

PIERRE DE CHARENTENAY SJ
Civiltà Cattolica (Rome)
Gasson Chair at Boston College (USA)

The divorce between nation and religion

1. Secularization – 2. Globalization – 3. Conclusion

When I give this provocative title, I am well aware of the various systems of separation of Church and State. But the divorce between nation and religion has to be analyzed not with a juridical approach but more a cultural approach of the relation between a nation and the religion of the people of that nation. Even with the separation of Church and State, the identity of a nation has long been based on a culture and religion.

In recent history, where there was a nation, there was a religion. This is the well-known formula *Cujus regio ejus religio*. This went on for a long time, I would say until the 1960s, when a double movement starts, a movement of secularization and a movement of migration. This is the theme I want to develop. What is happened during that period? All the preceding systems of relation between nation and religion lost its stability and is transformed.

These movements and their effect shall now be examined.

1. Secularization

Secularization is a long process of taking distance from a relation to the transcendence and to the religion which supports that relation. People are living a secular life as their faith is no longer an inspiration¹. This is different from a secular ideology which advocates for the disappearance of religion.

¹ Many works have been written on the subject. For the basic tradition see: P. BERGER, *The sacred canopy. Elements of a sociological theory of religion*, Doubleday 1967; TH. LUCKMANN, *The invisible*

We know that the reasons for secularization are many, mainly philosophical and connected to the enlightenment, but there are also practical reasons related to consumer society. That is why it really begins in the 1960s with the commencement of a consumer society. The practical aspect of one's life changed through insurance, medicine, social preoccupations, holidays and leisure and so on. This touched a majority of the people, while the enlightenment touched only a small group.

Secularization is extreme in many places with a great weakness of religious practice. But it does not mean that religion has no sense in modernity or that it is just the concern of irrational people. For instance we can witness a lot of interesting initiatives in a secularized Europe. Various movements like Taizé, San Egidio, l'Arche of Jean Vanier and many charismatic groups have developed and attract a lot of young people. We see how many monasteries are becoming centers of prayer and greatly deepening faith. Places of pilgrimage like Fatima, Lourdes and Częstochowa have never been so frequented as ever before.

So, religion still has meaning in many ways but since it is not supported anymore by a religious culture, the number of practitioners in ordinary parishes has been greatly reduced. The Britons coming to Paris are a good example²: they were practicing their religion in their village because it was a local culture and a way of sharing the community life, but when they arrive in Paris, they stop practicing because they do not see the meaning of it. They are caught in the anonymity of the big city where there is no more support for the particular culture, and especially for religion. Nevertheless, 5% may go on practicing because they know religion has a profound personal meaning in their life.

The different countries and the different religions have reacted differently to that evolution. It started early in countries like France³, it arrived later in Canada (in the 1970s), and later in Belgium or Ireland (in the 1990s). It is arriving slowly in the US with the younger generation taking distance from the practice of their parents and grand-parents, and in Eastern Europe according to different patterns.

It has been argued that this theory of secularization was wrong, because it was predicting the disappearance of religion, while we would observe a revival of religions on the national or international scene. The reality is that the different forms of revival does not change that diagnosis of secularization. Practical indifference and

religion, Mac Millan 1967. More recently: S. DENÉFLE, *Sociologie de la sécularisation. Etre sans religion en France à la fin du XX siècle*, Paris 1997.

² Y. LAMBERT, *Dieu change en Bretagne. La religion à Limerzel de 1900 à nos jours*, Paris 1985.

³ A book was written as soon as in 1943 on the French situation: H. DANIEL, Y. GODIN, *La France pays de mission?*, Paris 1943.

ignorance are developing. The big difference is that in a secularized world some people of faith want to be visible. So you could make the interpretation that there is a general religious revival, which is not true.

On the international level, the religious revival has to be studied case by case: in Russia, the Orthodox practice experiences new developments (the reconstruction of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour of Moscow destroyed by Stalin) after 70 years of intimidation, while Catholics and Protestants can openly practice their faith. In Iran, there is a reaction to an economic and political development which forgot the religious and cultural dimension of the people. In India, Hinduism is instrumentalized for political purposes. In the Muslim world, the revival looks like a radicalization process in some countries, far from the reality of Islam.

Thus secularization provokes a separation of a national culture and a particular religion. The practice which remains with some individuals becomes detached from the national culture. New religious initiatives are often international ones. Some authors⁴ have called that phenomenon an “exculturation”. The personal practice is detached from the national culture. It is “excultured”, without any national support. Thus, the culture of a country is not anymore Catholic or Protestant, but secular.

This process has various consequences: it produces a divorce between believers and non-believers, who do not have the same references, while in the past, all would have the same religious and cultural background. In the eyes of the religious person, the national culture becomes pagan, because it does not have religious references anymore. That is why Donald Trump, candidate for American president, is saying that he will go back to saying “Merry Christmas”, while many people are just saying now Happy Holidays in the USA.

Another consequence is that it tends to create fundamentalism as a reaction to secularization. A lot of people would follow these groups as a reaction against secularization. And they do that in their own religion: orthodox Jews, Integristism in Catholicism, radical groups in Islam. In extremes, with international political connections with foreign radicalism, it can lead to terrorism.

The place of religion remains an issue on the question of the identity of a people. Religion does not have the power now to create a strong bond between citizens, like before, because of that secularization of the people. There are other reasons that we will see later. This does not mean that religions disregard the national context and local identities: many religious groups have been invited to become partners of public institutions in the elaboration of national politics in various

⁴ D. HERVIEU-LÉGER, *Catholicisme, la fin d'un monde*, Bayard 2003, p. 91, 99.

areas, like social development, ethical legislations on life and death, migration issues and so on.

We must have a special look at the Muslims in Europe: they have been secularized like the rest of the population. They do not apply Sharia law and do not want to. They have taken a very individualistic way of interpreting their religion. Some more orthodox Muslims like the famous Tariq Ramadam accepts to postpone or to forget momentarily the application of it, like the lapidation of a woman.

The integration of Islam in a national culture can take different forms: multiculturalism like in Great Britain (with the danger of an extreme model of Islam), or assimilation like in France⁵ (with the problem of the destruction of one's cultural identity, that some people want to express, and the impossibility of a 100% assimilation). Both models are in crisis at the extreme. The big change is that Muslims in Europe have formulated their faith in terms of values (family, place of women, peace, respect), not of norms (Sharia law). That is a big change, which allows the gap between the two laws, civil and religious.

At an international level, Islam is very diverse. Some countries with a strong Muslim identity will be intolerant, non-democratic, and fundamentalist, like in Saudi Arabia. Others like Tunisia have moved toward a respect and acceptation of all religions, and of democracy⁶. Secularization is touching the Muslim world, first in Europe, and then in some countries like Tunisia, Morocco and starting in Turkey. In countries like Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, we should have a look at the private practice of religion, which we can observe when they go to foreign countries.

One most traumatic effect of secularization is what we observe in the transmission of faith: faith is not transmitted automatically from one generation to the following as it used to be in the past. It just does not work anymore, because the public culture does not speak or refer to any religion. There is no public support for religion. In this case, the transmission works only through families who have a strong religious identity, and practice an authentic personal faith. Attempts at "religious education" in public schools remains very low or just wishful thinking in some countries.

In this secularized context, where free expression is largely possible, we observe a will to show more the signs of religion and practice. Believers insist on their identity because of secularization. You will have Catholic radio, Catholic journals, Catholic pilgrimage and so on, in order to reinforce the religious identity. The same

⁵ J. LAURENCE, J. VAÏSSE, *Intégrer l'islam, la France et ses musulmans: enjeux et réussites*, Paris 2006.

⁶ Four of their leaders received the Nobel Peace Prize for that in December 2015.

process occurs for other religions. Some Muslims will desire to express their religious belonging by wearing veils, even young people, which was not the case of the older generation who wanted to be assimilated in Christian countries. A secularized context is an open one for the expression and the research of faith. It demands authenticity, truth and transparency, which are qualities that attract an open dialogue with non-believers. In that sense, it is an invitation of a deepening of faith, which allows a strong and truthful inter religious dialogue.

The extreme reaction against secularization is the attack against what is considered to be blasphemy by groups who want to control their religious patrimony and the belonging of their members by denouncing the destruction or the use of their own tradition in art for instance. This is typical of the reaction of some religions in a secularized society. It is also true for all religions.

2. Globalization

This second process is going on at the same time as the first: but two things happen here.

The first touches the nation: national identity (large and/or small states) are challenged by a globally connected system. The Internet creates new communities, new social movements, without borders. National identity is particularly challenged in Europe where we can go from any place to any other place without borders, without passports and with the same currency (for the eurozone). There is a free market between all those who look for religions: it is all open.

The second is a movement of people with their own religious identity, through migration. Muslims go everywhere, through movement of populations⁷ Evangelicals are in many Muslim countries, even Algeria and Morocco. This has been going on since the 1960s but has been accelerated recently from the Evangelical side, with their presence in those Muslim countries.

So globalization has allowed all religions to go everywhere, through migrations and world media, without the support of a particular national culture. It has provoked many movements of religions in new territories where they did not used to be. This is sometime missionary work for the Evangelical, or it is just migration for the Muslims.

⁷ See: O. ROY, *L'islam mondialisé*, Paris 2002; O. ROY, *Islam et Occident*, Paris 2004; J. DAKHIA, *Islamicités*, Paris 2005.

All these movements demand from religion the acceptance of the democratic system⁸: Muslim, Catholics or Jews cannot impose their law to the country where they go. They have to accept that there is a gap between their religious norms and the civil law. This is something that all fundamentalisms reject: that is part of the challenge of our time, because religion remains an instrument of personal identification, amongst the strongest.

This process of world movement started very actively in the XIX century for Catholicism, with a huge movement of mission all around the world, including French and Irish missionaries in the US, US Jesuits in the Philippines, French Jesuits in Madagascar, etc.

This is because some have said that there are similarities in the globalization of Catholicism in the XIX century and the globalization of Islam in the XXI century: the same refusal of pluralism, conversion of “the barbarian” to the real religion, etc. But they are essential differences: Catholicism was very centralized, while Islam is not now. Islam is completely diverse all around the world as far as the relation between civil and religious law is concerned. The XIX century is also a time of formation of nations, especially in Europe (Belgium, Germany, Italy) and in the US, and religion was important at that time. Now we are in a time where nations are losing much of their identity and power due to the globalization of the economy, media and tourism. So the comparison between the two periods is not too helpful.

3. Conclusion

The combination of these two phenomenon, of secularization with this “exculturation” process and of migration, has provoked the presence of many religions in the same place. All religions experience that situation peacefully most of the time because everyone accepts the democratic principles. There is no longer a religious identity for a country. Divorce lies ahead between nation and religion.

We cannot say any more that France or Italy are Catholic. Europe is no longer a Catholic continent. It is a pluralistic religious continent, where many religions find their place in respect of the law. France and Germany have welcomed more than 4 or 5 million Muslims without that many problems (terrorism is not religious) precisely because the link between religion and nation is broken. Jews have been present for many centuries. Buddhism is coming with the installation of monasteries.

⁸ O. ROY, *La laïcité face à l'islam*, Paris 2005.

The case of Poland and Slovakia may be special because of the strong Catholic identity of these countries and the limited migratory movement to these lands. Nevertheless, secularization is slowly coming in, especially among the youth. But other countries of Eastern Europe like Hungary and Czech Republic have entered that process.

We have to reflect on the consequences of this change. There is a new challenge in the building of the identity of each citizen: it is not anymore only at the national level, but it is at the individual and community level, and at the international level.

The identity of a nation will not be based anymore on religion, but on a history (where religion is present), on the respect of human rights, on a balance between individual and collective rights, on secular values which anybody can hold whatever his or her religion is. Many people are rediscovering their national identity, but in a new way, open to others and not closed to oneself.

Globalization has changed many things: religions are not any more linked to specific lands and nations. New religious presences exist in different secularized context. But, and this is new, there is a great ignorance of the history and the origins of religion: this is one of the themes of Olivier Roy⁹. Many Muslims of Europe know little about Islam but they use it their way, as they want, and they transform it the way they want. But it is the same for Christians who know very little of their own roots and want to rebuild the past their own way.

Should the government help in keeping religion in the national culture? The relation between governments and religions are very different from one country to another according to their own system of separation of Church and state. The tradition in Europe is to have authorized religions, with which the State is collaborating in social, health or educational matters. The American system is more concerned with religious freedom, without control. The cultural level and the secularization process are out of reach of governments. But they should at least protect the religious freedom, against strong secularist movements which want to expel religions from the public sphere.

Divorce between national culture and religion is almost achieved. The “clash of civilizations” did not take place. The boundaries of our communities have changed: the national and religious boundaries do not coincide. We are in a world of mixed boundaries, local, national, international, where everyone has to decide where he or she belongs, especially as far as religion is concerned.

⁹ See his book: O. ROY, *La Sainte ignorance*, Paris 2008.

*

Abstract: In recent history where there was a nation, there was a religion, according to the famous formula *Cujus regio ejus religio*. But in the 1960s a double movement started, first concerning secularization which will lead people to what some authors have called an “exculturation”, when the personal practice is detached from the national culture. The second movement leads people to migration all over the world, with their own religions, Muslim people in Europe, or Evangelicals in Muslim countries. The culture of a country is not anymore Catholic or Protestant, but secular. Its identity has to find other roots than religion. This movement is developed differently according to the local culture. It has been very strong in Western Europe, and slower in some countries of Eastern Europe and the US. It can provoke fundamentalist reactions, in order to defend ones identity, but the divorce between nation and religion is on the way.

Keywords: nation, religion, secularization, globalisation, Muslim.

Streszczenie: Rozłam między narodowością i religią. W najnowszej historii mieliśmy do czynienia z koegzystencją narodowości i religii w myśl zasady *cujus regio ejus religio*. Jednakże w latach 60. XX w. zostały zapoczątkowane dwa zjawiska. Pierwszym z nich jest sekularyzacja, która prowadzi do tego, co niektórzy autorzy nazywają „ekskulturacją”, kiedy osobiste praktyki religijne zostają oderwane od kultury narodowej. Drugie zjawisko jest związane z globalną migracją ludzi z ich własną religią. Muzułmanie mieszkają w Europie, a przedstawiciele ruchów ewangelikalnych w krajach muzułmańskich. Kultura w poszczególnych krajach nie jest już katolicką czy protestancką, ale świecką. Jej tożsamość musi poszukiwać innych korzeni aniżeli religijne. Tendencje te rozwijają się inaczej niż zgodnie z kulturą lokalną. Były one silne w niektórych krajach Europy Wschodniej i w USA. Może to prowokować reakcje fundamentalistyczne, mające na celu obronę własnej tożsamości, ale rozłam między narodowością i religią jest dokonującym się procesem.

Słowa kluczowe: narodowość, religia, sekularyzacja, globalizacja, islam.