Secularization as Declining Religious Authority*

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Abstract

Secularization is most productively understood not as declining religion, but as the declining scope of religious authority. A focus on religious authority (1) is more consistent with recent developments in social theory than is a preoccupation with religion; (2) draws on and develops what is best in the secularization literature; and (3) reclaims a neglected Weberian insight concerning the sociological analysis of religion. Several descriptive and theoretical "pay-offs" of this conceptual innovation are discussed: new hypotheses concerning the relationship between religion and social movements; the enhanced capacity to conceptually apprehend and empirically investigate secularization among societies, organizations, and individuals; and clearer theoretical connections between secularization and other sociological literatures. Ironically, these connections may indeed spell the end of secularization theory as a distinct body of theory, but in a different way than previously appreciated.

The central analytical question has been: "What is religion?" and the difficulty of providing a satisfactory answer to that question has consequently dominated the debate about secularisation in industrial societies. . . . The question is, without doubt, significant in both the philosophy and sociology of religion, but it has had the effect of inducing a certain theoretical sterility and repetitiveness within the discipline. The endless pursuit of that issue has produced an analytical cul-de-sac. (Turner 1991:3)

Hitherto, too many studies in the sociology of religion have been interested in meaning systems. It is my contention that the study of structural changes is more important and is in closer alignment with the great sociological traditions. (Dobbelaere 1989:42)

A longstanding consensus around classical versions of secularization theory has broken down in recent decades. Religion's stubborn refusal to disappear has prompted major reevaluation of inherited models of secularization. The "facts" are not much disputed: New religious movements continue to arise; older movements like Pentecostalism and Mormonism are expanding; religious

* *Many thanks to Penny Becker, Patty Chang, Peter Beyer, Kevin Christiano, Scott Cormode, Fred Kniss, Frank Lechner, Thomas Robbins, William Swatos, Olivier Tschannen, Rhys Williams, and two anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on earlier versions of this article.* *Direct all correspondence to the author, Department of Sociology, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN 46556.*

fundamentalisms thrive throughout the world; and, at least in the U.S., substantial segments of the population continue to say they believe in God and continue to participate in orthodox organized religion. However, the significance of these facts is very much disputed. Does the persistence of religion falsify secularization theory? Or does the form of religion's persistence render its persistence irrelevant to, or even supportive of, secularization theory? The current secularization debate may be understood as a Kuhnian paradigm clash, where theoretical perspectives compete, not over the truth or falsity of facts, but over their relevance.

At such a time it is worth the effort to reassess the "inherited model" of secularization (Wilson 1985) with an eye towards discerning what is valuable and what must be abandoned. This is an especially urgent task for those who believe, as do I, that currently fashionable claims suggesting that secularization theory has been decisively falsified (Hadden 1987; Hout & Greeley 1987; Stark & Iannaccone 1992) throw the baby out with the bathwater. This article takes up the challenge of rethinking secularization in light of the valid criticisms that have been directed against it. It offers a reformulation of secularization rather than a defense of the classical view (cf. Lechner 1991).

If secularization theory is always about, in one way or another, religion's decline, then how religion is understood determines secularization theory's direction (Shiner 1967). Durkheimians, on the one hand, to whom religion refers to a set of collective representations providing moral unity to a society, either rule secularization out by definition or dread it as social disintegration. Weberians, on the other hand, to whom religion is more substantively conceptualized as bodies of beliefs and practices concerning salvation, see secularization in social change that renders these religious meanings less and less plausible. As these well-known examples illustrate, how we understand secularization's object — religion — has a dramatic effect on how we understand secularization. This article takes advantage of this fact in that it attempts to reconceptualize secularization by reconceptualizing its object.

My central claim can be stated simply: Secularization is best understood not as the decline of religion, but as the declining scope of religious authority. More provocatively, I propose that we abandon religion as an analytical category when studying secularization. This proposed focus on religious authority (1) is more consistent with recent developments in social theory than is a preoccupation with "religion"; (2) draws on and develops what is best in the secularization literature; (3) reclaims a neglected Weberian insight concerning the sociological analysis of religion; and (4) suggests new and promising directions for empirical investigations of religion in industrial societies. Ironically, shifting the focus in this way does indeed spell the end of secularization theory as a distinct body of theory, but in a different way than previous critics have appreciated. Hence, understanding secularization as declining religious authority avoids the theoretical cul-de-sacs about which Turner warns us, and within which too much contemporary sociology of religion flounders.

Theoretical Context

NEW DIFFERENTIATION THEORY

My starting point is the same as that of virtually every other analyst of religion in "modern" societies: the social fact that various institutional spheres are more or less differentiated from religion (Tschannen 1991). Religion, in this situation, has been understood ambiguously. It has at once referred both to the differentiated sphere of religious roles and institutions and to vague sets of values and beliefs believed by some to provide the social glue necessary to counteract the centrifugal forces of differentiation. But this ambiguity is not a necessary part of a sociological approach to religion; nor is it a virtue. Fortunately, post-Parsonsian social theory has made it easier to rethink this heritage. One development, which I call "new differentiation theory," is particularly useful for resituating secularization.

New differentiation theory is an attempt to reevaluate and rethink processes of institutional differentiation that were central to Parsons's vision of the social system. The theoretical task is largely one of separating out what was unsustainable and problematic in Parsons's influential formulation of differentiation as "a paradigm of evolutionary change" (Parsons 1966:21). This evolving perspective can be characterized by four key elements: (1) the assumption of a master trend towards differentiation in all spheres is dropped (Alexander 1990; Tilly 1984:48); (2) the "functionalist fallacy" — by which we infer that extant institutions meet some legitimate societal need merely because they exist — is avoided (Alexander 1990:xiii; Coleman 1990:336); (3) the requirement for value integration is dropped, replaced by the idea that societal integration is achieved via institutional arrangements whereby functional spheres refrain from "producing insoluble problems" for other spheres (Dobbelaere 1985:383; Luhmann 1982, 1990); and (4) rather than identifying the ends of one or another societal sphere, say the state or the economy, with the ends of the society as a whole, new differentiation theory understands no single sector as necessarily primary in the sense of gathering within itself the essential goals of the entire society (Luhmann 1990).

This broad shift in perspective appropriately highlights the political, conflictual, and contingent nature of relations among societal institutions in general and between religion and other spheres in particular. Here, society is understood as "an interinstitutional system" rather than as a moral community (Friedland & Alford 1991:232). In such an interinstitutional system religion is understood primarily as another mundane institutional sphere or organizational sector; it can no longer claim any necessary functional primacy. The religious sphere may, in a given time and place, have its "domain of possibilities" circumscribed to some extent by the state or by science or by the market (Luhmann 1982:225). At other times and places, or in other ways at the same time and place, religion may circumscribe the domains of possibility for other spheres. There is no presumed master trend, no contentious notion that religion provides a moral integration that is assumed to be functionally necessary, and no a priori scaling of some institutions as more "primary" or "dominant" than others. Religion enjoys no theoretically privileged position, but neither does it

languish in a theoretically disprivileged position. It is one relativized sphere among other relativized spheres, whose elites jockey to increase or at least maintain their control over human actions, organizational resources, and other societal spheres.

At a stroke, a new world of sociological investigation opens up in which the subject is the multitudinous relations involving the religious sphere. Instead of that which integrates, religion represents one profane institutional sphere among others, with its own concerns and interests. Perhaps it is declining in power and influence, perhaps not. Unlike classical versions of the secularization hypothesis, in which other societal spheres (e.g., the state, science) are theorized to increasingly dominate social life at the expense of religion, new differentiation theory leaves this open to investigation. This theory opens the door to a new approach to secularization: one that situates religion and religious change in a concrete historical and institutional context. Secularization occurs, or not, as the result of social and political conflicts between those social actors who would enhance or maintain religion's social significance and those who would reduce it. Secularization, as Dobbelaere (1981) has pointed out, is carried by some social actors and resisted by others. The social significance of the religious sphere at a given time and place is the outcome of previous conflicts of this nature.[1] Understanding and explaining secularization thus requires attending to these conflicts.

New differentiation theory provides the context for what is to follow. Given differentiation, how is religion to be conceptualized so that its place in contemporary societies is adequately grasped and empirically accessible? I will suggest that, in a differentiated society, an adequate sociological approach to secularization requires redirecting attention away from the decline (or resurgence) of religion as such and towards the decreasing (or increasing) scope of religious authority.

SECULARIZATION AND RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY: PRECURSORS

I am not the first to offer a concept of religious authority, or to argue in some fashion that secularization refers to declining religious authority rather than to declining religion. Wilson (1976, 1979, 1982, 1985), for example, has long insisted that secularization refers to a process by which religion loses its social significance. His influential approach to secularization keeps the focus squarely on the process by which religion "ceases to be significant in the working of the social system" (1982:150), a process by which it "has lost its presidency over other institutions" (1985:15).

A primary motivation for developing this idea that secularization concerns religion's social significance seems to have been to downplay the otherwise uncomfortable fact that religion continues to maintain a hold on individual consciousnesses. As Wilson (1982) defines it, secularization "does not even suggest that most individuals have relinquished all their interest in religion, even though that may be the case" (150). Maintaining such a distinction between religion's influence and the mere existence of religious beliefs and sentiments among individuals represents an enduring contribution and will be fundamental to any valid notion of secularization.[2]

Such a distinction is fundamental because it is no longer possible to truthfully assert that "modernity" is incompatible with religious belief. The Weberian expectation that differentiation and its accompanying rationalization will disenchant the world in which individuals live has proven to be groundless, based on exaggerations of religion's hold on premodern consciousness, misapprehensions of the mechanisms (e.g., bureaucracy, science, distance from nature) by which modernity was thought to undermine religion, and blindness to evidence of religion's resilience. Rather than inevitably undermining religion, modernity seems quite unthreatening to, and perhaps even promotes, religious ideas, sentiments, and practices among individuals (Douglas 1982). Wilson's insistence that "it is the *system* that becomes secularized" (1985:19, emphasis in original) is an attempt to deal with this reality. From this perspective, all the important "action" concerning secularization is at the societal level.

However, Wilson's solution is only a partial one. Placing all that is important about secularization at the intersection of religious institutions and other societal institutions makes it more difficult than is necessary to conceptualize the ways in which secularization is and is not manifested at the individual level of analysis. Having developed a view that, appropriately, renders individual beliefs and sentiments irrelevant for secularization, a Wilsonian approach has difficulty bringing the individual back in (so to speak) in a consistent and theoretically relevant manner. Consequently, this approach has not fully exploited the potential of making religious authority the object of secularization at all levels of analysis.

Wilson himself has not been consistent in his emphasis on religious authority as secularization's object. He consistently maintains the focus on religious authority only when analyzing at the societal level, i.e., when describing the process of functional differentiation whereby societal spheres are liberated from religious control. When discussing individuals, religious authority recedes into the background and personal piety emerges into the foreground. On the one hand, Wilson insistently defines secularization as that which happens to societies and even emphasizes its lack of application to individual consciousness, yet on the other hand he often lists the signs of secularization in terms of individuals' concerns. Societies apparently are judged as secular or religious in part according to the extent to which individuals spend time being "preoccupied with the supernatural" and devoting "solemn attention and perhaps dedication" to superempirical ideas and beings (1982: 150f). This shift from religious authority at the societal level to personal piety at the individual level indicates that Wilson's prototypical emphasis on religious authority is not carried through; it does not sufficiently inform his analyses of secularization among individuals.[3]

More consistent is Lechner's (1991) assertion that "secularization theory . . . as a theory of societal change does not primarily address religious behavior of individuals at all" (1106). Here, however, all individual-level phenomena are rendered equally irrelevant when it comes to evaluating the validity of secularization hypotheses. To be fair, Lechner acknowledges in a footnote that "individual-level data *can* be used to evaluate secularization theory, but *only* if . . . these data are carefully linked to patterns in social action" (1991:1117,

emphasis in original). This is indeed a promising suggestion, but it is not one that Lechner pursues.

Dobbelaere (1988, 1989) presents a more refined notion of how to approach secularization at the individual level by arguing that what is sociologically relevant about individuals with respect to secularization is "the impact of religion on the micromotives of the citizens" (1989:38). Still, secularization for Dobbelaere (1988) remains fundamentally a societal-level process, driven by functional differentiation, to which religious organizations and individuals react.

Thus, these previous accounts share the position that secularization is about religious authority and as such they represent important precursors to the present argument. But they also share a reluctance to grant theoretical autonomy to organizational and individual-level secularization. Because of this they have not been as helpful as they might have been in clarifying how secularization can be studied at the organizational and individual levels. The approach I am developing here moves beyond this work by explicitly and relentlessly maintaining the focus on religious authority, and hence on religion's social significance, at all analytical levels, including the individual level. At each level of analysis, persistently focusing on religious authority makes it easier to discern the difference between phenomena that are theoretically relevant to a secularization hypothesis and phenomena that are not.

Secularization as the Declining Scope of Religious Authority

My suggestion is fairly radical. I advocate nothing less than abandoning religion as secularization's object, replacing it with religious authority. In this section of the article I present a concept of religious authority that develops a basic Weberian insight. Then, I draw heavily on the work of Dobbelaere to reconceptualize secularization as the declining scope of religious authority on three different dimensions. Third, I contrast this approach to what is, arguably, the primary alternative approach to secularization — Stark and Bainbridge's (1985) theory of secularization as a self-limiting process.

THE CONCEPT OF RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

It is well known that Weber ([1968] 1978) began his sociology of religion by notoriously refusing to define religion. Less famous, but significant here, is the fact that Weber did define religious organization, and he did so by reference to religious authority:

> A "hierocratic organization" is an organization which enforces its order through psychic coercion by distributing or denying religious benefits. . . A compulsory hierocratic organization will be called a "church" insofar as its administrative staff claims a monopoly of the legitimate use of hierocratic coercion. (54)

Clearly, Weber conceived religious organization by analogy with political organization. Indeed, the above passage comes immediately after Weber's famous definitions of political organization and the state, which also are defined by reference to the nature of the authority contained therein. Since "there is no conceivable end which *some* political association has not at some time pursued,"

political authority must be defined "only in terms of the *means* peculiar to it" (Weber [1968] 1978:55, emphases in original). For political authority, of course, the characteristic feature of those means is the actual or threatened use of force.

Weber extended that emphasis on means, rather than on ends, to religious authority. Just as the multiplicity of possible political purposes implies that political organization cannot adequately be defined by reference to ends, the multiplicity of possible religious ends led him to a similar conclusion. For both political and religious authority, the decisive distinguishing criterion has to do with the means used to gain compliance rather than with the ends pursued by elites within a structure. Just as political authority rests on the threatened use of physical coercion, religious authority rests, for Weber, on the threatened use of "psychic coercion." What follows builds on this basic Weberian insight: Adequately characterizing religious authority requires attending to the nature of that authority rather than to the nature of the ends pursued.

Weber's characterization of religious authority, however, needs modification, mainly because the direct analogy Weber drew with political authority cannot be sustained. Political authority relies at least in part on its potential to use actual physical violence. Authority that did not have this component would not be political authority. Some other types of authority, similarly, may be delineated by reference to the nature of the power that could be called upon. The authority of managers, for example, is authority backed by the threat of dismissal; the authority of teachers is backed by the threat of low grades; and so on. But there is no distinct type of reserve power that would delineate religious authority in a comparable fashion.

Weber's "psychic coercion" will not do. Unlike physical coercion or dismissal from a job, the efficacy of psychic coercion itself requires explanation. Once we say that political authority rests on the threat of physical violence, we need not say more by way of definition. That the ability to inflict physical violence could back claims to authority does not need further explanation, and it is perfectly intelligible to demarcate a type of authority structure on these grounds. But psychic coercion does not provide a satisfying basis for authority in the same way. To say that religious authority is authority that rests on its ability to coerce psychically is to beg other questions: Why does the psychic coercion work? What is its basis? The threat of psychic coercion does not fully characterize the nature of religious authority in the same way that the threat of physical coercion characterizes the nature of political authority.

Religious authority, therefore, cannot be adequately demarcated either by reference to the ends it pursues or by reference to the means it may or may not use to coerce compliance. It can, however, be characterized by the manner in which it legitimates its demands for compliance. Whatever ends it pursues and whatever actual power does or does not underlie it, religious authority can be distinguished by a particular kind of legitimation. Its defining characteristic is in its means of legitimation rather than in the means used to back authority in times of crisis.

Following this line of argument, then, I will define a religious authority structure as a social structure that attempts to enforce its order and reach its ends by controlling the access of individuals to some desired goods, where the

legitimation of that control includes some supernatural component, however weak.

Religious authority, like other forms of authority, has a staff capable of withholding access to something individuals want. When that withholding is legitimated by reference to the supernatural, authority is religious. It is worth pointing out that this concept sidesteps the old and sterile debate between functional and substantive definitions of religion because it partakes of both. It is functional in that it demarcates an object of study — structures of religious authority — by focusing on what those structures do: attempt to maintain themselves by using the supernatural to control access to something individuals want. This notion of religious authority structure shares with functional definitions in general the virtue that it prevents us from treating the culturally or historically specific content of some particular religion as if it were the defining characteristic of religion as such. It partakes of this virtue by placing no limit on *what* religious authority controls access to. At the same time, this concept avoids being all-inclusive and thereby empty by specifying a limit on how religious authority legitimates itself.

The distinguishing feature of religious authority is that its authority is legitimated by calling on some supernatural referent. The supernatural referent need not be activist in the sense that gods and spirits with personalities inhabit another, unseen, realm. An authority structure is religious as long as its claims on obedience are legitimated by some reference to the supernatural, even if the supernatural is impersonal and remote (cf. Stark & Bainbridge 1985). To say this another way, religious authority structures are distinguished by the fact that their claims are legitimated at least by a language of the supernatural. In contemporary U.S. society, that means that religious authority structures at least use "god-talk."[4]

The desired goods to which religious authority might control access will have different content from one religious authority structure to another. The substance in the definition is in the means that elites use to legitimate their control of access to valued goods, not in the nature of the goods themselves. The "goods" to which a religious authority structure controls access might be deliverance from sickness, meaninglessness, poverty, desire, sin, or other undesirable conditions. Or, religious authority might offer a positive good such as eternal life, nirvana, utopian community, perfect health, great wealth, or other valued states. The manner in which these goods are obtained might vary from membership in a certain community, to withdrawal from the world, to the profession of certain beliefs, to following a set of dietary laws or ritual obligations, and so on. The point here is that "religious goods" can be otherworldly or this-worldly, general or specific, psychic or material, collective or individual. Religious authority structures cannot be demarcated by reference to the content of the goods to which they control access because no good is inherently a religious good. Goods become religious goods by virtue of being embedded in a particular kind of social structure, a social structure that legitimates its control of those goods by reference to the supernatural.

Secularization as declining religious authority, then, will refer to the declining influence of social structures whose legitimation rests on reference to the supernatural.

SECULARIZATION AND RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY IN THREE DIMENSIONS

There is a fair degree of consensus that secularization, however else we think of it, must be multidimensional. The most well-developed and increasingly influential statement of secularization's multidimensionality is found in the work of Dobbelaere (1981, 1985, 1987). He identifies three dimensions of secularization, dimensions that I will label: laicization, internal secularization, and religious disinvolvement.[5]

Laicization refers to the process of differentiation whereby political, educational, scientific, and other institutions gain autonomy from the religious institutions of a society. The result of this process is that religion becomes just one institutional sphere among others, enjoying no necessary primary status. The second dimension, internal secularization, is the process by which religious organizations undergo internal development towards conformity with the secular world. Religious disinvolvement is Dobbelaere's third dimension of secularization and refers to the decline of religious beliefs and practices among individuals. These dimensions also may be understood as operating at three different levels of analysis. Laicization refers to a societal process; religious change to transformations at the level of the religious organization; and religious disinvolvement to shifts among individual persons.

These dimensions may be reconceptualized in terms of religious authority's declining scope. At each level it is possible to ask a similar question: what is the scope of control exercised by religious authority? Secularization at the societal level may be understood as the declining capacity of religious elites to exercise authority over other institutional spheres. Secularization at the organizational level may be understood as religious authority's declining control over the organizational resources within the religious sphere. And secularization at the individual level may be understood as the decrease in the extent to which individual actions are subject to religious control. The unifying theme is that secularization refers to declining religious authority at all three levels of analysis.[6]

CONTRAST WITH SECULARIZATION AS A SELF-LIMITING PROCESS

Stark and Bainbridge (1985) have influentially conceptualized secularization very differently, and it may be helpful to highlight the most salient ways in which the approach being developed here differs from theirs. Secularization, for Stark and Bainbridge, is driven by the fact that social inequality introduces variation in individuals' ability to secure rewards rather than settle for "compensators."[7] Those who are privileged, i.e., who have more rewards, require fewer compensators, fewer promises of future rewards in exchange for religious piety. Consequently, upward social mobility will push religious organizations in the direction of downplaying the supernatural elements in their theology and ritual. They will become more worldly, offering fewer compensators based on supernatural assumptions.

Becoming more worldly, however, means that religions diminish their appeal to individuals in two ways. First, less-privileged individuals, with fewer worldly rewards and therefore more desire for compensators, will not be

satisfied with these secularized religions and will seek out more otherworldly organizations. Second, certain rewards are inherently empirically unattainable (e.g., assurance of eternal life), which means they are only available via compensators. So, even large segments of the relatively privileged will favor supernatural vs. worldly religion, since only there do they find the compensators for what Stark and Bainbridge believe to be universal but unattainable human wishes.

Sects and cults, therefore, constantly arise to take up the religious slack produced by the older, secularized religions. As these new groups age, however, they also will secularize as their membership, via upward mobility, comes to include greater proportions of the relatively privileged. The cycle begins again. In this way, secularization is "a universal phenomenon always occurring in all religious economies." It is "a *self-limiting process* that generates countervailing responses elsewhere in religious economies" (Stark 1985:145, emphasis in original).

Stark and Bainbridge present this account as a theory of organizational change and the movement of individuals into and out of religious organizations as a result of that change. Leaving aside the issue of whether or not this is an adequate theory of those phenomena, I want to highlight the fact that their account essentially ignores the scope of religious authority.

Religious authority is ignored in two senses. First, laicization — change in religious authority's influence over other societal institutions — is ignored. The conceptual consequences of de-emphasizing laicization are most clearly seen when this cyclical model is generalized across time and space. Ignoring differences in laicization makes it appear more plausible than it is to posit a never-ending cycle of secularization and revival varying only in the theological peculiarities of the religions that happen to be waxing and waning at particular moments.

Stark, for example, has written that Mormonism "during the next century, may well become a new world faith," and that it "may be that rare phenomenon — a religious movement on its way to world significance" (Stark 1990:204, 217). More boldly, he also sees the same basic cyclical pattern even when looking back over vast expanses of time and space:

> Indeed, as I examine the sweep of history within my competence I find it best described by a model of alternating periods of secularization and revival — except once every few centuries when something really new does take place. . . From this viewpoint, the rise of Christianity was possible only because of the urgent failures of classical paganism and of the Judaism of the Diaspora to meet the needs of substantial segments of the religious market. (203)

On this view, where the vigor of established religion is at center stage and the relationship between religious authority and the rest of society is largely irrelevant, desecularization is essentially the same whether it is the rise of Christianity in the first century, the rise of the Baptists and the Methodists in the eighteenth century, or the rise of Mormonism in the twenty-first century. Secularization is an "age-old process," an "endless cycle" (Stark & Bainbridge 1985:529).

However, this ignores the fact that differences in the extent of laicization at a given time and place, especially differences in the relationship between religious authority and the state, greatly constrain the possibilities for religious authority and change entirely the significance of membership growth. Dobbelaere (1987), commenting on Stark and Bainbridge's attempt to compare the potential future of a contemporary new religion with first-century Christianity, put it this way:

> They should look, it seems to me, as far as Christianity is concerned, rather 300 years later, and see how it became a world religion supported by the polity. All major religions — Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, Judaism, and Shintoism — could impose themselves on the general population only with the help of rulers. Between then and now a major change took place: the process of functional differentiation. History is not a simple replication: the structures of societies have changed. (120)

Laicization thus presents a difficulty for a theory positing a self-limiting process of secularization-revival-secularization rolling across the millennia. It represents a shift in the scope of religious authority that decisively alters the significance of "revival" for enhanced religious authority at the societal level. If such shifts are important, it becomes exceedingly problematic to proceed as if relations among religions within a religious market are more significant for secularization than relations between a religion and other social institutions.[8]

A second sense in which Stark and Bainbridge ignore religious authority's scope is that they place undue emphasis on the emergence of new religious groups and on mere affiliation of individuals with those groups, thus downplaying the significance of religious authority's scope over the actions of affiliates.[9] In particular, they do not fully attend to the possibility that stable or even increased levels of affiliation to religious organizations may be perfectly compatible, even causally connected to, a decline in religious authority's scope over individuals.

Let me elucidate: I have not argued here against the validity of the Stark and Bainbridge theory as a theory about actions of individual religious "consumers" within a "religious market." I have merely argued that this is not an adequate account of secularization, understood as the declining scope of religious authority. If we believe that secularization concerns religious authority, and that such a phenomenon is worth investigating, then we are forced to conclude that the Stark/Bainbridge theory, however insightful it may be in other respects, is not particularly helpful as a theory about secularization understood in this way.

But this is really the heart of the matter: Why should secularization be understood as the decline of religious authority at three levels of analysis, rather than in some other way? Persuasively answering this question requires that I draw out more fully the theoretical promise of understanding secularization in this way.

Theoretical Promise of Secularization as Declining Religious Authority

Any conceptual innovation brings new features of the social world from the background into the foreground as some features are rendered theoretically irrelevant in favor of others that take on new significance. The test of such an innovation is whether or not focusing on the newly prominent features redirects empirical research in ways that promise greater understanding of the social world. Reformulating secularization as declining religious authority holds such promise: It prompts more fruitful theorizing about secularization both as an independent variable and as a dependent variable, making secularization more accessible both as *explanans* and as *explanandum*. Moreover, it does this by building bridges — or, more precisely, illuminating bridges that already exist but are underused — between the sociology of religion and other subdisciplines of sociology, a consequence that presumably is desirable, ceteris paribus.

SECULARIZATION AS *EXPLANANS*

Students of social movements have long been intrigued by the complex relationships between religion and social movements. Religion figured prominently in Hobsbawm's (1959) explorations of "primitive rebels." Smelser's (1962) classic work is replete with examples of religious movements. More recently, the prominent presence of religious organizations, leaders, or themes in major social movements (see, e.g., Beckford 1989; McAdam 1982; Morris 1984), as well as resurgent fundamentalisms, both in the U.S. and elsewhere (Marty & Appleby 1991), have alerted analysts of social movements to the fact that religion retains a certain political efficacy in a variety of circumstances. To date, however, there has been little systematic effort devoted to theorizing variation in the relationship between religion and social movements. Refocusing on religious authority rather than on religion offers a way to fill this gap.

I have the space only to sketch the insights prompted by focusing on religious authority, but hopefully the sketch will make clear the theoretical promise. The relation between religion and social movements, we might hypothesize, will vary depending on religious authority's scope in a given time and place. Figure 1 presents the possibilities in two dimensions: secularization at the societal level and secularization at the individual level.[10] Societies with low levels of societal-level secularization (i.e., a wide scope of religious authority at the societal level) are those in which institutions like education, science, and the state are rather directly influenced by religious authority, either because religious authority never has been historically differentiated from other spheres (as in some traditional societies) or because a differentiated religious authority has managed to exert (or reexert) control over other spheres (as in medieval Europe or contemporary Iran). Societies with high levels of societal secularization are those of the contemporary industrialized world, where religious authority exerts minimal and sporadic influence over the goings-on within the state, the economy, the arts, science, and so on.[11]

In societies with low levels of individual-level secularization, religious authority significantly regulates or influences individuals' actions. The extent of individual secularization will vary within societies as well as across societies.

FIGURE 1: Secularization in Two Dimensions: Social Settings

Individual-level secularization	Societal-level Secularization: High	Societal-level Secularization: Low
High	Most areas of contemporary industrial societies 1	Medieval Europe Colonial U.S. 2
Low	African American communities U.S. Protestant Fundamentalism 3	Some traditional societies Contemporary Iran 4

Within the contemporary U.S., for example, individual-level secularization has been considerably lower among blacks and continues to be lower among white Protestant fundamentalists than among other segments of the society. Individual-level secularization may also vary across geographical regions. Thus, the extent to which individual actions are subject to or respond to religious authority varies across communities. The U.S. is an example of a society in which rather uniformly high societal-level secularization coexists with substantial internal variation on individual-level secularization.

This is not simply a sterile classification game. The theoretical pay-off is that this two-dimensional space predicts something of considerable interest: the nature of the relationship between religion and social movements. Figure 2 contains the predicted relationships. In cell 1, where there is substantial societal and individual secularization, religion, to the extent that it is relevant at all, will serve as a cultural resource for social movements. That is, in such a setting a social movement may draw on religious symbolism and ideas in efforts to motivate and mobilize its constituency. It may draw on religion as a cultural resource because that is all it can expect from religion in a setting that is highly secularized on both of these dimensions. To say this another way, religious ideas and symbols may be salient in social movement rhetoric, but religious organizations and elites will not be significant players. This is how Beckford (1989, 1990), for example, understands the religious themes that occur in some "new social movements."

Demerath and Williams (1992) make a stronger claim about religion's potential for political influence in these highly secularized settings. They describe three conflicts — over a new homeless shelter, over neighborhood development, and over school-based health services — in which religion had a visible presence in the recent politics of Springfield, Massachusetts. In each case,

FIGURE 2: Secularization in Two Dimensions: Hypothesized Relationships between Religion and Social Movements

		Societal-level Secularization: High	Societal-level Secularization: Low
Individual-level secularization	High	Religion as cultural resource 1	Anticlerical movements 2
	Low	Religion as organizational base 3	Religio-political movements 4

religious activists succeeded in gaining public attention for their agenda; they became "players." On the basis of these cases they argue that where religion provides cultural resources to political actors, religion also can be authoritative in a new way. In settings where religious authority greatly influences neither other institutions nor individuals, religion still may express cultural authority or power.[12]

There are two reasons to be skeptical of this claim about a cultural authority for religion that is distinct from its institutional authority. First, Demerath and Williams's concept of cultural authority is rather vague. Cultural authority, for them, "is the capacity to use cultural resources to affect political outcomes." It "invokes such cultural resources as symbols, ideologies, moral appeals, and altered meanings [and it] includes the shifting soil of beliefs, values, meanings, and legitimacy." They argue that religious activists are able to draw on such cultural resources in attempting to redefine public issues in moral terms, thus enabling greater public voice for themselves. But the fact that religious symbols and images are invoked in political debate (i.e., are drawn upon as cultural resources) does not in and of itself imply that religion has cultural authority. Cultural authority, whatever it is, must denote something more than the mere capacity to inject certain symbols, ideologies, etc. into political discourse, something more than a willingness or ability to "convert management decisions into moral issues" (Demerath & Williams 1992:170, 284, 286).

Demonstrating that religious elites possess cultural authority requires a different kind of evidence than is offered by Demerath and Williams. I would argue that cultural authority entails the capacity to define, in a more or less binding fashion, social reality in certain settings. Doctors, for example, exercise cultural authority when they make "authoritative judgments of what constitutes illness or insanity, evaluate the fitness of persons for jobs, assess the disability

of the injured, pronounce death" (Starr 1982:14f). Accountants, to take another example, exercise cultural authority when they offer judgments about how to calculate depreciation, what counts as a legitimate deduction, and so on. The important aspect of these examples (which could be multiplied) is that the judgments rendered carry implications for other social actors.

By the same token, persuasively arguing that religion possesses cultural authority requires demonstrating that religious elites have their hands on certain levers within the cultural infrastructure. In some societies at some times, religious authority clearly exercises cultural authority in this way. At some times and in some places, religious authorities control the education of children; make binding judgments about university curricula; maintain a monopoly on literacy; settle disputes among individuals; and so on. Religion may continue to provide cultural resources to activists even in highly secularized settings, but it does not follow from this observation that religion maintains authority or that it is taking advantage of a distinctively cultural form of authority. Furthermore, instances of genuine cultural authority for religion are quite amenable to analysis in terms of religious authority's scope over other institutions, religious organizations, and individuals.[13]

Second, it is not at all clear that Demerath and Williams's cases of political influence for religious activists require introducing a notion of cultural authority in order to achieve adequate explanation or interpretation. On the contrary, there is a straightforward alternative explanation for these instances: These religious activists have (or are perceived to have) a constituency. I do not have the space to push this alternative interpretation through in each of the three cases described by Demerath and Williams. If correct, however, then these cases are perfectly intelligible via a more mundane form of explanation based on the capacity of activists to mobilize constituencies, with or without cultural authority.[14] So, Demerath and Williams have effectively shown that religious symbols will sometimes be used in mobilization attempts, but this in and of itself does not imply cultural authority. The case for religion's cultural authority in Springfield is not compelling, and neither is the case for a fourth, specifically cultural, dimension of secularization (Demerath & Williams 1992).[15]

Returning to Figure 2, the fourth cell contains settings in which secularization is low at both societal and individual levels. Here, we would predict the occurrence of full-fledged religious/political movements in which it is impossible to distinguish between religious action and political action. Traditional societies with undifferentiated religious and political/social authority would fit here. In this kind of setting, religious rebellion is political rebellion and vice versa. This kind of movement is where, for example, speaking in tongues is cause for police action and baptism is politically radical because it undermines the authority of local religious and social elites (see Fields 1985). We would also expect this kind of movement in theocratic settings such as contemporary Iran.

In cell 3 are settings where religious authority is narrow with respect to other societal spheres (i.e., high societal secularization) but wide with respect to individuals (i.e., low individual secularization), as in some African American communities, especially in rural areas, and among Protestant fundamentalists in this country. Here (unlike in cell 1) religious organizations and religious elites will be more significant players in social movements because they are able to

effectively mobilize certain individuals. Hence, black churches provided significant human and organizational resources in the civil rights movement (Morris 1984), and contemporary Protestant fundamentalism has been able to mount a significant political movement (Liebman & Wuthnow 1983). This situation also describes prerevolutionary Iran; hence the hugely significant role of Muslim elites and organizations in that revolution is not surprising. The key feature of the relationship between religion and social movement in settings like this is that religion will be able to serve as an organizational base for mobilizing a variety of human and material resources.

Finally, in cell 2, are settings where religious authority has significant influence over other societal institutions (i.e., low societal secularization) but minimal control or influence over individuals' actions. The classic case is that of the Roman Church in medieval Europe, which Turner (1991) describes as follows:

> If religion was "dominant," then it played an important role in the economic and political organizations of the land-owning class, but it cannot be suggested that the peasantry was significantly controlled by Christian belief and institutions. (153)

To give just one example, although the Lateran Council of 1215 made regular confession obligatory for laity, there "is certainly clear historical evidence that there was considerable lay opposition to the coercive nature of confession and priests experienced difficulties in bringing their flock to the confessional" (Turner 1991:152). Recent historical work on colonial America, most notably that of Butler (1990), suggests that this was another setting that would fit in cell 3.

In such settings — societally powerful religious authority with a weak hold on individuals — we would expect social movements that are explicitly anticlerical or anti-religious-authority. This is because the social/political authority of religious elites makes them likely targets for movements of discontent, and the absence of legitimate authority over individuals makes them more vulnerable targets. Hence, anticlerical movements like the Protestant Reformation and the democratic anticlerical movements of the seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century America (described by Hatch 1989) are, unsurprisingly, observed at such times and places.

All of this, of course, could be elaborated further, and the hypothesized connections between secularization and the relationship between religion and social movements should be subjected to more systematic empirical tests. In the present context, however, the point is this: A multidimensional focus on the scope of religious authority has transformed a notoriously vague pair of ideas (religion and secularization) into a relatively straightforward conceptual scheme, a scheme that appears likely to bear immediate theoretical fruit in at least this one area of sociological inquiry.

SECULARIZATION AS *EXPLANANDUM*

More traditionally, sociologists have been concerned with secularization as a dependent variable. Here, too, shifting the focus to religious authority suggests new ways to think about, investigate, and attempt to explain the varying scope

of religious authority across time and space. I have the space only to briefly indicate the productive directions at each analytical level.

Societies

Here, the key task is to describe and explain variations in religious authority's capacity to significantly influence the functioning of other institutional spheres. Previous approaches to this task (e.g., Wilson's and, to some extent, Dobbelaere's) have tended to see functional differentiation as identical to religion's capacity to influence other institutional spheres. Consequently, these approaches have tended to lump extensively differentiated societies together into a homogeneous "secularized" mass. The current approach, however, promotes research into the variable societal influence of religion even among societies with extensive functional differentiation.

Today, the most significant source of variation in this regard is the relative societal power of various religious fundamentalist movements. The Iranian Revolution provides the most obvious example of religious authority that has won control over other institutions in the society, and Beyer's (1993) analysis of that revolution, which highlights the role of religious authority, provides an instance of productive analysis and explanation of religious authority's changing societal scope.

Three features of Beyer's analysis bear emphasizing. First, he places the increased "public influence" of the Muslim religious authorities (i.e., the mullahs) at the center of attention, and attempts to explain how such an expanded scope of societal-level religious authority came to be. His dependent variable, in other words, is precisely variation in the scope of religious authority at the societal level.

Second, he provides a historically and sociologically grounded explanation of the successful revolution, highlighting (in addition to the usual variables of urban migration and exclusion of the masses from political participation) such variables as the prerevolutionary autonomy of *ulama* (religious scholars) from political authority, conflict between religious and secular authority over control of the courts and education, and the organizational network of Iran's mosques. Beyer's explanation of the "theocratic triumph" is thus an explanation of a successful social movement that expanded the scope of religious authority over other societal spheres. It is, of course, a matter for further research whether this analysis is of more general value in explaining success vs. failure of fundamentalist movements. Here, the point is that focusing on variations in the scope of religious authority promotes exactly this kind of grounded empirical work.

Third, Beyer's analysis incorporates secularization as an independent variable as well. That is, despite the stated goals of Khomeini and other leading clerics to establish total religious authority over all other spheres, the successful revolution almost immediately encountered pressures that continue to cause conflicts precisely around the issue of the appropriate scope of religious authority. The pressures are manifest as conflicts between religious authorities and other elites over issues such as the manner and degree of state intervention in the economy, or the proper relationship between parliament and the Council

of Guardians, a religious authority. To oversimplify, there seem to be structural limits to religious authority's capacity to impose itself in a society that participates at all in a global institutional environment that is highly secularized.

Thus, this analysis both identifies societal secularization as a key feature of the modern global system *and* offers an explanation for local variation in that secularization. Two questions require additional investigation: (1) What explains success or failure of fundamentalist movements? (2) What constraints does a wider, secularized environment place on even the most successful religious fundamentalist movements? The second question emerges directly from the focus on religious authority. While the first question does not require reconceptualizing secularization to either ask or answer it, it is nevertheless significant that this reformulated notion of secularization, by emphasizing organized conflicts among proponents and opponents of religious authority, so easily connects to the sociology of social movements.

Organizations

On the organizational level, the focus on religious authority's scope provides an intellectual handle for investigating what has been perhaps the most slippery of concepts within the secularization literature: internal secularization. The notion of internal secularization solved a theoretical problem for earlier versions of secularization theory: High levels of involvement in institutional religion were not as embarrassing to classical secularization theory if the institutions themselves could be rendered somehow less religious. But these early approaches to internal secularization (e.g., in Berger 1969 and Luckmann 1967) have been justifiably criticized. First, they relied on vague assertions about the "accommodation" or "adaptation" of religious organizations to the secular world; about the "lack of depth" underlying much religious activity; about the "replacement" of sacred values by secular values; about the "attenuated religious character of churches." But how, exactly, does one tell the difference between a sacred and a secular value? Between a religious and a secular activity? By what criteria are the current practices of religious organizations more secular than past practices? The early accounts of internal secularization sidestepped these questions by failing to specify exactly what would and would not count as internal secularization. Second, these early accounts did not recognize variation in internal transformations among religious organizations. They proceeded as if all U.S. religious institutions were equally subject to secularization pressures and all homogeneously followed the same developmental path towards internal secularization. This assumption prompted more hand-wringing than empirical investigation.

The focus on religious authority, however, suggests any number of concrete indicators of religious authority's scope within organizations. Dobbelaere (1988), for example, has examined internal secularization within Belgian Catholic schools using such variables as the number of liturgical services performed and the number of lay relative to religious professionals on teaching staffs. To take another example, I have elsewhere examined internal secularization within American Protestant denominations by examining the shifting career backgrounds of those who become denominational CEOs (Chaves 1993). The idea here is that selecting a leader reflects intraorganizational politics in denomina-

tions, just as in secular organizations (Fligstein 1987). Hence, a trend away from choosing denominational CEOs from within the religious authority structure (i.e., away from choosing bishops and active clergy and towards choosing professional administrators) indicates internal secularization. Focusing on religious authority inside religious organizations suggests indicators like these that promise to open new windows to internal secularization.

As important as providing new ways to describe religious authority's scope within organizations, however, is the fact that this approach opens new ways to explain variations in that scope. Most obviously, the entire body of developing organizational theory can be brought to bear. But there is another theoretical bridge whose relevance becomes clear when we remember that variations in religious authority's scope result from social and political conflicts between those who would extend religious authority and those who would limit it. Concretely, as Schoenherr (1987) has argued, this will mean emphasizing the position of religious elites, most prominently clergy. This focus on clergy, in turn, makes it possible to draw on sociological theory concerning competition and conflict among competing professional groups for control of organizations and other social resources.

Abbott's (1988) theory of professional systems may be particularly relevant here because of its explicit focus on jurisdictional battles among professionals. Theorists of internal secularization, who would be most interested in jurisdictional battles involving clergy, could put Abbott's variables to work in analyses of variation in the jurisdictional power of clergy within (and without) religious organizations. Several variables seem particularly promising: the extent to which professionals are able to hide from public view the assimilation of professional knowledge by others in the workplace; the prestige accorded the profession's academic knowledge (i.e., theology) as opposed to its practical knowledge (i.e., preaching, running a church, counseling, etc.); the extent of professional organization; the extent to which a profession is positioned to control the new work created by technological or organizational changes, and so on. For each of these variables, contemporary U.S. clergy would be coded in a way that would lead us to predict that they are increasingly disadvantaged in jurisdictional disputes with other professionals. But clergy in other times and places would have different characteristics. Far from a positing a "master trend," this framework provides a way to investigate historical and cross-sectional variation in the scope of religious authority. The dual point here is that the focus on religious authority renders internal secularization more empirically available, and it builds bridges over which sociological theories like Abbott's can travel en route to new explanations of observed variations in religious authority's scope.

Not incidentally, the concrete focus on religious authorities (i.e., clergy) as professionals competing for jurisdictional control over various activities has the potential to enable theoretical linkages between the organizational and the societal level. Abbott's "system of professions," after all, is a theory about societal power. The power of clergy within religious organizations will, of course, affect and be affected by their power in society. Some of the same variables that may help to explain waxing and waning religious authority inside religious organizations, then, may help to explain variations in religious authority's scope over other institutions and organizations as well.

Individuals

This approach apprehends microlevel social life in a way more consonant with the nature of individual identity in complex societies. Individuals in such societies, with very few exceptions, live their lives within a number of overlapping spheres, with some of their actions regulated by the authority of bosses at work, some by the demands of legal systems, some by family obligations, some by the rules of religions, etc. In such a society, the relevant individual-level questions for secularization are not questions about belief (how many people say they believe in God?) or mere organizational affiliation (how many people are members of religious organizations?). In such a society, the relevant questions about the scope of religious authority over individuals are questions about the extent to which actions are regulated by religious authority.

Thus, at the individual level, religious authority redirects attention away from religious ideas, sentiments, and affiliations and towards religious control/influence over actions of individuals. Hence, data about religious intermarriage, religious authority's attempted control over reproductive behavior, diets, voting, etc. are much more relevant to debates about secularization than are data about belief in God or church membership. Importantly, shifting our attention in this way gives a much different picture of the extent of individual-level secularization in the U.S.

Any investigation of individual-level secularization will be constrained by the availability of relevant trend data. While we might think of many indicators of religious authority's scope over individual action, trend data will be available for very few. Fortunately, religious intermarriage is one indicator for which such data are available. Even in the absence of religious proscription of intermarriage, this is a particularly good measure of religious authority's scope. Since strong religious authority will, by definition, affect some behaviors (e.g., diet, dress, weekend behavior), the more salient it is to individuals, the higher religious endogamy will be, if only because of a general tendency toward behavioral and cultural homogamy in marriage. Higher rates of religious intermarriage, therefore, bespeak weaker religious authority. To say this another way, if religious differences are increasingly irrelevant for marriage decisions, then religious authority's scope surely is narrowing.

Kalmijn (1991) has provided the most extensive analysis of intermarriage trends for Protestants and Catholics in the U.S. His "central finding" is that "intermarriage between people from Protestant and Catholic backgrounds increased dramatically between the 1920s and the 1980s" (797). At the same time educational homogamy has increased, indicating a general trend away from ascriptive and towards achieved statuses as most salient for marriage.

In the U.S., only Catholics are a large enough group to investigate the scope of a specific religious authority with survey data. The evidence clearly shows a substantially narrowing scope for Catholic religious authority over Catholic individuals. The percentage of Catholics who agreed that it is "certainly true that Jesus handed over leadership of his church to Peter and the popes" dropped from 70% in 1963 to 42% in 1973. By 1990, only 12% of U.S. Catholics accepted the Church's ban on artificial contraception (Christiano 1992). Research reviewed by Kalmijn (1991) finds largely nonexistent differences between Protestants and Catholics with respect to family-size preferences, marital

fertility, and birth control practices. As Christiano (1992) put it, there is "loyalty, but not obedience" (1535) among U.S. Catholics. To rephrase, there is religion, but there is little effective religious authority.

Thus, although mere religious activity (as indicated by belief in God, church membership, and church attendance) apparently has been quite stable in the twentieth-century U.S. (but see Hadaway, Marler & Chaves 1993), religious authority's capacity to regulate actions of individuals has indeed declined. It is this kind of important shift in descriptive understanding that results when secularization is seen as declining religious authority rather than as declining religion. Moreover, individual level secularization becomes more amenable to grounded sociological explanation, as in connecting declining religious endogamy to the increasing salience of education for marriage choice.

Conclusion

Secularization has been reformulated within the context of new differentiation theory. When the social fact of institutional differentiation is de-Parsonsified, and when religion is construed as one institutional sphere among others, the study of secularization becomes the study of a concrete, differentiated social structure. The notion of religious authority structure delineates the social structures of interest, and the study of secularization becomes the study of religious authority's variable scope on three dimensions. This reformulation yields a number of descriptive and theoretical pay-offs by making it possible to clearly conceptualize and use secularization as both independent and dependent variable in a variety of sociological analyses.

This argument has benefited from and builds upon a long tradition in which secularization has been approached in something close to this fashion (e.g., Bell 1980; Beyer 1990; Dobbelaere 1981; Fenn 1978; Lechner 1991; Luhmann 1984; Martin 1978; Tschannen 1991; Wilson 1985). The common concern of this literature is to rethink secularization in a way that recognizes the strong criticisms of recent decades while stepping back from the overstated versions of those critiques. I have tried to further this agenda by making the focus on religious authority, which has sometimes only been implicit in this previous work, fully explicit, by relentlessly insisting on that focus at all levels of analysis, and by showing why this focus is a promising one for the future study of secularization.

I would like to make two concluding points. The first was foreshadowed by the passage from Dobbelaere at the top of this article: The emphasis on religious authority brings the sociology of religion closer to other sociological subdisciplines. Political sociologists, for example, do not attempt to study power directly. They study concrete social structures in which power operates. Sociologists of stratification, to take another example, do not study inequality directly. They study the concrete institutions and processes that produce and maintain inequality. Sociologists of science, to take yet another example, do not study knowledge directly. They study the concrete institutions and social processes within which knowledge is produced.

Within these subdisciplines, inquiry about individuals' beliefs and percep-

tions about power, political discontent, inequality, truth, etc. forms only a small part of the research agenda. This is because it has long been understood that the sociological problem is not what is or is not in the heads or practices of isolated individuals; it is in the ways in which ideas and practices become mobilized and institutionalized in concrete social structures. In the study of social movements, for example, the replacement of "strain theory" (Smelser 1962) by various versions of resource mobilization theory (McAdam 1982; McCarthy & Zald 1977) illustrates this emphasis on social structure rather than on individual discontent.

I am attempting a similar shift in emphasis by advocating religious authority as the object of secularization rather than religion itself. Religion as the content of individual consciousness is like strain theory's diffuse discontent. When studying social movements, a fascinating and primary question is how and why diffuse discontent occasionally is mobilized into movements and organizations. Analogous questions may be asked of religion. The religious beliefs, sentiments, etc. in the minds of individuals are socially efficacious only when they become mobilized and institutionalized as structures of authority. Secularization as the declining power of these religious authority structures represents secularization as a truly sociological phenomenon.

Let me be clear here that this argument to replace religion with religious authority applies only with respect to secularization. I do not wish to limit the entire sociology of religion to the study of religious authority. My point is not that investigations of religious culture, religious markets, religious meanings, etc. are inherently unsociological. My point is merely that they have nothing to do with secularization.[16]

The second concluding point is that, as the examples in the previous section indicate, there is very little reason to believe that explaining the variable scope of religious authority across and within societies will require a separate and distinct body of secularization theory. If religious authority is one among several authority structures in contemporary societies, then what is needed is general theory explaining why this authority structure at this time and place seems to be dominant while that one at that time and place seems dominant. Explanations of resurgent (and sometimes successful) fundamentalist movements, for example, would be subsumed under theories of social movements and political revolutions. Explanations of new religious authority structures based on new configurations of religious ideas, sentiments, and practices, will be subsumed under more general theories of cultural innovation and its institutionalization. Explanations about variable degrees of religious authority within religious organizations — internal secularization — will be subsumed under general theories of organizational change.

As I argued above, since the relevant actors within religious authority structures are the religious professionals who people those structures, and since a focus on the scope of religious authority means, concretely, a focus on the reach of these individuals within a society, theories of variations in this reach may be subsumed under more general theories of professionalization. Abbott's (1988) theory of professional systems may be particularly relevant in that its explicit focus is on the jurisdictional battles among professionals. Variation in the scope of religious authority may very well turn out to be best understood as

a special case of variation in professional jurisdiction over actions, work, and organizational resources.[17]

Thus, reformulating secularization as a concept that enhances our ability to grasp the variable place of religious authority in contemporary societies may very well spell the end of secularization theory, but not in the way imagined by previous critics.

Notes

1. Fenn (1978) also develops this point, paying particular attention to ways in which "civil religion" is a contested construction rather than a unifying cultural center.

2. Daniel Bell (1980:331f) also has insisted upon this important distinction.

3. Martin's (1978) general theory of secularization is similarly limited. Although Martin has, better than anyone else to date, identified key factors affecting cross-national variation in religious participation, his theory remains largely a theory about individual piety rather than a theory about variation in religious authority's scope.

4. God-talk itself, however, is not enough to constitute a religious authority structure. The motto on our currency, "In God We Trust," or the phrase, "one nation under God," in the Pledge of Allegiance do not automatically make the U.S. government a religious authority structure. Religious authority is demarcated by the use of such language to legitimate controlled access to something individuals want. Fenn (1982) has explored more deeply the difference between religious language that is truly legitimating and religious language that is subordinate to some other authority. His intriguing analysis of religious language in contemporary U.S. courts of law shows that the mere presence of religious language in oaths and testimony does not bespeak the recognition of religious authority by those same courts. In those settings, religious authority clearly is subordinate to legal authority. Similar analyses of religious language in political settings would surely yield similar conclusions.

5. Dobbelaere's labels are laicization, religious change, and religious involvement. I find the "religious change" label for the middle dimension too vague. After all, religious change occurs in one way or another on all three levels. I change the valence on the third dimension to match that of the other two dimensions.

6. As Dobbelaere (1989) put it, secularization is about religion's impact "on the rules governing the different institutional domains. . . on the micromotives of the citizens. . . [and] on the enactment and application of laws, on court decisions, and on the preservation of traditional mores" (38).

7. A "compensator" is "the belief that a reward will be obtained in the distant future or in some other context which cannot be immediately verified" (Stark & Bainbridge 1985:6).

8. Mann's (1986, chap. 10) explanation of the rise of Christianity is in the same spirit as Dobbelaere's criticism in that it analyzes Christianity's rise largely in terms of its organizational relations to the Roman state rather than in terms of its place in a religious market.

9. Lechner also makes this point (1991:1111).

10. Compare Fenn (1978:67).

11. An additional complexity is that a given society might be very secularized with respect to one sphere (e.g., science) while at the same time quite unsecularized with respect to another institutional sphere (e.g., education).

12. Demerath and Williams use the phrase cultural "power." I will use cultural "authority" to enhance terminological consistency with the rest of this article.

13. Hunter and Hawdon's (1991:40) approach is more congruent with the approach I am advocating here. They define cultural authority as "the power to create and maintain a definition of public reality," and they then set out to evaluate trends in the capacity of religious elites to exercise such authority.

14. It is significant here that "[n]one of the episodes involved conventional churches, synagogues, or other religious organizations as major protagonists" (Demerath & Williams

1992:265). Instead, the relevant social actors were what Wuthnow (1988) has called "religious special purpose groups." Where religious authority's claim on individuals is very weak, religious activists will be constrained from using their congregations as an organizational base, and so (like other activists) they will form social movement organizations. Furthermore, it is not at all surprising that clergy, who have great autonomy with respect to how to spend their time, will be overrepresented among activists. No recourse to cultural authority for religion or for clergy is necessary to account for these facts.

15. To the extent that Demerath and Williams's cases represent true use of religious authority to mobilize constituencies, they are most straightforwardly characterized by cell 3 in Figure 2 (see below), rather than as anomalous cases from cell 1 that therefore require special explanation.

16. Relatedly, I might quibble with Warner's (1993) "new paradigm" for the sociology of religion: It is not an antisecularization paradigm. Warner's "religious market" paradigm, which emphasizes a vibrant and adaptable religious pluralism and highlights the ways in which religion has empowered various constituencies, does not in the slightest clash with secularization, so long as secularization is properly understood as having to do only with the scope of religious authority. Within the "new paradigm," then, secularization's spotlight is of smaller diameter but its light is brighter and it still illuminates social phenomena of considerable sociological importance.

17. For more macro- or more long-term shifts in authority structures, Mann's (1986) theory of the sources of social power may prove useful.

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