RELIGION, IRRELIGION AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

The problem of exclusionary secularism

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The purpose of this paper is to reflect on the place of religion in a civil society, understood as a *type* of society that is an order of both freedom and civility (Pérez-Díaz, 1994). The core of the institutional architecture of a *civil* society is what might be called *embedded liberalism,* or the institutions of limited and responsible government: the guaranty of private property and free markets, the rule of law, the division of power between the three branches of government, a representative government, and a free public sphere that gives voice to private interests and initiatives, articulates public opinion, and provides *fora* for a reasoned discussion of the public good. Since Alexis de Tocqueville's classic treatise on American democracy, the political tradition of liberalism has also stressed another core feature of a civil-democratic society: an active citizenry that engages in voluntary associations pursuing all kinds of civic purposes. It is assumed that the civic bonds of voluntary associations empower citizens, enhancing their capacity both to influence and resist government action. Associational affiliations break the trap of social isolation and foster citizens' sense of political efficacy, preventing democracy turning into a new form of despotism, and allowing minorities to counter the weight of majorities, marshalling influence beyond their numerical weight.

This tocquevillean strand of thought has recently been revived by the debate on the impact of social capital on democratic governance (Putnam, 2000). The concept of social capital refers to both social relations –a structural attribute- and the attitudes and expectations nurtured by those social relations –a cultural attribute-. The social relations that constitute social capital are of two types: informal friendship networks and the formal civic networks of associational affiliation. It is argued that these social networks foster expectations of reciprocity, generalized trust and other "habits of the heart" that are beneficial to both the individuals involved in them (and, therefore, they function as a private good), and to the community where they operate (and, therefore, they partake of the nature of public goods). As a private good, social capital fosters the capabilities for action of individuals, because it allows them to trust and count on the cooperation of others. As a public good, social capital produces synergies and externalities that, among other things, enhance the accountability and responsiveness of governments to citizens' demands, improving the quality of democracy, and making for better governance. Thus, social capital theory restates the tocquevillean claim that a robust associational sector is a necessary condition of civil-democratic governance.

The idea of social capital, by pointing to social structure as the fountainhead of the civic culture that sustains liberal democracy, bridges social structure, culture, and democratic politics, and makes the latter dependent on the former. However, in this paper

we take the opposite view and look at culture –understood in the broadest sense to encompass ideas and ideologies- as an independent factor shaping both civil society and democratic governance. In this paper I contend that a set of religion related values were of paramount importance in the historical genesis of civil society, understood either as a new type of society or as a part of society, and that they continue to be essential for its viability in both the present and the future. Among such religion related values stand out the values of religious freedom, the respect of religious feelings and experiences, and the tolerance of religious dissent and religious pluralism. These religion related values -and the institutional procedures they have inspired- were aimed at exalting both the existential and civic value of religion, and at preserving religious freedom by sheltering religion from the encroachments of the state and the pressures of hostile majorities. However, the current spread of a variety of secularism that we call *liberal exclusionary secularism*, poses a threat for the religion related values that belong to the core of the cultural tradition that sustains civil society. Liberal exclusionary secularism denies the cultural value of religion and strives to enclose it within the bounds of the private sphere. Though exclusionary secularism may tolerate religion to the extent that it remains private, it does not respect it –because it considers religion valueless-, and it is, by and large, hostile to it, though this hostility rarely manifests in violence –as it happened in the past with anticlericalism, another variety of exclusionary secularism.

Contemporary liberal exclusionary secularism is a new brand of secularism, which in part continues, and in part differs from, previous historical modes of secularism. Thus, with respect to nineteenth century's secularism, which rested on the positivist faith on scientific knowledge as a sufficient means for human betterment, and on the belief that modern science had rendered religion obsolete, current liberal exclusionary secularism is less theological and more in tune with the post-modernist distrust of grand narratives and the relativization of truth. However, liberal exclusionary secularism still sticks to the opposition between secular reason and religious truth, and demands that for religious claims to be admissible they have to be expressed in the language of secular reason. In this respect, liberal exclusionary secularism defends what amounts to the imperialism of secular reason.

It should be stressed that current exclusionary secularism is *liberal*, by opposition to the *totalitarian* and *atheistic* secularism of communist regimes, which adopted secularism as the ideology of the state, and enforced it to secularize the societies under their grip, either by banishing religion from public life or by putting it under the tight control of the state apparatus. Liberal exclusionary secularism, instead, does not aim at

banishing religion (otherwise it would not be liberal), but wants to confine it within the bounds of the private sphere, considering religion a private affair, not unlike personal hobbies or personal preferences and inclinations. Liberal exclusionary secularism endorses religious freedom in the private sphere, but it is distrustful of religion as soon as it trespasses the boundary that encloses the private sphere and becomes a public force. When religion behaves as a public force that wants its voice to be heard in the public square, liberal exclusionary secularism stops endorsing the banner of freedom *of* religion, to brandish the banner of freedom *from* religion.

Finally, unlike *anticlericalism*, which was the brand of exclusionary secularism that developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the Catholic countries of Southern Europe (where the Catholic Church had rallied against both political liberalism and socialism), which agitated the masses against the Catholic Church and, occasionally, indulged in collective violence against it. The new brand of liberal exclusionary secularism abstains from promoting violence against organized religion (again, otherwise it would not qualify as liberal). However, liberal exclusionary secularism retains a feature of the old anticlericalism: its strong dislike of Catholicism in particular and of Christianity in general. In this respect, liberal exclusionary secularism is as *Christophobic* as the old anticlericalism, though for different reasons.

Current liberal exclusionary secularism rests on two different types of cultural foundations, one is intellectual and explicit, and the other is implicit or cultural. The intellectual foundation is the late political philosophy of liberalism, in particular the principle of state neutrality (or the priority of the *right* over the *good*), and the idea of the unencumbered self as a criterion to judge the acceptability of beliefs with its political corollary that the only beliefs that are worth of government support are those freely chosen by an unencumbered self (Kymlicka, 1990).

The principle of state neutrality prescribes that the state must be neutral in the face of competing conceptions of the good, or that the state's actions must not be justified by appealing to a particular conception of the good. This principle leads to granting priority to decision procedures over substantive ethical ideals, or to granting priority to rights over the good. Since religion is a conception of the good in competition with other conceptions, the principle of state neutrality prescribes that the state must refrain from giving its support to religion. As a matter of fact, this principle has had two kinds of consequences: 1) the outright banning of religious symbols from public institutions, on the grounds that they are particularistic, and their substitution by secular symbols which are deemed to be universalistic and non-exclusionary, and 2) the discrimination of religious initiatives

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competing with secular initiatives for government support. Both religiously inspired and religiously oriented social initiatives tend to be excluded from government support on the grounds that they endorse a particular version of the good, while the latter receive government support on the grounds that they do no expose a particular conception of the good and are neutral in the face of rival conceptions of the good.

The idea of the unencumbered self characterizes human beings as choice-makers who, when allowed to choose freely, are able to make rational or informed choices on all issues that concern their lives, including the choice of beliefs. Since human beings have the capacity to choose what is best for them, it is the responsibility of the state not to encumber this capacity by restricting the individual's range of choice, but to maximize it by removing all possible external restraints on free choice (Kymlicka, 1990). The implication is that the only legitimate beliefs are those that have been freely chosen by the individual without external restraints. Thus, the idea of the unencumbered self, and its attending emphasis in individual rational-utilitarian choice, is inimical to tradition as a source of belief, and it is also inimical to the conception of belief as either mandate of conscience or as a response to an inner calling. In this respect, the liberal idea of the unencumbered self carries a bias against religious belief, because religious belief is always a received tradition, and also because it is more a matter of conscience than of rational-utilitarian choice.

Finally, liberal exclusionary secularism denies epistemological validity to religious claims, particularly to those that ground truth in transcendence. According to this view, only secular reason provides the universalistic language that allows transcending belief to arriving at universal truths, while religion would be a particularistic language enclosed within the bounds of belief and unable to transcend it. This stance ignores both the religious roots and the metaphysical foundations of secular reason, and raises secularism to the position of arbiter *supra partes* in the contention between religion and irreligion in the contemporary world. Thus, liberal exclusionary secularism needs not to take an explicit irreligious stance, siding with irreligion against religion, thought it may occasionally do it, but contents itself performing the role of gatekeeper of reasoned public debate, filtering out the arguments that are unfit for such debate. Accordingly, liberal exclusionary secularism allows religion in the public square to the extent that it expresses itself in the language of secular reason, and spurges its claims of any appeal to transcendence. As a matter of fact, this requirement amounts to ask religion that it ceases to be religion and to morph into another secular entity, for its voice to be listening to and respected in public debate. Since irreligion expresses itself in the language of secular

reason, it is free of the suspicions of liberal exclusionary secularism, for it already speaks the "correct" language of thought.

Summing up, the intellectual justification of contemporary liberal exclusionary secularism no longer revolves, as in the older versions of secularism, around the ideologies spawned by the Enlightenment's exaltation of human reason, such as materialism, naturalism, scientism, evolutionism, or the negative theology of atheism. Current liberal exclusionary secularism appeals to liberal political philosophy, with its emphasis on rights and its problematization of the good, and to the conception of religion as mere belief, which denies the truth validity of religious claims.

Liberal exclusionary secularism also finds a structure of plausibility in a *culture of disbelief* (Carter, 1994), which scorns religion as an unworthy pursuit, proper of backward and unenlightened minds. This culture of disbelief has been sedimented by a long process of enculturation in modern ideologies that, in some way or another, are hostile to religion and have promoted secularization (Smith, 2003). Among these secularizing ideologies stand out the materialist critique of religion as human alienation, which denies the authenticity of religious experience; the philosophy of naturalism, which denies religion as a valid epistemology; scientism or the positivist faith on science, which treats religion as an atavism proper of a pre-scientific age; biological evolutionism, which denies divine creationism; etc. Such modern ideologies, and the actors that have propagated them (academics, professionals, media, etc.), have contributed to shape a culture that depicts religion as irrational and un-modern, and stigmatizes it as a sign of character weakness and lack of intellectual sophistication (Smith, 2003).

In my view, this secularist culture of disbelief works as a culture of *shame,* in contrast to the so-called cultures of *guilt*. As it is well known, these two different types of culture rests on two different types of motivational mechanism to induce social conformity and to achieve social control. While guilt cultures induce social conformity by appealing to the individual's inner conscience, shame cultures induce social conformity by resorting to face loss and social ostracism. Guilt cultures punish deviants with the inner torments of conscience; shame cultures, instead, establish cannons of correctness, and punish deviants with ridicule and face loss, treating them as an inferior kind of socially unfit. Guilt needs not to be visible to be effective, but shame is dependent upon social visibility. Shame cultures appeal to the sheepish side of human nature –the necessity of social acceptance and the fear of social exclusion-, and work on the basis of social exposure, or the impossibility to escape the social pressures of the community. Usually, shame cultures are

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collectivist, while guilt cultures are individualistic; however, shame cultures may also flourish in individualistic contexts, as the case of the secularist culture of disbelief attests.

In order to understand how the contemporary culture of disbelief operates as a shame culture, it is necessary to consider how the modern mass media have saturated public life, raising the public visibility of all actors that enter the public arena, and the ensuing difficulties that actors confront to keep their face under the continuous assault of negative propaganda (Meyrowitz, 1985). Modern mass media have transformed the public arenas of modern liberal democracies into collectivist villages in which actors are exposed to continuous pressures to conform to the norms of correctness worked out by the cultural establishment, and risk being victims of face loss by the negative propaganda of hostile media.

The secularist culture of disbelief also draws from another two cultural features of modernity: its mercurial character, which exalts constructivism and self-mastery (or the denial of bounds), on the one hand, and the modern denial of death, on the other. Modernity, by indulging in the belief that unlimited possibility is just close at hand, by denying mystery -turning it into residual ignorance-, and by denying death -both by representing it as a stylized event deprived of existential content, and by enclosing real death out of public sight-, makes religion appear redundant, because religion is a way to cope with the experience of human frailty and limitation, the mystery of the cosmos, and the irreducible otherness of death.

Thus, wile the old secularism of the nineteen and early twentieth centuries faced a context of popular attitudes favourable to religion or at least respectful of it, the current wave of liberal exclusionary secularism occurs in a context dominated by a culture of disbelief, which no longer values religion and tends to deride it. In this culture of disbelief, secularization is both an emblem of modernity and a normative ideal: a modern society must be a secularized society. However, though the culture of disbelief is dominant in the West, it is not dominant at all in the Islamic world; and, even in the West, it is more dominant in Western Europe than in the USA and Latin America; and, throughout the West, it is more dominant among the highly educated elites than among the less educated. In any case, even where the culture of disbelief is stronger, it has not been able to dislodge religion, and has to coexist with it in uneasy accommodation. Moreover, the resiliency shown by religion in the West, and the recent surge of religion throughout the world, has shaken the self-confidence and the self-assuredness of the paladins of the culture of disbelief, prompting them to adopt a defensive stance towards religion.

Thus, liberal exclusionary secularism has to be seen not only in the context of the culture of disbelief that dominates the intellectual and cultural milieus of Western Europe and North America, but also in the context of religion's continuous resistance to -and defiance of- this same culture. Western secularist elites have to a large extent lost their past self-confidence with respect to religion, and now see the secular city that they strove to build after the Enlightenment as a citadel still besieged by religion. Liberal exclusionary secularism is in part a defensive reaction to this new secularist sensibility of fortress besieged. It is the response of secularist elites, who once thought –following secularization theory- that religion was either disappearing or bound to disappear in a not so distant future, to the contemporary resurgence of religion throughout the world, and to religion's revolt against secularist culture, which spurred the culture wars of the late twentieth century (Hunter, 1991; Guth, 1996).

After World War II, the social sciences forged, and the mass media diffused *urbe et orbe*, the idea that secularization was an inexorable correlate of modernization, and that the further societies advance along the pathway of modernity, the more marginal religion becomes. The underlying idea linking modernity and secularization was that the core beliefs and values, as well as the technical and institutional requirements of modern society, were inimical to religion. In this view, secularization meant basically two things: 1) that, as societies modernized, more and more people ceased to be religious believers, and, 2) at the same time, religion is expelled from the realm of public institutions, becoming a private affair exposed to the eroding pressures of pluralism (Berger, 1967). Finally, secularization was seen largely as an unintentional process, as a sort of *fatum* that imposes itself above and behind people wishes. Needless to say, this myth of the inexorable secularization of the world turned secularism into a redundant political ideology. Since secularization was already the work of history, there was no need for an active secularist movement to promote it. This helps to explain the abatement of militant secularism in the twentieth century, particularly in its second half, when the race to modernize extended to the entire world.

By the end of the twentieth century, however, a series of events eroded the plausibility of the theory of secularization and the expectation it had nourished of the inevitable demise of religion with the advance of modernization (Berger, 1999; Norris and Inglehart, 2004). First, the Iranian Islamic revolution of 1982, which overthrew the Sha's secularist political regime and replaced it with an Islamic state under the leadership Ayatollah Khomeini, not only denied the thesis that modernization inexorably leads to secularization, but it also contributed to spawn throughout the Islamic world different

brands of Islamic fundamentalism that demand the abolition of the secular state and the restoration of the Islamic *Umma*. Second, at the same time that Islamic fundamentalism made its rentrée in world politics, it also became clear that, whatever the scope of religion's decline, in the Western hemisphere religion is far from dying. Thus, in the USA, opinion surveys show that church attendance, far from being in the wane, has grown all along the twentieth century (Fink and Stark, 2005). The United States of today, which in many respects would appear to be the most advanced and modern country in the world, is no less religious than a century ago; newly arrived immigrants in the United States tend to become more religious than in their countries of origin; and religion still plays a major role in North American politics, particularly –though not exclusively- with the emergence of the religious political right in the 1970's, which aligned itself with the Republican party, and made a significant contribution to its electoral victories in the following decades (Wilcox and Larson, 2003).

The Christian churches have also played a mayor political role in many other areas of the world, for instance: as promoters of democratization in the third and fourth wave democracies of Southern Europe, Latin America and Asia, as well as in the fall of communism in the Eastern block (Jelen and Wilcox, 2002; Casanova, 1994). Throughout the world, the Christian churches are mayor building blocks of civil society, engaging in the provision of social services and education (Wuthnow: 2004). The only area of the world that seems to conform to the expectations of the myth of secularization is Western Europe. However, the Western European case is now seen more as an exception to be explained, than as the forerunner of a general trend (Davie: 1999, 2002, and 2006).

Finally, international migrations are changing the religious map of the West, from a religious terrain of either religious homogeneity or Christian pluralism, to another of religious diversity, in which Christian churches coexist with Islam and other imported religions. In Western Europe, this change is particularly visible in Britain, France, and Germany, which have large immigrant populations. Some observers have argued that, if current demographic trends continue unabated, by the mid of the present century, Christianity would no longer be the first religion in Western Europe, having been superseded by Islam (Weigel: 2005).

The rise of Islam in Europe has reawakened the conflicts between religion and the state in countries like France, where small local incidents like the wearing of head-scarves in schools by Muslim girls have escalated into state affairs, because they have challenged the strictures of *laicité,* which is the French variety of liberal exclusionary secularism (Bowen: 2006). Moreover, since Islam is not only a set of religious beliefs and rituals, but

also a system of law *(sharia)* and custom, whose principles, norms and habits sometimes violate the legal prescriptions of the civil codes of European secular states, Islam poses to these states a thorny problem of recognition and accommodation; a problem that is compounded by the fact that Islam lacks the institutional architecture of a binding *Ecclesia,* with which the state could negotiate an accommodation compact (Fetzer and Soper, 2003). Finally, the late appearance of a brand of Islamic terrorism that openly defies the West, and selects Western countries as its targets, has further compounded the problem of coping with Islam in the West.

Thus, by the end of the twentieth century, it had already became clear that the world was no longer moving in the direction predicted by the myth of secularization; that the secularization of the West had been the product of contingent human choices rather than the *fatum* of modernity (Smith, 2003), and that, therefore, the pendulum of history could now swing in the opposite direction. As a matter of fact, there were already multiple signs that seemed to point that the world was being swept by a "return of the sacred" (Bell, 1979). Even in the West, where secularization has progressed most, religion nevertheless continued being a lively public force with a strong presence in civil society, particularly in the United States, but also in Latin America and Western Europe (Cox, 2001; Martin, 1990; Davie and Hervieu-Léger, 1996).

Within this context, the strong papacy of John Paul II was a transformational event that, besides its huge impact in the geopolitics of the late twentieth century, raised the hair of secularist elites throughout the world by his determination to revert the post Second Vatican Council trend to turn Catholicism into an *invisible* religion. Under the strong papacy of John Paul II, the Catholic Church reinvented itself by deploying a strategy of collective mobilization that amplified both its public visibility and its public vocation (its willingness to be a *public* religion). Breaking a long tradition of popes enclosed within the walls of Vatican City, John Paul II incessantly travelled around the world to mobilize Catholics, providing them opportunities to affirm its public presence, and urging them to renew their commitment to the church and its mission in the world. John Paul II was a staunch challenger of the secularist culture of disbelief, and called Catholics not to give in, and to strive for the re-evangelization of the world. This firm anti-secularist position gained him the animadversion of secularist elites throughout the world, who label him a reactionary. What was more surprising –and frightening for the secularist elites- was the pope's capacity to connect with the young, who attended *en mass* each time they were convened by him. The pope's capacity to connect with, and mobilize the young astonished

the Western European secularist elites, who responded intensifying their feelings of Christophobia (Weigel: 2005).

Thus, the current wave of liberal exclusionary secularism may be seen as a reaction against this unexpected return of religion (unexpected for those that had internalized the myth of secularization), and, more in particular, against the late determination of the Catholic Church to reassert itself as a public force that challenges the dogmas of the culture of disbelief. However, there is still a last missing piece to complete the puzzle of contemporary liberal exclusionary secularism: the recasting of the left after the fall of communism. It bears reminding that the return of religion in the late twentieth century occurred in the context of –and was related to- the fall of communism. Communism had been an extreme historical experiment of exclusionary secularism. Being the product of an atheist doctrine, communism had been decidedly irreligious, and had only tolerated religion as a matter of expediency. Some communist regimes had no choice but grudgingly make some room for an independent church and coexist with it (as in Poland), but most kept a façade of religious freedom while submitting religious institutions to tight state control, while pursuing policies hostile to religion. With the collapse of the communist experiment also collapsed the promise of communism's atheistic secularism to regenerate society, building a just and decent society on the basis of strictly secular premises, denying religion any significant role in public life. In addition, religion played a major role in the battle against communism –at least in the European countries of the Eastern block-, first providing a spiritual refuge in the face of communism's totalitarian oppression, and, latter on, as a key strategic actor in the struggles that led to the demise of the Polish communist regime, a decisive historical turning point in the fall of communism in Eastern Europe (Weigel, 1999).

The fall of communism also had a second mayor consequence: it precipitated the crisis of the left, and not only the communist one, but the social-democratic too, which, since the end of World War II, had aspired to build a *via media* between capitalism and soviet communism in the form of a democratic socialism. This democratic socialism would have progressively extended the collective control of the economy, while preserving the representative institutions of liberal democracy; in other words, it purported to be a synthesis of economic collectivism and political democracy. With the fall of communism also fell this project of a socialist *via media*, the credibility of which hinged on the credibility of communism as a viable economic alternative to capitalism. In other words, the collapse of communism forced the left to swallow a sour pill: if communism lacked

economic viability, there was no alternative to capitalism, and, therefore, capitalism was untouchable.

Thus, the social-democratic left, which, in the second half of the past century, had directed its political strategy to reforming capitalism along collectivist lines, and to promote redistribution via the social policies of the welfare state, was now forced to reinvent itself. Since capitalism was now untouchable, economic and social policy –that is to say, redistribution- could no longer be the left's central political battlefield. In this context, the left has refurbished its political strategy giving more and more weight to what we may call a new *kultur kampf* politics, revolving around the issues of public culture, identity, gender, minority rights, etc. This new political strategy allows the left to enlist the support of the new social movements that had appeared in the Western political scene since 1968, advancing post post-materialist values and causes (ecologism, feminism, gay rights, multiculturalism, nationalism, etc.). Liberal exclusionary secularism may be seen as another facet of the new *kultur kampf* strategy endorsed by the left that aims to politicize the public culture of liberal democracies, turning politics into a struggle for the definition of public symbols, constitutive rules, and cultural boundaries.

So far we have characterized the new wave of liberal exclusionary secularism, clarifying its differences with previous modalities of secularism, and putting it in its cultural, historical and political contexts. Current liberal exclusionary secularism is a recent brand of secularism that draws on the late political philosophy of liberalism, but it is also closely connected to a culture of disbelief that derides religion and operates as a culture of shame that imposes cannons of cultural correctness. This new brand of secularism is to a large extent a defensive move on the part of secularist elites that have lost their confidence in the myth of the progressive secularization of the world, and which now strive to contain the incoming religious tide by reducing religion to a personal affair or a private ethic, enclosing it within the bounds of the private sphere. Finally, we have also shown that the current wave of liberal exclusionary secularism dovetails with the political reinvention of the left after the fall of communism; a reinvention that has shifted the axis of the left's political strategy from the economic arena (to reform the capitalist economy along collectivistic lines), to the cultural arena (to recast the public culture of liberal democracies). In the next section we shift to a comparison between the different religious profiles of the United States and Europe, and how religious forces are coping with liberal exclusionary secularism in these two contexts of the Western world.

Religion and liberal exclusionary secularism: European and American vistas.

It was the sociologist Peter Berger who once said that if India is the most religious country in the world and Sweden the less religious one, the USA is a country of Indians governed by Swedes. And we could add to Berger that Western Europe, unlike the USA, is, by and large, a region both inhabited and governed by Swedes. Though ironical remarks like these do not intend to provide exact portraits, nevertheless they point to a major contrast between North America and Europe –whether or not we enlarge it to include Eastern Europe-. By all counts, the USA is a much more religious society than Europe, even if we admit that Europe is not an homogeneous terrain in matters of religion, and that secularization has not proceeded at the same pace throughout the continent. Berger's ironical remarks also show us that the main contrast between the USA and Europe in matters of religion is not at the elite level, but at the level of the mass publics. Both American and European elites are highly secularized, but in the USA secularist elites have so far failed to influence the religious beliefs of large sectors of the population, while, in Europe, secularist elites seem to have been more successful in acculturating the mass publics in the culture of disbelief.

The comparative strength of religious orientations among American mass publics –in defiance of the secularist culture of the establishment- and its weakness among European ones, has obviously to do with the vitality of religion in social life in the USA and the lack of it in Europe. Though survey data on church attendance may not be the most reliable indicator of religious belief and practice, nevertheless the available evidence shows that a majority of Europeans have deserted their churches and temples, while Americans still stick to them (Casanova, 2004). What it is even more striking is the fact that, while in Europe there has been a steep decline in church attendance, in the USA the trend has been the opposite: church attendance has grown in the twentieth century; a process that has been referred to as the "churching" of America (Fink and Stark, 2005).

In the USA, religion has retained its social and communitarian dimensions, and it continues to be a fountainhead of sociability and social capital, while in Europe it is rapidly losing those dimensions, remaining only as a loose belief system lacking social and institutional reinforcements. We may state the contrast between these two regions with the terms of believing and belonging, formulated by British sociologist Grace Davie (1994): in the USA, believing and belonging still go together, and reinforce each other; in Europe, instead, believing no longer implies belonging, and, therefore, it lacks the reinforcement of belonging. This would explain the greater susceptibility of European publics to the culture of disbelief propagated by the European cultural establishment, though, as Grace

Davie has argued, in Europe, secularized publics still retain a distant attachment to organized religion, which she has labelled *vicarious religion*. This would be the vague expectation that some form of organized religion has to be there at hand to be used in special occasions (catastrophes, to mark life transitions, dead, etc.), even though those that hold this expectation have ceased to be religious believers by conventional standards (Davie, 1994).

The persistent social vitality of religion in North America has to do with the fact that religion still performs there an important function of social integration and community support, while in Europe religion plays a less important role in both respects (though, again, generalizations about Europe are made at the price of disregarding relevant intra-European contrasts) (Davie and Hervieu-Léger, 1996). Both Tocqueville and Weber had stressed the social functions that religious sects performed in North America. A new society founded by religious dissidents and made by immigrants coming from far distant lands, in North America, religion became an identity marker that signals trustworthiness, and, at the same time, allows immigrants to trespass the narrow confines of their ethnic backgrounds to integrate themselves into a wider community of faith. Thus, in the USA, by the middle of the past century, it was expected that immigrants would have to abandon their languages of origin, but that they would retain the religion brought from their countries, whether it was Protestant, Catholic or Jewish (Herberg, 1955). In this respect, the assimilation of immigrants in the USA tends to reinforce their religious allegiances: one becomes American by joining a religious faith and by engaging in a religious community. On the other hand, in the USA, religious organizations have provided a wide array of community and social services for the needy. This also happened in Europe, but here religious initiatives tended to crystallize in large, bureaucratic organizations, linked to the structure of the church, while, in the USA, religious activism in civil society remained a more diffuse and grass-root activity. The late development of a welfare state in the USA, kept alive, and did not stifle, but even stimulated, the dense network of local religious organizations that had arisen to cater for the needs of the communities, while, in Europe, the development of the welfare state tended to disincentive this type of grass-roots religious activism.

One of the features of the USA religious landscape that is most striking to European eyes is the strength of Evangelical Protestantism, scornfully labelled by secularist elites as Christian *fundamentalism*. As a matter of fact, Evangelical Protestantism is a popular movement of religious renewal that continues a long tradition of religious re-awakenings that have periodically erupted in this country (Smith, 1998, 2002). Evangelical

Protestantism has re-valued direct religious experience, and has opposed, in the name of orthodoxy, the rationalizing and secularizing assaults of liberal Protestantism. What is even more important is the fact that, after a long period of seclusion from the surrounding secular world, Evangelicals entered, in the last quarter of the past century, the arena of national politics as an organized force which aimed at influencing proactively presidential politics, to counter the secularizing policies of the three branches of government. Today, the so-called religious right (which now also includes a large segment of North American Catholicism, which has shunned the old alliance between the Catholic Church and the Democratic party, after this party upheld the cause of the right to abortion) is an electoral force that presidential candidates have to reckon with, and can ignore only at they peril. One might say that nowadays, in the USA, all presidential candidates are obliged to pray in public, or at least to pay lip service to religion.

However, even more than the emergence of an active religious right, the really important and differential feature of the American religious scene is the recent trend to join forces across religious denominations, to challenge the dominant secularist culture of the establishment (Hunter). In the USA, unlike in Europe, religion is no longer at the defensive, striving not to make noise to escape the rage of secularist elites. First of all, as I have already mentioned, religion has re-entered the political arena to exert influence upon national government, and to condition the political programs of presidential candidates. Second, religion has engaged in the battle of ideas, reclaiming its place in the public square, and fighting with the secularist establishment the so called "culture wars" (Hunter, 1991). In other words, in the USA a significant part of the religious camp has coalesced in a revolt against the dominant culture of disbelief and it is decided to resist the privatizing secularist pressures.

The consequence of this renewed religious activism has been the split of American religious communities into two opposing camps: conservatives and progressives -or orthodox and liberals- (Wuthnow, 1988). This cleavage is not only political, but also theological, moral and cosmological, and cuts across religious faiths and denominations, splitting each denomination, and pooling together conservatives and progressives across denominations (Hunter and Rie, 1991).

To simplify things for the sake of brevity, we may say that progressives are religious modernists that basically accept the secularist reduction of religion to a private affair and a private morality; religious progressives also tend to align themselves with the secularist establishment on issues like abortion, gay marriage, school prayer, and in the culture war between evolutionists and creationists; on matters of theology, progressives

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reject the literalist interpretation of religious scriptures, are critical of religious tradition, and defend the ordination of women as priests. On the contrary, religious conservatives defend what they see as the orthodox tradition of their respective religious confessions, from the encroachments of theological liberalism and the pressures of the dominant secularist culture; their defence of religious tradition leads them to maintain a staunch opposition to abortion, gay marriage, and the ordination of women; though not all conservatives are literalists in their interpretation of religious scriptures, they nevertheless reject theological liberalism, uphold a more demanding morality -particular with regard to sexual behaviour-, and show an intense concern for what they see as the spiritual crisis of public education. Above all, American religious conservatives are not resigned to survive as an island in an ocean of secularism, and they have decided to withstand and fight the dominant secularist culture, engaging in intellectual debate and reclaiming a place for religion in the public square. Since the secularist culture of disbelief is a common foe for conservatives of all religious stripes (particularly those belonging to the Judeo-Christian tradition, be they Protestant, Catholic or Jewish), religious conservatives have joined ranks across religious denominations, setting up a tradition of cooperation in special purpose organizations that promote single issue campaigns (Hunter and Rie, 1991). Thus, for the first time in the history of American religion, denominational boundaries are no longer barriers that prevent the emergence of a broad religious coalition.

We can say that, while religious progressives have adopted a chameleonic strategy in the face of the secularist culture, accommodating religion to conform to secularist strictures, conservatives have followed a strategy of sharpening boundaries with secularism, and closing ranks to face battle both in the political and –to a lesser extent- the cultural arenas. So far, conservatives have fared much better than progressives, at least with regard to their capacity to attract followers. Data on church attendance in the USA show that, while conservative religious denominations are swelling with members, progressive denominations are being deserted by a good deal of their membership, that find less and less appeal in a form of religion that, instead of offering an alternative to the secularist culture of disbelief, seems to offer a religious variation of it (Fink and Stark, 2005).

European Vistas

Compared to the USA, religion in Europe has been much less dynamic. First, as we have already mentioned, in Europe, secularization has made more inroads among the publics than in the USA. In a context of fast secularization, European churches have been fully absorbed in the task of survival, striving to keep afloat amidst the secularist deluge

(Burleigh, 2007). Second, in Europe the relations between religion and the state are much more complex and varied than in the USA, where the constitution's First Amendment established what Jefferson called a "wall of separation" between religion and the state, forbidding an established church at the federal level. In Europe, instead, we find a wide variety of situations in the arena of church-state relations, from the case of French *laïcité* in one extreme (which bans religion from public life), to the cases of the established churches of England and the Scandinavian countries, in the opposite extreme (where there is a state church), with the Catholic countries of Southern Europe as intermediate cases (where the Catholic Church, though not being an established church, is, nevertheless, heavily subsidized by the state) (Meadely and Enyedy, 2003). This means that, in Europe, the churches have been –and still are- more dependent on the state than in the USA, and this dependence has curtailed their capacity to challenge head-on both the secularist policies of the European states and the secularist establishments that have masterminded these policies.

Though the experience of religious decline may trigger religious renewal movements, in Europe this has not been the case so far. Thus, Evangelical Protestantism has not played in Europe the revitalizing role that it has played in the American religious scene, failing to ignite a current of religious enthusiasm throughout the geography of European Protestantism, capable of defying secularism's culture of shame in the name of transcendence. And European Catholicism, though not so stagnant as European Protestantism, is still digesting the *aggiornamento* of the Second Vatican Council; the Church hierarchy, in particular, is still doubtful about the scope and the limits of the church's reconciliation with modernity, and, at the same time, fears being shamed by secularist elites, who may trigger their cultural weapons and stigmatize them as reactionaries, and enemies of progress. On the other hand, the permeability of the catholic church to the social and cultural textures of society, has rested coherence to European Catholicism, which rarely speaks with a single voice, but usually expresses itself in a plurality of voices that frequently contradict each other (see, for an instance, the recent case of the stance of the Spanish Catholic Church in the critical issue of the survival of Spain as an unitary nation).

Summing up, in the past century, Europe lacked the religious dynamism of the USA, and, in the second half of the century, secularization gained momentum both at the elite and the population level, putting the European churches in the defensive position of administering the remains of religion's wreckage under the secularist tide. Both the churches' uncertainties about how to proceed in this extremely unfavourable scenario, and

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their greater dependence on the state, made them less vocal, and more fearful -or just prudent- than in the USA.

In this context of rather sheepish churches, which looked inward and moved defensively, the strong papacy of John Paul II was both a shock and a turning point. This first non-Italian pope in many centuries, coming from the other side of the steel curtain, who had known firsthand the miseries of the twentieth century's grand experiment of secular totalitarianism, came to the Roman siege with the intention to make an impact both in Catholicism and the world, and he outdid all expectations. Since the inaugural homily of his papacy, in which he enjoined Catholics not to have fear (the famous: "*Vi prego, non abbiate paura*"), and to recover their confidence in the Catholic Church and its mission in the world, John Paul II restlessly travelled the world, summoning Catholics of all continents to bear witness of the joys and the burdens of their faith, both in their private lives of work and family, and in their public lives of engaged citizens (Weigel, 1999). An extremely gifted communicator, John Paul II played a major role in the geopolitics of his age, and particularly in the fall of communism, by sustaining the struggle of the Polish Catholic trade union *Solidarnösck* against the Polish communist regime. But above all, the Polish pope took a decisive stance in the face of secularism and the culture of disbelief it had nurtured.

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church had striven to make Catholicism palatable for a secularized world, by adjusting both the church's doctrine and liturgy to secular values and sensibilities. However, the Council left a legacy of uncertainties about how far the Catholic Church should go in its attempt to accommodate itself to modernity. In this context, John Paul II was a boundary maker that contributed to dispelled the uncertainty of Catholics in the face of modernity by stressing that the main tasks of Catholics no longer was to *modernize* Catholicism, but rather to *Christianize* modernity by injecting in it an effusion of transcendence. The current papacy of Bennedict XVI continues this line opened by John Paul II. As a matter of fact, the choice of a reputed intellectual as cardinal Joseph Ratzinger to succeed Jean Paul II, signals the Church willingness to continue giving high priority to facing head-on the current secularist culture of disbelief.

For European secularist elites, habituated to the low profile of post-councillar European Catholicism, John Paul II appeared as a religious bigot, radicalized by the experience of communism, who wanted to revive an old-fashioned militant Catholicism that they thought to be definitely buried in the past. The growing influence of John Paul II in the international scene; his capacity to mobilize Catholics on a global scale, summoning

them to bear public testimony of their faith and not to be afraid of the dominant culture of disbelief; and, last but not least, his growing popularity among the young, that is, the sons and daughters of the generation that had lead the revolt of 1968 and had embraced the culture of disbelief as a liberating ideology. All this intensified the rejection of John Paul II by European secularist elites, a rejection that extended to Catholicism -and even Christianity-, in a new wave of christophobia (Weigel, 2005).

Two recent manifestations of the current Christophobia of European secular elites are the refusal to introduce a mention to Europe's Christian past in the preamble of the European constitution –also know as the *invocatio Dei* question-, and the Rocco Butiglione confirmation affair in the European parliament. The European Convention that drew the European constitution not only refused to introduce in its preamble either a mention to God (as it is the case of the constitutions of Poland and Germany), or to Christianity (as in the constitutions of Greece, Ireland, Denmark, Malta and the non written constitution of the United Kingdom), but it even refused to include an explicit mention to Europe's Christian heritage, as the catholic church demanded, with the support of some European governments (Italy, Spain, and Poland). Instead, the constitution-makers only made a passing reference to religion in the second paragraph of the Constitution's preamble, putting it along side humanistic culture, as if humanism and religion had been two independent and unrelated sources of European culture. Here goes everything the preamble says about religion:

"Inspired in the cultural heritage, religious and humanistic of Europe, whose values, always present in its patrimony, have anchored in the life of society the central role of the person, of her inviolable rights and the respect of law" (quoted in Weiler (2003: 77), my own translation from the Italian)

According to expert constitutionalist Joseph H. H. Weiler (2003), both the European constitutional debate on the *invocatio Dei* and the final triumph in it of an uncompromising position, which excluded any explicit reference in the constitutional text either to God or to Christianity as such, can be explained neither by objective constitutional reasons, nor by appealing to the juridical intricacies of church-state relations in Europe. For Weiler, the key to understanding the Convention's violent opposition to mention either God or Christianity, lay not in the constitutional arguments handled, which were weak and served as pretexts, but in other kinds of motivations. And he coined the term "christophobia" (a term that I have borrowed from him and have used in this paper with liberality), to refer to these extra-constitutional motivations:

"I shall call "christophobia" this phenomenon of removing God and Christianity from the constitutional texts of the European Union, a generic term with which

I intend to indicate a form of resistance that does not stems from constitutional reasons of principle, but from motivations that are sociological, psychological and emotional" (Weiler, 2003: 97).

The Rocco Butiglione affair represented the climax of christophobia in European institutions, and marked a turning point in European history, since, for the first time, the European parliament refused to confirm a candidate to office as Justice Commissioner of the European Commission (the Italian Rocco Butiglione, a catholic politician with close links to the Vatican) on the grounds that his catholic morality, which led him to consider homosexuality as a sin, was a hate morality that violated the rights of gays upheld by the EU. In other words, the non-confirmation of Rocco Butiglione on the grounds of his catholic morality, turned European Catholics into morally unfit citizens; a community of pariahs unfit for the dignity of public office in the European Commission. Here it was the culture of shame of European secularist elites working without restraints to shame and humiliate Catholics that had the strength to uphold in public their moral convictions in defiance of the secularist morality of the culture of disbelief. It is a cruel irony that, hardly two generations after the initiation of the process of European integration, in which Catholics played a major role (remember Jean Monet, Konrad Adenauer, etc.), now they are declared morally unfit for high office in the European institutions that they themselves had decisively contributed to create two generations ago.

The fact that European Catholics have swallowed the humiliation of the Rocco Butiglione affair without resorting to campaigns of collective protest and public denunciation reveals the current spirit of defeatism and resignation that prevails in the ranks of European Catholicism. It bears reminding that an affair like this would be unthinkable in the USA, but even if it were to happen, American Catholics would have never faced the humiliation with the blandness showed by European Catholics. In the USA, Catholics, far from having succumbed to defeatism, are in the forefront of the religious defiance against the secularist culture of disbelief, because they posses the institutional, moral and cognitive resources to lead this revolt.

The resignation of European Catholics shows that the shame culture of secularist elites has been much more effective in Europe than in the USA in penetrating popular attitudes and mentalities. In Europe, both the strong shame culture of secularism and the weakness of the religious citadel have led more and more religious believers -specially Catholics- to hide their religious convictions from public sight, keeping them as an inner concern lacking in external visibility. In this respect, we can say that a good deal of European religious believers have become a sort o *neo-marranos* who hide they religious

convictions to avoid being ostracized by the shame culture of secularism. Again, it was the Jewish constitutionalist Joseph Weiler who coined this metaphor to refer to the current plight of Christians in Europe:

"*[In Europe] Many Christians hide themselves, and have of their own become* marranos*, unconstrained. (Here I use the* marranos *metaphor with the intention to be provocative, being aware that there is a small difference between the age of the Inquisition and our age). The authentic* marrano*s of the past, fearing persecution, drew the curtains of their homes to hide their religious celebrations. Contemporary Christian* marranos *drew the curtains not so much because they are persecuted, but because of their own embarrassment. And those who dare to descend to the public square have to do it as a challenge: which, sadly, is the other side of the same coin*." (Weiler, 2003: 105; my own translation from the Italian).

Finally, I want to call attention to one last significant contrast between the religious profiles of the USA and Europe: the social configuration of Islam in each area. In the USA, Muslims are highly heterogeneous with regard to both race (Afro-Americans, white and coloured people) and their ethnic backgrounds (North Africa, Middle East, Central Asia, India, Indonesia), and they are scattered throughout the country. By and large, American Muslims do not form an underprivileged community, but rather provide a typical case of crosscutting social cleavages. American Muslims constitute one more religious minority in an extremely pluralistic religious landscape, and Islam is not growing faster than the other religious denominations. The implication is that, in the USA, Islam is seen just as one more religious denomination, and not as a socially and culturally homogenous grouping that poses a differentiated problem of integration. American Muslims do not see themselves as a socially disadvantaged group with respect to other religious confessions, and do not harbour feelings of either religious or social discrimination.

In Europe, instead, Moslems are immigrants that tend to share the same ethnic background (In France Muslim immigrants tend to come from North Africa, in Germany from Turkey, in Great Britain from Pakistan and Bangladesh). European Muslims also tend to be concentrated in urban enclaves where they are the dominant group or a strong minority. In addition, European Moslems tend to occupy the lower ranks of the social pyramid of their respective countries, with a majority of unskilled or low skilled workers that are exposed to higher rates of unemployment and labour precariousness. In other words, in Europe, Muslims usually are a socially disadvantaged group, isolated in territorial enclaves that form a society within the wider society, and often in conflict with it. Finally, in Europe, the fast demographic expansion of Muslims contrasts with the demographic

decline of native populations. Thus, European Muslims, unlike their American counterparts, besides being a religious community, also tend to be an ethically homogeneous and socially disadvantaged group; they provide a case of reinforcing cleavages, in which religious identity tends to be the bedrock of the community. The implication is that, while in America, Muslims do not pose a particular problem of integration, in Europe they do: the integration of Islam has become a much more difficult and conflictive process in Europe than in America.

For the European left, Muslim immigrants, being a socially disadvantaged group with a fast demographic growth would be a part of their "natural" electorate. However, the radical secularism of the European left conflicts with the strong religious identity of European Muslim immigrants, not to speak of the variety of religious fundamentalism that tends to flourish within their communities. Since they usually form homogeneous and cohesive communities, the most radical strands of European Muslims nurture the ambition to obtain from the European states the recognition of the right to rule their affairs by the Islamic law (*Sha-ria)*. However, this demand conflicts with the liberal principle of state neutrality with regard to religion, which is, as we have seen, the backbone of liberal secularism.

For the European left it is, therefore, tempting to treat European Islam as a minority culture that has the right to be protected, and could be the object of particularistic privilege (according to the dictates of the current ideology of multiculturalism), instead of a religion that would have to be treated according to the liberal principle of state neutrality. This muticulturalist trick would allow the European left to justify an islamophilic political strategy oriented to gain the electoral support of Islamic enclaves. The left's islamophilia would also serve its christophobia, for the expansion of Islam may be a means to further emasculating the power of Christianity in Europe; on the other hand, the left might also benefit from the growth of a militant Islam growingly hostile to Christianity in European soil, if it could present itself before the electorate as the indispensable mediator and appeaser of a radicalized Islam.

Though the islamophilia of the European left is today more of a possibility than a fully-fledged reality, there are signs that point in this direction. Among others, the European reaction to the crisis of the Danish cartoons. Again, this combination of christophobia and islamophilia among European leftist secularist is a pure European phenomenon that has no counterpart in the USA, and which presages a dark panorama for the continent: a liberal exclusionary secularism that is at the same time chistophobic and islamophilic!

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