

The power of faith and the lure of the market

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Traductrice : Vandana Kawlra

In order to avoid the singular blindness that reigns in France with regard to religion, the first sequence of this issue focuses on the relationship developing between religion and politics in today's secularised Europe and stresses the totally novel nature of contemporary religious practices. It also highlights the dual phenomena that has emerged following the hue and cry raised after Pope Benedict XVI's speech in Ratisbonne University¹: the significant role Islam will play henceforth in Europe, but also the strife within "Christian" Europe itself, between Protestantism with its "Kantian" and "formalist" spirit and a Catholic Church whose Authority has waned considerably over the years – whence the conflict between the fight for secularism and the "celebration" of Christian values. But as Blandine Chelini-Pont reminds readers at the outset, our lives are no longer regulated solely by the "secular" French nation or secularised Europe today. Globalisation has also affected religion across our planet. In fact, we are compelled to envisage the future by the yardstick of anthropological and social developments that are not necessarily ours.

In order to consider planetary developments related to religion more fully, lessons first need to be drawn from our planet's demography. Not unexpectedly, such an exercise leads to some not very surprising conclusions. While religious development in China confirms the notion of a universal revival of religious practices, "world" figures indicate – and this is what flummoxes Europeans – that the majority religion in the world in 2050 will not be Islam but Christianity, and that it will be Protestantism that will prevail within Christianity. While Islam's expansion in Africa and elsewhere was being highlighted a few decades ago – Vincent Monteil's "Black Islam"² is still remembered – it must henceforth be admitted that Christianity has been spreading its wings, especially in the South – both in Black Africa and Latin America. According to the World Christian Encyclopaedia, one out of two Africans is a Christian today, while in 1900, it was one out of ten. In other words: *le centre de gravité du christianisme, qui sera en 2050 la religion des trois quarts de l'humanité, n'est plus Genève, Rome, Athènes, Paris, Londres, New York mais Kinshasa, Buenos Aires, Addis Abeba et Manille* ("the centre of gravity of Christianity, which will be the religion of three-fourths of humanity in 2050, is no longer Geneva, Rome, Athens, Paris, London or New York, but Kinshasa, Buenos Aires, Addis Ababa and Manila"). To better apprehend the phenomenon, it must also be added that the difference in the number of Christians and Muslims in the world (2 billion as against 1.2 billion Muslims) is not likely to lessen³.

However, we must also look beyond the purely demographic approach to globalisation and increasingly question one particular phenomenon – the mushrooming of a myriad Evangelical Churches rooted in the underlying Protestant dynamism. In the wake of the review *Hérodote*, which had devoted a special feature in 2005 on *Les évangéliques à l'assaut du monde* (Evangelists besieging the world), the decision to publish articles that attempted to understand the reasons behind the ascendancy of religion in the four corners of the world was aimed at reminding readers that the wave of "globalisation" currently sweeping across the world could

not be seen merely as being limited to the economy – it also had a religious dimension. In fact, globalisation – a historical phenomenon inseparable from technological ruptures, from the sudden advent of a capitalism no longer like the one whose contradictions Marx analysed, as well as from the birth of a post-industrial world⁴ – also needs to be apprehended from a political (e.g. any shrinkage of the State’s perimeter?), identity-related, migratory, cultural... and religious point of view. The proliferation of Evangelical Churches (see the Glossary following this introduction and the articles by André Corten, Gilles Séraphin and Ruth Marshall) cannot therefore be dissociated from contemporary globalisation. Indeed, globalisation is characterised by the supremacy of flows of all kinds, as well as by a “privatisation” movement (economical, political, identity related, etc.) to which the emergence of small churches in Latin America or Black Africa (churches of an inspiration ranging from a Pentecostalism akin to Methodism to a Neo-Pentecostalism akin to sects or the faith ‘supermarket’) contributes on two counts. First and foremost, religious privatisation bears an economic character because small churches are, in a way, small-scale enterprises (they could be part of a network and associated with a diaspora) and their preachers are businessmen. But the main point is that a convert’s material wealth is the counterpart of what he spiritually offers God; economic and spiritual prosperity therefore go hand in hand. Finally, religious privatisation also has a psychological dimension because for the most part, a charismatic pastor gathers a small family tribe around him. But the imagination and motivations behind such practices – mostly inseparable from transnational networks – go far beyond Protestantism alone. And as Patrick Haenni showed, even within Islam – though far removed from Islamism – such small enterprises are also seeing the light of day. This is what the author calls “market Islam”:

“The economic dimension provides these new religious factions not just the market’s concrete support, but also their own categories of thought, by reformulating Islam, using the vocabulary of self-realisation and distilling some elements of Protestant ethics in it. These exchanges then give birth to a theology of prosperity heralding a new *Muslim pride* that is no longer based on confrontation or the affirmation of ostentatious pietism, but on performance and competitiveness⁵.”

However, small religious enterprises also play a social and medical role that is not (or no longer) offered by welfare States and government departments. In this context, small enterprises of the Evangelical kind work on mortals bruised by the disastrous consequences of the unfair distribution of the world economy. Indeed, an article on Kinshasa in these pages had recently described the “spiritual” re-education of child soldiers, accused by their mothers of being sorcerers and evil-doers⁶. Small churches use music, dance, trance and the Word – and not without violence – to repair the body. They also fuel an apocalyptic vision heralding the end of the world and its possible regeneration. Although they may have a history (three tides of history according to André Corten) and a certain amount of plasticity, the development of these small churches is based on an underlying feeling that we are living in a world in which we have to pay dearly for poverty as well as physical and mental adversity, while suffering agonies. Mortals must consequently be assisted, converted, transformed, made to believe that with conversion and the blessings of the Holy spirit, evil can be done away with – or at least,

that which makes the mind conjure up Evil can be destroyed. That is the reason miracles play such a decisive role in these faiths (*le miracle est à la théologie ce que l'état d'exception est à la loi* – “miracles are to theology what exceptions are to a rule”).

It is astonishing that the religious dimension of globalisation is generally ignored, as it is not without political significance. As Jean-Pierre Bastian emphasises here while referring to Latin America, the influence of these churches, the concomitant waning of the Catholic Church and the religious pluralism consequent upon it have changed the very concepts of secularism and the way relations between the State and religion develop. However, there is another political aspect that has a very “global” connotation: the fact that the Evangelical imagination is paradoxically shared by American neo-conservatives, often presented as the world’s new spiritual masters⁷. The Evangelical notion – of power as well as the market – cannot therefore be reduced to religious archaism because small churches all over the world draw from it, from its reserves of principles and its apocalyptic Manichaeism, in order to respond to the corporal agony brought on by an illness whose virus, many believe, is propagated by America. With this kind of market religion, good and evil eternally pass the buck to each other across the world. What is even more interesting, as Nicolas Masson proposes here, is the role of American NGOs and to a greater extent, denominational NGOs, as one of the factors behind the proliferation of these small churches for the saving of souls.

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1. See the three articles published in *Esprit* in November 2006: Christian Jambet, *Les malentendus de Ratisbonne : l'islam, la volonté et l'intelligence* (“The Ratisbonne University misunderstandings: Islam, resolve and intelligence.”); Olivier Abel, *Une division occidentale au sein du christianisme ?* (A split within Christianity in the West?); Hervé Legrand, *Quel dialogue islamo-chrétien dans le contexte de l'élargissement de l'Europe à la Turquie ?* (What Muslim-Christian dialogue in the context of EU’s expansion to include Turkey).

2. Vincent Monteil, *L'Islam noir* (Black Islam), Paris, Le Seuil, coll. “Esprit”, 1980.

3. The preceding figures and references have been taken from the excellent article by Blandine Chelini-Pont, *Prospective sur la religion chrétienne à l'horizon de 2050* (Projection of Christianity in 2050), in Garrigues. *Espaces de la foi*, no. 91-92, 4th quarter of 2005.

4. See Daniel Cohen, *Trois leçons sur la société postindustrielle* (Three lessons about the post-industrial society), Paris, Le Seuil/La République des idées (The Republic of Ideas), 2006.

5. Patrick Haenni, *l'Islam de marché* (Market Islam), Paris, Le Seuil/La République des idées, 2006, p. 10.

6. Filip De Boeck, *La ville de Kinshasa, une architecture du verbe* (Kinshasa City – The architecture of the verb), in *Esprit*, December 2006. See also a work that soon became a classic, Filip de Boeck with Marie-Françoise Plassart, *Kinshasa. Récits de la ville invisible* (Kinshasa. Stories of an invisible city), Brussels, Luc Pire, 2005; as well as the most recent book by Claude Wauthier, *Sectes et prophètes d'Afrique noire* (Sects and Prophets of Black Africa), Paris, Le Seuil, 2007.

7. But this is not new; see Sébastien Fath, *Militants de la Bible aux États-Unis. Évangéliques et fondamentalistes du Sud* (Activists of the Bible in the US. Evangelists and fundamentalists in the South), Paris, Autrement, 2004. The figure of the evil and demonic preacher haunts American literature and cinema –

just bring to mind Elmer Gantry, the preacher played by Burt Lancaster (Elmer Gantry by Richard Brooks, 1960) and the Devil (Wise blood, 1979) played by John Huston.

Glossary

Riding high in the current scenario, especially in the third world, Evangelical-Pentecostal assemblies have taken over traits that were present in the affiliations born within American Protestantism between the 18th and 20th century, in various ways.

Baptists – One of the main Protestant denominations that emerged in the 17th century in the US. They practice baptism by immersion for conscious individuals. Their communities (called Churches or assemblies) are autonomous and therefore bound by horizontal links of the congregational kind. They lay stress on conversion and biblical piety.

Congregationalists – They focus on self-governance by communities and assemblies for the election of their leaders and for organising their religious affairs and group activities. They are important for their democratic American culture. Many Baptist groups are Congregationalists.

Denominations – As the name indicates, these are “names” that are adopted or given to various churches and Protestant American “cults”, which are more or less autonomous and do not claim to offer the boons of salvation.

Evangelics (and not “Evangelists”) – A Protestant trend that emerged at the end of the 18th century. Evangelics emphasise the experience of internal conversion, through which the sinner feels the grace of God directly. According to Sébastien Fath, an eminent specialist on this movement (see *Du ghetto au réseau. Le protestantisme évangélique en France* [From the ghetto to the network. Evangelic Protestantism in France], 1800-2005, Geneva, Labor et Fides, 2005), they put forward four points: Bible (literal) reading, the Cross, personal conversion, activist commitment. Highly dynamic, they are found in all Protestant denominations.

Methodists – John Wesley, the English founder of Methodism in the 18th century, laid an emphasis on both personal conversion founded on Biblical fervour and on Methodist means to achieve perfection. Methodism stems from Wesley’s revivalist movement. Although it became one of America’s greatest Churches, it is now losing speed, like all “major American Churches”, considered too liberal by the recent fundamentalist affiliations.

‘Fondamentalistes’ – In common French parlance, ‘fondamentalistes’ or ‘fundamentalist’ is the term currently used to describe radicalism of any sort, especially religious radicalism, but it goes well beyond the religious domain (the word is almost synonymous with the French ‘intégriste’, used to refer to fundamentalists or extremists in the English sense of the term). Till recently, a ‘fondamentaliste’ was a (Protestant) believer who believed in a ‘literal’ reading of the Bible. According to S. Fath, literal readings often became more intense in the concerned Protestant movements (Evangelic, Pentecostalist, etc.), in the sense of strict orthodoxy, with an emphasis on the absolute trustworthiness of the Bible and “premillenarian” doctrines (millenarian tendency that lays stress on the imminence of the apocalypse and salvation through the return of Christ that was at hand).

Pentecostists – Emerging at the beginning of the 20th century, the essential Biblical reference

for Pentecostism is the text on the Acts of the Apostles (Chapter II), recounting the how the Holy Spirit burst upon the Apostles, disheartened after the death of Christ. Pentecostists lay an emphasis on the effusion of the Holy Spirit, which transforms, cures and saves those who receive it. They stress the charisma (gifts granted by the Holy Spirit, including prophecy, preaching, etc.) – the enthusiasm aroused by the Holy Spirit in the faithful gathered together, the miracles of cures that it can produce. Pentecostism has witnessed a spectacular expansion over the past several decades and has affected all churches (including the Catholic Church, where it is known as “charismatic revival”).

Pietists – Spiritual movement founded at the end of the 17th century by Jakob Spener from Alsace. In reaction to the ratiocination and the dryness of Lutheran spirituality and theology, he highlighted fervour, feeling and enlightenment, which must be present in prayers and in community life. Pietism exerted a strong influence on subsequent Protestant trends.

Puritanism – A Calvinist movement for the “purification” of the Reform, it saw the light of day in England in the 16th century and spread mainly to the US. Emphasising the sovereignty and authority of the Bible, it is also imbued with moral austerity and rigour, on which its current image is based.

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