

Religion and Politics In A Sociological Perspective: A Comparison Between the Usa and France

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ABSTRACT

By the 20th century, the main hypothesis of secularization theories was that religion would be expelled from public sphere, and be confined to private space and as a consequence it would become just an conscientious and individual phenomenon. But the time disproved this hypothesis. Some global level developments -such as the secularization experience of the USA, the Iranian Revolution, the effective role of religion in the experience of democratization in the Latin America, the rise of religious nationalisms opposed to secular nationalisms, the rise of Christian Right- has revealed that religion has no intention of leaving the public sphere, on the contrary its intention is to take an effective role in the construction of the public space. Thus, in my paper, I will compare religion-state-society relations in the USA and France as the most important representatives of secular state model. I believe that this comparison will give important clues for the reconstruction of religion-politics relations which is on the focus of discussions on the impartiality of the state, the borders of the religious freedom, the politicization of religion, the scope of separation of religion and state, and the problems of this separation in the implementation process.

Keywords: Religion, Secularization, State, USA, France

The Politics of Religion in Two Secular States

By the 20th century, the main hypothesis of secularization theories was that religion would be expelled from public sphere, and be confined to private space and as a consequence it would become just an conscientious and individual phenomenon. But the time disproved this hypothesis. Some global level developments -such as the secularization experience of the USA, the Iranian Revolution, the effective role of religion in the experience of democratization in the Latin America, the rise of religious nationalisms opposed to secular nationalisms, the rise of Christian Right- has revealed that religion has no intention of leaving the public sphere, on the contrary its intention is to take an effective role in the construction of the public space.

Thus, in my paper, I will compare religion-state-society relations in the USA and France as the most important representatives of secular state model. I believe that this comparison will give important clues for the reconstruction of religion-politics relations which is on the focus of discussions on the impartiality of the state, the borders of the religious freedom, the politicization of religion, the scope of separation of religion and state, and the problems of this separation in the implementation process. Now we pass through a period in which the positivist paradigm constituted by the modernity loses its effectiveness gradually; the new approaches appear on the place of religion in the public sphere and social life, differentiating from both secularization theories and the traditional approaches; the politics of religion go beyond the limited discussions of religion-state and move to the axis of religion-politics-society relations; the notion of traditional politics changes; the civil society rises and becomes more

effective in political arena; and the religion takes part in the civil society. In such period, I think that these two secular states' different experiences and implementations toward religion will provide new dimensions and perspectives to discussions on religion-politics relations both in present systems and new developing systems in the worldwide.

In my study, I will compare the USA and France's politics of religion in nine different aspects:

The Enlightenment

The enlightenment experiences of two states had been effective in the shaping of their models of religion-politics relations, especially in France, the enlightenment experience was crucial because it caused a spectacular change at French history.

The French Enlightenment started with seeking for solutions to its own internal problems and then it transformed to a worldwide enlightenment and became the source of inspiration for the enlightenments of the other states. The French Revolution, the catalyzer of the French Enlightenment, occurred against the Old Regime and a hegemonic religion which was bonded to it firmly. This point is so important to understand laic France's allergic and instrumental approach against religion, because the struggle with the Old Regime was meaning to struggle with the Catholicism, namely religion at the same time.

As for the American Enlightenment, in the USA, there is no struggle against a hegemonic religion and an old regime as in France or many European countries. In addition, it is not possible to mention a special American Enlightenment philosophy. In terms of this point, American Enlightenment is a

way of enlightenment which got inspired from European Enlightenment values and expressed “incontestable rights” notion. According to Himmelfarb, while at first, the French Enlightenment was an enlightenment model that effected all of the world, the American enlightenment was a local enlightenment. The American enlightenment was an exception at that time and it is still an exception today. Because it is a country which applies ideally the enlightenment’s values which France has never adopted and the UK gave up them today and perhaps it pioneered to the entire world about these values (Himmelfarb, 2004).

In terms of philosophical ideas, the American Enlightenment got inspired from John Locke’s and Montesquieu’s ideas and accordingly it has adopted “incontestable rights” notion and separation of religion and state (Locke, 1995). On the other hand, the French Enlightenment got inspired from Montesquieu’s, Rousseau’s, Voltaire’s and Diderot’s philosophical ideas. It accepts the religion’s legitimatizing role and the necessity of it for obedience of people to state’s authority. It sees a requirement for the state to use these roles of religion. But at the same time, because of allergy for Catholic Church, it defends separation of religion and state and to disposes church’s all public and political power.

Secularization Process

Both of two states’ secularization processes are the most important determinants of their religion-politics-society relations. These processes which started by the French and American revolutions continue today with ups and downs. It is the main feature of secularization processes of two states that they take steps toward secularization and take a step back

because of the different social-political “camps” struggle for the government of the state.

The American Revolution occurred with the consensus of the nation, whereas the French Revolution witnessed bloody conflicts. The main reason of this sharp difference between two states that America was a state which was just constituted at that time, whereas France had an Old Regime. It was necessary to constitute the new regime that the revolutionists cleaned all traces of the Old Regime. Because new France would have been diametrically opposed to the Old Regime. This caused to conflicts between proponents (the Catholic Church) and opponents (secularists) of the Old Regime and the transformation process has become very painful. During revolution and even after that, most clericals, priests who rejected the oath of allegiance to new regime were killed, guillotined, expelled and subjected to violence (McLeod, 1997).

However, after the revolutions, both two states has adopted secularism. This makes them similar to each other. But they have given secularism different meanings because of the states' own social structures and historical pasts.

The USA is a multi-religious country and this multi-religious social structure doesn't allow an established church. The majority religion, Protestantism is against clericalism and supports the separation of religion-state. On the other hand, the members of minority religions (Catholics, Jehova Witnesses, Mormons etc...) also support the separation of religion-state because they see the separation as the assurance of their religious freedom. For religious people in America, the separation prevent both state and the established church's intervention to religions. However, in France religion-state

separation is seen such that the state is made free from the religious intervention. Because in France, there was an hegemonic religion, Catholicism which was bonded to the Old Regime strictly; was against to the French Revolution and its values and had an interventionary tradition to the state, other religions and all the society. After the revolution, this hegemonic religion was face to face with loss of all authority. In that time, Church preferred to struggle for its authority against the new, secular regime. This preference caused that the church and also religion in general has been identified with the negative images like conflict, oppression etc... Because of this, the secular French state has adopted an allergic, hostile and assertive approach to religion.

In the USA, the support of religious groups for the separation provide that the state has approached the religion peacefully and it has not seen it as a threat for own existence. However, in France, the state has given severe response to the dissident Catholic Church. In the beginning, it approached the Church with Gallican tradition. According to this, the state tried to restructure and modernize the Catholic Church. It aimed to produce a French Catholicism compatible with the secular and modern system (Rémond, 1999). Thus it could use the religion for legitimating its own authority. But the French state's project has not become successful. After this unsuccessful experience, it tried to produce a Reason Religion and it also not become successful. Accordingly, the French state has seen justifiable to interfere in religion. The initiation of producing French Catholicism and today French Islam project demonstrates France's interventionary approach toward religion. Jean Baubérot calls French state's this approach as "enlightened

despotism" which is a sort of authoritarian laicism (Baubérot, 2008).

Finally, I remark that in which areas secularization has come true in two states? In the USA, the secularization process occurred in state level and this secularization process has taken support of the people. There was no an attempt to secularize the society. However, in France, the secularization has been constructed in a fascist, topdown way. There has become a secularization institutionally, culturally and socially. The French state aimed to clean French society and culture from Catholicism in particular and the religion in general. Accordingly, the state confiscated the properties of the Catholic Church and its public functions. The register was secularized. The Gregorian calendar was changed and adopted a new Republican calendar. The city and willage names has been changed because of containing the word of "Saint". The wedding and divorce has been civilized. The church wedding has been forbidden. The Republican festivals were replaced with religious festivals (Rémond,1999;Aulard,1987;Reşad,2006). In sum, the American society experienced a constitutional secularization based on the majority of nation's consensus, whereas the French society experienced a constitutional, institutional, ideological, policy and agenda secularization (Moyser, 1991) by the state hand, up to down.

Constitutional Basis for the Separation of Religion-State

In both of two states, the separation of religion and state are guaranteed by the constitution. There are a few legal and constitutional regulations in both states. This causes some confusions, disagreements and differences of interpretation. To produce solutions for these confusions is in the responsibility of

juridical institutions. In the USA, Supreme Court fulfill this responsibility; in France, the Council of State does that (Monsma,1997; Messner, 2008).

The only and critical constitutional clause of the USA is the First Amendment which guaranteed the separation of religion and state. It has gaved end the established religion, broken bond of established church with the law and guaranteed the religious freedom. As for France, the Separation Law brought the laic system in 1905. With the Seperation Law, the social and public functions of the religion has been captured by the state.

Aforementioned two constitutional clauses provide seperation of religion-state. But the understanding of these clauses differs in France and the USA. In the USA, the main aim of the First Amendment is not to expel religion from public sphere. Instead, the main aim is to prevent an established religion's intervention to both the state and the other religions. The problem is not religion itself, but one religion's domination on the other religions. But in France, the main aim of the Separation Law is to clean public sphere from the religion to make it neutral and safe.

Secularization Model

The USA and France adopted a secularization model, a policy of religion according to their secularization processes and political camps' different views. Alfred Stepan mentions two different models which secular democracies adopts: First one is separatism and second one is establishment. The subjects of our study, the USA and France are the examples of separatist model. However, France and the USA differs in understanding, interpretation and implementation of separatism (Stepan, 2007).

The USA adopted passive secularism (religious freedom policy) as a state policy on religion. This happened with the consensus of Enlightenmentist Liberals, Protestants, Jews, Catholics, accommodationists and separationists. However, supporters of assertive secularism and radical Right supporters demanding more rights and opportunities for Christians also exist in the USA as opponents. Carl Esbeck mentions five secularism interpretations in the USA political range: Assertive secularism, pluralist secularism, institutional secularism, non-preferentialist accommodationism and restorationism (Esbeck, 1986). There are “cultural wars” among these different interpretations of secularism on the public space, evolution theory, abortion, religious symbols, religious education etc... On the other hand, France has adopted assertive secularism, laicism as a state policy (Kuru, 2011). Because there became a long conflict between secular Republic and the Catholic Church until 1980s. This conflict caused to the state’s allergic and assertive approach to the religion. In country, there are supporters of passive secularism but their voices are weak. Laicist “camp” is rather politically strong. There is a debate among Radical Right, radical laics and supporters of plural laicism on headscarf ban, religious symbols, religious education etc...

Religious Structure

The religious structure is an important determinant of religion-politics-society relations. The determination is reciprocal. The religious structure also is determined by the type of religion-politics-society relations. Meanwhile implied with religious structure are society’s religiousness, secularity, religious diversity or domination of majority religion.

In terms of social religiousness and secularity, the USA's secularization model is exceptional. Because on the one hand, it realized church-state separation better than the other Western secular states; on the other hand, it has rather religious society. Thus, the USA example falsifies that argument: Modernity and secular state system make social secularization necessary. As for France, there is a strict laic state and a strict laic, secular society. French people were secularized because the Republic clean the social codes of Catholicism in particular and religion in general; and the Catholicism lost its position at the center of the collective identity of French society. Catholicism is still a component of French identity but not the most important component.

As for religious diversity, secularization institutionalized church-state separation in the USA, but it has not removed the religion from the public sphere and the religiousness of the society has not dropped. On the contrary, there has become an increase in the number of Christian denominations. Because people have freedom of found a religion or religious group if they don't adopt traditional religions. This free environment and the multi-religious migration to the USA pave the way becoming an enormous religious diversity in the society. In French side, there is a different picture that there is no visible religiosity because the state approve only individual religiosity. Communal religiosity is not demanded. Because of this, religion and religious groups are kept off from public space.

Religious diversity in the USA and the church-state separation has provided that a spiritual market occurred. In this spiritual market, religions prefer to generate their own financial sources instead of expecting financial support from the state. Religious

groups compete with each other for gaining new members. They improved new methods for convincing the people to participate in their religious group. The traditional churches even adapted themselves to spiritual market with some changes in their organizational structure (Noll,2002). American spiritual market give some cues why American secularization experience is different from Europe, especially France. During European modernization, the traditional churches preferred to struggle the new secular systems and lost in this struggle. Thus they also lost their effectiveness in public space and society. However, American denominations turned into an opportunity the separation and made themselves effective in the society and public sphere. It is an important done for why the USA is more religious than the European societies. Grace Davie also claims that social secularization in Europe is not because of the deficiency of demand, but because of the deficiency of presentation (Davie, 2001). Namely, in France particular and Europe in general, there has become a secularization in the society level not because of society's neglect of the religion; instead, because of that the conventional churches failed to make themselves effective in the new system.

Lastly, I deal with the role of religions in two states' way of life. In the USA, both majority religions and minority religions participate in American way of life more or less. They are effective in shaping American way of life. Hereby, all American religions harmonized with this life style. However, in France, French way of life and citizenship are secular. So participation of religions, especially minority religions in the French way of life is very difficult (Porterfield, 2007). When a religion begin to rise demographically, socially and politically in French public sphere, then French state and society also begin to see it as a

threat for their own way of life due to social memory in regard to Catholic Church. The rise of Islam in France is the most important and impressive example of this.

Religion-Politics Relations in Implementation

The School

The school has become dominant actor in the construction of the new regimes and the transmission their values both in France and the USA. Whereas in the USA the school has been used against Catholic threat; in France, it has become struggle arena between Catholic Church and laic state. In both countries, the primary and secondary public schools has become instrumentality for raising ideal citizens.

In the USA's education system, there is no religious education at public primary and secondary schools; and school management can't conduct any religious service at the school. But the students themselves are free to fulfill their rituals, to form a religious group and to read religious texts (Monsma, 1997). Similarly, in France, religious education is forbidden in public primary schools and secondary schools (Messner, 2008). At the same time, the religious practices for the student are forbidden within the school borders. Whereas in the USA, there is no ban for religious symbols (Kuru, 2011); in France the ostentatious religious symbols like headscarf, big crosses, kippa etc. are forbidden in public primary and secondary schools. As for the private religious schools, in the USA, these schools (primary and secondary) are not funded by the state, but colleges and universities are funded by the state, (Monsma, 1997) whereas in France, the private religious schools can be funded by the state in case that they arrange their curriculum according to the state's standards (Messner, 2008). This

implementation demonstrates that the Gallican tradition maintains in France.

Both in the USA and France, the states make a serious effort to render the public primary and secondary schools neutral and safe from religious effects. In the USA, the opponents of the state's this policy claim that this neutralization policy make schools a type of area in which the secular worldview is imposed the children instead of creating a neutral area (Reichley, 1985). According to them, the USA constitution guantees that neither religious view nor impiety will not be imposed to American citizens. But this policy means that the state supports secularist ideology financially and imposes to citizens secularist ideology. On the other hand, the atheists or non-monotheists in the USA object to the components of civil religion like oath of allegiance, national anthem, legislative parayer, oaths in the courts, the American money; for they are incompatible wall of seperation and they are discriminatory for atheists and non-monotheists because of rendering the public square religious. As for France, the ban for religious symbols in schools by the reason of being threat for school's neutrality and composure causes to serious discussions because of stricting the religious freedom. Such that, these discussions creates a laicism crisis.

Other Issues

In the USA, the wall of separation implies a real separation financially. There is no financial support to the religions for their rituels, their temples and the expenses of the clericals. However, the state supports financially secular services of the religions which is ratherly active in civil society and social services (hospitals, nurseries, etc...) (Monsma, 1997). In France,

Alsace-Lorraine region, the state appoints the Catholic, Protestant and Jew clericals and pays their salaries. In addition to this implementation, French state undertakes the repairing costs of church buildings which were built before 1906. Thus it supports the church financially (Robert, 1997).

Minority communities integrated the American system in the USA. However, in France, religious groups weren't recognized as minorities by the state. Laicism accepts individual religiosity and individual freedom only, and rejects the community solidarity of the religious minorities. Because the laic system find contrary to itself that the religious community take a mediator role between the state and the religious community members. Thus, France rejects ethnic politics model and prevent that the religious minorities constitute communal entities (Feldblum, 1999).

Religious Freedom and its Borders

The USA give importance religious freedom, because its multi-cultural society's unity depends on protecting people's religious freedom. The American system encompasses both individual and communal religiosity. However as mentioned above, in France, religious freedom is restricted with individual religiosity; because of this, the religion is kept out from the public sphere. French assertive secularism, laicism ignores the communal aspect of religion for creating a secular public sphere. Even, communal religiosity is overseen by the state institutions.

As for the borders of the religious freedom, in the USA, religious freedom can be restricted by the state in case that a

religious activity breaks the public order seriously and the state has no other solution except restriction of religious freedom. When the Supreme Court decisions are taken into consideration, it is possible to see that religious freedom of religious groups was restricted on the grounds that their religious activities do not accord with the American way of life and they refuse to accept the nation's symbols. For example, Mormons adopt polygamy as a religious ritual, but the Supreme Court has banned polygamy with the reason that polygamy is opposite to the American way of life (Monsma, 1997). On the other hand, Jehovah's Witnesses refuse to salute the USA's flag because they see saluting the flag as polytheism. The Supreme Court's decision on this case has not made Jehovah's Witnesses exempt from saluting ceremonies from 1923 to 1943. After a long struggle, in 1943, Jehovah's Witnesses became exempt (Lee, 2002). Finally, in the post 9/11, radical security based policies restricted Muslims' freedom and even caused discrimination. As for France, religious freedom is restricted more easily and rigorously when it comes to a threat to Republican values, public order, French way of life or laicism. The headscarf ban in the public sphere is the best example of this. Headscarf which is seen as a Trojan horse for further demands based on sharia, is banned in primary and secondary schools (Fetzer, 2006). Attending swimming courses and mixed-sex slumber camps are obligatory for Muslim girls although Muslim families do not want their children to attend these activities for religious reasons. On the other hand, photographs for driving licences and identity cards must be unveiled (Klausen, 2005).

In sum, in both countries, when it comes to public order and security, religious freedom can be restricted. So right of

religious freedom is open to violation of the state. But when we compare two states implementations, we can see that the violations in France are more and common than in the USA.

Crisis

There is a common actor at the center of crisis of religious policies of two countries: Islam. In France, Islam is at the center of laicist discussions as a result of a certain process, whereas in the USA, Islam found itself at the center of the crisis of America with an unprecedented event, 9/11. By the mid of 20th century, France experiences a process that the nation-state collapses, globalization is in the rise, multi-cultural societies appear with the international migration in the worldwide, religion especially Christian Right and Islam become visible in the public space, laicism doesn't response to people's demands toward religious freedom. Islam is an intersection point of all these new situations-the rise of religion, the international migration, the collapse of the nation-state, globalization etc... Because of these new situations which are threat for the French state; Islam as an intersection point of them is seen as a threat for French laic, Jacoben Republic and its values. So laic French Republic turn its route to Islam from Catholicism. Catholicism is not threat or enemy for the Republic since 1980s. Because it adapted itself laic order and accepted its domination. So now the new threat is Islam. Because it questions laicism and the nation-state by its existence in the French public square. Today, French state adopts assimilationist policies toward Islam and Muslims, it aims to create a French Islam according to laic system. This means that the Gallican tradition returns for the depths of the history.

However, in the USA, the religious freedom policy was started to discuss after the 9/11. Radical Christian Right, especially evangelical Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson charged the secular religious freedom policies as responsible of the 9/11 and criticized religious freedom policy vehemently (Falwell&Robertson, 2001). Under this pressure of the Christian Right, though its strong liberal tradition, the USA government took measures for security which restrict the freedom of Muslims. In sum, the USA was torn between its liberal tradition and the pressure of the proponents of security policies.

In these crisis, different “camps” approached to the issue variously. French Right in general approached Muslim immigrants assimilationist and hostile, whereas some Catholic priests and French passive secularist “camp” objected to headscarf ban and supported the Muslims’ religious freedom. In the same way, in the USA, passive secularists, separationists defended Muslims’ religious freedom and rejected religion based discrimination. On the other hand, Christian Right adopted a hostile policy toward Muslims because of 9/11 and identified with the terrorism them (Abdo, 2007).

As for the perspectives on the two religious policies; 9/11 is a turning point. Until 9/11, French laicism is not approved because of restricting the religious freedom and it is used to be seen as French exception. As to the USA, its religious freedom policy is used to be seen as an ideal policy allows that different religions and their members exist freely in the USA. But after 9/11, this picture changed. 9/11 created some question marks in the minds of people toward the USA religious policy. Does the American religious freedom policy pave the way religious fundamentalism and violation instead of being an ideal freedom policy? Does France conduct a true policy for

providing nation's security though laicism restricts religious freedom and become assimilationist toward foreigners. How these questions are answered is really important for the future of the religious freedom in the worldwide.

The Third Way

Amanda Porterfield, in her article "*Politicized Religion in France and the United States*", seeks a new policy on religion by bringing together the French and American religious policies' positive aspects passing beyond the infertile discussions of which one is true which one is wrong. According to Porterfield, a combination of French rational analysis and American multi-culturalism is a necessity both two states and the world in the future. This combination is a sort of moderate Republican multi-culturalism. In this combination, there is a secular government, an open-minded legal system and a strong support of government for the analyzing of religion rationally. It paves the way the new spaces for the real religious pluralism and multi-culturalism. The participation in religious community becomes consciously and the individual is free to wear and not to wear headscarf (Porterfield, 2005).

Although Porterfield's proposal is important, I claim that it is not reliable to propose a standard policy for worldwide by bringing together the positive aspects of the policies of these two states or another states. When I analyze both two states's policies, I saw that every country has a worldview, historical, political and social processes, socio-cultural and religious structure, sensibilities and interests, and problems in implementation of policies which make different it from another countries. So every country should produce a policy based on its own situations and implement it for meeting the

needs of its society effectively and successfully. However, there are some standard principles for religious freedom which all countries should take into consideration when they make their own policies on religion. I ascertained three principles which should be regarded in making policies on religion by virtue of my study:

Firstly, the state should shape its politics of religion not only regarding individual religiosity but also regarding communal religiosity. It should give importance to the communal religious freedom because the communal aspect of the religion is crucial for itself to get involved to the public sphere. It is indispensable that the state, which doesn't allow religion to contribute to the construction of the social and political space and ignore a social phenomenon like the religion by restricting it with the consciences of the people, approaches to the religion and its adherents oppressively and restricts religious freedom.

Secondly, religion-state separation should not be confused with religion-state-society separation. For "free religion in free state", religion-state separation is a crucial principle. However, it doesn't mean to break all bonds between religion, politics and society. When relations between these three entities are forbidden, an oppressor regime appears. So, instead the state ignores the religion, it should open new free spaces for the religions fairly, where they can contribute to processes of social construction.

Thirdly, when the state has to make a choice between protecting public security and protecting the right of religious practices, it should not prefer public security mostly. Instead of that, it should equilibrate between them. Because preferring the public security all the time means that the right of religious

freedom (freedom of exercise) is open to violation by the state. So it should be taken legal measures for preventing the state to ban religious practices easily because of reason that they break the public order. The state should have the right to ban religious practices only in the situation they violate another people's rights and freedoms.

In conclusion, I suppose that the state's approach ignoring religion and religious freedom and restricting religious practices with the reason that they threaten the public security and safe, is quite problematic. Today religious policies are preferring religious freedom and that might be successful and meet the contemporary people's needs based on freedom basedly and justicely.

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