



# GEOPOLITICS AND RELIGION

THE ROLE OF CHRISTIANITY IN  
EUROPE'S HEGEMONY AND DECLINE

*Philippe Pellet*





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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. FROM BIPOLAR TO MULTIPOLAR WORLD

After the end of the Cold War, it was expected that with the end of ideological conflicts would come a harmonious world. The desire to establish a united and peaceful world had already emerged at the end of the Second World War, with the creation of the United Nations in October 1945, whose first task was to draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948, presented as “the common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations”<sup>1</sup>.

The best-known formulation of this universal and harmonious vision of the post-Cold War world is that of Francis Fukuyama, who put forward the thesis of “the end of history”:

“We may be witnessing the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government (...). Overall liberal democracy has triumphed. The future will be devoted not to great exhilarating struggles over ideas but rather to resolving mundane economic and technical”.<sup>2</sup>

However, the world has obviously not followed the trajectory predicted by Fukuyama’s theory; rather, Samuel Huntington’s paradigm, illustrated in *The Clash of Civilizations*, seems to be taking shape. After the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the world did not become a unified system, but rather a multi-civilizational one. Emerging civilizations did not adhere to the model dreamed up by Western nations, namely the realization of a world united by Western values considered universal, and therefore to be followed by - not to say imposed on - all countries.

## 1.2. CIVILIZATIONAL MULTIPOLARITY BASED ON THE GREAT RELIGIONS

According to the Catholic historian Christopher Dawson<sup>3</sup> (1889-1970), the great religions are the foundation on which the great civilizations rest. “Religion is one of the great motors of history and a crucial factor in the rise and fall of civilizations”<sup>4</sup>. For Max Weber (1864-1920), German economist and sociologist, four of the five “world’s religions” - Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Confucianism - are associated with major civilizations. Why are religions the backbone of civilizations? Because religion is the idea that there is a transcendent world which gives meaning to this world. Religions, their beliefs, their dogmas, their gods, shape the understanding and interpretation of the terrestrial world, and thus shape civilizations.

In his book, Huntington distinguishes six civilizations, all linked to a religion<sup>5</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> Preamble to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted on December 10, 1948 in Paris by the 58 member states of the United Nations through Resolution No. 217 A (III)

<sup>2</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History*, The National Interest, 16 (Summer 1989), 4, 18.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Dawson, *Dynamics of World History*, p. 128, LaSalle, IL: Sherwood Sugden Co., 1978

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Dawson (1889-1970) was a historian of religion and culture whose main thesis was that religion is a key driving force of history. <https://christopherdawson.org.uk/>

<sup>5</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, p 45-46, Simon & Schuster, 1996

1. The Chinese civilization, marked by Confucianism, which has existed since 1500 BC, includes the countries of Southeast Asia.
2. Japanese civilization, an offspring of Chinese civilization, emerged between 100 and 400 AD.
3. Hindu civilization, which has existed since at least 1500 BC.
4. Islamic civilization, which emerged in the Arabian Peninsula in the 7th century and today extends to North Africa, Central Asia and Southeast Asia (Malaysia, Indonesia). It includes several subcivilizations, in particular the Arab, Turkish, Persian and Malay subcivilizations.
5. Western civilization, which emerged in Western Europe between 700 and 800 AD under the impetus of Christianity. Today, it includes Europe, North America and to a certain extent Latin America, which Huntington considers a distinct entity, that has been mainly Catholic and has incorporated Amerindian elements.
6. Orthodox civilization, mainly Russia, separated from the rest of the Christian world, that has had little exposure to the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment and “other Western experiences”.

Huntington also mentions African civilization, but points out that most civilization specialists, with the exception of Fernand Braudel, do not recognize its existence.

### **1.3. CHRISTIANITY AND WESTERN CIVILIZATION**

If we accept Dawson and Huntington's theories, Christianity gave rise to two civilizations: Western civilization and Orthodox civilization. The split between these two Christian civilizations is rooted in the division of the Roman Empire into two parts, the Western Roman Empire, which became Catholic and formed the territory subject to the spiritual authority of the Pope, and the Eastern Roman Empire, which became the center of gravity of Orthodoxy, which, after the fall of Constantinople (1453), moved to Moscow.

In this essay, we focus on the evolution of Western civilization, analyzing how religion influenced its rise and apogee between the mid-19<sup>th</sup> and mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, followed by its decline in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which, according to the predictions of several specialists, could lead to its disappearance, at least in Europe. The questions addressed in this essay are as follows: How has Christianity helped shape Western civilization, its rise and its domination of the world? Is Christianity also the source of the West's current decline? What is to be done to prevent the disappearance of European civilization?

## 2. THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION IN THE BIRTH AND GROWTH OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION

Western civilization, according to Huntington, today includes Europe, North and South America. It also includes other countries that were colonized by Europeans, in particular Australia and New Zealand.

The birthplace of Western civilization is Europe. It was through European emigration that European culture spread to other parts of the world (Americas, Australia and New Zealand).

### 2.1. EUROPE WAS BORN OF WESTERN CHRISTIANITY

It’s interesting to note that the term ‘*Europe*’ was first used, since the advent of Christianity, by the Irish monk Columban (543-615) in two letters to the Pope, in which he used the word “Europe” to designate the part of the world subject to the Pope’s spiritual authority. This was the meaning it took on, becoming synonymous with Western Christendom, while Eastern Christendom, in the ancient Roman tradition, obeyed the emperor of Byzantium. From this point of view, Europe is the original Christian idea of a space subject to the religious authority of the Pope, bordered by other spaces that do not recognize this authority.

Huntington, too, points out that “the term ‘*the West*’ is now universally used to refer to what used to be called Western Christendom”<sup>6</sup>.

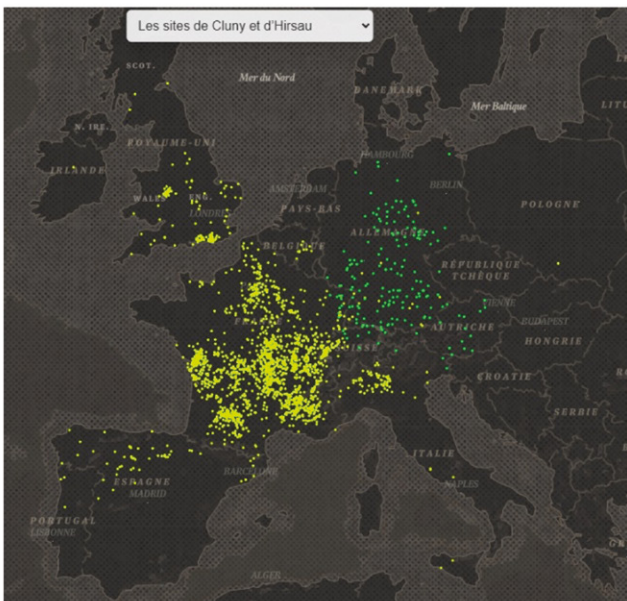
Monasticism played a key role in the birth of European civilization. First and foremost was St. Benedict of Nursia (480-547), whose rule was adopted by the Benedictine and then Cistercian monastic communities, which developed a vast network of monasteries throughout most of present-day Europe, making a major contribution to the spread and establishment of Christianity on the continent. The Irish monk Saint Columban (543-615) also played an important role in this process, founding several monasteries on the continent from 590 onwards. The major role played by St. Benedict and St. Columban in the birth and construction of Europe has been officially recognized by the Catholic Church: St. Benedict was proclaimed patron saint of Europe by Paul VI in 1964, and St. Columban was named a *European Saint* and *Father of Europe* by Benedict XVI in 2008.<sup>7</sup>

The map showing the location of Benedictine and Cistercian monasteries in the Middle Ages is eloquent in this respect, as it provides a fairly accurate outline of the European territory.

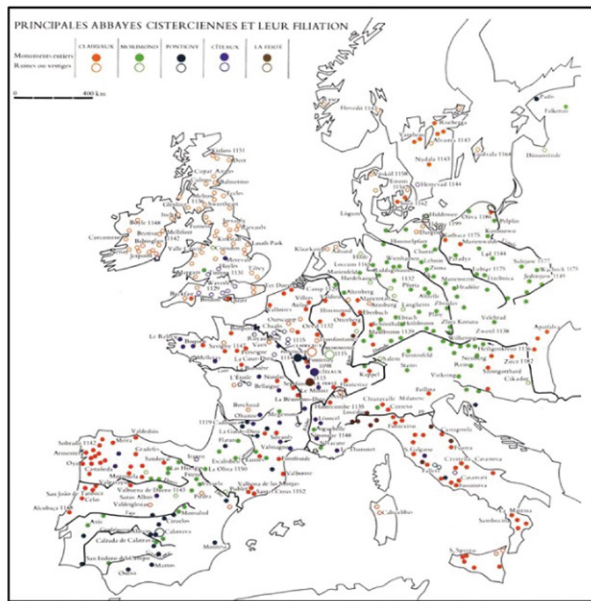
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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p 46

<sup>7</sup> Benedict XVI’s General Audience of June 11, 2008 dedicated to Saint Columban.



Map of the Cluny and Hirsau sites - Source: The digital encyclopedia of Cluny sites



Map of the Cistercian expansion in medieval Europe (Source: Duby, G. 1989: *L'art cistercien*, Flammarion, 6)

Many authors have written about the key role played by Christianity in the birth of European civilization. One of them, André Siegfried (1875-1959), a French sociologist, historian and geographer, wrote:

„European civilization is the result of a threefold conception of knowledge, man and high-level industrial technology. It owes its conception of knowledge to the Greeks, who taught it the logical use of reasoning, free from the obscure fumes of superstition. Its conception of man as a thinking individual, under the sign of the spirit, also comes from the Greeks, but also from the Gospel: as a spiritual unit, man, whoever he may be, is entitled to respect for his spiritual dignity, and as a political unit, he is entitled to respect for his status as a citizen: this notion, which blossomed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, found expression in the American Revolution and the French Revolution (...). From this point of view, the human being is not just a means in the hands of a tyrant or an all-powerful state, he is an end in himself, and it is up to him to receive political guarantees to this end.”<sup>8</sup>

Christopher Dawson goes even further, asserting that «Christianity is not one of Europe's roots, it is the only one, for Europe was born of it and its reappropriation of other roots (Greek, Roman, barbarian, etc.)»<sup>9</sup>. However, when it comes to the eastern boundary of Europe, he takes a different view. For him, Europe's eastern border is not clearly defined:

“Europe has never had an Eastern frontier. (...). The nominal geographical boundary between Europe and Asia has never been a political or cultural or even physical frontier. For example, the old Kievan Russia belonged to Europe.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> André Siegfried, *Europe, Amérique, Occident*, Revue Hommes et mondes, Vol. 5, No. 18 (JANUARY 1948), p. 1

<sup>9</sup> Quote from an article in *L'Homme Nouveau*

<sup>10</sup> Dawson, *Understanding Europe*, pp. 41-42

„Geographically speaking, it is not a continent at all, but merely a peninsular extension of the great Eurasian land-mass. It is a man-made continent, an historical creation, an invention of the Greeks, who adapted a myth in order to express their sense of independence towards the civilization of Asia.”<sup>11</sup>

In the same vein, in the days of the bipolar world and the Cold War, General de Gaulle repeatedly referred to “Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals”, while choosing to speak of “Russia” instead of the USSR, to signify that beyond the vagaries of history - namely the Bolshevik revolution - there remain profound human and cultural realities that are perennial. The future proved him right.

### 2.2. EUROPE AND ISLAM

If we follow Huntington’s theory, Europe can therefore be defined as that part of the Christian world that was subject to the Pope’s religious authority. As it will be explained later (paragraph 2.3.1), it was in this papal Europe that, as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the distinction between the temporal and the spiritual came into being, thus marking the border to the east with the future Orthodox world, where religious power has been subordinate to temporal power. But with the emergence of Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, another politico-religious frontier appeared to the south. For Huntington, “Europe ends where Western Christianity ends and Islam and Orthodoxy begin”<sup>12</sup>.

Europe is therefore also the part of the former Roman Empire that was able to resist the relentless Islamic assaults: the advance of the Arabs halted in 732 at Poitiers by Charles Martel, and two centuries later, resistance to repeated Saracen assaults from their base in the *Maures massif* (south-Eastern France), from where they were finally driven out in 990. Regular assaults were also carried out from the Iberian Peninsula, which had been under Muslim occupation since the 8<sup>th</sup> century and was not completely liberated until seven hundred years later, at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. But while they were being driven out of the south-western part of Europe, they were coming back from the Balkans via the south-east. Indeed, after the fall of Constantinople (1453), Ottoman troops led repeated assaults on Europe, finally triumphing in 1526 at Mohács in Hungary, the beginning of a hundred and sixty-year occupation of Eastern Europe, which ended with the failure of the Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1683 and the recapture of Buda in 1686, followed by the liberation of the Kingdom of Hungary. For these one hundred and sixty years, Hungary was, at its own expense, the bulwark of Christian Europe, protecting it from the Ottoman Empire’s expansionist ambitions.

The failure of the siege of Vienna and the recapture of Buda marked the beginning of a long decline of the Ottoman Empire until the end of the First World War, when Great Britain and France have eventually established their domination over the entire empire with the exception of the Turkish Republic.

Europe was therefore also built on its ongoing struggle against Muslim civilization, as Huntington points out in *The Clash of Civilizations*:

„ The causes of this ongoing pattern of conflict lie not in transitory phenomena such as twelfth-century Christian passion or twentieth-century Muslim fundamentalism. They flow from the nature of the two religions and the civilizations based on them. Conflict was, on the one hand, a product of difference, particularly the Muslim concept of Islam as a way of life transcending and uniting religion and politics versus the Western Christian concept of the separate realms of God and Caesar. The conflict also stemmed, however,

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 40

<sup>12</sup> Huntington, p. 158.



from their similarities. Both are monotheistic religions, which, unlike polytheistic ones, cannot easily assimilate additional deities, and which see the world in dualistic, us-and-them terms. Both are universalistic, claiming to be the one true faith to which all humans can adhere.”<sup>13</sup>

Since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Islamic civilization is on the rise again. Today, Islam - though deeply divided, particularly between Sunnis and Shiites - is a new power with an expansionist drive enshrined in the Koran<sup>14</sup>. Islam's expansion is notably reflected in the migration of Muslims to Europe, which some characterize as a new attempt by Islam to conquer the West. This is the thesis of Frenchman Jean-Frédéric Poisson in his 2018 book *L'Islam à la conquête de l'Occident*<sup>15</sup>, as well as that of Franco-Algerian Mohamed Sifaoui<sup>16</sup>, who in 2019 published *Taqiyya! Comment les frères musulmans veulent infiltrer la France*. This desire to establish Islam in Europe is also openly revealed on several official Muslim websites and documents. For example, on the IslamOnline website, one can read a 2000 fatwa by Youssef al-Qaradawi<sup>17</sup> (1926-2022), which states:

„Islam will return to Europe as a victorious conqueror, after having been expelled twice: once from the south, from Andalusia, and once from the east, after knocking repeatedly on the gates of Athens. I believe that this time the conquest will not be by the sword, but rather by advocacy and reflection”.<sup>18</sup>

Created in 1982, the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), a subsidiary of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) comprising 57 member states and 4 observer countries, aims to implement the Islamization of the West by advocating the non-assimilation and non-integration of Muslims. This program is set out in a document published by ISESCO, entitled “Strategy for Islamic Cultural Action Outside the World”, adopted by the Muslim world at the Islamic Summit of OIC countries in Doha, Qatar, in 2000.<sup>19</sup>

## 2.3. THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF CHRISTIANITY TO WESTERN CIVILIZATION

### 2.3.1. The “genius of Christianity”

Since the French Revolution, from which religion has progressively been evacuated from the public sphere, several authors have raised their voices to emphasize the immeasurable contributions of Christianity to European civilization.

#### ***Profusion in art and thought***

In 1801, in *Le génie du Christianisme*, Chateaubriand set out to prove that:

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<sup>13</sup> Huntington, pp 210-211.

<sup>14</sup> In the Koran, God guarantees the triumph of Islam (Sura 48, verse 28). Through jihad, Muslims are called upon to spread Islam (Sura 2, verse 193). Islam therefore has a universal vocation, and it is the duty of every Muslim to do everything in his power to hasten the submission of the whole world to the “true” religion.

<sup>15</sup> Jean-Frédéric Poisson, jurist and Doctor of Philosophy, currently President of the French Christian Democratic Party *Via, La voie du peuple*. A former member of parliament, he chaired the parliamentary commission of inquiry into the resources of Daech.

<sup>16</sup> Mohamed Sifaoui is a French-Algerian journalist, writer and film-maker who graduated in political science in Algiers in 1988.

<sup>17</sup> Youssef al-Qaradawi was an influential Sheikh, Sunni preacher and spiritual guide of the Muslim Brotherhood. A doctor of Al-Azhar University, he founded the first University of Islamic Sciences in Qatar, and was president of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, as well as the European Council for Fatwa and Research.

<sup>18</sup> www.Islamonline.net, URL : <http://www.Islamonline.net/fatwa/arabic/FatwaDisplay.asp?hFatwaID=2042>

<sup>19</sup> The French and English versions of this document have been removed (purposely?) from the ISESCO website. The French version of this document can be downloaded from the following link: <http://incarnation.blogspot.com/files/Strat%C3%A9gieExtVFLR1.pdf>

«Of all the religions that have ever existed, the Christian religion is the most poetic, the most human, the most favorable to freedom, the arts and letters; that the modern world owes it everything, from agriculture to abstract sciences, from hospices for the unfortunate to temples built by Michelangelo and decorated by Raphael ; that there is nothing more divine than its morality, nothing more amiable, nothing more pompous than its dogmas, its doctrine and its cult; it favors genius, purifies taste, develops virtuous passions, gives vigor to thought, offers noble forms to the writer, and perfect molds to the artist».<sup>20</sup>

### ***The invention of secularism***

While Chateaubriand praised Christianity above all in its poetic, artistic and moral aspects, sixty years later the historian Fustel de Coulanges (1830-1889), in his book *La Cité antique* published in 1864, highlighted that “the immense historical contribution of Christianity was to bring about the disjunction of the spiritual and the temporal, and that this was the crucible of individual freedom, from which modern society was born”<sup>21</sup>.

Several contemporary French authors have taken up this idea. These include Jean-Louis Harouel, author of *Le vrai génie du christianisme* published in 2022, and Jean-François Chemain who, in his latest book *Ces idées chrétiennes qui ont bouleversé le monde* published in 2023, develops his own thesis of the invention of secularism by Christianity. In it, he explains in clear terms in two sentences the Christian origins of the distinction between the sacred and the profane, which has existed since the very beginning of Western Christianity:

„Christians in the Roman Empire were persecuted for denying the divinity of the emperor. Thus, when the emperor converted to Christianity in 312, a tremendous evolution ensued: Christian emperors would no longer be gods themselves, and their authority, their divine strength, they would owe to an external institution, the Church led by the Pope.”<sup>22</sup>

Thus, the first Christian emperors who recognized the new Christian religion and its church were *de facto* subject, in moral and spiritual matters, to the authority of the Pope and the Church.

The Edict of Milan in 313 formalized the existence of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire, and in 392, Emperor Theodosius made Christianity the state religion by suspending imperial worship. Despite this, the Church remained a separate entity from temporal power, headed by the Pope. The temporal and the spiritual were no longer one, as they had been in the Roman Empire, but two powers, which, though intertwined, were distinct.

But the new state religion was expected to protect the empire, so much so that there was great disappointment when Rome fell in 410. It was in response to his contemporaries’ accusations that Christianity had failed to prevent the sack of Rome that Saint Augustine wrote his work *The City of God*. Written between 413 and 426, this book laid the foundations for the distinction between temporality and spirituality, expressing the principle of the necessary coexistence of two cities, the “earthly city” and the “heavenly city”.

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<sup>20</sup> François-Auguste Chateaubriand, *Le génie du christianisme*, pp. 11-12, Editions Alfred Mame et Fils, 1868

<sup>21</sup> Jean-Louis Harouel, *Le vrai génie du christianisme*, p. 10, Éditions Jean-Cyril Godefroy, 2022

<sup>22</sup> Jean-François Chemain, *Ces idées chrétiennes qui ont bouleversé le monde*, p. 71, published by Artège, 2023

The Church and the sovereign each have their own sphere and mission - the latter the pursuit of earthly good, the former the guidance of men towards eternal salvation. Yet their respective missions overlap in the need to pursue peace and justice together. The imperfect nature of the earthly city, marked by original sin, means that the sovereign in charge of temporal affairs cannot act entirely in accordance with evangelical principles.

„When in charge of an empire, it is sometimes necessary to take measures that are contrary to evangelical morality. To wage war, to restore order by force, to put guilty parties out of business, to accumulate wealth... All this, the sovereign decides not for himself, but for the whole people, not in his own interest, but for the common good. And yet, even if he is surrounded by advisors, he remains alone when faced with a decision that involves his personal salvation. Hence the need for the Christian sovereign to have a confessor and director of conscience to help him weigh up, in his innermost being, the reason of State against the personal risk of damnation. What Christianity has invented is that a „Christian” sovereign is bound to submit to Christian morality, both in his personal life and in the exercise of his political office. In this, he is subject to the authority of the Church, whose representatives have the right to call him to account. Power is no longer absolute. Massacres can no longer be committed with impunity; they must be repented of publicly, and above all personally.”<sup>23</sup>

It's up to the sovereign to manage temporal affairs, and up to the Church, with its spiritual power, to hold him to account and remind him that he must answer to God for his actions and decisions. The desire for salvation - or the fear of eternal damnation - is an effective safeguard against the temptation of excessive actions and decisions on the part of the Christian ruler. But even if he did not fear God, the ruler could not have absolute power, for he derived his legitimacy from the Church by virtue of the coronation he received from Her.

Since Theodosius, the dilemma has always been this: the sovereign could only obtain the sacred dimension essential to his full effectiveness from an institution that was independent of him and capable of holding him to account. Emperors and kings often tried to subjugate the Church, but She hasn't given in. The entire history of the Christian West was marked by this tension between these two powers. The second millennium was punctuated by recurring conflicts between the Papacy and the sovereigns, who constantly tried to control this authority that was escaping them, either through schism - Lutheran or Anglican - or through progressive subjugation, as in France with Gallicanism, absolutism and then the Church's integration into the State apparatus (Civil Constitution of the Clergy in 1790, and Concordat of 1801). Finally, in 1905, the French Law of Separation of Church and State put an end to the Concordat and the Gallicanism it spawned. The Church became independent, but on the other hand, religious counter-power disappeared, and the Republic freed itself from the moral tutelage of the Church and exercised power according to the principle of immanence, that is without recognizing the existence of a transcendent moral order to which the conduct of power and the laws should conform.

We have thus moved from a secularism of “distinction”, whereby the two powers are distinct but recognize and cooperate - and also often fight each other -, to a secularism of “strict separation”, not to say “rejection of religion”, leading to the absorption of the moral sphere by the temporal. Secularism thus leads to the following paradox: the separation of Church and State leads to the disappearance of the separation of the two powers, for the distinct spiritual power no longer exists, since the moral sphere have been absorbed by

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 81

the temporal power. The issue with this situation is that if temporal power is left unchecked, it inexorably leads to a totalitarian State.

### 2.3.2. Christianity, religion of the personhood

The disjunction of sacred and profane, a specific feature of European civilization from its very beginnings, had many other advantages. For the first time in history, it dissociated the citizen from the religious being, and established a dualism between civil and religious society. This distinction between State and Church not only recognizes that each of the two powers has its own logic of action, but also leads to the recognition of the autonomy of the person. The consequence of such a duality was to create, between State and Church, a space favorable to the blossoming of freedom. Such an idea that the person can be free and endowed with rights is unknown to neighboring civilizations, marked by the submission of politics to religion (Islam), or of religion to politics (the Orthodox world).

Christianity reveals that man, because he is “created in the image of God”, and because God himself became man in Christ, has an inalienable dignity that confers upon him a fundamental freedom that no power can usurp.

“Christianity taught that man belonged to society only through a part of himself, that he was committed to it through his body and his material interests (...), but that, as far as his soul was concerned, he was free and committed only to God (...) this new principle was the source from which the freedom of the individual could come. Once the soul was freed, the hardest part was done, and freedom became possible in the social order.”<sup>24</sup>

«It is this separation which is the intellectual foundation of public liberties, and which has been the main-spring of the prodigious scientific, technical and social success of the West, the starting point of the world’s modernization process.»<sup>25</sup>

### 2.3.3. Henrich’s theory

Western Christianity has not only granted freedom to man by removing him from the grip of the state, but has also worked to promote the freedom of the individual in relation to his family by promoting marriage by choice, freely consented to by each spouse, and not arranged by families. This is simply the application of a principle inscribed at the very beginning of the Bible, in Genesis chapter 2: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife”<sup>26</sup>. Especially from the 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the Church greatly contributed to promoting the full freedom of spouses in their marital commitment and to encouraging their mutual consent during the celebration of marriage. To combat clandestine and/or non-consensual unions, the Council of Trent decreed in 1563 that marriage could be valid and sacramental only if celebrated in the presence of a priest and two witnesses. The Church also favored “neolocal residence”, meaning that newlyweds set up home independently of their respective families.

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<sup>24</sup> Fustel de Coulanges, *La cité antique*, p.473

<sup>25</sup> Jean-Louis Harouel, p. 10

<sup>26</sup> Genesis, chapter 2, verse 24

All these interventions by the Church, based on the Gospel, were aimed at the freedom of the individual and the couple.

In a recent article from 2019<sup>27</sup>, Harvard professor of human evolutionary biology Joseph Henrich used a scientific approach to assess the potential influence of religion on economic development, asking why the peoples of the West, qualified by the acronym “WEIRD” (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) are so different from other societies. His empirical study shows that Western Christianity transformed European kinship structures during the Middle Ages, and that this transformation was a key factor in the evolution towards a WEIRD psychology. It also shows, on the one hand, that populations with longer exposure to the Western Church are associated with less kinship-based institutions, and on the other hand that populations with longer exposure to the medieval Western Church or to less kinship-based institutions are today more individualistic, less conformist, more prosocial (i.e. trusting strangers), more cooperative and more analytical. In other words, the marriage and family policy pursued by the Western Church from the Middle Ages onwards has been a key factor in the evolution of populations towards a “WEIRDer” psychology.

Another empirical study by Heinrich published in 2022<sup>28</sup> shows a negative correlation between kinship intensity and economic development. In other words, low kinship intensity promotes economic prosperity. This is because population with the weight of ancestral traditions lifted, could develop more autonomy, in terms of both ideas and actions, a mindset that is favorable to development.

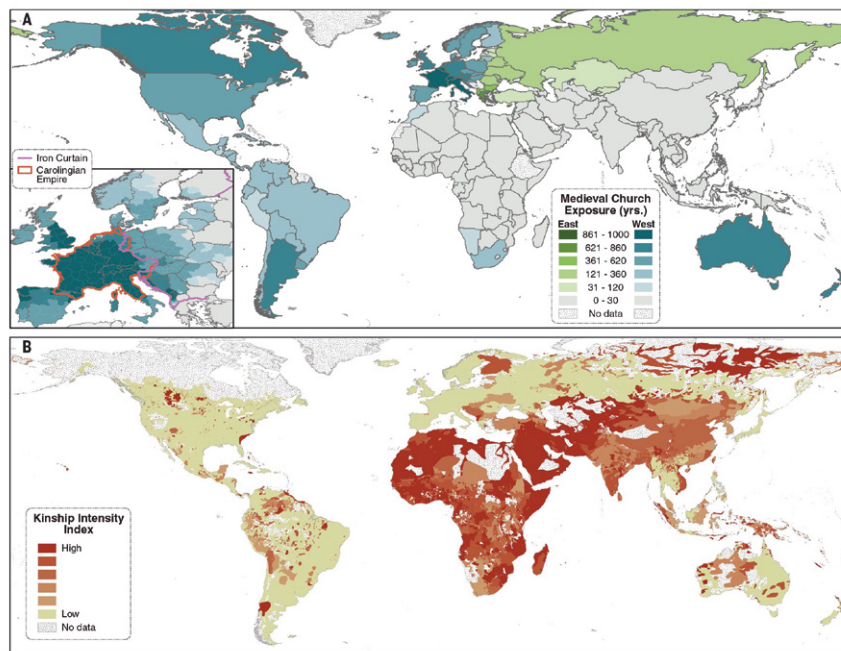
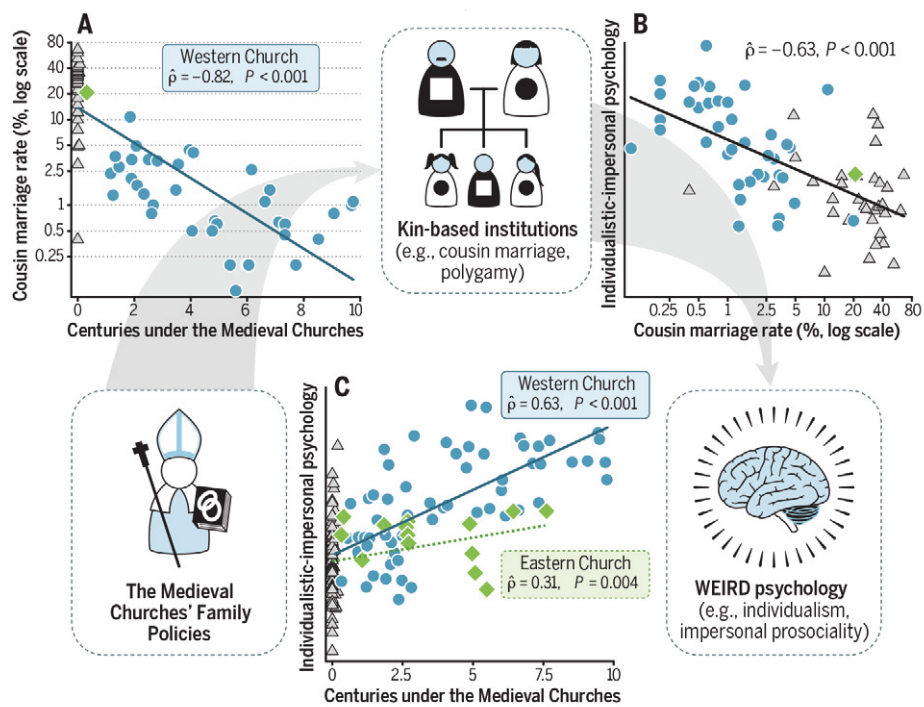
Henrich’s empirical studies are particularly interesting in that they demonstrate, through a scientific approach, that the matrimonial and family policy pursued by the Catholic Church since the Middle Ages - leading to a low intensity of kinship - has directly contributed to the economic development of Western countries, all the more so if they have been longer exposed to the Western Church.

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<sup>27</sup> Joseph Henrich, *The Church, intensive kinship, and global psychological variation*, Schulz et al, Science 366, eaau5141 (2019) 8 November 2019

<sup>28</sup> Joseph Henrich, *Kin-based institutions and economic development*, SSRN Electronic Journal - January 2022

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Source: Joseph Henrich, *The Church, intensive kinship, and global psychological variation*, in *Science* 366, 2019

URL: <https://henrich.fas.harvard.edu/files/henrich/files/sciencefull.pdf>

Henrich's recent theories are simply a scientific confirmation of the conclusions reached by many experts before him. For example, Dawson's extensive historical research has led him to conclude that the medieval Catholic Church was an essential factor in the rise of European civilization, and he has written several books in support of this thesis<sup>29</sup>. In *Understanding Europe*, he writes:

<sup>29</sup> In particular, in *Understanding Europe* and *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*

“The Christian tradition has made the conscience of the individual person an independent power which tends to weaken the omnipotence of social custom and to open the social process to new individual initiatives.”<sup>30</sup>

A host of other Western historians and researchers have made the same observation. But it is even more revealing that non-Western researchers seem to have reached the same conclusion. In a 2004 book by David Aikman<sup>31</sup>, the author quotes a researcher from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) in Beijing<sup>32</sup> with whom he spoke in 2002. According to this researcher, who wished to remain anonymous, one of the CASS’s areas of research was to determine the reasons for the success and pre-eminence of the West over the whole world. After studying this question from all angles - historical, political, economic, cultural - the researcher confided that the CASS studies finally came to the conclusion that it is Christianity that is at the heart of Western culture, and explains why the West has been so powerful.

#### **2.4. FROM EUROPEAN CIVILIZATION TO AMERICAN CIVILIZATION**

Christianity was therefore the main driving force behind the tremendous technological and economic development of the West, which in turn enabled the expansion and supremacy of European civilization for several centuries. After the complete reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula from the Moors at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Portuguese and Spanish conquests of Africa and the Americas began. The initial aim was to find new communication routes for trade, bypassing the Ottoman-dominated Near and Middle East. Over the next two hundred and fifty years, the entire Western Hemisphere and a large part of Asia were dominated by Europe. Western domination reached its apogee during hundred or so years between the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, during which time Europe extended its tutelage over almost all of Africa, consolidated its hold over the Indian sub-continent and other parts of Asia, and, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, brought almost the entire Middle East under direct or indirect European rule, with the exception of the Turkish Empire. This in turn was dismembered in the 1920s, divided between Great Britain, France and Italy.

“For four hundred years intercivilizational relations consisted of the subordination of other societies to Western civilization.”<sup>33</sup>

The source of this Western domination is Christianity, because Christianity is at the root of Europe’s technological and economic development, which in turn is the root of this domination.

During the course of this Western hegemony, the indigenous civilizations of North America were eliminated, and Indian, Muslim and African civilizations were subjugated. The conquest of the Americas from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards was followed by several waves of mass immigration from Europe to the New World. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, European emigrants rebelled against and freed themselves from European tutelage, forming independent states that nonetheless retained Western culture. Thanks to the rich natural resources and vast territories available, the New World experienced dazzling economic development, especially in North America, attracting even more Europeans

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<sup>30</sup> Dawson, *Understanding Europe*, p. 13

<sup>31</sup> David Aikman is a contemporary journalist who spent several years as bureau chief for “Time” magazine in Eastern Europe, Beijing and Jerusalem. He holds a PhD in Russian and Chinese history from the University of Washington.

<sup>32</sup> David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity is transforming China and changing the global balance of power*, p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> Huntington, p. 51

## GEOPOLITICS AND RELIGION – THE ROLE OF CHRISTIANITY IN EUROPE’S HEGEMONY AND DECLINE

tempted by the myth of the American promised land. Between 1821 and 1924, an estimated 50 million Europeans migrated overseas, 35 million of them to the United States.

European emigration led to the economic development of North America, which in the 20<sup>th</sup> century supplanted Europe in world domination. The United States became the world’s leading power, while Europe declined under the impact of two wars, followed by decolonization, which marked the end of the European colonial empire.

In this way, Western civilization, originally European, gradually saw its center of gravity shift to America. And yet, when a civilization leaves its homeland to settle and prosper elsewhere, it is inevitable that it will change. America is characterized by untouched spaces, landscapes and cities that bear none of the hallmarks of Europe’s long history. In a new geographical environment, conceptions are bound to evolve and adapt to these different geographical, economic and social conditions. Detached from its European cradle, Western civilization was reshaped by the New World.

“Historically, Western civilization is European. In the modern era, Western civilization is Euroamerican or North Atlantic civilization.”<sup>34</sup>

The strong development and capitalist economy of the United States has created a materialistic, consumerist society, where man tends to be reduced to an individual with a utilitarian value measured by his ability to produce and consume, thus compromising the Christian conception of personhood. Material success has also contributed in part to the decline of religion and secularization, for why turn to God if there’s nothing materially lacking? The technological miracle has ousted belief in divine providence. The West has gradually abandoned Christianity, which was the founding principle of its civilization.

During the “Glorious Thirty” (the Post-War economic boom), the old Europe, seduced by the success of the American model, became Americanized, adopting lifestyles and economic models borrowed from the United States. It also became economically, politically dependent on the United States, as well as militarily dependent in the face of the Soviet threat. Once the Iron Curtain fell, Europe could have become independent of the United States, but American leaders did everything in their power to prevent a rapprochement between Europe and Russia in order to avoid the rise of Eurasia, seen as “a geopolitical nightmare for the United States”, as expressed by Georges Friedmann, an American of Hungarian origin, a specialist in geostrategic analysis and economic intelligence, close to American leaders. Henri Kissinger’s view was no different:

“ Geopolitically, America is an island off the shores of the large landmass of Eurasia, whose resources and population far exceed those of the United States. The domination by a single power of either of Eurasia’s two principal spheres - Europe or Asia - remains a good definition of strategic danger for America, Cold War or no Cold War. For such a grouping would have the capacity to outstrip America economically, in the end, militarily.”<sup>35</sup>

As Goerges Friedmann puts it, the rapprochement of a reunified Germany and Russia would have inevitably led to the creation of a gigantic continental entity with a population of over seven hundred million, immense natural resources and unrivalled strategic depth, in continuity and contiguity with China, India and the Muslim world. This rapprochement is therefore unacceptable to the Americans, as it would call into question the hegemony of the United States. Under these conditions, everything must be done to prevent it from happening.

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<sup>34</sup> Huntington, p. 47

<sup>35</sup> H. Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (1994)



“The U.S. grand strategy has always aimed for the fragmentation of Eurasia as the first line of defense for U.S. control of the seas.”<sup>36</sup>

This is nothing other than the implementation of the strategy advocated by Zbigniew Brzezinski (1918-2017), developed in his 1997 book *The Grand Chessboard*. “Who controls Eurasia controls the world”. For American hegemony to continue, Brzezinski advocates that the United States must pursue the division of Europeans and cut Russia off from the Ukraine, for if it regained control of this country endowed with important natural resources and access to the Black Sea, it would once again become a powerful state stretching from Europe to Asia.

This is the background to the current war between Russia and Ukraine. This conflict is part of the US strategy to weaken Russia, in which Ukraine, the buffer zone between the West and Orthodox civilization, is the front line and battleground.

The American strategy is paying off in part: the breakdown of economic relations and sanctions against Russia are cutting off Germany and the rest of Europe from Russian energy sources. On the other hand, it does not weaken Russia, which since the start of economic sanctions in 2014 has accelerated the development of its own production capacities and has intensified relations with other major countries such as China and India. But the American strategy is weakening Europe and making it even more dependent on the United States.

Once a major world power, Europe declined over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, eventually becoming the vassal of the United States. A providential man, Charles de Gaulle, attempted in the aftermath of WWII to rehabilitate France and Europe as an independent power, but after the General's death in 1970, neither his French successors nor other European leaders were willing or able to pursue his ambitious project.

De Gaulle's ambition was to make France an independent power between the “two colossi”, and he set about achieving this in a variety of ways. He made France a military power with atomic weapon, and gave it energy independence by launching a major nuclear power plant program. In 1966, he decided to withdraw France from NATO's integrated command, and consequently called for the departure of the American and Canadian armed forces stationed on French territory. His aim was to restore France's sovereignty and ensure that it was not alienated from the will and interests of the United States. But forty years later, in 2009, under the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy, France rejoined NATO...

With regard to Europe, de Gaulle's vision was to create a Europe of nations, not a federal Europe:

“Our policy is to achieve the union of Europe. If I have insisted on reconciling France and Germany, it is for a very practical reason: it is because this reconciliation is the foundation of all European policy. But what kind of Europe? It has to be truly European. If it is not the Europe of the people, if it is entrusted to a few more or less integrated technocratic bodies, it will be a story for professionals, limited and without a future. And it is the Americans who will take advantage of this to impose their hegemony. Europe must be independent. That's my policy, which doesn't mean it shouldn't have allies (...). But it must exist by itself, for itself.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Georges Friedmann, *The next 100 years*, 2010

<sup>37</sup> Alain Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*, Fayard, vol. II, p. 366

“Each people is different from the others, incomparable, unalterable. They must remain themselves, as their history and culture have made them, with their memories, their beliefs, their legends, their faith, their will to build their future. If you want nations to unite, don’t try to integrate them like chestnuts in a chestnut purée. You have to respect their individuality. You have to bring them closer together, teach them to live together, to run their legitimate governments in concert, and one day, to confederate, i.e. to pool certain skills, while remaining independent for everything else. That’s how Europe will be made. We won’t do it any other way.”<sup>38</sup>

This has not been the direction taken by Europe. In fact, since the Single European Act of 1986, European integration has continuously reinforced the central institutions’ power, resulting in the gradual loss of sovereignty by member states. As predicted by General de Gaulle, the European Union has become dependent on the United States: “If it is entrusted to a few more or less integrated technocratic bodies, it will be a story for professionals, limited and without a future. And it is the Americans who will take advantage of this to impose their hegemony”.<sup>39</sup>

Today, among the member states of the European Union, there is only one country, Hungary, which militates for a Europe of nations, and which has a vision in many respects similar to that of General de Gaulle. But Hungary is in disgrace, because what de Gaulle said sixty years ago has become inaudible today, as it is considered contrary to the “values of Europe”. Yet de Gaulle’s predictions have come true.

### 3. THE ABANDONMENT OF RELIGION, THE SOURCE OF EUROPE’S DECLINE

Charles de Gaulle believed that the strength of France and Europe lay not only in economic and military power, but also in moral strength. For him, France’s Christian and humanist values represented something essential in the eyes of the world, and could greatly contribute to its influence and power.

“Apart from the two colossuses, there’s another international reality - there aren’t two. It’s France, which may be much smaller than the other two, but which knows what it wants, knows where it’s going, and has an immense role to play. Obviously, we have fewer guns and divisions than the two behemoths (...). There are rockets, but there are also ideas. France’s magistracy is moral. In Africa, Asia and South America, our country is the symbol of racial equality, human rights and the dignity of nations. France represents something essential. It had declined excessively over the last century. It must regain its place.”<sup>40</sup>

Yet France’s moral value lies in its Christian heritage. “The Republic is secular, France is Christian”<sup>41</sup> General de Gaulle is quoted as saying on several occasions. In 1959, he confided to an American journalist:

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 63

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 366

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 280 and 283

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Émile Poulat, *France chrétienne, France laïque*, p. 131.

“For me, the history of France begins with Clovis, chosen as King of France by the tribe of Franks, who gave their name to France, the first king to be baptized Christian. My country is a Christian country, and I start counting the history of France from the accession of a Christian king who bears the name of the Franks”.

What happened to the moral influence of France and Europe?

### 3.1. THE NEW VALUES OF THE WEST

At the start of European integration in the 1950s, three of the four founding fathers (Robert Schuman, Alcide De Gasperi and Konrad Adenauer) were devout Catholics (only Jean Monnet was not). It was clear to them that Christianity lay at the heart of European identity, and it was on the basis of evangelical values that they planned to found the European Community.

The political reorganization of the continent was launched in the aftermath of the war under the impetus of Winston Churchill, who, in his Zurich speech on September 19, 1946, invited European countries to form the United States of Europe, recalling that Europe was the “cradle of Christianity and Christian morality”. He proposed that the first practical step in this direction should be the creation of a Council of Europe. This was founded on May 5, 1949 in London by ten countries with the aim of promoting human rights and democracy throughout Europe. The Council’s first task was to draft the European Convention on Human Rights, adopted on November 4, 1950 and ratified in 1953. During the negotiations for the founding of the Council of Europe, the inclusion of Christianity and religion in the Council’s founding treaty was discussed. The first version of the Preamble, based on the resolutions adopted at the Congress of Europe held at The Hague in May 1948 under the chairmanship of Churchill, mentioned the traditions of Christian civilization, but in the end no reference to Christianity or religion was included, neither in the Founding Act of the Council of Europe signed in London on May 5, 1949, nor in the Convention on Human Rights adopted in 1950. Pope Pius XII’s appeal in 1948 was ignored:

“If Europe is to emerge from the crisis, must we not re-establish the link between religion and civilization? That is why we were delighted to read, at the head of the Cultural Commission’s resolution following the Congress in The Hague last May, the mention of the “common heritage of Christian civilization”. However, this is still not enough until we expressly recognize the rights of God and his law, or at least natural law, the solid foundation on which human rights are anchored. Isolated from religion, how can these rights and all freedoms ensure unity, order and peace?”<sup>42</sup>

Later, during the preparation of the draft Constitution for the European Union in 2004, it was at the insistence of French President Jacques Chirac, invoking the principle of secularism and the refusal to privilege one religion over another, that the reference to Europe’s “Christian roots” was removed from the draft Preamble, and consequently does not appear in the Treaty on European Union ratified in 2008.

The fact that Europe’s founding values are not anchored in a transcendent order has meant that they have become increasingly distant from the traditional values enshrined in Christianity. This development stems from the principle of the neutrality of the State, which is the foundation of the liberal conception of secularism, according to which the State must remain neutral with regard to all convictions and beliefs, and must leave each individual free to live

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<sup>42</sup> Pope Pie XII’s address to the Second International Congress of the European Union of Federalists on November 11, 1948

according to his or her own values. Freed from any higher moral law, European values<sup>43</sup> have become a compromise between diverse interests, transforming individual desires into rights.

“Whereas the human rights of 1948 reflected natural rights, the affirmation of individualism has generated new anti-natural rights, such as the right to euthanasia or abortion, leading in turn to the emergence of transhuman rights that today guarantee the power to redefine nature, such as the right to eugenics, to the child, or to sex change.”<sup>44</sup>

This move towards inverted values is the logical continuation of the secularization process that has been underway for several centuries, tending to eradicate religion from the public sphere. This movement of “*sortie de la religion*” (“away from religion”) - to use the expression of Marcel Gauchet, a contemporary French historian and sociologist - is, paradoxically, a consequence of Christianity, which has favored human emancipation. This is why Marcel Gauchet has said that “Christianity is the religion of the exit from religion” (“*Le christianisme est la religion de la sortie de la religion*”). Charles Taylor says the same thing in *A Secular Age*. Therefore, we may say that the rejection of religion has its origins in Christianity itself. This is why the rejection of religion is only happening in the West, while everywhere else there is a strengthening of religion, as Huntington points out in *The Clash of Civilizations*.

### 3.2. DECLINE OF VALUES, DECLINE OF CIVILIZATION

The abandonment of the Christian religion and the principle of state neutrality leaves the West vulnerable, as nature abhors a vacuum and other religions, particularly Islam, take its place. but also new “secular religions”, such as the Woke ideology<sup>45</sup> imported from the USA.

Islam is not just a religion, it’s also a civilization with a political project to conquer the world, particularly on the European continent, as we saw earlier. The principles of secularism, democracy and human rights are disarming Europe. Europe’s lack of resistance – “The Loss of Nerve” as Dawson wrote in *Understanding Europe* - is leading it towards a civilizational clash within its own borders, where a new civilization is taking root.

The unnatural values of the West have “gone mad”, as Chesterton put it, and the West wants to impose them on the rest of the world, on the pretext that they are universal. They have even gone madder for having fed from the Woke ideology for several years now. This pressure from the West, exerted directly by Western countries or through international institutions such as the UN, is very much resented in the rest of the world. Huntington wrote as long ago as 1996: “The West’s universalist pretensions increasingly bring it into conflict with other civilizations, most

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<sup>43</sup> Introduced by the 2007 Lisbon Treaty amending the Treaty on European Union. These European values are set out in Article 2 and include respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.

<sup>44</sup> PUPPINCK Grégor, *Les droits de l’homme dénaturé*, Éditions du Cerf, p. 11.

<sup>45</sup> Originating in American universities, the Woke movement (meaning “awakened”) is sweeping across Europe in a disturbing way. In his recent book *La Religion Woke*, published in 2022, Jean-François Braunstein, a French philosopher and university lecturer, demonstrates how the Woke ideology is a religion. The Woke religion consists essentially of three “theories”:

(1) The “gender theory” explains that the body doesn’t count, and that the only thing that counts is one’s awareness of being male, female or whatever: “gender identity” is said to be independent of the body.

(2) The “critical race theory” explains that racism is “systemic”: all whites are racists and all people of color, the “racialized”, are victims. To combat racism, skin color must always be taken into account, so that reverse discrimination in favor of the racialized can be established.

(3) “Intersectionality theory” potentiates victimized identities, whether of gender, race or anything else. It is often illustrated by the image of a black woman who is discriminated against as a woman and also as a black woman, as if she were at the “intersection” of these discriminations.

Wokism is a political tool that valorizes victimized identities of all kinds, and indicts the white, cisgender, European, colonizing man as guilty by definition.

Source: interview with Jean-François Braunstein, *Revue des deux mondes*, October 25, 2022

seriously with Islam and China”<sup>46</sup>, and further on: “the revival of non-Western religions is the most powerful manifestation of anti-Westernism in non-Western societies. That revival is not a rejection of modernity; it is a rejection of the West and of the secular, relativistic, degenerate culture associated with the West.”<sup>47</sup>

In several of his speeches, Vladimir Putin, with the approval of Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, denounces the moral depravity of the West and asserts his intention to defend Russia against the West’s pretensions to export its decadent morality.

Several African countries that not so long ago maintained good relations with France now rejects it, the latest examples being Burkina Faso and Niger, where anti-French putschists recently took power. France’s moralizing injunctions to promote the liberalization of morals are a fundamental factor in this disaffection. The Russians have understood this. Putin’s rhetoric on the moral decadence of the West strikes a chord with African authorities. They appreciate that Russia respects African identity and imposes no societal or political constraints in return for its aid. The new leaders of Burkina Faso and Niger have rejected the French military presence and have drawn closer to Russia. The entire Western democratic system has been rejected.

The rift between the West and Africa takes place even within the Catholic Church. The recent *Fiducia Supplicans* declaration issued by the Doctrine of the Faith and approved by Pope Francis, which paved the way for the blessing of homosexual couples, was unanimously rejected by all African bishops.

Europe, once admired the world over for its historical and cultural heritage, and its artistic, literary, philosophical and religious influence, is now considered morally decadent. This goes a long way towards explaining the backlash against Europe, particularly Islamist terrorism.

“They see Western culture as materialistic, corrupt, decadent, and immoral. They also see it as seductive, and hence stress all the more the need to resist its impact on their way of life. Increasingly, Muslims attack the West not for adhering to an imperfect, erroneous religion, which is nonetheless a “religion of the book,” but for not adhering to any religion at all. In Muslim eyes Western secularism, irreligiosity, and hence immorality are worse evils than the Western Christianity that produced them.”<sup>48</sup>

Convinced of the universality of its values, Europe sees the world through its own spectacles and has difficulty understanding other civilizations. It wants to establish democracy everywhere, for example by making its aid conditional on the introduction of a multiparty system, without seeing that in Africa, the multiparty system has harmful effects as it exacerbates ethnism and tribalism previously contained and channeled in the single party.<sup>49</sup> With its principles of secularism and tolerance, Europe is defenseless in the face of the conquering will of Islam, which it does not even realize, still believing with Fukuyama in the inexorable victory of democracy and so-called universal Western values.

By rejecting its roots and remaining a vassal of the United States, Europe doesn’t know itself. Nor does it understand other civilizations. As Sun Tzu wrote 1500 years ago: “If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Huntington: p. 20

<sup>47</sup> Huntington, p. 101

<sup>48</sup> Huntington, p. 213

<sup>49</sup> Bernard Lugan, *Afrique réelle*, no 167, p. 8, November 2023

<sup>50</sup> Sun Tsu, *The Art of War*, p. 11, Allandale Online Publishing, 2000

## 4. WHAT TO DO?

If, as this essay attempts to demonstrate, the decadence of European civilization is due to the rejection of transcendence and Christian roots, a necessary condition to avoid the disappearance of European civilization is a spiritual transformation and renewal of Christian culture. Not a return to the past, but a renewal.

“It was the age of Tiberius and Nero that saw the coming of Christianity, and the breakdown of the giant fabric of the world state in the third century was followed by the rise of the new Christian culture. The present crisis or our civilization can only be solved by a similar process of radical conversion and spiritual transformation [...]. Civilization can only be creative and life-giving in the proportion that it is spiritualized. Otherwise the increase of power inevitably increases its power for evil and its destructiveness.”<sup>51</sup>

From a political standpoint, in Europe, Hungary is the only country that attaches importance to transcendence and Christian roots. The Hungarian Fundamental Law of 2011 affirms Hungary’s roots in Christianity and the recognition of a transcendent order. The very first word of the Fundamental Law of Hungary is *God* (“God bless the Hungarians”, beginning of the national hymn). It also refers to the Holy Crown of Hungary embodying “the constitutional continuity of the Hungarian state and national unity”. The Preamble emphasizes the special role of Christianity in preserving the nation. In addition, several of the “non-negotiable” principles laid down by the Catholic Church<sup>52</sup> have been introduced into the Constitution, such as protection of the institution of marriage as a union between a man and a woman, protection of the family as the basis of the nation’s survival, the right of parents to freely choose the education they wish to provide for their children, and respect for the life of the unborn from the moment of conception. On the other side of Europe, on 8 March 2024, France, eldest daughter of the Church, land of the Enlightenment and human rights, enshrined in its Constitution the “guaranteed liberty of women to have recourse to a voluntary interruption of pregnancy”, in defiance of respect for every human being from the very first moment of life, and for the sanctity of life from the very beginning.

But Hungary is in the dock within the European Union. It is still holding out, but for how much longer?

Given the current situation, it would seem illusory to count on politics to bring about a renewal of Christianity; rather, Europe is currently moving in the opposite direction. It is therefore up to Christians, and above all lay people, to instill faith in society, as taught by the Second Vatican Council<sup>53</sup>. This is a difficult task, as society is becoming increasingly hostile to Christian principles. Many Christians try to influence politics and world affairs, but their words are increasingly inaudible to the vast majority of citizens. Exemplarity through the practice of heroic virtues could be a new way forward. In 2018, the policeman Arnaud Beltrame, received a national tribute because he sacrificed his life to save that of a hostage during a terrorist attack in the south of France. When, in June 2023, the “young backpack hero” Henri d’Anselme, who was on a pilgrimage to France’s cathedrals, used his backpack alone to fend off a knife-wielding terrorist attacking babies in Annecy, he was awarded the *Légion d’Honneur*. Virtuous deeds such as these leave a greater mark on society than all the talk of evangelical principles. The national tribute and the *Légion d’Honneur* are just the tip of the iceberg, for these virtuous deeds act as a ferment that secretly spreads

<sup>51</sup> Dawson, *Understanding Europe*, p. 204

<sup>52</sup> In particular, in Pope Benedict XVI’s post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, §83

<sup>53</sup> Decree of the Second Vatican Council (1965) *Ad Gentes* on the Mission Activity of the Church. §16: “The most important and therefore worthy of special attention are the Christian laity: namely, those who have been incorporated into Christ and live in the world. For it is up to them, imbued with the spirit of Christ, to be a leaven working on the temporal order from within, to dispose it always in accordance with Christ.” - §21: “the Gospel cannot be deeply grounded in the abilities, life and work of any people without the active presence of laymen.”

countless blessings, whether in the form of conversions to the Christian faith, as in the case of the hostage saved by Beltrame, or a new passion for France's Christian heritage and culture, thanks to the many lectures given by Henri d'Anselme, who is much in demand due to his high media profile following his heroic gesture.

Apart from such exceptional and heroic acts, the daily practice of the virtues by Christians in their everyday lives may have a profound impact on society.

As for the Church, Her main role is to sacralize and embody the sacred, to dispense the sacraments, and to give clear and demanding teaching, "energetic and sharper than any two-edged sword"<sup>54</sup>. By those means, it must seek to re-establish its spiritual authority.

The transmission of Christian culture to young people is also a fundamental point, and Christian schools have a key role to play in this area, offering an alternative to state schools which, especially in France by virtue of the principle of *laïcité*, have rejected from school curricula anything to do with religion. Dawson saw the Catholic school as a unique place for cultural engagement:

"The essential function of education is 'enculturation', or the transmission of the tradition of culture, and therefore it seems clear that the Christian college must be the cornerstone of any attempt to rebuild the order of Western civilization. In order to free the mind from its dependence on the conformist patterns of modern secular society, it is necessary to view the cultural situation as a whole and to see the Christian way of life not as an isolated precepts imposed by ecclesiastic authority but as a cosmos of spiritual relations embracing heaven and earth and uniting the order of social and moral life with the order of divine grace. Christian culture is the Christian way of life. As the Church is the extension of the Incarnation, so Christian culture is the embodiment of Christianity in social situations and patterns of life and behavior. It is the nature of Christianity to act as a leaven in the world and to transform human nature by a new principle of divine life."<sup>55</sup>

Last but not least, the monastic communities that have drawn the map of Europe by covering the continent with a mantle of abbeys, are for our civilization like the blood system that silently irrigates the body with oxygen and nourishment to ensure life. Through their continual prayer in sacred places throughout Europe, monks and nuns secretly irrigate society with the Spirit's life-giving breath. Monasteries are also essential places of renewal for lay people, whether Christian or not.

Many thinkers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century spoke prophetic words. A quotation from the Bishop of Mainz, Mgr. Ketteler (1811-1877), is particularly noteworthy:

"Founded, at its origin, without the support of physical force, by the sole power of the word and of grace, by the virtues of Christians and the blood of martyrs, it is by the same means that the unity of faith must be re-established and that it will certainly be"<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Letter of Saint Paul to the Hebrews, chapter 4, verse 12

<sup>55</sup> Dawson, *The Crisis of Western Education*, p. 115, Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010.

<sup>56</sup> Quote from Comte de Montalembert's Malines speech *L'Église libre dans l'État libre*, p. 99, in *Journal de Bruxelles*, August 25-26, 1863

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*“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.”<sup>57</sup>*

We have been warned.

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<sup>57</sup> Gospel According to Saint John, chapter 4, verses 5 and 6





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