

CHAPTER 3

Secularization, R.I.P.

For nearly three centuries, social scientists and assorted Western intellectuals have been promising the end of religion. Each generation has been confident that within another few decades, or possibly a bit longer, humans will “out-grow” belief in the supernatural. This proposition soon came to be known as the secularization thesis, and its earliest proponents seem to have been British, as the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 led to an era during which militant attacks on faith were quite popular among fashionable Londoners (Durant and Durant 1965).

As far as we are able to discover, it was the English divine and freethinker Thomas Woolston (1670–1731) who first set a date by which time modernity would have triumphed over faith. Writing in about 1710, he expressed his confidence that Christianity would be gone by 1900 (Woolston 1735). Half a century later, Frederick the Great thought this was much too pessimistic, writing to his friend Voltaire that “the Englishman Woolston . . . could not calculate what has happened quite recently. . . . It [religion] is crumbling of itself, and its fall will be but the more rapid” (quoted in Redman 1949, 26). In response, Voltaire ventured that the end would come within the next fifty years.

Widespread press reports about the second “Great Awakening” did nothing to deter Thomas Jefferson from predicting in 1822 that “there is not a young man now living in the United States who will not die a Unitarian” (Healy 1984, 373). Of course, a generation later, Unitarians were as scarce as ever, while the Methodists and Baptists continued their spectacular rate of growth (Finke and Stark 1992).

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Subsequent prophets of secularization have been no less certain, but they have been somewhat more circumspect as to dates. In France, Auguste Comte (1798–1857) announced that, as a result of modernization, human society was outgrowing the “theological stage” of social evolution and a new age was dawning in which the science of sociology would replace religion as the basis for moral judgments. But Comte did not say exactly when all this would be accomplished. In similar fashion, as often as Frederick Engels gloated about how the socialist revolution would cause religion to evaporate, he would only say that it would happen “soon.”

“Every day, every week, every month, every quarter, the most widely read journals seem just now to vie with each other in telling us that the time for religion is past, that faith is a hallucination or an infantile disease, that the gods have at last been found out and exploded,” Max Müller complained in his 1878 Hibbert lectures (1880, 218). “[T]he opinion is everywhere gaining ground that religion is a mere survival from a primitive . . . age, and its extinction only a matter of time,” A. E. Crawley noted early in the twentieth century (1905, 8). But a few years later, when Max Weber explained why modernization would cause the “disenchantment” of the world, and when Sigmund Freud reassured his disciples that this greatest of all neurotic illusions would die upon the therapist’s couch, they too would be no more specific than “soon.”

More recently, however, “soon” became “under way” or “ongoing.” For example, the distinguished anthropologist Anthony F. C. Wallace explained to tens of thousands of American undergraduates that “the evolutionary future of religion is extinction.” Although he admitted that it might require “several hundred years” to complete the process, he claimed that it already was well under way in the advanced nations (Wallace 1966, 264–65). Bryan Wilson, too, has throughout his illustrious career described secularization as “a long term process *occurring* in human society,” saying that “the process implicit in the concept of secularization concedes at once the idea of an earlier condition of life that was not secular, or that was at least much less secular than that of our own times” (Wilson 1982, 150–51).

In contrast to all this intellectual pussyfooting around, Peter Berger told the *New York Times* in 1968 that by “the 21st century, religious believers are likely to be found only in small sects, huddled together to resist a worldwide secular culture” (Berger 1968, 3). Unleashing his gift for memorable imagery, Berger said that “the predicament of the believer is increasingly like that of a Tibetan astrologer on a prolonged visit to an American university.” In light of the recent lionization of the Dalai Lama by the American media and his cordial welcome to various campuses, Berger’s simile now admits of rather a different interpretation. In any event, when his prediction had only three years left to run, Berger gracefully recanted his belief in secularization (as is discussed later). We quote his statements during the 1960s only because they so fully express the mood of the times.

Notice five things about all of these secularization prophecies.

First, there is universal agreement that modernization is the causal engine dragging the gods into retirement. That is, the secularization doctrine has always nestled within the broader theoretical framework of modernization theories, it being proposed that as industrialization, urbanization, and rationalization increase, religiousness *must* decrease (Hadden 1987; Finke 1992).

Keep in mind that modernization is a *long, gradual, relatively constant process*. Wars, revolutions, and other calamities may cause an occasional sudden blip in the trend lines, but the overall process is not volatile. If secularization is the result of modernization or, indeed, is one aspect of it, then secularization is not volatile and, rather than proceeding by sudden fits and starts, it too will display a long-term, gradual, and relatively constant trend of religious decline, corresponding to similar upward trends in such aspects of modernization as economic development, urbanization, and education. In terms of time series trends, modernization is a long, linear, upward curve, and secularization is assumed to trace the reciprocal of this curve, to be a long, linear, downward curve. Indeed, since modernization is so advanced in many nations that “post-modernism” is the latest buzzword, it must be assumed that secularization is at least “ongoing” to the extent that a significant downward trend in religiousness can be seen.

The second thing to notice about the secularization prophecies is that they are *not* directed primarily toward institutional differentiation—they do not merely predict the separation of church and state or a decline in the direct, secular authority of church leaders. Their primary concern is with *individual piety*, especially *belief*. Thus, Jefferson predicted that the next generation would find Christian beliefs, and especially faith in the divinity of Jesus, implausible and would limit themselves to the minimalist conception of God sustained by Unitarians. It was not bishops but the religious “fantasies” of the masses that most concerned Engels. Freud wrote about religious illusions, not about church taxes, and Wallace asserted that “belief in supernatural powers is doomed to die out, all over the world” (1966, 265) because, as Bryan Wilson explained “[t]he rational structure of society itself precludes much indulgence in supernaturalist thinking” (1975, 81).

In recent years, secularization has been defined in several ways (Hanson 1997; Tschannen 1991; Dobbelaere 1987; Shiner 1967), which unfortunately permits proponents of the thesis to shift definitions as needed in order escape inconvenient facts (see Dobbelaere, 1987; 1997; Lechner 1991; 1996; Yamane 1997). One definition, often referred to as the macro version (Lechner 1996), identifies secularization as deinstitutionalization (Dobbelaere 1987; Martin 1978). This refers to a decline in the social power of religious institutions, enabling other social institutions, especially political and educational institutions, to escape from prior religious domination.

If this were all that secularization meant, and if we limited discussion to Europe, there would be nothing to argue about. Everyone must agree that, in con-

temporary Europe, Catholic bishops have less political power than they once possessed, and the same is true of Lutheran and Anglican bishops (although bishops probably never were nearly so powerful as they now are thought to have been). Nor are primary aspects of public life any longer suffused with religious symbols, rhetoric, or ritual. These changes have, of course, aroused scholarly interest, resulting in some distinguished studies (Casanova 1994; Martin 1978). But the prophets of secularization theory were not and are not merely writing about something so obvious or limited. At issue is not a narrow prediction concerning a growing separation of church and state. Instead, as we have seen, from the start, the prophets of secularization have stressed personal piety, and to the extent that they have expressed macro interests, it has been to claim that they are so linked that a decline in one necessitates a decline in the other. Thus, if the churches lose power, personal piety will fade; if personal piety fades, the churches will lose power. Indeed, Peter Berger, long the most sophisticated modern proponent of the secularization thesis, was entirely candid on this point. Having outlined the macro aspects of secularization, Berger noted:

Moreover, it is implied here that the process of secularization has a subjective side as well. As there is a secularization of society and culture, so there is a secularization of consciousness. Put simply, this means that the modern West has produced an increasing number of individuals who look upon the world and their own lives without the benefit of religious interpretations. (Berger 1969, 107–8)

As noted, recently Berger (1997) gracefully withdrew his support for the theory of secularization. We quote this passage from his earlier work not to emphasize our previous disagreement with Berger, whose work we always have much admired, but as a contrast to the recent tactic by other proponents of secularization, who seek to evade the growing mountain of contrary evidence by pretending that the theory merely pertains to deinstitutionalization, and that any trends in personal piety are irrelevant. Let us note Karel Dobbelaere's breathtaking recent evasion, "the religiousness of individuals is *not* a valid indicator in evaluating the process of secularization" (1997, 9). Such revisionism is not only historically false, it is insincere. Those who employ it revert to celebrating the demise of individual piety whenever they see a fact that seems to be supportive or whenever they believe they are speaking to an audience of fellow devotees. Thus, at a conference in Rome in 1993, Lilliane Voyé and Karel Dobbelaere explained that because science is "a thoroughly secular perspective on the world" and has come to dominate educational curricula, this has resulted in "desacralizing the content of learning and the world-view of students." Citing earlier essays by Dobbelaere, they went on to claim that "the successful removal by science of all kinds of anthropomorphisms from our thinking have transformed the traditional concept of 'God as a person' into a belief in a life-force, a power of spirit and this has also gradually promoted ag-

nosticism and atheism—which explains the long-term decline of religious practices” (Voyé and Dobbelaere 1994, 95).

Exactly! That is precisely what the secularization thesis has always been, and Voyé and Dobbelaere’s empirical claims, if true, would fully satisfy Woolston’s prophesy—albeit a bit late. But, as will be seen, it is not so. What *is* so, is that secularization predicts a marked decline in the religiousness of the individual.

The third thing to notice about the secularization thesis is that, implicit in all versions, and explicit in most, is the claim that of all aspects of modernization, it is science that has the most deadly implications for religion. For Comte and Wallace, as for Voyé and Dobbelaere, it is science that will free us from the superstitious fetters of faith. Or, in the odd formulation by Bryan Wilson, “Christianity, with the impact of scientific and social scientific hindights, has lost general theological plausibility” (1968, 86). If this is so, then scientists must be a relatively irreligious lot. But, as was seen in chapter 2, scientists are about as religious as anyone else, and the presumed incompatibility between religion and science seems mythical. Additional evidence is examined later in this chapter.

Fourth, secularization is regarded as an absorbing state, which once achieved at is irreversible, instilling mystical immunity. However, events and trends in eastern Europe and the nations of the former Soviet Union do not support these expectations. Instead, as Andrew Greeley so aptly put it, after more than seventy years of militant efforts by the state to achieve secularization, “St. Vladimir has routed Karl Marx” (Greeley 1994, 272).

Fifth, and finally, while most discussions of secularization focus on Christendom, all leading proponents of the thesis apply it globally. Thus, it is not merely belief in Christ that is “doomed to die out,” but, as Wallace explained in the passage quoted above, “belief in supernatural powers,” and this is going to happen “all over the world.” Hence, Allah is fated to join Jehovah as only “an interesting historical memory.” However, no one has bothered to explain this to Muslims, as will be seen.

Now for specifics.

THE MYTH OF RELIGIOUS DECLINE

Many scholars appear to believe that if rates of individual religious belief and participation for most nations of northern and western Europe were graphed, they would indeed be reciprocal to the trends in modernization. Beginning with high levels of faith and practice at the end of the eighteenth century, the master trends are assumed to have been ever downward, culminating in very low current levels of religiousness. And the latter are regarded as but insignificant residuals, soon to disappear too (Wilson 1966; 1982; Bruce 1995; Lechner 1991; 1996). For evidence in support of these claims, we are directed to note a steep decline in church attendance in much of Europe and to infer from this an erosion of in-

dividual faith as well, on the grounds that participation is low because of a lack of the beliefs needed to motivate attendance. These views are wrong in all respects.

David Martin (1965) was the first contemporary sociologist to reject the secularization thesis outright, even proposing that the concept of secularization be eliminated from social scientific discourse on the grounds that it had served only ideological and polemical, rather than theoretical, functions and because there was no evidence in favor of any general or consistent “shift from a religious period in human affairs to a secular period” (Martin 1991, 465). Several years later, when Andrew Greeley (1972b) presented survey data refuting the secularization thesis, he was concerned that he might be labeled as a “conservative” because he dared to doubt the “demise of religion.” He argued, however, that his debate with other scholars was not ideological, it was empirical: “If I don’t believe Martin Marty, Peter Berger, Ramon Echarren, John Cogley, and Eugene Fontinell, it is not because I have ideological differences with any of them but simply because they do not offer evidence that convinces me” (Greeley 1972b, 7).

Astounding as it may seem, the secularization thesis has been inconsistent with plain facts from the very start. For example, having noted the popularity of the secularization doctrine among eighteenth-century philosophers, Alexis de Tocqueville commented: “Unfortunately, the facts by no means accord with their theory. There are certain populations in Europe whose unbelief is only equalled by their ignorance and debasement; while in America, one of the freest and most enlightened nations in the world, the people fulfill with fervor all the outward duties of religion” (Tocqueville [1835–39] 1956, 319).

In the more than 150 years since Tocqueville made those observations, not only has American religiousness not gone into decline, but the rate of church membership has actually doubled (Finke and Stark 1992), while other indices of commitment have held steady or have risen modestly (Greeley 1989; Finke 1992).

Moreover, although the American case continues to offer a devastating challenge to the secularization doctrine, the secularization thesis fails in Europe too. First, there has been *no demonstrable long-term decline in European religious participation*. Participation has probably varied from time to time in response to profound social dislocations such as wars and revolutions, but the far more important point is that religious participation was very low in northern and western Europe many centuries before the onset of modernization.

The second reason to reject claims about the secularization of Europe is that current data do not reveal the arrival of an age of “scientific atheism.” *Levels of subjective religiousness remain high*—to classify a nation as highly secularized when the large majority of its inhabitants believe in God is absurd. Indeed, the important question about religion in Europe is, as Grace Davie has put it, not why people no longer believe, but why they “persist in believing but see no need to participate with even minimal regularity in their religious insti-

tutions?” (Davie 1990b, 395). Of these two major bases for rejecting claims about the secularization of Europe, the claim that religious participation was never very high in northern and western Europe is the one that must strike most readers as dubious.

THE MYTH OF PAST PIETY

Everyone knows that once upon a time the world was pious—that in olden days most people exhibited levels of religious practice and concern that today linger only in isolated social subcultures such as those of the Amish, ultra-orthodox Jews, or Muslim fundamentalists. But, like so many once-upon-a-time tales, this conception of a pious past is mere nostalgia; most prominent historians of medieval religion now agree that there never was an “Age of Faith” (Morris 1993; Duffy 1992; Sommerville 1992; Bossy 1985; Obelkevich 1979; Murray 1972; Thomas 1971; Coulton 1938). Writing in the eleventh century, the English monk William of Malmesbury complained that the aristocracy rarely attended church, and that even the more pious among them “attended” mass at home, in bed: “They didn’t go to church in the mornings in a Christian fashion; but in their bedchambers, lying in the arms of their wives, they did but taste with their ears the solemnities of the morning mass rushed through by a priest in a hurry” (in Fletcher 1997, 476).

As for the ordinary people, during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, they rarely heard mass *anywhere*, most entering a church only for weddings, funerals, and christenings (if then), and their private worship was directed toward an array of spirits and supernatural agencies, only some of them recognizably Christian (Gentilecore 1992; Schneider 1990; Delumeau 1977; Thomas 1971). Alexander Murray’s assessment of medieval Italian religious life is typical: “[S]ubstantial sections of thirteenth-century society hardly attended church at all.” The Dominican prior Humbert of Romans, in his handbook *On the Teaching of Preachers*, advised his friars that “reaching the laity involves catching them at markets and tournaments, in ships, and so on,” which Murray interprets as “a fair enough sign that they were not to be caught in churches.” Indeed, Humbert frankly acknowledged that the masses “rarely go to church, and rarely to sermons [when they do attend]; so they know little of what pertains to their salvation.” Finally, Humbert admitted that the regular clergy were so involved in gambling, pleasure, and “worse things,” that they, too, “scarcely come to church.” In similar terms, the Blessed Giordano of Rivalto reported that, upon arriving in Florence to preach, he suggested to a local woman that she take her daughter to church at least on feast days, only to be informed, “It is not the custom” (Murray 1972, 92, 93–94). The anonymous English author of *Dives and Pauper* complained that “the people these days . . . are loath to hear God’s Service. [And when they must attend] they come late and leave early. They would rather go to a tavern than to Holy Church” ([ca. 1410] 1976:, 189).¹ In about

1430, St. Antonino, later archbishop of Florence, noted that Tuscan peasants seldom attended mass, and that “very many of them do not confess once a year, and far fewer are those who take communion. . . . They use enchantments for themselves and for their beasts . . . being ignorant, and caring little for their own souls or for keeping God’s commandments, which they know not” (quoted in Coulton 1938, 193). Antonino went on to blame most of this on “the carelessness and evil conscience of their parish priests.”

In further support of these reports, an extensive survey of surviving parish churches in various parts of Europe reveals them to be too small to have held more than a tiny fraction of local inhabitants (Brooke and Brooke 1984). Indeed, it was not until the late Middle Ages that there even were more than a few parish churches outside of the cities and larger towns (not counting the private chapels maintained for the local nobility), at a time when nearly everyone lived in rural areas (Morris 1993). This was no more than a continuation of the anti-rural outlook of the early Christian movement. Not only were the first Christians urban, as Wayne Meeks (1983) demonstrated, but they regarded peasants with disdain. Richard Fletcher explains:

The peasantry of the countryside were beyond the pale, a tribe apart, outsiders. Such attitudes underpinned the failure of the urban Christian communities to reach out and spread the gospel in the countryside. . . . For them the countryside did not exist as a zone for missionary enterprise. After all, there was nothing in the New Testament about spreading the Word to the beasts of the field. (Fletcher 1997, 16)

Indeed, the word *pagan* comes from the Latin word for countryman (*paganus*).

Even when rural parishes did appear, they suffered from neglect and many, perhaps most, lacked a pastor much of the time. Eamon Duffy has estimated that during the sixteenth century, for example, at least 25 percent of the parishes in the diocese of Strasbourg and up to 80 percent in the diocese of Geneva had no clergy. To make matters worse, even where there was an assigned pastor, “[a]bsenteeism was rife” (Duffy 1987, 88). The bishop’s visitation of 192 parishes in Oxfordshire during 1520 found 58 absentees (Coulton 1938, 156). “Bishops who never visited their sees were not unknown,” too, in northern Europe, P.H. Sawyer notes (1982, 139). Indeed, many bishoprics were given to papal protégés without any obligation to reside (Coulton 1938).

That religious participation was lacking even in the cities is not very surprising when we realize that going to church in, say, the fifteenth century, required the average person to stand in an unheated building to hear a service conducted entirely in incomprehensible Latin; in fact, the priest may not have been speaking Latin at all, but simply mumbling nonsense syllables, for many priests were profoundly ignorant. In 1222, the Council of Oxford described the parish clergy as “dumb dogs” (Coulton 1938, 157).

The Venerable Bede advised the future bishop Egbert that because so few English priests and monks knew any Latin, “I have frequently offered translations of both the [Apostle’s] Creed and the Lord’s Prayer into English to many unlearned priests” (Bede [730] 1955, 340). More than a thousand years after Bede’s efforts to at least teach clergy the Lord’s Prayer, however, nothing had changed. William Tyndale noted in 1530 that hardly any of the priests and curates in England knew the Lord’s Prayer or could translate it into English. This was confirmed when the bishop of Gloucester systematically tested his diocesan clergy in 1551. Of 311 pastors, 171 could not repeat the Ten Commandments, and 27 did not know the author of the Lord’s Prayer (Thomas 1971, 164). Indeed, the next year, Bishop Hooper found “scores of parish clergy who could not tell who was the author of the Lord’s Prayer, or where it was to be found” (Coulton 1938, 158).

Across the Channel, St. Vincent de Paul discovered in 1617 that his local priest knew no Latin, not even the words of absolution (Delumeau 1977). Similarly, in 1547, Archbishop Giovanni Bovio of the Brindisi-Oria diocese in southern Italy found that most of his priests “could barely read and could not understand Latin” (Gentilcore 1992, 42).

Clerical ignorance is not surprising when we recognize that “there were virtually no seminaries,” and that most priests “learned rubrics” and a “smattering of Latin” as an apprentice to “a priest who had himself had little or no training” (Duffy 1987, 88). In the fifteenth century, St. Bernardine of Siena observed a priest “who knew only the Hail Mary, and used it even at the elevation of the Mass” (Duffy 1987, 88). Eamon Duffy (1992) has effectively demonstrated the ignorance of the parish clergy from the contents of the very first “primers” for clergy that began to be distributed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. That these booklets, most of them written in the local language rather than in Latin, and prepared for those who already were serving as clergy, were limited to the most elementary aspects of doctrine and practice—for example, simple lists of the sacraments and of the sins that should be confessed—shows that church officials thought most serving clergy knew considerably less than a modern 10-year-old attending parochial school.

Given such clerical ignorance, it is no wonder that the masses knew next to nothing in terms of basic Christian culture. The Lateran Council of 1215, in addition to requiring all Catholics to confess and to take communion at least once a year during the Easter season, proposed that a massive campaign of elementary religious instruction of the laity be undertaken. Thus, at the Council of Lambeth in 1281, the English bishops responded by adopting the *aim* of teaching the laity the Lord’s Prayer, Hail Mary, and the Apostle’s Creed. Later this was expanded to include the Ten Commandments, the Seven Works of Mercy, the Seven Sacraments, and the Seven Deadly Sins (Duffy 1992). Similar plans to catechize the laity were adopted throughout Europe. Despite these very

modest goals, it seems unlikely that many of the laity, other than members of the educated elite, ever mastered these simple lessons—since so many priests did not. Ignorance of the formal content of faith was general,” writes Colin Morris (1993, 232), recounting the story of a village priest who managed to teach many in his congregation to recite the “Our Father” in Latin, although they had not the slightest idea of what it meant (possibly the priest didn’t either). Other examples come from investigations of scores of incidents involving religious apparitions (mostly of Mary) in Spain during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. These hearings revealed that most parishioners reporting such visions were ignorant of the Ten Commandments and the Seven Deadly Sins. It was not merely that they could not recite them, but that they were entirely ignorant of their contents. A typical instance involved a man who claimed frequent visions of Mary and who, during an interrogation in 1518, was asked if he knew the Ten Commandments and the Seven Deadly Sins. “He said he did not know any of these in whole or in part. . . . He was asked if pride or envy or lust or killing a man or insulting someone with offensive words was a sin, to each of these he replied that he did not know. He was asked if theft was a sin, and he said that, God preserve us, theft was a very great sin” (quoted in Christian 1981, 154).

It must be noted, too, that even when medieval people did go to church, they often did so unwillingly and behaved very inappropriately while there. “[I]t is problematical as to whether certain sections of the population [of Britain] at this time had any religion at all,” and “many of those who did [go to church] went with considerable reluctance,” writes the eminent historian Keith Thomas (1971, 159). When the common people did show up in church, often under compulsion, they often so misbehaved “as to turn the service into a travesty of what was intended” (*ibid.*, 161). “Members of the population jostled for pews, nudged their neighbours, hawked and spat, knitted, made coarse remarks, told jokes, fell asleep, and even let off guns,” according to presentations before ecclesiastical courts and scores of clerical memoirs (*ibid.*). Church records tell of a man in Cambridgeshire who was charged with misbehaving in church in 1598 after his “most loathsome farting, striking, and scoffing speeches” had resulted in “the great offence of the good and the great rejoicing of the bad” (quoted in *ibid.*, 162). A man who issued loathsome farts in church today surely would not draw cheers from part of the congregation in any British church, not even if he accompanied his efforts with scoffing speeches.

People often did gather regularly and eagerly within churches, but it was for entirely unreligious purposes. The archbishop of Florence, St. Antonino, denounced the Tuscan peasants of his diocese because “in the churches themselves they sometimes dance and leap and sing with women” (quoted in Coulton 1938, 193). Indeed, through the centuries there was a constant flow of injunctions to local parishes, and, often enough, even to those in charge of cathedrals, to cease using them primarily as indoor marketplaces and for stor-

age of crops and sheltering livestock. For example, between 1229 and 1367, in England alone, there were eleven episcopal “fulminat(tions) against holding markets . . . in churches” (Coulton 1938, 189). Letters survive in which the bishops of Augsburg and of Rheims warned their priests against pawning their vestments and church vessels (Fletcher 1997, 480–81).

Summing up his survey of popular religion in thirteenth-century Italy, Alexander Murray disputes “the notion of an Age of Faith,” saying: “The friars [of that era] were not typical figures in a freakish age, but, morally, freakish figures in a typical age. Their mendicant life was a lasting wonder to contemporaries. They were a small minority: ‘Virgins are few, martyrs are few, preachers are few,’ said Fra Giordano” (Murray 1972, 83, 106). To be sure, there were periodic explosions of mass religious enthusiasm in medieval times as new sectarian movements—including the Waldensians and the Albigensians—attracted large followings (Lambert 1992). However, as we shall see in chapter 8, such outbursts are not to be expected where conventional religious organizations are strong, but only where religious apathy and alienation are widespread. That is, religious rebellions during medieval times offer additional testimony against images of widespread involvement in *organized* religion.

As Europe passed out of medieval times, religious participation seems not to have improved—although the statistics on religious behavior do. Some of the best of these can be found in the reports written by various Anglican bishops and archbishops following visitations of their parishes. Thus, the Oxford Diocesan Visitations report that 30 parishes in Oxfordshire drew a *combined total* of 911 communicants in 1738, based on the four “Great Festivals”—Easter, Ascension, Whitsun, and Christmas. This turnout amounted to far less than 5 percent of the total population of these parishes taking communion during a given year. Other visitation reports yield similarly low rates of participation in communion over the remainder of the eighteenth century (Currie, Gilbert, and Horsley 1977). Indeed, Peter Laslett (1965) reports that only 125 of 400 adults in a particular English village took Easter communion late in the eighteenth century and notes “much smaller attendances” in other villages. Incredibly, Laslett uses these data to demonstrate the unanimity of faith in this era²—the title of his book is *The World We Have Lost*. Were these twentieth-century statistics, they would be cited routinely as proof of massive secularization.

If we use 1800 as the benchmark, then church membership in Britain is substantially higher today than it was then. In 1800, only 12 percent of the British population belonged to a specific religious congregation. This rose to 17 percent in 1850 and then stabilized—the same percentage belonged in 1990 (Stark and Iannaccone 1995). In his remarkable reconstruction of religious participation in the British communities of Oldham and Saddleworth, Mark Smith (1996) found there had been no change between 1740 and 1865—a period of intensive industrialization. As will be noted, Laurence Iannaccone (1996) has reconstructed a time series that does show a modest decline in church attendance in

Britain during the twentieth century. This finding is offset both by the lack of similar declines in most other European nations, as well as by studies suggesting recent increases in church participation in lower-class British urban neighborhoods long noted for their very low rates of attendance (G. Smith 1996). Indeed, according to a report issued in 1996 (*Signs of Life*), during the past decade, the decline in membership and attendance in the Church of England has halted, and there has been a very substantial rise in per capita weekly contributions (Cimino 1996, 5). The “market” theory of religiousness developed in chapter 8 is compatible with religious *variation*, that is to say, with increases as well as decreases in religiousness; indeed, its usual prediction is for relatively stable levels of religious commitment in societies. In contrast, the secularization thesis is incompatible with either stability or increase: it requires a *general, long-term pattern of religious decline*. It makes no provision for reports such as Gabriel La Bras’s (1963) that French Catholics today participate more willingly and frequently, with far greater comprehension of what they are doing, than was the case 200 years ago.

The evidence is clear that claims about a major decline in religious participation in Europe are based in part on very exaggerated perceptions of past religiousness. Participation may be low today in many nations, but not because of modernization, and the secularization thesis is therefore irrelevant. But what about *very* recent times? Perhaps the secularization theorists’ predictions were simply premature? As mentioned, Laurence Iannaccone (1996) has been able to use survey data to reconstruct church attendance rates for 18 nations (most of them European) beginning in 1920. In 15 of the 18, Iannaccone could detect no trends even vaguely consistent with the secularization theses: only in East Germany, Slovenia, and Great Britain did he observe downward trends that could possibly be claimed as support for secularization, and, as mentioned, the British trend may already have been reversed, while the declines in Slovenia and East Germany began with the imposition of Communist regimes.

Little wonder, then, that historians have long expressed dismay at “unhistorically minded sociologists” for clinging to the myth of Europe’s lost piety, complaining that “not enough justice has been done to the volume of apathy, heterodoxy and agnosticism that existed long before the onset of industrialization” (Thomas 1971, 173). For, as Andrew Greeley put it so crisply, “There could be no de-Christianization of Europe . . . because there never was any Christianization in the first place. Christian Europe never existed” (1995, 63).

THE FAILURE TO CHRISTIANIZE

This raises a most significant question: Why wasn’t the Christianization of Europe accomplished? At the start of the fourth century, Christianity was an immense *mass* movement sweeping over the Roman Empire, and by the middle of the century, a majority of the population probably had been converted (Stark 1996a). What happened then? The failure of the early church to Christianize

the outer reaches of the empire and the rest of Europe is entirely in keeping with the market model of religiousness developed in chapter 8. The Christianity that triumphed over Rome was a mass social movement in a highly competitive environment. The Christianity that subsequently left most of Europe only nominally converted, at best, was an established, subsidized state church that sought to extend itself, not through missionizing the population, but by baptizing kings (Davies 1996, 275) and then canonizing them as national saints (Vauchez 1997). That is, the Christianity that prevailed in Europe was an elaborate patchwork of state churches that settled for the allegiance of the elite and for imposing official requirements of conformity, but that made little sustained effort to Christianize the peasant masses (Duffy 1987; Greeley 1995). Thus, it is not merely that the state churches of Scandinavia and northern Europe currently lack the motivation and energy to fill their churches. They have *always been like this*. The “Christianization” of a Norse kingdom, for example, often involved little more than the baptism of the nobility and legal recognition of the ecclesiastical sovereignty of the church. This left the task of missionizing the masses to a “kept” clergy whose welfare was almost entirely independent of mass assent or support, with a predictable lack of results.

Indeed, corruption and sloth, as well as power struggles and enforced conformity, became prominent features of the Christian movement in the fourth century, almost immediately upon its having become the official state church (Johnson 1976). Thus, for example, Christian bishops no longer were leaders of a stigmatized, if rapidly growing, sect, but were “rapidly assimilated as quasi civil servants into the mandarin state which administered the empire” (Fletcher 1997, 22). House churches were replaced by resplendent public buildings, sustained by imperial largess. Contrary to the received wisdom, the conversion of Constantine did not cause the triumph of Christianity. Rather, it was the first, and most significant step, in slowing its progress, draining its vigor, and distorting its moral vision. Most of the evils associated with European Christianity since the middle of the fourth century can be traced to establishment.

The “conversion” of Scandinavia is instructive. Denmark was the first “Christian” nation in the north, as a succession of kings accepted, rejected, or were indifferent to Christianity, culminating in the ascension of the devout Christian Knut the Great in 1016 (Sawyer 1982; Roesdahl 1980; Jones 1968; Brøndsted 1965). This now is regarded as the “official” date of the Christianization of Denmark. However, most historians do not equate this with the Christianization of the Danish people, writing instead that this followed only “gradually” (Brøndsted 1965, 310) and noting that the conversions of the monarchs were “[n]ever the result of popular demand” (Sawyer 1982, 139).

Next came the “Christianization” of Norway. Olaf Tryggvason, an English-educated Christian convert, seized the throne of Norway in 995, whereupon he attempted to convert the country by force, killing some who resisted and burning their estates. These and other repressive measures aroused sufficient opposition to defeat him in the battle of Svolder (about the year 1000), during which he

died. Fifteen years later, Olaf Haraldsson, who had been baptized in France, conquered Norway. He too used fire and sword in an effort to compel Christianization. And he too provoked widespread hatred, leading to rebellion, and was driven into exile. When he attempted to return leading a new army raised in Kiev, he was defeated and killed at the battle of Stikklestad in 1030. Despite this, he was soon canonized as St. Olaf and is credited with the Christianization of Norway, which seems to have consisted primarily of the reimposition of Olaf's official policies of intolerance (Sawyer 1982; Jones 1968).

The conversion of Iceland followed a somewhat similar pattern as both Norwegian Olafs successively extended their efforts at forced conversion upon their colony. At a meeting of the Althing in 1000, the Icelanders yielded to Norwegian pressure by adopting the law "that all people should become Christian and those who here in the land were yet unbaptized should be baptized." But, the law read on: "people might sacrifice to the old gods in private" (Byock 1988, 142). Although paganism was subsequently outlawed, aspects of it still linger in Iceland, whose Christianization never resulted in more than the most minimal participation in the church.

The Swedish court remained pagan into the twelfth century, and Finland remained officially pagan until the thirteenth (Sawyer 1982; Brøndsted 1965). It seems revealing as to the lack of effort to Christianize the general population that no missionaries were even sent to the Lapps until the middle of the sixteenth century (Baldwin 1900). In reality, it is not clear when popular paganism actually began to wane in Scandinavia, and, as in the case of Iceland, there is reason to suppose that it never did entirely disappear (Sawyer and Sawyer 1993). Indeed, it seems to have been typical for the Norse to "convert" by including Christ and various Christian saints (especially Olaf) in the pagan pantheon. Thus, it was written in the Icelandic *Landnámabók* that Helgi the Lean "was very mixed in his faith; he believed in Christ, but invoked Thor in matters of seafaring and dire necessity" (quoted in Brøndsted 1965, 306). Johannes Brøndsted has noted that "a change of gods at the summit of society might occur easily enough; but lower down on the scale there was a natural resistance." Indeed, Brøndsted suggests that the conversion of Scandinavia occurred "only . . . when Christianity took over old [pagan] superstitions and usages and allowed them to live under a new guise" (ibid., 307). Thus, the popular Christianity that eventually emerged was a strange amalgam, including a great deal in the way of pagan traditions and celebrations, some of them only thinly Christianized (Davies 1996).

Consequently, as Andrew Greeley has pointed out, Christian commitment in northern Europe was neither deep enough to generate much mass attendance nor "deep enough to survive changes in the religious affiliation of their political leaders during the Reformation, sometimes back and forth across denominational lines" (Greeley 1996, 66).

Both of Greeley's points are easily demonstrated quantitatively. We began with the sixteen nations of western Europe.³ For each, we calculated the num-

ber of centuries since their supposed Christianization (20 minus the century), with values ranging from 16 for Italy down to 7 for Finland (Davies 1996; Barrett 1982; Sawyer 1982; Roesdahl 1980; Shepherd 1980; Jones 1968; Brøndsted 1965). This variable is based on the assumption that the more recent the Christianization, the more superficial. Turning to the 1990–91 World Values Surveys, we created a variable based on the rate of church attendance. As would be predicted, the duration of Christianization is extremely highly correlated with contemporary rates of church attendance (.72). In similar fashion, the most plausible measure of participation in the Reformation (since some of these modern nations include many areas that were independent states in the sixteenth century) is the percentage of Catholics, which we took from the 1996 *Catholic Almanac*. Again, as predicted, this variable is very highly correlated (.89) with the duration of Christianization.

SUBJECTIVE RELIGIOUSNESS

Steve Bruce of the University of Aberdeen has long been one of the most die-hard proponents of the secularization thesis. Recently, even he admitted (1997) that, in terms of organized participation, the Golden Age of Faith never existed. Indeed, Bruce now proposes that the medieval church was not even especially concerned to bring the people to mass as “was clear from the very architecture of churches and forms of service” (1997, 674). But, rather than giving up on the secularization thesis, Bruce now claims that the Golden Age of medieval religiousness was subjective, that people strongly embraced supernatural beliefs, Christian or otherwise. Put another way, Bruce now claims that even if the medieval masses seldom went to church, most people in this era still must be regarded as religious because they believed. We quite agree. Certainly most people in medieval times seem to have held religious beliefs, even if these were somewhat vague and included as much magic and animism as Christianity. Thus, through belief, if not through practice, these were *religious* societies (see Duffy 1992), keeping in mind, of course, that a substantial proportion of medieval populations did not take their religious beliefs very seriously. Nor must we forget that a significant number, probably about the same as today, rejected religious beliefs. As Franklin Baumer has put it, “Contrary to popular supposition there was plenty of scepticism in the Middle Ages, and some of it was quite radical” (1960, 99). Judging from the prevalence of blasphemous graffiti on the walls of Pompeii, the same must be said of the Greco-Roman era (Macmullen 1981; Stark 1996a).

Nevertheless, we also accept that belief was widespread, and we interpret the prevalence of religious beliefs as representing a potential demand for organized religion in these societies—a potential in the sense that it awaited activation by aggressive suppliers such as the Waldensians. However, rather than this restoring a benchmark of past piety against which to demonstrate the secularization of modern-day Europe, the same observation applies with equal force

today. That is, while rates of religious participation are far lower in Europe than in the United States, differences are small when comparisons are based on subjective measures of faith (Stark and Iannaccone 1994; Stark 1998c).

We are hardly the first to notice this phenomenon. There is a substantial British research literature on “believing without belonging,” as Grace Davie calls it (1990a; 1990b; 1994). “What is clear is that most surveys of religious belief in northern Europe demonstrate continuing high levels of belief in God and some of the more general tenets of the Christian faith but rather low levels of church attendance,” Michael Winter and Christopher Short sum up, adding: “[W]e have revealed a relatively, and perhaps surprisingly, low level of secularization” (Winter and Short 1993, 635, 648). It is perhaps for that reason that their work has not been much cited by other European social scientists, but what they say is nonetheless true: subjective religiousness remains high in the nations most often cited as examples of secularization, places where it is claimed that people have outgrown religion for good. It seems useful to examine one case in greater detail.

Because Iceland has been proposed as the first fully (or nearly fully) secularized nation on earth (see Tomasson 1980), it seems an appropriate test case. The claim that Iceland is extremely secularized is taken as self-evident on the basis of its empty churches—about 2 percent attend weekly. Nevertheless, on the basis of extensive fieldwork, William Swatos (1984) reported high levels of religion in homes in Iceland today; there are high rates of baptism, nearly all weddings occur in church, and “affirmations of personal immortality are typical” in newspaper obituaries, which usually are written by a close friend of the deceased rather than by a journalist. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the 1990 World Values Surveys report that 81 percent of Icelanders express confidence that there is life after death, 88 percent say they believe humans have a soul, and 40 percent believe in reincarnation. And when asked, “How often do you pray to God outside of religious services?” 82 percent said they prayed sometimes, and one of four said they did so “often.” Moreover, only 2.4 percent of the population of Iceland say they are “convinced atheists.” Surely this is not what usually is meant by a “secularized society.” Moreover, that 4 in 10 believe in reincarnation serves to remind us that the secularization theory never has been limited to Christianity; *all* beliefs in the supernatural are pertinent, and even a massive shift from belief in Jesus to the worship of the goddess Kali would not constitute secularization. It is worth noting, therefore, that spiritualism is also extremely widespread in Iceland, where it is popular even among leading intellectuals and academics (Swatos and Gissurarson 1997).

RELIGION AND SCIENCE

If secularization is to show up anywhere, it *must* show up among scientists. In chapter 2 we examined evidence that the conflict between religion and science is largely fictional, and that scientists are not notably irreligious. But, you may

wonder, aren't some scientists militant atheists who write books to discredit religion—the late Carl Sagan being an example? Of course, but their numbers are few compared with those employed in ostensibly religious occupations: it is theologians (see Cupitt 1997), professors of religious studies (see Mack 1996), and clergy (see Spong 1998) who are by far the most prolific sources of popular works of atheism.

Recently, quite amazing time series data on the beliefs of scientists were published in *Nature*. In 1914, the American psychologist James Leuba sent questionnaires to a random sample of those listed in *American Men of Science*. Each was asked to select one of the following statements “concerning belief in God” (all italics in the original):

1. I believe in a God to whom one may pray in the expectation of receiving an answer. *By “answer,” I mean more than the subjective, psychological effect of prayer.*
2. I do not believe in God *as defined above.*
3. I have no definite belief regarding this question.

Leuba's standard for belief in God is so stringent it would exclude a substantial portion of “mainline” clergy,⁴ and that obviously was intentional on his part. He wanted to show that men of science were irreligious. To his dismay, Leuba found that 41.8 percent of his sample of prominent scientists selected option one, thereby taking a position many would regard as “fundamentalist.” Another 41.5 percent selected the second option (many of whom, as Leuba acknowledged, no doubt believed in a somewhat less active deity), and 16.7 percent took the indefinite alternative.

Clearly, these results were not what Leuba had expected and hoped for. So he gave great emphasis to the fact that, as measured, believers were not in the majority and went on to express his faith in the future, claiming that these data demonstrated a rejection of “fundamental dogmas—a rejection apparently destined to extend parallel with the diffusion of knowledge . . .” (Leuba 1916, 280).

In 1996, Edward J. Larson and Larry Witham (1997) replicated Leuba's study exactly. They found that nowadays 39.3 percent of eminent scientists selected option one, which is not significantly different from the 41.8 percent who did so in 1914. This time 45.3 percent chose option two, and 14.5 percent took option three. Thus, over an 82-year period, there has been no decline in a very literal belief in God among scientists.

Eastern Revivals

The collapse of Soviet Communism had many remarkable consequences, not the least of which was to reveal the abject failure of several generations of dedicated efforts to indoctrinate atheism in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. “Never before in human history has there been such a concerted effort

to stamp out not merely *a* religion, but all trace of religion,” Andrew Greeley observes. “Atheistic Communism thought of itself as pushing forward the inevitable process of secularization in which religion would disappear from the face of the earth—a process which, in perhaps milder form, is an article of faith for many dogmatic social scientists” (Greeley 1994, 253).

And the results? Atheists are few in the countries of the former Soviet Bloc, not more prevalent than in western Europe, or, indeed, in the United States. In most of these countries, the majority of people pray, and by 1990 church attendance already had recovered to levels comparable to those in western Europe. Moreover, church attendance continues to rise, as do other forms of religiousness. In Hungary, for example, monthly church attendance rose from 16 percent in 1981 to 25 percent in 1991, while the percentage attending less than once a year fell from 62 percent to 44 percent! Meanwhile, the percentage of Hungarians who said they were “convinced atheists” fell from 14 to 4. In Russia, 53 percent of respondents said they were not religious in 1991. In only five years, this fell to 37 percent.

By any measure, major religious revivals are under way during these early days of the postcommunist era in the old Soviet Bloc. This seems to have taken most social scientists entirely by surprise (as have all recent signs of religious vitality). As Mary Douglas pointed out as long ago as 1982:

No one, however, foresaw the recent revivals of traditional religious forms. According to an extensive literature, religious change in modern times happens in only two ways—the falling off of traditional worship in Christian churches [or whatever the traditional churches of a society are], and the appearance of new cults, not expected to endure. No one credited the traditional religions with enough vitality to inspire large-scale political revolt. . . . But the explicitly Catholic uprising in Poland, which evokes deep Western admiration, was as unpredicted as the rise of the fundamentalist churches in America. (Douglas 1982, 25)

It would be needlessly vindictive to quote various social scientists who once were certain that “enlightened” educators in “socialist” nations were “freeing children” from the grip of superstition and launching a new era of permanent secularity. But our willpower does not go so far as to prevent a bit of crowing, hence we quote a paper initially presented at a conference in 1979:

[S]ecular states cannot root out religion, and . . . to the extent that they try to root it out, they will be vulnerable to religious opposition. . . . Lenin’s body may be displayed under glass, but no one supposes that he has ascended to sit on the right hand, or even the left hand, of Marx. . . . dams along the Volga do not light up the meaning of the universe. Moreover, repressive states seem to increase levels of individual deprivation and, in so doing, to fuel the religious impulse. In making faith more costly, they also make it more necessary and valuable. Perhaps religion is never so robust as when it is an underground church. (Stark 1981, 175)

And so it was.

Islam

The evidence examined thus far has been limited to Christian nations. Now let us turn to religious trends in Islam. In extraordinary contradiction to the secularization doctrine, there seems to be a profound compatibility between the Islamic faith and modernization—several studies from quite different parts of the world suggest that Muslim commitment increases with modernization.

In studies of Muslims in Java, Joseph Tamney (1979; 1980) found that religious commitment there was positively correlated with education and with occupational prestige. That is, people who had attended college or held high-status occupations were substantially more likely to pray the required five times a day, to give alms, and to fast in accord with orthodox Islamic practice than were Muslims with little education or low-status occupations. Tamney also recognized that his findings implied that Muslim practice would increase as modernization proceeded. In a subsequent work, Tamney (1992) has analyzed the “resilience” of religion: how it has been able to adjust to challenges of modernity.

A study of the leading Muslim “fundamentalist” movement in Pakistan found that the leaders are highly educated (all having advanced degrees) and supporters of the movement are drawn overwhelmingly from “the new middle class” (Ahmad 1991). This is confirmed by data on Turkish students based on an actual time series. Since 1978 there has been a remarkable increase in the proportion of students at the University of Ankara who hold orthodox Islamic beliefs, and in 1991 the overwhelming majority of students held these views. In 1978, 36 percent of students expressed firm belief that “there is a Heaven and a Hell,” whereas in 1991 three-fourths held this view. Faith in “the essential elements of Islamic beliefs is becoming widespread among the university students i.e., the prospective elites, in Ankara,” Kayhan Mutlu writes (1996, 355). These students are the future political and intellectual leaders of the nation, including its future scientists and engineers. Moreover, Turkey is, by most measures, the most modernized of Islamic nations and, beginning in the 1920s, experienced decades of official state secularity and semi-official irreligion, although these policies have waned in recent times (for reasons entirely clear in the data).

In similar fashion there have been dramatic shifts toward Islamic piety among university students in Nigeria, France, and Senegal, where branches of the Association of Muslim Students are said to have “quickly filled the place left vacant by Marxism in the student consciousness” (Niandou-Souley and Alzouma 1996, 253).

Of course, these Islamic data are fragmentary. On the other hand, no informed observer even needs data such as these to detect the thunderous vitality of contemporary Islam and to realize that it is in direct proportion to modernization.

Asian “Folk” Religions

Following World War II, all observers expected rapid and profound religious changes in Asian religions, especially in Japan and in the rapidly westernizing

Chinese enclaves of Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Malaysia. More specifically, it was assumed that the traditional, and highly magical, “folk” religions found in these settings would rapidly give way to modernity (Chen 1995; Chee-Beng 1994).

“Shinto religious practices would seem a highly likely candidate for extinction within Japan’s hightech consumer society,” John Nelson suggested, summing up the scholarly consensus (1992, 77). But that was not what has happened. Shinto remains very vigorous. “[I]t is commonplace that new cars be blessed at a [Shinto] shrine, that new residences, offices, or factories be built after exorcism ceremonies purify and calm the land and its deity, that children are dedicated there” (ibid.). Indeed, Shinto rituals seem to play a more prominent role in Japan today than in the pre–World War II days, when the emperor was thought to be divine and Shinto was the state religion. That Shinto was strengthened by being disestablished is entirely in accord with the market theory of religion.

In Taiwan today, there are likewise proportionately more folk temples than there were a century ago, and a larger proportion of the population (about 70 percent) frequent these temples than ever before (Chen 1995). In Hong Kong, traditional Chinese folk religion also flourishes, with the Temple of Wong Tai Sin, “a refugee god” imported from China in 1915, having the largest following (Lang and Ragvold 1993). And in Malaysia, too, Chinese folk religion “continues to thrive” (Chee-Beng 1994, 274).

In Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Malaysia alike, then, “old fashioned,” traditional faiths have thus come to be seen as especially suitable for modern life. Shinto and Chinese folk religion do not so much linger on among elderly, uneducated peasants as flourish among successful, educated young urbanites (Chen 1995; Chee-Beng 1994; Lang and Ragvold 1993; Nelson 1992).

MODERNITY, DOUBT, AND THE UNAFFILIATED

But, perhaps the proponents of secularization merely claimed too much too soon. Although religion has shown no terminal symptoms, it is nevertheless true that even in societies where the churches flourish, such as the United States, many people are not active in a religion, and even many of those who are active often harbor religious doubts. If these are the results of modernity, then it might be possible to salvage the secularization theory in modified form. However, considerable evidence shows that there is nothing modern about the primary reasons for religious doubt, and that the overwhelming majority of people who deny any religious preference are religious.

The prophets of secularization have always stressed the incompatibility between religion and science and argued that this cannot help but cause religious doubt. It must be recognized, however, that there is nothing modern about doubt per se: “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief” (Mark 9:24). Indeed,

for millennia, religious thinkers have stressed the problems of evil and tragedy as the primary sources of doubt. Why does God permit evil to flourish in the world; why do bad things happen to good people? When Christian Smith and his colleagues (1998, 163) asked Americans why they “often” doubted their religious faith, the overwhelming majority of those who reported doing so cited traditional reasons: “personal tragedies and heartaches, evil and suffering in the world, human hypocrisy, the daily troubles of life . . . human universals . . . not problems that particularly afflict modern people.” Few made any mention of science. “We have no sound basis for believing, then, that anything particular to modernity itself has become the cause of a significant decline in the plausibility of religious belief.” These findings were based on a sample of churchgoing Americans, but very similar results turn up in the general population. Respondents in the 1988 General Social Survey were asked to place themselves on a scale of one through seven on the basis of their degree of doubt concerning their religion. About one American in four (27.4%) is “completely free of doubts.” Most expressed a very low level of doubt, 61.4 percent ranked themselves at three or below. Only 7.2 percent ranked themselves at seven (“My faith is mixed with doubts”), and another 5 percent placed themselves at six. Of even greater interest is that concerns about religion and science came in a distant third when people were asked *why* they experienced doubts. Fifty-five percent attributed their doubts to personal suffering; 50 percent said that “evil in the world” contributed to their doubts; only 30 percent agreed that a “conflict of faith and science” caused them doubt. This rank order held among those with the most doubts as well as those with the least. Moreover, very few respondents thought that doubt was a significant problem for them, even if they did experience it from time to time.

But what about that “hard core” of American skeptics who, in national surveys, say they have no religious affiliation? Anywhere from 5 to 10 percent (frequently referred to as “religious nones”) give this response. Although several social scientists have claimed that this percentage has risen over the past fifty years, it turns out that any variations over time are because of variations in the wording of the question (Smith 2000). Far more significant is the fact that very few of those who report their affiliation as “none,” are irreligious. For example, data from the 1996 General Social Survey show that 85 percent of the “nones” pray! It would seem that most who give their religious preference as “none” mean “none of the above,” not “I am irreligious.”

Thus, even the weakest version of secularization fails to find support.

WHAT ABOUT CHANGE?

Recently one of us spoke to a group of Christian historians, some of whom found it very difficult to accept that secularization is not far along. One historian mentioned that religiousness rose very sharply in Germany in the latter

half of the nineteenth century, only to fall precipitously in the twentieth. Another went on at length about doctrinal changes over the past several centuries, and yet another chided us for failing to see secularization in the decline in belief in witchcraft. At first it was difficult to see how some of this related to the secularization thesis, until it became clear that these remarks came from people who somehow believed that we were proposing that there is no such thing as religious change! But of course religion changes. There is more religious participation and even greater belief in the supernatural at some times and places than in others, just as religious organizations have more secular power in some times and places than in others. So too do doctrines change—Aquinas was not Augustine, and both would find heresy in the work of Avery Dulles. But change does not equate with decline. If next year everyone in Canada became a pious Hindu, there might be many interpretations, but secularization would not be among them. Indeed, what is needed is a body of theory to explain religious variation, to tell us when and why various aspects of religiousness rise and fall, or are stable. In that regard, the secularization theory is as useless as a hotel elevator that only goes down.

CONCLUSION

Let us emphasize that no one can prove that one day religion will not wither away. Perhaps the day will come when religion has been relegated to memory and museums. If so, however, this will not have been caused by modernization, and the demise of faith will bear no resemblance to the process postulated by the secularization doctrine. Let us therefore, once and for all, declare an end to social scientific faith in the theory of secularization, recognizing it as a product of wishful thinking. As a requiem, we offer final remarks by three distinguished scholars: an anthropologist, a medieval historian, and a sociologist.

Mary Douglas has argued forcefully and persuasively against the secularization doctrine as having “been constructed to flatter prejudged ideas” that will need to be discarded “when religious sociology modernizes.” It is simply not true, Douglas notes, that modern life contrasts sharply with life in simple societies when it comes to the prevalence of religious belief. With Clifford Geertz (1966), she recognizes that unbelief is not uncommon in preliterate societies, and, indeed, was not uncommon in Old Testament times: “Uncritical nostalgia for past ages of faith being out of place in religious studies, let us note at once that there is no good evidence that a high level of spirituality had generally been reached by the mass of mankind in past times... Nor does [anthropology] teach that modern times show a decline from ancient standards of piety” (Douglas 1982, 29).

Where did the notion of an Age of Faith come from? Alexander Murray asked, having demonstrated that the original sources are nearly unanimous in their admission of widespread irreligiousness in medieval times. “The scientific

enlightenment was tempted to conceive faith not as a virtue, but as an original sin, from which the Messiah of knowledge came to rescue it," he concluded. "It follows from that view that, in the olden days, men must have believed all the Church told them" (Murray 1972, 106).

And, finally, interviewed in 1997, Peter Berger admitted:

I think what I and most other sociologists of religion wrote in the 1960s about secularization was a mistake. Our underlying argument was that secularization and modernity go hand in hand. With more modernization comes more secularization. It wasn't a crazy theory. There was some evidence for it. But I think it's basically wrong. Most of the world today is certainly not secular. It's very religious. (Berger 1997, 974)

After nearly three centuries of utterly failed prophecies and misrepresentations of both present and past, it seems time to carry the secularization doctrine to the graveyard of failed theories, and there to whisper, "Requiescat in pace."