

Religion in a Post-secular Society

BRYAN S. TURNER

INTRODUCTION: THE ARGUMENT

The concept of “post-secular society” has emerged in sociological discussion from the primarily philosophical debate that has followed the work of Jurgen Habermas (2006) on rationality and religion in contemporary society. The philosophical debate about religion in the modern period has played an important role in how sociologists think about their subject matter. It is of course often difficult to draw a clear distinction between social theory and social philosophy, and therefore there is always some degree of overlap between the sociology and the philosophy of religion. In this interaction between philosophy and sociology, there have been in the past a number of key figures – such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Ernest Gellner, and Peter Winch – who had so to speak a foot in both camps. In the recent discussion about the role of religion in public life, one might argue that it has been the philosophers and theologians- and not the sociologists – who have defined the parameters of discussion about the future of religion. I have in mind, in addition to Habermas, the contributions of Richard Rorty, Charles Taylor, Gianni Vattimo and Jacques Derrida. While it is the philosophers who have raised the major issues concerning the place of religion in apparently secular societies, I shall take a critical stance with respect to their characterization of religion for its lack of engagement with the comparative empirical data that are generated by anthropologists and sociologists. In short, while philosophy has set out the terms of the debate, their work often lacks substance and the quality of discussion now hangs on the injection of anthropological and sociological fieldwork, especially from outside the European and American context, into the public debate. What is at issue here is the very character of secular society, and as a result we are now obliged to give an answer, or at least attend seriously, to the question raised forcefully by Habermas – are we living in a post-secular society?

In this chapter I raise a number of critical reflections on the analysis of religion in contemporary sociology but via an engagement with modern philosophy. In what

follows when I refer to “philosophy” I more precisely mean “social philosophy.” This critical argument has several components. Philosophers tend, as an inevitable outcome of their professional training, to concentrate on religious beliefs rather than on practice and they almost never look at religious objects. Perhaps even the reference to “beliefs” here is too generous, since much of the actual discussion is about the lack of authority of formal theology in modern public debates. Obviously the major religions make significant truth claims in their official theologies, but the role of religion in everyday life puts practice in the foreground.

Insofar as we think about religious beliefs, we should think more seriously about belief as part of the habitus of individuals and pay more attention to religion and the body, or more specifically to religious habitus and embodiment (Turner 2008). We should try more systematically to incorporate the work of Pierre Bourdieu into the modern study of public religion (Rey 2007). If the body is often missing from the study of religion, the same might be said of the emotions. The sociology of the emotions has in recent years developed as an important field of contemporary research (Barbalet 1998), but it has not played a significant part in recent philosophical debate. Of course William James’s *Varieties of Religious Experience* was fundamental to the development of sociology – for example in the work of Émile Durkheim – but there is little attention to the role of emotion in modern religious commitment. Finally, because there is also a marked tendency to look at formal theologies, official statements of belief and formal institutions, there is a tendency to neglect major developments in modern religiosity, namely the growth of “post-institutional spirituality,” the development of all forms of popular religion, and the growth of revivalist or fundamentalist religion such as Pentecostalism and charismatic movements. These issues have of course been presented and discussed in various chapters in this volume.

Perhaps the lack of engagement by philosophers with the empirical research of mainstream sociology is the main issue. Philosophical discussions of the crisis of religious belief and authority all too frequently ignore social science empirical investigations and findings. Their abstract speculations rarely refer to any actual findings of social science. Whereas Charles Taylor in *The Secular Age* (2007) happily quotes William James and Émile Durkheim, contemporary research results rarely receive any systematic attention. This lack of attention to the empirical conclusions of modern sociology is compounded by a lack of interest in comparative sociology. Most Western philosophers have had little to say about religion outside Northern Europe and the United States. This is problematic since the point of the post-secular debate has been in part to recognize the peculiarities of the European experience of secularization, on the one hand, and American exceptionalism on the other. In other words, it is very difficult to generalize from the European experience in which the separation of the state and Church with the Westphalian settlement presupposed a history of confessional politics to the modern period and to religions outside the Abrahamic tradition of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. By contrast, contemporary anthropological and sociological research clearly illustrates the vitality of religion in the rest of the world especially as a result of modern pilgrimage, religious revivalism in Asia, and Pentecostal and charismatic movements in South America and Africa. When social philosophers have turned to religious movements outside the West, there is far too much attention given to fundamentalism in general and to

radical Islam in particular (Juergensmeyer 2000). There are many forms of revivalism and growth other than radical or political religion. The majority of Muslims in societies as far removed as Singapore and the United States are well integrated into modern multicultural society (Pew Research Center 2007). More attention to the historical and comparative study of religion would greatly improve, not only our understanding of the recent history of Muslim migration, but also our awareness of the complexity of secularization and post-secularization.

As this volume has shown, there is now general agreement among sociologists that the conventional secularization thesis of the 1960s and 1970s was narrowly focused on northern Europe, providing some insight into post-Christian society in the developed industrial world, but offering little that had relevance outside of that European context. There is an alternative to the simple notion of secularization as membership decline and social irrelevance. In modern societies, religion has been both democratized and commercialized with the growth of megachurches, TV evangelism, drive-in confessions, buy-a-prayer, religious tourism and what I have called “low intensity religion” (Turner 2009). Religion survives in Immanuel Kant’s terms not so much as a reflective faith but more as health and wealth cults offering a range of services to a variety of this-worldly needs of human beings. Religion is perfectly compatible with secular consumerism as we can observe through the functions of religious markets in providing general spiritual rather than narrowly ecclesiastical services. Some historians might argue that nothing has changed in the sense that the world religions have always satisfied such material interests in the sale of amulets or in providing pilgrimages to the graves of saints. However I argue that in religion there was always an element of sacredness in which the ineffable nature of divinity or holiness was present. I take it that this was the argument of Rudolf Otto (1923) in his account in 1917 of the “numinous” in *The Idea of the Holy*. God could not be known as such and the sacred was manifest through the communication of intermediaries – prophets, angels, mythical creatures, landscapes, or spirits- but the essence of sacredness was ultimately unspeakable. In the modern world with the development of the Internet for example the role of these traditional intermediaries is breaking down and the ineffable hierarchy of beings is being democratized by popular manifestations of religion. The sacred is now effable.

THE POLITICAL AND THE SOCIAL

I propose that the debate about secularization could be made conceptually more precise and more relevant if we draw a simple distinction between what I shall call “political secularization” and “social secularization.” The former refers specifically to public institutions and political arrangements that is to the issues around the historical separation of church and state, while the latter, to questions about values, culture and attitudes. The political dimension is largely institutional and formal, and the social, informal and customary. Political secularization was in fact the cornerstone of the liberal view of tolerance in which we are free to hold our private beliefs provided these do not impinge negatively on public life. In Western terms this liberal solution was associated with the Anglican settlement stemming from Richard Hooker and John Locke. It was initially a local political solution to settle

the conflicts between Catholics and Protestants. It is generally agreed that this settlement has broken down or is under considerable social stress, because modern societies tend to be multicultural and multi-faith. The seventeenth-century settlement did not envisage multicultural societies composed of many competing and contradictory religious traditions. Because in modern societies religion often defines identity, it is difficult to sustain a simple division between the public and the private. Furthermore, these identities are typically transnational and hence cannot be confined within the national boundaries of the state. We might argue that public space has been re-sacralized insofar as public religions play a major role in political life. The secular institutions of Western citizenship are straining to cope with these new developments, because the outcome of nineteenth-century citizenship is primarily a legacy of exclusionary national membership.

Political secularization refers to a historical process in which the place of religion in public life was defined and regulated, typically by the state. The separation of religion and state does not been therefore a relationship of equality. One such event occurred when the Virginia Assembly cancelled payment of salaries supported by taxes that had been traditionally paid to Anglican clergy and subsequently, following a number of contentious debates, the bill for Establishing Religious Freedom was passed, serving eventually as the First Amendment. The right to freedom of conscience was closely connected to notions of privacy and hence religious freedom became a major building block of political liberalism and modernity (Casanova 1994). Although this development is often seen to be the outcome of ideals, it is possible to see freedom of religion as a practical outcome of political processes. In the American colonies the irresistible growth in religious pluralism, the need to attract more migrants and the desire of merchants for more trade between the colonies were the material foundations of liberalism and individualism (Abercrombie et al. 1986). In more recent research employing the idea of competition in religious markets, the argument has taken on a more counter-intuitive hue in which it is claimed that "religious liberty is a matter of government regulation" (Gill 2008: 47). This proposition emerges from the argument in Anthony Gill's *The Political Origins of Religious Liberty* in which he asserts that, whereas dominant religious groups seek state regulation of minority religions, religious liberty will be the political objective of marginalized minority religious movements and groups. In terms of political life, this approach leads to the unsurprising but important conclusion that "politicians seek to minimize the cost of ruling" (Gill 2008: 47). Governance is clearly more problematic in pluralistic environments where there is plenty of scope for religious competition and conflicts. Because virtually all modern societies are multicultural and multiracial, the "management of religion" is an inevitable component of political secularization (Turner 2007). In other words, there is a paradox that precisely because religion is important in modern life as the carrier of identity, it has to be controlled by the state to minimize the costs of government. As we will see, Habermas calls this situation post-secular, because, in order to protect public communicative rationality, it is important for there to be some open dialogue with and between religions. The failure of such a dialogue would in all probability lead to political conflict.

By contrast, social secularization refers to issues about social values, practices and customs, namely to everyday life or what we might call the social sphere. This

arena is the ensemble of rituals, practices and sites where religion is practiced. We can apprehend this domain through the conventional sociological measures of religious vitality – church membership, belief in God, religious experiences, and acts of devotion such as prayer. This social space encloses a large heterogeneous collection of folk religious, superstitious practices, magical activities and customs as well as elements from more formal world religions. This arena of religion is certainly thriving in both formal and informal dimensions. In this regard, there is little evidence of formal religious decline outside of northern Europe and the conventional secularization thesis has to be either severely modified or abandoned. It is in this religious field that the now famous phrase of Grace Davie also has its maximum currency – believing but not belonging. However, the nature of secularization at the social level is in fact quite complicated. Looking outside Europe, there is obviously very clear evidence of a worldwide revival of religion that is variously described as fundamentalism or pietization. There is evidence of a revival of traditional religions in Asia such as spirit possession in Vietnam, Islam in Southeast Asia, Shinto in Japan and Taoism in China.

This argument provides a conceptually fruitful contrast between the role of religion in the public domain of politics and the social domain of civil society. This distinction is important because, while it is relatively easy for a state to create the conditions for the juridical regulation of religion in the political sphere, it is very difficult in practice for a state to exercise successful control over the social functions of religion. In the post-communist world – Poland, Vietnam, and China for example – it is now clear in retrospect that, while political secularization was relatively successful, religion was never fully eradicated, to use Habermas's terminology, from the life world. One may suppose that attempts in contemporary China to suppress Falungong at the level of ordinary life will in the long run fail (Goldman 2005). Perhaps an even more appropriate example of the differences between the political and the social can be taken from the history of the Russian Orthodox Church in relation to society and state. Although the Church was severely repressed in the early years of the Russian revolution, the close relationship between Orthodoxy and nationalism meant that Christianity could also play a useful role in Russian politics. Since the fall of the Soviet system, the Orthodox Church has made an important come-back under the skilful political leadership of Patriarch Alexy II who has forged a powerful alliance with both Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev (Garrad and Garrad 2009). In 1983 Alexy was successful in securing the return of the Don Monastery in central Moscow to ecclesiastical use. In 1991 he managed to restore the veneration of St Seraphim of Sarov who, dying in 1833, was revered as a patriot by Tsar Nicholas II. The saint's relics were restored to the Cathedral of Sarov. In 1997 a law on the freedom of religious conscience gave a privileged status to Orthodoxy while Roman Catholicism has been politically marginalized. In Putin's Russia, Orthodoxy has continued to prosper as an official religion offering some degree of spiritual and national legitimacy to the Party and the state. There is also a close relationship between the military and the Church in that religious icons are used to bless warships and the Patriarch offered a thanksgiving service in the anniversary of the creation of the Soviet nuclear arsenal. Although the public role of Orthodoxy has been largely restored, the Church's influence is largely based on cultural nationalism rather than on its spiritual authority. Thus while some 80 percent of Russians

describe themselves as “Orthodox,” just over 40 percent call themselves “believers.” This relationship between the political and the social allows us to say that, while Orthodoxy is a powerful public religion and that public space has been partially re-sacralized, Russian society remains secular. The legacy of atheism and secularism from the past still has a hold over the everyday social world even when religion now plays a considerable part in a nationalist revival. Therefore in any assessment of the notion of “a post-secular society” we need to be careful about whether secularization refers to formal institutions at the political level or whether it refers to lived religion at the social level. It is my contention that the philosophical analysis of the role of religion in public culture is very important, but it may tell us relatively little about how religion is embodied in the social world.

THE RETURN OF RELIGION

Whereas most modern sociologists and political scientists have come to the conclusion that religion has to be taken seriously in debates about the public sphere, such was not the case with major postwar social theorists – Louis Althusser, Pierre Bourdieu, Ralf Dahrendorf, Norbert Elias, Nicos Poulantzas, and others. What has changed? The obvious answer is that there are various transformations of social and political life that have placed religion as an institution at the center of modern society. I shall focus on a number of major macro-social changes that might explain this predominance of religion in the modern world. This account necessarily has to be a mere sketch as the background to understanding post-secularism.

The collapse of organized communism and the decline in Marxist-Leninist ideology allowed religion to flourish once more in European and especially in Poland, the Ukraine and what used to be Yugoslavia. As we have seen, the Orthodox Church has become closely associated with Russian nationalism and, while communist parties have not disappeared in Vietnam, the Renovation Period has allowed the return of religion to public life such as Roman Catholicism in South Vietnam and Protestant sects among the ethnic minorities. Spirit possession cults are also attracting business men from the expanding capitalist sector (Taylor 2007). In various parts of the world from Cuba to Cambodia that were influenced by communism, there was by the 1990s widespread disillusionment with organized communism and the doctrines of Marxist Leninism. Globalization and the Internet have created new opportunities for evangelism even in societies where the Party still attempts to regulate or suppress the flow of information and interaction. In China, Charter 08 calls for, among other things, freedom of religious assembly and practice. While these dissident movements are unlikely to shake the control of the Party or its authoritarian responses to religious revivalism, these developments are likely to see a significant growth in religious activity across both the existing communist and the post-communist world.

Another feature of globalization has been the growth of migration and permanent settlement producing the worldwide emergence of diasporic communities in societies with expanding economies. These diasporic communities are typically held together by their religious beliefs and practices in such a way that in modern societies the distinction between ethnicity and religion begins to become irrelevant. Indeed the

Turks in Germany have become Muslims and around the world Chinese minorities have often become Buddhists. In Malaysia, people of Chinese descent are automatically “Buddhists.” The result is that religion has become the major plank of “the politics of identity.” Religion becomes a site of ethnic and cultural contestation and hence states become involved in the management of religions, thereby inevitably departing from the traditional division of state and religion in the liberal framework. Paradoxically by intervening to regulate religion in the public domain, the state automatically makes religion more important and prominent. In societies as different as the United States and Singapore, the state intervenes to regulate Islam in the name of incorporating “moderate Muslims” into mainstream society (Kamaludeen et al. 2009). Throughout the modern world, there is a complex interaction between religion and national identity – from Hinduism in India to Catholicism in Poland to Shinto in Japan – whereby religion becomes part of the fabric of public cultures.

Similar arguments might be made about nationalism. In the postwar period, nationalism gained momentum in association with anti-colonial struggles. In the Arab world, this was often combined with pan-Arabism. These secular movements in North Africa and the Middle East enjoyed some political success after the Suez crisis and Nasser was able to mobilize support behind his vision of a post-colonial largely secular Arab world. If political activism increased in the 1940s with the evolution of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, there were further radical developments in the aftermath of the Arab defeat in the 1967 war with Israel. However, the critical event of modern history was the Iranian Revolution in 1978–9. The fall of the secular state in Iran which had promoted a nationalist vision of society over a traditional Islamic framework provided a global example of a spiritual revolution. It provided a singular example of the mobilization of the masses in the name of religious renewal. The message of the Iranian intellectual Ali Shariati against what he called “Westoxification” was embraced by a wide variety of religious movements outside the specific Iranian context (Akbarzadeh and Mansouri 2007).

In the modern debate about post-secularism, the crucial issue, which is often implied rather than stated explicitly, is whether radical forms of Islam can be successfully incorporated through dialogue into a democratic and largely liberal environment. What are the roots of Islamic radicalism? One issue is the intractable problem of the status of Palestine and conflicts with the state of Israel. In a broader historical perspective therefore, Palestine has probably been the single most important issue sustaining political Islam, because it has sustained “a vast collective feeling of injustice [that] continues to hang over our lives with undiminished weight” (Said 2001: 207). In socio-political terms, twentieth-century radical Islam has been interpreted as a product the social frustrations of those social strata (unpaid civil servants, overworked teachers, underemployed engineers, and alienated college teachers) whose interests were not well served and whose aspirations were not well met by either the secular nationalism of post-colonialism with such leaders as Nasser, Suharto or Saddam Hussein, or through the neo-liberal “open-door” policies of Anwar Saddat in Egypt or Chadli Benjedid in Algeria. The social dislocations created by the modern global economy have produced ideal conditions for external Western support of those secular elites in the Arab world who benefit significantly from oil revenues. These conditions of economic growth through the rent extracted

from oil production have produced bureaucratic authoritarianism through much of the Middle East. In summary, religious radicalism can be seen as a product of a religious crisis of authority, the failures of authoritarian nationalist governments, and the socio-economic divisions that have been exacerbated by the economic strategies of neo-liberal globalization.

The debate about Islamic radicalism has been heavily dependent upon the work of Gilles Kepel (2002) such as *Jihad*, which was first published in French in 2000; it is influential but also highly controversial. His thesis is relatively simply namely that the last three decades have witnessed both the spectacular rise of "Islamism" and also its political failure. In the 1970s, when sociologists assumed that modernization meant secularization, the sudden irruption of political Islam, especially the importance of Shi'ite theology in popular protests in Iran, appeared to challenge many dominant assumptions about modernity. These religious movements in Iran, especially when they forced women to wear the *chador* and excluded them from public space, were originally defined by leftist intellectuals as a form of religious fascism. Veiling has continued to fuel feminist critiques of the treatment of women in contemporary Iran (Nafisi 2008). Over time, however, Marxists came to realize that Islamism had a popular base and was a powerful force against Western influence, while Western conservatives were attracted by Islamic preaching on moral order, obedience to God and hostility to secular materialists, namely communists and socialists. Western governments were eventually willing to support both Sunni and Shi'a resistance groups against the Russian invasion of Afghanistan after 1979, despite their connections with radical religious groups in Pakistan and Iran.

These religious movements came eventually to fill the political vacuum left by the failures of Arab nationalism that had dominated anti-Western politics since the Suez Crisis. In Kepel's terms, Islamism is the product of both generational pressures and class structure. Religious radicalism has been embraced by young generations in the cities that were created by the postwar demographic explosion in the developing world and the resulting mass exodus of young people from the countryside. This generation was often impoverished, despite its relatively high literacy and access to secondary education. The underclass of the mega-cities became one recruiting ground for religio-political radicalism. However, Islamism also recruited among the middle classes – the descendants of the merchant families from the bazaars and *souks* who had been pushed aside by the processes of decolonization, and from the doctors, engineers and business men, who, while enjoying the salaries made possible by booming oil prices, were nevertheless excluded from political power. The ideological carriers of Islamism at the local level were the "young intellectuals, freshly graduated from technical and science departments, who had themselves been inspired by the ideologues of the 1960s" (Kepel 2002: 6). Traditional Islamic themes of justice and equality were effectively deployed against those regimes that were seen to be corrupt, bankrupt and authoritarian, especially those regimes that had been supported by the West in the Cold War confrontation with the Soviet empire.

The rise of Islamism has to be seen in the context of these international conflicts of the 1980s. The period was dominated by the struggle between the radical Shi'ite regime of Khomeini and the conservative Sunni monarchy of Saudi Arabia. While Tehran attempted to export its revolution abroad, conservative governments in Egypt, Pakistan, the Gulf and Malaysia often encouraged Muslim radicals in their

struggles against communism. These governments, such as Malaysia, were often willing to contain Islamism through co-optation and concessions, primarily over the role of religious law (the *Shari'a*). A principal objective of Islamism is to oppose the sequestration of religious law in the private sphere and to bring the *Shari'a* back into prominence in the public arena. According to Kepel's thesis the high point of political success for Islamism came in 1989 when during the Palestinian *intifada* the PLO came under threat from Hamas (the Islamist Resistance Movement) and in Algeria the *Front Islamique du Salut* enjoyed convincing electoral victories in the first free elections since independence. In the same year, a military coup in the Sudan brought the Islamist ideologue Hassan al-Turabi to power, Khomeini symbolically and controversially extended the reach of the *Shari'a* by placing a *fatwa* on Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* and the Soviet Army finally abandoned its humiliating war in Afghanistan. The collapse of the Berlin Wall was a powerful precursor to the final demise of the Soviet Union in 1992 and Islamism emerged eventually to fill the political and ideological gap in the international system created by the fall of organized communism and the associated failure of Marxist Leninism as its dominant theory.

Kepel's argument is, however, that political Islam has been in decline since 1989, despite the dramatically successful attack by Al Qaeda groups on New York in 2001 and later in London and Madrid. The political opponents of radical Islam have been able to exploit the divided class basis of the movement. For example, the fragile class alliance between the young urban poor, the devout middle classes and alienated intellectuals meant that Islamism was poorly prepared to cope with long-term and systematic opposition from state authorities. Over time governments found ways of dividing these social classes and frustrating the aim of establishing an Islamic state within which the *Shari'a* would have exclusive jurisdiction. Kepel regards the extreme and violent manifestations of Islamism – the Armed Islamist Group in Algeria, the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Al Qaeda network of Osama bin Laden – as evidence of its political disintegration and failure. The re-capture in May 2009 of Mas Selamat bin Kastari, the Indonesian-born Singaporean who had allegedly planned an attack on Changi Airport, brought to an end the immediate threat of terrorist attacks on Singapore under the broad umbrella of Jemaah Islamiyah.

However, opposition to the West is only one aspect, and possibly in the long run the least important aspect of modern Islamic revivalism. The more enduring feature may be connected with personal piety. In particular, modern piety movements appear to have a very strong attraction to women (Tong and Turner 2008). In her *Politics of Piety* (2005), Saba Mahmood has employed the principal concepts of Bourdieu's sociology to explore the growth and implications of the Muslim habitus for pious women in modern Egypt. Her ethnographic study of Cairo provides a fruitful framework for thinking in more global terms about Islamic renewal. In Egypt of course Muslims practice within a predominantly Islamic culture in which other groups such as the Copts are minorities. The need for religious renewal is invoked more sharply when Muslims find themselves in a minority within a larger or more diverse community and hence where the pressures for secularization and assimilation are much greater. Exclusionary group norms come into play more urgently when a religious community is a minority, or where the majority feels it

is under threat by a minority which for example is economically or politically dominant. These everyday norms of pious practice then become especially important for defining religious differences. Where Muslims are not an overwhelming majority, there are issues in everyday life as to how social groups should interact without compromising their piety. One of the prominent examples is diet because piety involves above all a set of bodily practices for defining social relations that involve some degree of intimacy. In these situations acts of piety may cause friction and possibly conflict with other social groups. With the growth of Muslim diasporas, these movements of renewal may become more frequent and more salient to group survival and hence the French head-scarf debate becomes in fact a common aspect of modern multicultural politics.

BELIEF AND PRACTICE IN POST-SECULAR SOCIETY

Returning now to our discussion of the prospects of a post-secular society, much of the debate about religion in modern society, as I have noted, has been dominated by philosophers, who largely neglect anthropological and sociological research on religion. Philosophical commentaries on religion – Habermas, Rorty, Taylor, Vattimo – have no feel for the ethnographic character of modern social science accounts of religion. In particular they neglect religious practice in favor of the idea that the modern problem of religion is a question of belief. As a result in reading their work, one has no sense of the actual character of everyday religion, only a sense of their belief systems. Following both Durkheim and Wittgenstein, concentrating on belief to the exclusion of religious practice is a major defect of these approaches; the vitality of religion is necessarily an aspect of practice. Belief can only survive if it is embedded in practice. Bourdieu's notion of habitus fits this critical argument rather well. The significance of religion in everyday life can be understood by reference to how religious observance is deeply incorporated into the habitus of a social group.

This argument about the practical nature of religion in the mundane world seems to me to be the central argument of twentieth-century anthropology especially in the social anthropology of Mary Douglas. Religion in Western society is weak, not because it is philosophically incoherent but because it has become de-ritualized, cut off from a religious calendar and disconnected from both the human life-cycle and the annual round of agricultural production. In the West one of the few remaining religious festivals (namely Christmas) is a commercial event in the year that now is often rolled into New Year as a secular celebration. Kant (1960) in *Religion within the Limits of Pure Reason* may have been correct in arguing that Christianity (essentially Lutheranism) was its own grave digger because as a reflecting faith it did not need the practices that Kant associated with "cultic religion." In fact German Protestantism appeared to be divorced from ritual practices as such.

Much has been written recently about the limitations of the conventional secularization thesis and correspondingly much thought given to the idea of a post-secular world (Habermas and Mendieta 2002; Habermas and Ratzinger 2006). Although I have complained about the limitations of much Western thought about religion, there may be an alternative defense of the secularization thesis, namely the

growth of religious markets. With the global commodification of modern religions, there is perhaps an alternative view of the secularization thesis after all. If religion is a system of belief and practice based on the ineffable nature of religious communication, modern liberal societies have democratized religion to make it an effable system that is perfectly compatible with the modern world. This “effability” can now be sold as both commodities and services on religious markets.

Much of Habermas’s contribution to the idea of a post-secular society has drawn upon work and arguments that are relatively familiar to sociologists of religion. He has for example claimed that the secularization thesis rested on the assumption that the disenchanted world (in a reference I assume to Max Weber) rests on a scientific outlook in which all phenomena can be explained scientifically. Secondly there has been (in reference I assume to Niklas Luhmann) a differentiation of society into specialized functions in which religion becomes increasing a private matter. Finally, the transformation of society from an agrarian basis has improved living standards and reduced risk, removing the dependence of individuals on supernatural forces and reducing their need for help.

Habermas notes correctly that this perspective is based on a narrow European standpoint. America by contrast appears to be vibrantly religious in a society where religion, prosperity and modernization have sat comfortably together. In more global terms, Habermas draws attention to the spread of fundamentalism, the growth of radical Islamic groups, and the presence of religious issues in the public sphere. There appears to be a need to rethink Lockean liberalism because the privatization of religion is no longer a viable political strategy in the separation of state and religion. Habermas’s solution to the conflict between radical multiculturalism and radical secularism is to propose a dialogue involving the inclusion of foreign minority cultures into civil society on the one hand and the opening up of subcultures to the state in order to encourage their members to participate actively in political life.

In some respects Habermas’s debate about the pre-political foundations of the liberal state with Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) at the Catholic Academy of Bavaria on January 19, 2008 was perhaps more interesting, or at least more revealing. Both men were in a reconciliatory or conciliatory mood. Habermas recognized that religion had preserved in tact values and ideas that had been lost elsewhere and that the notion of the fundamental equality of all humans was an important legacy of the Christian faith. Habermas’s response to the Pope can be understood against the background of *Kulturprotestantismus* in which there is a general respect for religion and where religion is far more prominent in public life than is the case in the United Kingdom. Habermas’s response may have been generous, but it does rest upon the idea that politics (the state) cannot really function without a robust civil society or without a set of shared values. The role of religion – contrary to much critical theory and contrary to the secularization thesis – may be to provide a necessary support of social life as such.

Both Habermas and Ratzinger had one important thing in common – they are both opposed to relativism which they see as a largely destructive force. Habermas in particular is hostile to the postmodern version of relativism. His approach to religion is, at least initially, somewhat different from that of either Rorty or Vattimo. In this discussion I shall refer primarily to their *The Future of Religion* (Zabala

2005). Rorty constructed his relativism out of a mixture of bourgeois postmodernism and pragmatism describing his position as “postmodern bourgeois liberalism” (Rorty 1991: 199) and as a result we can comfortably align his position with Vattimo’s “weak thought.” Both philosophers agree that there are “no facts only interpretations.” Their difference lies in relationship to religion since Vattimo is a practicing Catholic while Rorty belongs to a secular socialist tradition. The role of philosophy, he argued in *Consequences of Pragmatism* (1982), is not to provide eternal foundations of Truth, but rather to be a voice alongside literature and art in the edification of human kind. The measure of philosophical progress is not demonstrated by philosophy “becoming more rigorous but by becoming more imaginative” (Rorty 1998: 9). Because Rorty was concerned to establish the proper limitations of philosophical knowledge in a world which is unstable, changeable and insecure, his philosophical critique had much in common with postmodernism. Whereas J.-F. Lyotard defined postmodernism as “incredulity toward metanarratives” (1984: xxiv), Rorty in one of his most influential essays (“Private irony and liberal hope”) defined an ironist as somebody who has “radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses” (Rorty 1989: 73). Rorty’s post-professional philosophy attempted to reconcile the pragmatism of Dewey with the deconstructive intentions of continental philosophy. As Rorty sought to show in *Achieving our Country* (1998), the Dewey legacy is still highly relevant to progressive attempts to realize the emancipatory spirit of “the American Creed.”

In these essays on the future of religion Rorty and Vattimo embrace the idea that faith, hope and charity – the legacy of New Testament Christianity – provides a framework for values in modern society. They reject the authority of the Church in general and papal authority in particular. They also indicate that the Church’s teachings on gender and sexual relations are hopelessly antiquated and involve an essentialist reduction of women to nature (if not to anatomy). If the Church can abandon its hierarchical and anti-democratic structures and its commitment to a sacerdotal priesthood, the Church could serve the needs of modern society – or at least it would be better equipped to serve those needs. The outcome is implicitly to endorse Habermas’s conciliatory position that the Christian legacy is in many ways the underpinning of modern Western civilization.

These philosophical discussions are largely directed at political secularization that is what role religion might play in public life in shaping policies about women, justice and authority, but they are much less relevant to the analysis of everyday religion in which embedded practices are less available for philosophical speculation.

GLOBALIZATION AND RELIGION

One criticism that can be mounted against modern philosophical accounts of religion is that they are simplistic. Habermas thinks that the prominence of religion today is an effect of missionary work, religious competition and fundamentalism. But these accounts leave out other developments such as the globalization of piety, the commodification of religion and the emergence (mainly in the West) of what sociologists refer to as spirituality. We can summarize these manifestations of reli-

giosity by claiming that the globalization of religion takes three forms. There is a global revivalism that often retains some notion of and commitment to institutionalized religion (whether it is a church, a mosque, a temple or a monastery) with an emphasis on orthodox beliefs that are imposed with some degree of institutional authority. Within revivalism, there are conventional forms of fundamentalism, but also there are the Pentecostal and charismatic churches. Secondly, there is the continuity of various forms of popular and traditional religion which is practiced predominantly by the poorly educated who seek healing, comfort and riches from such traditional religious practices. Religion has less to do with meaning and identity, functioning instead to bring some comfort to those without adequate means of survival. Finally there is also the spread of new spiritualities that are heterodox, urban, commercialized forms of religiosity that typically exist outside the conventional churches.

The consequence of these developments is a growing division between “religion” and “spirituality” (Hunt 2005). Globalization thus involves the spread of personal spirituality and these spiritualities typically provide not so much guidance in the everyday world, but subjective, personalized meaning. Such religious phenomena may also be combined with therapeutic or healing services, or the promise of personal enhancement through meditation. While fundamentalist norms of personal discipline appeal to those social groups that are upwardly socially mobile, such as the lower middle-class and newly educated couples, spirituality is an urban phenomenon more closely associated with middle-class singles that have been thoroughly influenced by Western consumer values.

Whereas the traditionally religious find meaning in existing mainstream denominational Christianity, spiritual people, according to Courtney Bender (2003: 69) “build and create their own religions in a spiritual market place, intentionally eschewing commitments to traditional religious communities, identities, and theologies.” The new religions are closely associated also with themes of therapy, peace and self-help. Of course the idea that religion, especially in the West, has become privatized is hardly a new idea in the sociology of religion (Luckmann 1967). However, these new forms of private subjectivity are no longer confined to Protestantism or the American middle classes; they now have global implications.

These popular and informal religious developments are no longer simply local cults, but burgeoning global popular religions carried by the Internet, movies, rock music, popular TV shows and “pulp fiction.” These can also be referred to as pick “n” mix or DIY religions because their adherents borrow promiscuously from a great range of religious beliefs and practices. These forms of spirituality are not therefore confined to the West and can also be transmitted by Asian films such as *Hidden Tiger*, *Crouching Dragon*, and *House of Flying Daggers*. This development is one aspect of a new technological magic spectacularly presented in the special effects of contemporary blockbuster films. These phenomena have been regarded as aspects of “new religious movements” that are, as we have seen, manifestations of the new spiritual market places. Such forms of religion tend to be highly individualistic, they are unorthodox in the sense that they follow no official theological creed, they are characterized by their syncretism, and they have little or no connection with public institutions such as churches, mosques or temples. They are post-institutional and in this sense they can be legitimately

called postmodern religions. If global fundamentalism involves modernization through personal discipline, the global post-institutional religions are typical of postmodernization.

We live increasingly in a communication environment where images and symbols rather than the written word probably play an important role in interaction. This visual world is therefore iconic rather than one based on a written language. This iconic world requires new skills and expert hierarchies that no longer duplicate the hierarchies of the written word. It is also a new experimental context in which the iconic can also become the iconoclastic as Madonna in her post-Catholic period switched to Rachel and for a while explored the Kabbalah (Hulsether, 2000). This combination of self-help systems, subjectivity, devolved authority structures, iconic discourses and personal theology is an example of low intensity religion. It is a mobile religiosity that can be transported globally by mobile people to new sites where they can mix and match their religious or self-help needs without too much constraint from or concern with hierarchical authorities. It is a low emotional religion because modern conversions tend to be more like a change in consumer brands rather than a deep searching of the soul. If the new religious life styles give rise to emotions at all, these are packaged in ways that can be easily consumed and then discarded. Brand loyalty and commitment on the part of consumers in low intensity religions are also minimal. In a famous article on "religious evolution" in the *American Sociological Review* in 1964, Robert Bellah developed an influential model of religious change from primitive, archaic, historic, early modern to modern religion. The principal characteristics of religion in modern society are its individualism, the decline in the authority of traditional institutions (church and priesthood), a willingness to experiment with diverse idioms of religion and awareness that religious symbols are constructs. Bellah's predictions about modernity have been clearly fulfilled in the growth of popular, de-institutionalized, commercialized and largely post-Christian religions.

In a differentiated global religious market, these segments of the market compete with each other and overlap. The new spirituality is genuinely a consumerist religion and, while fundamentalism appears to challenge consumer (Western) values, it is in fact also selling a life style based on special diets, alternative education, health regimes, practices around prayer and religious meditation, and technologies of the self. All three share a degree of consumerism, but they are also distinctively different, and gender is a crucial feature of the new consumerist religiosity where women increasingly dominate the new spiritualities. Women in both the developed and the developing world who experience new educational opportunities and low fertility rates have the leisure time to invest in religious activity and they will become and to some extent already are the "taste leaders" in the emergent global spiritual market place.

While globalization theory tends to emphasize the triumph of modern fundamentalism (as a critique of traditional and popular religiosity), perhaps the real effect of globalization is the triumph of heterodox, commercial, hybrid popular religion over orthodox, authoritative professional versions of the spiritual life. Their ideological effects cannot be controlled by religious authorities, and they have a greater impact than official messages. In Weber's terms it is the triumph of mass over virtuous religiosity. The embodied habitus of modern religion is basically compatible

with the life styles of a commercial world in which the driving force of the economy is domestic consumption. In the urban environment of global consumer society, megachurches have embraced the sales strategies of late capitalism to get their message out to the public. On these grounds, I would argue that modern religions are compromised because the tension between the world and the religion is lost. We may define this development as social secularization, but paradoxically religion may also retain its influence at the political level because it acts as a transnational carrier of public identities.

To summarize our discussion so far, religion plays a major role in the public domain and in many societies the liberal framework of secularization involving the separation of the church and the state no longer applies. Religion often functions in the public sphere as a profound statement of nationalism or it can be the principal carrier of ethnic identity for minority groups in a diasporic multicultural society. These observations are largely in line with the arguments originally presented by José Casanova in his *Public Religions in the Modern World* (1994). In this respect there has been little significant political secularization. In this political context, the notion of post-secularism functions an aspect of cosmopolitanism and recognition ethics. It provides rational norms of public discourse in which the claims of religion are no longer dismissed as irrational assertions but as legitimate components of public dialogue. Religious developments in the social sphere also show little unambiguous evidence of secularization. The world religions are growing and new religious phenomena are abundant. However, there is also a global commodification of religion which renders much of belief and practice compatible with secular capitalism. The tensions between religion and the secular begin to disappear as a consequence of the incorporation of religion into modern consumerism. Can the sacred survive such a profound secular process of commodification?

WHAT IS AT STAKE? PUBLIC RELIGIONS AND THE SOCIAL

In the introductory chapter to this volume, I argued that the study of religion is important if we want to take the idea of “the social” seriously. In this concluding chapter, I return to Durkheim to argue that the social in the modern world is fragile and fragmented and that the erosion of the social has significant sociological implications for the survival of “the sacred.” Let us therefore once more return to Durkheim’s formulation of the question of society.

Durkheim (1995) had presented a theory of solidarity in *The Elementary Forms* in terms of a society based on commonalities, collective rituals and shared emotions, but the social world that emerged especially after the Second World War gave rise to very different images and theories of the social. With the growth of worldwide urbanization and the rise of global mega-cities, social life was thought to be increasingly fragmented, producing urban ghettos and subcultures. The idea of the “lonely crowd” painted a picture of passive and isolated urban dwellers glued to their TVs. In addition it was argued that from 1950 onwards, there were new youth subcultures associated with a growing consumerism. Ethan Watters (2003) in *Urban Tribes* claimed that these new social groups were composed of “never-marrieds” between the ages of 25 and 45 years of age who formed common but ephemeral

interest groups. Their new life styles were always shifting forms of identification with these fragmented groups. Dick Hebdige (1979) wrote a classic account of these developments in his *Subculture. The Meaning of Style* to describe the oppositional movements that followed “rock ‘n’ roll,” namely punk, Goths and other rave cultures.

These images of modern tribalism were eventually given a clear and creative sociological statement in Michel Maffesoli's *The Time of the Tribes* in 1996. The subtitle of this work in its English translation of 1988 was *The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*. Maffesoli argued that various micro-groups were emerging in modern society who share a common, but shallow and transitory culture. While these “tribes” are fleeting, their members share a common emotional bond which is very different from the cold, bureaucratic ties of formal organizations. Punks were probably the classical illustration of such youth interest groups. A year later in 1967 Guy Debord published his *The Society of the Spectacle* in which he developed Marx's theories of economic alienation to argue that modern society was further alienated by the impact of the mass media. Everyday life had been colonized by commodities producing what Marx had originally called the fetish of commodities. We can only experience our world through this mediation and in this alienated world our being had become merely appearing such that the relations between people had become a spectacular world of appearances and commodities. Debord's work on a spectacular society was the ideological foundation of the movement (mainly among students) of the *Situationist International*. Debord encouraged events and demonstrations as a protest against the alienation of a media – dominated world. His ideas had a profound effect on the student protests of 1968. After these social protests of the 1960s, ideas about the media and alienation subsequently became a permanent part of postmodern theory. Jean Baudrillard for example was influenced by Marshall McLuhan and Karl Marx, but criticized Marxism as a theory of production for neglecting consumption (Rojek and Turner 1993). In any case Marx could not have anticipated the growth of media. Baudrillard emphasized the ways in which reality and fiction, substance and appearance had merged in his *The System of Objects* (1968), *The Mirror of Production* (1973) and *Simulation and Simulcra* (1981).

These ideas about social fragmentation, social systems and representation began to influence science fiction and cultural and social theory around the themes of cyberspace and cyberpunk. The works of William Gibson (*Neuromancer* 1984) were said to give expression to a new community of hackers and the technologically literate who were socially disaffected and searching for social forms that could express the connectivity made possible by computerization. The new possibilities might overcome the limitations of the “electronic industrial ghettos” (Stone 1991: 95) that characterized modern society and some social theorists began to speculate about “cybersociety” as a more attractive alternative to the information city (Jones 1994). These theories also celebrated the merging of fiction and social science writing arguing that traditional social sciences had no chance of capturing even the basic features of the information age.

The point of this excursus into theories of modern tribalism is to suggest that the elementary forms of the social world which Durkheim attempted to describe through the lens of aboriginal tribalism in his sociology of religion are fast disappear-

ing and new but fragmented and ephemeral forms of association are emerging. The new forms of religion that we have broadly referred to as spirituality on the one hand and commodified religion on the other hand are the social expressions of this underlying fragmentation and commercialization of the everyday world. If the division between the sacred and the profane was the cultural expression of the underlying patterns of what we might call “thick solidarity,” the new subjective and emotional individualism of modern religion is the cultural expression of the emergence of what we might correspondingly call “thin solidarity.” What is at stake therefore in the revival of interest in religion is the possibility of discovering viable forms of social being in a global world of commercial and commodified religiosity. The prospects of sustaining the vitality of the social world appear however to be decidedly unpromising.

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