

19. *Holy Nations and Global Identities. Civil Religion, Nationalism, and Globalisation*. Edited by Annika HVITHAMAR... [et al.]. (International Studies in Religion and Society; 10). Leiden – Boston, Brill, 2009. 307 pp.

Studying spiritual dynamics in the light of local categories may seem far-fetched, but the geopolitics of religion is in fact fertile ground. To explore it, Danish scholars around the sociologist of religions Margit Warburg organized a conference at the University of Copenhagen in 2005. They gathered an international and interdisciplinary assembly of colleagues, especially from Scandinavia, England and Canada but with voices from the Balkan and Japan, too. The aim was to tackle a contradictory development in the contemporary religious scene. In a geopolitical view, religions prove, on the one hand, to be bound to particular local contexts, cultures, countries: even religions that would have seen themselves as predating, or relativising, patriotic ideas can suddenly exhibit or exacerbate nationalist tendencies. On the other hand, political and economic factors and, particularly, migration create an increasingly internationalised world which also affects religions; challenges like uprooting and re-contextualisation need to be faced by today's religions and societies—the category for this cluster of phenomena is, of course, globalisation.

The 2005 Copenhagen conference met under the evocative motto “Religion Out of Place.” This title touches, at the same time, the loss of localisation through globalisation and the shift in roles religions acquire in contemporary societies. They can be useful tools for national cohesion, can even be instrumentalised in creating identity or motivation for patriotic identification. The key term for such a functional ascription is “Civil Religion.” This is, then, the conceptual triangle within which the present book works: Civil Religion—Nationalism—Globalisation. The authors scan the area in three steps, each time holding the reality of “Civil Religion” against another socio-political phenomenon: first, nationalism, then nation-states, and finally globalisation.

For the publication, the “best” (p. 14) contributions to the Copenhagen conference were complemented by some articles written especially for the book.

Annika Hvithamar's explanation of the triangle's basic terms is helpful, indeed seminal. Talk of “civil religion” is already found in Rousseau and can have a strong enlightenment ring: the religion of reason. It was Robert Bellah, who, in 1967, used it to name a different reality: “an integrating force in American society, because it unites people from all kind of faiths ‘in a set of symbols, beliefs and rituals’” (p. 108). Later, the category of “civil religion” became a descriptive framework for the degree and mode of any societies' religious self-understanding. Civil religion in this sense can occur according to Coleman as *undifferentiated*—in modern Greece as Church centred, or in ancient Rome as state centred; it can occur as *secular nationalism*—one might think of the Soviet Union—or as *differentiated* (p. 109). What is the effect of globalisation on this? Due to the effects of migration, a society might have to change its civil religion, she quotes prof. Margit Warburg. Hvithamar had, however, started her terminological overview with “nationalism.” What is nationalism's relation to religion? Anthony D. Smith, she says, sees three schools: religion as *heir* to religion, as its *ally*, or as its *ersatz*. Smith is one of the big names in the present study of nationalism, she writes, but his approach is disputed. In the eyes of his critics, Smith has a perennialist or essentialist view of nationalism; he sees ethnic identity as something we always had. That seems hard to prove empirically. Smith rather calls his own perspective “ethno-symbolist”, Hvithamar informs us (p. 107). Smith, from the London School of Economics, also has his own contribution to the book. His text is too short to really study the history of nationalism. What one can well glean from his words is a triple scheme to compare phenomena of nationalistic claims: territory and hierarchy, election and tradition, the sacred and the civic.

Playing with the conference's title and with William James' *Varieties of Religious Experiences*, the acclaimed London sociologist Eileen Barker calls her contribution *In and Out of Place. Varieties of Religious Locations in a Globalising World*. She proceeds in three steps: connections, relations, and allocations. Each time she offers, in Max Weber's wording, “ideal types.” *First*, she looks at religions' “political connection.” She opens a wide spectrum: systems of theocracy (Iran), of Established Church (England) and National Church (Russia). Barker is conceptually less helpful when she says in Germany “the state favours two or more religions” (p. 236) - why not speak of a mutual recognition? In Turkey, the reality is a governmental

administration of Islam *plus* professed secularity. Then, there are constitutional separations with factual interpenetration (USA), there is French *laïcité*, which claims that all religions and secular ideologies can “flourish without state interference” (p. 237), and, on the far end of the spectrum, there are “atheistic nations such as North Korea, actively promoting a secularist ideology” (p. 237); and violently, one might add. Her *second* step maps ten types of “socio-cultural relations” of religion. The four are Rousseau’s: religion of “man”, religion of the citizen, religion of the priest, and civil religion; critically, this can, then, be seen as “cult of man” (Durkheim). Further, she introduces Bellah’s civil and global religion and Huntington’s clashing civilisations. His view is criticised by Amartya Sen’s analysis that the clash theorists, just as many communitarianists and multiculturalists, have fallen prey to the “solitarist” fallacy (p. 245). The term hints at two misperceptions, viz., monocategorialism and monolithism: where religion becomes the only descriptive parameter of civilisations, groups, or persons, one could speak of a monocategorial reductionism; positively, Sen notes the permeability of boundaries and, therefore, “cross-cutting ties” (p. 245). Finally, Barker takes a tenth type, her most dynamic, from Colin Campbell: “shifting civilisations.” Her *third* step, after politics and sociology, is almost theological. She lists ten types of answers to the question “*who* is religiously in or out of place” (p. 246): religion can be taken as cosmic, global and national religion, community religion, cultural and biological religion, lineage religion, individual, inner and, finally referring to cyberspace, virtual religion.

Most other contributions to the book are case studies.

Reviewing the publication as a whole, four questions may be asked. First, we learn much about Scandinavia, and the contributions on North America, former Yugoslavia and Japan are well conducted analyses; but would other, hotly discussed, situations like Islam in Europe, or the Hinduization of India, not have deserved more attention than an odd reference?

Second, a certain disciplinary limitation might be noted. As long as one meets for a conference on sociology of religion, one should hardly be surprised to meet sociologists of religion; but when one edits the conference’s proceedings and laudably tries to enrich their scope with other points of view, why not create a real dialogue of disciplines? Why not listen to, say, historians of Ancient Israel? They might have new facts, and, indeed, sociologically usable categories to adduce. In such a publication of encounter, why not let a psychologist and a philosopher reflect on subjective identity and community, and why not invite theologians of different denominations and religions to tackle the theologically deeply relevant questions *of* the book and *within* the book? It is precisely theologians who might have pointed at two hidden assumptions underlying the book.

For one, the Copenhagen conference seemed quite sure about what globalisation means for religion: with demographic changes, changes in civil religion become necessary (p. 116). This is a normative proposition. Religious communities should obviously participate in debates on their legal situation in given countries, but this must be a dialogical process in which the partners have true freedom. Where, however, politicians, possibly backed up by sociological advice, try to modify the socio-cultural role of religions, they are in fact already artificially manipulating.

Third, the sociological viewpoint tries to see what religion is for society. What, however, is a particular society in front of a given religion? When religion goes civil, the critical potential of its inspirations and institutions is easily domesticated, indeed, it may become banal. In a biblical perspective, by contrast, religion has a prophetic function. Religion’s countercultural challenge, its freedom before the nation state, and a resistance against its complete absorption into citizenship are vital; vital also for a society to be able to understand its own origins, problematics, its chances, its meaning and task. - *Felix Körner*, SJ.