

CULTURE AND RELIGION

THE DIVIDE

When Believers and Non-Believers Share the Same Culture

a) The Impossibility of a "Religious Society"

Religion creates culture, most of the time implicitly, because religion is also lived as a culture. It is inevitable that religion has a cultural "spin-off", for no society can maintain itself solely on the basis of an explicit belief. Governance can function only if the prevailing religion develops as a culture—in other words as a symbolic, imaginary system that legitimates the social and political order but does not make faith a condition of communal life. It is conformity, not faith, that forms the basis of a society; that is the difference between a community and a society.

But contrary to beliefs about religious ideologies, a faith community never is and never can be a true society, for such a community presupposes either that the citizen is profoundly and always religious (which cannot be maintained by coercion and therefore relies on the individual, in other words the political, and not on God's transcendence), or that religion is divested of its entire religious dimension in favour of external norms. That is what I set out to demonstrate with regard to Islam in *The Failure of Political Islam*.¹ In the Prophet's era, the community, which serves as a nostalgic paradigm for the advocates of an "Islamic state", had no option but to transform itself into a "real" society in order to survive: what is described as a fall or decline is the

CULTURE AND RELIGION

THE DIVIDE

When Believers and Non-Believers Share the Same Culture

a) The Impossibility of a "Religious Society"

Religion creates culture, most of the time implicitly, because religion is also lived as a culture. It is inevitable that religion has a cultural "spin-off", for no society can maintain itself solely on the basis of an explicit belief. Governance can function only if the prevailing religion develops as a culture—in other words as a symbolic, imaginary system that legitimates the social and political order but does not make faith a condition of communal life. It is conformity, not faith, that forms the basis of a society; that is the difference between a community and a society.

But contrary to beliefs about religious ideologies, a faith community never is and never can be a true society, for such a community presupposes either that the citizen is profoundly and always religious (which cannot be maintained by coercion and therefore relies on the individual, in other words the political, and not on God's transcendence), or that religion is divested of its entire religious dimension in favour of external norms. That is what I set out to demonstrate with regard to Islam in *The Failure of Political Islam*.¹ In the Prophet's era, the community, which serves as a nostalgic paradigm for the advocates of an "Islamic state", had no option but to transform itself into a "real" society in order to survive: what is described as a fall or decline is the

inevitable consequence of political success. That is why there is never any real competition between religious loyalty (ultramontanist towards the Vatican, the Islamic *ummah*, Jews and Israel) and national loyalty. A community is no more a society than a society is a community (even if it likes to think of itself as one), as Max Weber pointed out by making a distinction between *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft*, and as the anthropologist Maurice Godelier demonstrates:² what is true of anthropological communities (based on relations of kinship), is also true of religious communities. This also applies to Calvinist Protestant communities that were unable to transform themselves into proper states, despite having controlled towns such as Geneva or Boston.³ A society is based on sovereignty, starting with the appropriation of a territory. A society is first of all political, never religious, even if it calls on religion to legitimize power relations. And that is why the appearance of religion in the political sphere creates so much tension: because it cannot succeed. Religion's slide towards culture is therefore a form of domestication and instrumentalization: this explains the apparently paradoxical position of non-believers or agnostics who praise religion, from the anti-Dreyfusard journalist Charles Maurras to Nicolas Sarkozy.

The failure of politico-religious societies (American Puritans, Iran's Islamic Revolution) derives from the fact that they are officially unaware of their true means of operation (along political lines) in favour of a discourse on the leaders' and the citizens' virtue, and therefore the presumed non-virtue of any opponents, who are dismissed as unbelievers. This phenomenon of exclusion of the other in the name of purity also occurs in revolutionary ideologies: purity of class or purity of race. These are untenable systems, from Savonarola's Florence to the Khomeinist Revolution, including Calvin's Geneva; and this effective reduction to the temporal ultimately produces secularizations.⁴ The tension between politics and religion cannot be resolved by establishing a "religious" political system.

In order to endure, a society cannot rely solely on the explicit, but must build itself on the implicit and the unspoken, even if there is a consensus on the core values (which is not always the case). It must accept and not diminish its marginal elements, deviances and othernesses—from the brothel to carnival, from homosexuality to drug or alcohol use. This was often the role fulfilled by "popular culture", which also functioned as a regulatory system as it provided an outlet

and the opportunity for mockery without challenging the established order. In modern consumer societies, "diversionary" practices also serve to subvert the ruling order.⁵ The problem is managing, not restricting, the marginal elements: places of transgression (red-light districts), moments of transgression (holidays, carnivals), marginal elements, as well as private life and political opposition. There is no culture unless such spaces exist.

Societies that claim to be religious above all suppress these marginal elements and deviations, and are therefore condemned to permanent instability, as the demand for purity puts each person in a precarious and untenable position. These are societies rife with doubt and suspicion, and therefore fear (as in the Stalinist Communist systems where any hero can become a traitor). After the Wars of Religion in Europe, the idea that to be loyal, the subject must share the sovereign's religion (one law, one faith, one king), persisted for a long time, an idea confirmed both by the Edict of Nantes and its revocation, but here this religious affiliation is purely nominal, it does not imply piety.

The conviction that all members of a society must explicitly share one belief system is absurd and can only result in permanent coercion. While lamenting the lack of faith, traditional (non fundamentalist) religion is more realistic in substituting conformity for conviction, and organizing this in its own way. This is what the whole debate around *takfir* (declaring apostate a Muslim whose acts are in violation of the faith) in Islam, and confession in Christianity is about. Depending on whether it is upheld in private (Catholicism) or the subject of a public avowal (early Protestantism), the relationship between personal faith and the public person is totally different (and this legacy is apparent in the American taste for public confession, now televised). In the early days of Christianity, penitence was public and forgiveness was granted only once; this stopped when Christianity became a mass religion. Private confession (in the ear of the priest) represents a relaxing of discipline, and was introduced when "Christianity" was at its peak (in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries), i.e. when everyone was "assumed" to be Christian. Henceforth, in Catholicism, there was a complex "management" of transgression: description, categorization (list of sins), grading, confessional techniques (confessor's manuals), atonements, indulgences, forgiveness, repentance, etc. It was a question of avoiding the all-or-nothing approach, which is precisely what Calvin was to advocate. Protestantism's desired utopian return to the source also implied a return to discipline.

The same applies to *takfir* in Islam, which makes simple social conformism impossible since it demands from all a manifest faith and practice. Terrorist movements are quite naturally "takfirist", whereas *takfir* is banned in Islamic Iran precisely for reasons of governance. In Judaism, the question of an outward display of explicit faith occurs regularly in Israel insofar as conversion, which guarantees access to citizenship, is entrusted to orthodox rabbis. In May 2008, the Ashdod Rabbinical Court decided to nullify the conversions carried out by Rabbi Haim Druckman, because the outward behaviour of one of the converted women was not in keeping with her purported religious convictions.⁶ Such a decision suddenly makes the concept of citizenship more fragile: the Great Rabbinate therefore endeavoured to revoke it, more out of concern to maintain public order than because of the fundamental issue at stake.

If traditional religious societies are only held together by formal adhesion which is often simply conformism (and the other side of the coin, hypocrisy), it is also because they see real transgression only in the exception, i.e. scandal and therefore spectacular punishment, which then becomes another form of exceptionality. It would be mistaken to think that, in a society steeped in the cultural manifestations of religion, everything is religious. In a way, it could even be said that the profane and/or secular sphere is more developed in such a society, since the question of frontiers does not arise except in the scandal of the exceptional transgression. There is no paradox in seeing extreme punishment going hand in hand with a demand for extreme proof in many religions, which makes the application of penalties (outside a specific political context) almost impossible: the *hudud* laws in Islam, which entail the death sentence and amputation, are very difficult to apply, or they fulfil the desire to set an example in a context that is primarily political. The courts of the Catholic Inquisition adhered strictly to procedure. The Inquisition was a demand for conformity (but also for the eradication of the enemy within), which targeted specific categories of people (in general the *conversos*). The most shocking aspect of the execution of the Chevalier de la Barre, who was tortured and put to death in 1766, in Paris, for not having removed his hat during a procession of the Blessed Sacrament, was the discrepancy between the offence and the punishment. This discrepancy is explained by the fact that the sentence was not due to a sincere indignation at the religious transgression, but to the political will of a Gallican Paris Parliament

that wanted to demonstrate that it was better equipped than the Church to defend the symbols of Christianity.

Religion's extension or dilution (depending on one's point of view) within culture makes all the more sense in that religion itself creates the instruments for its transformation into culture, even if it uses existing operators (what I referred to earlier as formatting). Secularization in the strict sense in no way implies a conflict or a brutal separation from religion, as can be seen from the examples of Northern Europe, the USA, Great Britain, and even Thailand and Japan. Nor is the separation between Church and state necessarily a conflict between culture and religion conceived as two different belief systems, secularized or religious, as is also evidenced by the case of the USA. Moreover, numerous Gallicans were and are devout believers (General de Gaulle could doubtless be placed in this category).

b) Orthopraxy: When Secular and Religious Parties Agree on what is Good

Secularization does not necessarily imply a conflict, or even a breakaway from religion. A secularized society can remain in step with religious culture and values. Secularization affects faith, but not necessarily values, and when it is political (separation of religion and state), it does not automatically involve a debate on moral values: supporters of the clergy and anticlericals can share the same conception of morality, and changes in practice do not automatically result in a conflict between religion and culture.

The words "divorce" and "split" apply when believers and non-believers no longer find themselves with a shared "orthopraxy", even if for different reasons. Likewise, to use the word coined by Danièle Hervieu-Léger, we speak of "exculturation" when believers no longer identify with the surrounding culture, and when this culture no longer accepts religion.⁷

In many secularized societies, including republican France of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, the opposition between believers and atheists did not necessarily hinge on the issue of values, since they shared the same orthopraxy. The non-believer did not assert different values, but on the contrary claimed to be as "moral" (if not more so than) the man of religion, suspected of hypocrisy. The morality (the "morality of our fathers"), which Jules Ferry, France's

Minister of Education, included in the curriculum of the secular educational system he made compulsory in 1881, was not so far removed from Christian morality; as a matter of fact, it is a fundamental principle of this secular morality to be consensual and not to promote values that are antagonistic to religious values. Already the Napoleonic Code had a Christian vision of the family (on adultery, marital sin), which lasted until the end of the twentieth century, i.e. well after secularism had been enshrined as a constitutional principle. A woman was deemed "loose" irrespective of religious beliefs: the concept of "moral standards" was laid down in the law of the secular republic and in the administrative circulars of Republican France. In the 1920s, the vote for an anti-abortion law in France met with a certain consensus and certainly did not set believers against secular voters: there was strong pro-life support on the left (in the 1960s Jeannette Vermersch, partner of Maurice Thorez, first secretary of the Communist Party, took a stance against the liberalization of contraception). The idea that women were different from men and found fulfilment in motherhood prevailed in mainstream culture in the France of the Third Republic.

In many of today's Muslim societies, there is a similar consensus on values and norms—a consensus that owes little to explicit reference to *sharia* law.⁸ Orthopraxy here derives not from a religious practice or from an ideological demand, but from a consensus on what constitutes a shared horizon of intelligibility, which largely explains why the incantatory reference to *sharia* law generally goes alongside an indifference towards its actual implementation. Hence *sharia* is never (and never has been) fully applied, for the reasons we have continually underlined: the community of the Prophet's era was a religious community and, when it later became a political society, this was part of a political process which meant that no ruler could accept the complete autonomy of *sharia*. The ruler therefore sought to curtail it in two ways: by restricting its sphere of application (in general to personal status, family law, and possibly some penal regulations), or by codifying it along the lines of Western positive law, so as to include it in the field of state law (the Ottoman *mecele* or *mejele* Code, which remains in evidence to some degree in the legal systems of the various Arab countries). Any demand for the application of *sharia* in its entirety means an end to the political authority's autonomy, which is the aporia or insoluble contradiction inherent in the concept of the "Islamic state".

So where does the "demand for *sharia*" come from? From two very different places: firstly, from a fundamentalist impetus that is tantamount to refusing all references to history and culture, and therefore reduces social life entirely to a system of explicit norms; and secondly, by contrast, from a cultural orthopraxy, for which *sharia* is a virtual horizon of intelligibility and no longer a specific code. Beaudouin Dupret and Jean-Noël Ferrié's research shows that the Egyptians invoke *sharia*⁹ but practise it very little (no stoning, for example); it is a (very) pious hope, which is associated with the definition of a concept of "civility" (Ferrié) and not with a legal code.

If the reference to shared values is understood as a horizon of intelligibility and not as a set of explicit norms to be implemented by all possible means (legal and political), then conflicts of norms are manageable, whether they concern the question of brothels in a traditional Catholic society (where their acceptance has nothing to do with a relaxation of morals), or the contradiction between the Pashtun tribal code (*pashtunwali*) and *sharia*. The discrepancy between the norm and practice is experienced in a horizon of intelligibility which goes beyond it: I am a practising Catholic, but I can sin; I am Muslim, but I can be a bad Muslim. There is nothing schizophrenic about it. Conversely, with the arrival of the Taliban or of a Savonarola, condemned to death in 1498 for defying papal authority, everything changes: the norm is explicit and must be universally applied.

The problem comes from the break with orthopraxy and the weakening of the horizon of intelligibility. That is when the ties between religion and culture are severed: in the eyes of religion, culture ceases to be profane and becomes pagan.

The exculturation of religion is a key development in the present-day evolution of religion. It is both a consequence and an instrument of globalization and it largely explains the success of fundamentalist forms of religion. It has nothing to do with acculturation: this is not the clash between different cultures, it is a separation of culture and religion.

Divorce: Culture as Neo-Paganism

The exculturation of religion occurs when the religious norm breaks away from culture.¹⁰ For religion, culture suddenly appears as paganism and no longer merely as a profane or secular reality, borne by religion like the shadow of itself.

This happens in societies which have undergone a process of secularization. But there is no automatic link between exculturation and secularization. A secularized society can remain culturally religious, and exculturation can occur in societies which claim still to be profoundly religious but which no longer place this religion within the framework of a complex traditional culture, as is the case in the countries of Muslim culture. The divorce between religion and culture can therefore occur outside the classic secularization process.

In November 2007, the Moroccan press reported on a video circulating on the Internet, showing a "homosexual marriage" in the town of Ksar el Kebir: a man dressed as a woman is dancing surrounded by guests. There was a huge scandal. However it was more likely that the video showed a traditional exorcism ceremony during the festival of the local "saint" Sidi Madloume. We are therefore on the hitherto acceptable margins of a tradition that is supposed to be religious, perhaps also linked to *gnawi* music (practised for a very long time by the descendents of the Guinean slaves whose lineage lives on today). Suddenly, something that was both marginal and accepted becomes the subject of scandal and is no longer understood as the expression of a popular culture on the margins (margins in every sense of the word: social, as it is associated with bad boys and the socially relegated; psychiatric, as it is linked to healing; and lastly religious as it is connected to "the worship of a saint" which the dominant Salafism condemns). First of all, marginality no longer exists, because the ceremony filmed by a participant was immediately put on YouTube and widely broadcast: through technology, the incident was decontextualized and globalized. It was then interpreted through explicit norms, both neo-fundamentalist and Western—the condemnation of homosexuality, but homosexuality as defined by the West (referring not to the act but to the nature of the persons committing it). It is only in recent years that the debate on the legalization of "homosexual marriage" has gripped Western countries and become an election issue: but it has immediately spread around the entire world as a universal paradigm, devoid of any religious, cultural or simply legal context.

What is the legal definition of marriage? Marriage, in Islamic law, is a simple contract which is closer to the French PACS (civil contract between two partners, though irrespective of gender in the latter case) than to the secularized form of Christian marriage, which remains rooted in Napoleonic-type law. However, this "Western" marriage sym-

bolism suddenly becomes a universal form which stifles both Islamic law and the local cultural imagination. Simultaneously, the explicit Islamic religious norm, Salafist in this case, effects the same operation: erasing the local cultural imagination and espousing this legal concept of Western marriage. The imagination vanishes behind the reality of a symbolic system. The implicit is commanded to be explicit: for many Moroccans, if what they see on the video seems to them to be contrary both to their religion and their culture, it is precisely because the religious norm has erased the cultural imagination. The Internet creates a uniform, undifferentiated space, open to the gaze of everyone. There is no longer a centre or margins, no more gradation or variation of the norm on the one hand, or, more importantly, on the other, the norm is defined as a religious and universal norm based on a paradigm ("homosexual marriage") borrowed from the modern-day West.

So it is not a secularization process that makes such a ceremony seem strange in the eyes of Moroccan public opinion, but a neo-fundamentalist process, in other words one of asserting universal and abstract religious norms, divorced from any cultural context. The knowledge of a popular culture has suddenly disappeared. But these norms are also summary, very poor reconstructions, where religion is no longer founded on knowledge but on a mere normative code (do/don't do, *halal/haram*). We are aware of the extent to which fundamentalism of any kind ultimately rejects the complexity of all religious learning. Holy indignation is indeed holy ignorance.

This phenomenon of exculturation is even stronger in secularized societies, since the profane has lost its religious associations. Religion then has difficulty in reconnecting with a society now posited as an otherness. The cultural and the religious markers are disconnected. The need to rebuild itself within the purity of faith alone spurs the religious community voluntarily to sever the religious markers from a culture deemed pagan, and to then attempt to monopolize them. The community lives as a minority, even if the religion it claims is sociologically dominant—which is the case of Protestantism in the United States and Islam in the Middle East.

In June 1997, the Catholic patriarch of Venice, Bishop Scola, demanded the withdrawal of the dance performance *Messiah Games* by Felix Ruckert from the Venice Biennale, for in his view it was a sado-masochist interpretation of *The Passion of Christ*. In February 2005, an association close to the French episcopate, *Croyances et Libertés*

(Beliefs and Freedom), succeeding in persuading the courts to ban an ad by the fashion designers Marithé and François Girbaud, which featured Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, replacing the apostles with scantily clad young women. The court acknowledged the damage suffered by a community of people whose feelings might be wounded: the argument was not that of blasphemy (which does not exist in French law), but of *pretium doloris* (tort) and of anti-racism, in other words of the defence of a group defined by race, religion or sexual orientation. This ruling was quashed at appeal. It is interesting because it disconnects the cultural marker from the religious marker. The community of believers sees itself as having a sort of copyright on the religious marker, in this instance the *mise en scène* of a sacred text, whereas Leonardo da Vinci's painting supposedly belongs to a shared artistic heritage.

This is a problem, since either these religious symbols (*The Last Supper*) are universal and belong to Western culture, or they are specific to the community of believers, represented by an institution, the Catholic Church. But in a society like that of Europe, where art and religion have been profoundly interconnected, religious symbols belong to believers and non-believers alike. A living culture is constantly the subject of subversions, reversals and re-interpretations, even in its most trivial aspects (such as Quebecois swear words).

However, in recent years, the Vatican has systematically been reminding us of Europe's Christian origins, and Christian Democrat MEPs demanded that these Christian roots be mentioned in the preamble to the future European Constitution. But to say that there is a shared heritage is to permit anybody and everybody to appropriate it, including for the purposes of mockery, or regrettably for commercial reasons. The protest against commercialization extends beyond Catholic activist groups. If the advertising world seized on *The Last Supper*, it is because *The Last Supper* resonates with us. This subversion is a homage to the familiarity of religious references (an ad of this kind would make no sense in Yemen, for example). Banning the ironic or even blasphemous use of a religious paradigm amounts to excluding it from the cultural arena to locate it solely in that of the sacred. It then becomes the exclusive property of the community of believers, which demands to be recognized as such. It is no longer culture that forms the basis of identity, it is faith alone. The "pure" religion is the one that breaks away from all cultural references. In appropriating the

management of religious symbols, the Church asserts the opposite of what it intended to say in insisting on the importance of Christian culture in Europe. It is no longer defending a universality (even if it does think that its particularism has a universal value), but an inward-looking minority community, and it has to ask the law to protect the sensibilities of its members. This communitarian mindset is similar to that of those seeking to defend gay rights or ban sexist jokes. Its action is consistent with what has been observed in the religious arena, starting with Islam: religious revivalism flourishes by separating religion and culture, isolating religious markers from any social context and establishing a definitive division between believers and non-believers, apostates and sceptics. But the Christian culture, to which Europe can justifiably lay claim, has little in common with a faith that is pure and therefore very fragile and comes begging for the protection of the courts. Religion has just broken away from culture: the Church has become an agent of secularization.

Examples can also be found in the Muslim world. One of the strangest of these is the prohibition of Christians using the word "Allah" for "God" by the Malaysian Interior Minister. The word is reserved for the Muslims' God. But in Arabic, Allah means God in general, as is clear from the use of the word by Arab Christians. Here too the religious marker is severed from its cultural usage (in this case linguistic) and seized upon by a religion seeking to affirm its identity.

Thus the ambient culture is perceived by believers as a threat to religion; a permanent blasphemy. This exculturation of religion is a two-way process: religion loses its cultural foothold, and culture forgets its religious sources and all lay religious knowledge. Whereas in today's Muslim world it is frequent to meet secular intellectuals, even publicly declared atheists such as Abdelwahhab Meddeb, one of France's most respected Muslim writers, have been imbued with a solid religious culture—this is hardly the case any longer in the ex-Christian West. The anti-clericalists of the nineteenth century had a religious culture, often because they themselves came from religious backgrounds (Catholic secondary schools, schools run by educational religious congregations including the Jesuits); on the other hand, the late twentieth-century agnostics are often more indulgent towards a religion which they see as incongruous, strange, exotic or excessive rather than threatening—as attested by the popularity of John Paul II—since it is alien to them. It is no coincidence that since the end of the twentieth century

There has been a debate in France as to whether religion can be taught from a profane or secular standpoint, since effectively there is no longer a lay knowledge of religion. There is a paradox: those who turn to religion, as converts or as born-again, do so without religious knowledge, which they may or may not subsequently acquire, but it will be a knowledge divorced from any cultural context. The position of religious knowledge in fundamentalist circles is particularly striking.

Culture That Has Forgotten its Religious Roots

A common drawback today is that lay culture has forgotten its religious roots. This is not as a result of anti-clericalism or a militant anti-religious stance: it is ignorance. People no longer know what religion is, even if they continue to use the label. In France, in 2006, a survey was carried out among people who had explicitly replied *yes* to the question: "Are you a Catholic?"¹¹ In answer to the following question: "What is the main reason for defining yourself as a Catholic?", 55 per cent replied that it was because they were born into a Catholic family, and only 21 per cent because they believed in the Catholic faith. The survey also revealed that only 26 per cent of people who call themselves Catholics in France are convinced of God's existence. In 2007, the Archbishop of Paris, André Vingt-Trois, made the following observation: "As a result of the huge decline in religious teaching, many Catholics are no longer able to decide where they stand in relation to the Christian faith, for they are completely ignorant. For them, its symbols, its references, have become foreign or exotic. Furthermore, a certain number of Catholics have not yet realized the extent of the social consequences of this transformation. So in today's society, values are no longer based on the belief in God, the love of one's neighbour, the importance of sharing or the willingness to help others".¹² On the subject of religious instruction, he adds that "it is less a matter of consolidating or transmitting the faith but of introducing it, in a context where, of the 70 per cent of French people who call themselves Catholics, only 5 per cent are actually practising".¹³ Commenting on this survey, Father Madelin says:

When we speak of a minority culture? Indeed we can, if we consider the number of Catholics who practise their faith. But for me, living in Brussels, this is not specific to the French. A Belgian bishop recently stated that his Church would

soon find itself a minority like the Church in Turkey, in a configuration where the influence is no longer that of the primordial matrix. [...] The number of children attending religion classes has plummeted in France. This point, which was not included in the survey and over which the Church draws a coy veil, is however crucial. It explains why, in this age of the second generation that has not received a Catholic education, French Catholics do not follow the dogma. They simply no longer know it!¹⁴

This ignorance is a source of concern even in lay circles: in France, the European Institute of Religious Sciences was opened in 2006, in Paris, in response to the demand for lay knowledge of religion. But how do you teach religion without mentioning faith?

All religions share the same grievance.¹⁵ Even mainstream religions are setting about reconverting people who nominally claim to be of that faith but have lost all religious knowledge: this is the goal of movements such as the Tablighi in Islam or the Lubavitch in Judaism.¹⁶ For them, it is a matter of reconnecting a nominal affiliation with actual practice.

In spring 2006, Quebec's motorways saw the burgeoning of an unusual advertising campaign: typical Quebecois swear words such as *tabernacle* and *calice* appeared in large letters, followed by their definitions, in small type, which are religious. The campaign was spearheaded by the Bishop of Montreal with the aim of showing that these swear words had Christian origins. People only swear by the sacred, in both senses of the word "swear".¹⁷ But, when people continue to swear without knowing by whom or on what they are swearing, it means that mainstream culture has lost all its religious moorings. The Church has found no better solution than to use this profane ignorance to transmit religious knowledge, or simply to remind people of its existence.¹⁸

There is a new controversy in the Christian world, this time over religious festivals. The arrival of Halloween in France in the late 1990s angered some bishops, who condemned it as a "pagan" festival—which it is—reinforcing the slide from profane to pagan, which isolates religion from culture even more. The de-Christianization of Christmas is blatant: few people attend midnight mass these days, and Father Christmas/Santa Claus is more important than Jesus. But this de-Christianization becomes explicit in a "multiculturalist" framework, where a number of voices are clamouring for all Christian references to disappear in favour of a religious neutrality: the word "Christmas" is often evaded in the United States in favour of "Holiday" or "Yule" (a Germanic word for the December equinox); American department

stores have systematically begun replacing their *Merry Christmas* banners with the religiously neutral *Season's greetings*, much to the displeasure of many Christians.¹⁹

Confronted with this disconnect between lay culture and religion, two contrasting attitudes are emerging among the Christian authorities. On the one hand are those who are fighting to re-Christianize Christmas by preserving the word "Christmas" and thus reinstating the connection between the religious and cultural markers (see the declaration of Pope Benedict XVI of 9 December 2006, requesting that ostensible Christian symbols such as the crucifix continue to be displayed in classrooms and court rooms). On the other hand are those who, in line with fundamentalist Protestant tradition, want to separate the religious sphere completely from a lay culture seen as structurally pagan; the model for this tendency is the expulsion of the merchants from the Temple, a recurrent theme in the writings of theologian Karl Barth. In actual fact, the Protestants' desire to separate state and religion has nothing to do with liberalism—quite the opposite—it is a form of fundamentalism (similar to that of Shia Islam). The American Puritans did not celebrate Christmas, since for the strict Protestants there was no Biblical foundation for this celebration, and in the early nineteenth century Congress used to sit on Christmas Day. Modern-day Christmas, a family festival celebrated by the fireside, with a Christmas tree and presents, is a first step towards the de-Christianization of the birth of Christ, for it started in Victorian England and following the publication of Charles Dickens' novel *A Christmas Carol*. This was a departure from the Christian celebration of the period, when people left the warmth of their homes to walk through the cold night to Church. Once again, a "Christian tradition" turns out to be a cultural construct.

This "paganization" of religious festivals can be found in Judaism and Islam too: the number of *halal* turkeys sold in the United States for Thanksgiving has soared since 2001 (here *halal*, a Muslim religious marker, is placed over an American cultural marker, paying no heed to the festival's religious significance), and Jewish festivals are often combined with Christian ones, especially when the calendars coincide, which means that the religious markers on both sides are treated as cultural markers.²⁰

By extension, the disconnect between religion and culture leads to the loss of the world in-between, of nuance. The sphere of religious

culture comprised the transitional space between non-belief and the faith community. It was constructed in the mid-twentieth century as a sociological object, when believers were classified according to their degree of practice. Gabriel Le Bras had introduced quantitative methods in 1931, and Canon Boulard, a priest, mapped religious practice in France in 1947, which resulted in adaptations of pastorals and the involvement of priests in lay activities, culminating in the worker-priest social experiment. The Second Vatican Council endorsed *post hoc* this "embodiment of Christianity" in social activity. But the advent of Pope John Paul II in 1978 witnessed a return to the "faith community" where the "people of God" were paraded before the media; there was no room for nuance which was increasingly being replaced by the principle: "you're either one of us or you're not". By making the criteria of belonging more stringent,²¹ religions contribute to this growing dichotomy and to the erosion of a profane religious culture. Religion is thought of in terms of "full versus empty", of belonging, commitment and identity, and no longer of presence in the world. The "world", i.e. the surrounding society, becomes suspect, threatening, contaminating, for it is hostile, materialistic and impure—in a word: pagan.

Pagan Modernity: the Atheist's New Gods

Religions see culture's breakaway as a betrayal by culture and not as religion turning in on itself ("France, eldest daughter of the Church, are you still true to the promises made at your baptism?" exclaimed John Paul II on his first visit to Paris in 1981), or as a "cultural invasion" (*tajavoz e farhangi* in Iran).

When culture abandons religion, the result is not only the end of orthopraxy and a shared horizon of religious culture, it also promotes new values and references which are antagonistic to those of religion. Nowadays, religion condemns cultural neo-paganism. These values and references do not develop as a coherent system aiming to replace religion—which the major ideologies like communism did. In the conflict between Christianity and Marxism, there was symmetry, very often recognized by the stakeholders on both sides: there were two visions of the world which ultimately claimed to answer the same questions. However, today's neo-pagan culture does not offer a coherent system of values or references.

What are these new paradigms? Their central themes are sexuality, women and reproduction, and the place of the individual, and there-

fore of freedom, and wariness of any transcendental order. These are of course closely interlinked: the human being has replaced God. The rise of feminism with its demand for equality goes hand in hand with the idea that individual freedom should take precedence over nature. That is the crux of the abortion debate, which was probably the major debate of the second half of the twentieth century, since it embodies all the paradigm changes. Biological sex no longer determines gender; procreation is not only a choice but has become increasingly artificial; the family is no longer necessarily the framework for having children; the individual demands the right to self-determination, in terms of appearance (plastic surgery), affiliation and reproduction. Not only are values disconnected from nature and all transcendence denied, but the very notions of value, norms and ethics are being questioned, even though there has never been so much talk of universal norms (legal and political, such as democratization and human rights) as during this period. So it is not a question of a clash between a secular, libertarian world without norms and a religious world governed by a transcendental order, but of two fundamentally different definitions of human nature. Although the notion of individual and personal freedom (i.e. of human rights) stems from a common matrix with the Christian West, it finds itself in conflict with the Catholic world view that human rights are secondary to duty and to nature.

It was not the introduction of these new paradigms however which severed religion from culture, since all religions have undergone adaptation. Religion is also subject to changing cultural paradigms. As the historian Von Greyerz wrote regarding the period of the Reformation in Europe, culture does indeed have an autonomy from religion: the changes in religiosity, in attitudes toward religion, precede religious changes themselves. There was a pre-Reformation in Europe, that is, changes which were not a consequence of the Reformation but rather determining factors for the Reformation. Furthermore, it has been observed that there were parallel developments in the Catholic and Protestant worlds during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (an interest in education, for example). In short, certain things that were seen as consequences of changes within religion were actually the triggers for these changes.

During the twentieth century, the major religions encountered two contradictory movements: one was the accommodation of and even adaptation to cultural changes; the other was the acknowledgement of

a breakaway and the condemnation of cultural paradigms as neo-pagan. For example, the pro-life versus pro-choice debate is much more than the extension of the "secular" versus "religion" conflict since it does not reflect a power struggle but a conflict between fundamental values. This is way beyond a corporatist defence by a patriarchal religious institution allied with the conservative right. And yet, the Catholic Church—militantly anti-abortion since Pope Paul VI's 1968 *Humanae Vitæ* encyclical and vociferous in affirming the pre-eminence of life in all its forms—did not align itself with the conservative or neo-conservative right (except in precise, one-off instances: the Christian American right and President G. W. Bush, the Spanish episcopate and José Maria Aznar's Popular Party). On immigration, the environment, and social relations for example, the Catholic Church takes a more progressive stance than the conservative camp.

a) The New Paradigms: Sexuality, Women and Homosexuality

The relative consensus and prevailing orthopraxy with regard to these three issues was overturned at the end of the twentieth century.

For example, priests' chastity has become a central issue for the modern-day Catholic Church because it seems incongruous in today's Western world (and always has been in Islam). However, this was not an issue of great importance in the Middle Ages; independently of the actual practices of those concerned, chastity was culturally positive in Christianity, and therefore transgression was experienced as a marginal problem, which did not challenge the core values because it was not proclaimed. For the priests, transgression was managed on the fringes—a social space including prostitution, a personal conscience space that went with the concept of "weakness of the flesh", a ritual space within the framework of confession. But the teachings of the Churches on chastity have nowadays become inaudible, because sexuality has become a value in itself: priests' celibacy for Catholics, abstinence as a means of contraception or of combating AIDs, virginity until marriage, evangelical and Catholic opposition to divorce—all seem incongruous today. What used to take place on the margins (abortion, homosexuality, drug use, prostitution) now happens in public, either through those who "come out" and form pressure groups (abortion rights, recognition of gay marriage), or through the shrinking of the private sphere thanks to communications technology (Internet, social networking

sites such as Facebook), controls (police records) and an increase in the types of social relations being governed by law (for example, the extension of the definition of rape, child abuse, violence—and the concept of harassment). This means that entire swathes of private life have come into the public domain, as a result of a desire for expression, an affirmation of “identity”, or of denunciation. Nowadays, the reduced space on the fringes or simply twilight zones, the exposure of private lives, the demand for transparency, authenticity and truth plus religion’s repositioning of itself have resulted in a number of prime movers resisting sexuality being treated as a “weakness”, since for them it is now a dimension of human authenticity (take for example the cases of priests’ partners demanding recognition as such, or, in the case of Anglicanism, of gays coming out and demanding to be ordained). Nowadays “scandal” is permanent. Religion blames the new paradigms on materialism, pornography and selfish pleasure, seeing them as embodying the new idols of a society that has reverted to paganism (sometimes literally, with the development of movements that declare themselves as pagan, such as the Wicca).

The importance of the challenge to priests’ celibacy is part of the fallout from religion’s split from mainstream culture on the issue of morals. But the new paradigms also affect part of the Christian community, so that religious markers no longer even appear as a reference to a past culture, but very much as simple diktats from a hierarchy that is increasingly devoid of pedagogy. In 2005, two French Catholic priests, Bernard C., aged fifty-eight, priest of the parish of Villeneuve-sur-Lot, and Pierre B., aged sixty, of Port-Sainte-Marie (Lot-et-Garonne), were forced to leave the priesthood because the existence of their partners and children was made public.²² But local villagers, who were perfectly aware of their situations, signed a petition in their support: they did not see why there was any incompatibility, since their culture is that of the new paradigms (individual freedom, right to sexuality). On the other hand, public opinion suddenly found paedophilia, which has probably always existed in the Church, unacceptable, catching the Catholic hierarchy unaware in its inability to get to grips with the issue; its prime concern, without necessarily being over-lenient, was to avoid scandal.²³ Likewise, in the United States, the attempt by the evangelical Churches to promote the wearing of a chastity ring indicating that the wearer is against pre-marital sex does not appear to have reduced the number of people having premarital sexual relations,

which is reflected in the attempts to promote a declaration of “second virginity” (“I’ve done it but I won’t do it again”). According to sociological studies, the concept of chastity itself is being challenged by the extreme banalization of sex. Certain acts like fellatio are no longer considered sexual, as President Clinton claimed in his famous defence which came across as the ultimate hypocrisy to people of his generation, but apparently young people did not see it that way.²⁴

When it comes to homosexuality, the gulf between religion and the prevailing paradigm is even more blatant. Criminalized until the 1960s in most Western legal systems, homosexuality is not only tolerated, but has now become recognized and protected by a whole series of laws which treat homophobia as racism. It is unheard-of for a paradigm to change so fast within a culture without external pressure.

Suddenly, the homophobic campaigns, based on prejudices which were once rife throughout Western culture, appear today as hate campaigns spearheaded by religious fanatics. The campaigns led by Protestant fundamentalist groups are often considered by the authorities as racist-type discrimination (in Sweden or California, for example). In 2003, the Swedish Pentecostalist minister, Ake Green, was prosecuted for having described homosexuality as a “social cancer”; sentenced initially, he was acquitted by the Supreme Court in the name of freedom of expression and of religion. He was therefore prosecuted for denigrating a community, but acquitted by virtue of the same arguments: he belongs to a community which has the right to express itself. The acquittal in no way endorses his statements, but on the contrary places him within a community among others. The disconnect between religion and culture is total. In contrast, religions, particularly Christianity, view their battle against homosexuality explicitly as the affirmation of the superiority of the Word of God over culture: “The Gospel must take precedence over culture”, declared Bishop Drexel Gomez of the West Indies during a meeting of Anglican opponents of ordaining gay priests.²⁵ Since then the Anglican Church has been on the brink of a schism over the issue.

We note in passing that the powerful Dutch populist orator Pym Fortuyn started campaigning against Islam after hearing the Imam of Rotterdam, Khalil el-Moumni, state on television, in May 2001, that homosexuality was a disease threatening society; this opinion is shared in conservative Christian circles, but on this occasion it was made an Islamic specificity. In fact this is a good example of the horizontal

recasting of different religions around autonomous religious markers (condemnation of homosexuality) taken up outside any cultural context. The Dutch courts acquitted el-Moumni of incitement to hatred for the same reasons as the Swedish minister had been cleared.

In 2008, in Sacramento, capital of California, tensions erupted between the gay community and an evangelical Russian immigrant community (a young homosexual was killed in a brawl).²⁶ Here too the conflict was treated by the press as a conflict between two "communities", one of which (the evangelicals) was seen negatively as encroaching on the rights of the other; but the incident was not analysed as a social problem. The ethno-religious character of the evangelical community was systematically emphasized by the press. Religious communities, far from expressing a cultural consensus in their homophobic crusade, appear as intolerant minority groups.

On the other hand, in Muslim countries and in many parts of Africa, the rejection of homosexuality is still part of an orthopraxy, and its existence is frequently denied. During a press conference in New York in 2007, President Ahmadinejad of Iran stated that there were no homosexuals in Iran, while at the same time in Egypt several trials and anti-gay press campaigns defined it as the result of foreign influence. While Islam has never demonized the practice of sexuality in itself, and has even always recognized the legitimacy of pleasure, it remains intransigent on the issue of homosexuality, not necessarily as an incidental practice, but as the definition of a legitimate category, in common with the conservative Christian and Jewish stance.

Feminism also marks the establishment of a new cultural paradigm which poses a problem for religion. There was nothing specifically religious about gender inequality, which varies from one faith to another but is always a factor in religion, while being part of the general culture. Here again there was an orthopraxy upheld both by the law and by common morality (gender inequality within the couple in the eyes of the law persisted in France until the 1970s; a certain number of professions were exclusively male preserves, either officially or unofficially, and the constant discourse on the biological differences between men and women was not confined to Christian fundamentalists). Sexist jokes were not specifically limited to religious groups. As long as the restrictions on the role of women were part of wider culture, the teachings of the Church did not pose a problem. "Equal in dignity and unequal in social status" was a shared slogan. And yet

feminism was very quickly embraced by the establishment, at least in theory, as being integral to Western values. It is put forward today as a characteristic of the West compared with Islam.

Today, the West's major criticism of Islam effectively concerns the status of women (the campaign in Ontario around 2004 against the establishment of a *sharia* court on the model of the existing rabbinical courts hinged not on the principle of secularism, but on the different status of men and women in Islam), but this is a very recent phenomenon: the issue does not feature in the religious polemics of the Middle Ages or even of modern times. When Christian authors condemned polygamy in Islam, it was to censure the supposedly unbridled libido of Muslim men, not to defend women's rights. The emancipation of the Muslim woman became a central issue much later, as part of the strategies of the colonial and even postcolonial West. In the 1930s, the Soviet Union made women's emancipation the core issue of its Sovietization policy in Central Asia,²⁷ as did France in the Algerian War (but not during its previous colonization); and it has remained a central issue ever since, from the *Ni putes ni soumises* (neither whores nor slaves) movement in France to the support for Somali-born former Dutch MP Ayaan Hirsi Ali, known for her outspoken criticism of conservative Islam and the campaign against the Afghan Taliban championed by *Elle* magazine in 2000 and 2001.

Women's and gay rights therefore played a key part in the redefinition of religious markers in the second half of the twentieth century. The split is between those who embrace the new cultural paradigms, even reluctantly, and those who redefine religion by focusing on religious markers that are explicitly at odds with a culture now considered pagan. This process is clearly lengthy and complex. Globally, the issue of women's ordination led to an initial division between the various liberal Protestant Churches and Reform Judaism which accepted it. However, the Catholic Church, orthodox Christians, orthodox Jews and the majority of the evangelicals rejected it. Islam is experiencing the conflict less brutally, given the hazy definition of an imam. The first female imam (Amina Wudud) has opened her mosque in Washington, and for the first time, there have been applications from women for the position of Muslim chaplain in the American armed forces.²⁸ Meanwhile, mixed mosques are becoming widespread in the West.²⁹

Liberal Protestantism and Reform Judaism were the pioneers of the ordination of women. The first woman rabbi was appointed in the 1930s in Berlin, and the first woman minister of the Protestant Church

of France, Élisabeth Schmidt, in 1949 (but on condition that she did not marry); it was only in 1966, at the Synod of Clermont-Ferrand, that the principle of the unconditional ordination of women ministers was adopted. In November 2006, Jefferts Schori, a woman who was already a bishop, became primate of the American Episcopal Church at the age of fifty-two. The debate also embraces the theological aspect, a number of feminists argue for the divine being to be gender neutral, which reinforces the conservatives' view that the ordination of women is only the preface to a questioning of the very notion of God the Father.³⁰

Even religions that want to confine women to the role of wife and mother have to take into account the new paradigms and adapt, without going beyond the boundaries, particularly as they are all aware of the phenomenon of sexual dimorphism. In other words, the more general religious practice decreases, the greater the role played by women in religious life, even in the organization of the community itself. Today, in France, religious education and parish life are mainly taken care of by women. Islam is experiencing the same phenomenon of the strengthening of the role of practising women in a context where Muslims are a minority: the headscarf issue is the proof of women's increased contribution to the visibility and the management of the religious community. The attendance, even sporadic, at religious events organized by major Islamic bodies, like the Le Bourget festival of the Union of Islamic Organizations of France (UIOF), shows the extent to which women play a key role in organization, management and public relations. Even Orthodox Judaism is affected.³¹ For Salafism and for the orthodox Jewish movements alike, the need to rethink women's roles has also come about as a result of women's entry into the job market, which is unavoidable, even though it is often discouraged. And so the Israeli Labour Minister set up a job centre for Haredim women to counter the risk of poverty among the Orthodox community.

As regards homosexuality, there are two stages. First of all, groups campaign simply for gay believers to be considered as normal believers ("David and Jonathan" for the Catholics, Keshet for the Jews of Boston,³² Salaam, the Queer Muslim community of Toronto, more akin to the former); in general they lead to a change in tone on the part of the religious authorities (where they adopt a line that is more medical than theological), but not in fundamental attitude. However, since

2000, the real conflict has centred on the issue of gay marriage and the acceptance of openly gay ministers. And here the debate is bitter and the rift profound, particularly in the Protestant Churches.³³

And finally, the debate on artificial reproduction has also further isolated the Catholic Church, whereas most of the other religions are more open (including orthodox Judaism).

b) Neo-Paganism

Believers are alarmed not only by the changing paradigms relating to sexual behaviour but by the more serious disappearance of God altogether and the fact that the individual is the point of reference for all norms; the quest for spirituality no longer looks to God, but to post-modern religions. Both the disappearance of God and the search for substitutes display evidence of paganism.

Bishop Roland Minnerath, at the time professor of theology at the University of Strasbourg, writes: "Modernity reveals that entire swathes of Christianity are in the process of *pseudomorphosis*, a term taken from mineralogy, used by H. I. Marrou to describe the mutation of pagan religiosity in the second century. Nowadays, this concept is applicable to Christianity: within the unchanged outer casing of Christian words, rites and symbols, the content has changed and is changing and has become imbued with a new purely secular meaning, within a perspective from which the mystery of God is absent"; we are therefore witnessing a reversal of the processes which made the transition from paganism to Christianity possible. He adds: "Postmodernity paves the way for the irrational, gnosés and sects, with the New Age promising the fragmented individual a cosmic communion at a time when social or simply family communion has become impossible. Postmodernity is not conducive to a return to Christianity. It shows no interest in knowing the God who is transcendent and incarnate, creator and redeemer of the world and of humanity".³⁴ The divorce between culture and religion could not be more pronounced. This is particularly true of Spain, where, during the 2004 elections, the Catholic Church suddenly noticed it was culturally, and not only politically, a minority: the Archbishop of Madrid, Cardinal Rouco Varela then condemned "the culture of secularism" as a fraud.³⁵

The values of freedom take precedence over those of the Church, which attempts to link the two, but its message goes unheard, as Pope

Benedict XVI acknowledged during his visit to the United States in April 2008, when he declared in New York: “‘Authority’. ‘Obedience’. To be frank, these are not easy words to speak nowadays. Words like these represent a stumbling-stone for many of our contemporaries”.³⁶ Religions find the issues which are at the core of contemporary values—freedom, democracy and human rights—problematic. The fundamentalists reject them outright while the more moderate conservatives try to give them new meaning. But what is to be done when the religious establishment accepts the framework of democracy and institutions (and this is equally true of the Catholic Church, the Protestants, the conservative Jews and an increasing number of Islamists), but at the same time claims there are non-negotiable values (“life” for Christians who are anti-abortion, *sharia* law for the conservative Islamists). The dichotomy does not necessarily involve a conflict, but it places religion in a position of exteriority.

The new idols and beliefs, from Madonna to Harry Potter, Halloween and Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code* are another target. Not that these are new religions, but because thanks to them neo-pagan beliefs form the backdrop for contemporary culture, thus demeaning the major religions which have become mere avatars of the new beliefs. The success of *The Da Vinci Code* surprised the Catholic Church as not only does the novel destroy Christian theology from within, but it turns present-day Christianity into a sect, a plot, a successful heresy even: in fact it overturns the relationship between majority and minority, sect and Church. What doubtless shocked the Church above all is that this theory managed to sound plausible, if not true. This same battle is also to be found in Islam, but on two fronts. The first, Salafism, fears above all the Christianization of Islam and sees the cultural invasion as a form of Westernization. But there is another tendency which advocates an alliance between the major “religions” against the “pagans” and seeks common ground. Likewise the Catholic Church is also looking for allies in secular circles to combat Halloween, this time presented as a form of Americanization. There is a constant ambivalence in the battle against paganism, which zigzags between arguing that it is eroding religion and resisting imported foreign cultures, namely Western culture in the Orient, and American culture in Europe. That is why there is such a strong shared anti-American feeling, as the USA can be held responsible both for neo-paganism and Christian evangelicalism.

Refusing to legitimize homosexuality plays a major role in this endeavour to create a united religious front against materialism and neo-paganism. This is illustrated by the opposition to Gay Pride in Jerusalem in 2007 and 2008, to gay marriage in California in 2008 with support for the reinstatement of Proposal 8 banning same-sex marriages, and the joint communiqué issued by four religious leaders of the French city of Lyon, in 2007 opposing the legalization of gay marriage (the bishop, the rabbi, the imam and the evangelical Christian minister—the Reformed Protestant minister did not sign).

And now a new controversy has emerged: the evolution debate. Confined since the end of the nineteenth century to an American fundamentalist Protestant fringe, it has gained a new momentum in the United States with the intelligent design theory, which makes it possible to reintroduce the idea of a grand evolutionary design without appearing to promote a literalist interpretation of the Bible. Thus it is possible to rally a broader front in order to ensure the inclusion of intelligent design in the school curriculum; it also makes it possible to rally Muslims, as it is no longer the Bible as such that is being promoted. Around 2000, the storm suddenly crossed over to Europe both with the dissemination in European languages of works by the Muslim writer Harun Yahya (*The Atlas of Creation*), who echoes the arguments of the Protestant fundamentalists (another instance of a typically Christian debate imported into Islam by fundamentalists, who unwittingly become the agents of Islam’s Christianization), and with disparate comments by Catholic dignitaries distancing their religion from Darwinism (for example the Bishop of Vienna, Cristoph von Schönborn, writing in the *New York Times* of 7 July 2005). The notion of intelligent design is gaining currency in Christian and Muslim circles, and this represents a definite rift between culture and religion, since, like Galileo’s theory that the earth moves around the sun, evolutionism had become an integral part of shared culture, outside strictly scientific debate. Furthermore, the evolution debate underscores another crucial division: that between religion and science; it is not that religions have suddenly become obscurantist, but quite simply because religion no longer sees the affirmations of science as objective and neutral. The split goes beyond culture: it impacts on the relationship between science and faith.

A recurrent issue in the Muslim world is the condemnation of *kufr* (disbelief) which supposedly lies at the heart of Muslim society and of

culture. The loss of religious certainty means that at any moment the legitimacy of a particular practice can be called into question, from credit cards to shaking hands. Not that this is a return to an archaic traditional vision which did not have these problems. The question arises from the fact that current cultural and social practices, in the Muslim world too, do not derive from a traditional Muslim culture. Nothing is clear: religious practices are no longer embedded in the surrounding culture, they have to be reformulated, imposed (note for example the role of religious police in Saudi Arabia) and explained. *Kufr* is at the very heart of society because it is not recognized as such: it has acquired the social visibility that religion no longer has.

The *ulemas* associate neo-paganism in Islam with Western influence, which suddenly allows deviances to be externalized by labelling them a foreign import, as is exemplified by the trial of gays in Cairo (2001), Ahmadinejad's declarations that there are no homosexuals in Iran, or the repeated condemnation of Satanism in the Arab press. Here, as with sexuality, the prevailing orthopraxy means that there is a relative consensus on these matters and that there is no distinction between the religious stance and the secular. But, as in the case of the "homosexual marriage" in Ksar el Kebir, this is in fact a process of exculturation: everything that does not come within the explicit religious norm is considered as not conforming to the "authentic" culture. The crisis of faith is associated with growing Western influence. Thus, the defence of religion is recast as the defence of a cultural identity, of an "authenticity", which itself is cut off from the complexity of the real culture. The word "culture", as is often the case in contemporary Islam, does not designate otherness in relation to religion, but the reformulation of this religion into a number of norms in isolation from any real cultural context, and in particular from popular cultures. For many Muslim community leaders in the West, as well as for politicians from the Muslim world, to speak of "Muslim culture" is a way of expressing an abstract conception of religion in the idiom of multiculturalism, a concept promoted in numerous quarters in the West. Paradoxically, multiculturalism is used in a way to deculturalize traditional Islam(s) in favour of a global and homogeneous set of abstract religious norms (single sex education, the headscarf, *halal* etc.), while using the West's own lexicon. It is in the Muslim countries that the issue of defending cultural identity has been the strongest: to give way over cultural values is to give way over faith and religious

identity, and vice-versa. But at the same time, profane culture in the Arab world is fast disappearing under the dual pressure of Salafism and Westernization. The paradox is therefore that the promotion of a normative Islamic culture is detrimental to classic, popular cultures, and not to Westernization.

c) The Severing of Ties

Despite nostalgia for the good old days, when religion was embedded in culture and culture imbued with religion, the severing of these ties has been observed almost everywhere, including in societies where there is a majority religion. But often the first symptom of the disconnect between religion and culture is an internal division within the religious community, in the form of a schism or of a waning interest. The severing of ties became increasingly frequent from the 1960s, reflecting diverse responses to exculturation. In Catholicism, the driving force behind the split was Bishop Lefebvre who founded the Saint Pius X Fraternity in 1970 and broke with Rome in 1975. At the other end of the opinion spectrum was the departure of large numbers of priests and followers who tiptoed off without actually breaking away.³⁷ During this same period, inspired by the thinking of Sayyid Qutb, radical Muslim groups broke away from mainstream Islam, denouncing as apostates any Muslim leaders who refused to break off relations with the West and existing regimes: there was a spate of assassinations of Muslim religious dignitaries in Egypt (the Minister for Waqfs, Sheikh al-Dhahabi, in Cairo in 1977) by Shukri Mustafa's *Al-Takfir wal Hijra* (Excommunication and Exodus) group, as well as the storming of the great Mecca mosque by Juhayman al Utaybi in 1979.

In Protestantism, the many different Churches offered an array of choices so changes took the form of moving from one "denomination" to another, and thus from established Churches (Anglicanism, Lutherism, Episcopalianism, Methodism) to Pentecostalism and evangelicalism, which went hand in hand with exculturation and deterritorialization (people left their parish and local social networks to attend often distant places of mass worship). However at the beginning of the twenty-first century, internal splits on the question of homosexuality emerged, particularly in the Anglican movement, where a schism has been brewing between a faction that refused to legitimize homosexuality (comprising the African Churches joined by white American parishes and a

handful of English bishops), and the Anglo-Saxon majority, since the American Episcopal Church appointed the first openly homosexual bishop in 2003. In Judaism, the division between Reform, conservatives, orthodox and ultra-orthodox goes back to the nineteenth century when it was sparked off by the issue of incorporating and accepting secular values. This division was deepened by the creation of the State of Israel, where the orthodox have the monopoly on public religious practice and the rabbinical courts, which puts them on a collision course both with the secular community and also with the majority of American rabbis.

Breaking away also presupposes established procedures for entering (and being expelled from) the community, since the "sociological believer" (one who is born into a religion as opposed to choosing it) is no longer recognized. For the Protestants, it was the requirement to be born again by explicitly requesting baptism. Since the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church has been running educational courses for those wanting to be baptized: it is not enough just to request baptism, and sometimes it is not sufficient to have been baptized as a child if people have subsequently stopped practising. For marriage too, non-regular churchgoers are now asked to attend classes. Everywhere, in Judaism and Islam alike, conversions of convenience (for marriage purposes, for example), which were relatively easy until the 1960s (it was just a matter of finding the right rabbi), were called into question, and prospective converts now have to go through a proper process which takes a certain amount of time. Conservative rabbis campaigned against mixed marriages, for they now refuse conversions of convenience, and are moreover highly sceptical of genuine conversions: they therefore advocate endogamy. I am not aware of any studies on conversions of convenience in Islam, but my experience in my professional milieu (where by definition there have been a lot of mixed marriages) is that thirty years ago it was sufficient to say the *shahada* and the matter was settled, whereas today countries like Tunisia (even though purportedly secular) and Morocco insist on applicants undergoing proper training and being tested by imams.

d) Religious Purity

Once the split between religion and ambient neo-paganism has been internalized, there are two ways for religion to go: turning inwards or

reconquest (which does not preclude reconquest after turning inwards). Turning inwards occurs on the affirmation of a clear separation between the community of believers and the rest of the world: the shades of grey, nuance and ambiguity disappear; in other words, the cultural sphere. The main issue becomes "them and us": the discriminating factor being active faith, not just mere belonging. The new Protestant groups are "confessing"; in other words, to be counted as a member of the community adults must make a personal commitment, by being baptized anew, for example: there are no half-measures, no "sociological Christians". Personal faith must be declared and worn as a badge. So there is an emphasis on being born-again, being reborn into the faith as an adult. Even in religions that do not make it a theological principle, this return of the believer to a manifest faith is valued: this applies to the Muslim Tablighis as well as to the Catholic Charismatics. Orthodox Jewish groups, like the Lubavich, encourage those they call the *Baal Teshuva* (returnees) to revert to strict practice, renouncing a life that is not entirely governed by religious norms and markers.

As the philosopher Jean-Luc Marion says: "Christians should first of all be concerned with Christ, since non-Christians are concerned chiefly with the Church. For the rejection or acceptance of the Church does not derive from an ideological or even spiritual choice, but from a choice by God in Christ. The Christian or the non-Christian materializes by replying yes or no to this choice".³⁸ It is all or nothing. The strongly Calvinist notion of the chosen is very much back on the agenda, including in Catholicism; in the novel *Left Behind*, by the American evangelicals Tim La Haye and Jerry Jenkins, the chosen are suddenly called to God, leaving the profane world in a state of crisis and war.

Whereas Catholics generally seek to remain connected to culture and to keep it within the religious sphere, evangelicals and Salafis find the concept of culture itself problematic. They want to be rid of mainstream culture. Ignoring this pagan culture is a way of salvaging the purity of their faith. It is holy ignorance. What David Martin says of the rules established by the Pentecostals in Latin America eloquently defines the relationship of the new religious movements to culture:

These rules are rigid and puritanical, particularly the total ban on alcohol, tobacco and drugs, the tight controls on sexual behaviour and the hedges erected between believers and worldly temptations—cinema, dancing, football (because of its association with drunkenness and bad language), theatre, secular literature, and the entertainment of the mass media are all forbidden.³⁹

In this second quotation from an American theologian, it is clear that there is not an opposition between "good" and bad culture, but quite simply between faith and culture: "In order to live lovingly, we must somehow refuse to live in fear in a culture that constantly confronts us with well-publicized dangers... I suggest that the rhetoric of romantic love in our entertainment culture effectively functions as misdirection".⁴⁰

The "early years" paradigms therefore serve to bypass culture, which is seen as a product of historic contingencies, as an accretion which is at best useless, at worst, damaging. For Protestants, these "early years" are the time of Jesus and more specifically of the apostles. It is a matter of living one's faith as the early Christians did.⁴¹ The Biblical texts are followed to the letter, ignoring the literary and historical dimension of these scriptures; for example, the fact that the *Book of Acts* is filled with literary references, highly crafted and written in a complex style.⁴² On the contrary, it has been taken as the guide for the modern-day itinerant preacher. Ignoring culture does not mean rejecting cultural references or writings, but deliberately neglecting their cultural dimension. This also explains why, for the Protestants, translation does not pose a problem: the well-known disadvantage of any translation (loss of cultural and literary connotations, hence the Italian saying *traduttore, traditore* [translator, traitor]) becomes an advantage, since dodging the text's resonances allows the message to be understood immediately outside any cultural dimension. Translation is a plus, since it makes it possible to extract meaning devoid of context: it is a reversal of the problem of literary translation. The meaning is guaranteed by the presence of the Holy Spirit, not by the clarity of the writing.⁴³ Historical, linguistic or literary knowledge is unnecessary if one is assisted by the Holy Spirit.

This veneration of the early days to the detriment of history is also found in Islam among those who see the first Muslim community as the paradigm for all Muslim societies, which cannot be superseded, and who consider that the pinnacle of devotion is the emulation of the prophet (as among the Tablighis and the Salafis), and not theological knowledge.

The new religious movements are therefore reluctant to participate in social movements for they fear the dangers that engagement with the world means for their faith. In her study on the spread of evangelicalism in Latin America, Bernice Martin mentions the minister

Caballo de Pueblo Hundido in Chile, who condemns football not out of opposition to the sport in itself, but because it is associated with cultural behavioural traits that go against religious practice (for example, the use of alcohol), even if he himself has no reticence towards material or professional success. It is not through asceticism that he is opposed to the sport, but because football is associated with an immoral culture.⁴⁴

The Catholic Church, which in Europe opened up and lent churches to other faiths in the 1950s and 1960s, now closes its doors not only to other religions but even to lay activities, such as non-religious cultural events. Parishes in France refused to "lend" their church for Telethon concerts in 2007, bishops even spoke out against taking part in the Telethon, which fundraises for muscular dystrophy research, because such medical research might involve the use of embryos. Everywhere defending the group's identity and values takes precedence over social and pastoral concerns.

In some cases, physical attacks are carried out on the vectors of alien culture: the Taliban, both Afghan and Pakistani, prohibit television and video; the ultra-Orthodox Haredim Jews of Jerusalem rail against the last cinema left in the Mea Shearim neighbourhood, the Edison, whereas others have tried to develop a *kosher* Internet. For the problem is general: how can you use modern technology while separating it from the values it conveys?

In an American evangelical university, the preacher suggested that the students themselves isolate the negative cultural markers by writing them down on scraps of paper which were solemnly (accompanied by a prayer) thrown into the rubbish bin, along with objects symbolising pagan culture, all of which were "cultural garbage". This is the list: "Ryan Seacrest, Louis Vuitton, Gilmore Girls, Days of Our Lives, Iron Maiden, Harry Potter, 'need for a boyfriend' and 'my perfect teeth obsession'". One had written in tiny letters: "fornication". Some teenagers threw away cigarette lighters, brand-name sweatshirts, Mardi Gras beads and CDs—one titled "I'm a Hustla". The second stage consisted of rebranding: in replacing the cultural markers that had just been thrown away with religious markers, but with the same form (especially printed T-shirts); the preacher declared: "I strip off the identity of the world, and this morning I clothe myself with Christ, with his lifestyle. That's what I want to be known for". The journalist adds: "Outside the arena in Amherst, the teenagers at Mr. Luce's

Acquire the Fire extravaganza mobbed the tables hawking T-shirts and CD's stamped: "Branded by God". Mr. Luce's strategy is to replace MTV's wares with those of an alternative Christian culture, so teenagers will link their identity to Christ and not to the latest flesh-baring pop star".⁴⁵

Muslims living in the West are advocating "Muslim outfits", that go against current fashion: from the Salafist *shalwar kamiz* to the *dawa-wear* of "market Islam" to use the term coined by Patrick Haenni, it is a matter either of ignoring or of "rebranding" clothing fashion (by giving it a religious marker).⁴⁶ The prevailing cultural markers are replaced by religious markers, but which are worn exactly as if they were cultural identity markers.

A minority separatist vision is established. This minority discourse is now explicit, including in societies where religion is culturally dominant. We have even witnessed American evangelicals protesting against discrimination against them in schools and public spheres in the United States itself, or filing complaints claiming that competitive university entrance examinations discriminate against them because of their different sensibility; again, in doing so, they are adopting a communitarian attitude ("Don't touch my community!") and not one of evangelization.⁴⁷ Richard Turnbull, the principal of Wycliffe Hall, an Anglican theological college in Oxford, which is in no way marginal, states that 95 per cent of the British population will go to hell unless they repent and listen to the Word of God.⁴⁸ While there is nothing reprehensible about this theory from the theological point of view, it contrasts sharply with the restraint of the Anglican establishment and clearly shows a challenging of the link between the Anglican Church and British society coming from within.

In Islam, the radical groups of the 1960s and 1970s defined themselves by the names they chose, as small minorities within a world that had become Muslim in name only: the "Saved from Hell" or "Excommunication and Exodus". But, more generally, the Salafis promoted the *hadiths* of the Prophet that emphasize the inevitable division of the community, for example between seventy-two "sects" (*firqa* is the word for sect) of which only one will be saved (this is a very Calvinist theme: another sign of religion's standardization). On the Internet, a Muslim *a capella* (*nashid*) song became very popular in the noughties. It began with a video showing an activist who, having been sentenced to prison in Egypt, hums this song behind bars. It is called *Ghuraba*,

"The Foreigners", but these foreigners are the good Muslims, who are foreigners in this world because they are in a minority, because they are indifferent to mainstream culture even though it claims to be Muslim—"ghrabaa' hakazhal abraaru fii dunya-al 'abiid" (foreigners: this is how they are free in a world of slaves).

In late 2007, a strange correction notice was printed in the Israeli daily *Yated Ne'eman*, published by the ultra-Orthodox Degel Hatorah group:

Unfortunately, in the Friday edition an ad appeared that has no place in *Yated Ne'eman* (...) The ad was sent by a group that seeks reconciliation between the secular and the religious. We apologize to readers for the mishap. Steps have been taken so it will not recur. We must clarify that any Jew who believes in the 13 Articles of Faith can never enter into a friendship with those who deny faith in the Creator of the world. (...) We can never forget nor can we reconcile with secularism, which moved hundreds of thousands of children from religious education to an education of forced conversion from Judaism through deception and corruption.⁴⁹

Noah Feldman, a brilliant professor at the Harvard Law School and a practising Jew, describes how, after attending the annual meeting for alumni of the *yeshiva* where he had studied, he received the commemorative photo minus the picture of his wife which had been cropped from the group because she is not Jewish.⁵⁰ There is nothing new about the rejection of mixed marriages among orthodox Jews, but what is interesting, in the heated debate that followed the publication of this article, is that the question was posed in terms of safeguarding the community from slander rather than of adherence to religious principles.⁵¹ In 2006, the Lubavitch Rabbi Eliezer Shemtov published *Dear Rabbi, Why Can't I Marry Her?*— a little educational book which was translated into several languages. The campaign against mixed marriages was being waged openly, including in perfectly assimilated and politically liberal circles: the famous American lawyer Alan Dershowitz wrote a book refuting the argument of his son, who informed him that he was marrying a non-Jewish woman but wanted to remain Jewish.⁵² Assimilation has once more become a thorny issue in religious Jewish circles.⁵³

Religion, thought of as a minority category, thus ends up claiming to be one. "Aged between fifteen and twenty-five, they belong to a strange tribe. Journalists and sociologists have given this tribe a name: the John Paul II generation. They believe in God, they're Catholics (they call themselves "cathos"), they love the Pope and are proud of it,

and at the same time they are fully of their era, for better or for worse, and perfectly comfortable with themselves: strange animals indeed".⁵⁴ Religion then turns inwards towards identity or reconstructs itself as a faith community (people speak of Catholic identity or Muslim identity, which would have made no sense in medieval times). The paradox is that to build a "faith community", groups use the religious marker along the lines of the current cultural markers; they are thus forged in multiculturalism. Instead of encompassing culture, religion becomes a sub-culture, on a par with worker, gay, feminist or black culture etc. Thus it is not unusual to find the gay stand close to the Muslim stand at events bringing together "minorities", from San Francisco to London.

It is in this sense that the word "culture" is very often used by religions, Christian and Muslim alike. For example, the Italian Cardinal Biffi wrote the following on the subject of defining culture:

Whichever meaning we may subsequently wish to attribute to it (at least among those more commonly accepted and used), the existence and semantic—and not only semantic—legitimacy of a 'Catholic culture' is incontrovertible. And it is in carrying out our duty of safeguarding the 'Catholic culture' that we find the answer to the question we are asking. It means that the fundamental identity of a Christian involved in politics is not guaranteed by the fact that he adheres devoutly to the Creed, respects the sacraments, and accepts God's commandments without reservation. He must struggle to remain firmly faithful to that 'culture' which ultimately derives uniformly, through the different forms of the Church, from Christ and his Gospel. In short, he must remain faithful to a Catholic culture. [...] "Is there such a thing as a 'Catholic culture'? Yes, there is because a Catholic people exists and must exist, despite those who think that Christianity is dead and that is a good thing. Today's Christian society may be a social minority, unlike a few centuries ago, but this is no reason why it should be less alive and less clearly identifiable.

The cardinal concludes that political compromise should not be pushed to the detriment of an identity that must never be jeopardized.⁵⁵

All the vocabulary is there: minority, identity and culture as group culture, brought down to the explicit norms of religion and not to the profane development of religious inspiration. Surreptitiously, religion embraces the multiculturalist discourse by positioning itself as a cultural minority, for which the cultural marker is provided by the religious norm freed from any context. The religious marker serves as an identity marker. Once again religion and culture merge, but because it is the explicit religion which provides the cultural norm, it is indeed culture that disappears, drained by the religious norm.

And so it follows on quite naturally to find Christian Pride events conceived on the lines of Gay Pride, as in Paris in May 2008. The minister who organized it referred explicitly to an "evangelical culture", which is more restrictive than Christian culture, and shows that here the word "culture" refers to an identity, and not to a different content of purely religious markers.⁵⁶ Identity here is not the usage of a modern concept that helps to understand the past better: it is a "performative" concept which creates the thing it names.

For example, whereas throughout the twentieth century the Catholic Church in France, in its conflict with secularism, had encouraged parishes to become involved in social, cultural and sporting life again and to place the religious marker on these activities (patronage, sports clubs, summer camps), from the moment Cardinal Lustiger was appointed Archbishop of Paris in 1981, the tendency was rather for communities to become inward-looking while displaying the flag (in this case the cross): community radios, spiritual retreats, pilgrimages, etc. In the 1950s, merging with the surrounding secularism was seen as a kind of vocation (ministers wore lay dress, churches with no external signs were built, it was thought that God's grace manifested itself in profane areas, including in politics, in social and national liberation movements, for example); whereas now manifestations of belonging are re-appearing—clothing, architectural and linguistic. This is the opposite of the liberal trend embodied by the Protestants Friedrich Schleiermacher, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Harvey Cox, for whom secularization was not only inevitable, but positive, to the point where religion should merge with the secular; in a post-religious world, values are no longer conveyed by religion in itself. In this theology of secularization, the religious marker was obliterated. For today's new believers, it is the contrary: there is nothing positive in the profane, and the religious marker must not only be rehabilitated, but brandished.

The isolation of the religious marker is evident in the gradual appearance of a specific religious "labelling": there is talk of *Catholic* writers (which seems to have begun in 1905) in the same way as during the twentieth century people spoke of "black" or "women" writers. At the close of the century it was the "Islamist" writers who emerged, at the same time as a profane religious literature intent on promoting the religious marker once again in a world without religion⁵⁷ and always describes the same scenario: a young woman or man is tempted by worldly pleasures but ends up finding happiness in reli-

gion and family life.⁵⁸ Religious schools (with some exceptions, of course) tend either to become profane (like private Catholic schools in France), or to teach only religious studies, as is increasingly the case in the *madrassa* and the *yeshiva*. Of course, some tendencies encourage the double curriculum (going to university while pursuing religious studies) and others try to reintroduce secular teaching in religious schools. With hindsight, it is clear that nearly everywhere religion has withdrawn into a sort of identity sub-culture, while claiming to be universal.

Suddenly, this withdrawal leads to a double antagonism, externally and internally. Externally, attacks are launched either through the courts, or through the threat of direct action (the famous, and often imaginary *fatwa*). The proceedings instigated in secular courts are generally based on the principle of defamation against a community which demands to be respected (*The Last Supper* trial, the Danish cartoon case, the Rushdie affair). There are a growing number of cases involving anti-semitism, real or imagined, in the West. In countries with a state religion, we are seeing the revival of, or the demand for, blasphemy laws. Even supposedly "liberal" religions like Buddhism are playing this card.⁵⁹ Within the community, excommunication procedures such as *takfir* in Islam and *pulsa danura* among the Haredim are being revived.⁶⁰ Evangelical Churches are encountering the problem of "cooling off" from those who are not able to sustain the required degree of commitment. The fact that the religious community is no longer based on conformism, territorialization or the surrounding culture means that people join it as a result of a voluntary decision, but they can be expelled from it just as quickly.

e) Holy Ignorance

Taken to extremes, this rejection of profane culture also turns into suspicion of religious knowledge itself, with the notion that, firstly, there is no need for knowledge in order to be saved, and secondly, that knowledge can distract from the true faith. The Word of God can be transmitted directly, without the mediation of knowledge: that is precisely the function of the Holy Spirit for the Protestants. It is not erudition that enables people to discover the truth beneath the Biblical text, it is because this text is God's living word, because it speaks the truth. One must allow oneself to be inhabited by the Word. Taken to its

extreme, this vision is embodied by the Pentecostals' famous "speaking in tongues" (glossolalia): on the model of the apostles at Pentecost (hence the movement's name), believers, visited by the Holy Spirit, begin to utter sounds which each person understands in their own language. For them it is not a question of suddenly being able to speak Chinese, Tagalog or Hebrew, but of being understood directly through a sound medium that is not linguistic. Here there is no question of theological, linguistic, or cultural knowledge; on the contrary, it is that of a presence un-mediated by knowledge. This is the most typical case of the obliteration of the letter to serve a word that enters directly, without the mediation of language. But, by definition, language is both a vehicle for culture, an object of learning and a tool of knowledge. The obliteration of language in favour of the Word is probably the most perfect example of holy ignorance.

But there are other instances of the transmission of the message without transmitting knowledge: all forms of ecstasy, of meditation, of Zen. In Judaism, where knowledge is traditionally greatly valued, Hassidic movements nowadays place the emphasis on other forms of transmission: the Nachman or Na Nach as they are commonly called organize itinerant groups of musicians and dancers so as to "spread joy".⁶¹ Emotion is passed on, the aim is to share one's joyful religious experience with others, but anything resembling discursive knowledge is avoided, since it is a waste of time and risks straying into secular vanity.

Below is a testimony, admittedly individual, to this justification of holy ignorance published on the blog of Nicolas Ciarapica, a former head of an evangelical centre in Jerusalem. The text criticizes the commercial leanings of the evangelicals in Israel and proclaims (the author's capitals):

But that said, is it not more important to be transformed in the same way as JESUS CHRIST than to become "scribes" puffed up with knowledge? Paul the Apostle PAUL said: "knowledge puffs up". And that is still true. I do not need to know the Hebrew language to understand that I must rid myself of my "ego" to allow the HOLY SPIRIT to transform me daily just like CHRIST... but what I absolutely need to do is to "die within myself", to "negate myself daily", to refute my "own will" in order to obey That of my Master in order to achieve His perfect stature to produce His works through the power of the SPIRIT of CHRIST who will then live fully in me! When I think of the words of our Lord and Master which were as follows: "Except ye become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven", it would seem as if

nowadays you need a theology degree to receive the fullness of the SPIRIT! But our Master taught people through the means of simple parables, and, above all, he brought the kingdom of God to earth by delivering the possessed, healing the sick, opening the eyes of the blind, resuscitating the dead, etc. He overturned the knowledge of the “wise men” and the intellectuals of His time, HE of whom the Pharisees and the sacrificers said that He had not studied the Scriptures. (With them in their classrooms). The HOLY SPIRIT could make the distinction! AMEN”.⁶²

PART 2

GLOBALIZATION AND RELIGION