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After Secularization?

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Annu. Rev. Sociol. 2008. 34:55–85

First published online as a Review in Advance on April 9, 2008

The *Annual Review of Sociology* is online at soc.annualreviews.org

This article's doi:
10.1146/annurev.soc.34.040507.134740

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0360-0572/08/0811-0055\$20.00

Key Words

church attendance, de-Christianization, democracy, differentiation, Islamism, postsecular, religious economies, sociology of religion

Abstract

The study of secularization appears to be entering a new phase. Supply-side theories that focus exclusively on religious participation and membership seem too one-dimensional. But classical theories of secularization contain generalized and teleological premises that are at odds with the complexities of empirical reality and the historical record. This review seeks to map a new way forward and identify key obstacles and goals. It begins by retracing the development of secularization theory within sociology and the genealogy of the secularization concept within presociological discourse. It then reviews what is and is not known about secularization in the West, noting the limitations of the data and biases in research. The article further argues for comparative and historical approaches that incorporate non-Christian religions and non-Western regions. The social scientific literature that critically reassesses the relationship between diverse religious movements, secularisms, and liberal democracies presents new questions for future research. We stress the importance of theoretical approaches that move beyond the deeply entrenched secularist and religious assumptions and propose general guidelines for future research on the varieties of secularity.

In an undergraduate textbook written more than 40 years ago, the British social anthropologist Anthony F. Wallace confidently asserted that “[t]he evolutionary future of religion is extinction. . . . Belief in supernatural powers is doomed to die out, all over the world, as the result of the increasing adequacy and diffusion of scientific knowledge” (Wallace 1966). Even at the time, most sociologists of religion would probably have found this statement overdrawn. Some would have argued that the future of religion was privatization or generalization, rather than extinction (Luckmann 1967, Parsons & Toby 1977). Others would have attributed less weight to scientific knowledge than to other forms of religious or social change, such as the Protestant Reformation or the industrial revolution (Berger 1969). Still, most would have agreed with the general thrust of the argument: that modernity was somehow undermining the social significance of religion (Wilson 1966).

Wallace’s words would probably not even be known to contemporary sociologists had they not been repeatedly used as a set piece by Stark and collaborators in a series of articles attacking secularization theory from the mid-1980s onwards (Stark & Bainbridge 1985, Stark & Finke 2000, Stark & Iannaccone 1994). They presented Wallace’s words as a canonical formulation of secularization theory. This was hardly fair because there were, and are, many different versions of the theory, most of which do not predict extinction (Gorski 2000; Tschanen 1992a,b; Yamane 1997). Still, it was effective: Stark and the supply-siders sparked a new round of debate about secularization theory and helped to revive the sociology of religion.

Of course, the fuel for that debate had already been accumulating for some time: the rise of the Moral Majority, the Iranian Revolution, the collapse of communism qua secular religion, the rapid spread of Pentecostalism in the global South, communal violence in South Asia. These and other developments challenged the confident pronouncements of religious decline that humanists, rationalists, and social sci-

entists had been repeating since the days of Hume (1976, Hume & Coleman 2007), Voltaire (1974), and Comte (Comte & Lenzer 1998), to name only the best known. Secularization certainly seemed to have slowed or even stopped. Stark went further: He argued that secularization had never happened and urged that the term be expunged from the sociological lexicon (Stark 1999).

Stark was not the only one drawing conclusions in 1999. That was also the year in which Peter Berger, one of the principal architects of secularization theory (Berger 1969)—and, for a time, one of Stark’s favorite whipping boys (Finke & Stark 1988)—publicly recanted his earlier pronouncements concerning the purported link between religious pluralism and secularization. Surveying the contemporary world scene, Berger (1999) found little evidence of religious decline, except perhaps on the campuses of American universities and maybe also in Western Europe. The real puzzle, he countered, was not why religion had not declined in most parts of the world, but rather why it had declined in these particular milieus.

Nor were the second thoughts confined to the American academy. Religion was also being rediscovered on the other side of the Atlantic, in the very heartlands of secularity: Western Europe. In October 2001, just three weeks after the fateful attacks of September 11, 2001, the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas gave a high-profile public address before the German Publishers Association. Habermas, long an icon of secular rationalism, pronounced that the world had entered a “postsecular age” (Habermas & Reemtsma 2001). He did not mean that the world was returning to a presecular age in which unbelief would be impossible and rationality would be reunited with religion. Rather, the postsecular age would be one in which religious and secular worldviews could coexist and even enter into dialogue with one another (Habermas 2006, Habermas & Mendieta 2002).

Not everyone was jumping on the postsecular bandwagon, though. During these very same

years, as values voters (supposedly) returned George W. Bush to the White House and the Iraq War raged on, various natural scientists were busily writing up secularist manifestos defending unbelief and attacking religion (Dawkins 2006; Dennett 2006; Harris 2004, 2006). Their contributions were both cheered and jeered. The natural scientists were joined by prominent social scientists and public philosophers, who rose up in defense of secularization theory (Bruce 2002, Gauchet 1997, Hitchens 2007, Norris & Inglehart 2004). While acknowledging the historical contingency and geographical variability of secularization processes, they argued that secularization remained a useful concept—and a real process.

Though hardly exhaustive, the foregoing examples do show how much the terms of the secularization debate have shifted since the late 1960s. Today, secularism qua political project and secularization qua sociological theory both find themselves in an increasingly defensive and even beleaguered posture. Once hegemonic, liberal secularist philosophies and sociological theories of secularization are violently rejected by many outside the West, very much on the defensive in North America, and under fire even in Western Europe. Nor does the divide between religious and secular voices coincide with the division between left and right to the degree that it once did.

This review provides a brief introduction to secularization theory and a rapid survey of the current discussion of secularization. It is in four parts. We begin with a genealogy of the concept, tracking its various layers of meanings in sociological and presociological discourse. We then review the existing evidence for and against, noting what is and is not known about the history and evolution of religiosity in the West. The third section of the paper focuses on debates concerning the relationship between religious movements, secularism, and democracy. This sets the stage for the conclusion of the paper, where we reflect on the current state of the field and suggest some general guidelines for future research.

WHAT IS SECULARIZATION? SECULARIZATION IN SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY AND PRESOCIOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

As with most concepts in the social sciences, there is no single or widely accepted definition of secularization. There is, first of all, disagreement about its locus. Some definitions emphasize individual beliefs and practices, others the influence of religious norms and elites, and still others the differentiation of religious and nonreligious spheres or institutions. Currently, many theorists argue that secularization has multiple levels. But they diverge on how or if these levels are interrelated. This is not the place to review the history of secularization theory; that has been done ably enough elsewhere (Tschannen 1992a,b). Instead, we attempt to give some sense of the current state of the debate by focusing on a few key players and positions.

Let us begin with the supply-side or religious economies model advocated by Stark and colleagues. It rests on a rather simple, unidimensional definition of secularization as a decline in individual belief and practice or, in their terms, a decline in aggregate levels of religious demand (Finke & Stark 1998, Iannaccone et al. 1997, Stark & Finke 2000). Defining secularization in this way allows them to argue that the United States is a fatal anomaly for secularization theory because the United States is indisputably modern (urbanized, democratized, industrialized, rationalized, etc.) but not secular in their terms (church attendance is high, church membership higher, belief in God and an afterlife higher still) (Finke & Stark 1988, 1989, 1992). What about Europe though? Curiously, they argue that it is not really secularized either. If levels of religious consumption are low, they insist, this is not due to a decline in religious demand but rather to deficiencies in the religious supply. And these deficiencies can be traced, in turn, to the structure of Europe's religious markets, which are characterized by high levels of state regulation and even religious monopolies, which, they say, lead to a shoddy

and undifferentiated supply of religious products (Stark 1999, Stark & Iannaccone 1994). Because it defines secularization as a decline in religious demand, and because it defines religious demand as a constant, the religious economies model simply defines secularization out of existence in much the same way that neoclassical economics defines irrational action out of existence.

Secularization theorists have sought to define themselves back into existence by defining secularization as a multidimensional and variable process. They charged that Stark and colleagues had misunderstood or oversimplified the core claims of secularization theory (Gorski 2000, 2003; Lechner 1991; Yamane 1997). Specifically, they noted that most versions of secularization theory had a supraindividual level or levels. For example, in one much-cited article, Chaves (1994) argued that secularization is most productively conceived as a “decline in religious authority,” as a decrease in the influence of religious values, leaders, and institutions over individual behavior, social institutions, and public discourse. What influence, if any, such processes will have on standard indicators of individual religiosity, such as church attendance, says Chaves, is an open question.

Whereas Chaves seems to emphasize the power of ecclesiastical elites and institutions, other theorists give primacy to cultural and symbolic structures. Perhaps the most extreme formulation of this position is the one advanced by the French philosopher Gauchet (1997, 1998; Ferry & Gauchet 2004), who owes much to an earlier German theorist, Blumenberg (1983), who follows a still earlier German theorist, Jaspers (1953), who coined the term Axial Age. For Gauchet, the hallmark of religion is the postulate of a supramundane realm that is both separate from, and constitutive of, the worldly sphere, a development that he traces back well into antiquity. Accordingly, he views secularization as the loss of this constitutive or world-forming power, a process that he traces to the Enlightenment. From this perspective—and that is what makes it so radical—indicators of individual religiosity do not tell us anything

one way or the other about the degree of secularization. Indeed, they do not really indicate anything about religion! For Gauchet, the very notion of individual religiosity is a contradiction in terms. Religion is religion only insofar as it succeeds in structuring the whole of social life. Gauchet’s approach is, in a sense, the mirror image of Stark’s: By advancing such a demanding definition of real religion, Gauchet makes it easy to find evidence of secularization. However, by this definition, it is not at all clear that real religion has ever existed.

Between these rather extreme views, one finds more complex and nuanced frameworks that treat secularization as a multidimensional process. One of the first to move in this direction was the Belgian sociologist Dobbelaere (1981, 1999). He proposed that we distinguish between macro, meso, and micro levels of analysis and, more specifically, between three major processes: the functional differentiation of societal subsystems, the emergence of competitive religious markets, and the individualization and privatization of religious practice and belief. But what is the relationship between the dimensions? One approach is to treat each as a separate hypothesis. This is what Casanova (1994) does in his well-known book on *Public Religions in the Modern World*, when he argues that secularization theory actually consists of three separate hypotheses—differentiation, privatization, and decline—only one of which, the differentiation hypothesis, is plausible (Casanova 2006). Casanova then goes on to develop an argument about the relationship between the different levels. He contends that macro-level secularization (differentiation) actually sets the stage for a sort of meso-level desecularization: the emergence of public religions. Shorn of their role as grand legitimators, responsible for integrating and regulating society as a whole, religions can become movements and pressure groups that vie with rivals in the public sphere.

A second way of approaching the different levels of secularization is to assume that they are linked and to develop testable hypotheses about how they are linked. The orthodox theories of the 1960s generally did this implicitly (Berger

1969, Luckmann 1967, Wilson 1966), whereas the neo-orthodox syntheses of more recent decades have done so much more explicitly (Fenn 1978; Tschannen 1991; Wallis & Bruce 1992; Wilson 1982, 1985; Yamane 1997). One problem that plagues many of these analyses is that they operate with the teleological and ahistorical language of modernization theory and therefore have difficulty dealing with the cross-national variability and historical contingency of most secularization processes. For example, they cannot easily explain well-known differences in the timing and extent of secularization, even within Western Europe (more on this below). This has led some scholars to call for a fuller historicization of the secularization debate (Gorski 2000, 2003).

Apart from Martin (1978), however, the only sociologist who has taken up this call in a serious way is Bruce (2002). In one sense, Bruce remains squarely within the neo-orthodox tradition: He posits a strong link between modernization and secularization, broadly understood. But he recognizes the historical and cross-national variability of both of these processes and notes some potential counter-tendencies. At the heart of Bruce's argument are two sets of interrelated propositions: (*a*) Religion is undermined by the advance of individualism, pluralism, egalitarianism, and rationalism in the modern world; (*b*) religion persists if, and only if, "it finds work to do other than relating individuals to the supernatural" (Bruce 2002), as when it becomes a means of "cultural defense or integration." Variability in the timing and extent of secularization can then be explained in terms of (*a*) timing and variability in the events and processes that spur modernization (e.g., industrialization, urbanization, democratization, scientific education, etc.) and (*b*) the non/existence of countervailing tendencies. Unfortunately, although Bruce lays the foundations for a fully comparative and historical analysis of secularization processes, he does not deliver on the analysis itself. He advances a number of hypotheses, some old, some new, but does not delve deeply enough into his cases to substantiate them.

In summary, secularization has been defined in a variety of different ways by contemporary social scientists. Some definitions are unidimensional, but most are multileveled. Among the latter, some definitions posit two levels (e.g., individual and societal), but many prominent scholars favor a three-tiered schema of some kind. One also finds the familiar division between more structuralist and more culturalist approaches. Overall, the trend toward more explicitly multidimensional approaches has been quite productive theoretically, insofar as it has suggested many new hypotheses and research agendas, but less so empirically, at least so far, as we discuss in the next section. By contrast, the unidimensional approach advanced by Stark and colleagues has been quite productive empirically, insofar as it readily lends itself to standard forms of survey research and statistical analysis, and has spurred an immense debate over the past two decades (Bruce 1992), but it has been less productive theoretically, insofar as it has drastically narrowed the original research question.

Thus far, the discussion has focused exclusively on post-World War II social science. But it is important to realize that the history of the secularization concept goes well beyond these temporal and disciplinary bounds. It is important because sociological definitions and usages have been, and continue to be, influenced by pre- and nonsociological ones, and in ways that are not always salutary. Having some sense of the historical layers of meaning that have accumulated around the secularization concept, and of the political and cultural struggles that precipitated them, is important if one wishes to deploy the concept in a reflexive and nuanced way and avoid becoming an unwitting warrior in theological and political battles past and present.

Secularization is not the only sociological concept with a presociological career, of course. One thinks, for instance, of race or class. But its career was certainly a long and vexed one. The best biographies of the term have been produced by European scholars working within the German tradition of "the history

of concepts” (*Begriffsgeschichte*) (Blumenberg 1974, 1983; Lehmann 2004; Lübber 2003; Marramao 1992). Here, we can only summarize a few key milestones in the history of the concept. The etymology of secularization and kindred terms (secular, secularism, secularist, etc.) derives from the Latin word *saeculum*, meaning a century or, more generally, an age. In the theological writings of Augustine and the early church fathers, it retained this temporal connotation. Specifically, it referred to the present world as opposed to the world to come. The opposite of *saeculum*, in this context, was not the religious realm, but the *eschaton*—the end of time at the moment of Christ’s return.

The next layer of meaning was deposited during the low Middle Ages. In canon law, *saecularizatio* referred to a monk’s renunciation of the rule of his order, his exit from the monastery, his return to the world, and more specifically to his transfer to the worldly or secular clergy that ministered to the laity. Importantly, a secularized priest retained traces of his monastic past: He was required to wear the emblem of his order. This layer adds both a spatial and an individual dimension to the concept: spatial, insofar as the sacred space of the monastery is opposed to the profane space of the world; and individual, insofar as the departure of the monk implies a loss of heart or commitment, if not of belief itself. It also anticipates another common figure in secularization theory: the notion that secularized realms still bear religious traces.

The third layer of meaning can be dated to the Reformation, when Protestant rulers seized church properties and monies based on the argument, often just a pretense, that worldly rulers could use them better or more efficiently. Here, the concept acquires two political meanings with opposing valences: Negatively, it suggests unjust expropriation and illegitimate usurpation; positively, it suggests increased rationality and efficiency.

The fourth (and thus far final) layer of meaning crystallized during the late nineteenth century with the spread of free thought and the rise of secular societies in Western Europe. The principal goal of these societies and their allies

was the liberation of various social institutions, not necessarily from religion *tout court*, but certainly from clerical and ecclesiastical influence and control. The positive vision of the secularists, then, was to enable individuals to forge their own worldviews. The political program involved the secularization of educational institutions, scientific research, the liberal professions, and cultural production more generally. Like all revolutions, the “secular revolution” (Smith 2003) was interpreted very differently by supporters and opponents. Supporters of secularism, which included a good number of theologians and religious laypersons, saw themselves as champions of liberation and reason and viewed (and still view) their opponents as reactionaries and bumpkins. Opponents saw themselves as defenders of sacred tradition and common sense and viewed (and still view) their opponents as wicked and arrogant. We must note that the divide between secularists and their opponents did not, and does not, align neatly with the divide between professing believers and atheists. There always were, and still are, believers who espouse secularism in the name of tolerance and peace and unbelievers who oppose it in the name of order and stability. Nonetheless, the church/state struggles of the *fin de siècle* did impart new meanings to the secularization concept: liberation and toleration on the one hand, atheism and libertinism on the other.

Comparing the historically accreted meanings of secularization with the sociologically stipulated ones is revealing in a number of ways. One is struck, first, by the similarities and continuities between the sociological and presociological connotations of the term. Indeed, there is little in the present definitions that was not anticipated to some degree in the historical definitions. Take the notion that history consists of secular and religious phases. Here, secularization theory simply stands Christian eschatology on its head by postulating that religious darkness will give way to secular enlightenment. Similarly, the spatial sense of secularization anticipates the notion of differentiated spheres, and the monk’s departure from the monastery

parallels the individual's exit from the church. Or consider the idea that many secular ethics and institutions still bear the traces of their theological or ecclesiastical origins. This becomes a master trope in Weber's and Troeltsch's sociologies (Troeltsch 1958, Weber et al. 2002), which they, themselves, likely borrowed from Hegel (Monod 2002). It was already anticipated by the canon law meanings of secularization.

There is continuity of another sort as well: at the level of ambiguities or contradictions. Some sociologists insist that secularization is an outcome or an effect; others prefer to conceive of it as a cause or a process; and some tacitly treat it as both, leading to circular or tautological forms of analysis. Which meaning is the correct one? The history of secularization provides no answer. All the definitions can find a warrant somewhere in the history of the concept. For Reformation-era jurists, secularization was an outcome, a political settlement. For Comte, and Augustine before him, it would have been a process. In other words, the ambiguity surrounding the concept arises from the layers of historical meaning that have been deposited on it. There are also contradictions in the usages: Should we think of secularization as a working out of the internal logic of religious values or ethics, e.g., as a process of purification? Or should we think of it as the consequence of external forces that undermine religion, e.g., a Leviathan run amok? Once again, the history of secularization in the West provides no clear cut answer. There have been Christian theologians on both sides of the question at least since the Reformation. There still are today. So, if the secularization concept has contradictory meanings, this is not just because sociologists cannot agree; these contradictions are often the semantic legacies of the political and theological struggles of the past. This is, of course, a common problem in social science, where concepts migrate back and forth across the boundaries between political practice and scientific analysis.

The differences between the historical and sociological uses of the term secularization are useful to note, particularly the relative absence, until recently, of the fourth layer of mean-

ing: secularization as the political project of a secularist movement. Why is this most recent layer of meaning the most forgotten? The answer, as Beckford (2003) rightly points out, is that many early sociologists "were involved in political and practical schemes to clarify, obstruct or assist the decline of religion's significance." By emphasizing grand, impersonal forces and processes (science, rationalization), the post-World War II generation of secularization theorists was not just conforming to then-dominant ideas of science; it was also covering the tracks of their forebears (Swatos 1984, Vidich & Lyman 1985). Only in recent years have they begun to be uncovered again (Marsden 1994, Smith 2003).

This has led some scholars to argue that secularization theory is nothing but a myth or ideology (Hadden 1987, Stark 1999). Obviously, this overstates the case. Even the high secularization theory of the 1960s was much more analytical and empirical and much less mythological and ideological than the secularist philosophies of the nineteenth century. Berger's (original) theory of secularization is not Comte's. Still, secularization theory has done stints as a philosophy of history and a political program, and it has played a Rasputin-like role in the designs of early sociologists to usurp the role of the Christian ministry, so there is always a certain danger that the term will be deployed in an ideological and hubristic fashion, even today. There is a danger, in other words, that secularization theory becomes a vehicle for a secularist politics in which religion is aligned with tradition, superstition, and supernaturalism and kindred categories, whereas secularity is aligned with modernity, rationality, and science, with the terms operationalized so as to deliver the most resounding possible verdict on the future of religion.

A less remarked but even more pervasive danger arises when sociologists tacitly adopt what might be called a pastoral perspective, a perspective that implicitly conceptualizes religion and religiosity in terms that are both priestly and Protestant. In the pastoral perspective, real religion is necessarily churchly

religion, and real religiosity is manifested in individual orthodoxy. It is not difficult to see why a pastoral position tends to generate a deep disposition to understand religion and religiosity in this way. Nor would it be difficult to show how this pastoral disposition has become embedded in the research practices of sociology. Recall that the first statistics on church membership and popular beliefs were produced by turn-of-the-century pastors worried about empty pews and free-thinking parishioners. To them, declines in church attendance and popular orthodoxy indicated a decline in religiosity *per se*. We, however, must be attuned to the possibility that religion and religiosity may be undergoing an epochal change or perhaps just a cyclical slump. For us, pastoral definitions of religion should be an object of analysis, not a category of analysis, a piece of data, rather than a foundation for collecting data.

SECULARIZATION IN WESTERN HISTORY: WHAT WE DO AND DO NOT KNOW

Debates about the meaning of the secularization concept or the implications of secularization theory are often thinly veiled debates about the reality of secularization and the future of religion. As a result, disentangling evidence from argument is not always easy. Still, at least three basic findings currently provoke little disagreement. First, levels of Christian observance and belief in Western Europe are now much lower than they used to be. Second, the levels of decline vary considerably by country and region, as do the patterns of decline, their onset and rhythm. Third, ecclesiastical organizations and elites throughout the West perform fewer social functions than they used to. As the vagueness and generality of these formulations suggest, however, the scholarly consensus is geographically and empirically thin and theoretically underspecified. There is still considerable debate about just when and where secularization occurred, a woeful lack of attention to non-Western cases, and many unanswered questions.

Knowledge of trends in individual observance and belief in Western countries derives from three basic sources: (a) survey research gathered by social scientists, (b) official statistics compiled by government agencies, and (c) information collected by church officials. Each source has its weaknesses. Good polling data do not become available until the mid-twentieth century in most Western countries and not until the late twentieth century elsewhere. European official statistics reach back further in time—to 1851 in Great Britain, for example. But they only cover single countries and then only at an ecological level. Church statistics go much further back in time, to the Middle Ages in some cases. However, they typically focus on a single town or parish at a single point in time and only provide information on baptisms, weddings, funerals, or rates of participation in Easter Mass.

Even in those cases in which data are plentiful, they are not always easy to interpret. Consider the case of Great Britain. The British government collected information on church membership in 1676, 1851, and on a regular basis since around 1900. It has also collected information on various forms of religious observance (e.g., baptisms, weddings, funerals, communion, Sunday schools) since the early nineteenth century. Currie et al. (1977) published the first systematic, social-scientific study of these data. They focused on absolute levels of church membership between 1900 and 1970. By their reckonings, membership in Protestant churches increased during the first third of the twentieth century but entered into rapid decline around 1930 (p. 27). Rates of Easter Communion within the Church of England also reached an inflection point around this time but increased sharply around 1950 (p. 33). Rates of infant baptism entered into decline around 1940, rebounded briefly around 1950, and continued to decline thereafter (p. 47).

The Currie et al. (1977) study has three obvious defects: It does not compare church membership to population growth, it does not include data on church attendance, and it takes 1900 as its zero point. These deficits are

addressed in a major study by Gill (1993). Gill finds a much more complex pattern of growth and decline: general Protestant growth from 1820–1850, Anglican decline and free church growth between 1850 and 1880, and general decline from 1880, with an overall peak in rates of church attendance sometime around 1850. Of course, these findings are not as contradictory as they may seem. Rates of church attendance quite possibly declined earlier and more quickly than rates of church membership. This argument is more or less the one advanced by Davie (1994) in her landmark study of religion in post–World War II Britain. Davie particularly emphasized the considerable gap between passive belief (relatively high) and active membership (still declining), a situation captured in her much-quoted phrase, “believing without belonging.” Most other scholars have reached far less optimistic conclusions about the future of Christianity in Great Britain. On the basis of panel data and cohort analysis, Crockett & Voas (2006, Voas & Crockett 2005) have argued that Christian belief is declining at roughly the same rate as church membership and church attendance, and that they are declining steadily from one generation to the next. The results of a 1998 survey by Brierley point in the same direction (Brierley & Christian Research 2000). Indeed, Brierley warns that the Anglican Church may no longer be a going concern by 2050. A recent study by Brown (2001) is equally pessimistic. Employing discourse and content analysis on oral histories and popular media, Brown argues that Christian symbols and narratives have lost their hold in British culture. In his view, “the death of Christian Britain” was not a gradual process that started in the 1800s, but a revolutionary one that began with the countercultural experiments of the 1960s.

Does the death of Christian Britain mark the death of religious Britain as well? Not necessarily. Heelas (2006, Heelas & Woodhead 2005) and others argue that (churchly) religion in Britain is giving way to (individual) spirituality. Bruce (2006) counters that Heelas and colleagues define spirituality far too broadly and that the growth of New Age spirituality does

not match the decline in Christianity in any event. Spirituality in Britain and elsewhere is not as new as the New Age moniker implies. Its history extends back to the Victorian Age and beyond. Other authors note practices that are not usually classified as either religious or spiritual, such as witchcraft, paganism, and astrology (Pearson 2003, Spencer 2003); the history of these practices is even older. Thus, although the data certainly suggest that Great Britain is somehow less Christian than it used to be, other issues remain unresolved. When did the decline of British Christianity begin: 1960, 1940, 1930, 1880, 1850, 1800, or perhaps even earlier? Is Britain becoming more secular, more spiritual, both, or neither? Where should we draw the line between religion, spirituality, and magic? Should we draw such lines at all? These are the kinds of knotty, interpretive questions that any serious analysis of long-term religious change must wrestle with. We can say this much: Britons are less attached to established Christianity, but the alternative is not necessarily atheism. The spiritual lives of modern British adults include a wide range of beliefs and practices, from pre-Christian, to borrowings from Africa and Asia, to new expressions, although the modal form is still recognizable as Christianity.

Nor is this the only knot. For however one interprets the British patterns, they are clearly different from the patterns we observe in other Western countries. And there is also considerable variation within particular countries. Take Germany, for instance. In some ways, the trends and patterns there fit classical secularization theory better than they do in Britain. Indicators of religious observance start to trend downwards in the first half of the eighteenth century, especially in the cities and in the more economically advanced regions of the North and the East (Drews 1900; Hölscher 1989, 1990, 2005). But there are notable anomalies and nagging questions. Why does religious observance revive after the French Revolution and World War II? Why do church baptisms and funerals spike in fin de siècle Germany, even as church attendance declines (Pieper 1899)? Why

does religious observance remain so high in southwest Germany, one of the first regions to industrialize? And what should we make of the evidence that suggests that religious observance was always low in the North and the East, even in the Middle Ages, leading Höllinger (1996) to argue that modern variations in religious observance have premodern roots, and not just in Germany? As yet, social historians and historical sociologists have not done the hard work that is necessary to adjudicate these rival accounts.

Having briefly considered a predominantly Protestant society (England), and a confessionally mixed one (Germany), let us now turn to a Catholic one: France. There is an extraordinary wealth of data on Christian observance in France, especially from the nineteenth century onwards (Boulard 1982). There, too, one finds a downward trend beginning in the eighteenth century, punctuated by periodic revivals, though strong regional variations caution us against easy generalization. In contrast to Germany and Britain, however, baptisms, marriages, and funerals continued to decline during the *fin de siècle*. The decline in observance is also much sharper: Indicators of Christian vitality are considerably lower in contemporary France than in Germany. Still, the French pattern is probably still closer to the German pattern than to that of the other Catholic countries of the Mediterranean, where levels of observance remained very high until the 1960s and are still the highest in Western Europe (Ireland excepted). Nor are the French the least observant; that honor, if it is one, belongs to the Scandinavians. For all these reasons, we must be cautious about speaking of a European pattern.

Can we perhaps speak of an American pattern? Here, too, we must be extremely cautious. There is of course a wealth of survey data on religious belief and practice in the post-World War II United States (see, e.g., Gallup & Lindsay 1999, Greeley 1989). But the absence of a state church and the anemic character of federal data collection prior to the New Deal mean that the historical data are actually quite thin, at least compared with the Western

European sources. What we do have are data on church membership collected by church officials. Those data, so far as we can trust them, exhibit a clear pattern: a fairly steady upward trend from the Jacksonian era onwards, which plateaus in the mid-twentieth century and remains quite stable thereafter at around 80+%. Indicators of Christian belief and practice have also been surprisingly stable since World War II, with belief in God (broadly defined) well over 90%, and about 40% reporting weekly church attendance (Finke & Stark 1992). To what degree these trends represent an increase in religious observance and to what degree they represent a slackening in criteria for church membership are important but unanswered questions (Holifield 1998). Becoming a church member was not always as easy as it is today. Nor should we take self-reports of church attendance at face value; churchgoing is still normative for many Americans, and there is almost certainly overreporting (Chaves & Cavendish 1994; Hadaway et al. 1993, 1998). Nonetheless, rates of religious observance are surely still higher in the contemporary United States than they are in Europe, with the exceptions of Ireland and Poland, where Catholicism, nationalism, and anticolonialism intertwine with and strengthen one another. There is a divergence between Western Europe and the United States that clearly needs explaining and that is not adequately explained, even by sophisticated versions of orthodox secularization theory or the supply-side approach.

Most of what we know about religious observance and belief in other parts of the world derives from the World Values Survey. At first glance, the data hardly suggest decline; on the contrary, they indicate increase (Antoun & Hegland 1987, Sahliyeh 1990). This has led Berger and others to argue that the world is currently in a period of desecularization (Berger 1999, Karner & Aldridge 2004). Norris & Inglehart (2004) reject this view and develop an ingenious defense of secularization theory. On the one hand, they say, growing levels of existential security in certain countries and population segments have led to declining levels

of religiosity; on the other hand, high levels of religiosity continue to be correlated with high rates of fertility. If aggregate levels of religiosity are increasing, they argue, this is the result of demographic forces, not of putative desecularization. But what about the Euro-American divide? This divide is explained by the strength of the welfare state (high security) in Europe and the persistence of laissez-faire liberalism (low security) in the United States. Ingenious as it is, their argument is subject to some obvious objections. First, one of their key variables, existential security, is used inconsistently: When applied to non-Western countries, it means basic physical needs (food, water, shelter); when applied to the United States, it means higher-order psychological needs (predictability, protection against risk). Second, their data are purely cross-sectional in nature. For their causal claims to be fully persuasive, they must show that existential security and individual religiosity vary together over time as well. And it is not at all clear that they do. As we have just seen, levels of religious observance in Europe declined throughout the nineteenth century, a period of great social dislocation and existential insecurity for the popular classes.

Let us attempt to sum up. What do we know, and not know, about trends and patterns in individual religiosity? The answer to both questions is a great deal. For example, we know that Christian observance has been declining in most Western countries; that the overall declines have been punctuated by periodic resurgences; and that the timing, speed, and degree of de-Christianization vary a great deal, nationally, regionally, and sociologically. We also know that some countries buck these trends (the United States, Ireland, and Poland), that various indicators of individual religiosity (church membership, church attendance, church weddings, personal beliefs, etc.) do not always move in lockstep with one another, and that the distance between the trend lines also varies across nations and confessions. But there is also a great deal we do not know. For instance, we do not know how much of the regional and national variation in individual religiosity that we ob-

serve today antedates the modern era. Consequently, we do not really know just how exceptional the current state of affairs really is. The levels of religious observance seem exceptional when compared with the early nineteenth century, but are they exceptional when compared with the fourteenth century? Hackneyed images of the Middle Ages as a golden age of universal faith suggest they are. But these images are just that: hackneyed. Similarly, the individualism and eclecticism of contemporary Western religion seem radical when compared with the communalism and orthodoxy of the post-Reformation era. But they seem less radical when compared with pre-Constantinian Rome (Hopkins 2000) or, for that matter, contemporary Japan or China (Earhart 2004).

At this juncture, we would like to note three interrelated sets of biases that inflect analyses of secularization. Let us call them modernism, pastoralism, and methodologism. Modernism refers to the tendency, probably often unconscious, to postulate a premodern golden age of faith and to assume that trends and variations in contemporary religious observance are solely the result of modern social transformations. As we have seen, there are good reasons to doubt both of these premises. Pastoralism refers to the tendency to make priestly standards of good or true religion into sociological standards of religious vitality. Do people go to church regularly? Do they have their children baptized? Do they believe in a personal God? Do they believe in life after death? These are the kinds of questions a concerned church leader asks. The answers may be useful to the social scientist. But they are not necessarily answers to our questions, which concern religious change, not religious vitality. There is another reason the pastor's questions so often become the sociologist's: because our analyses are so often based on their data. It was concerned churchmen, after all, who first began to collect information on religious observance, and their concerns are consequently inscribed in the data themselves. Methodologism refers to the tendency to select questions on the basis of data and methods, rather than the other way around. Because of the plenitude of data

on individual religiosity and the amenability of the data to standard techniques of statistical analysis, the research output has been greatest in this area. Even though most sociologists of religion have repeatedly insisted that secularization is not (solely) an individual-level process, surprisingly little work exists on meso- or macro-level processes, perhaps because there is no clear recipe for doing so. Considerably less time and effort have been invested in work on the other levels or dimensions of secularization, perhaps because such work requires a comparative and historical approach, which is arguably more time-intensive and less susceptible to a division of labor. The claims that religious institutions have lost many of their social functions or that religious leaders have lost much of their cultural authority are often invoked but seldom investigated, at least not by sociologists.

Whereas many open questions remain about trends in individual practice and belief, far more remain about meso- and macro-level changes in religion and society. This is partly because sociologists have done so little research on these issues and partly because they have not fully mined the research already done by nonsociologists. Most discussions of secularization invoke the founding fathers (especially Weber and Durkheim), conjure a few concepts (rationalization and differentiation are favorites), cite a few stylized facts (e.g., the banishment of religion from public schools), and leave it at that. The exceptions are few. The two most important are Martin (1978) and Smith (2003) (see also Marty 1969). The title of Martin's book, *A General Theory of Secularization*, is somewhat misleading. It suggests a nomological account of a teleological process. What the book actually provides is a conjunctural account of a variable process, an effort to explain the various forms of secularism in terms of historical events (e.g., the Reformation settlement) and structural configurations (e.g., the degree of religious pluralism). The empirical generality and analytical precision of the book come at the expense of empirical detail and simple readability, however. The title of Smith's volume, *The Secular Revolution*, is more appropriate. It immediately suggests the

two fundamental premises of the analysis: that secularization was a political program as well as a social process; and that the realization of that program was the result of political contestation, rather than slow-moving, structural processes that played out behind actors' backs. On the basis of a political sociological perspective, Smith is attentive to the social well-springs of the conflict, to how economic and demographic shifts (industrialization and urbanization) created new groups (the bourgeoisie, the intelligentsia), and to the dynamics of the secularist movement. The other contributors to the volume then map out the repercussions of the secular revolution in various fields, from higher education to journalism, but only for the United States.

Fortunately, Anglo-American sociologists are not the only ones writing on the subject. Non-Anglophone sociologists have also produced foundational work on secularization and religious transformation. For instance, Lehmann has written and edited a series of volumes (Canning et al. 2004; Lehmann 1997, 2004), with useful essays on the genealogy of the secularization concept, church-state conflict in nineteenth-century Germany, and the differences between European and American secularity, among other things. The volume edited by Joas (2007) contains incisive essays by prominent specialists who write on the evolution of relations among religion, state, and society in most of the major world religions and historical civilizations. Francophone sociologists have also produced some highly original work on religious change in recent years. The thrust of Hervieu-Léger's (1999, 2000, 2001; Hervieu-Léger & Champion 1986) work, for instance, has been to move beyond simple dichotomies (religion and reason, modernity and tradition, secularity and Christendom) to develop an understanding of religious modernity and modern religion.

Naturally, social and religious historians have also produced a great deal of relevant scholarship, some of which explicitly thematizes secularization. A particularly noteworthy example of this genre is the work of McLeod, who has produced monographs on religion

in modern Britain (McLeod & Econ. Hist. Soc. 1984, McLeod 1996b) and edited volumes on religion in European cities (McLeod 1982, 1996a), as well as a comparative analysis of secularization in Western Europe (McLeod 1997, 2000; McLeod & Ustorf 2003) that is, for now, the best general treatment of the subject in any discipline. In these works, McLeod considers institutional changes, elite conflict, and individual practice, setting them all against the backdrop of industrialization, urbanization, democratization, and the relative success of Western churches in responding to them. McLeod's German analogue (and sometime collaborator) is Hölscher (1989, 1990, 2005). Although McLeod's work stays well within the confines of conventional social history, Brown's (2001, 2003) strays well beyond them. His 2001 book, *The Death of Christian Britain*, combines oral histories, autobiographies, popular tracts, and high literature to trace out the declining relevance of Biblically based narratives and symbols in British discourse from the nineteenth century onwards. If the power of religion is conceived as discursive power, he argues, we arrive at a very different periodization of de-Christianization: In his view, British Christianity did not really begin to wane until the 1960s, more than a century later than analyses of church attendance would suggest.

There are also a great many well-developed specialist literatures that bear directly on the topic of institutional differentiation and societal secularization. In this context, we can only note some broader themes, along with some representative works:

(a) Religion in education. There is a vast literature—indeed, several vast literatures—on religion and public education, but only a few comparative treatments, mainly by political scientists (e.g., Dierkens & Schreiber 2006, Monsma & Soper 1997). Historians have written a great deal about the political struggles and resulting institutional settlements (Bloth 1968, Curtis 2000, Feldman 2005, Garreau 2006, Laqueur

1976). And there are a number of important ethnographic studies that explore the theme in a more fine-grained way (Binder 2002, Ihli 2001). The story of religion's marginalization from American universities has been well told by historians and sociologists (Marsden 1994, Marsden & Longfield 1992, Reuben 1996, Smith 2003). The story of religion's place in European universities is quite different but has not received the same degree of scholarly attention (but see Howard 2006).

(b) Law and secularism. In the United States and many other countries, the role of adjudicating church/state relations has increasingly fallen to the judiciary. Legal scholars have produced a rich literature on the resulting jurisprudence, which includes careful case studies of single countries (Hamburger 2002), comparisons across countries (Jacobsohn 2003), and fine-grained examinations of particular legal cases (Sullivan 2005). And, of course, they have weighed in with their own solutions to America's church/state problem (Carter 1993, 2000; Feldman 2005).

(c) Religion and politics. Political scientists and social historians have written a great deal about the complex interplay between religion, class, nationalism, and party politics, and insofar as one conceives of secularization as the outcome of political contestation, this literature is of great interest. In the United States, this subject has received the greatest attention from the ethno-cultural school of political history (Benson et al. 1978; Formisano 1994, 1999; Kleppner 1987; Silbey 1991). French historians have treated it under the rubric of the two Frances (Chartier 1978, Ford 1993, Gibson 1989, Johnson 1978, Poulat 1988). Dutch and Belgian historians and social scientists examine it within the framework of "consociationalism" and "pillarization" (Groot 1992, Lijphart 1975, Post 1989). In England,

the emphasis has been on the link between Tories and Anglicans and Methodism and Liberalism (Hempton 1984, McLeod 1996b). In Germany, on the other hand, the relevant literature focuses on the *Kulturkampf* and the so-called Wehler-debate (Blackbourn 1980, Blackbourn & Eley 1984, Nipperdey 1988, Smith 1995, Sperber 1984). Much information can also be gleaned from work on party systems (Lipset & Rokkan 1967, Rokkan et al. 1999), on Christian Democratic parties (Hanley 1994, Kalyvas 1996), and the religious factor in voting behavior (Bolce & De Maio 1999, Brooks et al. 2006, Manza & Brooks 1997, Sperber 1997).

- (d) History of science, medicine, and the professions. To the degree that secularization is understood as declining religious authority, it is vital that one look at the clergy's intellectual competitors, as well as at the social history of the clergy itself. Of particular interest here are historiographical challenges to the war of religion and science narrative (Lindberg & Numbers 1986, 2003), work on the history of psychiatry and medicine (Goldstein 1978, 1990; Mauerer 1986), and the relationship between religion, charity, and social work, not to mention the clergy itself.

SECULARISM IN DANGER? RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS AND DEMOCRACY

In the long debates between supply-siders and secularization theorists, non-Western countries and non-Christian religions are generally left out of the picture (cf. Casanova 2006). More comprehensive, qualified, and original research on secularization, however, requires comparative analyses that incorporate diverse world religions. Although such comparative work is rare, a growing body of literature in various social scientific fields focuses on the implications of diverse religious movements—Islamic,

Hindu, and Christian—for established structures of secularity, for ideologies of secularism, and, by implication, for liberal democracy. In this section, we identify three major areas in this literature. Conflicts surrounding the religious claims of Muslim immigrants in European countries have drawn increasing attention in recent studies of citizenship and immigrant incorporation. Another debate taking place mainly within the terrain of political science focuses on the relationship of religious-political movements to democracy. Finally, an emergent strand in anthropology investigates secularism, not as the negative other of religion but as a positive cultural formation of its own.

Muslim Immigrants and European Secularisms

Conflicts surrounding the religious claims of Muslim immigrants in European countries constitute some of the most important political struggles concerning secularity today (Göle 2006a,b), and there is now a vast and varied literature on this topic. On the one hand, contested but widespread discourses among European publics posit Islam as a fundamentalist religion inherently incompatible with secularity, and by implication with modernity and democracy (cf. Casanova 2005). On the other hand, Muslim demands for inclusion challenge established structures and understandings of church-state relations, including the privileged positions of Christianity (and sometimes Judaism). Taken-for-granted structures of secularity are thereby rendered explicit and thematized, both critically and defensively, in public discourse and policy discussions. Political conflicts surrounding Muslim demands thus constitute crucial contingent events with potentially transformative consequences for institutionalized structures and understandings of secularity in Europe.

Most influential works in the literature on citizenship and immigrant incorporation in Europe devote some attention to the conflicts concerning the claims and practices of Muslims (Brubaker 1992, Favell 2001, Joppke 1999,

Soysal 1994). However, these works mainly focus on structures of citizenship, not on structures of secularity, and they do not theorize religion as a central dimension of incorporation (cf. Statham 2004). The normative and empirical literature on multiculturalism, in turn, extensively discusses challenges posed for liberal democracies by religious minority practices, focusing on issues such as veiling, female genital mutilation, arranged marriage, polygamy, and sex segregation (Benhabib 2002, Okin 1999, Shweder et al. 2002). With rare exceptions (Scott 2007), however, this literature subsumes religious practices and claims under the more general category of cultural difference, often neglecting the specific implications of these conflicts for secularism.

A number of recent studies seek to fill the gap on religion in the field of citizenship and immigrant incorporation. They focus on how nation-specific structures and ideologies of secularity result in different experiences of incorporation for Muslim immigrants across European polities. Fetzer & Soper's (2005) study systematically explores how institutionalized understandings and structures of church-state relations in European nation-states influence the modality and degree of religious accommodation for the Muslim residents of Britain, France, and Germany. In France, they argue, the strict exclusion of religion from the public realm grounded in the ideology of *laïcité* has resulted in a relatively low degree of accommodation. The state restricts Muslim religious expression in public schools, funds only a very limited number of private Muslim schools, and in some cases obstructs the construction of mosques. Germany, with its legal recognition of churches as public corporate bodies and its ideology of close church-state cooperation, offers a potential institutional channel for meeting the demands of new religious groups. At the same time, however, Muslims have not yet been legally incorporated into this corporatist structure, and their demands for Islamic religious education in public schools have been partially accommodated in a limited number of states. In Britain, the established church structure and

the historical recognition of a number of minority religions have resulted in a pattern of close alliance between church and state. Significantly supported by the Anglican Church, Muslim demands for parity have thus been accommodated in Britain to a larger extent than in both France and Germany. However, state aid for private Muslim schools is being granted through a slow process, and the scope of the blasphemy law remains limited to Christianity.

In another important study of immigrant incorporation in Europe, Koopmans et al. (2005) found that a majority of group demands by immigrants in the Netherlands, Britain, and France between 1992 and 1998 used a religious—mostly Muslim—frame of identity. Their content analysis reveals that there are significant differences in the type of group demands made by Muslims in these three polities; according to the authors, these differences in migrant claims reflect nation-specific differences in incorporation models. In the Netherlands, where strong multicultural policies based on the pillarization model give expansive rights to religious groups, most group claims by Muslims are proactive and oriented toward parity with other religious groups. However, the Dutch polity's encouragement of self-organization leads to competition for resources between smaller factions within the Muslim community. Although there is an emphasis on autonomous groups in Britain, its race relations regime recognizes Muslim individuals through racial and ethnic categories and not through their religious identity. Most Muslim group claims are proactive; however, compared with the Netherlands, a larger proportion of them plea for exceptional rights. In France, in contrast, most claims react to state policies seeking to restrict the wearing of headscarves in public space, and most group demands by Muslims are exceptional. The authors explain this finding with the republican ideology of *laïcité* that opposes the organization of citizens into religious-communal groups and seeks to strictly limit the role of religion in public life. [It is important to note, however, that the French polity in practice recognizes

organized religions and regularly establishes institutional channels of negotiation with religious communities despite frequent discursive reaffirmations of a strict *laïcité* (Bowen 2007, Ewing 2002, Kastoryano 2002)]. In general, the extent of religious groups' accommodation increases from France to Britain to the Netherlands. This comparative perspective reveals that the same kinds of religious group claims that appear exceptional in Britain and France simply constitute demands for equal rights and privileges in the Netherlands.

These studies in the field of immigrant incorporation and citizenship demonstrate that there are significant cross-national differences in the structures and understandings of secularism across Europe. These works thus complement comparative analyses of church-state relations in Europe (Madeley 2003) and more broad comparative studies of constitutional secularisms (Jacobsohn 2003). A different strand of work on Muslim immigrants and secularization focuses on the transformations of Muslim religiosity that result from the experience of living as minority groups in Western societies. Roy (2004) argues that the result has been the emergence of a globalized and individualized Islam decoupled from particular national cultures. Cesari (2004) similarly claims that the experience of living in Western societies—where states do not seek to define authoritatively the Islamic tradition—has led to the individualization of Muslim religiosity, resulting in diverse forms such as privatized, cultural, or ethical Islam as well as voluntary adherence to fundamentalism. According to Cesari (2004), this individualization of belief and practice represents a secularization of Islam through a process similar to that experienced by Protestantism and Catholicism.

Future studies focusing on Muslim immigrants in Western societies will further our understanding of secularism by exploring the role of religion in the exclusion and incorporation of immigrant groups, the divergent structures and understandings of church-state relations in European nation-states, recent transformations of these structures through po-

litical conflicts, and emerging forms of Muslim religiosity.

Religious Movements and Democratic Politics

The Islamic revival experienced globally since the 1970s and the rising importance of Islamist movements in international politics have increasingly drawn the attention of social scientists to the implications of these movements for democracy. Some scholarly discussions of this topic explore conditions conducive to the internal secularization of religious-political movements and investigate what forms of public religion may be compatible with democratic politics (Casanova 1994, Stepan 2000), thereby challenging secularist assumptions that a strict exclusion of religion from public life is a necessary condition of democracy.

Secularist actors regularly posit Islamist movements as inherent threats to democratic politics, often based on claims of an essential incompatibility between Islamic doctrine and fundamental concepts of democracy. However, as some scholars of Islam and secularization point out, in many Middle Eastern polities, major challenges against democracy come from authoritarian or semiauthoritarian secularist states that repress Islamist political movements and parties rather than from these movements themselves (Casanova 2005; Esposito 2000; Roy 2004, 2007; Yavuz 2003). Analysts that go beyond the practical presuppositions of the secularist actors engaged in political struggles instead seek to specify the conditions under which religious movements may be incorporated into democratic systems and explore the factors that make it unlikely (Schwedler 2006, Wickham 2004).

Although there is no scholarly consensus on the precise definition of Islamism, its common usage generally encompasses both the pietistic movements that seek to increase the impact of Islam on everyday conduct (re-Islamization from below) and political movements and parties that reconstruct Islam as a political ideology and seek to take control of state power

(re-Islamization from above) (Mahmood 2005; Roy 1994, 2004). The relationship of pietistic movements to the state-oriented movements needs to be explored in a context-specific manner, as there are close organizational and programmatic ties in some cases and major tensions in others (Bayat 2007, Mahmood 2005).

Important studies in sociology and anthropology have analyzed Muslim pietistic movements such as the headscarf movement in Turkey (Göle 1996) and the mosque movement in Egypt (Mahmood 2005) with a focus on the role of women in these movements. Although they may or may not engage in protest against the state, most of these movements define themselves against what they see as their corrupt secular-Westernized environment, criticize symbolic and traditional participation in the Muslim identity, and instead encourage their participants to conduct their everyday lives according to Islamic precepts in all aspects. These characteristics often place the pietistic groups into an antagonistic relationship vis-à-vis the secularist actors who want to minimize the influence and visibility of religion in public life.

The study of state-oriented Islamist movements and parties takes place primarily within the framework of political science (Kepel 2003; Roy 1994, 2004). An increasingly pressing question in the literature—not least because of its political relevance—is whether and under what conditions Islamist movements can be incorporated into democratic systems. Many public and some scholarly discussions of Islam and democracy (Huntington 1996; Lewis 2002, 2003; Tibi 1990) focus on the compatibility of Islam as a religion, fixed by its sacred texts, with Western democracy. Social scientists critical of this essentialist approach argue that concrete political struggles involve the selective employment of the religious corpus and point out that Islam and Islamist movements exhibit a great diversity across regions and contexts (Bayat 2007; Esposito & Voll 1996, 2001; Lawrence 1998, 2002; Roy 2007). Political scientists such as Roy (2007) and Kalyvas (2000) further suggest that the secularization of religious movements

and their incorporation into democratic systems hinge on political compromises and organizational structure rather than on religious ideology or theological reform.

Esposito & Voll (1996) argue that three factors determine whether an Islamist movement vying for state power will cause the destabilization of democratic politics: the legality of the organization, its degree of cooperation with the political elites, and the repression of the movement by ruling elites. However, they do not explain what factors determine movement leaders' willingness to cooperate or the elites' decision to refrain from repression in the first place. On the basis of a comparison of Islamist movements with other religious-political movements, Kalyvas (2000, 2003) seeks to provide an answer to these questions. Leaders of religious parties have strong incentives to moderate the party line when power seems within reach, as they may need to enter coalitions with nonreligious parties and—in some cases—fear the intervention of a secularist army. However, they may not always be able to convince the ruling elites that they will not subvert the political structure once in power.

The Belgian Catholic Party and the Algerian FIS (Islamic Salvation Front) represent two divergent outcomes in this respect. The leadership cadres of both parties were willing to follow a moderate line and sought to give signals of commitment to the existing political structure. However, the Belgian Catholic Party's assumption of power following its electoral victory in 1884 was not blocked, whereas the Algerian army canceled the results of the first round parliamentary elections won by the FIS in 1991 and consequently banned the party. The Catholic party was incorporated into the political system in Belgium, whereas the conflict in Algeria gradually escalated to a civil war.

Kalyvas (2000, 2003) explains these divergent outcomes with the differential credibility of the signals given by the party leadership to the ruling elites in the two cases. The credibility of the signals in turn depended on the organizational structure of religious authority: With the open support of the Catholic Church, the

moderates within the Catholic Party successfully gave the impression they held the reins; in the absence of the backing of a centralized and hierarchical religious authority, the moderates in the FIS failed to silence the radicals within the party and could not demonstrate convincingly that they were in control. Kalyvas thus shows that the organizational structure of the two religions played the key role in determining the divergent outcomes in these two cases. This powerful analysis demonstrates the analytical and substantive benefits of comparisons that include diverse world religions and regions.

Although one cannot speak of a general consensus in the ongoing scholarly debate on Islamist movements, secularity, and democracy, we can nevertheless sum up some conclusions that contradict or escape secularist assumptions: (a) Contrary to the assumption underlying most public discussions on the subject, religious ideology often plays a secondary role in determining the outcomes. (b) The strength of movement leadership and the organizational structure of religious authority may be decisive factors in the incorporation of religious-political movements into democratic systems. (c) Participation in the legitimate political process tends to lead to the internal secularization and moderation of religious-political movements (Nasr 1995, Roy 2007). This argument is sometimes referred to as the inclusion-moderation hypothesis (Schwedler 2006). (d) Secularist politics can pose as severe threats to the democratic rules of the game as religious-political movements (Stepan 2000).

Although most recent studies on religion and democracy focus on Islam in Europe and the Middle East, the relationship between secularism and democracy is also put into question in many other contexts. Contemporary actors in various regions and religious traditions contest the secularist assumptions that secularism is the answer to the question of peaceful coexistence under conditions of religious pluralism and that all challenges to secularism constitute threats for democracy. The United States and South Asia offer especially instructive cases in this regard. Scholars of American religion

and politics widely agree that pluralism, secularism, and democracy go hand-in-hand (Hecl et al. 2007). Sectarianism, revivalism, and immigration have made the United States the most religiously diverse polity in the West. Religious diversity, in turn, has undermined the power of established churches, leading to greater toleration of religious minorities and, eventually, to an extraordinary degree of religious freedom (Hall 1998, Hutchison 2003, Murphy 2001). The collapse of ecclesiastical hierarchies and clerical authority, meanwhile, has been a quintessential element of the democratization of U.S. society (Hatch 1989).

This model was elastic enough to accommodate Baptists, Methodists, Catholics, Jews, and Mormons, and it may be durable enough to accommodate new religious and nonreligious others as well. But it is important to realize that there are powerful constituencies in U.S. society that are vigorously opposed to doing so: conservative Christians, Catholic and Protestant, who argue that an overly secularist law and culture afford too little place to religious voices and freedoms in public life; Christian nationalists, mostly Protestants, who believe that the United States was founded as a Christian nation and must be returned to its Christian roots; and radical dominionists and theologians who go further still, arguing that the American polity was founded on a Biblical covenant and that the solution to all the nation's problems resides in (re)establishing Biblical law and Christian leadership, and not necessarily in a democratic form.

In India, the structure of religious pluralism has been significantly shaped through British colonial policies that helped reify religious-communal collective identities (Pandey 1990). Since independence, secularism has been a defining feature of the Indian polity, signifying its difference from Pakistan, which was declared an Islamic state following the partition. At the same time, however, secularism has been a deeply contested concept since the days of foundation. The basic contours of the debate are often traced back to the divergent understandings of Gandhi, who emphasized the links

between religious values and public virtue, and of Nehru, who thought that religion should be separated from public life and placed an emphasis on institutional modernization, science, and economic progress (Nandy 1988, Sunder Rajan & Needham 2007). Anti-Sikh, anti-Muslim, and anti-Hindu riots in the course of the 1980s and a series of violent conflicts between Hindu nationalists and Muslim activists that intensified in the 1990s—crystallized in the infamous destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya in 1992 and the violence directed against Muslims in Gujarat in 2002—have led to a widespread recognition of a crisis of secularism in India (Needham & Sunder Rajan 2007, Tambiah 1998). Secularism is challenged on the ground by Hindu nationalists who dismiss “pseudosecularism” as appeasement of minorities and by many Muslim and Sikh activists who see secularism as a cloak for Hindu majoritarianism (Sunder Rajan & Needham 2007).

Around the same time, many Indian intellectuals started an intense debate that critically assessed Indian secularism (Bhargava 1998b, Needham & Sunder Rajan 2007, Pantham 1997, Srinivasan 2007). Madan (1987) argued that secularism, a product of the Protestant Reformation, is not supported by the religious traditions of South Asia. Moreover, by seeking to marginalize religion, he argued, secularism served to strengthen fundamentalisms that it was supposed to curtail. Another influential commentator, Nandy (1988, 2007), delineated secularism as a hegemonic Western ideology imposed on Indian society by modernizing elites. He argued that the traditional faiths of India offer better resources than secularism for ethnic and religious tolerance. Against these portrayals of secularism as a concept alien to and thus not viable for Indian society, Bhargava (1998b, 2007) pointed out that India has developed a distinctive variant of secularism based on what he calls “a principled distance of the state from religious institutions” (Bhargava 1998b, p. 511). A third critic of Indian secularism, Chatterjee (1998) claimed that secularism does not offer a sufficient counterforce against Hindu majoritarianism. He suggested that mi-

nority rights and religious toleration would be better secured through the establishment of representative institutions within religious groups. Some other intellectuals, however, remain convinced that secularism is the best means of preserving religious tolerance in South Asia and should be vigorously enforced against communalism (Sen 1993, 1998).

Cultures of Secularism

Secularism as political ideology and movement has historically had, and continues to have, a crucial impact on institutionalized forms of public life and political order (Jacoby 2004, Post 1943, Taranto 2000). However, although scholars have analyzed religious movements as culturally rich phenomena involving sacred texts, iconography, rituals, and charismatic leaders, secularism has conventionally been conceived as a political stand reducible to a number of abstract principles about religion’s legitimate place in modern societies or in negative terms as the lack of religion and tradition. This scholarly perception ironically reflects both a particular strand of religious discourse that sees in secularism a vacuum of meaning and moral content and a fundamental secularist assumption that conceives of secularism as a post-traditional, rational, and neutral way of ordering social and political life.

As an anthropologist of secularism states, however, “the terms of secularism are not appropriate for the study of secularism” (Navaro-Yashin 2002). An emergent strand of work in anthropology instead explores secularism as a cultural structure with its own symbols, icons, discourses, and everyday practices, following the inspiration provided by Asad’s (2003) idea of an anthropology of secularism. These studies demonstrate that secularism is not a disenchanting political stand that consists of abstract principles and that the promotion of secularism is not an innocuous plea for public neutrality vis-à-vis the plurality of beliefs and worldviews. Secularism is carried by social actors with specific interests who associate it with concrete lifestyles, emotionally identify with it, sacralize

it in the image of the state and of the founding fathers, performatively display their adherence to it, and mobilize against religious movements through complex strategies.

Two anthropological studies, *Faces of the State* by Navaro-Yashin (2002) and *Nostalgia for the Modern* by Özyürek (2006), analyze a wide range of material from national holidays and museum exhibits to department stores and home decoration in order to investigate the culture of secularism in Turkey. Their cases focus on the state-induced but popular mobilization of secularists in the 1990s in response to the electoral successes of the Islamic Welfare (and later Virtue) Party and to the increasing visibility of Islamic symbols and practices in Turkish public life.

Özyürek's study demonstrates that the Turkish state's official ideology of secularism has been appropriated by segments of Turkish society and has taken on new accents in the course of this popularization. The popular carriers of secularism bring it into the private realm by placing its symbols in the nonofficial spheres of home and work, by representing it through the imagery of modern lifestyles, and by deemphasizing the official origins of its symbols and icons. Popular secularist performances thus seek to retell the story of state-led Turkish modernization as a voluntary process driven by civil society; this aims to provide state secularism with legitimacy in the face of Islamists' and liberals' critique of republican modernization as a top-down and authoritarian project. Paradoxically, Turkish state authorities play an active role in crafting the representation of a secularism based in the forces of civil society (Navaro-Yashin 2002).

Studies of secularist cultures reveal that the conflicts between secularists and religious-political activists do not simply follow from fixed political or religious ideologies opposed to each other; they rather progress spirally through the development of strategies in response to the opposing side. Nationalism often serves as a fertile ground for these struggles between secularists and religious-political activists, pitting secular and religious construc-

tions of national identity and collective memory against each other (Çinar 2005). An ethnographer of Islamist politics uses the Bakhtinian term dialogical relationship to capture these mutually transformative interactions between religious-political movements, secularism, and everyday religion (Tuğal 2006).

Varieties of Secularity

The teleological character of secularization theory implies that secularism is a one-size-fits-all proposition. Comparative analysis suggests otherwise. If we view secularization as a political settlement, rather than a historical process, as a variable outcome, rather than a unilinear trend, it soon becomes clear that secularity (or church/state relations) comes in many varieties. Within the domains of Western Christendom and its colonial offspring, there is enormous variation in the theory and practice of church/state relations. This is not the place to review or even classify them in all their multiplicity. But let us consider one example—the relationship between religious communities, elementary schools, and the state. In the United States, religious schools receive no public funding, and religious instruction is not permitted in the public schools. French public schools are even more secular: They restrict individual religious expression within the school setting (e.g., the wearing of religious symbols). In Germany, in contrast, many public schools are Protestant or Catholic, and all schools provide classes in religion or ethics; participation, however, is not mandatory. Further, in Australia the state not only permits religious instruction in the public schools but provides direct funding to independent, religious schools (mainly Catholic). These four examples give some sense of the range of variation in such arrangements. A similar range of church/state arrangements can be found in other areas, including social provision, church finances, and higher education. And the range is even greater if we consider non-Western cases, such as India, which recognizes special group rights and religious legal codes. Thus, India not only permits religious instruction and

observance within public schools; it recognizes religious minority schools, where at least half of all seats are set aside for members of the minority in question. In addition, the principle of Muslim personal law allows sharia to override national laws in certain private matters, such as marriage and divorce, though only for Muslims.

CONCLUSION: AFTER SECULARIZATION?

“After nearly three centuries of utterly failed prophecies and misrepresentations of both present and past, it seems time to carry the secularization doctrine to the graveyard of failed theories, and there to whisper *‘requiescat in pace’*” (Stark 1999). Thus, Stark’s epitaph to the secularization debate almost a decade ago. In retrospect, Stark’s graveside jig appears in an even more comic light. One imagines the dead theory rising up from the grave, like a zombie in an old-school horror movie. To really push the horror-show imagery, though, secularization theory might be better compared to a Frankenstein monster, stitched together, as it is, from the remnants of long-dead debates—Augustinian theology, canon law, the Henrician Reformation, positivist philosophies of history, and so on. And the Frankenstein analogy can be pushed further still. Like the monster in Shelley’s tale, the theory began as a product of scientific hubris, which sometimes rebels against its masters, slipping out of their control and out into the public square of political debate, where it dances to the tune of other masters, who use it to denounce secular humanists and beckon religious ideas back into the public square. What is one to do with such a monstrous theory?

One strategy would be to invoke it less and use more analytically specific, and less politically laden, concepts whenever possible. For example, when analyzing the historically Christian countries, one could substitute unchurching or de-Christianization for individual-level secularization without any loss in meaning, and with a considerable gain in precision. One would no longer have to make (often questionable) assumptions about the nature and

the future of religion *tout court*. For the same reasons, one might replace societal secularization with differentiation between church and state or the declining cultural authority of the Christian clergy.

This strategy is not without its disadvantages, however. Terms like secularization provide a focal point for scholarly debate, and empirical knowledge tends to condense and accumulate around theoretical concepts of this sort. The latest round of the secularization debate may not have produced consensus—an elusive goal in any event—but it has generated a great deal of knowledge. But if we wish to use it, we need to use it more carefully.

Another strategy, then, one advocated by Smith and others, is to treat secularization as an analytical variable. This means that we define secularization in a particular way for a particular project, and we use this definition in an ideal-typical fashion, as a means of identifying variation that is explained by other concepts or mechanisms, instead of invoking secularization as both explanans and explanandum, the traditional practice. Or, conversely, we compare the variations in secularization to variations outside the religious field, e.g., in party politics or civic life. In short, secularization could be used in much the same fashion as, say, bureaucratization or democratization. The key proviso, here, is that we explicitly acknowledge the manifold and contradictory usages to which the secularization concept has been put and firmly renounce any pretenses to fixing a correct meaning once and for all.

So, we reject Stark’s unwarranted recommendation. But we understand his frustrations. The debate about secularization has often led scholars of religion to focus narrowly on a scientifically unanswerable question and ignore other, more tractable ones, some of which are, arguably, just as urgent. The unanswerable question concerns the future of religion: Will it survive or will it die? All too often, debates about secularization degenerate into vehicles for partisan debates about the future of religion, with those who wish religion would finally disappear defining secularization in the

most expansive possible way, so that they can accumulate as much evidence as possible that it is occurring, with the partisans of religion pursuing the reverse strategy.

Meanwhile, there are other more answerable, and more urgent, questions. We have noted two of them in this review. The first concerns secularism and democracy, particularly, but not exclusively, as they relate to Islam. Most Western theorists of democracy would agree that the establishment of a democratic polity involves some renunciation on the part of religious actors and, indeed, of all comprehensive worldviews. Why? First, because recognition of the right of conscience—the historical fount of all human rights (Jellinek & Farrand 1901)—inevitably generates religious pluralism. And second, because religious pluralism, combined with majority rule, creates the possibility of religious tyranny and minority oppression, which can be prevented only by codifying certain basic rights. Or so, at least, the Western experience suggests. The skeptics argue that Islam's claim to be a comprehensive way of life does not allow the necessary renunciation (e.g., Lewis 2002). Their critics counter by pointing to the internal pluralism and decentralized structure of the umma (Roy 2007). As we have noted, the critics' view is further buttressed by the history of Western Catholicism, which faced similar charges, charges that were eventually proven false (Gross 2004).

Another answerable question concerns the varieties of secularism. Unfortunately, this question has been doubly obscured by the secularization debate, insofar as it has been framed as a yes/no question, rather than a how question, and insofar as secularization theorists have, until recently, denied the importance of secularism qua movement and ideology. As we have seen, however briefly, there have been a wide variety of secular settlements, governing the proper boundaries and roles of religious and nonreligious institutions and actors across a variety of domains—education, social provision, marriage law, etc. Although political scientists have done some comparative spadework on these issues, and historians have dug fairly deeply

into individual cases, sociologists have not contributed much in this area. This is unfortunate. In an era when secular settlements in many parts of the world, including the United States, are under challenge, knowledge of the various forms of secularism, with their attendant advantages and dilemmas, would be useful knowledge indeed.

Are we then entering into a postsecular age, as Habermas and others have suggested? In our view, this is not a question that social scientists qua social scientists can answer. What can be said with some confidence, though, is that 2008 looks a lot different than, say, 1968. Outside of Western Europe, organized religion is flourishing, even resurging. So, too, is politicized religion. As the old political religions (e.g., nationalism, fascism, communism) have faded or disappeared, traditional, transcendent religion has become a key cleavage in domestic and international politics—in many contexts the key cleavage. The ranks of the pro-Enlightenment party of reason, meanwhile, have dramatically thinned, and not only in the West, with many one-time partisans adopting a more appreciative and open stance toward religion, even if they do not go native. This is not to say that the secularists have disappeared, or that secularism has vanished. Hitchens and Dawkins and other secular humanists and scientific naturalists are perhaps more vociferous now than they have been in almost a century. And with good reason: They are under attack! Still, it seems certain that their party will live to fight another day. With what outcome we cannot know. For the moment, however, they are in no position to expand the boundaries of the secular. It should be noted, though, that humanists are not the only secularists. There are many people of faith throughout the world who support some form of secularity because they believe the religious community must be shielded from political contamination, because they fear tyranny of the religious majority, or because they believe that religious pluralism is itself a positive good that should be protected, a fact that is vehemently denied by culture warriors of the right, who define secularism in such a way as to

include everybody except themselves and their closest allies, and by the culture warriors of the left, who define religion in such a way that it includes only their most implacable enemies. Which is to say that the definition of the secular and its relationship to the religious are as hotly

disputed now as ever, and that the scope of the debate is probably wider than ever. Whether this period of contestation marks the beginning of a postsecular age, or merely a period of secular ebb and religious flow, only time will tell.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors are not aware of any biases that might be perceived as affecting the objectivity of this review.

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