prophetic letter’s secret of the Bible into “communicative action” (Habermas 1984), which is both civil and religious. The article aims to test the strengths and the weaknesses of Adventism’s symbolic function in the paradigmatic myth (Bratosin 2007) of the State, on the assumption that, in the creation of spiritual meaning in the present world, Adventism is an external referent to social transformation. Theoretical and exploratory in nature, this article also seeks to broaden the understanding of an atypical religion—“without particular religion”—through the old and the new media theory and research program of mediatization (Bratosin 2016). As such, this study will attempt to analyze the origins of the Adventist beliefs as religious phenomenon as well as a historical and social phenomenon (Willaime 2010, p. 363) of a mediated nature (articulation between media messages, individuals and cultural, social and political environment cf. (Martín-Barbero 1993)) and mediatized nature (within the framework of mediatization “as a high-level societal metaprocess concerned with the historical adjustment to or appropriation of media logics by institutions and cultural practices across diverse domains of society” (Lunt and Sonia 2016, p. 466). Nevertheless, the article will not focus on studying the specific beliefs of a specific religion, along with its spirituality or theology. Instead, the paper will examine a current in its objectifying dimension via symbolic expressions manifested in the public sphere of the media as an agent that shapes and ‘in-forms’ religion.

Mediatization is an approach based on the presumption that media action is present in the transformations undergone by institutions, socio-cultural spaces, and processes. A significant theoretical literature on the mediatization of religion (Hoover 2006; Hjarvard 2008; Campbell 2010;

Lundby 2013; Schofield Clark 2011; Lövheim 2011; Stout 2012; Bratosin 2016; Gomes 2016; Lövheim and Lundmark 2019) demonstrates the importance of mediatization for the study of religion, not only because religion and the media are linked together by the function of mediation, but also because the media transforms, becomes embedded into, and shapes society as a whole (Lunt and Sonia 2016). These intellectual contributions, which explain the way in which media participates in the construction of religious phenomena as fact of mentality and society (Mauss 1968), have the merit of highlighting three functions of the mediatization research program, in the empirical field of the Adventism: (a) Awareness of new issues, (b) interpretation of results to overcome the parsimony of explanations and misconceptions, and (c) the stimulation of new hypotheses and avenues for testing (Tudor and Bratosin 2020a, p. 5). Based on this approach, the article underscores the specific symbolic characteristics of Adventism, not through an abstract model, but through clarifying the particular issues raised by the “public religion” (Wuthnow 1994; Wook 1999). This methodology emerges from the observation that Adventism is essentially the deployment, over time, of a set of political, economic, social, and religious beliefs centered on interpretations and intertextualities of the prophetic pronouncements of the pre-scheduled “end of the world,” whether it is a happy one, or catastrophic all depending on various ideological positions. In light of the aforementioned, it should also be noted that while Adventism is neither officially nor unconditionally attached to any political or economic orientation, all economic views eventually tap into it at some point, whether socialism or capitalism. For instance, socialism—Marx’s *Capital* was written in 1844, a historic year for the Millerite movement—draws on Adventism on the idea of Sabbath as a fundamental principle of the weekly rest that should be mandatory as a rule for the workplace (Méndez 2016). From a Weberian perspective, capitalism develops another flagship doctrine of Adventism, that of an elite that is specially blessed not only spiritually, but more so economically (Lewellen 2019). With the rise of communication media (in its broadest sense) and with the development of the power of written mass media (Debow 1854; Dill 1928; Emery 1962; Pred 1973), Adventism was historically revitalized during the 19th century by renewing its meaning through mediatization (as “a media action present in the transformations undergone by institutions, spaces and socio-cultural processes”, cf. (Tudor and Bratosin 2020b)) in an American context where,

newspapers represented and exacerbated all the lines of cleavage in the early republic. In every case of alleged sedition or treason, the newspapers were there: the treason of loyalism, the treason of Republican Jacobinism, the treason of Federalist monarchism, of the Jay Treaty, of the Sedition Law of 1798, of the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, of the New England secessionist conspiracies of 1804 and 1814, and of the Missouri crisis of 1819. And on and on. To hear the newspapers tell it, traitors and seditionists lurked everywhere. Even beyond the government, newspapers cultivated faction and dissension. In religion, for example, newspapers in the early nineteenth century were often the carriers of radical evangelical doctrines that under-mined the standing order of religious orthodoxy. In other words, when Americans in the early republic saw treason, sedition, fragmentation, dissension, disintegration, degeneration, disunion, anarchy, and chaos, they usually saw it first in the newspaper. (Nord 1991, pp. 392–93)

In this context, Adventism enters¹ the public sphere neither as a dissident theological movement, nor as a dislocated section of a religion, but as a humanist current of deism. This perspective was

¹ As explained in the previous paragraph, with the rise of the 19th century American press, Adventism became an ongoing social and political issue. Its presence in the public sphere, which was originally ideologically shaped in the Morning Star Lodge by William Miller before 1820, gains significance after 1832, in relation to what scholars refer to as “civil religion”.

originally initiated in the Morning Star Masonic Lodge in Poultney, Vermont² by William Miller,³ and then developed through the radicalization of what should be called the “civil religion” (Bellah 1967; Coleman 1970; Wimberley 1976; Gehrig 1981; Demerath and Williams 1985; Schieder 2009; Beiner 2010), the patrimonialization of the progressive populism of the millenarian imagination (Anthony and Robbins 1979; Cantor 1992; Bolner 1998), and the publicization of the prophetic secret (Champagne 1995; Cefai and Pasquier 2003; Fanuzzi 2003; Freeman 2003; Ryfe 2006). To account for this, the article successively considers these three communicational conditions that brought Adventism back to the public in the 19th century.

2. Methodology

This article is a case study anchored into Willaime (2010) four-perspective approach to the study of religious phenomena.

First, the *collective phenomenon* perspective consists of the study of the actors (founders, institutions, etc.) sharing a common good, and belonging to a common world.

Second, the *material phenomenon* perspective is based on the mediated and mediatized fact, and it mainly involves the thematic content analysis of two types of material sources: (a) Documentaries, a very large body of 1857 texts for the present case (scientific articles and internal core documents related to Adventism, focused on themes of the Origins, Founders, Organization, and Media⁴); and b) press articles (693 digitized press articles published between 1841–1863 in *Signs of the Times*, *Advent Herald*, *Midnight Cry*, *Western Midnight Cry*, *The (Day-Star)*, *Present Truth*, *Adventist Review*, and *Review and Herald*). Methodologically, the object of content analysis is communication (Bardin 1977; Negura 2006). Content analysis takes into account the dynamics of social representations and the “production/reception” of the content of media message as symbolic universe of production of meaning (Wolf 1992).

For reason of demonstration, in this paper we feel it necessary to use extensive quotations from scholarly literature and historical documents which, on the risky side, might make the reading of this article somewhat cumbersome. Nevertheless, such extensive quotations are particularly necessary in tackling this field of research—with multiple and vast extensions—since the method leads to taking into account both the intersection of the religious phenomenon with the servant and civil dimensions, the communicative action, as well as the mediatization of religion.

² As documented: “Morning Star Lodge, No. 27, was organized in Poultney prior to the year 1800, (. . .) we are informed that the Lodge was strong in numbers and ability, and took a prominent stand among the Lodges of the State. (. . .), Capt. William Miller (. . .) were among the Masters of the old Lodge. In the year 1826 (. . .) a great excitement arose throughout the country, and continued for some years. In Vermont, as well as in the State of New York, this excitement was intense, and in this State (. . .) most of the Lodges were obliged to suspend work—the Poultney Lodge about the year 1832. The Grand Lodge of the State held its annual elections until 1836. It then suspended its work for about ten years. January 14, 1846, a meeting was held at Burlington, and the Grand Lodge was revived and reorganized, and from thence the work of Masonry was again set in motion in the State.” (Joslin et al. 1875, p. 157).

³ Founder of the Adventist movements, he was a rationalist and while studying the books of Daniel and the Apocalypse and considering the many apocalyptic systems then developed in the United States, acquired in 1818 the conviction that the return of Jesus Christ will take place between the 21st March 1843 (see Miller’s statement of 5 September 1822 in White 1875, p. 62) and March 21, 1844. “(. . .) in the years that Miller joined and belonged to the lodge it developed a decidedly Christian ethos, emphasizing the same fraternal and benevolent qualities evangelicals were promoting. At the same time, evangelicalism was adopting the rational rhetoric of republicanism. The rapprochement made Masonry a meeting place where people of all faiths and sects could gather and unite in the cause of charity, leading at least one Mason to forecast ‘[a] happy Masonic millennial period’ that would soon commence ‘to the inexpressible joy of all inhabitants of the earth.’ Miller undoubtedly gained experience in benevolent work through his lodge long before he applied those lessons in the Baptist church, and the fellowship he found there would have pleased his primitive dislike for sectarianism and yearning for common ground where rational men could build righteous community based on virtue. After his conversion, Masonry offered something more personal, a rational piety that allowed him to move slowly toward a more affective spirituality that required a level of trust in God he had not yet achieved. It was, in short, a safe place where God and angels could mingle with Wisdom and Virtue.” (Rowe 2008, pp. 91–92).

⁴ A part of them are available in E.G. White Estate, Adventist Research Institute of the General Conference, etc.

Third, the *symbolic phenomenon* perspective is based on the same mediated and mediatized corpus. It is devoted to the study of representations (of the world, of society, of moral and doctrinal systems, etc.), and to meaning.

Fourthly, the *experiential and sensitive phenomenon* perspective focuses on a collective scale which concerns the aspect of acting; that is behavior, and structures of social and economic conduct in a Weberian sense (Weber 2013).

3. Radicalization of the Symbolism of Civil Religion

The Adventist beliefs fit into the general landscape of civil religious beliefs, symbols, and rituals that were involved in the political process of the United States, during the late 18th century, and early 19th century. Specifically, the beliefs represent an original and sufficiently complex social product resulting from the process of cultural and political construction of the American civil religion of the time. The originality of Adventism lies within the fact that it draws its strength from its undeniable adherence to civil religion, while it positions itself in an admittedly minimal yet sufficient dissonance to differentiate itself from the perspectives that are just as remarkable as elusive. The complexity of Adventism owes to its strong symbolic consistency, camouflaged not only by the capacity to produce and promote a theological *trompe-l'oeil*, but more so by the spiritual engineering attached to the symbolic imaginary of the 19th century America, which managed to institutionalize this *trompe-l'oeil*: “The early Adventists (. . .) fashioned their ideology into the mirror-image of contemporary civil religion. (. . .) Adventism may thus be seen as a heretical form of civil religion that has sacralised a subtly differentiated alternative to the American way of life.” (Bull 1989, p. 178)

The idea that Adventism could be a heresy of the civil religion (Bull 1989) is based on a presupposition that resulted from the comparison of the concepts of heresy and civil religion, as defined by Zito (1983), and respectively by Bellah (1967), Coleman (1970), and Gehrig (1981). Thus, for Zito (1983), heresy makes sense in a context where (a) the discourse is a collective activity ordering its concerns through language, (b) the ideology is a discourse that seeks to monopolize the ways of speaking about the world, and (c) the orthodoxy is an institutionalized ideology. From this perspective, the heresy is an attack on an institutionalized way of speaking about the world, using the same language as orthodoxy, but seeking to orient the speech to another end; whereas the American civil religion is designated as the system of religious symbols, which links the role of the citizen and the place of the American society in space, time, and history, to the conditions of its ultimate existence and meaning. It is a system structured differently from the political community model, and from the religious community model (Zito 1983). The articulation of these two theoretical presuppositions leads to the paradoxical conclusion that

civil religion is a meaning system which exists independently of any social group. Although civil religion does not ‘exist’ in the same sense that a denomination exists, it is undeniable that the language of politics has pervaded American religion, and that religious language has, throughout American history, been used to express political concerns. What is in doubt is whether or not this interpretation constitutes a discourse in its own right. In what follows it is argued that the discourse of civil religion was sufficiently differentiated for a deviant social group to define itself in a heretical variant of the same discourse. The interrelationship between Adventism and civil religion thus reveals not only the identity of the former but also the ‘existence’ of the latter as a differentiated ideology. (Bull 1989, p. 179)

The arguments made to support the heretical character of the Adventism in relation to the civil religion are, however, limited to the markedly dissonant symbolism of the Sabbath among Adventists and its pragmatic consequences in terms of its relevance to civil religion. While the Sunday Sabbath was a fundamental doctrine in the godly minds of the American colonies—colonies for which rigorous Sabbath-keeping was strictly tied to the future success of the new nation—the deviant proposition of the Adventists to observe the Sabbath of Saturday had of course, a considerable symbolic importance.

The act of not respecting Sunday as a day for rest called into question a whole new developed mythology, in agreement with the ideological claims of the moment (Goen 1985; Montgomery 1995; Ryan 1997), where the revivalist theologies used imagination in order to achieve the millennium on which the very future of the West depended. Therefore, this questioning, which appears both as an adherence to the Sabbatarian symbolism of the American civil religion and as a proposal for an alternative Sabbatarian symbolism. can be interpreted as a deviant form of the Millerite⁵ discourse on the millennium, and allows speculation of an opposition between the Adventism and the American civil religion by asserting that

the Adventist movement and the American nation were perceived as two rival groups competing to realize their respective millennia” and “Adventist discourse inverted the institutionalized ideology of civil religion: the persecuted became the persecutor; the progress of righteousness was equated with the triumph of evil, and the American Sabbath became the mark of the beast. (Bull 1989, p. 184)

However, such interpretation is weakened by empirical findings that in the wake of this civil “heresy,” Adventism has developed “a full range of alternative institutions,” and that, as an imitation of the civil religion, Adventism “resulted in the development of a vast network of institutions which mirrored those provided by the American state” (Bull 1989, p. 184). Undoubtedly, it is appropriate to associate Adventism with a form of radicalization of the symbolism of the American civil religion, rather than with heresy. It pushes civil religion to an extent where it manages to join, and paradoxically, to institutionalize and emulate exactly the functional forms of politico-religious power of the old continent, to which both Adventism and the American civil religion were opposed. Adventism finds in the Saturday Sabbath not a contentious doctrine to put itself in dissonance with the civil religion, but quite simply the radical symbol allowing the American civil religion to display its dissociation from the religion of the “beast”.

“Thus, Adventism, as a form of radicalization of the symbolism of the American civil religion, is a remarkable illustration of the conceptualization of the civil religion made by Cristi (2001, pp. 9–11). First, as a form of radicalization of the symbolism of the American civil religion, Adventism ontologically fails to adopt the role of a tool for social integration, since, by its radical nature it can give rise to social conflicts, to tensions and divisions. Hebert (2009) observes that Adventist beliefs “speak of excluding and separating those who do not agree with their beliefs, having a special knowledge (like the Gnostics), maintaining a-works righteousness mentality (like the Judaizers), and holding to a form of Universalism. When taken in total and compared to the central core doctrines of orthodoxy, these beliefs move them outside the realm of orthodoxy.” (Hebert 2009, p. 228)

The values and ritual practices assumed by Adventism only make sense for certain populations. In fact, Adventism seizes on the excessive inclination of the civil religion to cover social areas of ideological, ethnic, political, and economic conflicts. For this purpose, it induces a seductive adhesion by its initiatory character, by allowing access to special knowledge, by training in a respectful mindset of order and rigor, as well as by openness towards universality in the same way as religion, science, or media.

Second, as a form of radicalization of the symbolism of the American civil religion, Adventism never sets itself the objective of becoming a national religion since, by definition, it must cover and only partially contain the values (in its broader meaning cf. Dacheux and Goujon 2020), and the beliefs of the entire society; that is to say, only those of the “elected”. This position is not fundamentally at odds

⁵ For William Miller, the Sabbath is the observance of Sunday rest. The Millerite Adventists began keeping the seventh day as Sabbath, probably in the early spring of 1844.

with the original spirit of the American civil religion, and the symbolism which “suggests that the whole of public and political life is linked to God and His will. The American people themselves are presented as the ‘chosen people’ whose mission would be to carry the good word throughout the world” (Bordes 2018, p. 109). On the contrary, Adventism resonates harmoniously with the foundational socio-political program of the United States of America, because “for the Puritan colonists who arrived from England in the 1620s it was a question of founding a community of saints prefiguring a perfect Christian society and offering themselves to the world as a model.” (Froidevaux 1999, p. 80). The Adventist translation of this foundational program of the “chosen people” was made in the radical terms of the remnant: “Has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth” (The Remnant and its Mission 2020)

Third, as a form of radicalization of the symbolism of the American civil religion, Adventism is an unreliable instrument of legitimizing since it serves democratic as well as undemocratic regimes. More exactly, through its positioning as a niche, it cannot set itself up as a “higher law” and claim the exercise of the function of moral reference. The most convincing illustration is the way Adventism functioned in countries under communist dictatorships, or under the German fascist regime. In these cases, Adventism rejected the ideology of power, but pledged allegiance to the authority: “. . . whatever may have been their understanding of church-state separation, by their own admission German Adventist leaders were guided by one consideration above all others: to keep the church from being outlawed. This is why they lent pen, pulpit, and church institutions to the Nazi cause (. . .): “We wanted to be loyal to God, and yet obey the authorities as God’s servant.”” (Blaich 1993, p. 278–79).

Fourth, as a form of radicalization of the symbolism of the American civil religion, Adventism will never be an indicator of a people’s level of religiosity, since its purpose is different from religion as such. The symbolism of Adventism is not about a theology, but rather about the type of politics and government to be sustained and operated. Adventism displays and assumes its status as a religious minority with an institutionalized commitment to the defense of its social and political rights: “Adventists constitute a religious minority, and have at times been subject to restrictions and discrimination. Consequently, they have felt it necessary to stand up for human rights. As loyal citizens, Adventists believe they have the right to freedom of religion, subject to the equal rights of others. This implies the freedom to meet for instruction and worship, to worship on the seventh day of the week (Saturday), and to disseminate religious views by public preaching, or through the media” (<https://www.adventistliberty.org/religious-freedom>).

Finally, as a form of radicalization of the symbolism of the American civil religion, Adventism is not a belief system that fuses religious and state structures. On the contrary, it finds the meaning of its existence in the circles which dissociate these structures; its institutions being mobilized in this direction, and the “lobbies for or against relevant legislation, files amicus briefs in court cases, and works closely with other groups concerned with protecting the ‘wall of separation,’ while its bimonthly magazine Liberty, which is distributed widely among ‘thought leaders,’ in its ‘declaration of principles’ proclaims that ‘the God given right of religious liberty is best exercised when church and state are separate’” (Lawson 1996, p. 279). The radicalized symbolism of Adventism, which advocates the separation between religion and State, is not present without its strategic counterpart in the social sphere. It allows Adventist beliefs to be closely associated with social and political institutions such as the educational, medical, and legal systems that may conceive. By emphasizing its part in the separation between religion and State, Adventism blurs the radicalism of its symbolism, thereby strengthening its social effectiveness: “The level of tension between American Adventists and society has lowered markedly and at an increasing pace in recent decades. The growth and accreditation of their educational and medical institutions has encouraged participation in society and provided opportunities for upward mobility; Adventist medicine has become increasingly orthodox, and many

of its hospitals have prospered and won friends; the coming of the five-day week has removed most of the major problems surrounding Sabbath observance; and Adventist dietary and smoking prohibitions have won increasing credibility as a result of medical research" (Lawson 1995, p. 338).

4. Patrimonialization of the Progressive Populism from the Millennial Imagination

In resonance with the radicalized symbolism of the civil religion, a second symbolic socio-cultural support—which organized and framed the transition of Adventism from Poultney's Morning Star lodge toward the mediatized public sphere—was the traditional Christian imaginary resulting from the millennial beliefs. This transition was facilitated by the originality of the millenarian vision proposed by William Miller who, in the debate of the time, and while distancing himself from post-millennialism, did not completely adhere to pre-millennialism and proposed a third original way of interpretation. Indeed, from 1822 William Miller affirmed in his seventeenth belief that the end of the world will take place after the second coming: "I believe in the resurrection, both of the just and of the unjust—the just, or believers, at Christ's second coming, and the unjust one thousand years afterwards—when the judgment of each will take place in their order, at their several resurrections; when the just will receive everlasting life, and the unjust eternal condemnation" (White 1875, p. 63). Nonetheless, the Adventist beliefs remain fundamentally an intellectual construct attached to the idea of the millennium, which is an idea historically inseparable from Puritanism, Whig republicanism, deism, humanism, and natural philosophy, because,

early settlers were convinced of the truth of the Biblical millennial prophecies and that these prophecies sustained, guided, and motivated them. Millennialism as an idea and as the spark of religious and social movements is highly intriguing in itself. Millennialism may not have 'caused' any specific historical development in America, but (. . .) it can help us understand how Americans have understood the meaning of being American (. . .) At times its influence has been overt; at other times, subtle. It is as if there were a millennialist/Adventist stratum in the self-consciousness of those who have shaped American life, a stratum that sometimes rises to the surface and at other times quietly weaves in and out of the fabric of common life". (Bolner 1998, p. 191)

By localizing itself in this niche position ("on the border") of the millenarian debate, during the 19th century, the Adventist beliefs adopted, *de facto*, the role of a tool in the service of the civil religion, by allowing a cultural intervention which resulted in the instrumentalization of both populism and progressivism—or, later, even revolutionary in some societies of the 20th century—of the millennial imagination by imposing it on the world as American cultural heritage. The consequences of millenarian imagination integrated into the Adventist heritage are a part of the nation's collective approach, which consists not only of preventing the destruction of the symbolic millenarian heritage of the pilgrim fathers, but more so of preserving and transmitting this heritage as a reference, and using it to symbolize the trends of an era. At the same time, the Adventist patrimonialization of the millenarian imagination participates in the societal response to the manifest needed to disseminate new ideas by updating the religious feelings and fears buried in the collective consciousness. Adventist millenarianism is, therefore, a process of legitimizing current events experienced and now mediatized in the country, and a way of explaining and making people accept the events, while contributing to a change of perspective on the nature of social justice, and the exercise of power in the future. Thus, Adventist millennialism broadens the puritanical heritage offer by diversifying it through its historical embedding in debates that mediatize new imaginaries; that is to say, by producing new referents that are supposed to build a relationship of continuity with future generations. In fact, this way of ensuring the inter-generational transmission of a belief shared by the Protestant colonists in search of exemplary social affirmation and economic success responded to the pragmatic need for civil structuring of the American public sphere, and for the formation of the national identity.

Despite its religious, puritanical, and apocalyptic rhetoric, Adventist millennialism emerged as a civil millennialism because it opened up and fueled debates on themes that preoccupied the political consciousness of society, that is, trans-institutional political themes, such as freedom: “Under the aegis of civil millennialism ministers of varying theological persuasions came to do homage at the same shrine, that of liberty, and expressed their allegiance in projections about the future which were as novel as they were pervasive. The language of civil millennialism has a strange ring to an ear accustomed to that of Puritan apocalyptic thought, but not because the political dimension of millennialism was itself a novelty” (Hatch 1974, p. 408). Thus, by its intrinsic political dimension, this patrimonialization of the imagination of the civil millenarianism percolated in the American societal thought not only at a frozen moment in time, but in a lasting way, through all of its symbolic forms—language, mythical-religious thought, science, art, etc. It percolated to such an extent that today it offers itself as a necessary paradigm for understanding some of the most sensitive aspects of American policy:

Protestant millennialism gave us the themes and language of American civil religion and exceptionalism. American millennialism responds to the exigencies of the times. In the case of pre-Civil War America, the chosen people became the members of the churches who were one in the same with the citizens of the new nation. During this period of national optimism, the millennium was understood to be a sometimes literal, sometimes figurative one thousand-year reign of religious and political liberty that would hasten the Second Coming of Christ. The enemy of the ‘chosen people’ was seen in English rule, Catholicism, the native peoples, and other competitors for the resources of the continent. The ideas and language of millennialism so thoroughly infused the broader civil religion and political speech of the time that they are nearly indistinguishable from one another. It is in this way that millennialism framed the specific foreign affairs and security policies of the time and gave shape to American objectives. (Stuckert 2008, p. 22)

In what concerns form and substance, the Adventist patrimonialization of the millennial imaginary constitutes the symbolic capital whose effectiveness—less religious and more political—is at the service of populism and progressivism or in a more inclusive perspective in the service of populism. The Adventist millennialism, that is far from being a spontaneous spiritual eruption of a new theological order in the first half of the 19th century, is on one hand the synthesis of the concomitant process of reconsideration of the interpretation of Bible prophecy, and is on the other hand a synthesis of the democratization of Christendom. This is a part of the populist religious movement in search of the political and social freedoms, and then it is associated with the fresh creation of the United States, which hasn’t ceased since to mark the changes in American society:

Religious populism has been a residual agent of change in America over the last two centuries, an inhibitor of genteel tradition and a recurring source of new religious movements. Deep and powerful undercurrents of democratic Christianity distinguish the United States from other modern industrial democracies. These currents insure that churches in this land do not withhold faith from the rank and file. Instead, religious leaders have pursued people wherever they could be found; embraced them without regard to social standing; and challenged them to think, to interpret Scripture, and to organize the church for themselves. Religious populism, reflecting the passions of ordinary people and the charisma of democratic movement builders, remains among the oldest and deepest impulses in American life. (Hatch 1989, p. 5)

More precisely, the target of the populism attached to the millennial imagination mediated by the Adventist beliefs has been the rural population (Theobald 1985).

This sociological orientation can be explained by two characteristics of this populism. One of these characteristics could be qualified as political. This started in the wake of a rhetoric that attempted to explain the socio-political and economic problems in their everyday forms, individualized by the universal controversy between “good” and “evil”. It is a question of pitting the “pure people” of

small-scale farmers working hard to provide the needs of their families. against the “corrupt elite” of industrialists and capitalists acting for and in the name of money, as incarnations respectively of good and evil. The promise carried by the Adventist millennialist imagination is, in short, an unequivocal part taken by the “pure people” inhabiting the countryside. Indeed, even today, the idea of the necessary return of the “elected” to the countryside before Christ’s return remains relevant among Adventist fundamentalists. The second major characteristic of this populism can be qualified as historical-institutional. The prophetic explanations on which the Adventists built their millennial imagery pointed to the Catholic Church as the representative of evil in the universal conflict between the “good” and the “evil.” However, the urban populations having their origins in countries culturally and socially under the historical influence of the Catholicism, that is to say of the “evil”, constitute for the millenarian populism Adventist a target less likely to find itself in its line of focus:

It is worth observing that Adventism’s hostility to the city and its enthronement of ruralism was a familiar theme in North American social movements during the last decades of the XIXth century. The Women’s Christian Temperance Union and the various populist movements which appeared in the mid-West during the 1880s and 1890s are examples (. . .) Adventism, like populism, diagnosed the current tribulations of life and attributed them to the machinations of sinister forces. Adventism, like populism, was hostile both to large-scale business and to organised labour. Adventism in fact interpreted the growing conflict between the two as a portent of the end. The fact that an increasing number of city inhabitants were from southern Europe, where Roman Catholics together with the Catholic Church’s support for organised labour could not but confirm Adventists’ deepest suspicions as well as their prophecies. (Theobald 1985, p. 120)

During the 19th century, the patrimonialization of populism of the Millennial Adventist imagination in the United States mobilized two symbolic powers whose original distance over time allowed a functional articulation that was both unprecedented and effective in terms of production of meaning. The first symbolic, ancient, traditional, and therefore inherently trustworthy power to reveal the truth was that of the literal approach to the Bible. The Millennial Adventist imagination translated the prophetic letter word for word into the immediate social, political, economic, and scientific news, then it was experienced by the American population in their daily life. The second symbolic power mobilized by the populism of the Millennial Adventist imagination is a new and burgeoning power; the power of media seducing and insidiously producing public opinion. So, “the Millerites were impelled by personal conviction to spread their message of the nearness of Jesus’s coming. Many Evangelicals read their Bibles and came to the same conclusion as Miller did; this populist Bible reading message was at the heart of his philosophy as stated earlier. Also, Miller eventually took advantage of the power of the press and tent camp meetings. The publications provided a platform for spreading his views publicly beyond his ability to travel. Unlike Finney revivals, Millerites established loose knit organizations that sprung up and were manned by missionary volunteers to help spread his message of revival. To be Adventist Millerite, people did not have to change their place of fellowship and their belief system was in line with contemporary living and thinking of the day” (Krug 2008, pp. 52–53). By arranging the encounter between the literal interpretation of the Bible and the new currents of thought, Adventist beliefs charged the millennial imagination with a paradoxical originality which was later institutionalized, and which consisted in the capacity of a movement to adopt and make progress in the various spheres of human activity. The patrimonialization of the progressive populism of the millenarian imaginary—resulting from putting it in the public sphere of the Adventist beliefs—constitutes one of the best illustrations of the thesis formulated by Ernest Lee Tuveson: “The coming together of the New Philosophy and the revival of the belief in a literal millennial end to history produced the Idea of Progress (. . .) without the combination of these two great ideologies, the faith in the secular millennialism that we know as Progress could never have arisen. For that combination created the great characteristic modern belief that advance in technology, standard of living, and other purely material aspects of culture is advance

religiously and spirituality as well—that man gets better and better as he controls nature more and more; and, on the other hand, there has been the materialization of religion, to which (. . .) a revival of literal millennialism would easily lead” (Tuveson 1964, p. vi).

5. Publicizing the Prophetic Secrecy

A third decisive symbolic social act that marked the transition of the Adventist beliefs from Poultney’s Morning Star Lodge to the American public sphere in the early 19th century was the publicization of the inspiring prophetic secrecy of Adventism. Indeed, William Miller’s Masonic fascination with the secrecy of the Bible prophecy transformed, the moment his lodge was dissolved (Joslin et al. 1875, p. 157) in 1832, into an opportunity to publicly lift the secrecy. “Discovered” by him in the literal reading of the prophetic books of the Bible as his own statements attest: “The first time I ever spoke in public on this subject was in the year 1832. The Lord poured his grace on the congregation, and many believed to the salvation of their souls. From that day to this, doors have been opened to me, to proclaim this doctrine of the second coming of Christ, among almost all denominations, so that I have not been able to comply with but a small portion of the calls. I have lectured in the states of New York, Vermont, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania, and Canada. In every place, I think, two good effects have been produced. The church has been awakened, and the Bible has been read with more interest” (Miller 1841, p. 12). However, this lifting of secrecy, along with the creation of alternative forms of social sharing of knowledge, has never been done in terms of disclosure of the institutional secrets, but as a pragmatic transposition corresponding to an alternative community management of the mediation of secrecy. First, it was because William Miller never gave up his Masonic rhetoric and “the way Masons speak about symbolism indicates that the fraternity is (. . .) formed on the promise of an inexhaustible secrecy. (. . .) Masonry’s deployment of the inexhaustible secret generates the curiosity that leads to its continued existence” (Gunn 2008, p. 261). Secondly, it was because “Secrecy is irreducibly paradoxical for it “must itself be performed in a public fashion in order to be understood to exist” (Herzfeld 2009, p. 135). In addition, despite secrecy’s reliance on concealment, “the power and attraction of the secret lie in the possibility that it may be disclosed” (Beidelman 1993, p. 41). The revelation of concealment is a way of socially mobilizing the secret as a form of socio-cultural capital without dispersing restricted knowledge. The titillating risk of dispersal may be essential to the value of some displays of secrecy” (Jones 2014, p. 55). Moreover, even after 1863, when it was institutionalized, Adventism has always cultivated through its beliefs the protection of the intellectual and socio-organizational environment respectful of secrecy by demanding (a) the unreserved adherence to the cause, (b) the initiation to gain access to special knowledge, (c) the construction of an ordered and rigorous mentality in obedience to a framework of legality, and (d) the openness to universality through the alleged capacity to hold the truth (Hutton 2015, pp. 28–29).

In this perspective, Adventist publicity⁶ of prophetic secrecy is based on the rhetoric of secrecy that was unprecedented two centuries ago, and it is innovative in its intrinsic adaptability to the pace of development and technological democratization of the field of information and communication.

Indeed, the Adventist publicity of prophetic secrecy is produced neither by occult rhetoric nor by religious rhetoric, but by media rhetoric. William Miller “in his public discourses he is self-possessed and ready; distinct in his utterance, and frequently quaint in his expressions. He succeeds in chaining the attention of his auditory for an hour and a half to two hours; and in the management of his subject discovers much tact, holding frequent colloquies with the objector and inquirer, supplying

⁶ It is about a media strategy revealing the secrecy which nourishes the curiosity of the public without revealing for all that that is hidden on the “becoming public” of what is “made public”: “The idea of ‘publicization’ implies that the ‘public’ is not a given in itself, antecedent or exterior to the performances that target it: it “publicizes” itself through the “publicization” of a social problem (. . .). It “publicizes” itself in the arena of the multiple (. . .) philosophical disputes and scientific controversies, wars of feathers and battles of words that an event gives rise to. The ‘public’ is entirely in this process of ‘publicization’” (Cefai and Pasquier 2003, p. 14).

the questions and answers himself in a very natural manner; and although grave himself, sometimes producing a smile from a portion of his auditors" (Miller 1841, p. 16).

The Adventist publicity of the prophetic secrecy is not the result of occult rhetoric, since it is the opposite of rhetoric that is "veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols" (Gunn 2008, p. 252): It allegorizes what it is veiled and symbolizes the illustrations. Indeed, the Adventist "unveiling" of the secret meaning of Bible prophecy about the end of the world ensures the credibility for the circulation of the literal reading of the text and maintains the network that welcomes this circulation. For example, by using the symbolism of the heavenly sanctuary cleansing ritual as an engine for the circulation of the literal reading of the text, the Adventist rhetoric of publicizing the prophetic secrecy triggers curiosity and awe inspired by the uncertainty of the personal ending to illustrate the widespread promise of disclosure of the future of the world promised by the texts in circulation. Without being occult, in the truest sense of the word, the Adventist rhetoric nonetheless joins occult rhetoric in its capacity to build an audience animated by the desire to know a mystery which knowledge cannot exhaust. Thus, the role of this rhetoric of secrecy is not primarily a question of content production, but above all of shaping and preparation for the cosmic advent of a new world order and therefore of continuous promotion of the suspicious questioning on the mystery of recent events along with their implicit warning signs. The Adventist publicity of the prophetic secrecy proceeds from the rhetoric of the occult about the virtualization (Lévy 1995) of the actuality of the unveiling. In the Adventist rhetoric of secrecy, "the answer is the secret, or, more precisely, the secret is the answer. The secret fills out the gap and conceals the inconsistency between the public supposed to know and the public supposed to believe. It holds open the possibility that the judging public will judge correctly, the possibility in which the believing public needs to believe. The secret marks the absence necessary to sustain belief in the public supposed to know. It's that missing information warranting the rightness of the opinion of the public tribunal. Once they have the information, the truth, their judgment will embody the certainty they already have" (Dean 2001, p. 631). In this logic, the Adventist rhetoric of secrecy borders on political rhetoric.

However, neither of those is the Adventist publicity of prophetic secrecy produced by pure religious rhetoric that does not otherwise merge with occult rhetoric: "Religious discourse differs from the occult because of its attempts to invite exoteric redemption, a movement against secrecy marked most notably in Christian history, for example, by the Protestant Reformation: God keeps no secrets. Religious discourse also differs from the occult in terms of its repertoire of tropes: The word of God comprises a very old vocabulary, and there is nothing "new" or exotic in the great Holy Books of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Religious discourse, however, can be characterized as "occult" when there are pockets of secrecy (the Vatican, Jewish Kabbalah, Sufi orders, and so on) or when a new language is deployed to establish the authority of one or more individuals (which is usually described in terms of the creation of a sector, in normative terminology, a 'cult')" (Gunn 2004, pp. 43–44). At the same time, the Adventist rhetoric of the secrecy preserves a major internal ambiguity with respect to religious and, more accurately, Christian rhetoric. Indeed, 19th century American Adventism "naturally" falls into the camp of Protestantism through attachment and participation in the historical context of its updating. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the implicit justification for its publicity is based on a Catholic belief contested by Protestantism: Adventism finds its historical *raison d'être* in the need to make believers discover the secrets behind the letter of the biblical text. However, this reason joins that of the Catholic Church of the Middle Ages, which did not find the layman capable of interpreting the Bible on his own and that the only valid interpretation was that mediated by the clergy. This gap between Protestantism, which put the Bible in the hands of the people by postulating that the understanding of the Scriptures is possible without intermediaries for each believer, and a Catholicism which values the functionalism of the mediation of the interpretation, is a gap which pushes away the Adventist rhetoric of the secrecy of religious rhetoric, and brings it closer to the rhetoric of initiation. Adventist rhetoric of secrecy is more a rhetoric of initiation because it is the place of "the meeting of two orders of facts, which one could be defined as the individual capacity

of symbolic association, on one hand, and the necessity of a cultural transmission of a tradition, on the other hand" (Boyer 1980, p. 54). From the perspective of the initiation, the Adventist rhetoric of publicizing the prophetic secrecy takes hold of the concept of "progressive revelation." Thus, the Adventist publicity of prophetic secrecy maintains contact with religious rhetoric while distancing itself from epistemology, allowing it to start a subculture subject to access protected by the successive character of revelations of the prophetic "truth".

Without completely breaking free from occult rhetoric and without genuinely adhering to religious rhetoric, skillfully blending the final orientations of political rhetoric with the primary obsessions of initiation rhetoric, the Adventist publicity of prophetic secrecy is fundamentally the work of a media rhetoric which "is based on a constant confusion-maintained by the use of these recurring formulas - between information and commentary. Or more precisely, the characteristic of the discursive strategies implemented in journalistic discourse is to constantly reverse the information in the commentary, and to give the illusion of informing without leaving the space of interpretation, which leads us towards the definition of the objectivity understood as a communalized interpretation imposed on all in the form of a doxa, in the sense (. . .) of a set of beliefs and opinions which escape any questioning. Media rhetoric constitutes a doxa in its own right which leans on logics of conformity determining the forms of objectivity" (Bertini 2007, p. 5). Indeed, the Adventist publicity of the prophetic secrecy is carried by a doxa which invested the media by the rhetoric of the secrecy since 1830 when "a group of men, decided to take the concept of the Masonic order and make a semi-public Church out of it" (Summers 2016, p. xxx)⁷. Newspapers and magazines like *Signs of the Times*, *The Midnight Cry*, *The Western Midnight Cry* (*The Day-Star*), and *Advent Herald* will become, ten years later, the full vectors of this doxa. Looking at these journals, it appears that the Adventist publicity of the prophetic secrecy stems from a body of beliefs that articulate a simple manner of complex relationships of inclusion and exclusion, similarity and difference, fake news and good news, or revelation hiding and hiding revelation. Smith (1983), for example, in analyzing how Adventist beliefs of the imminent return of Christ articulate political and initiation rhetoric about slavery, observes surprising similarities between Adventist rhetoric and that of the abolitionists. So, while Adventists believed that moral change or reform was the obvious consequence of the preparation for the immediate end of the world revealed in Bible prophecy, they had a public discourse that was, paradoxically, closer to the rhetoric of the abolitionist reformers than "all gradualist or static philosophies of history." The main major difference between the Adventist discourse and the abolitionist discourse was the way the rhetoric was applied: "Adventists were not fatalistic premillennialists; neither were they social reformers. They were immediatists in their own right, working in their own community to prepare for an Advent that would replace the present corrupt society" (Reid 2004, pp. 111–12).

The symbolic effectiveness of the Adventist publicity of prophetic secrecy is organized and effectively supported by rhetoric that "tapped the current of millennialist enthusiasm, revivalistic fervor, and a 'populist' scriptural hermeneutic, all of which were running strong in American evangelicalism. But they melded those influences in the crucible of their spiritual experience to create something distinctive. Challenging the prevalent postmillennialist conception of the United States as an instrument of progress toward the millennium, they (. . .) pointed to slavery and the Protestant establishment's intolerant treatment of dissenters as evidence of the fulfillment of prophecy" (Morgan 2001, p. 11).

In favor of a pragmatism constituting a "brand", and in the passage from Morning Star to the public sphere, Adventism negotiated its piece by piece, by changing them for symbolic operational

⁷ It is in this context that William Miller "longtime Mason and onetime Grand Master, he found himself on the defensive in the church and community. For fifteen years after becoming a Baptist he had remained a Mason, but in September 1831 he wrote a grudging letter of resignation from the local lodge, not because belonging to the Masons was wrong but "to conciliate the feelings of my Brethren in Christ" and to avoid "fellowship with any practice that may be incompatible with the Word of God among masons"" (Rowe 2008, pp. 93–94).

functions—of expression, representation, and significance—subsequently ordered historically, in the mediatization of his beliefs.

6. Conclusions

This communication perspective on Adventism calls for three concluding observations. First, it should be noted that the mediatization of the passage of Adventist beliefs from Poultney's Morning Star lodge to the public arena underscores religious symbolism. Unlike mythical symbolism, religious symbolism is not contingent upon the subjectivity of emotions specific to mythical narratives. Rather, it relies on reason and takes the risk of separating (i.e., producing cleavages inside the system regarding doctrine, ideology, social ties and relationships, etc.). The case of the Saturday Sabbath is the most radical illustration of this. However, the meaning of this symbolism breaks with the language used for the mediatization of the Adventist beliefs. The meaning of this religious symbolism is not theological. It is rather civil and civic in full agreement with Butler's conclusion that "A theological rustic, (. . .), Miller attracted a diverse, popular movement of both the rabble and the respectable, much as Jackson had done for politics (. . .), transmuted history into eschatology, seeing the past as apostasy and the future as apocalypse. (. . .), his appeal to prophecy as 'evidence' echoed the earliest conservative Enlightenment thinkers, (. . .) expositions on biblical prophecy relied as much on the poetic intuitions of a Romantic mind" (Butler 1986, p. 52). Therefore, from a sociological point of view, considering the angle of approach to the religious phenomenon as a symbolic fact (representations of doctrinal, theological systems, etc.), the Adventist theology is a lure. Conclusively, Adventism has a civil and civic discourse which is built upon Judeo-Christian religious symbolism. Yet the mere use of this biblical symbolism in its rhetoric does not serve as theology, that is to say it does not play the role of "specific Adventist discourse on God".

Second, as a mediatization of a religious fact, the shift of the Adventist beliefs from Poultney's Morning Star lodge to the apparatus of the public debate reveals itself as carrying a populist approach by the very nature of its message. More precisely, this message focuses attention on the millenarian imaginary as the founding Christian heritage of American society, and contributes to its patrimonialization, by articulating its questioning and its legitimacy, or the utopian aim and ideological issues. Thus, Adventism offers itself as a grid of intelligibility for society without, however, producing the means to make its content evolve. As a religious fact, Adventism limits its purpose to forms. This is the reason why the preservation of its institutions prevails over ideological obedience.

Finally, from the perspective of mediatization of the Christian faith, the shift of the Adventist beliefs from Poultney's Morning Star Lodge to the American public sphere in the 19th century did not take place through evangelical rhetoric. It is not the effect of rhetoric of proclaiming the "good news", but of rhetoric of revival oriented towards a community institutionally bounded by an already established body of doctrine. This passage was promoted by a rhetoric of the journalistic information, "angels flying in mid heaven" at a time when the invention of the telegraph and the development of information and communication technologies conquered the world. This passage benefited from *ad-hoc* foundational "present truth" rhetoric to an audience. More precisely, this passage took place with the aid of rhetoric of public announcement, that is, of unfinished revelation implicitly activating the secularization of the letter of prophetic secrecy.

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