Translator's Note

Religion as a Chain of Memory

Danièle Hervieu-Léger

Translated by Simon Lee

not of this lineage). Seen thus, one might say that a religion is an ideological, practical and symbolic system through which consciousness, both individual and collective, of belonging to a particular chain of belief is constituted, maintained, developed and controlled.

This definition raises a number of objections and contains a number of implications. We shall attempt to respond point by point to these objections and to develop the implications. But the really fundamental question is whether or not it is useful. At the risk of labouring the point, it is not required that the last word be said on religion but that a working concept be found, which, among other possible uses, enables one to grasp over and above analogies made between traditional and secular religions what justifies treating their situation and their future within modernity together from a sociological point of view. Thus viewed, our objective is not only to determine whether the beliefs and practices of this or that political or environmental group may or may not be termed religious, or whether the emotional investment of football fans or the fervour unleashed at a rock concert may be so termed. Rather it is to know whether this or that contemporary expression of Christianity or Judaism or whatever other tradition is regarded by society as to do with religion can, in fact, in the light of this definition, be characterized as religious.

5

Questions about Tradition

The proposal to apply the term 'religious' to the form of believing whose distinguishing mark is to appeal to the legitimizing authority of a tradition has been tentatively put forward in various discussions and research notes.[1] Understandably, it has often aroused lively comment. Some of the objections raised merit particular attention, the first concerning the paradox implied by defining religion by reference to tradition if one sets out to identify the religious products of modernity, the second concerning the limits of the religious as thus understood. Rather than move straight to the outcome of a debate which owes much to the objections raised, it would seem preferable to describe its different stages, showing how each moved the debate forward and enriched it, showing too what still remains to be achieved.

Tradition opposed to modernity

Until now, the main argument has been devoted to justifying an approach to religion which, for all that its essence remains intangible, may enable one to grasp what is specific in its relation to modernity. Thus it is not surprising that the first question touches on the paradox, if not contradiction, implied by proposing a definition of religion which turns on the concept of tradition, suggesting as it does that religion is wedded to traditional society, which is more often than not identified as being opposed to modernity. This would seem to invalidate the original purpose of examining the religious products of modernity.

The question bears on the reasoning adopted, and hence is a fundamental one. A common notion, to be found even in some scientific studies, is that religion is concerned with the past, doomed to lose all cultural plausibility in the modern world and able only to turn itself to account in instances of cultural regression, which correspond with the sporadic reactions against modernity that mark our crisis-prone society. One way round this frequently accepted notion, which inhibits serious analysis of contemporary religious renewal, might be to sever the notional link between religion and tradition so that the one is no longer identified with the other. However, we would propose rather to rearticulate the core relationship between tradition and religion within modernity. But in order to do so it is necessary to reconsider how the distinction drawn between so-called traditional and modern societies has evolved in the way it has.

Such a rehearsal does not imply questioning the view largely accepted by the social sciences according to which tradition supplies the structure of premodern societies; it simply means that premodern societies are unaware of what Maurice Gauchet has called the imperative of change, which characterizes modernity. In premodern societies, tradition generates continuity, to borrow Georges Balandier's expression.

> It denotes the relationship with the past and the constraint of the past, it imposes conformity resulting from a code of meaning, and hence values which govern individual and collective conduct and are transmitted from generation to generation. It is a heritage that defines and maintains an order, by obliterating the transforming effect of time and by retaining only the initial core phase from which it draws its legitimacy and authority. It ordains in every sense of the word.[2]

In the world of tradition, religion is the code of meaning that establishes and expresses social continuity. By placing the origin of the world outside time and by attributing the order of the world to a necessity beyond society, it erases the chaos represented by reality, at the same time removing reality from the transforming effect of human control. It is the unified matrix of believing which 'imparts all form and meaning to dwelling in the world and ordering its creatures'. In the fully developed form it assumes in societies prior to progress, it presents itself, according to Marcel Gauchet, as the intellectual expression of 'mankind, naked and defenceless in the face of overwhelming nature', and 'at the same time as a means for the mind, by admitting this to be so, to overcome a situation of extreme destitution'.[3]

We shall not here join the debate which has induced anthropolo-

gists to describe the primitive world as an immobile world or to conceive of the absolute domination of religion in primitive society. We would simply remark that Marcel Gauchet puts the fundamental change initiating the march of humanity at about 3000 BC in Mesopotamia and Egypt; a march, as he calls it, 'from an order that is endured to an order that is increasingly willed'.[4] This dating, in its very lack of precision, is a way of pushing as far back as possible into human history a time when the world of tradition imposed itself in its pure form. Probably the only way to interpret Marcel Gauchet here is to take him as defining a representative extreme, to which stands opposed the extreme of pure modernity, characterized by general acceptance of 'responsibility for an order recognized as proceeding from the individual will, itself held to pre-exist the tie that binds society together': on the one hand, 'a predisposition to the precedence of the world and the law of things'; on the other, 'a predisposition to the precedence of human beings and their creative activity'.[5] On the one hand, heteronomous society, its institution beyond reach and outside its own control; on the other, autonomous society that recognizes itself as at once self-created and creative.[6]

But this conflict of type does not allow for an absolute discontinuity between so-called traditional and modern societies to be situated empirically. Were this so, it is difficult to see how the transformation of cold societies of tradition (themselves far from corresponding to one model) into warm modern societies could be brought about. The problem of putting a date to the start of modernity (the Enlightenment? the Reformation? the twelfth or thirteenth centuries?) further shows that modern society is equally elusive, as immune to being encompassed in a single definition as is traditional society. Neither is self-enclosed, the opposition between them is not absolute. The dynamics of each overlap, the one giving precedence to order, the other to movement. Human life is witness to the gradual predominance of movement over order, and of human autonomy over heteronomy. But the process does not completely resolve itself in the destruction and disappearance of the former world. There is de-structuring and re-structuring, disorganization but also re-development and re-employment of elements deriving from the earlier order in the fluid system of modern society.

Religion, as total expression of the former order in the register of symbolism and ritual, has become caught in the same dialectic of change. In choosing a definition that stresses its being anchored in the world of tradition, it is not thereby excluded from the world of modernity. Its place there is signalled from the outset, but in the reconstructed form of tradition within modernity.

The creative power of tradition

Yet it is clearly only a partial response to the problem raised. To say that religion has to do with tradition, namely with continuity and conformity, in a world dominated by pressure for change effectively denies it any active social or cultural role in modern society. It is thereby effectively consigned to a function of nostalgic or exotic remembrance, apart from fulfilling the function of memory and upholding the survival of tradition in the world of modernity.

This is a serious objection and calls for a dual response: first, to examine more closely the connection between tradition and social change; then, to consider whether the dynamic of tradition which is active and creative in society (always supposing it has been given prominence) still has a role to play in society, perhaps as a force for renewal.

The first point calls for the removal of a common misunderstanding. To say, as does Georges Balandier, that tradition is bound up with a view of society as continuity and conformity does not mean that societies in which it plays a vital role are static and impervious to change. What tradition, and more specifically religion which is its code of meaning, brings about is a world of collective meanings in which day-to-day experience that can play havoc with groups or individuals is related to an immutable, necessary order that pre-exists both individuals and groups. The world which thus constitutes *traditionalism* is characterized, according to Max Weber, by a 'propensity to accept the customary round of everyday life in the belief that it constitutes a norm for action'.[7] This imaginative force for action implies that the past can be read as the exclusive source of the present. To experience the real meaning of being part of a continuing tradition, one can hardly do better than refer to the book in which Josef Erlich describes in minute ethnographic detail the celebration of the Sabbath in a Polish *schtetl*. Every gesture expressed, every moment passed by the Jewish family followed through the course of the feast day is invested with a sense of immemorial continuity in which it is supposed to find its place.[8]

And one concludes at once that a definition such as that given in the *Petit Robert* dictionary, reducing tradition to 'ways of thinking, doing or acting which are inherited from the past', by wrongly reifying the dynamic source, ignores the essential, that is to say, the authority attributed to the past to settle the problems of the present. What defines tradition (while, in fact, it serves present interests) is that it confers transcendent authority on the past. This transcendence shows itself in the impossibility of determining its origin. The origin of tradition for

ever moves back in the sense that it is fed only from itself. It implies, in the words of Joseph Moingt, 'assenting to a past, determination to prolong it in the present and the future, the act of receiving a sacred, intangible trust, humble and respectful resolve to repeat something already said'.[9]

This means that one cannot, as Edward Shils does,[10] make tradition encompass the whole body of *tradita* of a society or group, that is to say, the whole stock of representations, images, theoretical and practical knowledge, behaviour and attitudes which is inherited, received from the past. All that constitute tradition in the proper meaning of the term are the parts of this stock whose value is linked to the continuity between the past and the present of which they are the evidence and which on this account are passed on. The invocation of such continuity may be fairly crude ('it's always been done') or highly formalized, viz. the case of all doctrinal tradition. But in all instances the invocation is at the source of the way tradition is able to establish itself as a norm for individuals and groups. Looked at thus, tradition describes the body of representations, images, theoretical and practical intelligence, behaviour, attitudes and so on that a group or society accepts in the name of the *necessary* continuity between the past and the present.

Thus what comes from the past is only constituted as tradition insofar as anteriority constitutes a title of authority in the present. Whether the past in question is relatively short or very long is only of secondary significance. The degree of ancientness confers an extra value on tradition, but it is not what initially establishes its social authority. What matters most is that the demonstration of continuity is capable of incorporating even the innovations and reinterpretations demanded by the present. To grasp what this implies, one has to bear in mind that any tradition develops through the permanent reprocessing of the data which a group or a society receives from its past. The sifting and the shaping by means of which this heritage becomes a norm for the present and future are theoretically carried out by those in the group or society who are invested with the power to do so and/or dispose of the instruments of physical, ideological and symbolic coercion to have them carried out. The social monopoly of the regulation of tradition is in fact always threatened by the shattering impact (*coup de force*) of the prophet, who claims to redefine the principles by virtue of the personal revelation that has come to him.[11] More generally, there is a constant issue of social conflict, through which the political, ideological and symbolic equilibrium of group or society disintegrate and are reconstituted.

The fact that the social mechanisms for regulating reference to

tradition are part and parcel of the dynamics of social relations whereby a society creates itself and creates its own history means that tradition is not simply a repetition of the past in the present. This goes not merely for modern societies in which the demand for change always conflicts with the logic of tradition. In all societies where the past asserts its authority, and in the spheres of societies that are moving into modernity where this authority is still dominant, the distinctive mark of tradition is to actualize the past in the present, to restore to human lives as they are lived the living memory of an essential core which gives it existence in the present. As Louis-Marie Chauvet observes, the concept of tradition cannot be reduced to a ranking of established fundamental references – sacred texts, immovable ritual and so on – set for all time (traditionalist tradition). And he points also to 'the hermeneutic process by which a community of human beings rereads its ritual or statutory practices, its own historical narrative or again the theoretical constructions received from its institutional tradition (traditionalizing tradition)'.[12]

The process of rereading is inseparable from the process of creating a new relationship with the past, in the light of the present, hence with the present too. Even in so-called traditional societies, which are presented as being entirely ruled by the injunctions of tradition and unlikely to breed disorder, Georges Balandier makes the point that 'tradition manipulates change but only indirectly plays on the appearance of stability'. Tradition must also adjust to the possibility of disorder and the peril of opposition to change, and comes into action here only if it can truly convey a 'forcefulness that enables it to adapt and deal with events and exploit alternative possibilities'.[13] This insistence on dissociating tradition from outright conformity or continuity leads Balandier to distinguish three forms of traditionalism:

> Fundamental traditionalism upholds the maintenance of the most deep-rooted values and models of social and cultural observance; it serves a state of permanence and what is considered to be a constituent of human beings and social relations according to the social coding of which it is both product and preserver. Formal traditionalism, incompatible with the previous form, makes use of forms that are upheld but changed in substance; it establishes a continuity of appearances, but serves new designs; it accompanies movement while maintaining a link with the past. Pseudo-traditionalism corresponds to a tradition that has been refashioned; it occurs in periods of accelerated movement and major upheaval; it enables a new construction to be put upon change and the unexpected; it enables them to be tamed by being given a familiar, reassuring aspect. It feeds interpretation, assumes continuity and expresses a dawning disorder. In this sense, it reveals the extent to which the

work of tradition is not separate from the work of history, and how far tradition constitutes a stock of symbols and images, and also ways of appeasing modernity. Tradition may be seen as the text that constitutes a society, a text according to which the present is interpreted and processed.[14]

It would be more correct to use the term 'traditional society' only where fundamental traditionalism applied. Manifestly, in an unalloyed form it is an ideal type, as is the wholly religious society of the past which directly corresponds to it. Ancient societies based on tradition have all in varying proportions combined these three forms of traditionalism whose interaction enables change to mesh with continuity.

Religion as folklore

The problem is to know – and this is the second aspect of the question above – whether the creative dynamic of tradition, which inaugurates change by invoking continuity, still has relevance in a society where change is valued for itself, where the principle of continuity is no longer inviolable and where reference to tradition plays only an ancillary role in society's production and legitimization of norms, values and symbols proposed for acceptance and credence by the individual or group. What is there for religion to do in modern societies except play a subsidiary cultural and symbolic role? Or, to put it more bluntly, is it not bound to be marginalized as having little real significance except as folklore?

In 1973, Michel de Certeau opened a broadcast discussion with Jean-Marie Domenach by asking: 'Has Christianity transformed itself into the folklore of current society?'

'Any discussion which has to do with moral standards in public or private life', he remarked with reference to the media,

> inevitably brings in an ecclesiastical figure and religious discourse. The figure and the discourse are no longer there as witnesses to a truth. They play a theatrical role. They are part of the repertoire of a social *commedia dell'arte*. The situation is quite different from what it was only a matter of years ago, when Christian belief still had solid roots in society. Then a certain type of discourse was upheld or it was actively resisted. It did not simply drift as it now does. Christianity defined particular associations and observances. Now it has become a fragment of culture. Cultural Christianity is no longer connected to the faith of any particular group.[15]

Michel de Certeau's remarks throw light on what the term 'folk-lore' may here convey. There is a process of dislocation at work which affects traditional religions (the discourse of Christianity, in particular) as a corpus of meaning in very advanced societies. The process is itself linked to the break-up of communities in which the discourse acquired consistency in the form of practices and behaviour; and at its source is the growth of rationalization. By gradually demystifying whole sections of human reality, rationalism inevitably provoked (and still provokes) the dislocation of comprehensive systems of meaning, which in past societies gave sense and coherence to the chaos of experience. The historic religions were subjected to the full force of the change, while primary communities which experienced this meaning and co-herence in common as certainties (in the form of elementary beliefs that Pierre Bourdieu refers to as states of the body) simply faded away. The process of secularization implicit in modernity is by now too fa-miliar to be dwelt on further;[16] it needs only to be acknowledged that the marginalization of traditional religions as folklore constitutes one of the outcomes facing religion in modernity. The dominant religions can still supply individuals with a unifying ferment from their own experience, yet they have all but lost the power to inform the organi-zation of social life, with the exception of those voluntary groups which depend on individual membership. The transfer of the potential for meaning vested in the historic religions from society to the individual has meant that in all advanced societies they have become sources of cultural heritage revered for their historical significance and their em-blematic function, but to all intents and purposes poorly mobilized for the production of collective meaning.

In modern societies which are no longer governed by reference to tradition, is religion indeed able to *create* meanings that correspond to the new problems that are there to be faced? For some writers the answer is unequivocally no. The German sociologist, Niklas Luhmann, has recently made use of the concept of resonance, describing the in-terplay between the system and its environment, in order to examine whether religion might not be able independently to contribute to the production of meanings which would enable advanced societies ac-tively to integrate ecological issues into their own functioning. He pro-vides a highly developed analysis of why religion is incapable of fulfilling this role. In his view, no problem relating to the environment and accommodating the technological, economic and ethical demands of modern society can be inferred from a religious code, because, for all the changes it has undergone, it remains fixed in the vision of a tran-scendental world separate from the real world. At best, religion 'offers a language of protest against deforestation, against air and water pol-

lution, against the nuclear threat or against excessive medicalization', when these scourges have reached a certain point of visibility. But beyond denouncing and admonishing, it is incapable of formulating a truly independent approach to such problems, because it is slave to an outmoded perception of society. In Luhmann's words, in the end reli-gion 'has no religion to offer'.[17]

Luhmann's analysis of the inadequacy of religion in producing mean-ing that corresponds to the new problems facing modern society is explicitly directed at the official theology of the dominant Christian churches. But in a wider focus it concerns the inexorable disparity between a religiously integrated view of the world and the culture of modernity, a disparity that leads to its marginalization as folklore de-scribed by Michel de Certeau. Yet the question remains whether there is any more to say about the situation of religion within modernity, once one has accepted that the tendency for the dominant religions to be marginalized to a point where they are no more than picturesque and parasitic is inescapable.

Historically, modernity's questioning of the world of tradition uni-fied by religion has led not merely to the confinement of institutional-ized religion in a specialized social field. For the very reason of its having initiated a conflict between the separate field of institutional-ized religion and other social fields, it has opened the way to novel applications of the stock of symbols constituted by traditional reli-gions in the context of aesthetics and culture, of morals and politics too. The tension between religion and politics, a consequence of their distinctiveness, has been instrumental in mobilizing religious symbols for the cause of utopian politics. In the course of several centuries the memory of religion nurtured by societies which acceded to modernity provided the chief imaginative source for visions of the coming order, those of a golden age for instance.[18] The imaginative function of the early Christian community in nineteenth-century utopian socialism,[19] and the significance of messianic themes from Jewish tradition in the shaping of libertarian ideals in central Europe,[20] are merely two exam-ples of the utopian fecundity of the major religious traditions.

The point underlined by Michel de Certeau that religious beliefs and practices no longer – or at any rate decreasingly – identify particu-lar groups perhaps implies the destruction of the creative potential that religion enjoyed within modernity. Bryan Wilson seems also to be of this opinion and draws attention to the absence of a utopian dimen-sion in most of the new religious movements, thus disclaiming their authenticity as religious movements.

The creative strength of a politico-religious utopia stems from its being a source of both imaginative and social energy and from its con-

veying a multitude of symbols and values that can be given concrete collective form. Without its being rooted in society, the utopian mobilization of unfocused religious references is unlikely. But recent developments show that the social uncoupling of religious beliefs and practices is reversible; given certain circumstances, these may become socially reidentified, thus playing an active role in the production of meaning and in the expression of collective aspiration, with social, political and cultural consequences. The role of religion in the transition to democracy in eastern Europe or the importance of the Islamic reference for young second-generation North African immigrants in France in search of their identity[21] provide two illuminating examples.

The religious productions of modernity: is this concept meaningful?

But, it will be objected, the last two cases (to which we shall return in the final section) are not entirely convincing. Certainly they provide evidence that religion in the modern world is more than just a residual facet of culture; they show that it can retain or reassume a creative potential in society, given that it functions as reawakened or invented memory for actual social groups. But they also suggest that the inability of modernity to respond to the aspirations it gives rise to, and to produce corresponding collective meanings, is what favours the renewal of belief linked to the authority of tradition – thus, the collapse of the promises of socialism and the mirage presented by the promises of integration. Rather, they lead to the conclusion – reinforced by the knowledge that religious expression may well be a very transitional cover for social and political protest which is denied an outlet[22] – that religious activity may, by way of compensation, move into areas that have been left more or less untouched by modern rationalism. This consideration alone cannot justify us talking of the religious productions of modernity any more than can the observation made earlier that traditional beliefs, in part or in whole, may persist in the modern world though in altered form – spiritualized, intellectualized and so on. For the term to be meaningful, it requires more than simply registering limitations in the modern process of rationalization, or even recognizing the constant intermingling of the modern demand for change and the ancestral demand for continuity, even in highly advanced societies. It requires one to be able to declare that the modernity in question, which ideally is defined by the self-affirmation and future of the autonomous individual, *prompts* a need on the part of both individuals and society to refer to the authority of tradition. Fail-

ing this, one must reconcile oneself to the fact that the definition of religion as a form of believing whose distinctive quality is to invoke the legitimizing authority of tradition is no more than a renewed demonstration that religion is structurally alien to modernity and that it survives only as a residue of a bygone world. But if one argues, as has been suggested thus far, that modernity and religion are not mutually exclusive (hence that religion retains a creative potential within modernity), one has to accept the paradox that modernity produces what is of essence contrary to it, namely heteronomy, submission to an order endured, received from outside and not willed.

The proposition may cause some surprise but it is not original. The anthropologist Louis Dumont is one among others who have argued it in connection with individualism, itself characteristic of modernity. 'What is the source of non-individualistic factors or elements?' he asks. in *Essais sur l'individualisme*.

> In the first place, they stem from the permanence or survival of premodern and more or less general elements, such as the family. But they owe their source also to the fact that the very development of individualistic values set off a complex dialectic which, in many spheres, and in some instances as early as the late eighteenth century, resulted in combinations where they find themselves with their opposites.[23]

The same dialectic holds for the social and economic sphere. Louis Dumont has referred to the work of Karl Polanyi, which demonstrates that economic liberalism led to the need for protective social measures and finally brought about what may be termed contemporary postliberalism.[24] It holds for the political where, he explains, 'totalitarianism is a dramatic expression of something one constantly comes across anew in the contemporary world, namely that individualism is both all-powerful and perpetually haunted by its opposite.'[25]

We would argue that the dialectic holds too in the case of religion, where affirmation of the autonomy of the individual which undermines the authority of tradition paradoxically rekindles, but in new forms, the need to have recourse to the assurance this authority imparts. Some clarification is needed.

Modernity has not done away with the individual's or society's need to believe. Indeed it has been observed that the uncertainty that flows from the dynamics of change has made the need stronger, as illustrated by the infinite diversity of the demand for meaning, on the part of both individuals and groups, and the imagination-fed solutions arrived at. In a society in which affirmation of the autonomy – the liberty – of the individual is inseparable from the insistence on

independence in private life,[26] the question of meaning that comes to the fore in extreme situations – where there is suffering, where there is death – is more than likely to receive a subjective, an individual response. This tendency towards the individualization and atomization of belief has often been stressed, but that it inevitably encounters a limit has been less often remarked on. This is not simply the effect of sociocultural circumstances that externally demarcate the area of what the philosopher Paul Ricoeur has called the available scope for belief (*le disponible croyable*) at any one time. It also marks an internal limitation to the process of producing meaning: in order for meaning to have an effect, there must be at a given point the collective effect of meaning shared; meaning that is individually constructed must be attested by others, it must be given social confirmation.

In premodern society, the need for meaning to receive social confirmation did not arise, except for the bearer of charisma, who was constantly obliged to furnish the confirmation (normally in the form of prodigies, according to Weber) necessary in order to obtain recognition on the part of followers and justify the breach of commonly accepted norms and certainties.[27] But ordinarily such confirmation was implicit in conforming with the code of meaning received from the past and binding on all through a system of stable norms. In more differentiated societies where the emergence of the state had broken this immutable religious order by giving an institutional framework to social order, primary communities – family or locality – for a long time continued to fulfil the function of confirmation in the sphere of meaning, in spite of increasing competition from dominant ideological systems, such as churches, schools or political parties, vying for monopoly in the production of meaning.

In the more advanced modern societies which are subject to the psychological modernity described by Jean Baudrillard, where the individual rules with 'the autonomy of his or her individual conscience, psychology, personal conflicts, private interests, of his or her unconscious even',[28] social confirmation of meaning tends increasingly to be entrusted to a diversified network of affinity groups, where the sharing of meaning is a matter of private initiative. The significance of community expectations and experiments in societies where individualization has been taken to the greatest lengths is often presented as expressing a reactive protest against modernization and occasionally as a disturbing rejection of the universal values of modernity. A return to tribal reflexes is called to mind as a worrying sign of social and cultural regression to be set against the individual's conquest of autonomy and the noble heritage of the Enlightenment.

Such a reading of contemporary community practices as a protest

against modernity is to a considerable extent legitimate, with the reservation however that the motivation here comes from individuals, not from any external force. Such practices and the aspirations informing them underline the growing importance of relationships based on affinity in the production of meaning, inasmuch as such meaning is no longer externally imposed, that is as both a corpus of meaning and as a system of norms.

The consequences of high mobility and the remoteness of social relations which characterize modernity are now intensified by the collapse of the dominant ideological systems which claimed to embody meaning for society as a whole, these being undermined by the unending acceleration of social change and their own inability to have a positive impact on it. In highly complex societies where there is no sense of permanence or certainty, the production of collective meaning and the social authentication of individual meaning are a matter for voluntary communities. The community stands in opposition to urban industrial society but comes into its own once again in societies of mass communication where individualism is triumphant, because it nurtures fundamental social relations. The demands of French *lycéens* in 1990 that their schools should be living communities, and the gangs of youths in suburban ghettos, can be taken as representative of two socially differentiated methods of articulating one and the same urge to put an end to atomization by communal action; the corollary of the difference, of course, being that in the one case official recognition follows virtually automatically, while in the other for its full expression it requires recourse to violence. But what is at issue in both instances is the need to stand up to a dearth of collective meanings which precludes individuals giving or attaching coherent meaning to their existence otherwise than by endowing the groups to which they relate with extraordinary symbolic or emotive force.

Gilles Lipovetsky, in *L'Ère du vide*, has remarked upon the scale of what he calls the relational craze. He links the proliferation of situational networks and the multiplication of collectives with miniaturized, hyperspecialized interests to a generalized outbreak of narcissism which feeds the 'desire to get together with people who share the same immediate and clearly demarcated interests'. 'The ultimate form of individualism', he writes,

> does not reside in sovereign asocial independence, but in link-ups and connections with collectives with miniaturized, hyperspecialized interests – groups bringing together widowers, parents with homosexual children, alcoholics, stutterers, lesbian mothers, bulimia sufferers, and so on. Narcissus needs to be found a new place among the integrated

circuits and networks. Microgroups in their solidarity, voluntary move-
ments and support groups, situational networks confirm a trend in nar-
cissism, they do not contradict it . . . Narcissism is not distinguished
just by self-absorbed hedonism, but equally by the need to link up with
individuals who are 'identical', so as to be more effective certainly and
to campaign for new rights, but also for self-liberation, to resolve per-
sonal problems by articulating them through contact with others and
shared experience.[29]

And the purpose of such support groups is precisely that they provide
a forum for saying: '*Your* problem is *my* problem; the answer *you* come
up with is *my* answer too.' The more painful or complex the problem,
the more it involves extreme situations, the more vital the exchange.
Sickness, calamity, failure, death – once such scourges are no longer
resigned to as an inevitable part of human life – are necessarily seen as
appalling injustices and reversals to self-realization. In doing away with
the fatalism that distinguished traditional societies, modernism has re-
leased a huge creative potential within individuals and society, while at
the same time rendering individuals vulnerable to the sense of their own
limitations, which may be acute in periods of instability. At such times
resources that offer mutual comfort and support constitute the only
antidote to the often unbearable sense of isolation of having to stand on
one's own. They constitute an elementary form of what we have pointed
to as a form of social recognition of individual meaning.

Moreover, it has been observed that, alongside or in combination
with the tendency for like to associate with like, one of the main-
springs of this recognition is reference to a common lineage, and one
which is the more effective as and when social solidarity weakens. The
appeal to tradition and explicit reference to the continuity and author-
ity of a shared past frequently accounts for the way voluntary groups
are set up and are able to endure; and it affords a source of compensa-
tion for the looseness of current social ties. Nor is it necessary for this
sense of continuity to be historically verified. It may be purely imagi-
nary, so long as its recall is strong enough to allow identification to
build and preserve the social bond in question. Loyalty to the tradi-
tions of the Republic or of the Church, the proclamation of continued
attachment to ancestral values, the declared intention to return to the
authenticity of a past that is lost or deformed, serve to validate mean-
ing bestowed on the present or on plans for the future.

It is in places where an imagined reference to tradition, which re-
emerges from modernity itself, encounters modern expressions of the
need to believe – linked to the endemic uncertainty of a society facing
constant change – that the religious productions of modernity come

into being. We shall take a closer look at this later on. For the mo-
ment, in reply to the question posed, it only needs to be said that the
modern domain of religious believing is in no sense a residue in the
world of modernity of a world that is obsolete. It has its source in the
rationale of modernity, in the very movement by which modernity
undermines the traditional foundations of institutionalized belief.

Back to the question of definition

The insistence on the process whereby religious belief is based on ap-
peal to a line of witnesses (for all that the line may be dreamt up) again
raises the question of the limits of religion. One of the aims of the task
of definition carried out so far has been to maintain a clear distance
from inclusive approaches to religion which are inclined to dissolve it
into the totality of ultimate meanings. But would not making tradition
the fulcrum of religious believing in the end produce the same result
by incorporating anything society claims to be a heritage from the
past into the sphere of religion?

It would certainly be a misunderstanding to conclude from what
has just been argued that whatever has been socially transmitted must
be included in the concept of religion. The definition we are proposing
is much more precise, given that its three elements are closely adhered
to – the expression of believing, the memory of continuity, and the
legitimizing reference to an authorized version of such memory, that is
to say to a tradition. In modern society, freed from the constraint of
continuity which is characteristic of so-called traditional societies, tra-
dition no longer constitutes an order constricting the life of the indi-
vidual and society. Hence it no longer represents the unique matrix of
expressions of believing that result from the uncertainties of living,
which themselves are as characteristic of the human condition now as
they were when human beings were defenceless and nature was hostile
and mysterious. Hence there is no automatic overlapping of the frag-
mented world of believing and the equally fragmented world of tradi-
tion. This point need hardly be dwelt on further. On the other hand,
before putting the proposed definition of religion to the test, two fur-
ther implications must be considered.

The first implication can be expressed as follows: everything in
modernity that has to do with tradition is not necessarily an integral
part of believing, and therefore does not necessarily fall within the
sphere of religion. Thus, for instance, all the know-how and expertise
acquired through experience is vindicated because it stands the test of
time. This is best illustrated by an example. Makers of string instru-

ments who continue to apply ancestral techniques of treating wood do what they do, not in the name of a belief but of a practice that has been verified, that of the special quality these time-honoured methods bring to the sound of the instrument. Upholding the tradition is not valued in itself, or if it is, only secondarily, as is the special sense of complicity created between members of a guild who possess a secret in common, or else as is the cultural heritage such knowledge represents, and which is worth while preserving along with other equally esoteric knowledge. But what above all counts is the result obtained, in the absence of proof that more modern techniques are capable of producing at least comparable results. There is no occasion here for adding to the vast assortment of so-called implicit religions the case of the instrument-maker who says of himself: 'I've tried other ways, but this way has not been bettered.' Étienne Vatelot, with a world reputation as a string instrument-maker, shows no sign of an inclination to develop string instrument-making into a religious practice. Questioned recently about the mystery of the varnishes used by Stradivari, he had this to say:

> What secret? The varnish used by Stradivari was produced by a Cremona apothecary, proof of which is that all the varnishes used by string instrument-makers in Cremona have the same quality. If you go to Naples, they are quite different, the reason being that the humidity of the air is different; with the result that a violin needed the protection of harder varnishes. In Venice too, you'll find a more or less similar varnish used by all string instrument-makers, but different again from the one used in the other cities.[30]

The advice Vatelot is giving to young string instrument-makers is not to rediscover and copy the lost secret of the Stradivarius, but to perfect new products so that they can be as effective as possible in protecting and enhancing violins. The past does not furnish a model for reproduction, which as such would be unsurpassable. It merely affords proof that it is possible to achieve success with the means available at any given moment, and that is quite a different thing.

On the other hand, once the act of conforming to a recognized lineage becomes a passionately felt obligation and finds concrete expression in observance as a believer, the possibility arises that one is dealing with religion. Thus one would need to look closely at the case of a string instrument-maker who might say: 'For me this method is special because, when I apply it, I take on the gestures and even the spirit that enabled Stradivari or Guarneri or Amati to give life to violins whose perfection has never been equalled.' Confirming or denying the religious nature of whatever traditional practice can only come from a

highly refined empirical exploration of each case to establish whether it shows signs of ideal-typically embodying religion. It is very likely that such an approach will only exceptionally produce a clear answer, so in most cases leaving one to conclude that religious features are there in a more or less marked degree. Clearly, an approach which consists in measuring the religious ingredient in terms of its degree of conformity to an ideal type removes us decisively from classifying religion into what is implicit or analogical on the one hand, and what is fully religious on the other, according to the substance of the beliefs conveyed.

The second implication can be put in the following way. Anything in our society which relates to believing does not necessarily relate to tradition, and hence cannot be attributed to what is implicitly or potentially religious. One can believe in progress, in science, in revolution, in a better tomorrow or in impending disaster. In each of these cases (and in that of any other referents), the work of the imagination can merge with the task of projection in extrapolating on the basis of known and established facts or of analysing change that has occurred or is currently occurring. But the evidence of past historical experience serves to justify rational projection of the future, it does not constitute, in principle at least, the invoking of a tradition that is validated by its own continuity.

The scientist who believes in the science he practises certainly recognizes himself as continuing a line. He sees himself as heir to Galileo, Newton, Pasteur, Einstein and so on, the heroic figures of modern science. But, aside from a mythological anomaly which would take him outside the sphere of science, it is not his belonging to this lineage that justifies his conviction that he will obtain a result; rather it is the proven certainty of the efficacy of the experimental and control methods which are those of his discipline and which enable him to innovate and to invent, just as they enabled his predecessors to do in the course of making their own discoveries. It could indeed be shown that belief in the inherent value of scientific method has sometimes been taken to the point of making it the condition of the authenticity of any discourse or action. This scientism which triumphed in the second half of the nineteenth century, in the writing of Ernest Renan and Marcellin Berthelot and others, has acquired in our own time, with someone like Jacques Monod, a new – but no less lyrical – formulation of the dream of scientific method reaching into all aspects of human behaviour and conditions.[31]

The unrestricted validity of the model of scientific knowledge has sometimes been presented as conferring a sacred quality on science, whereby scientism is equated with religion. We have already given our

opinion about a too great readiness to establish correspondence between processes of conferring sanctity and processes of constituting a religion. It need only be remarked here that the scientist's recognition of what he owes to his predecessors and the will to preserve the memory of their work, as a legacy that is precious and valuable for his own endeavour, cannot constitute ends in themselves. If they did, and only then, could one speak of science having a religious extension (in which case we should be outside the sphere of science). But the scientific attitude in fact imposes the need to go beyond the kind of fidelity to forerunners that is self-justifying. It implies the need at any moment to break such fidelity should it contradict the rationality which is proper to the scientific process.

According to Gaston Bachelard, scientific thought requires constant conversion which calls into question the very principles of knowledge.[32] The dynamic nature of scientific knowledge, which even so implies belief in the values and potential of knowledge as such, is at bottom radically incompatible with the need to put an exclusive value on tradition, even on intellectual tradition. One knows the extent to which the inertia of the academic attitude in science has in the past worked – and can still work – against this dynamic. One knows also what established interests can, knowingly or unknowingly, be served by the religious anomaly of paying the respect due to the recognized authorities in science. Yet there are no grounds for applying the term 'religious' to the aspect of believing which attaches itself uncompromisingly to the exercise of scientific activity, inasmuch as it invariably looks beyond the present state of knowledge. The modern differentiation of social fields and institutions, each of which functions according to its own set of rules, also produces a differentiation in ways of believing proper to each of the fields, and in particular the ways in which, within such believing, the imaginary link with the past and projection into the future are joined. In our view, religion is only one of the figures in this pluralized world of believing, a figure characterized by the legitimizing exclusiveness of reference to tradition.

6

From Religions to the Religious

Any human activity, whatever it may be, calls for and gives rise to believing. Thus far, the course of our argument suggests that every activity secretes the particular form of believing it needs, just as every activity requires memory and imagination to be mobilized for its own development. From this standpoint, what is specific to religious activity is that it is wholly directed to the production, management and distribution of the particular form of believing which draws its legitimacy from reference to a tradition. But such specialized believing, itself the result of the modern differentiation between institutions, does not mean that every sphere of activity appropriates only one type of believing. It merely implies that a given social activity generates a particular, dominant, mode of believing. It does not however rule out that different modes of believing can coexist and even prosper in any one of the sectors from which they should, by rights, be banned on account of this very institutional specialization.

The instance of the religion of science, referred to above, shows the fluidity of believing, which may transcend the effects of institutional differentiation. Hence the concept of religion we have adopted may be said to present a practical interest to the extent that it constitutes an instrument with which to identify manifestations of religious believing in any social context whatever. To illustrate this statement and to give greater substance to the analytical method it spawns, it is worth pausing to consider an example from the world of sport which we have already touched upon. What we should like to know is whether the approach we have chosen allows us to dispose of the problems raised

of disintegration and one of reintegration through reference to the continuity of a line of belief. This reintegration itself implies renewed forms of mobilizing and inventing a common memory, from symbolic material taken from the traditional stock of historical religions, but equally from the resources offered by profane history and culture, which are themselves reprocessed in accordance with the social and political interests they serve.

To return to the case of Poland, which again serves well as a model here, Patrick Michel points out revealingly that the equation linking Polish and Catholic is of relatively recent origin and came into its own only by way of the political exploitation of Catholic references that occurred in the context of Sovietization. At the same time, he shows how Catholic practice, by instilling an awareness (through images, ritual and pilgrimages) of Poland's rootedness in a past which enables a future to be conceived, laid the foundation, where there were no other symbolic resources available, for a religion of patriotism, giving the word 'religion' its full sense.[44]

Thus the ethno-religious element (re)constitutes itself and develops in modern societies to a point at which the contracting membership of traditional religions intersects with the various attempts to invent or reinvent an imaginative hold on continuity, whereby a group or a society discovers new reasons for belief in its own permanence, over and beyond the perils that threaten its existence (as in the case of the Balkan states or Northern Ireland) or over and beyond the atomization that constitutes a multiple threat to its own cohesion (which is more a feature in the west). Insofar as it has become possible to 'believe without belonging' (to borrow Grace Davie's admirable formula for characterizing the post-religious attitude in Britain,[45] and which looks set to become the prevailing attitude), it has also become possible to 'belong without believing', or more precisely while believing only in the continuity of the group for which the signs preserved from the traditional religion now serve as emblems – a shift in the nature of religion which fails to protect society from some form of return to religious wars, rather the reverse.

Conclusion: Post-traditional Society and the Future of Religious Institutions

Thus far, the emphasis has been on change and fragmentation. Fluidity and mobility are the keywords in modern religion, which finds itself in a world that is pluralistic through and through;[1] and the metaphor used *ad nauseam* to describe the pattern which religion has assumed in this context is that of a symbolic market, a metaphor originally and tentatively proposed in a classic article by Berger and Luckmann.[2] What was simply put forward suggestively as a means of invigorating the sociological imagination has been turned into an all-embracing assumption, with attempts being made to regulate the trading of symbols, which no system of meaning can any longer claim to control on its own, with the help of concepts taken from economic theory.[3]

The effect is to produce a model which is mechanistic and convenient, and which ascribes to religious institutions unequivocal strategies of symbolic marketing. This is taken to somewhat absurd lengths in the attempt by Lawrence Iannaccone, the Californian religious economist, to apply theories of rational choice to the analysis of personal piety, on the basis of the notion that individuals assess the benefits of choice in religion just as they do with any other choice they make.[4] For Berger and Luckmann, the metaphor of the symbolic market was in no sense meant to imply that the production and consumption of reli-

gious signs relate literally to highly problematic laws governing the production and consumption of goods and services. Their notion, as developed by Peter Berger, is that in modern society religious adherence has become purely a concern of the individual who incurs no sanction should he or she keep it at a distance, decide to change, or resolve to do without it altogether.[5]

This 'availability' of individual believers for a long while pushed up competitiveness between the dominant purveyors of meaning (established religions, political ideologies, scientist fantasies in a world wholly rational, and so on), whose diversity has been a feature of the course taken by modernity. The current radicalization of modernity, which probably played itself out in the collapse of the last polarization of meaning systems represented by the east–west divide,[6] is demonstrated by a general uncertainty regarding all references, itself an expression of the mistrust felt for the dominant traditions and their claim to permanence and stability. Some see this process as the social consummation of what Nietzsche long ago forecast as the era of nihilism, in which all values lose their value, since they obtain no further than does the power of assertion that proclaims them.

Without touching on the properly philosophical side of the debate, one need only observe that, sociologically speaking, our late twentieth-century generation, the first post-traditional generation, is the first one to find itself in a situation of structural uncertainty symptomized by the mobility, reversibility and transferability of all markers. The situation is one that does not even allow of a compensating recourse to belief in the continuity of a world whose complexity fails to draw out a modern version of belief in progress and a positive future for humanity, beyond crisis and cataclysm. The final collapse of the world of tradition has to be confronted without the eschatological predictions on offer from either traditional or so-called secular religions.

The break between the rule of tradition and that of modernity has occurred at the (clearly ideal) point at which evidence of continuity has become transformed into a vision of change represented as progress. The present transformation of modernity is taking place at the (equally ideal) point at which the dynamic representation of continuity whereby tradition could be given a utopian reconstruction has itself disintegrated. Does this mean that we are entering the phase that is sometimes called postmodernity? In the sense which Alain Touraine gives to the term, postmodernity is characterized by the 'complete dissociation of instrumental rationality which has now become a strategy in mobile markets and communities locked in their distinctness'. It corresponds to 'the dissociation of economic strategies and of the construction of a form of society, culture and personality', in a world in

which the conditions for economic growth, political liberty and individual happiness no longer appear analogous and interdependent.[7] The process of dissociation is a logical development of modernity itself; and Alain Touraine scrutinizes the different variants – hyper-modernism in Daniel Bell, anti-modernism in Baudrillard or Lipovetsky, cultural environmentalism in opposition to the universalism of the modernist ideology or other attempts to refute the claims of modernity to represent the fictitious unity of a world ruled entirely by the market – variants of a post-historicism that in several ways acknowledges the elimination of the individual rationally engaged in creating a society.

Postmodernisms assume charge of this essential reshaping of the relationship between human beings and society which is a consequence of humanity being immersed in a world of signs and language that lacks historical depth, in which 'everything fragments, from individual personality to life in society.' Touraine's purpose is to look beyond the success of the postmodernist critique in a search for a new definition of modernity which recognizes the relative autonomy of society and actors and sets a distance between itself and both neo-liberalism 'which describes a society reduced to being a market with no actors' and a postmodernism 'which calls to mind actors without a system, enclosed in their imagination and their memories'.[8]

Thus he is led to address the notion of postmodernity itself, aside from the many and frequently ambiguous meanings attributed to it. These ambiguities are of little concern to us here and we would recommend concentrating on the notion of high modernity used by Anthony Giddens to denote the omnipresence of risk (hence of uncertainty) peculiar to modern societies. Giddens sees the massive exposure to risk as the result of globalization which places the everyday life of each individual at the mercy of upheavals affecting society on a planetary scale.[9] Deprived of the security of stable communities which supplied evidence of a code of meaning that was fixed once and for all, deprived too of the great universalist visions imparted by modernist ideologies, individuals are adrift in a universe without fixed bearings. Their world is no longer one they can construct together. Self-fulfilment is now the chief aim, the subjective unification of fragmented experience that corresponds to different sectors of activity and different social relations. Given such a context, the deliberate choice of invoking the authority of a tradition, by becoming incorporated into a continuing lineage, constitutes one possible, post-traditional way of constructing self-identity among others, all of which call upon an individual's affectivity and are fed on his or her search for community, and his or her memories and longings.

Post-traditional religion and the institution of the religious

The very dissemination of ways in which individuals attempt to recon-
struct meaning for themselves, through reflecting on the diversity of
experience they have undergone in a kind of perpetual present, is at
the source of the explosion of the religious in the context of high mo-
dernity. Any such experiences, emotional, aesthetic, intellectual or of
whatever sort, can act as a fulcrum for the subjective reconstruction of
meaning, by providing a hold for the imaginative (re)constitution of a
chain of belief. The act of acquiring religious coherence may be abso-
lute and afford an organizing principle for an individual's entire life; it
may be partial and combine with other forms of imposing meaning on
subjective experience. However that may be, the religious reference to
a chain of belief affords the means of symbolically resolving the loss of
meaning that follows from heightened tension between the unrestrained
globalization of social phenomena and the extreme fragmentation of
individual experience.

The rise of the religious does not necessarily give rise to religion.
For that to be the case, it would require reference to tradition to be
capable of generating social links. In other words, it would require
assembly of the minimum conditions for a collective validation of
meaning necessary for a community of believers to be able to establish
itself, in the dual form of a tangible social group – whose organization
may range from very informal to very formal – and an imaginary lin-
eage, both past and future. Inasmuch as there no longer is any broad
spontaneous evidence of temporal and spatial continuity experienced
within the family, at work, in a neighbourhood or a denominational
gathering, such a pattern has to come from commitment on the part of
individuals who acknowledge their membership of a genuine spiritual
community.

This helps in understanding why the sect, entry to which is invari-
ably through conversion, that is to say personal choice, constitutes a
form of religious association presenting, ideal-typically, more affinity
with current features of cultural modernity than do church-type groups,
which nevertheless apply themselves, according to classic Troeltschian
typology and unlike sects, to seeking a compromise with cultural mo-
dernity. It has often been observed that the forms of religious renewal
which occur within the major churches favour the acclimatization of
sect-type features (personal commitment, emotional intensity, egali-
tarianism, closed community and so on) within church-type systems.
In standard approaches to analysing routinization within religious in-
stitutions, the sectarian dynamics of renewal is often linked to the
radicalism of beginnings, a radicalism destined in the medium term to
become subdued, to be 'ecclesiasticized'.[10]

If this perspective presents some interest, it nevertheless skirts the
essential – namely, the eminently modernizing function of the sectar-
ian argument itself and its renewed applicability to cultural plural-
ism.[11] Thus, just as it dissolves, as does its opposite, all religious systems
built on the heteronomous authority of a tradition, modernity, like its
counterpart, gives rise to the possibility of post-traditional religion.
Such a religion, instead of making individual obligation ensue from its
assumed generation within a tradition, defers recognition of a tradi-
tion's power of generation to the effectiveness of individual commit-
ment.

In modernity, being religious is not so much knowing oneself begot-
ten as willing oneself so to be. This fundamental reworking of the
relationship with tradition which characterizes modern religious be-
lieving opens up theoretically limitless possibilities for inventing, patch-
ing together and playing with systems of meaning that are capable of
'establishing tradition'. But only theoretically, for history and socio-
cultural determination impose limits on what can be believed, con-
ceived of and imagined and, further to these limits, context itself is
restrictive. This is well illustrated in the studies made by Roland
Campiche of the case of Switzerland.[12] Yet in spite of there being ef-
fective limits to a self-assembling construction of belief, the transfor-
mation in the relationship to tradition does not simply mean that no
particular tradition can any longer claim a monopoly of meaning. It
affects, at its very source, the institution of the religious, by way of the
institution of believing. What is called into question today – and prob-
ably irreversibly – is the possibility of an authoritative system being
able to impose itself in society, of its being in a position, while vouch-
ing for the truth of this or that body of belief, to exercise exclusive
control over its proclamation (by selected representatives) as well as
over what is proclaimed (by sifting, standardizing and grading the
authorized content) of such a body of belief.[13]

Beyond secularization, de-institutionalization

This last proposition, as I see it, implies that the discussion on
secularization – to what extent are modern societies secularized socie-
ties? Is secularization irreversible? – is now superseded. The real de-
bate, and the real issue for a sociology of the major religions, relates to
the consequences for the traditional institutions of religion of the radi-

cal de-institutionalization of the religious. For the problem they face is not primarily the management of their fairly discordant relationship with a secular environment which tends to marginalize their influence, still less that of knowing whether their loss of influence is the result of eagerness or reluctance to make concessions to modern culture. There is indeed something desperate in the contradictory self-criticism shown by Christian institutions, Catholic and liberal Protestant alike, in the face of the mounting indifference surrounding them, and in their reproaching themselves both with 'carrying their compromise with worldly attitudes too far' and with 'being unable to talk the language of today'. The real problem that concerns the future – perhaps the survival – of traditional religious institutions has to do with their ability, as an essential part of their function and a mark of their credibility in the world of high modernity, to give serious attention to the flexible nature of believing as it affects them, and which must oblige them to come to terms with the dynamics of the propagating and reprocessing of religious signs, itself a negation of the traditional mode of administering authorized memory.

How can religious institutions, with their prime purpose of preserving and transmitting a tradition, reform their own system of authority – essential for the continuity of a line of belief – when the tradition is thought of, even by believers, not as a sacred trust, but as an ethico-cultural heritage, a fund of memory and a reservoir of signs at the disposal of individuals? All religious institutions, whatever the theological notions of the religious authority they deploy, are faced with this question. Their problem, in every single case, is not primarily the cultural risk to the symbolic heritage in their possession: the point has already been made that in an uncertain world this constituted a singularly potent attraction. The problem is the possibility open to them of dispensing the true memory that can be used as a weapon against believers for whom the subjective truth of their own line of belief is primary.

This shift in the repository of the truth of belief from the institution to the believer does not only concern those who assemble their beliefs ('I'm religious in my own way'), or those who allow the possibility, if not the probability, of their believing ('I believe in something, but I'm not quite sure what'), both of whom surveys show to be on the increase, particularly in the younger generations, where relativism counts for more.[14] The trend towards a metaphor-fed subjectivizing of the contents of belief and the separation of belief and practice, the crisis facing the notion of religious obligation, the shift in the importance of observance in relation to the institutional norm defining the terms of authorized recall and so on, are merely the most readily available and

assessable symptoms of the disintegration of all religious systems of belief. But the same current affects certain neo-integralist movements – Catholic or Protestant charismatic movements in the first place – which are not necessarily to be counted as part of the demodernizing strain disturbing the dominant churches in spite of the assertiveness of their certainties in belief. Manifestly such movements start from the premise, in clear contradiction of modern thought, that the world in which they live has a wholly religious meaning and this gives it fundamental unity. But this religious meaning in their view can only be recognized subjectively, through the personal experience of the one who can read the signs providentially placed in his or her path.

> Everyone round me has a religious meaning, everything that happens to me, every event has religious significance. But the meaning is for me. It is up to each person to discover it in the course of his or her own experience. It is up to me to discern the sense of what is granted me in my everyday life, through the inspiration the Spirit gives me, and with the help of my community, with whom I share my experiences.

This extract of a conversation with a young management expert, who holds a doctorate in computer science and is a member of a charismatic prayer group, well illustrates this subjective fundamentalism, expressed through a construct of signs, whose unified representation of the fragmented world in which the individual in question lives is open to him or to her alone; a world whose ground rules, albeit profane, he or she can accept since in any event they are secondary in comparison with the 'real meaning of things' for which he or she holds the key. The separation – which might be described as schizophrenic if taken to its extreme – between the real world, with its own laws, and the subjective world of constructed meaning – 'realer than the real world' – constitutes a paradoxical means of recognizing the autonomy of the world, at the same time as it offers a possibility of religious integralism ('the whole of religion in the whole of life') becoming adapted to the modern culture of the individual ('the whole of my religion in the whole of my life'). It goes some way towards explaining the mystery, as it is sometimes seen, of the very large number of individuals with high scientific and technological qualifications who belong to renewal movements which promise their followers a complete rehabilitation in religion of their personal existence.

But these believers for whom everything is a sign perhaps pose as many problems to religious institutions as do those who profess a 'take it or leave it' form of belief. In both cases the institution's capability to control, or at least regulate, meaning, in this instance a product of the

individual and of the community, is in some degree at least called into question.[15] In both cases, such questioning is a function of the assertion of the primacy of the individual and of his or her experience over institutionally controlled conformity with the norms of belief implicit in the lineage. In both cases, religious experience is compatible with full and entire participation in this or that branch of secular culture; either because its scope is strictly limited to what is private and intimate, or because its domain is that of 'another reading', a purely spiritual and subjective reading, of the reality of the world.

The point needs to be made once again that Christianity – unlike Judaism or Islam, both of which attach more emphasis to the fulfilment of observances as a criterion of religious belief[16] – has itself facilitated the destabilizing of the essential structure of the religious, constituted by reference to an authorized memory, by giving the believer's personal faith, 'in spirit and in truth', pride of place. The modern de-institutionalization of the religious which reaches its culmination in the cultural world of high modernity is, in part at least, an offshoot of the Christian subjectivization of religious experience.

But pointing to this vulnerability in the Christian religion, itself a source of support for a theology advocating the coming of Christianity without religion, in no way implies that the other traditional religions can avoid a fundamental reworking of the relationship with tradition which is the peculiar feature of religious modernity. In the Jewish context, the development of movements embodying a return to tradition conforms, somewhat paradoxically but surely, to the general mood of destabilizing the institution of the religious, which displays innovative ways of redirecting a tradition that has been turned into a toolbox of symbols. This is well illustrated in Herbert Danzger's study of the Ba'alei T'shuva in the United States, in which young people of Jewish extraction began in the 1970s to make a total commitment not to a reformed or conservative doctrine of Judaism but to the most anti-modern orthodoxy.[17] Danzger shows how broad the divide is between these returnees and earlier instances of return to Jewish observance. Judaism in North America has long witnessed cases of young Jews, who generally for very personal reasons of wishing to assume their identity, return to the tradition of their forebears. The Talmud Torah and the congregational schools had, with them in mind and after negotiating a settlement with American educational authorities, already set up a system of remedial classes designed to meet the needs of those who had, and expressly felt, a lack of background in Jewish culture. In the 1970s these classes were swamped by new candidates, most often from a counter-culture, who were looking to an integral form of Judaism, removed from the slightest compromise with the

secular world, to provide them with an alternative means of decrying the American way of life, from a stance which they had in most cases previously developed through the experience of different sorts of alternative community. Danzger shows clearly how for the first elements among them, sizeable enough in the 1950s, the principal aim was to revive the memory of their origins and re-establish contact with their past, and thus by way of 'backward' reidentification be able to reconstruct their Jewish identity within American society in the wake of the Shoah. Jewish institutions offered them teaching programmes, summer camps, beginners' *minyans* and placements within practising families, a close contact with their culture and religion which they had missed in their own upbringing.

The second wave have quite different aims. Jewish orthodoxy attracts them because it affords an opportunity to break away from the secular world, to change one's life. Danzger gives prominence to the affinity that exists between these new converts to orthodoxy and a culture of self secreted by the modernity they reject (unfortunately he does not develop analysis beyond recognizing the problem this causes the Jewish establishment). Judaism is seen by them as a community of publicly declared affinities (special food, special clothes and so on), in which the charisma of the *rebbe* and insistence on ritual serve to strengthen emotional ties within the community. Religious radicalism which prompts them to seek the strictest conformity with Jewish laws has the unexpected effect of setting off a shock wave in currents of orthodoxy that one would least expect of compromise with the outside world; because the significance put upon observance by these neophytes places the system of institutionalized observance in an ambiguous position on sensitive questions such as the weight given to personal experience or the place of women within the community. More fundamentally, the question that arises from Danzger's observations (confirmed by other studies of the return to tradition in other contexts) concerns the institution of traditional Jewish life itself, when tradition ceases to represent the evidence of a way of life passed down from generation to generation and becomes an object of subjective preference on the part of individuals who choose to relate to it.

The institutional production of a chain of memory

One question that is bound to arise is that of knowing whether the impact of the crisis affecting religious institutions upon traditional religions does not apply especially to those in which the authority of tradition is expressly formalized under the guidance of a *magisterium*

recognized as having the exclusive power to regulate religious observ-
ance. This would further justify sociologists of Protestantism in again
pointing to the difference with churches which grew out of the Refor-
mation and which do not conform to the 'ritual institutional model',
identified by Jean-Paul Willaime as being one of the three ideal-typical
models for regulation in religious institutions.[18]

In the case of this last model, best exemplified by Catholicism, the
institution itself is the repository of truth. With its hierarchical struc-
ture directly threatened by the recognition that the growing number of
new communities it is harbouring closely matches the tendency for
belief to become individualized, it has reacted energetically by reaf-
firming the centrality of the doctrinal authority of Rome. Thus it is
committed to normalizing the references offered not just to the faith-
ful but to all humanity. This is borne out by the recent publication of
a universal catechism whose aim is both to reassert the articles of be-
lief in a unified form and to impose restrictions on conduct admissible
in every area of life, for believers and for the whole of humanity as
well. In an uncertain world, whose socially and psychologically de-
structive features it never tires of dwelling upon, the Catholic Church
strives to offer recourse to a stable system of clear references.

But there is a contradiction in that its offer of meaning is only cred-
ible, in a world where the subjectivity of the individual predominates,
inasmuch as it avoids being a recital of duties incumbent on the faith-
ful. The Church is obliged to compensate for the loss of authority
sustained by its message by giving it a prophetic character; and the
distance between the message and the values of those to whom it is
addressed is presumed to testify to its truth. But the prophetic charge
given the normative discourse fails to operate outside the decreasing
circle of believers for whom in any event it has always been the norm.
Hence the breach (which is very clear over the question of contracep-
tion and the use of condoms as a safeguard against Aids, though rather
less so over abortion) leaves priests with no alternative but to reiterate
the interdiction and/or reflect rather sadly – as did the chairman of the
conference of French bishops recently – on what could be done to
'narrow the gulf between the Church and civil society'.[19]

Clearly, the Reformed Church with its long experience of internal
pluralism and a religious mentality which affirms the believer's au-
tonomy outside the authority of the Bible, is able to be more flexible.
But one must be careful not to see a too systematic contrast with the
Catholic model of doctrinal normalization. It may be true that Protes-
tantism establishes the continuity of the lineage (the apostolic succes-
sion, in theological language) in a way that is appropriate to the message
rather than through conformity in observance, but the problem of

legitimate interpretation, and hence of the authority constituted to
convey the true memory of the message, is nonetheless present. It is in
fact more acute to the extent that the Protestant churches have fewer
means for imposing the true memory. As Jean-Paul Willaime remarks,
'the affirmation of the *sola scriptura* and of the universal priesthood
of believers may easily result in a religious group only bringing to-
gether people who practise a given reading of Bible texts and who
only recognize religious power in the person or group promoting a
specific understanding of the Christian tradition'.[20]

The threat of sectarian fragmentation is constantly alive in the Re-
formed Church inasmuch as the ideological institutional model which
prevails makes religious truth a matter of interpretation, leading to
constant criticism of the formulation used in the presentation of arti-
cles of faith. The need to face this historically recurring threat has led
Protestant churches themselves to develop an inclination to institu-
tionalize ideological power, which can serve to construct and recon-
struct authorized memory within the religious group. The Protestant
desacralization of the institution has weakened authorized memory,
but alongside 'schisms which have come about because of a reading
judged to be more truthful to a biblical context', Protestantism has
continued to create tradition for itself – a more mobile, more fluid
tradition perhaps, but tradition nonetheless, which constitutes it as an
exclusive religion, hence makes it answerable for the destabilizing of
all authorized memory that is a feature of high modernity.

The problem which confronts the major religions because of the
crisis in the institution of the religious, itself a product of high moder-
nity, occurs outside their various differences about how the relation-
ship with the truth is to be managed. It has to do with the possibility
that the capital of memory each one constitutes may continue to cre-
ate tradition, in other words that it may take on lasting representation
as a chain of belief, transcending the different communities in which
the chain has been and is made actual. The cultural demise of the
comprehensive memory which historically provided the dominant re-
ligions with their legitimacy is a consequence of the tendency to uni-
formity and fragmentation in modern societies. It nurtures a dual
process of reconciling the different ethical traditions, on the one hand
by extracting a number of universal values, on the other through the
spread of community-based small memories which absorb the need
for identity, itself suppressed by the modern culture of uniformity
masquerading as universality.

Thus all religious institutions mobilize their resources in the endeav-
our to seek out the possible symbolic benefits of the contradiction in
which they are inevitably placed. They resort to an ecumenicalism of

values so as to bring out the closeness of all believers within a culture that shows no response to institutionalized religious discourse and at the same time the divergence of communities which enables them to meet the demands for identity that match present uncertainties. It is a high-risk endeavour, in that a too great insistence on one dimension of the strategy immediately alienates those among their faithful who identify mainly or entirely with the other. The problem for all religious denominations is to have to give equal attention to the expectations of the faithful who seek authority in a message rather than an institution, and to those of other faithful who choose to belong to a community rather than submit to a body of beliefs and values. The best means of lessening the risk (in particular, the risk of sectarian splintering which such a situation encourages) is to exercise as little control as possible over signs and thus intervene as little as possible in the attempts by the different tendencies to reach a compromise.

Two registers seem particularly to favour the policy of conflict-avoidance which religious institutions have opted for in order to tackle the danger both of implosion and of outside competition to which they are subject because of the generalized fragmentation of the religious – emotional mobilization on the one hand, cultural rationalization on the other. Emotional mobilization provides a means of transcending conflict by recreating an individual and collective consciousness of emotional belonging, cultural rationalization of playing down conflict by giving it the appearance of a worthwhile expression of diversity in culture and feeling; in fact, the religious establishment, which is itself grappling with cultural modernity, is well able to accept this. In each case, the institution arms itself against the possibility of those it considers its constituents exiting from religion – employing the expression of belief without obligatory reference to tradition in the register of emotion, and the reference to tradition, without its necessarily implying believing, in the case of cultural rationalization. At the meeting point of these two dimensions it seeks to reconstruct the effect of lineage for which there is no longer a natural place in the continuity of generations.

To see this complex strategy in action, it is instructive to turn to the various operations which religious institutions are obliged to engage in so as to maintain their visibility in a cultural and symbolic climate, where their message is under threat of dilution from anodyne generalized ethical systems[21] and from attempts to rebuild identity over which they have no control. If one simply takes recent instances from France, one might again point to the Église Réformée de France and its attempts to recover its own memory in order to head off the danger of its own disappearance in view of the compromise it has made with modernity.[22]

These attempts well exemplify a strategy of marrying the emotivity of belonging with a reasoned appeal to ethico-cultural heritage. From the commemoration of the tricentenary of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes to the setting up of museums of Protestantism,[23] the urge to restore the Protestant grasp of continuity, the lifeline of its survival as a religion, has coalesced with the emotional remembrance of a minority, living its faith under the permanent threat of destruction, and with the celebration of Protestantism's historic contribution to the modern ideals of the Republic.

Judaism in France has adopted a similar strategy. The mass festival called by the Chief Rabbi and the Consistory at the Le Bourget exhibition centre outside Paris in 1991 was both a celebration of the unity of Judaism – cemented by the experience of genocide and recalled in commemorating the Shoah – and a buoyant testimony to its cultural diversity. It had the dual aim (a) of exorcizing the aggravated antagonism between models of Jewish identity extant in the community, and (b) of facing up to the threat posed to this same community by the steadily growing number of mixed marriages.

As a further instance of institutional top-down attempts to revive consciousness of a chain of belief there is the initiative taken by the Roman Church in launching worldwide pilgrimages of young people to places of special significance in Christian history, such as Rome, Santiago de Compostela and Czestochowa. Again the double strategy is clear – emotional remembrance and historico-cultural reconstruction of the failing memory of the continuity of belief. The masses of young pilgrims (500,000 in Spain, 2,000,000 in Poland), prepared for the final gathering by the long journey across Europe by bus, by train, in some cases even on foot, were invigorated by the sheer impact of their numbers, by the elation of taking part in an event that was being given worldwide media coverage and by the scale of the final celebration with the pope himself as principal actor.

The purpose behind such mobilization of feeling, involving as it did discovery of visible traces of the history of Christianity in Europe,[24] was to induce all who participated resolutely to take on – and be seen to take on – a Catholic identity, an identity given respectability by rapid immersion in religious instruction during the ten days that the pilgrimage lasted with its solemn confirmation by the papal presence. Yet one cannot say with complete conviction that the effect of this consciously organized (re)assembling of the chain of belief on those taking part fully corresponded with the aims of its promoters. It would seem that the essential element in the whole experience was its cultural (and ethical) affirmation of youth, given universality because of its cosmopolitan character, and not the assertion of religious and de-

nominational identity.[25] Beyond the contrast in the position and perception of the young pilgrims *vis-à-vis* those who took charge of the pilgrimage (as it became clear from the different surveys conducted after the event), the abiding impression is that from an institutional point of view the attempt to instil and control voluntary identification with tradition is an extremely hazardous operation.

What clearly emerges here is the ambivalent character of religion in modernity, in which the traditional religions can only hold their own by tentatively exploiting the symbolic resources at their disposal in order to reconstruct a continuing line of belief for which the common experience of individual believers provides no support. How do these policies that are based on tradition meld with the production of the religious in modernity, which it has been the purpose of this book to analyse? What new patterns of belief play a role in this encounter? Together with what types of religious sociality, implying what modes of symbolic and ideological regulation? What new interlinking of religion with politics and with culture is likely to come about? There is a vast field of investigation for a comparative sociology of traditional religions, which might open onto a more general sociology of the problems of transmission in modern societies. Certainly, these concluding remarks give little idea of the potential of such a project. But it was never our purpose actually to set our course in that direction. Our purpose has been to try to prepare the ground for an initiative which is capable of drawing the sociology of religion away from its abiding propensity – beyond every reappraisal of the theories of secularization – to conceive the relation of the religious to the modern through the spectrum of an inevitably damaging transformation of the historic religions. Such an approach would enable transformation to be conceived as inseparable from the problem of religious modernity itself. The aim is ambitious, probably too ambitious. But it waits on a more credible one being found.

Notes

1   Sociology in Opposition to Religion? Preliminary Considerations

1   See Poulat (1987) and Béguin, Tardits et al. (1987).
2   Le Bras (1956: 6).
3   Desroche (1968: ch. 1); Desroche, Séguy (1970); Poulat (1986, 1990).
4   Le Bras (1956: 6).
5   Ibid.
6   Ibid., p. 7.
7   François-André Isambert gives a penetrating analysis of this essentialist deviation in phenomenology in his comments on Roger Caillois's interpretation of festivals (1966: 291–308), which he returns to in Desroche, Séguy (1970: 217–57); see also Isambert (1982: 125ff).
8   Bourdieu (1987: 155–61).
9   Ibid., p. 160.
10   Boudon (1988: 73–6).
11   Burnouf, *La Science des religions* (Paris, 3rd edn, 1870), quoted in Desroche, Séguy (1970: 175).
12   Touraine (1974: 26).
13   Durkheim (1982: preface to 2nd edn).
14   Bourdieu (1968: introduction).
15   See Bertrand Russell's graphic summary in *Science and Religion* (1999).
16   Bellah: 'Christianity and Symbolic Realism', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religions*, 9 (1970), p. 93, included in Bellah (1970); also see Bellah: 'Comments on the Limits of Symbolic Realism', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religions*, 13 (1974), pp. 487–9.
17   Robbins, Anthony, Curtis, 'The Limits of Symbolic Realism', *Journal for*