

Review of

Robert Cipriani

Diffused Religion: Beyond Secularization. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
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Abstract

The book is about the theory of diffused religion. It provides various explanations for the resilience of religions worldwide, and particularly in Europe. The strength of this landmark in the sociology of religion resides in three points: First, it shows a continuity, yet lousy, not a rupture, between religion and secularism: the way secularism has indeed opposed religion, or reduced religion to spirituality or transcendence seen as very problematic. For Cipriani, the secularism is thin in some countries, such as USA, Latin America and even in Europe. Second, it develops some thought on religious values. These values are transmitted through religious socialization. Finally, it highlights the transformation of a collective religiosity into an individual one.

Keywords: religion, secularism, Italy, religiosity, religious values

Robert Cipriani's book is the fruit of his long career as a sociologist of religion, and a culmination of his empirical work in Italy as well as his subtle contributions to worldwide surveys on religion, religiosity, and values. The book is about the theory of diffused religion, and provides various explanations for the resilience of religions in Europe and across the globe. He wants to show a continuity, yet lousy, not a rupture, between religion and secularism and, in the word of José Casanova in the forward of the book, aims to "diffuse and to blur boundary distinctions, the temporal boundary between traditional religion and secular modernity, and the spatial boundary between ecclesiastical religion and modern secularity" (vii).

This book sets the stage for more research that focuses on what he calls a tendency towards the "sociological construction of inconsistency" by means of "purely theoretical reasoning, or of a marked use of figures and results put together in scientifically controversial ways." He is right, as the European survey's respondents tend to downplay their religiosity when they reply to a subjective question (such as: do you consider yourself a religious person?), compared to their reply to objective questions related to their religious practices, suggesting religiosity was seen incompatible with modernity. This, for instance, is not the case when it comes to the typical American way of replying to religiosity indicator questions.

What the meaning of a *diffused religion*? The qualifier *diffused* needs clarification in order to be properly understood: diffused *in*, which means religion does not disappear as the theory of secularization suggested/predicted, but still spreads via prayer, rites and values to vast sections of the population. It is also diffused *by*, which means through values. For Cipriani, and against the utilitarian sociology, values are very important, as there is always a connection between inspiring value and practical actions, between value and choice, and between what is desirable and what is possible. If values are personal, they become shared through institutions and primary socialization. Together with interests, values are very salient for identity formation. It is through values that people identify themselves with a movement, a religion, a political party or an ideological perspective.

The book is composed of two parts: the first is theoretical, forging some concepts and showing us the distinctions between other concepts in sociology of religion (such as folk religion, civil religion, common religion, implicit religion, etc.) and the second is a more empirical part, taking the case of Catholicism as diffused religion in Italy, beginning with the original intuition of something relevant in the relationship between religion and politics in the 1970's, and 1980's, the contents and trends of the Italian situation may provide. His description to the relationship between communism and Catholicism allows me to figure out what was puzzling in the relationship between the Italian left and religion. The Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo, who has a long academic career and served as Deputy of the European Parliament representing the communists, illustrates this case. Vattimo points out how Christianity has contributed to contemporary culture and accommodates itself to the process of secularization.

Cipriani develops some thought on religious values, and enumerates those which are common to many religions, such as: do not kill, do not torture, do not violate; do not steal, do not corrupt, do not betray, do not lie, do not bear false witness, do not commit abuse. These values are transmitted through religious socialization (especially family, and religious authority). In the case of Italy, one of the evidences of such transmittal is the religious initiation (baptism) where more than half of Non-Catholics have baptized or will baptize their children (2014). Diffused religion moves and develops according to similar characteristics: an acquired cultural heritage, possessed and transmitted intergenerationally though constantly reshaped to meet different circumstances and contexts.

Cipriani highlighted the transformation of a collective religiosity into an individual one: "a personal God, seems quite functional to the individual needs of social actors struggling with multiple, complex, risky and unpredictable problems which do not always find suitable answers in solutions provided by the traditional historically consolidated religions". Yet, institutional religion is not disappearing and here the difference between the Luckmann notion of "invisible religion" and Cipriani notion of "Diffused religion" is profound. Both individual and institutional/family religiosities are still highly visible and effective in its diffusive action. Cipriani quotes Campiche: "these two poles are not antagonistic. The analysis of religion at individual and

family level clearly highlights the fact that each of us oscillates between these two poles and that the meaning of each one's journey is never determined once and for all" (91).

Cipriani criticized the way secularism has opposed religion, or reduced religion to spirituality or transcendence. For instance, Luckmann focused only on transcendence. He distinguishes between subjective experiences falling within the "little" spatial or temporal transcendences of daily life, the "intermediate" transcendences of relationships to other human beings and the "great" transcendences of life and death. The reductionism will justify for him the "privatization" of religion, and making him incapable of seeing, contrary to Cipriani, how religion enters in the public sphere and into politics. For Cipriani, the transcendent and the mundane have been in tension since the Axial Age, but they will always negotiate their presence in the public sphere. He also demystifies how thin the secularism is in some countries, such as USA, Latin America and even in Europe. He brought a striking example from Switzerland, quoting Campiche that considering this country as secular is "a historical, legal and sociological contradiction". There, 80% of the population refers to a religious tradition and become more and more pluralism as only 56% consider Christian. Finland provides another example. There, even a diffused form of Lutheran religion produces clear effects, well beyond abandonment of practice and membership of the Church.

Cipriani adopts Bhargava's concept of "principled distance" between state and religion, a proper distance based on the principle of equity, which is the fifth model of secularism favoring the values of peace, universal rights, dignity, freedom, equality, and fraternity. Europe, for instance, cannot find appropriate solutions to the many problems that arise concerning religion, as it does not adopt a policy of equidistance aimed at mitigating the pressures caused by the dominant religions and thus supports minorities. Indian secularism, according to Cipriani, would be the proper role model for Europe. I think Modi's India becomes problematic, and thus I suggest, following Brian Turner (2011), that Singapore would be one of the workable models to copy in terms of how religions are managed by the State. In any case, I don't think that the issue of state management of religious diversity was sufficiently treated in Cipriani's work. Even when he puts limitations on the concept of diffused religion while dealing with majority religions, he does not develop the question of how the majority religion will deal with the minority religions. Islam, for instance, becomes more and more a minority religion in many countries, as more than a quarter of Muslims (27% in 2014) live outside the Muslim world.

Cipriani invites us rightly to take values more seriously in our research and to report on the debate over the attempt of some trends of the sociology of religion to kill religion (at least as values) while studying it. Yet he, like many French scholars, translates the Weberian concept of *Wertfreiheit* as freedom from values or "*neutralité axiologique*" but this is not what Weber meant. This concept was unhappily translated. For Isabelle Kalinowski (2015) this term refers to a "non-imposition of values." Research can have two moments, one descriptive with non-imposition of values, and another one considering values, or thinking normatively to take into account culture and how a solution would be applied to a society. This is in fact in line with

Cipriani's belief in the non-neutrality of any kind of scientific method and all kinds of theories of knowledge.

Finally, Cipriani's book is a major breakthrough and landmark in the sociology of religion, and I impatiently look forward to reading his forthcoming publication unfolding the outcome of the new survey of religiosity in Italy.

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