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Public Religions in the Modern World

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Pre-text: Religion in the 1980s

Religion in the 1980s "went public" in a dual sense. It entered the "public sphere" and gained, thereby, "publicity." Various "publics"—the mass media, social scientists, professional politicians, and the "public at large"—suddenly began to pay attention to religion. The unexpected public interest derived from the fact that religion, leaving its assigned place in the private sphere, had thrust itself into the public arena of moral and political contestation. Above all, four seemingly unrelated yet almost simultaneously unfolding developments gave religion the kind of global publicity which forced a reassessment of its place and role in the modern world. These four developments were the Islamic revolution in Iran; the rise of the Solidarity movement in Poland; the role of Catholicism in the Sandinista revolution and in other political conflicts throughout Latin America; and the public reemergence of Protestant fundamentalism as a force in American politics.

During the entire decade of the 1980s it was hard to find any serious political conflict anywhere in the world that did not show behind it the not-so-hidden hand of religion. In the Middle East, all the religions and fundamentalisms of the region—Jewish, Christian, and Muslim—fed by old power struggles, were meeting each other in civil and uncivil wars. Old feuds between the various world religions and between branches of the same religions were flaring up again from Northern Ireland to Yugoslavia, from India to the Soviet Union. Simultaneously, religious activists and churches were becoming deeply involved in struggles for liberation, justice, and democracy throughout the world. Liberation theologies were spreading beyond Latin America, acquiring new forms and names, African and Asian, Protestant and Jewish, black and feminist. With the collapse of socialism, liberation theology seemed the only "International" that was left.

The decade, which began in 1979 with the Iranian and Nicaraguan revolutions, the visit of the Polish pope to Poland, and the establishment of the "Moral Majority," ended as dramatically and as ambiguously as it had begun, with the Salman Rushdie "affair," the death of Ayatollah

Khomeini, the final triumph of Solidarity reverberating throughout Eastern Europe, and Gorbachev's visit to the pope. It was symbolically fitting that even the Romanian Revolution was sparked by a Hungarian Reformed pastor. No less telling was the fact that in El Salvador the decade which had opened with the assassination of Archbishop Romero closed with the murder of yet six more Jesuits by state terror.

Throughout the decade religion showed its Janus face, as the carrier not only of exclusive, particularist, and primordial identities but also of inclusive, universalist, and transcending ones. The religious revival signaled simultaneously the rise of fundamentalism and of its role in the resistance of the oppressed and the rise of the "powerless." Ali Shariati, the intellectual father of the Islamic revolution, in translating Franz Fanon's *Les Damnés de la Terre,* chose the resonant Koranic term *mostaz'afin* (the disinherited). The term "the disinherited of the earth" was to occupy a central place in the rhetoric of the Islamic revolution.[1] Gustavo Gutiérrez, the father of liberation theology, effected a similar transvaluation from secular back to religious categories when he turned the proletariat into the biblical *los pobres.* "The eruption of the poor in history" became one of the central categories of Gutiérrez's eschatological theology.[2] A similar term, "the power of the powerless," was coined by Vaclav Havel, the father of the "velvet" revolution.[3] It all looked like modernization in reverse, from rational collective action back to primitive rebellion.

It is unlikely that these are mere historical coincidences. They can be seen rather as examples of biblical prophetic politics linking the Middle East, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. The transvaluation of values which, according to Nietzsche, biblical slave morality had introduced into the dynamics of classical aristocratic civilization was apparently still at work. The archetypal dream of a liberating Exodus from enslavement had not yet lost its utopian, eschatological force.[4]

I have selectively left out of my account of religion in the 1980s many other religious phenomena which also gained wide publicity throughout the decade and certainly had public and political significance, but which were not in themselves varieties of what I call "public" religion. I have in mind such phenomena as "New Age" spirituality; the growth of cults and the ensuing controversies surrounding them; televangelism with all its peccadillos; the collective suicide of the residents of the People's Temple in Jonestown; the spread of evangelical Protestantism in Latin America; the rapid growth of Islam in the United States; the seriousness with which so many people in modern secular societies—including Nancy Reagan while at the White House—took astrology; the fact that Manuel Noriega may have practiced voodoo; or the fact that most people everywhere continued to practice, or not to practice, religion in the 1980s in the same way they had in the 1970s.

Those were significant religious phenomena, and any comprehensive history of religion in the 1980s would have to include them. It is likely that quantitative surveys would select precisely those phenomena as being the typical, normal, and relevant ones. Nevertheless, one could still argue that they were not particularly relevant either for the social sciences or for the self-understanding of modernity, at least insofar as they do not present major problems of interpretation. They fit within expectations and can be interpreted within the framework of established theories of secularization. As bizarre and as new as they may be, they can nonetheless be taken for granted as typical or normal phenomena in the modern world. They can be classified as instances of "private" or of what Thomas Luckmann called "invisible" religion. Such religious phenomena per se do not challenge either the dominant structures or the dominant paradigms.

What was new and unexpected in the 1980s was not the emergence of "new religious movements," "religious experimentation" and "new religious consciousness"—all phenomena which caught the imagination of social scientists and the public in the 1960s and 1970s[5]—but rather the revitalization and the assumption of public roles by precisely those religious traditions which both theories of secularization and cyclical theories of religious revival had assumed were becoming ever more marginal and irrelevant in the modern world. Indeed, as Mary Douglas has rightly pointed out, "No one credited the traditional religions with enough vitality to inspire large-scale political revolt."[6]

The central thesis of the present study is that we are witnessing the "deprivatization" of religion in the modern world. By deprivatization I mean the fact that religious traditions throughout the world are refusing to accept the marginal and privatized role which theories of modernity as well as theories of secularization had reserved for them. Social movements have appeared which either are religious in nature or are challenging in the name of religion the legitimacy and autonomy of the primary secular spheres, the state and the market economy. Similarly, religious institutions and organizations refuse to restrict themselves to the pastoral care of individual souls and continue to raise questions about the interconnections of private and public morality and to challenge the claims of the subsystems, particularly states and markets, to be exempt from extraneous normative considerations. One of the results of this ongoing contestation is a dual, interrelated process of repoliticization of the private religious and moral spheres and renormativization of the public economic and political spheres. This is what I call, for lack of a better term, the "deprivatization" of religion.

I do not mean to imply that the deprivatization of religion is something altogether new. Most religious traditions have resisted all along the process of secularization as well as the privatization and marginalization which tend to accompany this process. If at the end they accepted the process and accommodated themselves to the differentiated structures of the modern world, they often did so only grudgingly. What was new and became "news" in the 1980s was the widespread and simultaneous character of the refusal to be restricted to the private sphere of religious traditions as different as Judaism and Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism, Hinduism and Buddhism, in all "three worlds of development."

The inelegant neologism "deprivatization" has a dual purpose, polemical and descriptive. It is meant, first, to call into question those theories of secularization which have tended not only to assume but also to prescribe the privatization of religion in the modern world. Yet, while I agree with many of the criticisms that have been raised lately against the dominant theories of secularization, I do not share the view that secularization was, or is, a myth. The core of the theory of secularization, the thesis of the differentiation and emancipation of the secular spheres from religious institutions and norms, remains valid. But the term "deprivatization" is also meant to signify the emergence of new historical developments which, at least qualitatively, amount to a certain reversal of what appeared to be secular trends. Religions throughout the world are entering the public sphere and the arena of political contestation not only to defend their traditional turf, as they have done in the past, but also to participate in the very struggles to define and set the modern boundaries between the private and public spheres, between system and life-world, between legality and morality, between individual and society, between family, civil society, and state, between nations, states, civilizations, and the world system.

Basically, one can draw two lessons from religion in the 1980s. The first is that religions are here to stay, thus putting to rest one of the cherished dreams of the Enlightenment. The second and more important lesson is that religions are likely to continue playing important public roles in the ongoing construction of the modern world. This second lesson in particular compels us to rethink systematically the relationship of religion and modernity and, more important, the possible roles religions may play in the public sphere of modern societies. In this respect, the story of religion in the 1980s serves literally only as a *pre-text* for the book.

The Text: The Structure of the Book

The book itself is a study, both theoretical and empirical, of public religions in the modern world. The first two chapters address this task theoretically, trying to answer a question which, at least implicitly, would seem to be a contradiction in terms for theories of secularization as well as for most theories of modernity, namely, what are the conditions of possibility for modern public religions?

Chapter 1, "Secularization, Enlightenment, and Modern Religion," offers a critical review of the concept and the theory of secularization, embedded in a historical account of the development of Western modernity. It argues that the deprivatization of religion forces us to rethink and reformulate, but not necessarily to abandon uncritically, existing theories of secularization. The analysis shows that what passes for a single theory of secularization is actually made up of three different propositions: secularization as religious decline, secularization as differentiation, and secularization as privatization. It stresses the need to differentiate analytically and to evaluate differently the three main premises of the classical paradigm. The assumption that religion will tend to disappear with progressive modernization, a notion which has proven patently false as a general empirical proposition, is traced genealogically back to the Enlightenment critique of religion. The analysis affirms that the thesis of the differentiation of the religious and secular spheres is the still defensible core of the theory of secularization. But it holds the related proposition that modern differentiation *necessarily* entails the marginalization and privatization of religion, or its logical counterpart that public religions *necessarily* endanger the differentiated structures of modernity, to be no longer defensible.

What we need are better theories of the intermeshing of public and private spheres. In particular, we need to rethink the issue of the changing boundaries between differentiated spheres and the possible structural roles religion may have within those differentiated spheres as well as the role it may have in challenging the boundaries themselves. Chapter 2, "Private and Public Religions," begins to address some of these issues. It does not try to develop either a general theory or a comprehensive and exhaustive typology of public religions. It is a partly theoretical, partly typological exercise which draws on two different traditions, the comparative sociology of religions and theories of the public sphere and civil society, in order to examine those forms of modern public religion which may be both viable and desirable from a modern normative perspective. By "viable," I mean those forms of public religion which are not intrinsically incompatible with differentiated modern structures. By

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"desirable," I mean those forms of public religion which may actually contribute to strengthening the public sphere of modern civil societies.

The core of the book, chapters 3 through 7, offers empirical studies of what could be called varieties of public religion in the modern world. It presents five cases of transformation of contemporary religion, chosen from two religious traditions—Catholicism and Protestantism—in four different countries: Spain, Poland, Brazil, and the United States. Each of the case studies tells a different and independent story of transformation. In the case of Spanish Catholicism, the problem at hand is the change from an established authoritarian state church to the disestablished church of a pluralist civil society. In the case of Poland, the analysis traces the more subtle change from a disestablished church that protects the nation against foreign rule to a national church that promotes the emergence of civil society against a Polish authoritarian state. The chapter on Brazilian Catholicism analyzes the radical transformation of the Brazilian church from a state-oriented oligarchic and elitist institution to a civil society–oriented populist one. Moving on to the United States, chapter 6 analyzes the transformation of Evangelical Protestantism in America from its public hegemonic status as a civil religion during the nineteenth century to its sectarian withdrawal into a fundamentalist subculture in the late 1920s to its public reemergence and mobilization in the 1980s. The last case study analyzes the transformation of American Catholicism from an insecure sect to a defensive private denomination to an assertive public one.

Since the criteria for choosing these particular case studies may not be self-evident, let me offer a rationale for the choice. From a hermeneutic point of view each story is intrinsically justifiable. Moreover, each of the five stories not only is interesting in itself but also serves to illustrate empirical instances of various types of public religion. Therefore, I have tried as much as possible to let the different stories speak for themselves without forcing an external analytical framework upon them. Placing all of them together, however, in a comparative-historical framework within a single sociological study brings out some asymmetries.

First, the comparison involves one Protestant and four Catholic cases. Such an asymmetry could be problematic if one were setting out to compare Catholicism and Protestantism as "private" religions of individual salvation. Viewed as salvation religions, Spanish, Polish, Brazilian, and American Catholicism are, despite some striking differences, fundamentally alike. In terms of religious beliefs and practices, the international differences within transnational Catholicism probably are not greater than those which may exist between the various sectors of the Catholic population within each country. In any case, the four Catholic churches share the same basic doctrines, rituals, and ecclesiastical structure. As "public" religions, however, the various national Catholic churches have exhibited historically clear and fundamental differences. Indeed, the comparison of Spanish, Polish, Brazilian, and American Catholicism seems to indicate that, at least since the emergence of the modern state, the public character of any religion is primarily determined by the particular structural location of that religion between state and society. Therefore, in studying possible varieties of public religion, a comparative group made up of four Catholic and one Protestant religions may be justified fully if it is instrumental in helping to develop an internally consistent typology of public religions.

Furthermore, the overconcentration on Catholicism can also be justified on theoretical grounds. Catholicism served as the central focus of the Enlightenment critique of religion. It offered for centuries the most spirited, principled, fundamentalist, and apparently futile resistance to modern processes of secularization and modernization in all spheres. It fought capitalism, liberalism, the modern secular state, the democratic revolutions, socialism, the sexual revolution. In brief, it has been the paradigmatic form of antimodern public religion. In the mid-1960s, however, the Catholic church inaugurated a tortuous process of official *aggiornamento* to secular modernity and accepted the legitimacy of the modern age. Yet it refuses to become a private religion. It wants to be both modern and public. Indeed, since the Second Universal Council (Vatican II) it has kept a highly public profile throughout the world.[7]

A second obvious asymmetry results from the fact that the group under consideration appears to be composed of three integral units and two fractions of a much larger unit, that is, by three national churches with quasi-monopolistic control over the religious market in their respective countries and two structurally very different denominations within a single, free, and highly pluralistic religious market. Again, the apparent imbalance may actually be theoretically helpful. Since freedom of religion and pluralism may be assumed to be structural conditions of modernity, the inclusion of two different denominations, U.S. Catholicism and Protestant fundamentalism, which illustrate different structural locations as well as different types of public religion within the same free and pluralistic religious system, may turn out to be an advantage in a comparative study which sets out to examine the conditions of possibility for public religions in the modern world.

Finally, either from the temporal-developmental perspective of modernization theory or from the spatial-developmental perspective of world system theory, questions could be raised about a study which includes countries at such different stages of modernization—that is, secularization—and which occupy such hierarchically asymmetrical positions within the world system. But the inclusion from the (no longer extant) "three worlds" of development, or from the three world-systemic spaces—center, semiperiphery, and periphery—also turns out to be an advantage. If the study is able to show that public religions exist or have reemerged recently in all worlds of development, it will serve to support the assertion that the deprivatization of religion is indeed a global phenomenon.[8]

The final chapter, "The Deprivatization of Modern Religion," recapitulates the main theoretical arguments developed in the first two chapters, now substantiated by the historical evidence presented in the five case studies, draws out some comparisons and general conclusions from those studies, and reformulates more systematically the thesis of deprivatization, placing it in a more general and global perspective.

I acknowledge, however, a real imbalance. The present study is clearly a Western-centered study, both in terms of the particular cases chosen for investigation and in terms of the normative perspective guiding the investigation. Certainly, it would have been highly desirable to include the Iranian revolution as an additional case study. After all, the public resurgence of Islam has been one of the main developments thrusting religion back into public view. Studies of the deprivatization of Judaism in Israel, or of the deprivatization of Hinduism in India, or of the deprivatization of Buddhism in Burma would have been equally appropriate and desirable. Of course, such an immense task would have required a modification and expansion of my typology of public religions, of the theory of religious and political differentiation, and of the general analytical framework employed in this study. While difficult, such a task would not have been impossible.

Unfortunately, I have to plead limited time, knowledge, and resources, as well as a postmodern enhanced awareness of the dangers of excessive homogenization. I do not think, however, that non-Western cultures are "the other." All human languages are translatable, and all discourses are ultimately comprehensible. The room for misunderstanding and misinterpretation is certainly much greater in intercultural communications, but not necessarily different in principle from the dangers inherent in everyday communication, where we also frequently fail to get each other's messages. Moreover, anybody can be converted to any "faith." After all, it is the enduring revelation which humanity owes to *all* the universalistic salvation religions that any human person—irrespective of gender, race, class, clan, caste, tribe, ethnos, etc.—may be "born again" into a new "self." We are all—we have become whether we like it or not—citizens of one single human civil society. It is up to all of us either to find or to make the rules which will govern our unavoidable communicative discourse.

1

Secularization, Enlightenment, and Modern Religion

Who still believes in the *myth* of secularization? Recent debates within the sociology of religion would indicate this to be the appropriate question with which to start any current discussion of the theory of secularization. There are still a few "old believers," such as Bryan Wilson and Karel Dobbelaere, who insist, rightly, that the theory of secularization still has much explanatory value in attempting to account for modern historical processes.[1] But the majority of sociologists of religion will not listen, for they have abandoned the paradigm with the same uncritical haste with which they previously embraced it. Indeed, some are mocking the rationalists, who made so many false prophecies about the future of religion, in the same way the philosophes before them mocked religious visionaries and obscurantist priests. Armed with "scientific" evidence, sociologists of religion now feel confident to predict bright futures for religion. The reversal is astounding when one thinks that only some twenty years ago practically nobody was ready to listen when, in the first "secularization debate," the first voices were raised by David Martin and Andrew Greeley questioning the concept and the empirical evidence, or lack thereof, behind the theory of secularization. But how could anybody listen attentively then, when even the theologians were proclaiming the death of God and celebrating the coming of the secular city?[2]

How can one explain this reversal? How could there have been so much myth before and so much light now? It is true that much empirical counterevidence has been accumulated against the theory since the 1960s, but similar counterevidence had existed all along and yet the evidence remained unseen or was explained away as irrelevant. The answer has to be that it is not reality itself which has changed, as much as our perception of it, and that we must be witnessing a typical Kuhnian revolution in scientific paradigms. Some may object to the use of the word "scientific" in this particular context. But there can be no doubt that we are dealing with a radical change in intellectual climate and in the background worldviews which normally sustain much of our social-scientific consensus.

At the entrance to the field of secularization, there should always hang the sign "proceed at your own risk." Well aware of the traps, let me nonetheless proceed in the hope of introducing some analytical distinctions which, should they prove useful, may convince some of the unbelievers to take a second look before discarding a theory, some aspects of which may be not only salvable but necessary if we are to make sense of some important aspects of our past, of our present, and, I would say, even more, of our global future. Let me begin by introducing a distinction between the concept and the theory of secularization. Then I shall make a further distinction between three different moments of the theory which *must* be kept clearly apart.[3]

Secularization as a Concept

The distinction between the concept "secular," or its derivation "secularization," and the sociological theory of secularization proper is important because the concept itself is so multidimensional, so ironically reversible in its contradictory connotations, and so loaded with the wide range of meanings it has accumulated through its history. Perhaps it would even be reasonable to abandon the concept, were it not for the fact that to do so would pose even greater problems for sociology.[4] The concept's very range of meanings and contradictions makes it practically nonoperational for the dominant modes of empirical scientific analysis.[5] Consequently, ahistorical positivist sociology has to reduce it to clear and testable hypotheses, easily verifiable through longitudinal surveys which try to count the heads, hearts, and minds of religious people. But to drop the concept altogether would lead to even greater conceptual impoverishment, for in such a case one would also lose the memory of the complex history accumulated within the concept, and we would be left without appropriate categories to chart and to understand this history. A sociology of religion self-engrossed in the present of American secular society could perhaps afford to eliminate the concept, but comparative-historical sociology cannot do so.[6]

Let me recall only three historical moments of the concept to illustrate the way in which they are enmeshed with real historical processes of secularization. Looking at the concept's etymology, we learn that the medieval Latin word *saeculum* had three undifferentiated semantic connotations. The equivalent nouns in the Romance languages (*secolo, siglo, siècle*) have preserved those three meanings. The entry *siglo* in Cassell's Spanish dictionary reads "century; age; world." Yet, in the contemporary secular "age" and in the contemporary secular "world," only the first of the three connotations, "century," has preserved its usage in everyday life, since the differentiation of time and space into two different realities, a sacred one and a profane one, became truly meaningless long ago, even in Catholic Spain.

A related but different semantic moment comes from Canon Law, where secularization refers to what could be called a "legal action" with real legal consequences for the individual. Secularization refers to the legal (canonical) process whereby a "religious" person left the cloister to return to the "world" and its temptations, becoming thereby a "secular" person. Canonically, priests could be both "religious" and "secular." Those priests who had decided to withdraw from the world (*saeculum*) to dedicate themselves to a life of perfection formed the religious clergy. Those priests who lived in the world formed the secular clergy. When Max Weber designates as secularization the process whereby the concept of "calling" moves or is relocated from the religious to the secular sphere to signify, now for the first time, the exercise of secular activities in the world, he is using as analogy the canonical meaning of the concept.

Finally, in reference to an actual historical process, the term "secularization" was first used to signify the massive expropriation and appropriation, usually by the state, of monasteries, landholdings, and the mortmain wealth of the church after the Protestant Reformation and the ensuing religious wars. Since then, secularization has come to designate the "passage," transfer, or relocation of persons, things, functions, meanings, and so forth, from their traditional location in the religious sphere to the secular spheres. Thus, it has become customary to designate as secularization the appropriation, whether forcible or by default, by secular institutions of functions that traditionally had been in the hands of ecclesiastical institutions.[7]

These historically sedimented semantic moments of the term "secularization" only make sense if we accept the fact that, "once upon a time," much of reality in medieval Europe was actually structured through a system of classification which divided "this world" into two heterogeneous realms or spheres, "the religious" and "the secular." The separation between the two realms in this particular, and historically rather unusual, variant of the sacred-profane division was certainly not as heterogeneously absolute as Durkheim always thought it was. There was ample ambiguity, flexibility, permeability, and often outright confusion between the boundaries, military orders being a case in point. What is important to realize is that the dualism was institutionalized throughout society so that the social realm itself was dualistically structured.[8]

The existence of "two swords," the spiritual and the temporal, both of them claiming to possess their own autonomous source of charisma—a kind of institutionalized dual sovereignty—necessarily had to be the source of much tension and open conflict, as well as of attempts to put an end to the dualism by subsuming one of the spheres under the other. The repeated "investiture" conflicts were the manifest expression of this ever-present tension. The theocratic claims of the church and spiritual rulers to possess primacy over the temporal rulers and, thus, ultimate supremacy and the right to rule over temporal affairs as well, were met with the caesaropapist claims of kings to embody sacred sovereignty by divine right and by the attempts of temporal rulers to incorporate the spiritual sphere into their temporal patrimony and vassalage.

A similar dualist structure, with the same room and propensity for intellectual tension and conflict, became institutionalized in the emerging medieval universities, where faith and reason became separate but parallel epistemological foundations, supposedly leading to the one single Truth: God. Here also the absolutist claims of theology set in motion the counterclaims first of self-assertive rational philosophy, which rejected its ancillary relationship to theology, and then of early modern science, which asserted its claims that the Book of Nature should rank along with the Book of Revelation as separate but equal epistemological ways to God.

This structured division of "this world" into two separate spheres, "the religious" and "the secular," has to be distinguished and kept separate from another division: that between "this world" and "the other world." To a large extent, it is the failure to keep these two distinctions separate that is the source of misunderstandings in discussions of secularization. One may say that, properly speaking, there were not two "worlds" but actually three. Spatially, there was "the other world" (heaven) and "this world" (earth). But "this world" was itself divided into the religious world (the church) and the secular world proper (*saeculum*). Temporally, we find the same tripartite division between the eternal age of God and the temporal-historical age, which is itself divided into the sacred-spiritual time of salvation, represented by the church's calendar, and the secular age proper (*saeculum*). Ecclesiologically, this tripartite division was expressed in the distinction between the eschatological "Invisible Church" (the *Communio Sanctorum*), the "Visible Church" (the *Una, Sancta, Catholica, Apostolica* Roman church), and secular societies. Politically, there was the transcendental City of God (Heavenly Kingdom), its sacramental representation here on earth by the Church (the Papal Kingdom), and the City of Man proper (the Holy Roman Empire and all Christian Kingdoms). In modern secular categories, we would say that there was natural reality and supernatural reality. But the supernatural realm itself was divided between nonempirical supernatural reality proper and its symbolic, sacramental representation in empirical reality.

We may say, therefore, that premodern Western European Christendom was structured through a double dualist system of classification. There was, on the one hand, the dualism between "this world" and "the other world." There was, on the other hand, the dualism within "this world" between a "religious" and a "secular" sphere. Both dualisms were mediated, moreover, by the "sacramental" nature of the church, situated in the middle, simultaneously belonging to the two worlds, and, therefore, able to mediate sacramentally between the two. Such a system of classification, of course, rested solely on the claims of the church and was able to structure reality accordingly only as long as people took those claims for granted. Indeed, only the acceptance, for whatever reasons, of the claim of superiority of the religious realm over the secular realm could have maintained within bounds the conflicts inherent in such a dualist system.

Secularization as a concept refers to the actual historical process whereby this dualist system within "this world" and the sacramental structures of mediation between this world and the other world progressively break down until the entire medieval system of classification disappears, to be replaced by new systems of spatial structuration of the spheres. Max Weber's expressive image of the breaking of the monastery walls remains perhaps the best graphic expression of this radical spatial restructuration. The wall separating the religious and the secular realms within "this world" breaks down. The separation between "this world" and "the other world," for the time being at least, remains. But from now on, there will be only one single "this world," the secular one, within which religion will have to find its own place. If before, it was the religious realm which appeared to be the all-encompassing reality within which the secular realm found its proper place, now the secular sphere will be the all-encompassing reality, to which the religious sphere will have to adapt. To study what new systems of classification and differentiation emerge within this one secular world and what new place religion will have, if any, within the new differentiated system is precisely the analytical task of the theory of secularization.

So far, our analysis of religion has been solely spatial-structural, in terms of the location of religion within the system of classification that served to structure the social reality of medieval Christendom. Nothing has been said about the individuals living in this social space, about their religious beliefs, their religious practices, their religious experiences, that is, about the private dimensions of individual religiosity. We may speak with some confidence about two of the public dimensions of individual religiosity. Membership in the church was practically one hundred percent. With some exceptions, such as among the Jews and some Muslims who were permitted to live in their special enclaves within Christendom, membership in the church was compulsory and, therefore, in itself tells us little about individual religiosity. Everybody was a Christian. Even dissent and heresy, which encountered the same inhuman treatment they suffer in modern authoritarian states, were expressed regularly as a reformation of Christendom or as a sectarian return to the purity of origin, not as its rejection.[9] Concerning the so-called religious factor or consequential dimension of religion—that is, the extent to which behavior in the secular realm was influenced by religion—we may also say that since life in the *saeculum* itself was regulated, at least officially, according to supposedly Christian principles, by definition Christians within Christendom led Christian lives.

Naturally, like every society, Christendom had its share of offenders. In fact, the official doctrine was that everybody was a sinner. There were the venial sinners, the capital sinners, those who lived in permanent sin, and those who lived beyond the pale and were excommunicated. There was, to be sure, differentiation and tension between Canon Law, Roman Law, and Common or Germanic Law. But the differentiation between religious sin, moral offense, and legal crime was not yet clear. In any case, about the statistical distribution of the various categories of sinners, or about the extension and intensity of their religious beliefs, practices, and experiences, we have scant reliable or generalizable data. Even when historians are able to determine with relative certainty the proportion of priests and religious persons within society, this statistic in itself tells us little about their actual religiosity. We have sufficient information about widespread corruption in the papal court, about rampant hedonism in the monasteries, and about simoniacal priests. If the religious virtuosi led such lives, there is no reason to believe that ordinary Christians led more virtuous lives. Indeed, precisely because the official Christian structure of society guaranteed that everybody was leading Christian lives, it was not so necessary to stress personal devotion. It was the structure itself that was religious, that is, Christian, not necessarily the personal lives that people lived within it. Within this structure, there was much room for fusion as well as fission between Christian and pagan, official and popular forms of religiosity. It is from the records of the conflicts between orthodoxy and heresy and the tensions between official and popular religion that ethnologists and social historians are extracting new revisionist perspectives on medieval and early modern religion.[10]

Assuming that the ideal-typical characterization presented so far, as oversimplified as it may be, is nevertheless a fair one, we may say with certainty that the assumption that premodern Europeans were more religious than modern ones reveals itself precisely as that, as an assumption in need of confirmation.[11] Those versions of the theory of secularization which begin precisely with such an unfounded assumption and conceive the process of secularization as the progressive decline of religious beliefs and practices in the modern world are indeed reproducing a myth that sees history as the progressive evolution of humanity from superstition to reason, from belief to unbelief, from religion to science. This mythical account of the process of secularization is indeed in need of "desacralization." But this does not mean that we ought to abandon altogether the theory of secularization. What the sociology of religion needs to do is to substitute for the mythical account of a universal process of secularization comparative sociological analyses of historical processes of secularization, if and when they take place.

The Theory of Secularization

Any discussion of the theory of secularization, particularly any attempt to trace its genealogy and its history once it was incorporated into the social sciences, especially into sociology, where the theory eventually found its home, has to begin with the statement of a striking paradox. The theory of secularization may be the only theory which was able to attain a truly paradigmatic status within the modern social sciences. In one form or another, with the possible exception of Alexis de Tocqueville, Vilfredo Pareto, and William James, the thesis of secularization was shared by all the founding fathers: from Karl Marx to John Stuart Mill, from Auguste Comte to Herbert Spencer, from E. B. Tylor to James Frazer, from Ferdinand Toennies to Georg Simmel, from Émile Durkheim to Max Weber, from Wilhelm Wundt to Sigmund Freud, from Lester Ward to William G. Sumner, from Robert Park to George H. Mead.[12] Indeed, the consensus was such that not only did the theory remain uncontested but apparently it was not even necessary to test it, since everybody took it for granted. This means that although the theory or, rather, the thesis of secularization often served as the unstated premise of many of the founding fathers' theories, it itself was never either rigorously examined or even formulated explicitly and systematically.

The foundations for the more systematic formulations of the theory of secularization are to be found in the work of Émile Durkheim and Max Weber. By freeing themselves from the positivist and the Enlightenment critiques of religion—even though Durkheim remained an avowed positivist and Weber always saw himself as a disenchanted product of the Enlightenment, duty bound to carry out without illusions and to its outer limits the task of scientific enlightenment—they established the foundations for the social-scientific study of religion.[13] By separating the question of the truth of religion from that of its symbolic structure and social function, Durkheim's sociology served as the foundation for later structural-functionalist analysis in anthropology as well as in sociology. Weber, on his part, by abandoning the obsession of reducing religion to its essence and concentrating on the task of studying its most diverse meanings as well as its social-historical conditions and effects, established the foundations for a comparative, historical, and phenomenological sociology of religion.

For Durkheim as well as for Weber, it may be said that the sociology of religion stands at the center of their sociological work; that the theory of differentiation, though markedly different in both cases, forms the core of their sociological theories; and that the thesis of secularization forms the core of their theories of differentiation, serving both as the premise and as the end result of processes of differentiation.[14] Strictly speaking, the theory of secularization is nothing more than a subtheory of general theories of differentiation, either of the evolutionary and universal kind proposed by Durkheim or of the more historically specific kind of Western modernization theory developed by Weber. Indeed, the theory of secularization is so intrinsically interwoven with all the theories of the modern world and with the self-understanding of modernity that one cannot simply discard the theory of secularization without putting into question the entire web, including much of the self-understanding of the social sciences.[15]

Even Durkheim and Weber, however, while laying the foundation for later theories of secularization, themselves offer scant empirical analysis of modern processes of secularization, particularly of the way in which those processes affect the place, nature, and role of religion in the modern world. Even after freeing themselves from some of the rationalist and positivist prejudices about religion, they still share the major intellectual assumptions of the age about the future of religion. Their prognoses may be different, but their diagnoses of the present share the view that the old historical religions cannot survive the onslaught of the modern world. Both take for granted that, in Durkheim's words, "the old gods are growing old or already dead"[16] and that, in any case, they will not be able to compete either with the new gods, which Durkheim believed modern societies would create for themselves, or with the modern polytheism of values and its unceasing and irreconcilable struggle which, according to Weber, has resulted from the process of differentiation of the various secular spheres as they press to realize their own "internal and lawful autonomy." The old churches, for Weber, remain only as a refuge for those "who cannot bear the fate of the times like a man" and are willing to make the inevitable "intellectual sacrifice."[17]

Notwithstanding the widespread consensus within sociology over the secularization thesis, it was not until the 1960s that one finds attempts to develop more systematic and empirically grounded formulations of the theory of secularization. It was then that the first flaws in the theory became noticeable and the first critics were heard.[18] For the first time it became possible to separate the theory of secularization from its ideological origins in the Enlightenment critique of religion and to distinguish the theory of secularization, as a theory of the modern autonomous differentiation of the secular and the religious spheres, from the thesis that the end result of the process of modern differentiation would be the progressive erosion, decline, and eventual disappearance of religion. The new functionalist theory of secularization, formulated most systematically in Thomas Luckmann's *The Invisible Religion,* did not postulate the inevitable decline of religion in modern societies, only the loss by religion of its traditional societal and public functions, and the privatization and marginalization of religion within its own differentiated sphere. Since many of the "new" religions and religious movements of the 1960s and 1970s could be interpreted as instances of Luckmann's "invisible religion," few people used them as evidence against the theory of secularization. Only in the 1980s, after the sudden eruption of religion into the public sphere, did it become obvious that differentiation and the loss of societal functions do not necessarily entail "privatization."

In any case, the old theory of secularization can no longer be maintained. There are only two options left: either, as seems the present inclination of most sociologists of religion, to discard the theory altogether once it is revealed to be an unscientific, mythological account of the modern world, or to revise the theory in such a way that it can answer both its critics and the questions which reality itself has posed.

Three Separate Moments of the Theory of Secularization

The main fallacy in the theory of secularization, a fallacy reproduced by apologists and critics alike that has made the theory nearly unserviceable for social-scientific purposes, is the confusion of historical processes of secularization proper with the alleged and anticipated consequences which those processes were supposed to have upon religion. As already mentioned, the core and the central thesis of the theory of secularization is the conceptualization of the process of societal modernization[19] as a process of functional differentiation and emancipation of the secular spheres—primarily the state, the economy, and science—from the religious sphere and the concomitant differentiation and specialization of religion within its own newly found religious sphere. To this central thesis, which may be called the differentiation thesis, two other subtheses have often been attached which allegedly explain what will happen to religion as a result of this process of secularization. One subthesis, the decline-of-religion thesis, postulated that the process of secularization would bring in its wake the progressive shrinkage and decline of religion until, some extreme versions added, it eventually disappeared. The other subthesis, the privatization thesis, postulated that the process of secularization would bring in its wake the privatization and, some added, the marginalization of religion in the modern world. Only if we separate these three theses analytically can we fully make sense of the complexity of modern historical reality.

The Differentiation and Secularization of Society

To view modern historical transformations from the perspective of secularization means, to a large extent, to view reality from the perspective of religion, since the secular, as a concept, only makes sense in relation to its counterpart, the religious. The advantage of such a perspective derives from its ability to show the radical extent to which Western societies have changed precisely in this respect. The medieval dichotomous classification of reality into religious and secular realms was to a large extent dictated by the church. In this sense, the official perspective from which medieval societies saw themselves was a religious one. If the main category of thought was that dividing the religious from the secular, then everything within the *saeculum* remained an undifferentiated whole as long as it was viewed from the outside, from the perspective of the religious. Only the end of this dichotomous way of thinking permitted the secular realm to establish new perspectives from which it could view itself differentiatedly.[20] The fall of the religious walls opened up a whole new space for processes of internal differentiation of the various secular spheres. Now, for the first time, the various secular spheres could come fully into their own, become differentiated from each other, and follow what Weber called their "internal and lawful autonomy." Weber's theory of differentiation, as developed in his masterpiece "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions," is a theory of secularization precisely because it views this differentiation from the perspective of the radical clash of each of the spheres, as they follow their "internal and lawful autonomy," with the charismatic religious ethic of brotherliness or with the organic social ethics of the church.[21]

The analysis of the same process of differentiation from the perspective of the differentiation of each of the spheres not from religion but from one another would necessarily look different. Such a perspective would show that, in the particular case of the transition to modernity, some of the secular spheres, particularly the emerging modern absolutist state and the emerging capitalist economy, were more lawful and more autonomous than the others. It would probably show as well that it was their differentiation from one another, their mutual dependence and their clashes, that more than anything else dictated the dynamics of the whole process.[22] Actually, these two secular spheres, states and markets, now tended to dictate the very principles of classification which served to structure the new modern system. In spatial-structural terms we may say that if reality before was structured around one main axis, now a multiaxial space was created with two main axes structuring the whole. In the language of functionalist systems theory, each subsystem became the environment for the others but two subsystems became the primary environment for all. In the new spatial structure, therefore, the religious sphere became just another sphere, structured around its own autonomous internal axis but falling under the gravitational force of the two main axes. Irrespective of which perspective we choose, however, it will show that the religious sphere now became a less central and spatially diminished sphere within the new secular system. Moreover, from the new hegemonic perspective of modern differentiation one may add that, now for the first time, the religious sphere came fully into its own, specializing in "its own religious" function and either dropping or losing many other "nonreligious" functions it had accumulated and could no longer meet efficiently.[23] The theory of secularization does not need to enter into the controversial search for the first cause which set the modern process of differentiation into motion. From its particular perspective, it may be sufficient to stress the role which four related and simultaneously unfolding developments played in undermining the medieval religious system of classification: the Protestant Reformation; the formation of modern states; the growth of modern capitalism; and the early modern scientific revolution. Each of the four developments contributed its own dynamic to modern processes of secularization, that is, each of them was one of the carriers of the process of secularization. The four of them together were certainly more than sufficient to carry the process through.[24]

The role of the Protestant Reformation can be analyzed at three different levels. At the very least, most observers will agree that the Protestant Reformation played a destructive role. By undermining the very claims to unity, sanctity, catholicity, and apostolicity of *the* church, which from now on will require the qualifiers Roman Catholic to distinguish it from other competing Christian churches, it destroyed the system of Western Christendom and thus opened up the possibility for the emergence of something new.[25] By destroying the old organic system, it helped to liberate, perhaps unwittingly, the secular spheres from religious control.[26] At a higher level, Protestantism may be viewed not only as the corrosive solvent which made room for the new but also as the religious superstructure of the new order, as the religion of bourgeois modernity, as a religious ideology which, at a time when ideological and class struggles were still fought in religious garb, served to legitimate the rise of bourgeois man and of the new entrepreneurial classes, the rise of the modern sovereign state against the universal Christian monarchy, and the triumph of the new science against Catholic scholasticism.[27] There is finally the view that Protestantism, particularly what Weber calls "ascetic Protestantism," not only helped to offer religious legitimation to processes already under way but itself through the introduction of new religious principles and new secular ethics served to impel and shape these processes in a particular direction. Protestantism would be from such a perspective not only a secularizing force but a form of religious internal secularization, the vehicle through which religious contents would take institutionalized secular form, thereby erasing altogether the religious/secular divide.[28]

If the universalist claims of the church as a salvation organization were undermined by the religious pluralism introduced by the Reformation, its monopolist compulsory character was undermined by the rise of a modern secular state which progressively was able to concentrate and monopolize the means of violence and coercion within its territory. In the early absolutist phase the alliance of throne and altar became even more accentuated or, properly speaking, it came actually into its own. New secular *raison d'état* principles of legitimation were mixed with old sacro-magical ones, and absolutist rulers claimed divine right along with thaumaturgic powers.[29] The churches attempted to reproduce the model of Christendom at the national level, but all the territorial national churches, Anglican as well as Lutheran, Catholic as well as Orthodox, fell under the caesaropapist control of the absolutist state. The political costs of enforcing conformity became too high once religious nonconformism turned into political dissent. The principle *cuius regio eius religio* soon turned into the principle of religious tolerance and state neutrality toward privatized religion, the liberal state's preferred form of religion. Officially, church establishment may have lasted much longer, in some cases until today, but in the process the established churches have only become weaker and no longer able to emancipate themselves from the state. Of all religions, the "established" churches of secular states, caught as they are between a secular state which no longer needs them and people who prefer to go elsewhere if and when they want to satisfy their individual religious needs, are the least able to weather the winds of secularization.[30]

Before it became a self-reproducing system governed by impersonal laws, capitalism, that revolutionizing force in history which "melts all that is solid into air and profanes all that is holy,"[31] had already sprouted within the womb of the old Christian society in the medieval towns. The church's attempt to regulate the new economic relations in accordance with traditional Christian principles was bound to fail. No amount of economic casuistry could hide the distance between just price theory and capitalist profit or the irreconcilable conflict between the new capitalist relations and the traditional "moral economies," that is, the communitarian brotherly ethics or the organic social ethics. Nor could the church's ever more desperate official condemnations of usury stem the growth of financial and merchant capitalism, a growth to which the church's own avid search for larger revenues contributed in no small part. No other sphere of the *saeculum* would prove more secular and more unsusceptible to moral regulation than the capitalist market. No other media of exchange and social interaction would prove as impersonal and as generalizable as "money." Nowhere is the transvaluation of values which takes place from medieval to Puritan Christianity as radical and as evident as in the change of attitude toward "charity"—that most Christian of virtues—and toward poverty. The evangelical injunction "blessed be the poor," which had led to the elevation of begging into a religious "profession" by the mendicant orders, turned into the condemnation of almsgiving and the view of poverty as a divine punishment for sin. Following Weber, one could distinguish three phases and meanings of capitalist secularization: in the Puritan phase, "asceticism was carried out of monastic cells into everyday life" and secular economic activities acquired the meaning and compulsion of a religious calling; in the utilitarian phase, as the religious roots dried out, the irrational compulsion turned into "sober economic virtue" and "utilitarian worldliness"; finally, once capitalism "rests on mechanical foundations," it no longer needs religious or moral support and begins to penetrate and colonize the religious sphere itself, subjecting it to the logic of commodification.[32]

The tension between faith and reason was intrinsic to medieval intellectual life. It was the great achievement of medieval scholasticism, particularly of the Aristotelian-Thomist synthesis, to have institutionalized the tension into an all-encompassing metaphysical system. Late medieval nominalism introduced such cracks into the system that it became necessary to search for new foundations, for new certainties and certitudes in the sphere of faith as well as in that of reason. Hence the similarities and parallelisms between the early modern revolutions in scientific, philosophical, and theological thought.[33] Only now could the three become clearly differentiated as they embarked on their separate modern journeys. It is well known that the conflict between the church and the new science, symbolized by the trial of Galileo, was not about the substantive truth or falsity of the new Copernican theories of the universe as much as it was about the validity of the claims of the new science to have discovered a new autonomous method of obtaining and verifying truth. The conflict was not, strictly speaking, one between the contents of religion and a particular scientific paradigm, but one between the church and the new method's claim to differentiated autonomy. Thus, the attempts of all the pioneers—Galileo, Kepler, and Newton—to enthrone the Book of Nature as a legitimate, separate but equal, epistemological way to God, along with the Book of Revelation.[34]

The attempt was successful in Puritan England but failed in Lutheran and, miserably so, in Catholic countries. The Puritans would become pioneers in the differentiated institutionalization of the modern scientific enterprise.[35] The Newtonian Enlightenment established a new synthesis between faith and reason, which in Anglo-Saxon countries was to last until the Darwinian crisis of the second half of the nineteenth century. As the Newtonian Enlightenment crossed the Channel, however, it became patently radicalized and militantly antireligious.[36] Science was transformed into a scientific and scientistic worldview which claimed to have replaced religion the way a new scientific paradigm replaces an outmoded one. The process of secularization now found new historical carriers, the various militant secularist movements, ready to do battle with ignorance and religious superstition wherever they found it. Some of those, such as the British secularist movements, turned out to be rather innocuous and petered out, in part because society itself became largely secular.[37] Others emerged in unexpected places, like the adoption in the second half of the nineteenth century by many Latin American states of "positivism" (Comtian or Spencerian) as official state ideology.[38] Others, however, turned nefarious, and not only for religion, as they gained state power. Parallel to its plans of forced industrialization from above and its war on the peasantry, the Soviet state undertook campaigns of forced secularization from above and its war on religion. The only official place left for religion in the Communist state would be the museums of atheism, where the antireligious tirades of the philosophes became enshrined in a petit bourgeois philosophy of history documenting the "ascent of man" from religious superstition to the zenith of scientific enlightenment, Marxism-Leninism in its Stalinist version.[39]

If one views secularization as a modern historical process and accepts the view that, above all, these four simultaneous developments—the Protestant Reformation, the rise of the modern state, the rise of modern capitalism, and the rise of modern science—set in motion the dynamics of the process by undermining the medieval system and themselves became at the same time the carriers of the processes of differentiation, of which secularization is one aspect, then it follows that one should expect different historical patterns of secularization. As each of these carriers developed different dynamics in different places and at different times, the patterns and the outcomes of the historical processes of secularization should vary accordingly. Intuitively, even a superficial knowledge of the various histories tells one that this is the case, yet it is striking how few comparative historical studies of secularization there are.[40]

If Protestantism, for reasons much more complex than the ones adduced here, is itself one of the carriers of secularization, then one should expect to find different patterns of secularization in Protestant and Catholic countries.[41] If the modern state in its own right is also a carrier of processes of secularization, then one should expect that different patterns of state formation, let us say in France, England, and the United States, should also have some effect on different patterns of secularization. If science and even more so scientific worldviews are also autonomous carriers of processes of secularization, then one should expect that the different character of the Enlightenment in the Continent, England, and the United States, as well as the presence or absence of a militant critique of religion, would in itself also be an important factor affecting patterns of secularization. Only when it comes to capitalism has it been nearly universally recognized that economic development affects the "rates of secularization." This positive insight, however, turns into a blinder when it is made into the sole main variable accounting for different rates of secularization. As a result, those cases in which no positive correlation is found, as expected, between rates of secularization and rates of industrialization, urbanization, proletarianization, and education, in short, with indicators of economic development, are termed "exceptions" which deviate from the "norm."[42]

Only if secularization is conceived as a universal teleological process whose eventual final outcome one already knows, is it understandable that social scientists may not be particularly interested in studying the different paths different societies may take getting there. Moreover, if, as it has been proclaimed so often, the outcome is going to be "the death of god," then it has to be possible to find simple measurable and generalizable indicators to determine how far along in the process the various societies are. Only the conviction that religion was going to disappear may explain the fact that the overwhelming evidence showing that different modern societies evince significantly different patterns of secularization could have been ignored or found irrelevant for so long.

The Decline of Religion Thesis

The assumption, often stated but mostly unstated, that religion in the modern world was declining and would likely continue to decline until its eventual disappearance was so widespread and dominant among social scientists that only in the 1960s do we find the first theories of "modern" religion, namely, theories that ask themselves which specifically modern forms religion may take in the modern world. By "modern" I mean religions that are not only traditional survivals or residues from a premodern past but rather specifically products of modernity.[43] But what empirical evidence is or was there for the assumption that religion is likely to decline in the modern world? Since, unlike those who believe that this assumption is only a myth, I believe that there is some empirical evidence behind the assumption, let us first examine the evidence, before looking at the mythical components of the assumption.

One should begin with some caveats. First, from a global perspective, sufficient empirical evidence is not available and that which does exist is very uneven and not conducive to comparison. But the evidence available may be sufficient and adequate if one only wants to make some empirically informed statements which could serve as the point of departure for further discussion. Second, one should keep in mind the well-known difficulties, apparently inherent in the field of religion, when it comes to evaluating the existing evidence. There is no consensus, perhaps there will never be, as to what counts as religion. Furthermore, even when there is agreement on the object of study, there is likely to be disagreement on what it is that one ought to be counting, that is to say, on which of the dimensions of religiosity (membership affiliation, beliefs, ritual and nonritual practices, experiences, doctrinal knowledge, and their behavioral and ethical effects) one should measure and how various dimensions should be ranked and compared. Finally, one should be very careful when applying to non-Western religions categories and measures derived from the study of Western religion.[44]

Nevertheless, on the basis of the tentative evidence gathered in Frank Whaling's (ed.) *Religion in Today's World,*[45] one can begin with the following factual statements:

—From a global perspective, since World War II most religious traditions in most parts of the world have either experienced some growth or maintained their vitality. This has been the case despite the fact that throughout the world since World War II, there have been rapid increases in industrialization, urbanization, education, and so forth.

—The main exceptions to this apparently global trend are the rapid decline of primal religions, the sudden and dramatic decline of religion in communist countries following the establishment of communist states, and the continuous decline of religion throughout much of Western Europe (and, one could add, some of its colonial outposts such as Argentina, Uruguay, and New Zealand).

How should one evaluate this tentative evidence? We may safely disregard the evidence concerning the decline of primal religions, since it appears that people leave them often "under duress" and mostly for other religions (Muslim, Christian, etc.).[46] We may also disregard the evidence concerning the decline of religion in communist countries, since it is a clear case of state-imposed decline, which appears to reverse itself dramatically the moment state coercion either disappears or lessens. The contemporary religious revival in China and the dramatic revival of religion along with nationalism in the former communist countries of Eastern Europe seem to confirm the reversibility of the process.[47]

What remains, therefore, as significant and overwhelming evidence is the progressive and apparently still continuing decline of religion in Western Europe. It is this evidence which has always served as the empirical basis for most theories of secularization, and one should not discard it lightly. Indeed, Western European societies are among the most modern, differentiated, industrialized, and educated societies in the world. Were it not for the fact that religion shows no uniform sign of decline in Japan or the United States, two equally modern societies, one could still perhaps maintain the "modernizing" developmentalist assumption that it is only a matter of time before the more "backward" societies catch up with the more "modern" ones. But such an assumption is no longer tenable. Leaving aside the evidence from Japan, a case which should be crucial, however, for any attempt to develop a "general" theory of secularization, we are left with the need to explain the obviously contrasting religious trends in Western Europe (meaning here all countries and regions of Europe which were part of Western Christendom, i.e., Catholic and Protestant Europe) and the United States.[48]

At least since the beginning of the nineteenth century, European visitors have been struck by the vitality of American religion and by the fact that Americans seem to be such a religious people when compared with Europeans. This impression was shared by Beaumont and Tocqueville, as well as by Thomas Hamilton, in the 1830s. Marx uses this evidence in his essay "On the Jewish Question" against Bruno Bauer to argue that since America is both the example of "perfect disestablishment" and "the land of religiosity par excellence," it follows that Bauer's proposal of political emancipation of the state from religion cannot be the solution to full human emancipation.[49] The same argument could be used to demonstrate that industrialization, urbanization, scientific education, and so forth does not necessarily bring religious decline.

We have, moreover, not only anecdotal evidence from European visitors. Historians have begun to show that the story of religion in America from 1700 to the present is one of ascension rather than declension, of growth rather than decline.[50] Longitudinal survey research also shows that there has been no discernible decline of religion in America in this century.[51] Since the evidence of decline in European religion, however, appears to be equally overwhelming, how do we explain these contrasting trends?[52]

Until very recently, most of the comparative observations as well as attempts at explanation came from the European side. Looking at those explanations, what is most striking at the outset is the fact that Europeans never seemed to feel compelled to put into question the thesis of secularization in view of the American counterevidence. Actually, the assumption that European developments are the modern norm is so unquestioned that, what from a global perspective is truly striking, namely, the dramatic decline of religion in Europe, does not seem to demand an explanation. What requires an explanation, though, is what they assume to be the American "deviation" from the European norm. Basically, the explanations tend to fall into two groups, both of which reveal a clear strategy to avoid having to question the paradigm of secularization.

The first strategy, a casuistic one, is to rule out the American evidence as irrelevant. "Closer scrutiny," so Weber's argument goes, reveals that American religion itself has become so "secular" that it should no longer count as religion, because the functions it fulfills are purely secular ones.[53] Luckmann, in the first systematic attempt to explain "the differences in the character of church religion in Europe and America," uses a similar strategy to reach the similar conclusion that "traditional church religion was pushed to the periphery of 'modern' life in Europe while it became more 'modern' in America by undergoing a process of internal secularization."[54] The second typical strategy, used more informally, is to resort to the "last resort," "American exceptionalism," and imply that America is the exception that confirms the European rule, the corollary being that the European rule does not need to be questioned.

Turning the European explanation on its feet, what truly demands explanation are two things: namely, the striking European pattern of secularization, that is, the dramatic decline of religion there; and the fact that Europeans, and most social scientists, have refused for so long to face or to take seriously the American counterevidence. In other words, we need to explain the lasting convincing power of the secularization paradigm in the face of overwhelming contrary evidence. Here we can only hint at possible explanations to the two questions. A plausible answer to the first question requires a search for independent variables, for those independent carriers of secularization present in Europe but absent in the United States. Looking at the four historical carriers mentioned above, it is clear that neither Protestantism nor capitalism can serve as a plausible candidate. All the major American Protestant denominations (Episcopalian, Congregationalist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist) are basically transplants from British Protestantism.[55] Prima facie, capitalist developments in both places were also not as strikingly different as to warrant their consideration as a plausible independent carrier. The state and scientific culture, however, could serve as plausible independent variables, since church-state relations and the scientific worldviews carried by the Enlightenment were significantly different in Europe and America.

What America never had was an absolutist state and its ecclesiastical counterpart, a caesaropapist state church. This is what truly distinguishes American and European Protestantism. Even the multiple Protestant establishments of the colonies were never strictly speaking caesaropapist churches. The denominational logic of American Protestantism was already at work well before the constitutional separation of church and state. In the absence of state churches, the *raison d'être* of nonconformist sects disappears as well, and all religious bodies, churches as well as sects, turn into denominations.[56]

It was the caesaropapist embrace of throne and altar under absolutism that perhaps more than anything else determined the decline of church religion in Europe. The thesis is not new. It was put forth by Tocqueville and restated differently, because of his different normative perspective, by Marx.[57] It becomes evident to American observers the moment they look at European trends.[58] It should have been evident to Europeans as well, had they looked at the striking differences within Europe itself between, on one hand, Catholic Ireland and Catholic Poland, which never had a caesaropapist state church, and, on the other, Catholic France and Catholic Spain. Besides, consistently throughout Europe, nonestablished churches and sects in most countries have been able to survive the secularizing trends better than has the established church.[59] It is not so much the minority versus majority status that explains the difference but the presence or absence of establishment. One may say that it was the very attempt to preserve and prolong Christendom in every nation-state and thus to resist modern functional differentiation that nearly destroyed the churches in Europe.

If church establishment explains to a large extent the decline of church religion, what explains the fact that the available evidence remained ignored and invisible for so long? Plausibly, one could answer, the same factor which maintains and sustains the taken for granted nature of every paradigm. Namely, as long as there is consensus within the community of practitioners that they already possess a coherent, consistent, and convincing explanation of the phenomena in question, there is no reason why one should look for alternative explanations when the available ones seem to work. The Enlightenment critique of religion provided the social sciences with such an explanation, and this explanation apparently remained plausible as long as the basic assumptions inherited from the Enlightenment persisted. Surely, religious changes and overwhelming counterevidence eventually contributed to undermining the paradigm, but much of this evidence itself became visible only when new questions were asked as a result of a crisis, one could almost say, of a sudden collapse of the underlying assumptions.[60]

The Enlightenment critique of religion. To a certain extent, the Enlightenment critique of religion became in many places a self-fulfilling prophecy. The Enlightenment and its critique of religion became themselves independent carriers of processes of secularization wherever the established churches became obstacles to the modern process of functional differentiation. By contrast, wherever religion itself accepted, perhaps even furthered, the functional differentiation of the secular spheres from the religious sphere, the radical Enlightenment and its critique of religion became superfluous. Ideas from the Newtonian Enlightenment, which in England were the respectable and established currency among scientific circles, educated publics, and even in the royal court, became seditious and sacrilegious in France and in continental absolutist Europe once Montesquieu, Voltaire, and others imported them. Forced underground into Masonic lodges and conspiratorial societies, these ideas reemerged only more radicalized and spread wherever ecclesiastical institutions tried to maintain intellectual, political, or moral control over individuals or groups striving for emancipation from the absolutist state, from hierarchically stratified social relations, from the church, or from any "self-incurred tutelage."[61]

The Enlightenment critique of religion had three clearly distinguishable dimensions: a cognitive one directed against metaphysical and supernatural religious worldviews; a practical-political one directed against ecclesiastical institutions; and a subjective expressive-aesthetic-moral one directed against the idea of God itself. In its first cognitive phase, the Enlightenment critique was directed against those religious worldviews which stood in the way of the legitimation and institutionalization of modern scientific methods. As the natural sciences first and the social and cultural sciences later had to establish their autonomy and legitimacy against traditional religious-metaphysical explanations of nature, culture, and society, those sciences began to inflate their own absolute claims to superiority over prescientific worldviews and their ability to provide total and exclusive explanations of reality. Reduced to a prescientific and prelogical primitive form of thought and knowledge, religion necessarily had to disappear with the ever-progressive advancement of knowledge, education, and scientific worldviews. The "darkness" of religious ignorance and superstition would fade away when exposed to the "lights" of reason. Naturally, such a critique of religion was particularly effective wherever the church was still committed to the medieval Aristotelian-Thomist metaphysical synthesis, resisted all modern cognitive heresies, and continued to claim absolute rights to the control of education. The same critique had to be less relevant wherever religion had freed itself from its ties to medieval scholasticism, either to establish new ties with the new science (the Newtonian synthesis in England and Scottish commonsense realism in America), or to abandon the external objective world of nature and society altogether and find a place in the interior subjective world of the human heart (the various forms of pietist and romantic religion).[62]

Once science was free to proceed "as if" God did not exist, however, it turned its own method to the analysis of the hypothesis of God. The first "scientific" explanations of the origins of the first primitive religion, from which all later religions were supposed to have sprung, concluded that the genealogy of religion could be traced back either to the fears and impotence of primitive humanity in the face of the superior forces of nature; to the first bubbling and stammering attempts of the human mind to understand its own psyche, its own dreams and visions; or to the attempts of the first social groups to understand and represent themselves. Religion was therefore either primitive physics (naturism) or primitive psychology (animism) or primitive sociology (totemism), all of which would inevitably be replaced by the corresponding modern scientific paradigms.[63] With the replacement of religious worldviews by scientific ones, science would become, in Weber's formulation, the final carrier of the universal process of disenchantment which religion itself had initiated by progressively freeing itself from magic. In the final act of this process, scientific worldviews themselves would succumb to the process of secularization as science, accepting its own self-limitations, disenchanted its own "charisma of reason." At the end of the process, science's own self-misconceptions, as the path to *true* art, to *true* nature, to God, or to happiness, would reveal themselves as so many illusions.[64]

While the cognitive critique of religion was directed against the truth claims of religious worldviews, the practical-political critique was directed against the ideological functions of religious institutions. In their struggles against the absolutist alliance of throne and altar, the philosophes came almost naturally to an alternative explanation of the historical origins of revealed religion. Fascinated by ancient mystery religions and by their own personal experiences with esoteric initiations into secret Masonic societies or forced underground into conspiratorial societies, the philosophes arrived at an explanation of religion as a grand historical conspiracy between priests and rulers to maintain the people ignorant, subject, and oppressed. Voltaire's *écrasez l'infâme* served as declaration of war against the church and all ecclesiastical institutions. The radical Enlightenment reveled in exposing sacred texts as forgery, sacred practices as contagious pathologies, religious founders as impostors, and priests as slothful hypocrites, imbeciles, or perverts. The same methods which Catholic rationalism had applied to popular religious superstitions and which sectarian Protestantism had turned against Catholic popery were now turned against revealed religion and any form of clericalism. Of the three forms of religion analyzed by Rousseau—"the religion of man," "the religion of the citizen," and "the religion of the priest"—it is the third which "is so evidently bad that it would be losing time to demonstrate its evils."[65] Indeed, the presence or absence of anticlericalism is the best indicator of the suitability as well as the effectiveness of the political critique of religion in any given country.

All the branches of the Enlightenment agreed that this "religion of the priest," the Roman church and all established churches, was bound to disappear with the fall of the ancien régime and the establishment of political liberties. But some currents of the Enlightenment balked at what they feared to be the consequences of a society without religion. A conservative tradition, best represented by the deist Voltaire, who was mindful of the consequences atheism and libertine discourse could have upon his own servants, upheld the ancient theory of double truth, wanting to preserve the ancient distance between the agnostic educated elites and the superstitious masses. The liberal tradition, while favoring the "religion of man," was tolerant of any religion as long as it was properly disestablished from the state and separated from the economy—as long as it was privatized. In such a form, liberal statesmen and entrepreneurs concurred, religion was even useful. Generally, enlightened liberal thinkers had no difficulty in finding modern religious reality faithfully depicted in Gibbon's celebrated passage on ancient religion: "The various modes of worship which prevailed in the Roman world, were all considered by the people, as equally true; by the philosopher, as equally false; and by the magistrate, as equally useful."[66]

Another current, which will culminate in Durkheimian sociology, mindful of the anomic and unsolidary consequences of a society governed solely by utilitarian norms and egoist self-interest, postulated the need for a new secular "civil religion" to play a societal, normative-integrative function. Only the radical materialists, Holbachian or Marxian, followed the logical consequences of their atheism. The Holbachians were convinced that the secular sovereign through the proper administration of pain and pleasure could do without the need for religious legitimation or normative integration. Not the priest but the hangman was the ultimate guarantor of social order.[67] Marx, recognizing that religion was not only the ideology of the oppressor but also "the sigh of the oppressed creature" and "the inverted consciousness of an inverted world," argued that the need for state repression, the need for religious consolation, and the need for false consciousness would last as long as their common source, class societies, endured. It was "the task of history" to carry to completion the process of secularization initiated by capitalist development, to construct a fully rational, socialist society which would "strip off its mystical veil" and "offer to man none but perfectly intelligible and reasonable relations to his fellowmen and to Nature."[68]

Marx's critique of religion, however, already proceeds from "the anthropological turn of the religious question."[69] This anthropocentric turn was first developed by the Left Hegelians, most systematically in Feuerbach's theory of religion as "projection" and "self-alienation," was continued in three different directions by Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud in their critiques of religion, and came together once again in the early Critical Theory of the Frankfurt school.[70] It is perhaps not surprising that the subjective, aesthetic, and moral critique of religion would emerge and be most effective in Lutheran Germany, while the cognitive and political critiques had thrived in Catholic France and somewhat belatedly and in milder form in Anglican England. After all, it was Luther who in his pamphlet *The Freedom of a Christian* had created a radical chasm between the realm of freedom and the realm of unfreedom, assigning freedom to the "inner" man, to the "inner" sphere of the person, while the "outer" person was irremediably subject to the system of worldly powers.[71] The external world of society and nature was literally left to the Devil, while religion underwent a visible process of subjective internalization. By withdrawing to the inner subjective expressive sphere, by becoming a pietist religion of the heart, Lutheranism and all modern forms of expressive religion became relatively immune to the scientific critique of religious worldviews and to the political critique of ecclesiastical institutions. The sphere of politics was indeed the sphere of violence and evil. As a state church, the Lutheran church also partook of this sphere, but Lutheranism introduced the principle of a double morality, a secular one for the outer sphere of the "office" and a Christian one for the "inner" sphere of the person, so that the freedom of "inner religion" was assured.[72]

If, as Engels pointed out, the publication of Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* was received with such a general enthusiasm and the book had such a liberating effect upon its readers, certainly upon the

Left Hegelians,[73] it was because it expressed in the most simple and unambiguous terms a widely shared but not yet verbalized experience: that the essence of Christianity is humanity, that theology is anthropology, and that the object of religion, God, is nothing but the expression of the essence of man. Feuerbach insists that the point of departure of his atheism is not the cognitive positivist postulate that "religion is an absurdity, a nullity, a pure illusion," nor the political anticlerical postulate that religion is a priestly conspiracy or that the Gospels are a forgery and "the life of Jesus" a myth but, rather, the recognition that religion itself teaches us atheism, since "religion itself. . .in its heart, in its essence, believes in nothing else than the truth and divinity of human nature."[74] Moreover, he added, he was not inventing anything since "theology has long since become anthropology." Luther had already shifted the interest from God's ontological essence to what God is for man, that is, to Christology, and Schleiermacher had reduced religion to mere "feeling." The consequences of such a reduction could only be, as Hegel pointed out in his critique of Schleiermacher, that religion, god, and the religious experience all would dissolve into mere subjectivism.[75] Indeed, any theology that begins with human subjective states cannot but produce anthropological statements. Feuerbach could, therefore, conclude that religion is "the solemn unveiling of a man's hidden treasures, the revelation of his intimate thoughts, the open confession of his love secrets."[76]

"To enrich God, man must become poor; that God may be all, man must be nothing."[77] This being the secret of divine omnipotence and human impotence, it was time to reclaim as their own the self-alienated essence which humans had projected onto heaven. It was time to stop the sensual renunciation, the self-denial, religious asceticism in all its forms. For the young Marx, "It was now no longer a question of the struggle of the layman with the *priest outside himself*, but rather of his struggle with his *own inner priest*, with his *priestly nature*."[78] If, as Feuerbach said, "religion is the dream of the human mind," then not the positivist critique of theology but the psychoanalytic interpretation of dreams is the adequate method of critique of religion. It was time, as Freud said, to recognize that religious illusions expressed powerful human desires longing to be fulfilled, that "as a universal obsessional neurosis" religion was based on the *repression* and *displacement* of *instinctual impulses*. It was time for humanity to "come of age," to abandon its infantile narcissism, to accept *the reality principle*, to reconcile itself with *culture* and to overcome all the *discontents* that result from the deprivations and instinctual controls which culture demands.[79]

Through his own method of deep psychological introspection, Nietzsche arrived at similarly radical but different conclusions. It was no longer a question of mere scientific atheism and the maturity required to do without religion and without surrogate paternal authority. The naked truth unveiled by the *genealogy of morals*, much harder to accept than Freud's *reality principle* and all the scientific *facts*, was that the entire structure of modern civilization, its rational secular moralities, and its religion of humanity were nothing but a secularized form of Judeo-Christianity—the *cleverest revenge* of that *priestly caste* which had proven to be unmatched *wizards* as carriers of the contagious *hysteria of the ascetic ideal* and as *diverters of the course of resentment*.[80] Precisely, for that reason, the infinite ocean left empty by *the death of god* could not simply be filled by humanity. Only the birth of the *superman*, in possession of a transmoral conscience *beyond good and evil*, could surmount nihilism and avert the impending catastrophes modern societies were facing.

All the thinkers of the nineteenth-century German Enlightenment and anti-Enlightenment, in reacting against Hegel's last-ditch effort to establish a Christian-philosophical synthesis, simply took for granted, like Feuerbach, that

> Christianity has in fact long vanished, not only from the reason but from the life of mankind, that it is nothing more than a *fixed idea*, in flagrant contradiction with our fire and life assurance companies, our railroads and steam carriages, our picture and sculpture galleries, our military and industrial schools, our theaters and scientific museums.[81]

In such a world, whatever residual religion, if any, still remains becomes so subjective and privatized that it turns "invisible," that is, marginal and irrelevant from a societal point of view.

The Privatization of Religion Thesis

The most elaborate and systematic formulations of the privatization of religion thesis are to be found in the works of Thomas Luckmann and Niklas Luhmann. The point of departure and main assumptions of the privatization thesis are that the process of secularization has largely run its course, that the process is most likely "irreversible," and that the consequences of this process for the Christian or any other religion are the ones which Wolfgang Schluchter has summarized into two theses:

> (1) As far as the world views are concerned, largely completed secularization means that religious beliefs have become subjective as a result of the rise of alternative interpretations of life, which in principle can no longer be integrated into a religious world view.
>
> (2) As far as the institutions are concerned, largely completed secularization means that institutionalized religion has been de-politicized as a result of a functional differentiation of society, which in principle can no longer be integrated through institutionalized religion.[82]

These two related theses were first elaborated systematically by Luckmann and later reformulated by Luhmann in the language of systems theory.

In *The Invisible Religion,* Luckmann radicalized the thesis of secularization by arguing, first, that traditional religious institutions were becoming increasingly irrelevant and marginal to the functioning of the modern world, and that modern religion itself was no longer to be found inside the churches.[83] The modern quest for salvation and personal meaning had withdrawn to the private sphere of the self. Anticipating later analyses of narcissism and of the "new religious consciousness," Luckmann argued that "self-expression" and "self-realization" had become the "invisible religion" of modernity. Luckmann's explanation is tied to theories of institutional and role differentiation. Modern differentiation leads to a sharp segmentation of the various institutional domains whereby each domain becomes an autonomous sphere governed by its own "functionally rational" internal norms. The person qua person becomes irrelevant for the functionally rational domains, which come to depend increasingly on abstract, impersonal, replaceable role performances. Since the individual's social existence becomes a series of unrelated performances of anonymous specialized social roles, institutional segmentation reproduces itself as segmentation within the individual's consciousness.

Since religious institutions undergo a process of differentiation and institutional specialization similar to that of other institutional domains, religious roles also become specialized, "part-time roles" within the individual conscience. The more the performance of the nonreligious roles becomes determined by autonomous "secular" norms, the less plausible become the traditional global claims of religious norms. Consequently, "a meaningful integration of specifically religious and nonreligious performances and norms with their respective jurisdictional claims remains a problem."[84] In principle there are several typical solutions to the problem, from (a) "a prereflective attitude in which one shifts from 'secular' to religious performances in routine fashion" to (b) a reflective reconstitution of individual religiosity after some search to (c) the adoption of competing "secular" value systems.[85] Crucial is the fact that the individual can and thus has to choose at least implicitly one of those solutions. Irrespective of the choice, the solution will be, therefore, an individualistic one. The free choice, in turn, determines the consumer attitude that the "autonomous" individual manifests vis-à-vis a widened range of options. As a buyer, the individual confronts a wide assortment of "religious" representations, traditional religious ones as well as secular new ones, manufactured, packaged, and sold by specialized service agencies, out of which the individual constructs and reconstructs—either alone or in congregation with like-minded selves—a necessarily precarious private system of ultimate meanings.

Significant for the structure of the modern world is the fact that this quest for subjective meaning is a strictly personal affair. The primary "public" institutions (state, economy) no longer need or are interested in maintaining a sacred cosmos or a public religious worldview. In other words, modern societies do not need to be organized as "churches," in the Durkheimian sense, that is, as moral communities unified by a commonly shared system of practices and beliefs. Individuals are on their own in their private efforts to patch together the fragments into a subjectively meaningful whole. Whether the individuals themselves are able to integrate these segmented performances into "a system of *subjective* significance" is not a relevant question for the dominant economic and political institutions—so long at least as it does not affect their efficient functioning adversely. In any case, it is amply evident that capitalist markets and administrative states can live with a lot of individual and social "anomie" before reaching a Durkheimian crisis of social integration. Luckmann shows, moreover, how the modern sanctification of "subjective autonomy" and the retreat of the individual to the private sphere serves de facto to legitimate and reinforce the "autonomy of the primary institutions." In this respect, Durkheim was correct in viewing "the cult of the individual" as a social product, as the new social form of religion which modern societies have created for themselves. But as Luckmann points out, "By bestowing a sacred quality upon the increasing subjectivity of human existence it supports not only the secularization but also what we called the dehumanization of the social structure."[86] Luckmann concludes by noting pessimistically that even though one may view such "dehumanizing" modern trends as undesirable, they may have become nonetheless "irreversible."

Niklas Luhmann's systems theory elaborated further Luckmann's functionalist thesis. Luhmann's theory distinguishes between three different *forms* of differentiation of society (segmentation, stratification, and functional differentiation). In so doing it offers a convincing answer to the problem posed by Durkheim's theory of the *division of labor.* Working within the Durkheimian tradition, Luhmann shows that functionally differentiated modern societies do not require and are unlikely to have the kind of normative societal "positive" integration postulated by Durkheim.[87] Thus, any theory of modern religion which postulates the likelihood of the "birth of new gods" or the "return of the sacred" or "religious revivals" or the existence of a "civil religion" on the basis of society's functional need for normative integration is based on untenable premises. Luhmann's theory of functional differentiation is also well situated to explain why the privatization of religion is a dominant trend in modernity. Indeed, when viewed from such a perspective, Durkheim's sociology of religion becomes to a large extent irrelevant to an understanding of religion in the modern world.

The theory and the thesis of privatization become problematic, however, when they are applied in such a way that the thesis of privatization, from being a testable and falsifiable empirical theory of dominant historical trends, is turned into a prescriptive normative theory of how religious institutions ought to behave in the modern world. Schluchter's discussion of "the irreversibility of secularization" may serve to illustrate the dangers implicit in such a use of the theory of functional differentiation. On the basis of the two theses stated above Schluchter asks two questions:

> (1) Is there a legitimate religious resistance to secular world views that is more than a refusal to accept the consequences of the Enlightenment?
>
> (2) Is there a legitimate religious resistance to de-politicization, a resistance that is more than a clinging to inherited privileges?[88]

My answer to both questions, on the basis of the empirical evidence I am going to present in the five case studies, is an unconditional yes. This does not mean that the evidence supports the thesis of the reversibility of secularization. It only means that both questions are formulated in such a way that they prejudge the relationship between secular worldviews and Enlightenment and the relationship between religious politicization and threats to functional differentiation. A theory which is not flexible enough to account for the possibility that some secular worldviews may actually be anti-Enlightenment and that religious resistance in such cases may be legitimate and on the side of Enlightenment is not complex enough to deal with the historical "contingencies" of a yet unfinished modernity and of a not yet completed secularization.

Indeed, the theory should not start with the premise that "there must be a fundamental tension and conflict between a religious and a secular world view, between religious and secular humanist conduct."[89] We may say with some confidence that currently, at least in America, both religious "fundamentalists" and fundamentalist "secular humanists" are cognitive minorities, that the majority of Americans tend to be humanists, who are simultaneously religious and secular. The theory of secularization should be reformulated in such a way that this empirical reality ceases to be a paradox. If, as Schluchter himself recognizes, the tension has lessened and "the old front lines have largely crumbled," it is not only because the Enlightenment has lost some of its fundamentalist antireligious edge, as a result of the disenchantment of its own charisma of reason. The rapprochement has been reciprocal, for religion has often served and continues to serve as a bulwark against "the dialectics of enlightenment" and as a protector of human rights and humanist values against the secular spheres and their absolute claims to internal functional autonomy.[90] Indeed, religion could even serve as a bulwark against the claims of systems theory that humanist self-referential conceptualizations are theoretical anachronisms; that is, religion could stand against all posthumanity and posthistory theses.

The theory of secularization should also be complex enough to account for the historical "contingency" that there may be legitimate forms of "public" religion in the modern world, which have a political role to play which is not necessarily that of "positive" societal integration; that there may be forms of "public" religion which do not necessarily endanger modern functional differentiation; and that there may be forms of "public" religion which allow for the privatization of religion and for the pluralism of subjective religious beliefs. In order to be able to conceptualize such possibilities the theory of secularization will need to reconsider three of its particular, historically based—that is, ethnocentric—prejudices: its bias for Protestant subjective forms of religion, its bias for "liberal" conceptions of politics and of the "public sphere," and its bias for the sovereign nation-state as the systemic unit of analysis.

Unlike secular differentiation, which remains a structural trend that serves to define the very structure of modernity, the privatization of religion is a historical option, a "preferred option" to be sure, but an option nonetheless. Privatization is preferred internally from within religion as evinced by general pietistic trends, by processes of religious individuation, and by the reflexive nature of modern religion. Privatization is constrained externally by structural trends of differentiation which force religion into a circumscribed and differentiated religious sphere. Privatization is mandated ideologically by liberal categories of thought which permeate modern political and constitutional theories.

Indeed, it is only by questioning the liberal private-public distinction as it relates to religion, and by elaborating alternative conceptualizations of the public sphere, that one can disentangle the thesis of privatization from the thesis of differentiation and thus begin to ascertain the conditions of possibility for modern public religions.