

## **Public Religions Revisited**

in Hent de Vries, ed. *Religion: Beyond the Concept* (Fordham U.P., 2008)  
pp. 101-119.

José Casanova  
Professor and Senior Fellow  
Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs  
Georgetown University  
[Jvc26@georgetown.edu](mailto:Jvc26@georgetown.edu)

It has been now over a decade since the publication of **Public Religions in the Modern World** and it can be asserted with some confidence that the thesis first presented there that we were witnessing a process of "de-privatization" of religion as a relatively global trend has been amply confirmed.<sup>1</sup> The most important contribution of the book, in my view however, was not so much the relatively prescient empirical observation of such a new global trend, but the analytical-theoretical and normative challenge to the liberal theory of privatization, namely the claim that the thesis of privatization of religion in the modern world was no longer defensible either empirically or normatively. In a certain sense, the best confirmation of the validity of the "de-privatization" of religion can be found in the heartland of secularization, that is, in Western European societies.

To be sure, there is very little evidence of any kind of religious revival among the European population, if one excludes the significant influx of new immigrant religions.<sup>2</sup> But religion has certainly returned as a contentious issue to the public sphere of European societies. It may be premature to speak of a post-secular Europe, but certainly one can sense a significant shift in the European *Zeitgeist*. At first the thesis of the de-privatization of religion as a new global trend did not find much resonance in Europe. The privatization of religion was simply taken too much for granted both as a normal empirical fact and as the norm for modern European societies. The concept of modern public religion was still too dissonant and religious revivals elsewhere could simply be explained or rather explained away as the rise of fundamentalism in not yet modern societies. But recently, in the last three-four years at least, there has been a noticeable change in attitude and attention throughout Europe. Every second

---

1 José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994)

2 José Casanova, "Die religiöse Lage in Europa," in Hans Joas und Klaus Wiegandt, ed., *Säkularisierung und die Weltreligionen* (Frankfurt, Fischer, 2007)

week one learns of a new major conference on religion being planned somewhere in Europe, or of the establishment of some newly funded research center or research project on “religion and politics” or on "immigration and religion" or on “religion and violence” or on “interreligious dialogue.” Most tellingly, there are very few voices in Europe today simply restating the old thesis of privatization unrevised and unadorned. Even the self-assured French *laïcité* is on the defensive and ready to make some concessions.

The terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the resonance of the discourse of the clash of civilizations have certainly played an important role in focusing European attention on issues of religion. But it would be a big mistake to attribute this new attention solely or even mainly to the rise of so-called Islamic fundamentalism and the threats and challenges which it poses to the West and particularly to Europe. Internal European transformations contribute also to the new public interest in religion. General processes of globalization, the global growth of transnational migration and the very process of European integration, particularly the possibility of Turkey joining the European Union, are presenting crucial challenges not only to the European model of the national welfare state, but also to the different kinds of religious-secular and church-state settlements that the various European countries had achieved in post-World War II Europe.<sup>3</sup>

But the purpose of revisiting "Public Religions" is not simply self-congratulatory, but rather it is a critical attempt to point out what I see as the main shortcomings or limitations of the argument I developed there. The main shortcomings of my argument can be grouped into three categories:

---

3 José Casanova, "Religion, European secular identities, and European Integration," in Timothy A. Byrnes and Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *Religion in an Expanding Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) pp. 65-92.

1) Its Western-centrism

2) The attempt to restrict, at least normatively, modern public religions to the public sphere of civil society

3) The empirical framing of the study as church-state-nation-civil society relations from a comparative national perspective, neglecting the transnational global dimensions

In many respects those short-comings were consciously imposed self-limitations for good methodological, substantive, and strategic reasons. I already acknowledged then in the introduction that it was a "western-centered study, both in terms of the particular cases chosen for investigation and in terms of the normative perspective guiding the investigation."<sup>4</sup> The self-limitation of the study to Western Christendom, in terms of: a) the genealogical reconstruction of particular historical processes of secularization within Latin Christendom (rather than viewing secularization as a general universal process of human and societal development); b) the restriction of the study to mainly Catholicism and Protestantism as particular forms of religion; and c) the restriction to Western (European and post-colonial) societies, was fully justified. At the time, I pleaded "limited time, knowledge, and resources, as well as a postmodern enhanced awareness of the dangers of excessive homogenization," as well, one could add, of the dangers of "orientalism."

Strategically, I was convinced that it was necessary to challenge first empirically and normatively the theory of secularization immanently, as it were from within, within Western societies and within Western discourse, before one could undertake the even more daunting yet necessary task of going beyond Western Christendom and adopting a global comparative perspective. As I indicated then, "such an immense task would have required a modification

---

<sup>4</sup> Casanova, *Public Religions*, p. 10.

and expansion of my typology of public religions, of the theory of religious and political differentiation, and of the general analytical framework employed."<sup>5</sup> To a certain extent my work since the publication of the book has been an attempt to address and transcend the three mentioned shortcomings. I've been impelled in this direction, partly by the poignant critique of Talal Asad, partly by my own research on transnational migration and transnational religion, and above all by the inevitability of confronting processes of globalization and their effects on all religions.

Let me now sketch very briefly the way in which I've been trying to address those shortcomings at the three levels:

**1. Rethinking Secularization beyond the West: Towards a global comparative perspective**

**2. Public Religions beyond Ecclesiastical Dis-Establishment and Civil Society: the dual clause and the "twin tolerations"**

**3. Transnational religions, transnational imagined communities and globalization**

**1. Rethinking Secularization beyond the West: a global comparative perspective<sup>6</sup>**

While the two minor sub-theses of the theory of secularization, namely "the decline of religion" and "the privatization of religion," have undergone numerous critiques and revisions in the last 15 years, the core of the thesis, namely the understanding of secularization as a single process of functional differentiation of the various institutional spheres or sub-systems of modern societies remains relatively uncontested in the social sciences, particularly within European

---

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid* p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> For a more elaborated version of the following section see, José Casanova, "Rethinking Secularization: A global comparative perspective," *The Hedgehog Review*, Spring/Summer 2006.

sociology. Yet one should ask whether it is appropriate to subsume the multiple and very diverse historical patterns of differentiation and fusion of the various institutional spheres (that is, church and state, state and economy, economy and science) that one finds throughout the history of modern Western societies into a single teleological process of modern functional differentiation.<sup>7</sup>

Talal Asad was the first to call our attention to the fact that “the historical process of secularization effects a remarkable ideological inversion.... For at one time ‘the secular’ was a part of a theological discourse (*saeculum*),” while later “the religious” is constituted by secular political and scientific discourses, so that “religion” itself as a historical category and as a universal globalized concept emerges as a construction of Western secular modernity.<sup>8</sup>

But as I pointed out in my response to Asad’s poignant critique, contemporary genealogies of secularism fail to recognize the extent to which the formation of the secular is itself inextricably linked with the internal transformations of European Christianity, from the so-called Papal Revolution to the Protestant Reformation, and from the ascetic and pietistic sects of the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries to the emergence of evangelical, denominational Protestantism in nineteenth-century America.<sup>9</sup> Should one define these transformations as a process of internal secularization of Western Christianity, or as the cunning of secular reason, or both? A proper rethinking of secularization will require a critical examination of the diverse patterns of differentiation and fusion of the religious and the secular and their mutual constitution across all the religions of the world, and specially across the so-

---

7 For a poignant critique of the thesis of differentiation see, Charles Tilly, "Four more pernicious postulates," in *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (New York: Russell Sage, ) pp. 43-60.

8 Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003) p. 192.

9 José Casanova, "Secularization Revisited: A Reply to Talal Asad," in David Scott and Charles Hirschkind eds., *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and his Interlocutors*" (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006) pp. 12-30.

called "world religions," even though we are aware thanks to Tomoko Mazusawa how much the "world religions" are also invented constructs of Western secular Christian modernity.<sup>10</sup>

The contextualization of our categories, such as "religion," "the secular", "the theologico-political" and so on, should begin with the recognition of the particular Christian historicity of Western European developments, as well as of the multiple and diverse historical patterns of secularization and differentiation within European and Western societies. Such a recognition in turn should allow a less Euro-centric comparative analysis of patterns of differentiation and secularization in other civilizations and world religions, and more importantly the further recognition that with the world-historical process of globalization initiated by the European colonial expansion, all these processes everywhere are dynamically interrelated and mutually constituted.

There are multiple and diverse secularizations in the West and multiple and diverse Western modernities, and they are still mostly associated with fundamental historical differences between Catholic, Protestant, and Byzantine Christianity, and between Lutheran and Calvinist Protestantism. As David Martin has shown, in the Latin-Catholic cultural area, and to some extent throughout Continental Europe, there was a collision between religion and the differentiated secular spheres—that is, between Catholic Christianity and modern science, modern capitalism, and the modern state.<sup>11</sup> As a result of this protracted clash, the Enlightenment critique of religion found here ample resonance; the secularist genealogy of modernity was constructed as a triumphant emancipation of reason, freedom, and worldly pursuits from the constraints of religion; and practically every “progressive” European social

---

10 Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

11 David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978).

movement from the time of the French Revolution to the present was informed by secularism. The secularist self-narratives, which have informed functionalist theories of differentiation and secularization, have envisioned this process as the emancipation and expansion of the secular spheres at the expense of a much diminished and confined, though also newly differentiated, religious sphere. The boundaries are well kept; only they are relocated, drastically pushing religion into the margins and into the private sphere.

In the Anglo-Protestant and in Calvinist cultural areas, by contrast, and particularly in the United States, there was “collusion” between religion and the secular differentiated spheres. There is little historical evidence of any tension between American Protestantism and capitalism and very little manifest tension between science and religion in America prior to the Darwinian crisis at the end of the nineteenth century. The American Enlightenment had hardly any anti-religious component. Even “the separation of church and state” that was constitutionally codified in the dual clause of the First Amendment, was promoted by the religious sects and had as much the purpose of protecting “the free exercise” of religion from state interference and from ecclesiastical establishments as that of protecting the federal secular state from any religious entanglement. It is rare, at least until very recently, to find any “progressive” social movement in America appealing to “secularist” values; appeals to the Gospel and to “Christian” values are certainly much more common throughout the history of American social movements, as well as in the discourse of American presidents.

The purpose of this comparison is not to reiterate the well-known fact that American society is more “religious” and therefore less “secular” than European societies. While the first may be true, the second proposition does not follow. On the contrary, the United States has always been the paradigmatic form of a modern secular, differentiated society. Yet the triumph

of “the secular” came aided by religion rather than at its expense, and the boundaries themselves became so diffused that, at least by European ecclesiastical standards, it is not clear where religion begins and the secular ends. Yet it would be ludicrous to argue that the United States is a less functionally differentiated society, and therefore less modern, and therefore less secular, than France or Sweden. On the contrary, one could argue that there is less functional differentiation of state, economy, science, etc., in *étatiste-laïciste* France than in the United States, but this does not make France either less modern or less secular than the United States.

If the European concept of secularization is not a particularly relevant category for the “Christian” United States, much less may it be directly applicable to other axial civilizations with very different modes of structuration of the religious and the secular. As an analytical conceptualization of a historical process, secularization is a category that makes sense within the context of the particular internal and external dynamics of the transformation of Western European Christianity from the Middle Ages to the present. But the category becomes problematic once it is generalized as a universal process of societal development and once it is transferred to other world religions and other civilizational areas with very different dynamics of structuration of the relations and tensions between religion and world, or between cosmological transcendence and worldly immanence.

The category of secularization could hardly be applicable, for instance, to such “religions” as Confucianism or Taoism, insofar as they are not characterized by high tension with “the world,” insofar as their model of transcendence can hardly be called “religious,” and insofar as they have no ecclesiastical organization. In a sense those religions that have always been “worldly” and “lay” do not need to undergo a process of secularization. To secularize—that is, “to make worldly” or “to transfer from ecclesiastical to civil use”—is a process that

does not make much sense in such a civilizational context. In this respect, China and the Confucian civilizational area have been “secular” *avant la lettre*. It is the postulated intrinsic correlation between modernization and secularization that is highly problematic. There can be modern societies like the U.S., which are secular while deeply religious; and there can be pre-modern societies like China, which from our Euro-centric religious perspective look deeply secular and irreligious.

The concept of multiple modernities, first developed by S. N. Eisenstadt, is a more adequate conceptualization and pragmatic vision of modern global trends than either secular cosmopolitanism or the clash of civilizations. In a certain sense, it shares elements from both. Like cosmopolitanism, the concept of multiple modernities maintains that there are some common elements or traits shared by all “modern” societies that help to distinguish them from their “traditional” or pre-modern forms. But these modern traits or principles attain multiple forms and diverse institutionalizations. Moreover, many of these institutionalizations are continuous or congruent with the traditional historical civilizations. Thus, there is both a civilization of modernity and the continuous transformation of the pre-modern historical civilizations under modern conditions, which help to shape the multiple modernities.

The multiple modernities position rejects both the notion of a modern radical break with traditions as well as the notion of an essential modern continuity with tradition. All traditions and civilizations are radically transformed in the processes of modernization, but they also have the possibility of shaping in particular ways the institutionalization of modern "religious" and "secular" traits. Traditions are forced to respond and adjust to modern conditions, but in the process of reformulating their traditions for modern contexts, they also help to shape the particular forms of "religious" and "secular" modernity.

## **2. Public Religions beyond Ecclesiastical Dis-Establishment and Civil Society: the dual clause and the "twin tolerations"**

My own analysis of the deprivatization of religion tried to contain, at least normatively, public religions within the public sphere of civil society, without allowing them to spillover onto political society or the democratic state. Today I must recognize my own modern Western secular prejudices and the particular hermeneutic Catholic and "ecclesiastical" perspective on religion which I adopted in my comparative analysis of the relations between church, state, nation and civil society in Western Catholic and Protestant societies. The moment one adopts a global comparative perspective, one must admit that the deprivatization of religion is unlikely to be contained within the public sphere of civil society, within the territorial boundaries of the nation-state, and within the constitutional premises of ecclesiastical disestablishment and juridical separation of church and state. We need to go beyond the secularist discourse of separation and beyond the public sphere of civil society, in order to address the real issues of democratic politics across the world. Alfred Stepan's model of the "twin tolerations" offers in my view a more fruitful approach.<sup>12</sup>

By my hermeneutic Catholic perspective I mean the fact that my theory of "modern public religion" was very much informed by the experience of the official Catholic *aggiornamento* of the 1960s. Of all the world religions none had seemed as threatened at its core by the emergence of the modern world system of sovereign territorial states as the Roman

---

12 Alfred Stepan, "The World's Religious Systems and Democracy: Crafting the 'Twin Tolerations'," in *Arguing Comparative Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 218-225.

church. The Protestant Reformation and the ensuing dissolution of Western Christendom undermined the role of the Papacy as the spiritual head of a universal Christian monarchy represented by the Holy Roman Empire. The Papacy not only lost spiritual supremacy over Protestant territories and peoples, but it lost control as well of the emerging national Catholic churches to Caesaro-papist Catholic monarchs.<sup>13</sup> At the Congress of Westphalia (1648), the concerted effort of Catholic and Protestant princes successfully shut out the papacy from European international and internal national affairs. One by one, from the 16th to the 19th century most of the transnational dimensions of Medieval Catholicism receded or disappeared altogether. It is not surprising therefore that the Catholic church remained for centuries adamantly anti-modern and developed a negative philosophy of history, which conceptualized modern processes as so many heretical deviations from the Catholic ideal of Medieval Christendom. But the lifeworld of Catholicism did not remain frozen in the past of Medieval Christendom, nor were the Catholic reactions to so many modern developments (Counter Reformation, Counter Enlightenment, Counter Revolution, etc.) simply reactionary regressions to an unchanging tradition, but rather reactive attempts, often awkward ones, to fashion its own Catholic versions of modernity. Only a teleological normative version of a single progressive and unilinear Western modernity can construct such historical responses as fundamentalist reactions.

The Catholic *aggiornamento* to secular modernity culminated in the Second Vatican Council and is expressed in the two most important documents of the Council, the Declaration on Religious Freedom (*Dignitatis Humanae*) and the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the

---

13 For a more extensive elaboration of this argument see, José Casanova, "Globalizing Catholicism and the Return to a 'Universal' Church," in Susanne Rudolph and James Piscatori, eds., *Transnational Religion and Fading States*. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997) pp.

Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*). The official recognition of the inalienable right of every individual to religious freedom, based on the sacred dignity of the human person meant that the church abandoned its traditional compulsory character and accepted the modern principle of disestablishment and the separation of church and state. *Gaudium et Spes* represented, in turn, the acceptance of the religious legitimacy of the modern secular age and of the modern secular world, putting an end to the negative philosophy of history that had characterized the official Catholic position since the Counter-Reformation.

The *aggiornamento* led to a fundamental relocation of the Catholic church from a state-oriented to a civil society-oriented institution. Moreover, the official adoption of the modern discourse of human rights allowed the Catholic church to play a crucial role in opposition to authoritarian regimes and in processes of democratization throughout the Catholic world. But the Catholic church's embrace of voluntary disestablishment did not mean the privatization of Catholicism but rather its relocation from the state to the public sphere of civil society. This is the hermeneutic context within which I developed the analytical framework of modern public religions and the theory of de-privatization. But obviously, there are many other forms of modern public religions and other forms of de-privatization.

Yet, the transformation of Catholicism is particularly instructive because the modern discourse of secularism was often constructed in relation to Catholicism. There was always some justification, based on the official position of the Catholic church, for the modern secular anti-Catholic discourse. The church after all had resisted or judged negatively most modern historical developments: the Protestant Reformation, the modern secular state, the modern scientific revolution, the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and the 1848 democratic revolutions and had officially condemned as "modern errors" or heresies the discourse of

human rights, liberalism, Americanism and Modernism. Yet, to a certain extent, Catholicism was also a construct and an effect of the anti-Catholic discourse, a discourse that can be traced back to the Protestant critique of Catholicism, through the Enlightenment critique of religion, through liberalism and secularism as critiques of the Ancient Regime and all the alliances of "throne and altar." Catholicism always constructed itself discursively in dialectic relation with the anti-Catholic discourse of the time. But the varieties of practices and mentalities within the life world of Catholicism always surpassed the homogeneous discursive construct.

Irrespective of how one judges the old anti-Catholic prejudices, the swift and radical transformation of the political culture of Catholic countries as the result of the official reformulation of the religious teachings of the Catholic church in Vatican II puts into question the notion of the unchanging essence of even a world religion as dogmatically structured as Catholicism. The premise of an unchanging core essence should even be less valid for other "world religions" like Islam, which have a less dogmatically structured doctrinal core or a more pluralistic and contested system of authoritative interpretation of the religious tradition. Islam today has in fact replaced Catholicism as the other of Western secular modernity.

The contemporary global discourse on Islam as a fundamentalist anti-modern and undemocratic religion shows striking similarities with the old discourse on Catholicism that predominated in Anglo-Protestant societies, particularly in the United States, from the mid-19th century to the mid-20th century.<sup>14</sup> Both discourses have been built upon three similar premises or principles: a) a theologico-political distinction between "civilized" and "barbaric" religions, that is, between religions which were compatible with Enlightenment principles and liberal

---

14 José Casanova, "Catholic and Muslim Politics in Comparative Perspective," *The Taiwan Journal of Democracy* Vol 1:2, December, 2005, pp.

democratic politics and religions which were grounded in traditions that resisted the progressive claims of the Enlightenment philosophy of history, liberalism and secularism; b) a nativist anti-immigrant posture that postulated the inassimilability of foreign immigrants due to their illiberal and uncivilized social customs and habits supposedly grounded in their traditional religion; and c) transnational attachments and loyalties to either a foreign religious authority (i.e., the papacy) or to a transnational religious community (i.e., the *umma*) that appeared incompatible with republican citizen principles and the exclusive claims of modern nationalism. Any of these three principles may have been more or less salient at any particular time and place. It was their superimposition, however, that has given the anti-Catholic and anti-Muslim discourses their compelling effect.

As in the case of Catholicism before, the internal and external debates over the compatibility between Islam and democracy and modern individual freedoms is taking place at three separate yet interrelated levels: 1) in debates over “Islamism”, the transnational structure of the world of Islam and the alleged clash of civilizations between Islam and the West at the geo-political level, with clear parallels with earlier debates on the clash between “Republicanism” and “Romanism;” 2) in debates over political Islam and over the democratic legitimacy of Muslim political parties in Turkey and elsewhere, which like their at first equally suspect Catholic counterparts may establish new forms of Muslim Democracy, akin to Christian Democracy; and 3) in debates over the proper articulation of a Muslim *ummah* in immigrant diasporic contexts outside of *Dar el Islam*.

Both discourses, the anti-Catholic as well as the anti-Muslim, have been grounded in the same logic of modern secularism. The "secular" nature of the modern European state and the "secular" character of European democracy serve as one of the foundational myths of the

contemporary European identity. There is a frequently heard secular European narrative, usually offered as a genealogical explanation and as a normative justification for the secular character of European democracy, which has the following schematic structure: Once upon a time in medieval Europe there was, as is typical of pre-modern societies, a fusion of religion and politics. But this fusion, under the new conditions of religious diversity, extreme sectarianism, and conflict created by the Protestant Reformation led to the nasty, brutish and long-lasting religious wars of the early modern era that left European societies in ruin. The secularization of the state was the felicitous response to this catastrophic experience, which apparently has indelibly marked the collective memory of European societies. The Enlightenment did the rest. Modern Europeans learned to separate religion, politics, and science. Most importantly, they learned to tame the religious passions and to dissipate obscurantist fanaticism by banishing religion to a protected private sphere, while establishing an open, liberal, secular public sphere where freedom of expression and public reason dominate. Those are the favorable secular foundations upon which democracy grows and thrives. As the tragic stories of contemporary violent religious conflicts around the world show, the unfortunate deprivatization of religion and its return to the public sphere will need to be managed carefully if one is to avoid undermining those fragile foundations.

Until very recently, moreover, the story of secularization was embedded within an even broader narrative of general teleological processes of social modernization and progressive human development. The West simply showed the future to the rest of the world. Today, there is an increasing recognition that we may be entering a global "post-secular" age and that, as Mark Lilla pointed out in a cover story of *The New York Times Magazine* "the great separation" of religion and politics may be a rather unique and exceptional historical achievement, the more

to be cherished and protected.<sup>15</sup>

It should be obvious that such a historical narrative, grounded in the self-understanding of the Enlightenment critique of religion, is indeed a historical myth. The religious wars of Early Modern Europe and particularly the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) did not ensue, at least not immediately, into the secular state but rather into the confessional one. The principle *cuius regio eius religio*, established first at the Peace of Augsburg and reiterated at the Treaty of Westphalia, is not the formative principle of the modern secular democratic state, but rather that of the modern confessional territorial absolutist state. Nowhere in Europe did religious conflict lead to the secularization of state and politics, but rather to the confessionalization of the state and to the territorialization of religions and peoples. Moreover, this early modern dual pattern of confessionalization and territorialization was already well established before the religious wars and even before the Protestant Reformation. The Spanish Catholic state under the Catholic Kings serves as the first paradigmatic model of state confessionalization and religious territorialization. The expulsion of Spanish Jews and Muslims who refused to convert to Catholicism is the logical consequence of such a dynamic of state formation. Ethno-religious cleansing, in this respect, stands at the very origin of the early modern European state. Religious minorities caught in the wrong confessional territory were offered not secular toleration, much less freedom of religion, but the "freedom" to emigrate. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, with its multi-confessional Catholic, Protestant-Lutheran, and Orthodox ruling aristocracies, offers the unique exception of a major early modern European state that resisted the general European dynamic of territorial confessionalization and offered

---

15 Mark Lilla, "The Great Separation: the Politics of God," *The New York Times Magazine*, August 19, 2007, pp. 28-34, 50, 54-55, and *The Stillborn God* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007).

refuge to religious minorities and radical sects from all over Europe, well before North America and other overseas colonies offered a more safe haven. For the next three hundred years, European societies continued exporting all their religious minorities overseas, while the confessional territorial boundaries between Catholic and Protestant and between Lutheran and Calvinist remained basically frozen until the drastic secularization of post-World War II. European societies made those confessional boundaries seemingly irrelevant.

In fact, without taking into account this long historical pattern of confessionalization of states, peoples and territories, it is not possible to understand the difficulties which every continental European state has, irrespective of the fact whether they have maintained formal establishment or are constitutionally secular, and the difficulties which every European society has, the most secular as well as the most religious ones, in accommodating religious diversity, and particularly in incorporating immigrant religions.<sup>16</sup> It is true that in the last two hundred years all European states underwent some process of secularization and today all of them are formally and/or substantively secular. But the pattern of caesaro-papist regulation and control of religion established by the early modern confessional absolutist state, - by Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Calvinist, and Orthodox alike - has been maintained, basically unchallenged, until the present.

The particular historical arrangements of separation and church-state relations in Europe tend to oscillate between three patterns: a) that of formal church establishment with relative "free exercise" of religion in society, (England, Scotland, the Nordic Lutheran countries and Greece are examples of this pattern); b) that of formal disestablishment of the church and

---

16 José Casanova, "Immigration and the New Religious Pluralism: A EU/US Comparison," in Thomas Banchoff, ed., *The New Religious Pluralism and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) pp.

constitutional separation of the secular state with strict regulation and control of religion by the state (France and the former communist states followed such a model), and c) that of formal separation of church and state with informal single or multi-church quasi-establishment along with various corporatist-consociational arrangements and church-state entanglements (bi-confessional countries such as Germany, Holland, Switzerland, the remaining Catholic countries and all post-Communist states follow some version of this model). All of them, with the exception of the United Kingdom, share moreover a pattern of limited religious pluralism. In terms of religious majority/minority relations, the model throughout Europe has remained either that of one single national church that claims to be coextensive with the nation or that of two (usually Catholic and Protestant) competing but territorially based national churches, along with an indefinite but limited number of religious minorities, which have assumed the structural position of sects *vis-à-vis* the national churches.

Indeed, despite all the normative discourse and the often repeated trope of the modern secular democratic state and the privatization of religion, it is legitimate to question how "secular" are really the European states? How tall and solid are the "walls of separation" between national state and national church and between religion and politics across Europe? To which extent should one attribute the indisputable success of post-World War II Western European democracies to the secularization of society and the privatization of religion, as it is so frequently done? If one looks at the reality of "really existing" European democracies rather than at the official secularist discourse, it becomes obvious that most European states are by no means strictly secular nor do they tend to live up to the myth of secular neutrality.<sup>17</sup>

France is the only Western European state which is officially and proudly "secular," that

---

17 Stepan, "Crafting the 'Twin Tolerations'," pp. 218-225.

is, that defines itself and its democracy as regulated by the principles of *laïcité*. The disestablishment of the Catholic Church and the hostile separation of church and state had the function of freeing the laic state from ecclesiastical control but not that of freeing religion from state control. As a secularist republican *etatist* ideology, *laïcité* functions as a civil religion in competition with ecclesiastical religion. It requires the strict privatization of religion and the radical separation of any private religious or ethnic (comunitarian) identity from the common public identity of all citizens. The state protects the freedom of religion of all its citizens, Catholic, Protestant, Jew and Muslim alike, so long as religion remains private. But the French state is far from being neutral or distant from religious institutions. It frequently regulates religious affairs, establishes institutional relations with the Catholic church through concordats, has tried at different times to organize the other religious communities, Protestant, Jewish and Muslim alike, into church-like ecclesiastical institutions, which the state can use as interlocutor and institutional partner. As illustration of the kind of entanglement between national church and state, approximately 20% of French pupils attend religious Catholic schools, which cover approximately 80% of their finances with state funds. Muslim schools are far from receiving equal state support. Indeed many Muslim girls attend Catholic schools in order to circumvent the ban on veiling in public schools.

By contrast, there are several European countries with long-standing democracies which have maintained established churches. They include England and Scotland within the United Kingdom and all the Scandinavian Lutheran countries: Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Finland, and, until the year 2000, Sweden. Of the new democracies, Greece has also maintained the establishment of the Greek Orthodox Church. This means that with the exception of the Catholic Church, which has eschewed establishment in every recent (post-1974) transition to

democracy in Southern Europe (Portugal, Spain) and in Eastern Europe (Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia), every other major branch of Christianity (Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Orthodox) is officially established somewhere in Europe, without apparently jeopardizing democracy in those countries. Since on the other hand there are many historical examples of European states that were secular and non-democratic, the Soviet-type communist regimes being the most obvious case, one can therefore safely conclude that the strict secular separation of church and state is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for democracy.

Within this group of European countries with established churches, moreover, there are significant variations in the levels of religious pluralism, from England, one of the most religiously pluralistic countries of Western Europe, to Denmark, one of the least religiously pluralistic countries. One can safely assume that the more religiously pluralistic the country, the easier will it be to accommodate additional religious diversity. More important, however, than the absolute number of minority religions may be the willingness of the established church to tolerate dissenting sectarian movements within its own sphere, such as Methodism and other evangelical movements within Anglicanism, or the evangelical sectarian movement within Lutheranism in Norway. The level of secularization does not seem to be a relevant factor here. Denmark is undoubtedly one of the most secular countries of Europe, or at least one of the countries with the lowest level of regular church attendance (less than 5%, a figure comparable to that of East Germany), with one of the highest levels of religious affiliation (close to 90% of the population declare their affiliation with the Danish Lutheran Church, a figure comparable to that of much more religious Catholic countries such as Ireland or Portugal), and one of the lowest levels of religious diversity (only 2% of Danes declare other religious affiliation).

One could of course retort that European societies are de facto so secularized and, as a consequence, what remains of religion has become so temperate that both constitutional establishment and the various institutional church-state entanglements are as a matter of fact innocuous, if not completely irrelevant. This may well be the case for the national majorities, whether they maintain implicit (i.e. vicarious) or explicit religious affiliation with their national churches. But it can hardly be said to be the case for most religious minorities, least of all for new immigrant religious minorities. What is clear is that no European state can be said to meet the criteria of a secular neutral state, which is supposed to offer equal access, equal distance, equal respect or equal support to all the religions within its territory. In a certain sense, the principle *cuius regio ejus religio* has remained a constant in most European societies, even after the transference of sovereignty from the monarch to the people or the nation, and after drastic secularization. In any case, neither democratization nor secularization have altered radically the general continental European pattern of very limited religious pluralism. It is not surprising therefore that European societies encounter difficulties accommodating the religious diversity brought by new immigrants.

Alfred Stepan has pointed out how the most important empirical analytical theories of democracy, from Robert Dahl to Juan Linz, do not include secularism or strict separation as one of the institutional requirements for democracy, as prominent normative liberal theories such as those of John Rawls or Bruce Ackerman tend to do. As an alternative to secularist principles or norms, Stepan has proposed the model of the "twin tolerations," which he describes as "the minimal boundaries of freedom of action that must somehow be crafted for political institutions *vis-à-vis* religious authorities, and for religious individuals and groups *vis-à-vis* political institutions." Religious authorities must "tolerate" the autonomy of democratically elected

governments without claiming constitutionally privileged prerogatives to mandate or to veto public policy. Democratic political institutions, in turn, must "tolerate" the autonomy of religious individuals and groups not only to complete freedom to worship privately, but also to advance publicly their values in civil society and to sponsor organizations and movements in political society, as long as they do not violate democratic rules and adhere to the rule of law. Within this framework of mutual autonomy, Stepan concludes, "there can be an extraordinarily broad range of concrete patterns of religion-state relations in political systems that would meet our minimal definition of democracy."<sup>18</sup>

### **3. Transnational religions, transnational imagined communities and globalization.**

The empirical case studies in **Public Religions** were still framed as national case studies under the premises of the kind of methodological nationalism that has framed so much of the comparative work in the social sciences, whether comparative historical sociology, or comparative politics, or comparative economic development. Personally, I had been of course well aware of the transnational dimensions of Catholicism. But for me, the truly revealing lesson of the kind of comparative Catholicism which I undertook, was the extent to which all the transnational dimensions of Catholicism which had been characteristic of medieval Christendom, from the transnational Papacy to transnational religious orders, to ecumenical councils, to transnational universities and centers of Catholic learning, to transnational pilgrimages, all of them had been substantially diminished, if not altogether disappeared, from the 16th century with the emergence of the Westphalian system of territorial nation-states to the early 20th century. Since the end of the 19th century one can witness the reemergence and reconstruction of all the transnational dimensions of Catholicism on a new global basis.

---

<sup>18</sup> Stepan, *Ibid.* p.217.

Catholicism has been reconstituted as a new transnational and de-territorialized global religious regime.<sup>19</sup>

The trajectory and fate of the Jesuits from their foundation to the present offer a perfect illustration of the ebbs and flows of national and transnational Catholic dynamics. They were established at the University of Paris in mid-16th century by a group of Spanish students at a time when both the faculty and the student body of every major European university was still transnational. Soon they became the paradigmatic transnational order organized militantly to defend the universal, i.e. transnational, claims of the Papacy against the Protestant Reformation and against the emerging absolutist *raison d'etat*. They also spearheaded the early modern phase of Catholic colonial globalization from East Asia to Brazil. But with the emergence of the modern system of nation states, the papacy not only lost control of the Catholic national churches, but the Catholic monarchs themselves attained veto power over the process of papal nomination. In mid-18th century one Catholic monarch after another expelled the Jesuits from their Catholic domains and then conspired together through their "crown cardinals" to elect Lorenzo Ganganelli, who as Pope Clement XIV decreed the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773. Amazingly, the Jesuits survived by finding refuge in non-Catholic territories, in Orthodox Russia and in post-colonial Protestant America.

With the nationalization and democratization of sovereignty in the 19th century we find again the frequent expulsion of the Jesuits from Catholic territories after every liberal revolution. Secularizing laws of education led to their expulsion from France, while they were expelled from Germany during the *Kulturkampf*. Yet during World War I, at a time when Pope Benedict XIV proved to be one of the few sane voices in Europe condemning the senseless

---

<sup>19</sup> Casanova, "Globalizing Catholicism."

slaughter of European youth, the papal order heard much more loudly the nationalist calls to arms. French as well as German Jesuits returned to serve their nations and to die for their fatherlands. It would be unthinkable today for the Jesuits or any other Catholic transnational order to join a nationalist war.

From 1870 to the present one can witness the reconstitution of all the transnational dimensions of Catholicism that had nearly disappeared with the emergence of the Westphalian system of sovereign territorial states: uncontested papal supremacy, ecumenical councils, transnational religious orders, transnational cadres, a transnational Curia, transnational centers of Catholic learning, transnational pilgrimages, and transnational Catholic movements.

If the transformation of contemporary Catholicism illustrates the opportunities which the process of globalization offers to a transnational religious regime with a highly centralized structure and an imposing transnational network of human, institutional and material resources, which feels therefore confident in its ability to thrive in a relatively open global system of religious regimes, contemporary Pentecostalism may serve to illustrate the equally favorable opportunities which globalization offers to a highly decentralized religion, with no historical links to tradition and no territorial roots or identity, and which therefore can make itself at home anywhere in the globe where the Spirit moves.<sup>20</sup>

We make take Brazil as a paradigmatic example. The transnational character of Brazilian Pentecostalism is inscribed in its very beginnings. It arrived from the United States already in 1910, just a few years after the Azusa Street revival, brought by European immigrants, by an Italian and two Swedish missionaries who had encountered Pentecostalism in Chicago. Yet almost immediately Pentecostalism assumed an indigenous Brazilian form. In

---

20 José Casanova, "Religion, the New Millennium and Globalization," *Sociology of Religion* 62:4, 2001, pp 415-441.

this sense, Brazilian Pentecostalism represents a dual process of de-territorialization: North-American Christianity is de-territorialized by taking indigenous roots in Brazil, a Catholic territory, which therefore leads to the de-territorialization of Catholicism from Brazil. This is the most important consequence of the explosive growth of Pentecostalism throughout Latin America. Latin America has ceased being Catholic territory, even if Catholicism continues to be for the foreseeable future the majority religion of all Latin American countries. It is estimated that currently two-thirds of all Latin American Protestants are Pentecostals-Charismatics. Latin America, particularly Brazil, has become in a very short time a world center of Pentecostal Christianity, wherefrom it has now begun to radiate in all directions, including back into the United States.

The growth of Pentecostal Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa (Ghana, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, South Africa) is no less explosive. Moreover, African Pentecostalism is as local, indigenous and autonomous as its Latin American counterpart. The same could be said about Pentecostalism in Korea or in China. Korean missionaries, for instance, are becoming ubiquitous in evangelical missions throughout Asia. Indeed, Pentecostalism's expansion must be seen as a multi-source diffusion of parallel developments across the globe. Pentecostalism is not a religion with a particular territorial center like the Mormon church, which is rapidly gaining worldwide diffusion. Nor is it a transnational religious regime like Catholicism with global reach. As Paul Freston has pointed out, "new churches are local expressions of a global culture, characterized by parallel invention, complex diffusion and international networks with multilateral flows."<sup>21</sup> Pentecostalism may be said to be the first truly global religion. Moreover,

---

21 Paul Freston, "Charismatic Evangelicals in Latin America: Mission and Politics on the Frontiers of Protestant Growth," in Stephen Hunt, Malcolm Hamilton and Tony Walker, eds., *Charismatic Christianity. Sociological Perspectives* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997) p. 185.

Pentecostalism is simultaneously global and local. In this respect, it is historically unique and unprecedented. It is the historically first and paradigmatic case of a de-centered and de-territorialized global culture.

Similar illustrations could be offered from other branches of Christianity and from other world religions. The dynamic core of Anglicanism no longer resides in post-Christian England. But today, immigrants from all over the British post-colonial world are reviving Anglicanism in secular England. Think of the transnational politics of the global Anglican Communion over the ordination of homosexual or female bishops, playing out between England, Africa, North America, and the Caribbean. The Patriarch of Constantinople is reemerging, at least symbolically, as a de-territorialized global center of Eastern Christianity, in competition with the Moscow Patriarchate and with the other territorial autocephalous national Orthodox churches.

For the world religions globalization offers to all the opportunity to become for the first time truly world religions, i.e. global, but also the threat of de-territorialization. The opportunities are greatest for those world religions like Islam and Buddhism which always had a transnational structure. The threat greatest for those embedded in civilizational territories like Islam and Hinduism. But through world-wide migrations they are also becoming global and de-territorialized. Indeed, their diasporas are becoming dynamic centers for their global transformation affecting their civilizational homes.

Trans-societal migrations and the world religions, at times separately but often in conjunction with each other, have always served as important carriers of processes of globalization. In a certain sense, one could argue that the successive waves of migration of homo sapiens out of Africa some 50,000 years ago and the subsequent settlements throughout

the globe constitute the point of departure of the process of globalization. But these migrations had no subjective dimension of reflexive consciousness and can only now be reconstructed objectively thanks to advances in DNA and other scientific technologies. By contrast, the subjective dimension of imagining a single humanity sharing the same global space and the same global time was first anticipated in all universalistic world religions. Yet, these imaginary anticipations, while serving as precondition for the civilizational expansion of the world religions, lacked a structural, i.e. objective and material global base.

Until very recently, the civilizational *oikoumenē* of all world religions had very clear territorial limits, set by the very world regimes in which those religions were civilizational and thus territorially embedded and by the geographically circumscribed limitations of the existing means of communication. The Bishop of Rome may have always claimed to speak *urbi et orbi*, to the city and to the world. But in fact this has become a reality first in the 20th century. What constitutes the truly novel aspect of the present global condition is precisely the fact that all world religions can be reconstituted for the first time truly as de-territorialized global imagined communities, detached from the civilizational settings in which they have been traditionally embedded. Paraphrasing Arjun Appadurai's image of "modernity at large", one could say that the world religions, through the linking of electronic mass media and mass migration, are being reconstituted as de-territorialized global religions "at large" or as global *ummas*.<sup>22</sup>

For that very reason, Samuel Huntington's thesis of the impending clash of civilizations is simultaneously illuminating of the present global condition and profoundly misleading.<sup>23</sup> It

---

22 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996)

23 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994)

is illuminating in so far as it was one of the first prominent voices calling attention to the increasing relevance of civilizations and civilizational identities in the emerging global order and in global conflicts. But it is also profoundly misleading insofar as it still conceives of civilizations as territorial geopolitical units, akin to superpowers, having some world religion as its cultural core.

This process of dissociation of territory, religion and civilizational culture is by no means uniform or homogeneous across world religions and civilizations, and indeed it encounters much resistance on the part of states which still aspire not only to the monopolistic control of the means of violence but also to the administrative regulation of religious groups and cultural identities over their territories, as well as on the part of “churches”, in the broad Weberian sense of the term, as religious institutions or as religious imagined communities which claim or aspire to religious monopoly over their civilizational or national territories.

There is a fundamental tension in the modern world between two well-recognized principles. There is on the one hand the principle of the inalienable right of the individual person to freedom of conscience and therefore to freedom of religion, but also to freedom of conversion. This principle has assumed in all modern democratic societies the form of an unquestioned universal human right. Nobody should be coerced or forced to believe or not to believe any particular religious doctrine. Consequently, everybody has also the right to believe or not to believe any particular religious doctrine, including the right to conversion to any particular religion. On the other hand, there is also the increasing recognition of the collective rights of peoples to protect and preserve their traditions and their cultures from colonial, imperialist and predatory practices. Such recognition is primarily enshrined in United Nations documents on the rights of indigenous people. But it could easily be turned into a general

principle of the reciprocal rights and duties of all peoples of the world to respect each other's traditions and cultures, constituting the basis of what could be called an emerging global denominationalism.

Actually, one finds practically everywhere similar tensions between the protectionist impulse to claim religious monopoly over national or civilizational territories and the ecumenical impulse to present one's own particular religion as the response to the universal needs of global humanity. Transnational migrations and the emergence of diasporas of all world religions beyond their civilizational territories make this tension visible everywhere. Of course, neither transnational migrations nor the resulting diasporas are a novel phenomenon per se. It is the general, almost universal character of the phenomenon under novel global conditions that makes it particularly relevant for all world religions.

When it comes to Islam, or to an imagined transnational community of Muslims, we in the West are naturally obsessed with state islamism and *khilafist jihādism* as the two contemporary dominant forms of globalized Islam. But I would like to argue that the majoritarian currents of transnational Islam today and the ones likely to have the greatest impact on the future transformation of Islam are transnational networks and movements of Muslim renewal, equally disaffected from state Islamism and transnational *jihādism*. They constitute the networks of a loosely organized and pluralistic transnational *ummah*, or global Muslim civil society: from the “evangelical” Tablighi Jama'at, a faith movement highly active throughout the Muslim world and in Muslim diasporas, whose annual conferences in India represent the second largest world gathering of Muslims after the *hajj*, and other transnational *dawa* networks, to the neo-Sufist Fethullah Gülen's educational network, active throughout Turkey, Turkish diasporas and the Turkic republics of Central Asia, and other Sufi brotherhoods

such as the Mourids of West Africa who have also expanded their transnational networks into the Muslim diasporas of Europe and North America.

One could make a similar analysis of the formation of a global Hindu *umma* linking the civilizational home, "Mother India," with old diasporic colonial Hindu communities across the former British Empire from South East Asia, to South Africa, to the Caribbean and with new immigrant Hindu communities throughout the West, from the British Isles, to North America, and to Australia. The purification of separate Muslim and Hindu identities in the diasporas of the sub-continent, from South Africa to Guyana, among peoples who have lived together either as the *colored* under *apartheid*, or as Indo-Caribbean in contrast to Afro-Caribbean, is one of the most telling manifestation of this global phenomenon.

It is this proliferation of de-territorialized transnational global imagined communities, encompassing the so-called old world religions as well as many new forms of hybrid globalized religions such as the Bahais, Moonies, Hare Krishnas, Afro-American religions, Falun Gong, etc, that I call the emerging global denominationalism. Of course, they compete with many other forms of secular imagined communities or ummas. But all those transnational imagined religious communities present fundamental challenges to both to international relations theories which are still functioning within the premises of a Westphalian international system and to secular cosmopolitan theories of globalization.

I use cosmopolitanism here in the broad sense of any worldview that envisions the future global order as a single relatively homogeneous and unified global economic, political and cultural system or as a single human "universal civilization." To a certain extent, most theories of globalization share similar cosmopolitan assumptions insofar as they assume that economic and technological globalization will determine the shape of global society and of global culture.

Though more complex, Luhmannian theories of “world society” are based on similar assumptions.

Cosmopolitanism builds upon developmental theories of modernization that envision social change as a global expansion of Western modernity, which is understood not as the hegemonic expansion of a particular social formation, but as a universal process of human development. In most cosmopolitan accounts, religion either does not exist, or it is simply “invisible” in Thomas Luckmann’s sense of the term of being an individualized and privatized form of salvation or quest for meaning, that is irrelevant to the functioning of the primary institutions of modern society. In its collective dimension, religion is simply reduced to just another form of cultural group identity. If and when religion emerges in the public sphere and has to be taken seriously, it is usually branded either as anti-modern fundamentalism resisting processes of secularization, or as a form of traditionalist collective identity reaction to the threat of globalization. In other words, religion in the eyes of cosmopolitan elites is either irrelevant or reactive. Indeed, when it comes to religion all forms of cosmopolitanism share at least implicitly the basic tenets of the theory of secularization which the social sciences and modern liberal political ideologies have inherited from the Enlightenment critique of religion. Cosmopolitanism remains a faithful child of the European Enlightenment.

It is time to revise our teleological conceptions of a global cosmopolitan secular modernity against which we can characterize the religious “other” as “fundamentalist.” It is time to make room for more complex, nuanced and reflexive categories which will help us to understand better the already emerging global system of multiple modernities. As long as we maintain this concept of a single cosmopolitan modernity as a general process of secular differentiation, indeed as a normative global project, we are compelled to characterize all forms

of religion we cannot accept as our own as threatening “fundamentalism” and we become ourselves unwittingly partisans in a supposedly worldwide secular-religious conflict and may even help turn the so-called “clash of civilizations” into a self-fulfilling prophecy. What is at stake, ultimately, is the recognition of the irremediable plurality of universalisms and the multiplicity of modernities, namely, that every universalism and every modernity is particularistic. One could say that we are moving from a condition of competing particularist universalisms to a new condition of global denominational contextualism.

Under conditions of globalization, moreover, all the world religions do not only draw upon their own traditions but also increasingly upon one another. Intercivilizational encounters, cultural imitations and borrowings, diasporic diffusions, hybridity, creolization, and transcultural hyphenations are as much part and parcel of the global present as Western hegemony, cosmopolitan homogenization, religious fundamentalism or the clash of civilizations.