

Religions and the Public Sphere: Accommodating Religious Diversity in the Post-secular Era.

Assessment of recent research and possible guidelines for the future

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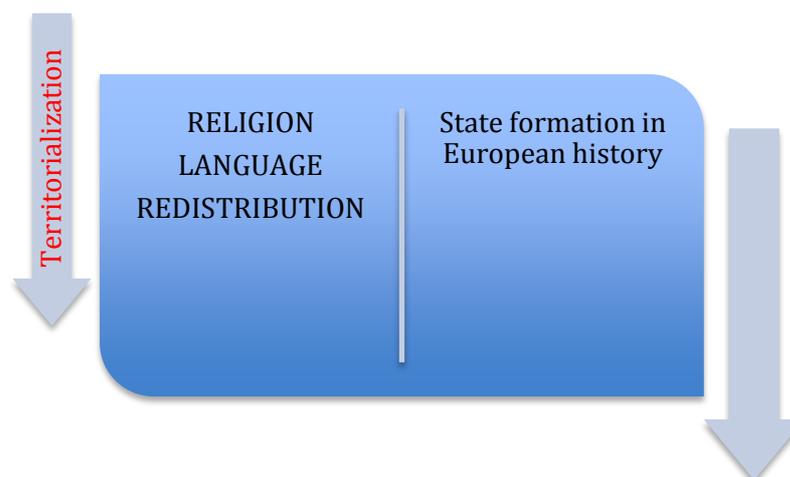
1- Social complexity and the Functionalist tradition in sociology:

Talcott Parsons coined the term *structural differentiation* (1937) to describe how social institutions have progressively lost many of the functions they performed in the past; they thus have become *differentiated*.

Stein Rokkan, S. N. Eisenstadt, T.H. Marshall, and others described the Nation-building process in terms of struggles for territorial concentration of power, increased political participation and the granting of social rights. The Welfare State would therefore be the last stage in the process of Nation-building.

This functionalist approach has been thoroughly criticised for being evolutionist in its idea of social development, implicitly Eurocentric, consensus biased, and unable to explain social change. However, it conceived of society as a complex system made out of social structures and functions, an idea that still is useful for framing the notion of *complex diversity*. In fact, *complex diversity* could be better understood as a problematisation of the functionalist assumptions on modernization and social change.

From a European perspective, the four variables explored by RECODE (**religion, language, redistribution and territory**) can be consistently approached as describing the historical and structural dimensions of European state formation:



2- Historical relations between religious and political authority in Europe

Christianism was originally an *urban* religion. Until the Middle Ages the cities played a pivotal role in the evolution of European Christianity. The conversion of the Germanic tribes and the Northern and Eastern European peoples (between 5th and 12th century) was a *top to bottom* process: conversion of the nobility first, then imposition of the new faith on the general population.

Christianization as a process of religious co-option of political authority

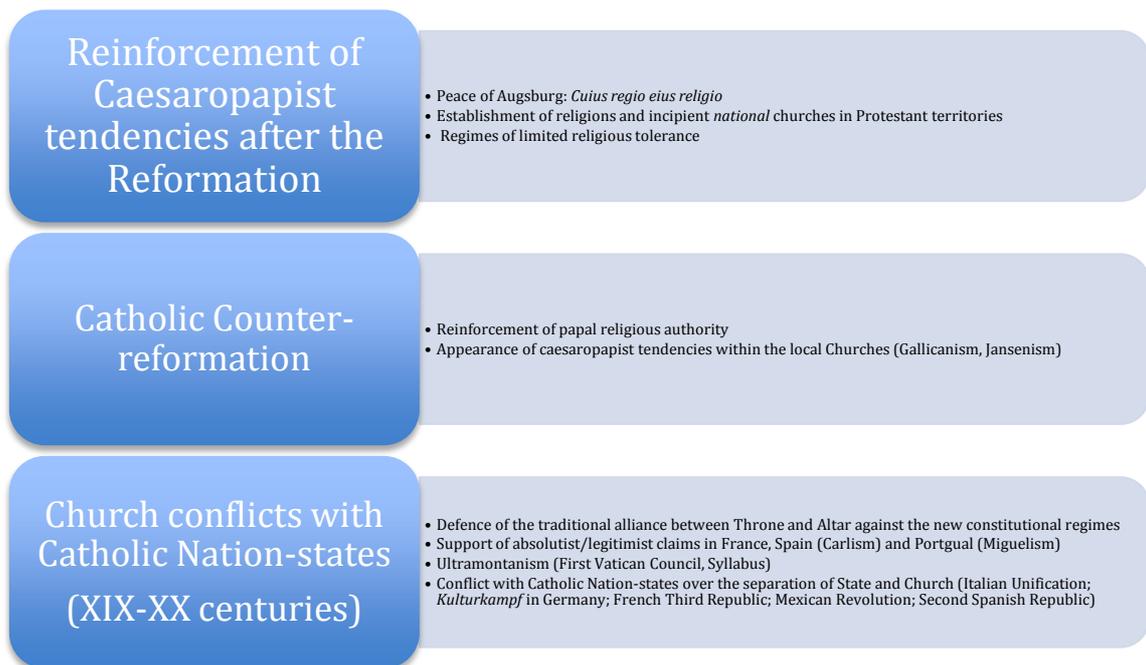


During the first modern period, the religious background of political authority was a major source of conflict between Christian sovereigns and the popes - and after the Protestant

Reformation, between sovereigns and their subjects, and between sovereigns of different faith.

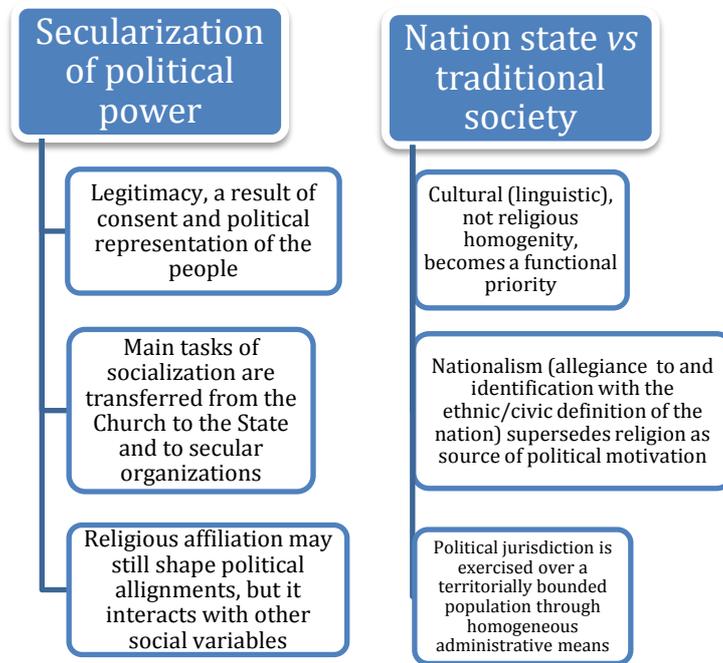
Religious homogeneity and the control over religious authority were deemed necessary for the stability of the body politic. Religious tolerance was considered a lesser evil (Locke) or totally inadmissible. The seeking of religious freedom pressed the creation of new societies in America by English dissenters. Religious motivation was also present, although in a different way, in the colonization of Spanish and Portuguese America.

Catholic sovereigns tried to secure the appointment of local religious authorities (Gallicanism in France and the control of the Church overseas through the *Royal patronage* in Spain and Portugal).



3- Secularization and the changes in the social functions of religion:

The demise of feudalism and the secularization of political power changed the social functions of religion:



Secularization has become the label for a sociological theory about the historical function of religion. This theory is intimately connected to Positivism and although it has multiple implications, in its simplest form it states the gradual disappearance of religion with the advance of science and the changes of modern society. The secularization thesis was formulated as *disenchantment* of the world and *rationalization* of social action by Max Weber, as a change in the structure of social cohesion (mechanic and organic solidarities) by Durkheim and as unveiling of self-deluding interpretations of the world by Marx.

The equation of secularization with modernization has been thoroughly criticised during the last decades. The main points of critique have been the following:

1
Secularisation should not be understood as an all-encompassing trajectory, but as one part of a more contradictory process which contains moments of sacralisation as well

2
European history does not offer a universal pattern for interpreting the secularisation process: it certainly does not capture the experience of the Islamic world nor the distinctive dynamics or religious and political culture in the US

3
Politics need not be merely understood as the effect, and not the cause of the social developments described under the label of secularization. Politics concerning the relationships between church and state have played a decisive role in the differences between Europe and America

4
Secularisation should not be defined as the disappearance of religion: it is a retraction of religion as the sole normative source of public political allegiance

4- Secularization and the state in Canada:

The history of state formation may explain the different meaning of secularisation when comparing Europe with the United States and Canada.

- The separation of state and church in the USA was instituted by the First Amendment in 1791: "*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances*". However, this separation only applied at the federal level. Until the 1830's most of the states applied religious tests for the access to public office. Since then, the relations between religion and the state have been imagined in the USA as divided by a *wall of separation*.
- In Canada, the need to accommodate the two largest communities (English-speaking Protestants and French-speaking Catholics) within a colonial status has historically conditioned the political structure of the country. Protestant dissenters did not enjoy the same influence as in the United States. The Church of England was an established denomination for a short period of time, and only in a part of British North America. Lastly, the Catholic Church was granted a large degree of autonomy by the British Crown and controlled the social life of Quebec until well into the twentieth century.
- In France, the separation of State and Church started with the guaranteeing of free worship by the 1795 Constitution. In most European Catholic countries the relation of the state with the Church is regulated through concordatary agreements. During the XIX century and the first half of the XX century the relations between European states and churches were sometimes tense and even violent, but nowhere in Europe there has been a complete separation of church and state. National churches continue here to develop important social and educative functions funded by the states. In fact, social and educational services were built in many countries along confessional lines, either in the form of *pillarization* (The Netherlands) or in collaboration with the established churches.

- All these reasons help explain why English- and French- Canadian societies have experienced a dissimilar pace of secularization, and differences with Europe and the United States. The Canadian process of secularisation resembles more generally the European than the American experience. On the other hand, the massive drop of religious observance in Europe (and in Quebec) during the 1960s was mainly related to questions of religious, moral and political authority, not necessarily of religious belief.

5- Directions for future research on religion and complex diversity in Europe and Canada:

- *Crisis of the large paradigms and appearance of new ones (rational choice applied to religious offer and demand)*

- *Continued reassessment of the secularisation theory:*

- Multiple secularizations (I. Katzelson, G. S. Jones)
- Normative dimension of secularism (Ch. Taylor, J. Maclure)
- Study of immigrant minorities in Western societies and their relation with secularization

- *Study of religious radicalism:*

- "Fundamentalism project" (M. Marty)
- *Research on Islam and modernization*
- *Research on the accommodation of religious minorities*

- *Large national/transnational surveys (L. Beaman in Canada, RELIGARE in Europe)*

- *Research on the intercultural accommodation and cultural transfer between social groups and minority/majority relations*