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## FRENCH-LANGUAGE SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION IN EUROPE SINCE THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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As the task of presenting an overview of post-war sociology of religion in the French language and identifying trends in research is so daunting as to be virtually impossible, it is important to establish the limits of this study from the outset. They are basically four. (1) While taking into account the main contributions from French-speaking Belgium and Switzerland, the study focuses on research carried out in France. Moreover, it would be necessary, in order to complete the picture of French-language sociology of religion, to include Canadian contributions and the studies of the many researchers throughout the world who use French as their working language (in Africa, Lebanon, etc.). (2) In France itself, we have given prominence to research within the sphere of influence of the three laboratories of the sociology of religion which are associated with the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* (CNRS) and are involved in the publication of the journal *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* (Paris): the *Centre d'Etudes Interdisciplinaires des Faits Religieux* (EHESS-CNRS) run by Danièle Hervieu-Léger in Paris, the *Groupe de Sociologie des Religions et de la Laïcité* (EPHE-CNRS) run by Jean Baubérot in Paris and the center *Société, Droit et Religion en Europe* (University of Strasbourg III-CNRS) run by Francis Messner in Strasbourg. Although these three laboratories account for a large proportion of the research carried out in France, other centres of research in the sociology of religion exist elsewhere, for instance in Aix-en-Provence, Clermont-Ferrand, Grenoble, Lille, Strasbourg and Toulouse. (3) In the sociology of religion, as in other fields, research comes to light through countless articles published in scientific journals with reading panels. French-language sociology of religion in Europe is published, for the most part, in two journals: the *Archives des Sciences Sociales des Religions* (Paris) and *Social Compass* (Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium). But in this paper we have basically confined our review of the development of research to individual or collective works published during the period concerned. Sociologists who publish few or no books but produce substantial articles for journals are therefore at a disadvantage. (4) Lastly, we have chosen to focus on discussions in two areas that have exerted a particularly strong influence on the sociology of religion in France in recent years: one is the reconstruction of belief and the

issue of a definition of religion; the other is the relationship between secularization and “laïcité” (a French word almost untranslatable)<sup>1</sup>. This choice prompted us to give more prominence to some contributions than to others. Different choices could have been made and the two discussions on which we have decided to focus clearly do not do justice to the breadth and diversity of the sociology of religion in French-speaking Europe.

## 1. The rise of religious sociology

The post-war period in France was a major turning-point in the history of sociology: it was during this period that sociological research evolved, became institutionalized in the CNRS (National Centre for Scientific Research) and was eventually recognized as a branch of study at university level (creation of a *licence* (bachelor’s degree) in sociology in 1958). It was also the period of distance-taking from the Durkheimian heritage and the French school of sociology through the discovery of new methods of investigation and new projects.

### 1.1 *Gabriel Le Bras and the sociology of Catholicism*

The sociology of religion was dominated after the war by the figure of Gabriel Le Bras (1891–1970), a historian of canon law who imparted strong momentum to the sociology of Catholicism. French sociology of religion, which had been dominated before the war by the explanatory and theoretical approaches of the Durkheimian school and ethnological research, subsequently focused on Catholicism and took a more empirical turn. Although, as noted by the great French rural sociologist H. Mendras, sociology had become “the Antichrist for Catholics”, “Le Bras showed that religious observance could be studied without questioning the existence of God: he exorcised Durkheimism and stimulated theoretical and practical reflection on the relationship between the Church as an institution and the world. (...) During the 1950s, the Catholic Church was certainly the leading institutional sponsor of sociological research, with little money but plenty of goodwill” (Mendras, 1995, pp. 26–27). Le Bras, continued Mendras (1995, p. 28), “created a sociology of religion that owed nothing to Durkheim, Weber or anybody else and which was acceptable to the Church because it made no claim to deal with the supernatural”.

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1 To translate “laïcité” into English by the word *secularism* is, for example, an misinterpretation.

What task had Le Bras set himself? “To get to know the Christian people to whom the law of the Church applies”. He had published a twenty-five page questionnaire in 1931 in the journal *Revue d’Histoire de l’Eglise de France* as the basis for a survey of contemporary religious observance in the French population that would provide the material for “a detailed examination” and “a historical commentary on the state of Catholicism in the various regions of France”. The idea was to obtain a picture as accurate as possible of the “religion of the people” – of “religion as it was actually lived”. How was this to be done? By measuring the acts defined by the institution as religious observance and establishing a typology of practising Catholics in terms of degree and forms of observance. This project met with a considerable response in the post-war context, at a time when the Catholic Church was worried about a fall-off in the numbers of the faithful. A large number of surveys were actually conducted during the 1950s and the 1960s.

Le Bras (1995, 1996) established a fourfold typology, in which he differentiated between: those *outside the fold of the Church* (or *dissidents*); *seasonal conformists* (i. e. those who go to Church for such rites of passage as baptism, first communion, marriage, burial); *regular churchgoers* (i. e. those who attend Sunday Mass and go to confession and communion at Easter); and the *devout* (i. e. religious militants).

These surveys of observance were used to produce a geographical picture of religion in France. In 1947, thanks to the efforts of Canon Fernand Boulard (1898–1977), a first religious map of rural France was published. In 1968, F. Boulard and Jean Rémy compiled a religious map of urban France. The ample material generated by Canon Boulard was used in the CNRS by F. A. Isambert and J.-P. Terrenoire to produce an *Atlas de la pratique religieuse des catholiques en France* (Atlas of religious observance in France) (1980). In addition, a team of historians published the documents accumulated by F. Boulard in a work entitled *Matériaux pour l’histoire religieuse du peuple français* (Materials for a religious history of the French people) (Vol. I, 1982; Vol. II, 1987; Vol. III, 1992). These publications helped to shed light on important regional differences in French religious observance and on the historical depth of the religious geography that they brought to light. J. Rémy, for example, referred to “cultural regions” in order to highlight the importance of geographical context in religious observance: “The most strongly observant towns are those associated with an observant region” (Boulard and Rémy, 1968, p. 59). G. Le Bras took acts of observance as the basis for his study of the “civilization of practising Catholics”. Observance was to be viewed, of course, as a dependant variable influenced by various other factors (geographical, social, historical, etc.) but also as an independent variable producing a variety of social effects



(on the countryside, work, the family, hygiene, etc.). While demonstrating the extraordinary potential of systematic studies of this type of indicator of religious activity, G. Le Bras was fully aware of the fact that studies of a population's religious vitality could not consist solely in an analysis of observance, even when the scope of the analysis extended far beyond a mere headcount of practising churchgoers and included a study of *forms* of observance (for example, length of delay before baptism). As early as 1945, Le Bras wrote: "Observance falls far short of revealing the full scope of the religious vitality of a country, a parish or an individual" (Le Bras, 1956, 561). He took a practical interest in all aspects of the relationship between a religious group and its social environment as reflected in places, buildings, individuals and groups (see his posthumous work *L'Eglise et le village*, 1976). Liliane Voyé's analysis of Sunday observance in Belgium showed how instructive a study of this particular religious act could prove (see her *Sociologie du geste religieux*, 1973).

These research trends were not only based on sound scientific foundations. They also went some way towards meeting the concerns of the Church as an institution. Aware of its loss of influence, the Church showed a strong interest in sociological studies that helped take stock of the religious situation. The studies were particularly welcome because they coincided with the pastoral interests of priests who were less concerned with traditional religious activities than with more secular religious behaviour. This also led to a wide-ranging debate, in both Church and academic circles, on the notion of "popular religion" (on this subject, see the records, published in 1979, of the international symposium convened in Paris in 1977).

French-language sociology of religion received another strong stimulus from J. Rémy, L. Voyé and Canon François Houtart at the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium. L. Voyé's opening words in a collection published as a tribute to J. Rémy perfectly summarizes the essence of his contribution to the sociology of religion: "From shrewd analysis of structures and roles in the Catholic Church to studies of the significance of observance in popular religion, a broader interpretation of symbolism, and reflections on the encounter between religion, politics and economics and on the transactions between religion and modernity, Jean Rémy has continuously instilled new life into current thinking about a field that was long confined within the bounds of simplistic sociography. Reinterpreting the classical authors, particularly Max Weber, while at the same time enriching them with his own 'sociological imagination', he has always sought to encourage debate in an area that has often been strongly opposed to the idea. In so doing, he has at least succeeded in training researchers (...)." (Voyé ed., 1996, p. 5). For his part, the priest-researcher F. Houtart, motivated by a pastoral concern with young people and the world of work, began to take

an interest in forms of urban integration of Catholicism, in both Belgium and Chicago (1957; with J. Rémy, 1968), thus inaugurating an approach in which comparative international studies played a major role. Again with J. Rémy, he undertook an analysis of the social situation of priests (1970). Following studies during the Second Vatican Council of the links between Church structures and prevailing social circumstances, Houtart focused more and more on analyses of the relationship between religion and development, adopting an approach influenced by Marxism. He worked in Latin America and Asia, providing training courses and publishing a large number of studies (1970, 1974). Like J. Rémy, he helped to train numerous researchers, especially from the “Third World”, in the sociology of religion.

It was also in Louvain that the *Conférence internationale de sociologie religieuse* (International Conference of Religious Sociology) was founded in 1948 by Canon Jacques Leclercq. Initially a Catholic association, it distanced itself from early pastoral concerns and assumed non-denominational status in 1971, becoming the prestigious bilingual (French-English) scientific society now known as the *International Society for the Sociology of Religion*. French-speaking sociologists of religion continue to play an important role in the Society, whose current President, a French-speaking Belgian sociologist (L. Voyé), was preceded from 1991 to 1995 by a French-speaking Swiss sociologist (R. J. Campiche).

### 1.2 *Early trends in the sociology of Protestantism*

Church interests and sociological research also crossed paths in Protestantism, which was grappling, like Catholicism, with the challenges of modern society. A number of studies, particularly those of F.-G. Dreyfus, provided valuable socio-demographic information on the French Protestant minority. Together with A. Coutrot, F.-G. Dreyfus presented a highly informative overview of the place and role of religion in France (Coutrot, Dreyfus, 1965). In Protestantism, religious socio-phenomenology focusing on the theology of the study group rather than the institutional church tended to predominate. The work of Roger Mehl (1912–1997), especially *The Sociology of Protestantism* (1965), is representative of this school of thought, which shows how individual religious cultures have helped to shape a distinctive approach in sociology. In Mehl’s socio-phenomenology, the Protestant religious group is perceived in terms of its underlying aims, attention being focused on doctrine and its influence on social structures, collective behaviour, forms of religious observance, lifestyle and responses to global society.

Another characteristic of the sociology of Protestantism was its interest in history. E.-G. Léonard, author of a masterly *Histoire générale du protestantisme* (3 volumes, 1961–1964), stressed both the rich diversity of Protestantism and the importance of historical memory in forging its identity. This attachment was particularly strong in the case of minority Protestant groups who were concerned about their survival in both demographic and cultural terms. In his socio-historical and socio-psychological research, E.-G. Léonard tried to identify the distinctive features of the “French Protestant”, as indicated by the title of one of his works (*Le Protestant Français*, 1955). Like R. Mehl, he tended to pay particular attention to doctrine: “A close acquaintance with the positions associated with the Reform is necessary even for those whose sole concern is to count the number of ‘faithful’”. (Léonard, 1959, p. 128). In the years when quantitative sociology prevailed, E.-G. Léonard played down the importance of such studies, stressing the role of historical sociology and psychology in investigating a religion which, alongside its minority status, left considerable scope for individual behaviour.

The sociologists of Protestantism distanced themselves from the Le Bras approach by attaching less importance to religious observance as an indicator of vitality. Sociological analysis of Protestant groups had to allow for the fact that religious worship is in no way compulsory in Protestant theology. As in the case of Catholicism, the sociologists of Protestantism studied the impact of urbanization on religious life (see Roland J. Campiche’s research (1968) on a district in Lausanne). While the French historian E.-G. Léonard had already taken an interest in Protestant groups in Latin America, the renewed interest among French-speaking sociologists in Latin American Protestantism is attributable to the Swiss sociologist C. Lalive d’Epinay (Lalive d’Epinay, 1975) and the tradition is being carried on today by the French-Swiss sociologist J.-P. Bastian (1994).

## **2. From religious sociology to the sociology of religion**

While meeting the manifest pastoral concerns of post-war Catholicism, the trail blazed by Dean Le Bras, by focusing on the “religion of the people”, was to produce a whole generation of researchers in the field of religious sociology, who gradually broadened the scope of their “master’s” thought by enhancing the independence of research from pastoral concerns and the views of the Church: the upshot was the establishment in 1954 in the G. Le Bras circle, encompassing H. Desroche, F.-A. Isambert, J. Maître and E. Poulat, of the

*Groupe de Sociologie des Religions* at the CNRS. The very title of this laboratory clearly demonstrated its resolve to take all religions into account.

The *Groupe de Sociologie des Religions*, whose emergence has been reviewed by Emile Poulat, developed the sociology of Catholicism while turning its attention at the same time to other religious persuasions. It also studied, in the light of various “classical” authors, the status of the application of the discipline of sociology to religious phenomena and the methods used (Desroche and Séguy, 1970). H. Desroche (1914–1994) was interested from the outset in sectarian non-conformists, so-called “contraband religions” (the title of a series of studies published in 1994), and messianic religions. His studies of the American Shakers (*Les Shakers américains*, 1955), of messianic religions (1969), of socio-religious Utopias (including studies of Saint-Simon, Owen and Fourier) and of the relationship between socialism and religion (1962, 1965) are a key contribution to the sociology of imagination-based representation. By showing that the messianic imagination was not merely socially determined but also socially determinative, that it possessed a power of social change through its transfiguration of the present (by linking a memory that generates a new genealogy and relates to a mythical past with a visionary future in which present reality is blurred in favour of a reality to come), H. Desroche considerably enhanced the scope of “religious sociology” and engaged in a constructive dialogue with Marxism. His *Sociologie de l'espérance* (Sociology of Hope), published in 1973, offers a remarkable introduction to his work. F.-A. Isambert, in his early works, studied the relationship between Catholicism and the world of work (1961) and analysed some of the origins of sociology (*De la charbonnerie au Saint-simonisme*, 1966; *Buchez ou l'âge théologique de la sociologie*, 1967). Combining the Le Bras and Durkheim heritages in a critical approach, he developed an analysis of ritual (1979) and investigated the social and intellectual origins of the concepts of “the sacred” and “popular religion” (these studies were collected in 1982 in *Le sens du sacré. Fête et religion populaire*). Drawing in particular on a study of the changing Catholic ritual for the dying, F.-A. Isambert drew the attention of researchers to the process of “internal secularization of Christianity”, following which he turned his attention more specifically to the sociology of ethics (1992). J. Maître made a special study of trends in the Catholic secular clergy (1967) and explored the use of mathematical methods in religious sociology (1972). He next embarked on a study of the lives of the mystics, adopting a combined psychoanalytical and sociological approach. In *Mystique et Féminité* (1997), he brought together four clinical monographs written between 1993 and 1995. E. Poulat focused on the historical sociology of Catholicism and undertook an in-depth analysis of the relationship between the Catholic Church and the modern world. Poulat's entire work (1994, 1996), ranging from his study of the modernist crisis (1962)



to that of worker priests (1965) and including his analysis of intransigent Catholicism (see, in particular, *Intégrisme et catholicisme intégral*, 1969, and *Eglise contre bourgeoisie. Introduction au devenir du catholicisme actuel*, 1977), demonstrates the need, in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of the future of Catholicism, to pay due attention to the characteristic logic of its tradition and institutional regime and to the specific tensions that underlie its whole existence. E. Poulat closely analysed the complex interplay in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries between “the dominant bourgeoisie, the Catholic establishment and the socialist movement”, each one of which, faced with practical reality, experienced the limits of doctrinal intransigency in its own way. In 1987, with *Liberté, laïcité. La guerre des deux France et le principe de la modernité*, E. Poulat reopened the socio-historical debate on French “laïcité”.

Jean Séguy, who joined the *Groupe de Sociologie des Religions* in 1960, embarked on a study of Protestant sects (1956) and produced a masterly socio-historical study of Anabaptist-Mennonite congregations in France (*Assemblées anabaptistes-mennonites de France* (1977)). He also turned his attention to the ecumenical movement (1968 and 1973). But J. Séguy also helped, through his abiding interest in Weber and Troeltsch, to introduce many young researchers to these two authors (*Christianisme et société. Introduction à la sociologie de Ernst Troeltsch*, 1980). In a number of articles, including miscellaneous studies of historical sociology, he developed and intensified sociological thinking on charisma. Studies of the Weberian sociology of charisma were later pursued by J.-M. Ouédraogo (1993, 1997).

The essential legacy of the Le Bras followers in the CNRS *Groupe de Sociologie des Religions* was an expansion and consolidation of the sociology of Catholicism (for example through regional studies such as that of S. Bonnet (1972) on Lorraine and that of D. Hervieu-Léger on students (1973)), an examination of sects and messianic religions, theoretical work on the precursors of the sociology of religion and the introduction of German sociology of religion into France.

The work of Doris Bensimon and Jacques Gutwirth on Judaism (Bensimon, 1971; Bensimon and Della Pergola, 1986; Gutwirth, 1970 and 1987) and that of Jean-Pierre Deconchy in the field of experimental social psychology (Deconchy, 1971 and 1980) extended the *Groupe's* research horizons not only by moving beyond Christianity but also by diversifying its disciplinary approaches (as it opened up to social psychology and anthropology). One member of the *Groupe*, Jacques Sutter, studied the portrayal of the religious life of the French through public opinion surveys between 1944 and 1976 (Sutter, 1984).

The expansion of research beyond the bounds of Catholicism was also reflected in the change in 1971 of the *Centre Catholique de Sociologie Religieuse* (Catholic Centre of Religious Sociology) established in 1952 into the *Association Française de Sociologie Religieuse* (French Association of Religious Sociology), with an intake of researchers working in diverse religious environments. In 1998 it was renamed *Association Française de Sciences Sociales des Religions* (French Association of the Social Science of Religion). The launching of a CNRS journal on the sociology of religion (*Archives de Sociologie des Religions*) in 1956 was a milestone event: translations and commentaries on the classical literature of the discipline, original empirical and theoretical studies, and a well-stocked bibliographical bulletin ensured that the journal evolved into an important international research tool. In 1977, to mark a new multidisciplinary approach, it changed its title to *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* (ASSR).

Noting that in most Western societies, i. e. societies that were the chief embodiment of modernism, religious observance was declining, church and ancillary church staff were dwindling and vocations to the priesthood were falling off significantly, sociologists were increasingly inclined to approach religious phenomena from the standpoint of loss. Since modernism was viewed as the vehicle of religious disintegration, contemporary religious trends could be analysed on the basis of a paradigm of secularization proceeding according to the rules of a zero-sum game: the ground gained by modernism corresponded to a loss of ground for religion. This trend was accentuated by the fact that, during the 1960s and 1970s in France, the sociology of religion and the other social sciences were characterized by a strong Marxist influence and a questioning of the role of religion in control-based social relationships. Henri Desroche's rereading of the writings of Marx and Engels alongside those of the Utopian socialists was crucially important in this regard. Desroche set out to demonstrate the active role played by religious representations in social and cultural change. By focusing on the Utopian dimensions of religious thought, he was able to apply Marxist analysis while avoiding the pitfall of reductionism. His comparison of different forms of socialism and Christianity was particularly enlightening. In addition, a study of messianic religions showed that religion was potentially a vehicle for socio-political protest movements that could even lead to revolutionary upheavals. M. Löwy, who studied the libertarian Utopias produced by Central European Jewish communities, summed it up nicely when he said that "some forms of religion may be charged with political significance and some forms of social Utopia may be suffused with religious spirituality" (Löwy, 1988, p. 250).



Researchers who adopted a Marxist approach also found it difficult to reduce religion to socio-economic class interests. Examining political trends as reflected in electoral behaviour, they noted that the most influential variable in terms of French political behaviour was not class membership but degree of integration into Catholicism (Guy Michelat and Michel Simon, in *Classe, religion et comportement politique* (1977)). Marxist authors increasingly admitted the limits and inaccuracies of Marx's analysis of religion. Michèle Bertrand, for example, thought that the founders of Marxism were wrong when they predicted the imminent end of religion. "To the extent that the foundations of religious sentiment are not all of social origin", she wrote, "the hypothesis of the endurance of religion (as a form of awareness) cannot be ruled out" (Bertrand, 1979, pp. 184 and 185).

French translations of Max Weber and the efforts of French sociologists who were able to read German (Raymond Aron, Julien Freund, Freddy Raphaël, etc.) to generate awareness among their compatriots to the contribution of the German sociological tradition enabled the younger generation of researchers to familiarize themselves with the analyses of Weber and Troeltsch. The role of Jean Séguy was crucial in this respect, particularly through his interpretation and use of the famous Weber-Troeltschian typology of "Church" and "Sect". In a broader context, receptiveness to Weber-Troeltschian issues enabled French sociologists, who had been culturally marked by the head-on clash between Catholicism and modernity, to adopt a new approach to the relationship between religion and modernity. Openness to these issues also diverted most French sociologists of religion from the pursuit of reductionist trends. Religion could certainly not be boiled down either to society (Durkheim) or to relations between classes (Marx).

### **3. The flowering of research in the 1980s and 1990s**

Given that religion was not so easily reducible to something other than itself and was not a rapidly disintegrating phenomenon in the face of an all-conquering modernity, the incentive was all the greater, while analysing the manifold social determinants of observed religious forms of expression and trends, to take a closer look at the dynamics of change that were operating within each religious environment. Accordingly, many works on each of the main religious traditions represented in France appeared during the 1980s and 1990s. These studies examined both the loss of influence of religious institutions over their members and society and the way in which traditional religious cultures and structures evolved as they were compelled to adapt to a new socio-cultural

configuration. The emergence of Islam was also given special attention. The following are the main products of this research:

– On Catholicism, the studies of Y. Lambert: *Dieu change en Bretagne* (God is changing in Brittany) (1985); D. Hervieu-Léger (assisted by F. Champion): *Vers un nouveau christianisme? Introduction à la sociologie du christianisme occidental* (Towards a new Christianity? Introduction to the sociology of Western Christianity) (1986), a study that includes Protestantism; P. Ladrière and R. Luneau, eds.: *Le retour des certitudes. Événements et orthodoxie depuis Vatican II* (The return of certainty. Events and orthodoxy since Vatican II) (1987); G. Michelat, J. Potel, J. Sutter, J. Maître: *Les Français sont-ils encore catholiques?* (Are the French still Catholics?) (1991); J.-M. Donegani, *La liberté de choisir. Pluralisme religieux et pluralisme politique dans le catholicisme français contemporain* (Freedom to choose. Religious pluralism and political pluralism in contemporary French Catholicism) (1993); and R. Luneau and P. Michel, eds.: *Tous les chemins ne mènent plus à Rome. Les mutations actuelles du catholicisme* (All roads no longer lead to Rome. Changing trends in Catholicism) (1995). As in other countries, sociologists also took an interest in the travels of the Pope (Séguy et al., 1988, Willaime ed., 1991).

On Protestantism, the works of J. Baubérot: *Le retour des Huguenots* (The return of the Huguenots) (1985) and *Le protestantisme doit-il mourir?* (Is Protestantism moribund?) (1988); Y. Bizeul, *L'identité protestante. Etude de la minorité protestante en France* (Protestant identity. Study of the Protestant minority in France) (1991); and J.-P. Willaime: *Profession: pasteur* (Profession: pastor) (1986) and *La précarité protestante* (The precariousness of Protestantism) (1992).

On Judaism, the works of C. Tapia: *Les Juifs sépharades en France (1965–1985). Etudes psychosociologiques et historiques* (Sephardic Jews in France (1965–1985). Psycho-sociological and historical studies) (1986); M. Löwy: *Rédemption et utopie. Le judaïsme libertaire en Europe centrale* (Redemption and Utopia. Libertarian Judaism in Central Europe) (1988); E. Cohen: *L'Etude et l'éducation juive en France ou l'avenir d'une communauté* (Jewish studies and education in France or the future of a community) (1991); and S. Strudel: *Votes juifs. Itinéraires migratoires, religieux et politiques* (Jewish votes. Migratory, religious and political paths) (1996).

On Islam, the works of G. Kepel: *Le prophète et le pharaon. Les mouvements islamiques dans l'Égypte contemporaine* (The Prophet and the Pharaoh. Islamic movements in contemporary Egypt) (1984); *Les banlieues de l'islam. Naissance d'une religion en France* (The suburbs of Islam. Birth of a religion in France)

(1987); B. Etienne: *La France et l'islam* (France and Islam) (1989) and *L'islam en France* (Islam in France) (1990); A. Bastenier and F. Dassetto: *L'islam transplanté. Vie et organisation des minorités musulmanes en Belgique* (Islam transplanted. Way of life and organization of Muslim minorities in Belgium) (1984); and J. Césari: *Etre musulman en France. Mosquées, militants et associations* (Being a Muslim in France. Mosques, militants and associations) (1994).

Numerous recent publications continue to explore trends in these religious environments, especially in the Muslim community (Dassetto, 1996; Dassetto ed., 1997; Babès, 1997; Saint-Blancat, 1997; Frégosi ed., 1998). F. Dassetto and Y. Conrad compiled a bibliography with commentary (1996) of studies dealing with Muslims in Western Europe. In terms of subject matter, the emphasis has been on studies analysing power structures and the exercise of authority in the Catholic Church (Palard, 1985 and 1987) and the Protestant denominations (Campiche et al., 1990), and on studies of attitudes to women in various religions (Campiche ed., 1996; Messner ed., 1996; Lautman ed., 1997). G. Vincent (1997) compiled a collection of studies on "the place of religious works and actors in social protection schemes". There has been a considerable body of research on religious change in Central and Eastern Europe viewed from the standpoint of the relationship between religion and politics (Michel, 1988, and Michel ed., 1992). In a broader geographical context, G. Kepel and P. Michel have undertaken comparative studies of the relationship between religion and politics, bringing together material spanning different continents and religions: the former in *Les Politiques de Dieu* (The Politics of God) (1991) and the latter in *Religion et démocratie* (Religion and Democracy) (1997).

French and Belgian researchers, like their colleagues in other European countries, have carefully analysed data gathered from European surveys of value systems undertaken in 1981 and 1990 by the *European Values Systems Study Group* (EVSSG). The findings can be used to situate religious trends within the overall context of socio-cultural change in Europe and to compare religious trends in different European countries. The global results of the 1981 survey were presented, at the European level, by J. Stoetzel in *Les valeurs du temps présent: une enquête européenne* (Contemporary values: a European survey) (1990). The findings of the 1990 study on religion were analysed, in the case of France, by Y. Lambert (1994b) in H. Riffault ed., *Les valeurs des Français* (French values). Y. Lambert also carried out comparative studies of religion in different European countries (see Lambert, 1994a and 1995). In the case of Belgium, comparable publications were *L'Univers des Belges. Valeurs anciennes et valeurs nouvelles dans les années 80* (The world of the Belgians. Old and new values in the 1980s) (1983) edited by J. Kerhofs and R. Rezshohazy,

and *Belges, heureux et satisfaits. Les valeurs des Belges dans les années 90* (The Belgians, happy and satisfied. Belgian values in the 1990s) (1992), edited by L. Voyé et al. In *La Belgique et ses dieux* (Belgium and its gods) (Voyé et al. eds., 1985), Belgian sociologists surveyed the various religious and secular groups representing the "spiritual forces" at work in Belgium. In Switzerland, a nation-wide survey based on a special questionnaire and conducted by a team led by R. J. Campiche resulted in the publication of *Croire en Suisse(s)* (Belief in Switzerland) (1992). Aside from the European surveys, a genuine Europeanization of research has occurred through the numerous working relationships that have been forged among researchers in different European countries. The following four collective publications are particularly noteworthy examples of the trend: *Religions et transformations de l'Europe* (Religion and change in Europe) (directed by G. Vincent and J.-P. Willaime, 1993); *Religions et laïcité dans l'Europe des Douze* (Religion and laïcité in the European Community) (directed by J. Baubérot, 1994a); *Identités religieuses en Europe* (Religious identities in Europe) (directed by G. Davie and D. Hervieu-Léger, 1996); and *Cultures jeunes et religions en Europe* (Youth cultures and religion in Europe) (directed by R. J. Campiche, 1997). On the last theme, religious attitudes among young people, research has been conducted on the religious aspirations of secondary-school students (Cousin, Boutinet, Morfin, 1985) and the religion of university students (Delestre, 1997). The survey entitled *Crépuscule des religions chez les jeunes? Jeunes et religions en France* (Twilight of religion among the young? Young people and religion in France), compiled by Y. Lambert and G. Michelat in 1992, employs data and studies to take stock of the situation in France.

However, research on the sociology of religion in France, Belgium and Switzerland is by no means confined to studies of the countries themselves and of Europe. A further striking feature of recent research has been the growing interest in other continents: Latin America, Asia and Africa. One needs only glance through the abstracts in the journal *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* to be convinced of the diversity of the areas that are being covered. In the case of Latin America, we have studies of the evangelization of Latin America (Garcia-Ruiz ed., 1992), the relationship between religion and politics (Garcia-Ruiz and Löwy eds., 1997; Löwy, 1998), Protestant denominations (Bastian, 1994) and global religious change in Latin America (Bastian, 1997). In the case of Asia, we have surveys published in the *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* on "Religion and society in India. Detours and return to tradition" (Malamoud ed., 1989), "The rise of proselytism in the Indian sub-continent" (Clémentin-Ohja, Gaborieau eds., 1994), "Religion, politics and identity in the Himalayas" (Toffin ed., 1997), and studies focusing on a particular group such as that of N. Luca (1997) on a messianic church in Korea.M.-L.

Reinicke and H. Stern (1995) have studied the relations between religion and politics in South Asia in a book entitled *Les ruses du salut (The Cunning of Salvation)*. Africa, for its part, seems to have been explored more thoroughly by anthropologists than sociologists, but a number of studies, such as that by J.-P. Dozon on the relationship between politics and religion in contemporary Africa (1995), tend towards a relativization of the academic distinction between anthropology and sociology (a trend previously discernible in the works of R. Bastide and G. Balandier).

Given the limited scope of this article, we shall focus on two areas that have been particularly prominent in discussions of the sociology of religion in France in recent years. One is the reconstruction of belief and the resurgence of the issue of a definition of religion, and the other is the relationship between *laïcité* and secularization.

## 5. Contemporary religious change and trends in French sociology of religion

As noted by D. Hervieu-Léger in her paper to the International Society for the Sociology of Religion in Toulouse on “Religious reconstruction and current trends in the sociology of religion in France” (1998, pp. 143–153), religious change has led to a challenging of the prevailing model of secularization. The following quotation from D. Hervieu-Léger refers to her assessment of the situation in 1986 in her book *Vers un nouveau christianisme?* (Towards a new form of Christianity?) written in collaboration with F. Champion:

*By challenging, in both theoretical and empirical terms, the linear model of secularization, inseparably defined as a process of rational reduction of the social space occupied by religion and a process of individualist reduction of religious choices, the sociology of religion proceeded to reconstruct its vision of the relationship between modernity and religion in broader terms, approaching it from the dual angle of dissemination of belief and conduct, on the one hand, and institutional deregulation of religion, on the other.*

Hervieu-Léger, 1998, p. 146

The reorientation of research in the field of sociology of religion was itself part of a more general trend towards the rehabilitation of action-based sociology, such as that of Alain Touraine, as opposed to structural-functionalist sociology, such as that of Pierre Bourdieu, which focused on the primary influence of the social system on individuals.



#### 4.1 *The reconstruction of belief and the resurgence of the issue of a definition of religion*

Although they do not present the whole picture of contemporary religion, such phenomena as “new religious movements”, various forms of religious extremism, syncretism and ecumenism, the close ties between religion and ethnic and religious identity in many countries, secular religiosity, shifting frontiers between religion and therapeutics, and the trend towards flexible and pragmatic forms of belief (*religion à la carte*) provide interesting material for sociologists of religion in French-speaking Europe. Admittedly, research on “new religious movements” is less developed in French-speaking Europe than in the English-speaking world. Nevertheless, we can refer to the studies of Mayer (1985, 1993) and to the Luca’s ethnological monography on a messianic movement in South-Corea (1997). Moreover, sociologists did become involved in the public debate on “sects” in the wake of the 1996 report by the French Parliamentary Commission (Introvigne and Melton eds.; 1996) and in the case of the Order of the Solar Temple (Campiche, 1995; Mayer, 1996). Two important collective books on sects and new religious movements have recently been published (Champion, Cohen eds., 1999; Messner ed., 1999).

F. Champion proposed using the term “nebulous-mystic-esoteric” (1989) to describe the amorphous groups between which people tend to move freely without being long-term members, and the networks that have developed around certain journals, bookshops and training or conference centres that specialize in various categories of spiritual experience and research. They include ancient esoteric traditions, occult sciences, therapeutic movements and mystic trends. It is therefore a scene composed of shifting parameters and embracing a wide variety of practices. Sociologists are nevertheless able to identity certain common characteristics: the search for salvation through the attainment of a certain state of well-being in this life; setting high store by experience and authenticity and attaching more importance to individual experience than to belief (each individual must find the way that suits him/her best); a holistic conception of the basic unity of beings and things, and the sense of belonging to an all-embracing whole; individual self-assurance and the development of positive thinking. F. Champion (1993a) has focused in particular on the belief of these mystic-esoteric networks in the unity of science and religion: one finds both religious reinterpretations of scientific discoveries and scientific reinterpretations of religious ideas.

Although a close correlation between religious observance and belief is still discernible, the key feature of the contemporary religious situation is the dissemination of belief. Thus, P. Cousin, C. Fourage and K. Talin conclude their analysis of surveys in Angers and Grenoble with the finding that: “Over



half of our respondents cannot be categorized as individuals who are driven by religious or anti-religious beliefs. This religious definition provides further evidence of the changing face of contemporary belief. The realm of certainty has given way to self-definition of religion and shifting parameters of belief.” Dissemination of belief, individualization and subjectivization are the characteristics of contemporary religious reconstruction. Individual and community religious experience is rated highly. This return to emotion in religion (Champion and Hervieu-Léger eds., 1990) varies in terms of religious traditions. A tendency to apply a modern criterion of truth – testing through experience – may be detected, the idea being to assess the validity of a religion. Faced with these trends in religiosity, French sociologists have shifted their focus from the study of faiths to that of belief (Babès ed. 1996), without neglecting those who profess “no religion” (Denèfle), since the fact of assigning oneself to that category by no means implies a total absence of any linkage with religion. In the study of “belief and modernity” that we published in *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* (1993, No. 1 and No. 2), we wrote:

*May we not view modernity as a rephrasing of the question of meaning in a period of transition, in a context in which transition is the basic characteristic of social experience? (...) Contemporary belief is caught up in the mobility of the times, as reflected, inter alia, in the slackening of the links between signifier and signified that has been noted by many contributors to this study: the symbolic material provided by different cultural and religious heritages is available and lends itself to all kinds of recycling. The shifting nature of belief offers particularly wide scope for actors to symbolize their existence in a creative and ambivalent way. At the same time, the rich substratum of culture and its structuring potential must be borne in mind: belief, however volatile, does not appear out of nowhere. Tradition – doubtless coupled with an undermining of the legitimacy accorded to tradition – has also played a role in contemporary upheavals affecting belief (particularly the emergence of a new age of credulity). All this makes it even more difficult to objectivize belief-related phenomena. But it also offers an opportunity, on the one hand because the new circumstances make a change of stance imperative: we must move forward from the study of faiths to the study of belief, not with the intention of ignoring faiths but, on the contrary, in order to be able to understand their scope and significance. It also offers an opportunity because such circumstances prompt researchers to overcome their dependence on institutional codes of belief and to refocus attention, in the area of belief, both on the freedom of action of the individual actor and on the collective challenges that ensue. Social science must turn to account, in epistemological and*

*methodological terms, the contemporary changes in belief that have shaken the foundations of so many previous models.*

Willaime, 1993a, p. 15

While these contemporary upheavals in belief did not lead observers to find religion everywhere after finding it nowhere, it was nonetheless difficult not to detect religious features reflecting transfers of sacredness in a number of secular phenomena although they could not be described as religion in the strict sense of the term. It may simply be argued that the more diffuse and amorphous contemporary religion becomes, the more chance there is of rediscovering religious phenomena in a secular context, in the tendency to transcendentalize and ritualize various objects. The fact that we can refer to secular forms of religiosity (Piette, 1993) and that it is difficult to distinguish the religious from the secular and the secular from the religious is an indication of the contemporary dissemination of religion and, as A. Piette (1994) puts it, of its “hybridity”: part belief and part non-belief, part tradition and part modernity, part religious and part secular. Hence the resurgence of the discussion of a definition of the very concept of religion. As a contribution to this discussion and a way out of the dilemma of “functional” and “substantive” definitions of religion, D. Hervieu-Léger has proposed an approach that concentrates on the legitimizing function fulfilled by subscription to a tradition of belief: religion then consists in the knowledge of having been engendered, in believing as others before us have believed. She defines religion as “an ideological, practical and symbolic mechanism that constitutes, maintains, develops and controls (individual and collective) awareness of belonging to a particular tradition of belief.” (1993, p. 119). D. Hervieu-Léger carefully specifies that all belief is not religious, just as all tradition is not religion; religion exists only if three elements are combined: “the expression of a belief, the memory of continuity and a legitimizing reference to an authorized version of that memory” (*ibid.*, p. 142). Religion is concerned with “the particular form of belief that is legitimized by reference to a tradition” (*ibid.*, p. 147). We have proposed as our own contribution to the discussion that religion should be viewed as “a regular symbolic communication through ritual and beliefs that relates to a founding (or refounding) charisma and that generates a line of descent” (Willaime, 1998a, p. 124). We thus stressed the fact that “there were no religions without teachers of religion and that the sociology of religion could be considered as the study of the manifold social effects of this unique social relationship” (*ibid.*, p. 125).

Sociologists are aware of the fact that the religious sphere tends to be harnessed as a source of memory at the societal and individual level (as though in response to the destructuring of space and time) and as a source of collective

and individual identity, festivals and ritual. While all-conquering modernity has led to the disintegration of cultures, it has been unable to digest everything and society has never come fully under the sway of cold instrumental rationality. Some things have proved incapable of being assimilated: emotions and passions, the imaginative dimensions of social bonds, traditions and customs. The question also arises whether traditions, especially religious traditions, have not actually assimilated modernity just as modernity has assimilated them: if we consider, for example, the internal secularization of Christianity, some of its theological products and the evolution of some of its observances, we find that the specifically religious change is impressive and demonstrates the dynamic ability of religion to ensure self-preservation while at the same time engaging in a process of renewal (an approach particularly well argued by H. Hatzfeld in his publication *Les racines de la religion* (The roots of religion), 1993). But a strikingly important development has been the demystification of modernity itself. Modernity tends to become disillusioned when it exercises its faculty of self-reflection and dynamic self-criticism: thus, modernity has become critical of modernism and of its own Utopianism and absolutism. This criticism assumed a political dimension in the context of the crisis of Marxism and the collapse of the communist regimes. In the modernity-religion relationship, it is also discernible in the form of a modernity that views itself less as an alternative to religion than as a pluralist framework within which various forms of religious expression may exist. It is in the light of this trend that we have used the terms “secularization of *laïcité*” and “secularization of science” (Willaime, 1990).

In reaction to the formlessness of non-space and the impossibility of comprehending its nature, the religious domain has been harnessed with a view to designating spaces to which people can relate. It has been harnessed as an architectural and cultural heritage which the secular Republic is particularly keen to maintain and promote in France. A wide-ranging discussion has begun in the French Republic as to whether courses in the history of religion should be organized in state-run schools in order to remedy the religious ignorance of schoolchildren (Boespflug et al., 1996; Messner ed., 1995). In reaction to the dissolution of time in the present moment and to the loss of a sense of continuity, the religious domain has been harnessed to establish continuity and to forge a memory. These are the reconstructions of traditions of belief through the power of imagination mentioned by D. Hervieu-Léger in *La Religion pour Mémoire* (Religion for memory) (1993), reconstructions that seek to transcend the monotonous routine of the present and that can serve as a means of resolving, in symbolic terms, “the lack of meaning, for individuals and groups, that results from the escalating tension between the extreme globalization of social events and the extreme atomization of individual experience” (*ibid.*, p. 243). A sense of tradition is forged anew by force of will: “being religious, in the

context of modernity, is not so much knowing that one has been engendered as wanting to be engendered" (*ibid.*, p. 245). This is a highly meaningful perception of the situation of religion in the context of ultra-modernity, in which the religious domain is harnessed anew and virtually recreated through personal choice in reaction to the hollowing-out of its social content.

We may also note with D. Schnapper (1993, p. 158) the striking convergence between "the social functions of ethnic renewal and religious revival" by virtue of the parallels in practical terms between religious experience and ethnic self-assertion. "In a society dominated by a general principle of rationalization and secularization, they both tend to give meaning to human suffering and to enable the individual to forge direct emotional relationships with others." According to Schnapper, emotional forms of both religion and ethnicity are therefore fuelled by modernity itself and tend to "compensate for the abstraction and meritocracy of modern society" (*ibid.*). It is through this compensatory function that the religious and ethnic domains may be viewed as contiguous while undergoing a process of self-transformation. Here again we are dealing with the phenomenon of religious reconstruction which seems to be characteristic of ultra-modernity: emotional and imaginary dimensions are forged anew by means of the symbolic materials available in national and religious memories.

#### 4.2 *Secularization and laïcisation*

J. Baubérot in his paper to the International Society for the Sociology of Religion in Toulouse on "The changing face of French *laïcité*" (Baubérot, 1998) addressed another issue that has recently resurfaced. "When the sociology of religion developed institutionally in France in the 1950s", notes Baubérot, "*laïcité* did not seem to be one of its explicit concerns. We may even say with hindsight that French sociologists did not think that the distinctive secular character of their country could contribute to the discussion of secularization. No real attention was paid to *laïcité* until a study by Emile Poulat was published in 1987" (Baubérot, 1998, p. 176)<sup>2</sup>. Changes in religion went hand in hand with changes in *laïcité*, which was confronted with an entirely different socio-religious situation from that which had prevailed historically. The question that came to the fore again was that of the social link, the Durkheimian question so to speak, and that of the symbolization of "living together" in an eminently pluralist society. This is the context in which we, in turn, have taken an interest in the metamorphoses of French-style civil religion (Willaime, 1993b).

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2 J. Baubérot is referring to E. Poulat's book published in 1987 entitled: *Liberté, Laïcité. La guerre des deux France et le principe de la modernité*.



The example of French *laïcité* has prompted French sociologists to explore the relationship between *laïcisation* and secularization. These are two complex terms, the first of which is familiar to French-speakers and the second to English-speakers. O. Tschannen (1992) has undertaken an in-depth critical study of sociological theories of secularization. J. Baubérot, having specialized in the history and sociology of *laïcité* (1990), has proposed a conceptual distinction between *laïcisation* and secularization, basing himself on a socio-historical analysis of the French case and refusing to confine *laïcité* to the “French exception”. *Laïcisation* is, in his view, “linked to explicit tensions between different social forces (religious, cultural, political or even military) which may evolve into open conflict. The issue at stake is the possibility of controlling (or at least exerting a strong influence) over the machinery of State so that it intervenes as a social actor and provides or even imposes a solution relating primarily to religion as a social institution.” (1994b, p. 12). Secularization, on the other hand, is, according to J. Baubérot, “predominantly a process whereby the religious domain loses social relevance gradually and in relative terms. This occurs, as one of a number of major trends, chiefly through social dynamics and without entailing a major clash between the political and religious spheres. In other words, economic, political, religious and scientific changes may in these circumstances generate internal tensions in each area but there is no serious discord between changes occurring within the religious domain and other social changes. Religion may thus, in interaction with other fields, change its nature or scale down its social pretensions so as to legitimize, or even in some cases to provoke, a certain loss of influence.” (Baubérot, 1994b, p. 14).

Viewed in these terms, Denmark is not a *laïque* but a secularized country: although Lutheranism is the national religion, civil society is highly emancipated from all forms of religious authority. Turkey, on the other hand, is the classic example of a *laïque* country that has not been secularized: although Islam lost its status as the State religion following the Kemalist revolution, it continues to play a major role in social life. Taking up this distinction, F. Champion defines it as follows: while the scenario of *laïcisation* is a process of conflict, occurring mainly in Catholic countries, between the political authorities and the Church and between anti-clericals and the clergy, the scenario of secularization is a “joint and progressive transformation of religion and the various spheres of social activity” (Champion, 1993, p. 592). In the latter case, it is less a matter of antagonism between religion and the political authorities as of conflict pervading both churches and society. This second scenario is encountered chiefly in Protestant countries which are far less affected by the phenomenon of anti-clericalism than Catholic countries. For our part, we have suggested that it might actually be preferable to differentiate between the institutional

and cultural aspects of secularization, the question of the secularization of individuals and their practices and representations being, in turn, left open by these two aspects. Using a single term while differentiating between the institutional level, the level of culture and the level of actors may prove operational precisely as a means of studying the manifold combinations of the phenomenon of secularization in terms of these three registers. It is interesting to note, for example, that France, as a *laïque* country whose culture is Catholic, is by no means an exception but occupies an intermediate position between the European countries of the North and those of the South in terms of its religious characteristics (Willaime, 1998b).

## 5. Conclusion

French sociologists, as demonstrated by the symposium organized by the *Association Française de Sociologie Religieuse* on "The religious domain of sociologists" (Lambert, Michelat, Piette eds., 1997), nowadays adopt an approach to their subject, as noted by O. Tschannen in the Symposium's conclusions, that is more constructivist and less reductionist, an approach that is particularly sensitive to the phenomena of changing affiliations and references in the contemporary religious domain. An unmistakable trend towards decompartmentalization of this branch of social science research is also discernible: whereas it tended to be marginalized in the 1960s and 1970s, the issue of religion has again attracted the interest of numerous researchers: sociologists, political scientists and anthropologists who are not specialists in the field have invaded the territory, their work overlapping with that of the specialists. Sociologists seeking to develop a general theory of the future of contemporary Western societies incorporate religious change in their analysis (e. g. Touraine, 1992, 1997; and Dubet, Martuccelli, 1998). The situation is therefore reminiscent of the period when the foundations of sociology were being laid: analyses of religious change are a key component of the analysis of trends in Western modernity.

Studies focusing on the processes of deinstitutionalization currently under way in different branches of social life (Dubet, Martuccelli, 1998) and studies such as those of A. Touraine which emphasize the gulf between the system and the actor have much in common with the research of sociologists of religion who have drawn attention to a process of dualization of religion. As part of this process, the social system acknowledges the role that can be played by a soft, reasonable, ecumenical and ethical form of religion, one that it wishes to maintain as a "sacred canopy" and as the distant horizon of a society which,



however secularized, thus indicates that it still forms part of a more fundamental order: this religious dimension, which is allusive and kept at a distance, helps to diminish society's uncertainty about itself and adds a sacred dimension to its ethical frame of reference. Although minimalist and unassuming, this *civil religion*, which operates in particular as an ethical and ecumenical religion of human rights, reflects the durability of certain religious standards of reference in the social order.

At the opposite end of the spectrum from the social system, which accords religion a certain distant recognition, we have the individual and the community for whom religion is close at hand, personally tamed and multifaceted. Individual religious commitment may be radical either at the group or at the individual level: at the group level when sectarian religious phenomena assume the form of distinctive sub-societies or subcultures that can operate within a pluralist society provided that they remain within certain bounds; and at the individual level when a person seeks seminal experiences and strong emotions with the help of a spiritual guide but without necessarily involving the formation of a religious community. These group and individual forms of religious expression are perfectly compatible with a secularized society.

The gap between these two ends of the spectrum, society on the one hand and individuals and groups on the other, may widen to the point that the corresponding forms of religious expression are viewed as somewhat alien: a tamed and rational religion as opposed to a warm and emotional religion, an intellectualized and liberal religion as opposed to a more sensitive and fundamentalist religion. Preparing the ground for research on "religious transmission in the context of modernity", D. Hervieu-Léger, having identified four dimensions of religious identity (community, emotional, ethical and cultural) clearly categorized this "dissociation of the constituent elements of the mechanism that generates religious identities associated with a tradition", each of which had been "dislodged from the system of relations that made it dependent on all the others" and had become "the exclusive principle involved in the self-construction of identity" (1997, p. 136). In the context of ultra-modernity<sup>3</sup>, the tensions between sensibility and intelligibility and between individuation and generalization are therefore strongly activated in the religious domain and of course in others too (particularly the political domain). This does not rule out the possibility of cross-currents by virtue of which soft and rational forms of

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3 Ultra-modernity is still modernity, but a modernity which is disenchanting and problematized, a modernity which undergoes the set-back of the systematic reflexivity which it has unchained. While modernity was the movement plus the certainty, the change accomplished in the name of a missionary belief in progress, ultra-modernity is the change with the uncertainty (see Willaime, 1998c).

religion become emotionalized and intransigent, and intransigent and emotional forms become liberal and rational. Although ultra-modernity is conducive to dualization, exchanges between the rational and the emotional and between the individual and the institutional have by no means ceased. Secularization, however undeniable, is also, as G. Balandier put it (1994, pp. 173–175), “uncompletable”. To advance in the analysis of ultramodern metamorphoses of religion, sociologists of religion, while not necessarily rejecting all aspects of the paradigm of secularization, must unequivocally shun all approaches which, using facile terminology, posit the “end of” or “a return to” religion.

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