

SECULARISM IN FRENCH SPEAKING COUNTRIES IN AFRICA

INTRODUCTION

France proclaimed very early in the beginning of the twentieth century the principle of separation between State and Religion. The bill of 1905 on secularism illustrated this proclamation. Many countries in Africa were colonized by France or were under France mandate very long time. However, talk on secularism in Africa generally and in French speaking countries particularly, very long time, it is a silence which remained.

There is practically no writings and documents on which analyses may be based.

First reason is the fact that many African people in sub-Saharan were polytheist in term of religion and adoration and most of them remains polytheists. It is a real fact that people believe not only in the monotheist religion but also in their own traditional divinities. In terms of tolerance and acceptance of other religious opinion, there is any fundamental problem.

Second reason, the religion fact itself, is so dominant that it is not easy to discuss or talk on secularism.

After fifty years of independence, it is now legitimate to discuss and establish an assessment.

Whatever it can be said, French secularism influences legislations in French speaking countries. It leads to the constitutional proclamation of separation between States and religion even if its effectiveness is a controversy.

I-) INFLUENCES OF FRENCH SECULARISM ON LEGISLATION IN FRENCH SPEAKING COUNTRIES

If officially in France, the bill of 1905 proclaimed the total or entire separation between the Roman Catholic Church and the French State, in Africa, Roman Catholic and Presbyterian churches have continued playing their role of education and sponsoring.

Church such as Roman Catholic Church and Presbyterian Church has accompanied the transformation of the African colonial and traditional societies. The same colonial State which proclaimed the separation of Church and State, give to church the mission to form and train the citizens in term of education in Africa.

Most of African leaders 1960 were the “products or fruits” of education obtained or acquired in religious Roman Catholic or Presbyterian schools. During this period, only these Catholic or Presbyterian schools were able to open a political perspective.

Most of the first republics proclaimed in Africa have nothing in terms of Republic even if the first constitutions proclaimed the secular characters of the state. They were dictatorship government or one political party government which liked manipulating religions in their own interest. Consequently, the elementary rights of peoples and citizens were ignored or derided.

Generally, the demand of secular State had been a simple use or tool to take a possession of belongings of the Clergy.

The sectarian church expansion of 1980 aggravated or made the situation very worse. The economic crisis brings to Africa its groups of messiah who think that they possess or they have the power to promise a better life. These traders of Hope have been evolving under complacency of political powers which profited of the weakness of the social situation.

However the democratic constitutions of 1990, proclaimed the secular characters of States and the separation of State and religion. (II)

II-) PROCLAMATION OF SEPERATION BETWEEN STATES AND RELIGIONS IN AFRICA

Togolese constitutions of October 14, 1992 like the constitutions of others French speaking countries proclaimed the strict separation between State and religions in Africa.

Togolese constitutions in terms of secularism states the following rules:

ART 1er- Togolese Republic is a rule of law, secular, democratic and social. It is one and indivisible.

ART.2 - Togolese Republic ensures equality before the law of all citizens without distinction of origin, race, gender, social condition and religion. It respects all political, philosophic opinions and all religious beliefs.

Its principle is the government of people for people and by people for people. Its motto is: « labor-Liberty-homeland »

ART.7 - Political parties have to respect the constitution. They may not be identified to a region, an ethnic group, a race or a religion.

ART.11 - All human beings are equal in right and dignity. Nobody may be favored or disadvantaged because of his or her familial, ethnic or regional origin, his/her economic or social situation, his/her political, religious, philosophic opinions and others.

ART.25- Everybody has the right for free thinking, consciousness, religious worship, opinion and expression. Adoration and expression of beliefs are lead in respect of the secular character of the state

These constitutional rules are the same in all French African speaking countries even if the majority of the populations are Muslims or not (Niger, Mali, Senegal, Mauritania etc...

III-) ISSUE OF EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PRINCIPLE OF SEPARATION BETWEEN RELIGIONS AND STATES IN AFRICA

Constitutions in French African countries have been adopted directly by the people through referendum. This means that secularism is a will of people to live without a pressure of any religion. Every body must be free to believe what he would like to believe but the events of the recent months and years showed that the road of peace and mutual acceptation is very far.

Influence of Islamic or salafi thinking in countries where Muslims constitute the majority are not insignificant.

The new challenge of Sharia in Nigeria with Boko Haram linked to Al Qaeda and AQIM, the situation in Mauritania, MALI, Egypt, and Tunisia with the requirement of Sharia stated and formulated by a group, political parties or rebels groups in shows that the way of tolerance, pacific coexistence of people with different beliefs and religions are very far. In front of all these situations, African countries need to be solid governments able to protect individual liberty, in particular the liberty of free expression and free consciousness.

CONCLUSION

In the principle, secularism ought to be a real rampart or bulwark against the vague of tribalism, religious extremism or fanaticism and would have to reinstate not only the concept of commons “goods” belonging to all individuals, but also a plural pacific society, nowadays derided by des oligarchies and fanatic religious groups.