

Religious Pluralism and Crises of Identity

Giovanni Filoramo

Religion at the end of the modern age and its future

At the dawn of the new millennium religion is going through some radical changes: the first of these is related to the fact that the processes of secularization¹ have had an influence on traditional religions, are doing so today and will continue to do so, starting with Christianity in its different forms, but they have not precipitated the decline of religion as an institutional and public factor and still less the decline of faith as a private phenomenon.

What we are experiencing is rather a huge process of transformation and adaptation of the religious as a private dimension and religion as an institutional factor, resulting in a profound metamorphosis of the socio-cultural situation (see Lyon, 2000). The two main elements of the change are as follows: the triumph of the mass media and consumer society and the processes of globalization (Kurz, 1995) are radically changing the very face of religion: groups and movements with a clear religious identity are involved in a relentless process that is at the same time a process of adaptation and resistance to these changes. The outcome of this process is uncertain, but there is no doubt that it is only where religions prove they are capable of using and adapting their messages of salvation to the new mass media system² that they will be able to survive and maybe even spread.

The great traditional religious movements, in both East and West, have responded to the challenges of change, either by retreating into the citadel of fundamentalism (see below) or by trying to adapt to a succession of changes that attack our very perception of time and space; at the same time we have recognized the appearance and growth of charismatic forms of emotional communities, such as the Pentecostalism that is triumphing in Latin America (Martin, 1990), forming a delta into which are flowing the streams of the religious 'deregulation' that has formed at the margins of traditional religions.

The new postmodern conditions, that are by definition hidden (*umbratili*) and volatile,³ together with the quickening pace of the processes of globalization, help us

Copyright © ICPHS 2003

SAGE: London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi, www.sagepublications.com
0392-1921 [200308]50:3;31–44;038508

to understand changes in the area of alternative religiosity too. After the period of the new religious movements of the 1980s, which still had a clear-cut sociological character, and the New Age movements of the 1990s – a typical veiled religiosity with apocalypse in the background structured in a network – there came the era of a protest religiosity based on ecology, an ‘anarchic’ response to the radical challenges of globalization. Across the vast territory of ‘unattached believers’ certain basic religious themes circulate, in accordance with the typical model of deregulation: apocalyptic, eschatological or catastrophic commitments, continuation of end-of-millennium fever; the sacralization of the Self; reincarnation with all its consequences and finally magic and esoteric themes.

Faced with a scenario as complex as this, where the religious factor has again become a significant component of the public and no longer just the private scene, certain important questions arise, among which stand out nature and the dynamic peculiar to religious pluralism. Indeed the multicultural society that we are destined to inhabit is distinguished by the coexistence of a plurality of religious traditions, which on the one hand are undergoing a thorough reshaping of their own identities, and on the other are having a significant influence on areas – such as politics – that seemed to have become permanently autonomous. This is a phenomenon that at first sight appears new but in fact is an integral part of European history. After a few remarks on the origins of the category ‘religious pluralism’, I intend to reveal here the umbilical cord that links current religious pluralism to the religious history of Christian Europe. Indeed it is only by recalling its secular competitors that it will be possible adequately to assess the specific nature of current religious pluralism and identify certain processes that characterize it.

Religious pluralism from a sociological standpoint

Peter Berger, a sociologist who was strongly influenced by his theological training, has helped to clarify decisively the central character of pluralism as a distinctive aspect of religion in the era of secularization. During the 1960s, in connexion with the surge of secularization processes in Europe and the changing religious situation in the USA, Berger (1967) was already stressing, first of all, the gradual and, in his view, inexorable loss of public importance of the traditional religions as institutions, and secondly the privatization of the religious dimension due to the rise in the prevalence of the religious individualism typical of modernity. This new situation would have resulted in a crisis for the institutional role of religions, starting of course with Christianity. To support this interpretation Berger used a definition of the substance and not the function of religion, which means that religion tends to coincide with the sacred and what Paul Tillich defined as the ‘ultimate concern’. Thus in the new scenario institutional religions were said to be based only on individual experience of reality, seen by the believer as having a supreme interest because it was differentiated according to the private options of the individual and not the respective traditions and social functions. As Berger continued to assert, echoed by a growing number of interpreters (see, for example, Berger, 1979, 1992, and a change of perspective in the 1999 book), in the new religious scenario of modernity, religion is no

longer a destiny but the result of a choice. Religious pluralism was thus becoming the distinctive characteristic of a scenario that, because of the relativism of faiths and the loss of visibility overtaking traditional religions, was turning into a supermarket of beliefs where, with the advent of a consumer society increasingly dominated by the media, what was becoming crucial was their 'consumption', and consumer choice – relative to the 'best-value' product and not the preservation of a traditional faith – was assuming a decisive character.

An important aspect of Berger's concept is the central role of the sacred: if the basis of this language is no longer 'religion' in the sense of Christian, but 'ultimate concern', a very wide space thus opens up for vague sacredness. With this in mind religious pluralism ends up occupying the whole religious field: beginning with the smaller circle comprising the (great) traditional religions, this perspective extends outwards to the new religions and more generally to alternative religiosity whose centre remains a sacred thing that is open to an unpredictable multiplicity of 'ways'.

Berger's concept of 'religious pluralism' was widely taken on board by first American then European theologians since it offered, within the context of a scenario that was changing radically, and beyond or beneath the different competing religious languages, a common basic experiential reference (see Taylor, 1998: 10 *et seq.*; Hamnett, 1990). This deeply influenced, for instance, an important strand in the theology of religions such as that started by John Hick, who defined the confrontation between the different religions not as a confrontation between institutions and revelations but in terms of different responses to the same basic experience of 'ultimate reality' (see the 1987 article). Even if, as we are about to see, the situation is much more complex: the problem of pluralism has in fact been very much determined by certain theological options underlying the way in which Christianity's relationship to modernity is read (for example, in Berger's case the hypothesis of the primacy of 'belief', to the detriment of 'religion', from a viewpoint very much influenced by Karl Barth); in addition, this is a recurring theme that deeply affected 20th-century studies in the history of religions (see Hjelde, 1994).

In other words the way the question about religious pluralism is asked depends on the definition of religion underlying it. To prove this, an example can be given that is drawn, not at random, from the North American situation, which has had a deep influence on our way of viewing religious pluralism. Berger's theory assumes that traditional religious institutions, starting with the various Protestant churches and denominations, are gradually losing their importance and authority in favour of private choices and alternative religiosity. However, in the 1980s a succession of research projects revealed a trend that gave the lie to this hypothesis over the long term. In the 19th and 20th centuries the USA experienced a rise rather than a decline in church membership. This rise mostly benefited sects: in other words, not only did the trend to secularization mainly affect Europe but the trend to growth in membership seemed to be dictated by a rational choice that was quite precise, favouring the religious 'agencies' that were the least compromised by the world and tending to promise salvation outside it according to the traditional parameters of the salvation religions (see Stark and Bainbridge, 1985, 1987). The new concept of religious pluralism that resulted was due to a different definition of religion and an associated theory of rational choice that abandoned any utilitarian model underpinning

Berger's definition: what became decisive in this case was a definition of religion as an 'interpretation of the situation' (Young, 1996).

Religious pluralism in European history

This last point leads us on to a third group of problems: the question of method. In fact, religious pluralism can be approached from a multiplicity of standpoints typical of the human sciences; according to the method chosen, different problematics and questions will arise. But from a historico-religious viewpoint, which is the one that interests us, is Berger right to maintain, along with many other sociologists, that religious pluralism is an essentially modern phenomenon (and so an essentially western one)? The answer can only be in the negative. We need take only a superficial look at our past history, the 17th century or the end of Antiquity, to realize that in fact we are dealing with a long-standing phenomenon that is certainly not peculiar to modern and above all contemporary European history.

The question is more complex and delicate than it seems at first sight. I will give just one example: the policy of the 'new evangelization' of Europe promoted by the current pope in the 1990s. It was based on the idea of Europe's Christian identity. The idea itself is not a new one. It surfaces in certain of Pius XII's speeches, such as the one addressed to German Catholic women on 17 July 1952 ('We must keep the following clearly in mind: either European culture will be authentically Christian and Catholic or else it will be consumed by the destructive fire of that materialist culture for which only mass and purely physical force are important'); and returns in statements made by Paul VI (to the European bishops, the speech of 18 October 1975: 'we might say it is faith, the Christian faith, the Catholic faith, that made Europe, so that it has almost become its soul . . . I believe that only Christian civilization, that brought Europe into the world, can save this continent from the emptiness it is experiencing'). The present pope, however, has taken up the same discourse with utterly renewed vigour and emphasis. He has not simply stressed the importance of Christianity in European history and made it the most significant component in that history, but he has stated that Europe exists only through Christianity, which is at its origin: thus its roots are Christian, and its identity is incomprehensible without Christianity, and as a corollary, which was already there in Paul VI's speech, the Church is the repository of its 'soul' (for a detailed analysis, see de Benoist, 2002; the Italian translation adds an important postscript to the French original).

This is not the moment to concentrate on this project, which was based, among other things, on a slightly special view of Europe that sees Poland as a mediator between the Catholic and Protestant West and the Orthodox East (from which – and it is no coincidence – Russia seems to be excluded); nor is it possible to analyse the reasons for which in general it was anticipating failure. What we need to stress instead in our discourse is another fact. The consequence of this positioning, where Christianity has the main role, is obvious: all the other religious traditions, from Judaism to Islam, are marginalized when, although in the minority, they are an essential part of European religious history. Furthermore, there is a dismissal of the presence of the 'pagan' component, which had nevertheless been preserved as a

'folk' culture in the various European states, starting with western Europe, and which, from its rediscovery by Romanticism, is a basic constituent of European religious identity. Indeed, despite all attempts at eliminating it, the 'genie of paganism' has never truly disappeared; in fact, via many metamorphoses, it has survived up to the present day by managing to form an element of contemporary religious pluralism that, though hard to define and identify, is nevertheless significant.

Even though Christianity and Islam have adopted a position that is at first glance annexationist and therefore anti-pluralist, historical reality is far more complex; indeed European religious history cannot be equated or restricted to the history of Christianity and the Christian churches alone; this much is clear, for example, from the history of Italian religion, insofar as it is the history of relations between Christians, Jewish communities and at certain periods Islamic communities, not to mention the confrontation with the pagan substrate that periodically re-emerges and so forms a kind of *basso continuo*.

The legal context of religious pluralism and the relationship with political theology

We might ask ourselves what made religious pluralism possible in late Antiquity. And during the Renaissance too? And then today? Here we are coming to another basic aspect of religious pluralism: the relationship between the law and religion, between politics and religion. The point I need to emphasize, because it has important consequences for the current situation of religious pluralism, is twofold:

- the central character that the legal and institutional framework for this scenario assumes in a situation of religious pluralism, which is likely to be competitive;
- the place occupied in this scenario, which is legally guaranteed, by the different political theologies of the opposing parties, the religious actors present.

Here we must digress in order to accommodate a definition of the meaning I give to the phrase 'political theology', which is in any case ambiguous (see Filoramo and Bettio, 2002).

It is well known that we owe to the antiquarian Varro (116–27 BC) the 'invention' of the category *theologia civilis*.⁴ He thought there were three types of theology: the *genus mythicon* of the poets, the 'physical' type of philosophers, and the 'political' (*civilis*) type of citizens and priests. Each of these types had its own institution: respectively, theatre, school and forum. In his view, that generated three different ways of approaching the religious phenomenon, of 'incorporating' it. From the Roman viewpoint the basis of *theologia civilis* was legal, as was demonstrated by the close bond between public cult and priestly class, who thus carried out a more or less political public function. Consequently, this legal structure defined the institutional context of religion, distinguishing *religio licita* from *religio illicita*. The history of early Christianity in the Roman Empire was decisively influenced by this institutional, legal and political framework which formed the backdrop to the religious pluralism typical of the imperial period. From this standpoint Christianity appears as a kind of

'corporation' that was at first opposed, then tolerated and eventually raised to the status of the state religion. The very application by the Christian emperors of this legal framework and its political implications for Christianity had to bring about the profound transformation of the religious pluralism of late Antiquity as a consequence of the new scenario of 'truth' imposed by revealed faith.

Apart from the legal context, mention of the context of political theology helps to clarify a second aspect, which is assuming great significance again: the 'theological' basis of politics at a period of crisis, either for the secular state, or for the traditional forms of political action. If we understand by 'political theology' *the way different conceptions of God and divinity influence, directly and/or indirectly, the political arena*, it will be easier to understand an important aspect of the present position of religious pluralism, which increasingly affects the different competing political theologies.

Nowadays the problem arises from a dual crisis: the crisis of political representation and that of the secular state, in a context of widespread tension between religion and politics (see Miszal and Shupe, 1992). The current tensions between politics and religion are the expression of the limits of modernity. They spring in particular from the problems posed but not solved in the configuration of the democratic state in its modernity. Indeed the founding claim of this type of state is the neutralization of ethical and religious conflicts over value, since a democratic state, by definition, cannot side exclusively with one ethical or religious viewpoint without the risk of losing its plural and secular character. Neutralization was achieved and is being maintained either through regulation by the state of the spaces where citizens can exercise their religious freedom (concordats, agreements, recognition of rights related to religious membership: see Rémond, 1999), or by changing the allegiance of most citizens to a religion that is a basic element in national identity. This is why a democratic state cannot be an ethical state if it wishes to avoid getting into contradiction with itself.

The target of modern forms of religious *polemos* (expressed by religious institutions and groups) is precisely the democratic state's claim to neutralization of conflicts over value. It is directly or indirectly blamed for the gradual individualization of choice of belief and for the consequent 'relativization of belief', attitudes that are widespread in open European societies. This is why religious pluralism, guaranteed by the democratic state, is interpreted either as a threat to collective identity, which would be better represented by a supposed common heritage of ethico-religious values of which one religion or the other feels it is the repository (cf. the case of Christian Europe noted above), or as a blurring of the truth on the horizons of meaning for individuals and communities. Indeed modernity has relegated faith (the Christian faith, of course) from its position as a globalizing reference for the community to that of a personal choice for the citizen. In this new scenario the primary motor for belief that is individualized and removed from the control of Church authority is no longer the afterlife but self-identification here on earth: in other words, the other world called in to serve this one. And this means that religion itself now depends on a metaphysics of subjectivity, a simple preoccupation with constructing the self in the world (Gauchet, 1998).

The crisis facing the structure and the very identity of the modern state may also

be expressed by observing that the crisis we are witnessing today is the crisis of the secular state:

After two centuries the roots of European modernity, which descend deep into the meeting between Enlightenment culture and the Christian heritage, are seeming to waver, and the secular nature of the state, one of its most important roots, is no exception to this.

The king is naked. After the disappearance of Marxism, and with it the most recent secular claim to construct new man, and the even earlier disappearance of confidence in the ultimate virtues of science and reason, the secular state has given up (fortunately, many would say) on trying to carry through an ethical project that looks for its legitimacy in the function of guaranteeing the freedom of all: honest broker in a game played by other subjects, guarantor of the rules that all competitors must obey in the competition to make sure their own political, economic, cultural and religious ideals are allowed to prevail.

(Ferrari, 1997: 8)

From this perspective the fundamental problem thrown up by the new situation of religious pluralism lies in what the implicit assumption of compatibility between the demands made by each social subject has turned out to be lacking, in actual fact, in the religious area. The most obvious case in this context is provided by Islam, in other words a religion that, while maintaining its complexity and variety, has to all intents and purposes not taken part in the modern project of the secular state. However, the new problem is in general raised by the appearance of social subjects who wish to assert a strong identity that is also legitimated by religion, and so facilitate the outbreak of conflict. However that may be, the example of Islam is interesting in that it re-emphasizes the importance of the legal context within which pluralism with its particular dynamics takes its place.

The issue in question can also be approached from another standpoint. In fact pluralism, which challenges the traditional basis of political and social legitimacy, raises the question of the creation of new forms of non-theological legitimation, and thus poses the problem, which is today widely debated, of civil religion; or the question of trying to find, in the age of secularization and starting from the civil religion theorized by Rousseau in the *Social Contract*, an ethical, non-revealed basis for social life in community; or, finally, the question as to the need to create a public space guaranteed by the state (the *Offentlichkeit* theorized by J. Habermas), a sort of forum or modern agora where topics and problems of general interest might be publicly debated (Rusconi, 2000).

Even though these are very different realities, there is a similarity linking these two aspects to the problem of human rights, which is crucially important nowadays. The common element is provided by the attempt by all states to find a minimum basis that is not religious in character but might lead to agreement between the various religions in order to move beyond the unavoidable conflicts that flow from the identity-linked insistence on positive beliefs typical of current religious pluralism. In addition the case of human rights raises a more general issue, the search for a common basis for religious variety and difference; certain theologians' and philosophers' efforts are also pointing in this direction in an attempt to find an ethical consensus between religions (see Küng, 1991).

Religious pluralism and crisis of traditional identities

It may be that the most radical challenge posed by religious pluralism to traditional religions is the discussion about the different collective religious identities (Niethammer, 2000). From this perspective it acts as a litmus paper measuring how corrosive modernity is for religion and religions, and at the same time as a test for a religious tradition as to its ability to take on the very essence of this challenge at a moment when all religions are coming to be seen as equal.

Nowadays, in some predominantly Catholic countries that traditionally had a secular regime of separation (France, Italy, Spain), there is emerging an apparently new form of collaboration: recognition of the representatives of the great religions as 'moral authorities' to whom those in power do not hesitate to appeal, whether it be about religious education or ethical questions preoccupying public opinion. Bishops and priests, imams and rabbis are regularly consulted. But in what respect? First there is, implicitly or explicitly, and so in reality, a pluralist acknowledgement that all more or less officially represented religions are on an equal footing vis-a-vis the government of the day. Second, the prime area for dialogue is the ethical one: which nevertheless does not imply a recognition on the part of the state that any moral or 'natural', and even less religious, law can take precedence over positive civil law. The basic impression is that in the end this new relationship does not alter very much: rather the political class, while apparently welcoming their religious identity instead of relegating it to the ghetto of the private sphere, nevertheless ends up putting the various churches back into a purely secular context. In other words, paradoxical though it may seem, what brings the religions centre-stage is in fact their own retreat.

Another even more significant example of the subversive nature of the current situation of religious pluralism is the new *agora* created by the Internet. Indeed the net offers the supermarket of faiths an extremely valuable virtual space where they all start equal. It is no coincidence that it is particularly the sects, the mystery cults, the organizations whose content is esoteric and occult, that have crowded into this new-style fair, a spiritual bazaar that is relatively swiftly surveyed, where everyone can show off their own wares, but also where cults and minority groups are able to compete on a level playing-field (using graphics, etc.) with the most powerful religious organizations. Virtual space is linked to a virtual time that puts the cultural memories of the different religious traditions back at square one: indeed in a network you have to start from square one in religious writing by finding the most effective way of presenting your own 'history' and organization. In a way we can draw a comparison with the missionaries: the net has become a new site where the 'good news' about a faith can be announced, a pulpit but also, via more or less esoteric chatlines and mailing lists, a sort of confessional or group dedicated to its mysteries. If we take account as well of the fact that rites are celebrated on the net (see prayers for everyone), that it is possible to use it to sell sacred objects or organize pilgrimages and religious tourism, we have just a partial idea of this new virtual reality's capacity for dissemination (Apolito, 2002).

The function of this new organization of the religious field is twofold: the various organizations can communicate with each other in real time, so the net particularly

favours the organization of groups that are smaller or in the form of a meta-network like New Age; at the same time the various 'shop windows' transformed into temples become icons through which different messages are sent out.

Very many issues are raised by this phenomenon that should be of interest to anyone who thinks about the complexity of the present religious situation:

Are we witnessing a raising of the profile of already existing cults, via an unprecedented means of communication, or also the advent of new religious movements arising out of the internet? The mother of all networks can turn itself into a sacred place similar to a church or temple, or is its power to persuade being exploited rather by fishers of souls to bring rebellious humanity back to the age-old holy places? Do the veins of the superhighway run with spiritual energy or merely gigantic mystifications?

(Merlini, 1997: 7)

These are questions it is not easy to answer. Indeed, Internet religion is only one element, but a crucially important one, in the globalization process mentioned at the start; as such it needs to be taken seriously, because it reflects and at the same time fosters a real process of enormous reach, which, in differing forms and to differing degrees, affects all our lives, even if the effect of those waves reaches our shore in such a muted way that we do not notice it. This is a ghostly religion without a 'body', characterized by a lack of specificity and homogenization of content ('anything goes'), where what matters is being part of it, whatever it costs. In this virtual reality there is not just one universe, independent of our perception; life is a fluid interchangeable reality. It will be hard for all this not to influence the perception of religion, which could be in danger of losing its anchor points. In addition, an underlying narcissism typical of contemporary individualism is being dangerously encouraged: we construct our own self, or a significant part of it, just as we construct a website; instead of being transmitted or kept jealously hidden, it is virtually recreated and can be manipulated as in genetic engineering.

To conclude, cyberspace may be seen, in its virtuality, as being at the opposite pole to the traditional sociological scenario of the great religions, composed of institutions, bureaucracy and tradition; it is non-stop chaos: anarchy, immediacy, fragmentation. In this sense it expresses well the essence of the postmodern religion that De Benoist defines from the fact that the postmodern moment lies in liberation from the dual authority of a past carried by tradition and a future carried by the myth of progress. This would correspond to determination through the present. In the post-modern world everything would be a matter of preference and individual choices, or choices made among individuals, determined by a desire for immediate affirmation rather than a founding model or a project for the future (De Benoist, 2002).

I have devoted some space to this example because, returning to the theme of religious pluralism, computerized spirituality reflects well the potential but also the ambiguities, the positive trends but also the dangers, of a new type of religious pluralism whose essential characteristic is to raise questions about traditional identities. Religious identities are in fact the result of a continuous process of (re)construction and (re)negotiation between the collective religious subjects present on the political and cultural scene. Given the instability (and plurality!) of the concept, we

can reject the competing positions 'against identity' because by its very nature it is a fragile concept, interpreted by virtue of the distinctive aspects of the new scientific paradigm emerging from recent debate about method.

Religious pluralism and fundamentalisms

Contemporary religious pluralism has some new features that help to establish on a non-traditional basis the problem of the preservation and renegotiation of individual or collective identities. The area of confrontation cannot avoid the two distinctive characteristics of our society at the end of the modern era: the triumph of communications highlighted by the internet and the spread of the consumer society. We have already discussed the first aspect; as far as the second is concerned, consumption has become the heart of economic and social life, a moral and cognitive fire, as Zygmunt Bauman (2000) in particular has stressed. The consequences seem obvious, even on the specific market of religious goods, which are more and more being absorbed into the maelstrom of consumer rhetoric. In a world where factors that provide direction, like political legitimacy and common values, are declining, their place having been taken by the utopia of consumption with unlimited choice, there is no longer any room for certainties and lasting relationships, if life, even religious life, is bound increasingly to take on the characteristics of pastiche, ambiguity, multi-functionality and fragmentation. It is against this background that the responses of fundamentalisms in particular will appear as attempts to re-establish on a new basis the threatened identity of contemporary society's religious traditions.

*

I end with some thoughts on the relationship between religious pluralism and fundamentalisms.

As we know, the term 'fundamentalism' has Christian origins. It was adopted for the first time by a movement started in the USA in the 1870s to indicate conservative Protestant groups critical of the fundamental values of modernity; the movement subsequently became the World Christian Fundamentals Association in 1919 (see Carpenter, 1988). It spread through a series of leaflets, published between 1909 and 1915 in the USA, with the name *The Fundamentals – A Testimony to the Truth*. By claiming to take their inspiration from Scripture and thus from the literal truth rejected by modern critical exegesis, and more generally by setting the realm of faith against that of science, these groups meant to combat the trends and values of modernization (pluralism, relativism, historicism, evolutionism, etc.), which in their view were corrupting Protestantism. The term became topical again in the 1980s following Khomeini's revolution in Iran and the triumph of the religious right in the United States under Reagan's presidency. Unthinking use has resulted, on the one hand, in 'fundamentalism' becoming a deviant media term applied to any form of fanaticism and opposition to the dominant society, a big catch-all phrase to cover theological ideas, religious movements and various political programmes distinct from one another. On the other hand specialists have applied it to the study of similar phe-

nomena present either in other Christian confessions (the problem of Catholic fundamentalism) or in the other monotheisms (Islamic or Jewish fundamentalism), or in other religions (Hindu or Sikh fundamentalism, etc.: see generally Marty and Scott Appleby, 1991b–1995, a kind of ‘encyclopedia’ of fundamentalism that is the compulsory reference term). From a comparative perspective these manifestations have been lumped together because they indicated a fight to defend a doctrinal past, whether real or mythical, and at the same time a struggle under God’s protection against everything that threatens that return. In addition, its increasingly widespread use, and also the difficulty of clearly defining it compared with similar terms like traditionalism, radicalism, integrism, etc., have given rise to a heated debate, encouraging some scholars to call for its suppression (see Filoramo, 1999): a classic example of a remedy worse than the evil (see the remarks in Marty and Scott Appleby, 1991b: VIII, which may be shared). In actual fact, like other terms invented by the science of religion, even ‘fundamentalism’, which can be compared for example to ‘orientalism’, is an invention of the West typical of a western world astounded to find that religion exists ‘on the other side of secularization’. In this sense the use of the concept ‘fundamentalism’

is one of the many strategies we use to allow ourselves to ignore the unpleasant imperialist side of modern culture. We agree to ignore the fact that the modern West after the Enlightenment was and often remains as absolutist and intolerant as the ‘fundamentalists’ we are fighting. We agree to maintain the illusion that the word *modernity* is synonymous with pluralism, democracy, respect for difference – everything ‘fundamentalists’ are not, or so we assume. We agree to say that the values cherished by American ‘high culture’ represent what modernity is and has always been. However, this is a pious illusion . . . The fact is that the very word *modernity* is not synonymous with any kind of political or cultural orientation; it is quite simply a meaningless construction to which we assign a significance largely because we feel we are on that wavelength. Usually, in the discussion about fundamentalism, *modernity* connotes all that is good and healthy, whereas the ‘medieval’ world to which we are opposed represents all that deserves to be condemned.

(Harris, 1994: 139)

Harris is right, especially in the light of the tragic events of 11 September: *mea res agitur*. The problem of fundamentalism contains a large projective element and appears to conceal the much wider and more complex problem of modernity; it is no accident that, in the Christian context, fundamentalisms emerge as a reaction to attempts to modernize, or that on the other hand the Orthodox Church, that is the Christian confession that has faced up the least to the challenges of the modern world, at least so far, is not experiencing significant fundamentalist movements.

Beyond the differences, which are nevertheless considerable, what brings together the various fundamentalisms is above all the fact that they form a sort of ‘modern anti-modernism’, a product of modernity, to which they adopt a critical attitude, rejecting its objectives and principles but at the same time using the technological means (mass media) provided by this same modernity to carry their critique to its audience (Lawrence, 1989). In second place, and central to the various fundamentalisms, is the relevance of the theme of politics: ‘Fundamentalism is in fact a

kind of religious thought and action that is raising questions about the ethical link uniting people who live in the same society, experienced as the totality of believers committed as such to each field of social action. As far as they are concerned, they raise in a radical way the problem of the ultimate ethico-religious basis for the *polis*: the political community that takes shape in the state must be based in a pact of religious fraternity' (Pace and Guolo, 1998: 4). But what brings them together beyond these theological, sociological and politico-cultural differences, that are nevertheless so blatant, is above all an essentially religious factor: the reminder of a pure, uncontaminated foundation for the very identity of the faith, based on an exclusive conception of the relationship with their own God, and the tradition which leads them to identify their own religious community and values with the civil community, in complete opposition to the tradition typical of the modern secular state. In order to impose this vision the religious community, thanks also to the fact that it is the repository (in accordance with a theocratic model typical of political theology) of the law given by God, must accomplish a mission of salvation consisting of the affirmation of its own vision of the world, even by using violence. Consequently the fundamentalisms appear as factors in a search for identity faced with the processes causing a crisis either of the model of the secular state and the privatization of religion, or else of the globalization of religious processes with the ensuing crises of identity.⁵ For this reason some political analysts, by placing the emergence and rise of recent fundamentalisms in the international context in place at the end of the 20th century, have seen them as one of the possible protagonists in the political and religious arena of the new millennium (Huntington, 1996; for a critique see Riesebrodt, 2000). In fact these fundamentalisms, starting with the Christian ones, are part of a more general dialectic typical of modernity, by virtue of which the radicalization of the processes of modernization is a counterweight to the attempt to oppose it by using in various ways traditional models even going as far as 'invention of tradition' and new forms of political Jacobinism (see Eisenstadt, 1999).

In this way fundamentalisms have helped to complicate the context of the current situation of religious pluralism and constitute the obligatory backdrop to future religious scenarios, which will without a doubt be characterized by instances of cross-fertilization and creolization, but will be distinguished still more by a complexity unimaginable only 10 or 20 years ago.

Giovanni Filoramo
University of Turin

Translated from the Italian by Daniel Arapu
Translated from the French by Jean Burrell

Notes

1. Secularization as a meta-narrative of the modern is dead (Casanova, 1994).
2. Beginning with the web, for instance, to reconstruct the background (Castells, 1996); on 'technological religion', see Noble (1997).
3. These form the scenario of 'fluid modernity' described by Bauman (2000).

4. On Varro see Lehmann (1997).
5. See the excellent synthesis by Marty and Scott Appleby (1991a: 835). 'Fundamentalism is a tendency, a habit of the intelligence, that is 'found within religious communities and paradigmatically embodied in certain representative individuals and movements, which manifests itself as a strategy, or a set of strategies, by which beleaguered believers attempt to preserve their distinctive identity as a people or group. Feeling this identity to be at risk in the contemporary era, they fortify it by a selective retrieval of doctrines, beliefs and practices from a sacred past. These retrieved "fundamentals" are refined, modified and sanctioned in a spirit of shrewd pragmatism . . . Moreover, these fundamentals are accompanied in the new religious portfolio by unprecedented claims and doctrinal innovations . . . In this sense contemporary fundamentalism is at once both derivative and vitally original. In the effort to reclaim the efficacy of religious life, fundamentalists have more in common than not with other religious revivalists of past centuries. But fundamentalism intends neither an artificial imposition of archaic practices and life-styles nor a simple return to a golden era, a sacred past, a bygone time of origins – although nostalgia for such an era is a hallmark of fundamentalist rhetoric. Instead, religious identity thus renewed becomes the exclusive and absolute basis for a recreated political and social order that is oriented to the future rather than the past. By selecting elements of tradition and modernity, fundamentalists seek to remake the world in the service of a dual commitment to the unfolding eschatological drama (by returning all things in submission to the divine) and to self-preservation (by neutralizing the threatening "Other").'

References

- Apolito, P. (2002) *Internet e la Madonna. Sul visionarismo religioso in Rete*. Milan: Feltrinelli.
- Bauman, Z. (2000) *Liquid Modernity*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- De Benoist, A. (2002) *La 'nuova evangelizzazione' dell'Europa*. Casalecchio (BO): Arianna Editrice.
- Berger, P. L. (1967) *The Sacred Canopy*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Berger, P. L. (1979) *The Heretical Imperative*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Berger, P. L. (1992) *A Far Glory*. New York: Macmillan.
- Berger, P. L., ed. (1999) *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religions and World Politics*. Washington: Ethics and Public Policy Center.
- Carpenter, J., ed. (1988) *The Fundamentalist–Modernist Conflict: Opposing Views on Three Major Issues*. New York: Garland.
- Casanova, J. (1994) *Public Religions in the Modern World*. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press.
- Castells, M. (1996) *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Edge, P. W. and Harvey, G., eds (2000) *Law and Religion in Contemporary Society: Communities, Individualism and the State*. Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate.
- Eisenstadt, S. (1999) *Fundamentalism, Sectarianism, and Revolution: The Jacobin Dimension of Modernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ferrari, S. (1997) *Diritto e religione in Europa occidentale*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Filoramo, G. (1999) *Millenarismo e New Age*. Bari: Dedalo.
- Filoramo, G. and Bettiolo, P., eds (2002) *Attualità della teologia politica*. Brescia: Morcelliana.
- Gauchet, S. (1998) *La religion dans la démocratie. Parcours de la laïcité*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Hamnett, J., ed. (1990) *Religious Pluralism and Unbelief: Studies Critical and Comparative*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Harris, J. M. (1994) 'Fundamentalism: Objection from a Modern Jewish Historian', in J. S. Hawley (ed.) *Fundamentalism and Gender*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hick, J. (1987) 'Religious Pluralism', in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 12. New York: Macmillan.
- Hjelde, S. (1994) *Die Religionswissenschaft und das Christentum. Eine historische Untersuchung über das Verhältnis von Religionswissenschaft und Theologie*. Leiden/Boston/Cologne: Brill.
- Huntington, S. P. (1996) *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

- Küng, H. (1991) *Progetto per un'etica mondiale*. Milan: Rizzoli.
- Kurz, L. R. (1995) *Gods in the Global Village: The World's Religions in Sociological Perspective*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Lawrence, B. (1989) *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt against the Modern Age*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- Lehmann, Y. (1997) *Varron, théologien et philosophe romain*. Brussels: Latomus.
- Lyon, D. (2000) *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Martin, D. (1990) *The Tongues of Fire*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Marty, C. E. and Scott Appleby, R. (1991a) 'An Interim Report', ID: 835.
- Marty, C. E. and Scott Appleby, R. (1991b) *Fundamentalisms Observed* (The Fundamentalism Project, vol. 1). Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press.
- Marty, C. E. and Scott Appleby, R. (1993a) *Fundamentalisms and Society* (The Fundamentalism Project, vol. 2). Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press.
- Marty, C. E. and Scott Appleby, R. (1993b) *Fundamentalisms and the State* (The Fundamentalism Project, vol. 3). Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press.
- Marty, C. E. and Scott Appleby, R. (1994) *Accounting for Fundamentalisms. The Dynamic Character of Movements* (The Fundamentalism Project, vol. 4). Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press.
- Marty, C. E. and Scott Appleby, R. (1995) *Fundamentalisms Comprehended* (The Fundamentalism Project, vol. 5). Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press.
- Merlini, M. (1997) *Pescatori d'anime*. Rome: Avverbi.
- Miszal, B. and Shupe, A., eds (1992) *Religion and Politics in Comparative Perspective. Revival of Religious Fundamentalism in East and West*. Westport, CT/London: Praeger.
- Niethammer, L. (2000) *Kollektive Identität. Heimliche Quellen einer unheimlichen Konjunktur*. Hamburg: Rowohlt.
- Noble, D. F. (1997) *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention*. New York: Knopf.
- Pace, E. and Guolo, R. (1998) *I fondamentalismi*. Rome/Bari: Laterza.
- Patrick, M., ed. (1997) *Religion et démocratie*. Paris: Albin Michel.
- Rémond, R. (1999) *La secolarizzazione. Religione e società nell'Europa contemporanea*. Rome/Bari: Laterza.
- Riesebrodt, M. (2000) *Die Rückkehr der Religionen. Fundamentalismus und der 'Kampf der Kulturen'*. Munich: Beck.
- Rusconi, G. E. (2000) *Possiamo fare a meno di una religione civile?* Rome/Bari: Laterza.
- Stark, R. and Bainbridge, W. S. (1985) *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Stark, R. and Bainbridge, W. S. (1987) *A Theory of Religion*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Stump, R. W. (2000) *Boundaries of Faith: Geographical Perspectives on Religious Fundamentalism*. Lanham/Boulder/New York/London: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Taylor, M. C., ed. (1998) *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press.
- Young, L. A., ed. (1996) *Rational Choice Theory and Religion: Summary and Assessment*. New York/London: Routledge.