Rethinking Religion and World Affairs

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2. Bellin, in her review article, identifies the perspective: "Perceived as limited in theoretical reach and methodological sophistication, studies of religion in politics have typically been shunted to the margin of the profession." "Faith in Politics," 315.

3. Kissinger contrasts the two images of the world. The medieval universalist perspective: "The world was conceived as mirroring the Heavens. Just as one God ruled in Heaven, so one emperor would rule over the secular world and one pope over the Universal Church." In the modern world: "With the concept of unity collapsing, the emerging states of Europe needed some principle to justify their heresy and to regulate their relations. They found it in the concepts of raison d'état and the balance of power." Henry Kissinger, Diplomacy (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 56, 58.

4. The normative vision that held the medieval order together was a mix of faith and reason, the latter embodied in the philosophy of Natural Law. When the religious unity of the West collapsed, three key figures—Vitoria, Suarez, and Grotius—sought to salvage the Natural Law philosophy of statecraft as a source of restraint. Eventually, the field of positive international law emerged from their efforts.

5. Describing the transition away from medieval ideas achieved by Richelieu, Kissinger comments: "In an age still dominated by religious zeal and ideological fanaticism, a dispassionate foreign policy free of moral imperatives stood out like a snow-covered Alp in the desert." Diplomacy, 62.


7. Thomas F. Farr, "Diplomacy in an Age of Faith,” Foreign Affairs 87:2 (March–April 2008), 114. Farr’s summary statement is: “The problem is rooted in the secularist habits of thought pervasive within the U.S. foreign policy community. Most analysts lack the vocabulary and the imagination to fashion remedies that draw on religion, a tool that is often overlooked in the development of foreign policy.”


10. Ibid., 25.

11. Ibid.


Rethinking Public Religions
José Casanova

The aim of this chapter is to revisit the argument first presented in Public Religions in the Modern World in order to ascertain the extent to which the theoretical-analytical framework developed there needs to be critically revised and expanded to make it more applicable beyond Western Christian contexts. The central thesis of the book was that we were witnessing a process of deprivatization of religion as a relatively global trend. As an empirical claim, the thesis has been amply confirmed by subsequent developments practically everywhere. In a sense, the best confirmation of the thesis can actually be found in the heartland of secularization, that is, in Western European societies. Even though 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, religion has certainly returned as a contentious issue to the public sphere of most European societies.

In this respect, more important than the empirical confirmation of the global trend of deprivatization of religion has been the widespread acceptance of the basic analytical-theoretical and normative claims of the thesis, namely, that the deprivatization of religion did not have to be interpreted necessarily as an antidemocratic, antireligious, or antidemocratic reaction. In my view, the most important contribution of the book was that it offered to prescriptive theories of privatization of religion and to the secularist assumptions built into social theories of Western modernity and in most liberal theories of modern democratic politics. The critique was made possible by two new analytical contributions.

The first contribution was the analytical disaggregation of the theory of secularization into three disparate components or subtheories: (1) the theory of the institutional differentiation of the secular spheres, such as state, economy, and science, from religious institutions and norms; (2) the theory of the decline of religious belief and practices as a concomitant of levels of modernization; and (3) the theory of privatization of religion as a precondition of modern democratic politics. Such an analytical distinction enables testing each of the three subtheories separately as different empirically falsifiable propositions. Because in Europe the three processes of secular differentiation, religious decline, and privatization have been historically interconnected, the tendency has been to view all three processes as intrinsically
interrelated components of a general teleological process of secularization and modernization, rather than as particular contingent developments. In the United States, by contrast, one finds a paradigmatic process of secular differentiation that is not accompanied either by a process of religious decline or by the confinement of religion to the private sphere. Processes of modernization and democratization in American society have often been accompanied by religious revivals, and the wall of separation between church and state, though much stricter than the one erected in most European societies, does not imply the rigid separation of religion and politics.

The second main analytical contribution was the distinction of three different types of public religion, corresponding to the analytical distinction between three different areas of a modern democratic polity: state, political society, and civil society. Established state churches would be the paradigmatic example of public religion at the state level. Religions that mobilize their institutional resources for political competition through political parties, social movements, or lobbying agencies would be examples of public religion at the level of political society. Finally, public religions at the civil society level would be exemplified by religions that enter the public square—that is, the undifferentiated public sphere of civil society—to participate in open public debates about the res publica, that is, about public issues, public affairs, public policy, and the common good or commonwealth.

Obviously, this is an analytical, “ideal-typical” distinction. In actual empirical reality, the boundaries between the three areas of the polity are by no means so clear-cut, and therefore the delineation of the different types of public religion can also not always be clear and distinct. Nevertheless, the purpose of the analytical distinction was to put into question any rigid theory of privatization that would like to restrict religion to the private sphere on the grounds that any form of public religion represents a threat to the public sphere or to democratic politics.

Although I think that the analytical-theoretical framework developed in *Public Religions* is generally useful and still defensible today, I can see three main shortcomings or limitations of the argument: (1) its Western-Christian centricism; (2) the attempt to restrict, at least normatively, modern public religions to the public sphere of civil society; and (3) the empirical framing of the study as church-state-nation-civil society relations from a comparative national perspective, neglecting the transnational and global dimensions.

Since my study was focused on the two main branches of Western Christianity, Catholicism and Protestantism, it could function with a relatively reflexive category of “religion.” The moment one adopts a global comparative perspective, however, this is no longer possible. In fact, within the academic discipline of religious studies, the very category of religion has undergone numerous challenges, as well as all kinds of critical genealogical deconstructions.

Thus, any discussion of religion in the contemporary global age should begin with the recognition of a paradox, namely, that scholars of religion are questioning the validity of the category of religion at the very same moment when the discursive reality of religion is more widespread than ever before and has become, for the first time, global. I am not claiming that people today everywhere are either more or less religious than they may have been in the past. Here I am bracketing out altogether the question that has dominated most theories of secularization, namely, whether religious beliefs and practices are declining or growing as a general modern trend. I am claiming only that religion as a discursive reality—indeed, as an abstract category and as a system of classification of reality, used by modern individuals as well as by modern societies across the world—has become an undisputable global social fact.

It is obvious that when people around the world use the same category of religion, they actually mean very different things. The actual concrete meaning of whatever people denominate as religion can be elucidated only in the context of their particular discursive practices. But the very fact that the same category of religion is being used globally across cultures and civilizations testifies to the global expansion of the modern secular-religious system of classification of reality that first emerged in the modern Christian West. This implies the need to reflect more critically on this particular modern system of classification.

Rethinking Secularization beyond the West: Toward a Global Comparative Perspective

While the two minority subthemes of the theory of secularization, namely, the decline of religion and the privatization of religion, have undergone numerous critiques and revisions in the last fifteen years, the core of the thesis, the understanding of secularization as a single process of functional differentiation of the various institutional spheres or subsystems of modern societies, remains relatively uncontested in the social sciences, particularly within European sociology. Yet, I do not think 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.

Moreover, rather than viewing secularization as a general universal process of human and societal development culminating in secular modernity, one should begin with the recognition that the very term *secularization* derives from a unique Western Christian theological category, that of the *saeculum*, which has no equivalent term in other world religions, not even in Eastern Christianity. The modern Western process of secularization, therefore, is a particular historical dynamic that can best be interpreted as a response and reaction to the particular medieval Latin Christian system of classification of all reality into spiritual and temporal, religious and secular.

As Charles Taylor has clearly shown, the historical process of modern secularization begins as a process of internal secular reform within Latin Christendom as
an attempt to spiritualize the temporal and to bring the religious life of perfection out of the monasteries into the saeculum, thus literally as an attempt to secularize the religious. These medieval movements of Christian reform already established the basic patterns of secularization that would be later radicalized by the Protestant Reformation and by the French Revolution.3

The Protestant path of secularization, which attained its paradigmatic manifestation in the Anglo-Saxon Calvinist cultural area, particularly in the United States, is characterized by a blurring of the boundaries and by a mutual reciprocal infusion of the religious and the secular, in a sense making the religious secular and the secular religious. 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 was as much about protecting the free exercise of religion from state interference and from ecclesiastical establishments as it was about protecting the federal secular state from any religious entanglement. This pattern of secularization does not necessarily entail the decline of religion. On the contrary, from the American Revolution till the present, processes of radical social change and secular modernization have often been accompanied by great awakenings and by religious growth.

The French-Latin-Catholic path, by contrast, takes the form of laicization and is basically marked by a civil-ecclesiastical and laical-clerical antagonistic dynamic. Here the boundaries between the religious and the secular are rigidly maintained, but those boundaries are pushed into the margins, aiming to contain, privatize, and marginalize everything religious, while excluding it from any visible presence in the secular public sphere. When the secularization of monasteries took place first during the French Revolution and later in subsequent liberal revolutions, the explicit purpose of breaking down the monastery walls was not to bring the religious life into the secular world but rather to laicize those religious places, dissolving and emptying their religious content and making the religious persons, monks and nuns, civil and laical before forcing them into the world, now conceived as merely a secular place emptied of religious symbols and religious meanings. This could well serve as the basic metaphor of all subtraction narratives of secular modernity, which tend to understand the secular as merely the space left behind when this-worldly reality is emptied of religion.

A recognition of the multiple and diverse historical patterns of secularization and differentiation within European and Western societies should allow a less Eurocentric comparative analysis of patterns of differentiation and secularization in other civilizations and world religions and, more important, 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.

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 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. Moreover, in the same way as Western secular modernity is fundamentally and inevitably post-Christian, the emerging multiple modernities in the different postcolonial civilizational areas are likely to be post-Hindu, post-Confucian, or post-Muslim; that is, they will also be a modern refashioning and transformation of already existing civilizational patterns and social imaginaries.

Public Religions beyond Ecclesiastical Disestablishment
and Civil Society

THE DUAL CLAUSE AND THE “TWIN TOLERATIONS”

My own analysis of the privatization of religion tried to contain, at least normatively, public religions within the public sphere of civil society, without allowing them to spill over into 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 that 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 privatization 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 to address the real issues of democratic politics across the world.

My theory of modern public religion was largely informed by the experience of the Catholic aggiornamento of the 1960s. 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. The most important document of the Second Vatican Council, Gaudium et Spes, represented the church’s 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 deprivatization. But obviously, there are many other forms of modern public religions and other forms of deprivatization.

I cannot find a compelling reason, on either democratic or liberal grounds, to in principle banish religion from the public democratic sphere. One could at most, on pragmatic historical grounds, defend the need for separation of church and state, although I am no longer convinced that complete separation is either a necessary or a sufficient condition for democracy. In any case, the attempt to establish a wall of separation between religion and politics is both unjustified and probably counterproductive for democracy itself. Curtailing the free exercise of religion per se must lead to curtailing the free exercise of the civil and political rights of religious citizens. Particular religious discourses or particular religious practices may be objectionable and susceptible to legal prohibition on some democratic or liberal ground, but not because they are religious per se.

Toqueville was arguably the only modern social theorist who anticipated, rather presciently, that the democratization of politics and the entrance of ordinary people into the political arena would augment, rather than diminish, the public relevance of religion. The history of democratic politics throughout the world has confirmed Toqueville's assumptions. Religious issues, religious resources, interdenominational conflicts, and secular-religious cleavages have all been relatively central to electoral democratic politics and to the politics of civil society throughout the history of democracy.

As the example of many modern secular authoritarian and totalitarian states have shown, from the Soviet Union to Kemalist Turkey, strict no establishment is by no means a sufficient condition for democracy. On the other hand, several countries with at least nominal establishment, such as England or Lutheran Scandinavian countries, have a relatively commendable record of democratic freedoms and of protection of the rights of minorities, including religious ones. It would seem, therefore, that strict separation is not a necessary condition for democracy. Indeed, one could advance the proposition that of the two clauses of the First Amendment, "free exercise" is the one that stands out as a normative democratic principle in itself, while the no establishment principle is defensible insofar as it might be a necessary means to free exercise and to equal rights. In other words, secularist principles per se may be defensible on some other ground, but not as intrinsically liberal democratic ones.

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 an institutional requirement 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 "two tolerations" between religious and political institutions and authorities. Within this framework of mutual autonomy and toleration, Stepan concludes that "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."24

Notwithstanding the official discourse of European secular democracy, the complex diversity of institutional patterns of church-state relations in Europe's "really existing democracies" offers a perfect illustration of Stepan's argument. Indeed, only a handful of European states may be said to be strictly secular, and none of them lives up to the myth of secular neutrality. Even the French state, the only self-defined secularist state in Western Europe, is far from being neutral or distant from religious institutions. It frequently regulates religious affairs, has established institutional relations with the Catholic Church through concordats, and has tried at different times to organize the other religious communities, Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim alike, into churchlike ecclesiastical institutions, which the state can use as interlocutor and institutional partner.

At the other extreme, several European countries with long-standing democracies have maintained officially established or national churches, including the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, the Lutheran churches in most Nordic countries, and the Orthodox Church in Greece. Ironically, this means that with the exception of the Catholic Church, which has eschewed establishment in every recent transition to democracy in Southern and Eastern Europe, every other major branch of Christianity (Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Orthodox) is officially established somewhere in Europe, without apparently jeopardizing democracy in those countries.

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.

One should remember also that the drastic secularization of most Western European societies came after the consolidation of democracy, not before, and therefore it would be incongruent to present not only the secularization of the state and of politics but also the secularization of society as a condition for democracy. Moreover, at one time or another, most Continental European societies developed confessionally religious parties, which played a crucial role in the democratization of those societies. Even those confessionally parties that initially emerged as antiliberal and at least ideologically as antidemocratic, as was the case with most Catholic parties in the nineteenth century, ended up playing a very important role in the democratization of their societies. This is the paradox of Christian Democracy so well analyzed by Stathis Kalyvas. The story of the transformation from Political Catholicism to Christian Democracy is particularly relevant at a time when the
alleged incompatibility of Islam and democracy and the supposedly antideocratic nature of Muslim and other religious parties is so frequently and publicly debated.  

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, comparative politics, or comparative economic development. While one may take for granted the transnational dimensions of Catholicism, what is truly revealing is the extent to which, from the sixteenth to the early twentieth century, all the transnational dimensions of Catholicism that had been characteristic of medieval Christendom, from the transnational papacy to transnational religious orders, ecumenical councils, transnational universities and centers of Catholic learning, and transnational pilgrimages, had all been substantially diminished, if they had not altogether disappeared. Since the end of the nineteenth century, however, one can witness the reemergence and reconstruction of all the transnational dimensions of Catholicism on a new global basis.

Catholicism has been reconstituted as a new transnational and deterritorialized global religious regime. Other world religions are undergoing their own peculiar transformations as a response to the same global processes. The contemporary worldwide expansion of Pentecostalism may serve to illustrate the relatively favorable opportunities globalization offers to a highly decentralized religion, with no historical links to tradition and no territorial roots or identity, which therefore can make itself at home anywhere in the globe where the Spirit moves.

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

Until very recently, the civilizational 

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 became a reality first in the twentieth century, what constitutes the truly novel aspect of the present global condition precisely the fact that all world religions can be reconstituted for the first time truly as deterritorialized 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 deterritorialized global religions at large or as global ummas.  

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. It is illuminating insofar as it calls 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.

When it comes to Islam, there is today, perhaps unavoidably, an obsession with state Islamism and khilafist jihādīsm as the two contemporary dominant forms of globalized Islam. But one could 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 the state Islamism and transnational jihādīsm. They constitute the networks of a loosely organized and pluralist transnational ummah, or global Muslim civil society: from the "evangelical" Tablighi Jama'at and other transnational dawa networks, to the neo-Sufi Fethullah Gülen's educational network, to other Sufi brotherhoods, such as the Mourids of West Africa, all of which have 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 ummah linking the civilizational home, "Mother India," with old diasporic colonial Hindu communities across the former British Empire from Southeast Asia, to South Africa, to the Caribbean and with new immigrant Hindu communities throughout the West. It is this proliferation of deterritorialized transnational global imagined communities, encompassing the so-called old world religions, as well as many new forms of hybrid globalized religions, such as the Baha'is, Moonies, Hare Krishnas, Afro-American religions, and Falun Gong, that I call the emerging global denominationalism. Of course, they compete with modern nationalism and with many other forms of secular imagined communities. But all those transnational imagined religious communities present fundamental challenges to international relations theories that are still functioning within the premises of a Westphalian international system and to secular cosmopolitan theories of globalization.
Notes


Annotated Bibliography


An invaluable source on “illiberal” religious political movements around the world, which summarizes the findings of The Fundamentalism Project: highly recommended, despite the problematic assumption that they are all manifestations of a singular global religious fundamentalism, resisting modern secularization.


A pathbreaking “genealogical” account of the secular, which builds upon Asad’s pioneering Genealogies of Religion. It has been the single most influential source in reorienting the focus of much of social science from the study of “religion” to the comparative study of “the secular” and “secularisms.”


A sociologically grounded theoretical political critique of secularism as a model of governance of religious diversity and a compelling normative defense of democratic pluralism that incorporates religious groups into its institutional arrangements.


An invaluable reconstruction of the emerging world system of religions as a function of processes of globalization that illuminates both the role of globalization in the contemporary transformation of all religions and the central role of religion in ongoing processes of globalization.


A pioneering book that brings recent debates about the religious-secular divide, depolarization, and the global resurgence of religion into the center of international relations, challenging in the process the core secularist assumptions of the field of IR.


A spirited, though not fully convincing, defense of the traditional theory of secularization based on extremely rich and interesting data from the World Values Surveys that seem to confirm a positive strong correlation between religious beliefs and socioeconomic insecurity. An invaluable source of information, full of original analytical insights, within an oversimplified theory of religion and history.


The best analytical, phenomenological, and genealogical account we have of our modern, secular condition by one of the most important philosophers of our time. It challenges equally all the received positions on secularization, secular modernity, and secularism, making every oversimplification look simplistic.