

INTERVIEW / REYNIEM

Islam and China are the threat, but Christianity the future

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For political scientist Dominique Reynié, there is no doubt that "Christianity and democracy are bound together: it is inevitable that Christians will be persecuted. The challenge lies in the Chinese and Islamic models." This is why Reynié, professor of

political science at Sciences Po Paris and director of the renowned French think tank Fondation for Political Innovation, decided to serve as editor for the collection of essays *Le XXI^e siècle du Christianisme* (Éditions du Cerf). He told the *Daily Compass* about the genesis of the book which has contributions from ten analysts conducting an unprecedented study about why the future lays in the hands of Christianity.

Professor, how can you define the 21st century as Christian?

The religious question occupies a central place in the life of the world and public affairs. In our book, I point out that today, globally speaking, 84% of women and men say they are believers. Christianity itself is expanding. There are 2.3 billion Christians (31% of all believers). Second are Muslims, with 1.8 billion believers (24%), followed by Hindus (1.1 billion, or 15%), Buddhists (500 million, or 7%) and, finally, Jews which are less than 1%. We are entering an era which is simultaneously less democratic but more religious and in which techno-science will play a more important role.

What contribution has Christian culture made to European institutions and to modernity itself? And what could it still contribute in the future?

The ideas of a universal human condition, of equal dignity, of fundamental human rights and of a critical questioning of powers. All these would not exist without Christianity. Christianity is at the heart of the idea of democracy. It is an idea that stems from an interweaving of Jerusalem, Athens and Rome, Judaism, Greek philosophy and Roman law. It influenced the separation of religion and state.

And the Church as an institution?

The Church is itself a too little known and yet decisive source of the electoral civilisation as we know it. For ten centuries, the medieval millennium, the Church remained the only institution where elections did not disappear. The Church strongly contributed to the triumph of the fundamental principle that authority cannot be legitimate without obtaining the consent of the governed. The contribution of medieval monasticism to “electoral civilisation” is crucial.

Is the clash between Muslims and Christians in Europe real?

Considering that in the Islamic world it is forbidden to call oneself non-Muslim, in a political, social, religious and cultural authoritarianism, I think that the data on Islam are overestimated. There are also many non-Muslims in Europe. And others who convert to Christianity. Yet, it remains true that Europe can become a field of confrontation between Muslims and Christians, especially since some Muslims are engaged in a political project, Islamism, with the support of powerful networks, such as the Muslim

Brotherhood and increasingly aggressive countries such as Turkey or Qatar.

How is it possible that Christianity remains the most persecuted faith?

Christianity is in fact the most persecuted religion today, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, in the East, in China, in India. In the book, we report how according to the World Index of Persecution of Christians, the number of Christians killed for their faith increased by 60% between 2019 and 2020.

Where do Christians suffer persecution the most?

Almost all (91%) of the Christians who were murdered in 2020 are on the African continent. This is one of the consequences of the growth of jihadist groups in sub-Saharan Africa. However, the fact that Christianity is on the verge of extinction where it was born, in the East, is due to the fact that it is one of the forces that builds civil society in the face of political authority and has a critical view of power and its exercise. It is the bearer of the separation between the political and the religious which is why it frightens people.

Does it especially frighten Islam?

Islamism and Chinese totalitarianism are waging both a war on the separation of politics and religion and a war on democracy. Christianity and democracy have a linked destiny. It becomes inevitable that Christians will be persecuted.

What challenges does Islam impose on Christian Europe and are they recognised as such?

If on the one hand there is the Chinese model, which embodies the political power that takes total control of the religious sphere, confiscating all independence, on the other hand there is the Islamic model. Islamism is the religion that also represents temporal power. It is another version of a totalitarian system. This is the challenge that Islamism poses to Europe. And this gives rise to an inevitable confrontation between democracy and Christianity.

The Christian genius has produced a civilisation with a universal vocation. Now that citizens no longer feel like they are its heirs, what do you think will be Europe's fate?

This is the historical moment of the decline of the great political ideologies. However, these ideologies have served as a framework for thought, as a system for representing the present and projecting into the future. Europe will rediscover its belief systems, whether religious or political. It will probably find itself in Christianity. I entitled my book "The 21st Century of Christianity" (*Le XXI^e siècle du Christianisme*) to recall the longevity

of this religion. Considering the depth of its roots, thinking of all that this religion has gone through and all that it has survived, one is inclined to think that it is not about to disappear.

In that past it was the home of the Gospel. Soon the Middle East will become a museum of the Church. Why does the West continue to ignore the persecution there?

The answer is difficult. Westerners suffer from their past of empire. Ignorance leads them to confuse everything. I am sure that many imagine that the Christians of the East came as colonists with the crusaders. Do we still know that Christians are six centuries ahead of Muslims in the East?

The tendency is to justify everything....

The West tries to win the favour of Muslim countries, or at least offend them as little as possible. It does so for geopolitical reasons, but the results are very modest, if not pitiful.

Will religious freedom survive in the 21st century?

Globalisation poses serious questions to humanity: our duties towards life, the universality of the human condition, equality, solidarity, the ethics of action. Religions cannot remain silent. Freedom of worship is proof of the condition of separation between politics and religion. We can say that there is no freedom or religion if God is compulsory, as in Islamist regimes, or if you have to be a Party member, as in China.