

ABSTRACT

This essay has been divided into two parts: the first is a theoretical analysis of the interplay between religion and ethnicity, the second is a case study of the Friulan ethnic group.

Part I Chapter I analyses the tools already found in sociological literature that investigate the interplay between religion and ethnicity. These tools along with new insights have given way to the development of an ideal-typical model which attempts to clarify the numerous aspects of this interplay.

Religion is often placed among the so-called objective elements of ethnicity, generally along with language, territory, "race" and other minor factors. Each of these elements can be combined in a number of ways. The difference of confessions between two groups could be one of the causes - or perhaps the main or single cause - that brings about an ethnic difference between them. When they share the same confession, the role played by religion is not predictable: it could prove itself to be totally irrelevant or it can hinder the emergence of an ethnic diversity.

Some other relevant factors explaining why religion is or is not involved in ethnic dynamics are the types of confession (universal/tribal), and the social aims of nationalist movements (conservative/progressive).

State power is also particularly relevant. In fact, it can exercise a control over a religious confession thereby using the religious channels to implement its own policies, even of an ethnic type. Such a situation is particularly likely to occur when the confession is hierarchically structured and its internal control mechanisms are efficacious.

The clergy has often been involved in ethnic dynamics. There could be many reasons for such social commitment. Among the most common reasons we should take into account the ethnic origin of the clergy, the convenience derived in terms of status or power, the value-priorities and the social, non-religious roles of the clergy.

In the past decades some attention has been given to the psychological bases in the connection between ethnicity and religion and some probable parallelisms between the two phenomena have been highlighted. For instance, it has been said that religion and ethnicity could serve either as alternative criteria to define the group-identity, or as principles that guarantee social order, or as complementary/alternative attempts to overcome the fear of death.

Another important psychological aspect of the connection between ethnicity and religion is to be found in the manifestations of ethnic emotions. In fact, these constitute the so-called subjective element of ethnicity and, according to Smith and others, they typically assume the form of myths and symbols. These myths and symbols are often taken from religious repertoires and are expressed in terms that echo religious language. Notable too are the considerable analogies that exist between religious rites and the rites of nationalism, both from an aesthetic and a psychological point of view.

The second part of this essay deals with the ethnic dynamics of the Friulan group and focuses on the role played by religion. Two historical periods have been singled out: the first includes the decades before World War II and the second the years that followed.

The pre-modern era was characterised by the liturgical, paraliturgical and literary use of the Friulan language by the clergy of the Dioceses of Concordia and Aquileia (and later those of Udine and Gorizia). These customs ended during the first decades of the XX century, when the ecclesiastical authorities, as a result of the "statisation" of the Friulan church, prohibited the use of the *linguae vernaculae* other than Italian.

After World War II Friuli saw the rise of claims for autonomy, which can be grouped into three or four main periods. The second period originated from the cultural activity of an association,

Scuele Libare Furlane, founded and directed by members of the clergy. Their goal was to spur the Friulans on to preserve their own language, which they feared to be undermined through Italian.

The appeals of Scuele Libare Furlane were merely linguistic and cultural, therefore the movement cannot be defined as ethnic. In 1962 a group of priests separated from Scuele Libare Furlane and founded the magazine *Int Furlane*. As a result the range of the claims widened. This way the clergy acted as a protagonist in the crucial phase characterising all ethnic movements which consists in the transformation of merely cultural claims into political claims.

Int Furlane introduced many of the themes that would have dominated the political debate in Friuli up to our days. Among these we find the idea of internal colonialism and the refusal of dominant stereotypes about Friulans.

In 1966, as a result of some events which had strongly displeased the Friulan population and had shown the scarce ability of traditional parties to understand its claims, arose the Movement *Friûl*. Among its founders there were some of the priests who had co-operated with *Int Furlane*. During the first years of life of the new party a part of the clergy actively contributed to circulate its ideas and, above all, to build its ideological repertoire. This means that the Friulan clergy played the mythopoeitic function which characterises the first phase of any ethnic movement and which is generally up to the so-called "national intellectuals". This myth-symbol-complex, conceived as an opposition to that of Italian patriotism, is based on the patriarchal mythomoteur, i.e. the new interpretation of the historical events connected with the religious and secular institution of the Patriarchy of Aquileia. The Patriarchy serves as a core-myth from which depend the myths of the age of gold, of common descent, of language, of territory, of "race", of boundaries, of polyethnism, of psychological ethnotype and also the myth of internal colonialism. The latter had a larger success than the patriarchal - and became itself a mythomoteur - for several reasons, among which the gaining of Movement *Friûl*'s leadership by its left wing.

At the same time the ethnically engaged clergymen drew themselves from the political ground and returned to their cultural and pastoral activities. In the same period the de-statisation of the Friulan church began, which led the high clergy to promote Friulan ethnic claims. This seems to confirm the hypothesis of the different role of the high and of the low clergy in ethnic dynamics and the non-indispensability of difference of confession between two ethnic groups to cause religion to be involved in ethnic dynamics.

As a conclusion it can be said that the role played by the clergy in the Friulan ethnic movement corresponds to the theoretical expectations. In fact, the priests play essentially the role of national intellectuals producing ethnic myths.