Secularization: Master Narrative or Several Stories?

I need to begin with comments on what is known as 'the standard model' of secularization, because however battered by four decades of critical pressure, it still holds the field. And that is because it is not straightforwardly untrue. In any case whatever sophisticated reservations are entertained by sociologists of religion, in the world at large secularization, in more or less simple guise, is implicitly assumed. However, once 'the standard model' has been briefly handled I revert to my usual tactic, which is to turn the 'hermeneutic of suspicion' against the taken-for-granted. I point to the number of possible stories about secularization, allude to the infiltration of ideological, philosophical and theological influences, and draw out the paradoxes and ambiguities deflecting or blurring the trajectory of secular advance.

Since secularization stories are so numerous, even if they intersect and overlap, I select just three of major importance which bear on what many, and José Casanova in particular, regard as the most workable form of secularization theory: social differentiation, meaning by that the increasing autonomy of the various spheres of human activity.[1] Once welfare and education (let's say) were under ecclesiastical aegis and the governing modality of thought was theological. Now welfare and education are independent spheres and theology has become a delimited sphere of our thinking. That was the approach adopted in my own *A General Theory of Secularization*.[2] It goes back to Talcott Parsons and I now extend it to the spheres of nature, of nation and of religion itself in the form of evangelicalism.

However, when I was setting out that 'General Theory' and trying to integrate empirical trends in belief and practice with the increasing autonomy associated with social differentiation, I found it very difficult to absorb approaches to secularization based on the history of ideas. I could do little more than indicate how different historical patterns of secularization, Anglo-American, Latin or whatever, cast national intelligentsias in very different roles with respect to religion.

At the same time the history of ideas is important and has been very broadly based on the notion of the avant-garde, whereby what the intellectual élite propose today the mass will accept tomorrow. That means it has organized history to pick up successive and crucial advances on the intellectual front line, such as the advocacy of a separate sphere of civil government by William of Ockham or Marsilius of Padua, or the secular consequences of Puritanism, or the moment in the mid-nineteenth century when the cooperation of religion and science collapsed in a phase of hostility.

It is perhaps this kind of history which serves to lodge simple secularization stories in educated minds, and my treatment of nature, nation and evangelicalism seeks at least to make matters more ambiguous and complicated. My linking thread still remains the increasing autonomy of spheres, so that what was united in social organization and thought has broken up into semi-independent realms. The coping stone has come down.

The Standard Model

What then of the standard model? You find it laid out with maxium simplification in the kind of sociology textbook chapter briefly dealing with religion and perhaps mostly given over to ethnic minorities. The focus is on empirical trends in belief and practice, and these are handled with what I once called a handy historical tripod, one leg in the high-Victorian period, another in the high Middle Ages, from which to measure the advance of secularity. The governing frame is modernization, based either on the contrast between medieval society and today, or on downward trends since the time of high Victorianism. At this point I pause only to recollect that the year 1870 in both England and France can be regarded as the peak of re-Christianization after the inroads made over the eighteenth century. However that may be, at some point or other, variously determined between 1880 and 1960, trends start to turn decisively down, though there are temporary plateaus and some upturns on particular criteria.[3] What had been massive practice, even quasi-uniformity in some regions, supported by social sanctions, becomes the purely optional leisure activity of a decreasing minority. Western Europe becomes the most secular place on the globe.

Inevitably there are debates about what these trends mean and their relation to other relevant trends, by such well-known scholars as Grace Davie, Steve Bruce, Rodney Stark, Robert Wuthnow, Peter Berger, Callum Brown, Hugh McLeod, Wade Clark Roof and Robin Gill. Whereas Rodney Stark has argued for persistent renewals of religious activity, especially where there is competition rather than monopoly, Steve Bruce has argued for steady irreversible decline.[4] Whereas Grace Davie has suggested religious decline is part of downward trends in voluntary association as such, Steve Bruce argues the loss of appeal affects religion quite specifically.[5]

There are two wider issues, the first of which has to do with what has been identified as 'European exceptionalism': is secularization in Europe due to factors not present elsewhere? The second concerns the impact on participation both of the Victorian domestication and feminization of Christianity and of the changes in women's roles, more particularly since the mid-twentieth century. Peter Berger, David Martin, and Grace Davie in her *Europe: the Exceptional Case* (2002) have argued that secularization in Europe has been exceptional due to factors not necessarily present elsewhere, for example the USA, while for others, Steve Bruce

included, the problem is rather 'American Exceptionalism'.[6] Both Grace Davie and Linda Woodhead have examined the question of female participation, which has been for a long time considerably greater than male participation, and Callum Brown, in his *The Death of Christian Britain*, has dramatized what a changing female role has meant in terms of the overall decline of the churches since the 1960s.[7]

Those who believe Europe is exceptional and those who believe it is the test-bed for a secular future watch the USA with care. In the USA participation increased during the nineteenth century and up to the mid-twentieth, and though there has been a levelling off and downward slopes visible in younger age groups, both participation and belief are greatly in excess of what one finds in Europe. There are important debates about Robert Putnam's thesis as to the relation between religious decline and a more general decline in social capital, for which Nancy Ammerman's documentation of the continued vitality of American religious groups is a major marker, as well as some continuing debate about the theses of Thomas Luckmann and Will Herberg concerning the internal secularization of religion in the USA.[8] Harold Bloom, in his idiosyncratic, *The American Religion*, suggests that we are now dealing with post-Christian and gnostic spirituality.[9] Few doubt that popular religion in America, as everywhere and always, has a somewhat 'flakey' character. After all, it is just as 'flakey' in contemporary Italy or Brazil.

These, then, are just some of the issues, and I want now to illustrate the contrast between explicit sociological theories based on fundamental processes and crucial transitions associated with modernization, and the kind of implicit assumptions which I suggest undergird cultural history. I choose Scandinavia to bring out the approach of cultural history, partly because it has long been a prime exhibit (with France) in the straight case for secularization, and partly because a recent book on Scandinavia, *The Soul of the North* by Neil Kent,[10] touches on my three secularization stories about nature, the nation and evangelicalism (or Pietism).

It is not generally realized that much of Northern Europe, and even more so North-eastern Europe, was not Christianized until well after the millennium. However, once established, often by warfare and the monarch's decision, the Roman Catholic Church became a pivot of ideological, economic and political power. As a result the Reformation was not only motivated by spiritual protest but (in Sweden at least) by aristocratic and monarchical desire to strip ecclesiastical assets. As Lutheranism supplanted Catholicism, the Church retained its monopoly and its obligatory character until the rise of a more individual, experiential and (to some extent) voluntary piety. Evangelical Pietism based on feeling overlapped both the rise of Romanticism, with its reverence for nature, and the rise of nationalism, with its cult of national symbols, the language and a semi-mythic history. In Denmark, for example, there was a cult of the nation both in a religious form, as promoted by Grundvig, *and* also quite independently. The nation, like nature, had become an independent object of worship, even though religion *might* still include both nation and nature.

The crucial underlying contrast Neil Kent draws is between the Middle Ages and today. Once the Church was pre-eminent, and the main source of legitimation, whereas the Lutheran Church of today, while retaining the passive adherence of an apathetic majority, is now a voluntary organization appealing to people of a charitable and liberal disposition. Even the revivalism of the nineteenth century tended to peter out in the twentieth. Adding a further gloss, one might say Scandinavia has moved from a communal and binding faith to an individual and optional spirituality.

How does this compare with a sociological approach based on fundamental processes and crucial transitions? The umbrella term is the process of modernization, under which head are a group of cognate terms such as rationalization, bureaucratization and disenchantment; urbanization and industrialization; individualization, privatization and liberalization. All these processual terms are adjuncts of secularization and together they frame the analysis of empirical trends in belief and practice.

There are also large-scale dramas of fundamental transition, specifying *the* great transition (or transitions) cutting us moderns off from the past. Such dramas of discontinuity may be based on one stage, as for example in Ernest Gellner's *Thought and Change*,[11] or on two stages, as in a recent book by John Gray entitled *Straw Dogs*.[12] Ernest Gellner not only posited a great gulf fixed between all previous modalities and modern ones (nationalism included), but specified the different elements. In a discussion of French eighteenth-century materialism he pointed to various shifts initiated by the Enlightenment, such as the rejection of 'supernatural' or spiritual explanations of phenomena in favour of the structure and activity of matter; determinism and relativism; empiricism in epistemology; hedonism and/or egoism in psychology; belief in reason as the arbiter of existence; utilitarianism in ethics; utilitarianism and/or democracy in politics; pragmatism in the theory of truth; and a belief in the power of education to improve the human condition. Gellner also suggested that what was once the duality of nature and supernature had become the duality of subject and object.[13]

I cite John Gray in his *Straw Dogs* because he offers a two-stage transition, and because it contains somewhat different elements, though his position and Gellner's need not be contradictory. The first stage is represented by the secular humanism still widely represented in the educated classes, but that, in Gray's view, is only so much theology in disguise. Belief in progress is millennial expectation transmuted, while the unique status of man is a version of the *imago dei*. It is time now finally to jettison these theological residues and to enter a stage of realism, facing the reality of our true status as animals who are not going anywhere. That, it would seem to me, implies a post-modernist understanding of the petering out of all master narratives. Parenthetically, Charles Taylor gives a very different account of the humanist dependence on an unacknowledged Christian ontology in his seminal *The Sources of the Self*.[14]

The point is that master narratives *should* peter out, and it is worth noticing just

how often philosophical accounts include a prescriptive as well as a descriptive element. That is particularly obvious in the case of secular theologies, where prescription virtually overrides description. In Harvey Cox, Christianity provides a long prologue to the advent of the secular city while in Don Cupitt a linguistic analysis of contemporary expressions purports to reveal Christian notions emptied out into mundane reality. The 'sea of faith', itself one of those dramatizing master metaphors, is not so much at very low tide as resurgent and once again 'at the full' in the resonant way we talk about everyday experience. Unlike George Herbert, who saw another world 'as through a glass', we have a single eye for a single reality.

So, then, we have grand schemes, multitudes of them in fact, including the post-modern scheme to end all schemes. However, not only are the various scenarios apt to combine philosophies with expectations, but inherently related to theories of religion and what it is 'essentially' about. It is not that such linkages undermine an argument *per se* but we are certainly dealing with organizing frames which – as is usually the case – leap beyond what can be inferred from observation. As to master metaphors such as the ebbing sea of faith, the most pervasive of them contrasts faith in the childhood of humanity with secular reality in its maturity.

Two organizing frames of increasing contemporary importance are evolutionary psychology (or cognitive science) and 'rational choice' theory. The expositions I select are Pascal Boyer in his *Explaining Religion*[15] and – of course – Rodney Stark and his associates in *Acts of Faith*.[16] The model for the first is sociobiology, and for the second economics, and it is interesting how trenchantly both deal with earlier theories of religion. Evolutionary psychology is, of course, notorious for reductionism, and especially for reducing other subjects to its own level of understanding.

Rodney Stark in his *Acts of Faith* (written with Roger Finke) argues that religion arises from perfectly reasonable calculations (allowing for the level of knowledge) with respect to what is incalculable and intrinsic to the human condition. There is, therefore, a built-in limit to secularization, though religious vitality is more likely to manifest itself where there is competitive pluralism rather than established monopolies. Pascal Boyer, in contrast, sees no evidence of 'rational choice' because concepts fostering religious notions are delivered from the mental basement where they were laid down long ago under the exigencies of survival and selection. An example of such a concept would be the attribution of agency to spiritual entities. Only members of intellectual élites can expect to escape their power, and so once again there is a limit to secularization. Clearly in both cases the theory of secularization complements the theory of religion. Reductionism has no necessary connection with confident predictions about a secular future.

In summary, then, we have here two powerful illustrations of what I have been suggesting so far. The frames which govern our understanding of secularization are the frames which govern our understanding of religion. They reflect contemporary world-views, including concepts of human nature. In the two cases just cited the world-views are choices on a competitive market and the unconscious structure of

our animal nature. Both go beyond mere observation and both are comprehensive in that they exclude each other and a very wide swathe of previous theorizing, all of it equally confident and comprehensive. So let us just for the moment bracket the question of validity to say with modesty and simplicity that there is enough circumstantial evidence for a hermeneutic of suspicion.

Differentiation: Autonomous Nature

Here I extend an approach based on increasing differentiation to the increasing autonomy of nature, before looking at the autonomy of the nation, and at evangelicalism as that kind of religion which *in principle* represents increasing autonomy with respect to nature and nation. As will be illustrated in each case, there is a dialectic of secularization and sanctification, so that the sanctification of nature, or of nation, or of religion in evangelical form, while it becomes a matter of *choice* rather than necessity, increases in emotional potency. All three can be recombined, and very often are, but a break has been made which cannot be unmade. Thus, to take the example of nation, the separation of Church and State, and the separation of communities of faith from the processes of secular government, is unlikely to be reversed. To that extent secularization theory is endorsed.

Historically, attitudes toward nature have been grounded in imaginative visions of the world. That argument is eloquently advanced and illustrated in Mary Midgeley's *Science and Poetry*,[17] but there are many earlier versions of it, such as Burtt's exploration of the metaphysical foundations of modern science, or the quite contradictory views of Robert Merton and Lewis Feuer on the role respectively of ascetic Protestantism and hedonism in fostering the investigation of nature. Mary Hesse has stressed the role of metaphor in theories of nature (and society); and a revisionist historiography of science has challenged notions of a cumulative displacement of religion by science, and documented periods of cooperation between religion and science, as well as phases of conflict dramatized and sometimes misrepresented by secular ideologists. The well-known struggles in the late nineteenth century were about professional power as well as truth, and varied greatly in length and vigour according to social, religious and national context.

The emerging autonomy of nature includes both a disenchantment rejecting the operation of occult forces and a rational religiosity complemented by a rational atheism. Perhaps one should pause at this point to distinguish this rational atheism from the practical atheism of (say) Samuel Pepys or William Petty. A rational religiosity has now become an *option*, and if one adopts the terms used by Roy Porter, it was based on an admiration for order, unity and intricate mechanism.[18] Perhaps one sees its spatial manifestations in the geometrical organization of city and garden. God himself is Divine Architect and Great Mathematician, and from Newton and Priestley to James Jeans and Paul Davies admiration for the mind of God revealed in nature has constituted a continuing genealogy of rational religion.

Just how dangerous that could be when deployed out of context is clear from Newton's attempt to understand and organize the Bible along similar lines. Such a religion requires little or nothing by way of institutional or clerical mediation, and is likely to view miracle as arbitrary interference with law. But it is not merely a transitional phase en route to atheism, such as secularization theory might lead one to suppose. Fundamental kinds of faith exist in their own right, not as interim modes. Moreover, evangelical Christianity itself, whatever its stress on redemption rather than natural theology – Wesley, say, rather than Watts and Cowper – often propagated common-sense views in the philosophical meaning of the term. It admired the rational goodness of creation, and was reinforced in that by the Hebrew Scriptures and the Wisdom tradition. Evangelical scientists, including a great if tragic figure like Philip Gosse, traced the intricacy of nature up to, and back to, nature's God.

The alternative genealogy, rigorously articulated by D'Holbach, does not *need* the hypothesis of a divine originator or sustainer. As a *hypothesis* God is otiose, especially if the order of nature is reduced to an atomized and closed collocation of components. Again, one has to stress that the social distribution of scientific atheism is related to a national, cultural and religious context and to cultural struggles over the governing definition of 'the real', so that English responses tended to be less thoroughgoing than was the case in France.

The opposition to a mechanized, disenchanted world came from various sources, such as Blake and Swedenborg, but above all from the holistic re-enchantment of nature sought by Romanticism, which stressed reverence, awe and participation, rather than 'measurement and line'. As in rational religiosity, so in Romantic religiosity one might *choose* either a theistic or an atheistic response, and Christianity and Church and religion were not even residually coextensive. I mean that for Keats an intense response to nature stood in sharp contrast to the dispirited condition of the Established Church. Some poets such as Wordsworth might adopt a panentheistic philosophy, or like Shelley turn to Neoplatonism, but Richard Jefferies could celebrate a purely naturalistic ecstasy. One has only to compare Goethe with Blake and Swedenborg to see how variously a personal gnosis could treat the Christian repertoire.

When Keats writes about the sea as employed in its 'priest-like task of pure ablution round earth's human shores' or Wordsworth of a mountain pass in the Trossachs as 'an apt Confessional', one sees how metaphors have been taken from ecclesiastical ritual into the open air, and how Catholic ceremonial and imagery provide a richer resource than the radically reduced rites and imagery of Protestantism. It is as if Catholicism has undergone a translation outside the frame of institution and creed to serve and feed a personal religious apprehension.

Wordsworth is especially interesting because he created a mode of personal faith which (eventually) reintegrated nature, nation and even Church in a manner still quite influential. He united a nature mysticism celebrating moral impulses 'from a vernal wood' with a biblical sense of awe in the high and holy place, as well as with

an evocation of the sacred edifice set in the particular landscape of England. The same evocation is present in Constable, while in the later Gainsborough one sees a further linkage between evangelicalism and Romantic 'sensibility' about place which includes the poor who inhabit the place. Gainsborough himself was a Methodist, but what we see germinating here are divergent as well as intersecting streams of personal piety, including an autonomous invocation of nature entirely outside the confines of creed or institution.[19] These potent intersections and major divergences have been immensely influential and are a part of our religious repertoire utterly opaque to the interview schedule or questionnaire.

Something of the impact of cultural context can be gained by comparing how the differing elements combine and diverge in different national contexts. In Germany a devout Christian such as Caspar David Friedrich represents a rich strand of connection in his representation of the soulful Romantic standing in the high and solitary place or set against a background of evocative landscape and Gothic sacred edifice. Here we see one major source of a whole genre of country and mountain mysticism. In Germany, as in Scandinavia and Britain, the evocation of nature, of country – in the widest sense – and of sacred edifice has been potent, and probably remains so. In the USA the paintings of 'The American Sublime' suggest an interesting mutation in that the strong religious connotations, for example in Frederic Church, turn on Bible and Creation rather than on Church.

The 'history of religions' movement, as recently explored by Hans Kippenberg, could offer further illustration of how the themes of the religious repertoire were variously inflected in Britain, Germany and France.[20] But crucial to the whole movement in Kippenberg's view is a *religious* frustration with an over-intellectualized and chronically moralistic Christianity, all the way from the wistfulness about a lost pagan world expressed in 'Schöne Welt, wo bist du?' to the recovery of myth and ritual. That this lay more in a Catholic ambience than a Protestant one is obvious, and its reworkings in symbolist painting make this abundantly clear.

In these reworkings elements from the Christian repertoire might reappear as universal types, including the outsider and the victim cast against seascape and landscape, as in Crabbe and Melville. Landscapes and seascapes contain significant figures. Analogues of ancient dualisms might also reappear in a revived sense of the hostile, ferocious and recalcitrant character of the natural environment. Today we are still inheritors of all these shifts of repertoire and register. We have, for example, to ask ourselves just how far language about the 'rape' of the natural environment or about the intrusion of evil into the innocent paradise of Bali is extravagant metaphor or massive echo of a Christian repertoire.

Differentiation: Nation as Autonomous Icon

Nationalism as conceived by some, for example, by Ernest Gellner,[21] is part of the project of modernization, specifically, in the view of Anthony Smith,[22] related to the aspirations of intellectuals who present themselves as an avant-garde awakening the true spirit of the nation. It is here that one sees how the reconstitution of the Holy Church as manifesting the authentic national *Geist* runs alongside reconstitutions of Christianity as a source of civilization or vanguard of progress. A national *Heilsgeschicte* is created with accompanying genealogies devised to provide legitimation, especially through invocations of antiquity, and in this one recognizes a simultaneous secularization and sanctification of both history and nation. Just as the Bible sets up genealogies reaching back to Adam or Abraham, and monarchies devise genealogies reaching back to the Bible and the figures of classical or local antiquity, so the nation invents its succession and mythic self-presentation. One of the attractions of Mormonism is to provide a third testament for the Americas and even to create a new nation for those who otherwise might feel they had missed out. If the Scottish kings made it up, why not the Mormons?

Just as, in relation to nature, there is a shift from admiration of mechanism to holistic participation, so in relation to the nation there is a shift from contractual notions of membership to concepts of a sacred and integral bond. The Catholic definition of heresy becomes a national definition of treachery, and the all-inclusive and automatic inheritance of baptism becomes an all-inclusive inheritance in the holy spirit of the nation and its sacred emblems. Whether the Church itself plays a role in the creation and sustaining of this spirit, or some more general invocation of Protestantism or Catholicism, or some reference back to 'pagan' pasts in Nordic, classical or native American myth, is a matter of national trajectories. Poland, as a Catholic nation under occupation, emerged as a suffering Messiah, whilst France as a revolutionary nation switched from eldest daughter of the Church to first standard-bearer of liberty, equality and fraternity. Britain and the USA deployed biblical ideas of the 'other Eden', of New Israel and New Jerusalem.

The USA as the first new nation and first unchallenged superpower traces genealogies designed to paint an icon of America as the abode of persecuted innocents who have turned the wilderness into a Promised Land of milk and honey, as well as successor to republican Rome. In the course of this idealized self-presentation God has been put on contract to deliver by ensuring victory in war, prosperity in peace and provisional immortality for every citizen. It is this postulate of New Israel or the *Novus Ordo Seclorum* which helps explain the language of fractured and violated innocence following the events of 11 September. That the attack was wicked and appalling is clear, but the blowing out of city centres has been a regular experience in Britain and Europe. More generally (and not in the context of 11 September), it is as if the biblical model of judgement as well as promise has in God's own country shifted decisively to promise.

Peace is one of the great biblical visions, and both the USA and Britain have felt that the peace and prosperity promised to Jerusalem have been partially or wholly extended to them, in a protected continent and a protected island respectively. In Europe, however, violation, destruction and intrusion have been so endemic up to

the mid-twentieth century that the stark reality of political imperatives is frankly accepted, and the likelihood of an unhappy outcome fully canvassed. Innocence and virtue are less frequently claimed by continentals than they are by Anglo-Americans. Yet by a curious reversal, ever since Europe has been shielded by American power, Europe has begun to see itself as the abode of Immanuel Kant's 'perpetual peace' and the USA as still in a Hobbesian situation of inevitable war. Something approaching complacent innocence has begun to emerge in Europe with the slow recession of inveterate war though, of course, French *realpolitik* never wavers.

The literature on nationalism frequently distinguishes between a civic variety based on universal citizen rights and more organic varieties basic on the mythic spirit of the people (or even their biological constitution). Organic nationalism may combine ethnicity with religion (as in Greece where precisely that combination is now fiercely debated, or as in most of the countries of Eastern Europe and the Middle East). Civic nationalism is by definition more open to a multi-ethnic, multicultural mix, but even those countries exemplifying civic nationalism retain ethnic, cultural and maybe religious markers in reserve. These come out under pressure of mass migration, particularly when the migrants are at some cultural distance from the 'home' population, for example, Islamic migrants from North Africa attempting to stay in the countries of the northern Mediterranean, or Hispanic migrants crossing to the USA from Mexico.

There are many points on the spectrum from civic to organic nationalism of which England offers an example close to the civic and Spain and Ireland examples closer to the organic, at least until recently. England has historically understood itself as a Protestant and progressive nation apart from its Church, whereas imperial Spain and an oppressed Ireland centred their identity both in ethnicity and the Roman Church. Of course, civic nationalisms still invoke the spirit of the real nation while organic nationalisms shift towards notions of citizenship, law and education divorced from religion.

It is worth stressing the extent to which civic nationalism in practice requires assimilation to the national totems and ethos on the part of sub-communities bound by ethno-religious bonds. In Britain and the USA at the present time the official public doctrine of multiculturalism is proving difficult to sustain when challenged by quite different forms of ethno-religious solidarity and popular resistance to them by the majority population. The current tension focuses for obvious reasons on Islam, but a particularly interesting earlier example is provided by the Jewish community. When Jews were confined to a ghetto they retained their ethno-religious identity over against hostile pressure from the ethno-religiosity of the majority, for example in Poland and Russia. However, in enlightened nations like post-revolutionary France they were invited out of the ghetto on condition they accepted the universal criteria of citizenship. Several consequences followed. One was an embrace by many Jews of enlightened universalism based on humanity as such as a way to outflank Christian universalism. Jews, particularly Jewish intellectuals,

became part of the advance guard of secularization, challenging the ethno-religious understanding of the majority behind the banner of a civic definition of national identity. A typical example would be the late nineteenth-century clash in Denmark between Brandes as a secular Jew of germanophile sympathies and cosmopolitan provenance, and those followers of Grundvig who viewed the Danish nation in terms of its authentic religious spirit.

Just as there is a variable admixture of the civic and the organic, so there is a variable balance between a national project framed in terms of a manifestation (or fount) of civilization and one framed as vanguard of progress. In the USA religion is closely aligned with a national project leaning towards the idea of progress, which has something to do with its vitality, whereas in Victorian Britain religion was aligned with a combination of civilization and progress, which may have something to do with its subsequent declining vitality given that both the Christian Churches and the nation lost confidence in civilization and progress after 1914. In France there emerged two nations, one Catholic, leaning towards the French role as the heart of civilization; the other secular and republican, relating French civilization to progress. Paris was the artistic capital of the world up to the mid-twentieth century, since when claims to progress and to civilization have been defensive rather than confident.

In short, in considering the state of religion one has to take into account how far it is or is not aligned with the national project, and how united or divided the nation is with respect to what lies at the heart of that project. One has to ask what are the consequences of French Catholics blaming secularists for the defeat by Germany in 1870, and of secularists blaming Islam (or at any rate the Caliphate and failure to westernize) for the defeat in 1918–19. Again, one has to enquire into the consequences for the Russian Orthodox Church of the collapse of the communist version of progress and of the national project in 1989. This is not an area in which one can propose straight correlations, because of the many factors involved and because both failure and success are capable of reinvigorating national aspirations. It is all much more complex than the relatively simple relationship discernible between suppressed nationhood in Ireland, Croatia, Slovakia, Lithuania and Poland, and the degree of religious vitality. That kind of relatively simple relationship may also be seen in the remobilization of Islam under pressure from the West, as well as in Hindu and Buddhist nationalism. Will it be Islamia *contra mundum*? The obvious question which follows in that context is whether this global rise in religious nationalism will follow the European sequence of rise followed by fall.

A final question to be asked is whether Catholicism, having felt the hostile pressure of movements for national independence, may not benefit from the contemporary slackening of national identity, if indeed that is actually happening. International Catholicism might find itself consonant with modern internationalism, while at the same time reconceiving itself as the largest voluntary denomination and making an implicit alliance with evangelicalism – the pioneer of voluntarism. That

might lead progressive Catholics to link up with liberal Protestants over against conservative Catholics and evangelicals.

Seamus Heaney offers a comment relevant to the future role of Catholicism, more particularly with regard to Ireland now it has become a consumer nation on equal terms with others rather than a frugal republic. In *The Independent* for 31 October 2002, he says that

> some kind of metaphysic has disappeared from the common life. The inner ethic that came from this authoritarian Church, which gave so much of its character to Irish life – its puritanism, but also its sense of service and readiness to go on missions and so on … I think we are running on an unconscious that is informed by religious values, but I think my youngsters' youngsters won't have that. I think the needles are wobbling in that way.

Differentiation: The Autonomy of Religion Itself

The paradox of evangelicalism (in which Pentecostalism is included for present purposes) turns on the way it both embodies secularity and seeks a more thorough sanctification. Evangelicalism is the most expansive element in contemporary Protestantism and yet as it seeks this deeper appropriation of faith at the individual level it erodes the idea of a Christian society by dismissing the uncommitted majority as not Christian. Given that the democratic state increasingly reflects the comparative indifference of the majority, evangelicalism in principle abandons it, except in the USA, where it has devised a myth of a Christian Constitution about as ill founded as the opposing myth of militant secularists. That leads to forays into the 'naked public square' from which it retires frustrated and bruised, wondering why a 'moral majority' makes comparatively little effective impact. Whether the Bush presidency is altering that remains to be seen.

The 'ideal type' of evangelicalism has to be constructed in terms of the restriction of religion to a voluntary sector unable and unwilling to propose norms governing the autonomous sectors of law, business, politics and foreign policy. These sectors follow their own rules. Given the voluntary group has to survive in the religious market, everything except personal piety turns on instrumental and pragmatic criteria as to what works, including objective ritual and the location of the sacred. The public forum and public face of religion have been subjectivized *in foro interno*.

Of course, evangelicalism seeks to Christianize society, as it attempted to do in the late nineteenth century in Britain and America; and as a moral interest group it seeks to influence law and public policy to favour its agenda. It may even, in certain circumstances, revert to notions of theocracy or embrace neo-Calvinist ideas of a comprehensive Christian understanding of culture. But in logic and in practice it jettisons birthright membership in the community or neighbourhood for a second birth within the voluntary religious group, and reduces comprehensive political concern to a limited moral agenda. If politics is somehow to be redeemable, that

depends on the personal virtues of those in public life, not on some overall social vision.

None of this is invalidated by an evangelical ambition to Christianize a whole country, such as Simon Green outlines in his study of part of northern England between 1870 and 1920 entitled *Religion in the Age of Decline*.[23] In fact it is in part the over-extension involved in such an ambition that is a factor in decline. Evangelicalism as a faith based on choice and mobility stands in contrast with socially comprehensive faiths based on birthright membership and territorial location, and it is part of the process whereby parishes cease to be foci of local community. Territorial parishes retain some relevance, of course, because even voluntary groups are based on proximity, and there are elements of local belonging even in the most mobile sectors of society. There have to be places for communal mourning and celebration, as for example assemblages at Trinity Episcopal Church and St Patrick's Cathedral in New York after 11 September and parallel assemblages at St Paul's, London. There is, therefore, a continuing dialectic between the principle of mobility and second birth and the principle of settlement and generational transmission. One correlate of mobility plus generational transmission is the increase in faith-based rather than community schools. Where school, community and peer groups subvert rather than support learning, discipline and virtue the remedy is obvious.

Evangelicalism can also be understood as part of a long-term process of individualization and interiority rooted in Christianity itself, and in Judaism for that matter, with varying expressions in Augustine, Cistercian spirituality, the Reformation and pietism. Here lies part of the rationale of its relative indifference to objective ritual, sacred objects, liturgical language, credal formulas and the mediations of clerical hierarchy. All such elements, while retaining a place as part of necessary structures of ecclesiastical and social order, are undermined by heartwork and by the pragmatism about forms that so easily goes with it. Such pragmatism opens the way for a persistent adjustment to new conditions, which actually means that evangelicalism can be trapped and immobilized by the culture into which it initially enters as an agent of change. Though the evangelical spirit restricts the individualistic motif somewhat in order to sustain solidarity and mutuality, all the same the emphasis on inwardness and the good feelings consequent on faith leads to persistent adjustments to cultural demand such as one sees in the churches of the 'New Reformation' like the Calvary Chapel: transparency, secular-looking facilities, minimal clerical mediation.[24] In the case of evangelicalism, one possible adjustment is a therapeutic view of religion consonant with wider therapeutic culture, or a consumerism based on catering for post-modern eclectic preference with a vaguely Christian ambience and vocabulary. Whether such consumerism is new or just more explicit than before is a moot point, but it is interesting that in a theologian like Don Cupitt consumerism is actually validated. However, in Britain the likely consequence has been a refusal to 'consume' institutional Christianity based on a culture (particularly among young males) of

inarticulate interiority, or else the spectacle of ex-evangelical denominations operating as declining clubs for religiose entertainment.

In this sphere of entertainment the prime tactic of evangelicalism, at least initially, is to bring all aspects of Christian living under supervision of a sanctified spirit. It provides leisure facilities like the YMCA or Seamen's Missions or Temperance hotels or sports venues or Christian television to show how the spirit can animate all aspects of leisure. But in entering the consumer market it is bound to be in competition with secular rivals to provide a rather similar product. In the USA, where evangelicalism is more pervasive, it may have the resources to compete, at least in the provision of an acceptable ensemble of services in the context of mutual solidarity; in Britain it does not, and the Salvation Army (for example) formed originally to sanctify 'the world' becomes internally secularized and without sufficient religious distinctiveness. Society proves yet more individual, mobile and competitive than evangelicalism. Here the contrast between Britain and the developing world is stark because throughout the continents of Africa and Latin America, and in parts of Asia, versions of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity can provide comprehensive environments far more all-embracing than alternatives subject to the corrosions of a chaotic and secular world. Pentecostal and charismatic religion becomes the presenting edge and avant-garde of social and geographical mobility. It is in the lead rather than reacting to what is happening elsewhere. The inevitable question is for how long, or is this a phase on the way to the condition of developed society? Will that developed society be on the US or the European model?

So, the paradox of evangelicalism is a simultaneous claim over the whole of personal life accompanied by a diminution in range as the once-established national churches cease to provide religious cover for a whole community or to put forward regulatory social principles about usury or family or sexuality. In this, evangelicalism contrasts sharply with the churches descended from the Radical Reformation for whom the regulatory principles of the Gospel are at the heart of a social project, and who stress obedience to the requirements of the Kingdom come on earth rather than transactions in the individual soul. The paradox of simultaneous secularization and sanctification central to my argument is here truly dramatic, because one either extends a claim over the whole secular society, which is bound to fail, or one withdraws into a carefully bounded enclave. Moreover, this radicalism also swings between setting up the Kingdom by violence, taking God's providence into one's own hands, and pacific withdrawal. In religious terms the long-term consequence is a pacific and utopian communtarianism, leaking radical reforms into the wider society. However, in S.N. Eisenstadt's view, the long-term consequence of sectarianism is found in the tradition of apocalyptic revolutionary politics, and in the rule of the pure which in turn leads either to the dissipations of anarchy or to authoritarian corruption as the pure try to drive society through a forcible transition to a qualitatively better world.[25]

That, however, is a counterpoint to evangelicalism too large to pursue here because it raises the vast question of secular religions and ideologies reproducing the morphology of religious forms in immanent formats. More germane here is the problem for sociological hermeneutics posed by an evangelical attempt at sanctification which can mutate into internal secularization. Evangelicalism is persistently inventive, altering and renewing itself in capturing the world for Christ. It is, for example, simultaneously implicated in scaling religion down to family values and domesticity, with consequences in terms of the feminization of religion, and in seeking to create masculine versions of Christianity to compensate. Something similar is true of evangelical music, which is a major medium of conversion: the impulse to sanctify seeks to rob the devil of all the best tunes by almost giving up the religious register of the sacred to embrace whatever works and attracts. The result is that the higher reaches of the aesthetic remain the potent resource of older churches still retaining a sense of 'the sacred' and the register appropriate to it.[26]

The hermeneutic and methodological problem is clear enough. Given the background assumptions derived from the master narrative of secularization, does one treat new initiatives as creative restatements or as responses to secularization based on a compromise with 'the world' which is bound eventually to fall on bad times and evil days? When an interpretation based on compromise is adopted, the notion of 'traditional religion' is often called upon to provide a historical baseline, without a time and place being precisely specified or the content of traditional religion itself fleshed out. Nor does one enquire whether analogous if not identical compromises with 'the world' have not occurred many times before. Thus if a sociologist identifies a serious fragmentation in contemporary American religion, one does not ask just how far a similar situation existed in 1850 or in 1750. The possibility of a partial rotation in types of religious situation should at least be accorded the same right to consideration as a straight line (with intermittent wobbles) to a secular terminus.

That same query about baselines and the persistence over centuries of a 'secular practice' can be extended much more widely because so much standard historiography elides the underlying questions, preferring to proceed *ad hoc* and reaching for such crude organizing metaphors as come to hand. The lack of comparison between the type of pluralism found in classical antiquity and contemporary pluralism provides one illustration, but on a less extended timescale one might ask how one assesses the Catholic and evangelical revivals of the mid-nineteenth century against the antecedent baseline provided by the courts of the four Georges, and such figures as Lord Melbourne, Charles James Fox, the Duke of Wellington, Lord Nelson and Beau Brummel. Even with respect to the immediately pre-modern piety so eloquently evoked by Eamon Duffy and others, how does one assess what Joel Rosenthal called *The Purchase of Paradise*[27] in terms of consumerism? May not the consumerist attitude be rather more persistent compared with the well-publicized forms of clerical asceticism, just as *realpolitik* is a persistent feature of society before as well as after Machiavelli scandalized

'Christian' Europe? The modalities differ, but the structures of desire and power persist.

Some of the worst distortions derived from the master narrative of secularization occur in relation to Puritanism, supposing one still feels able to use that label with any confidence. In the sociological literature trailing in the wake of Weber's master work, we often do not bother to ask when 'Puritanism' existed, or how many people were involved and how it eventually turned from a conservative to a radical force. Instead we focus on a trail of consequences for science, democracy, individualization or capitalism under the joint head of secularization and modernity. Puritanism in its own right barely figures and yet it serves effectively to blot out vast and significant movements like the Counter-Reformation and enlightened absolutism. The trajectory of history moves forward on an erratic course determined and distorted by the problematic of modernity and what are identified as its potent anticipations. The French Revolution and the American duly appear, but all other enlightenments except the French are elided as sideshows to the real story. Thus we acquire a quick fix on what Tennyson aptly called 'the ringing grooves of change'. History, it seems, is a train on a railway line to a terminus, and 1642, 1776 and 1789 are stations en route to *the* future, rather than history being full of cunning alleyways, and the future prone to turn whimsical or unexpected. And the reason we tidy up history in this intolerable manner is because we are still thinking through the lens provided by the semi-mythic horizons which carried the forces behind 1642, 1776 and 1789 to victory. *They* have constructed the way we see *them*. As Patrick Collinson commented with respect to the English Revolution, the developmental processes discussed by scholars all the way from R.H. Tawney to Christopher Hill may not correspond to any notion of modernity likely to appeal to the twenty-first century.[28]

I am not implying that modernity is other than distinctive or that the modalities of society since the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution are not very different. I am saying, however, that our observations are inflected and selected according to semi-mythical frames associated with crucial and successful social groups, and that our key metaphors and master narratives have philosophical links which include recommendation as well as documentation.

The trajectory derived from the French Revolution has been vastly influential through its dispersion among intelligentsias as a track along which history is destined to proceed. At the same time, it is supplemented by Anglo-American traditions of utilitarianism, so that a composite picture is built up of an advance guard proceeding either on a mainly revolutionary or a mainly evolutionary trajectory. In the early stages religion is allowed to be part of this advance guard, but then it not only falls behind but falls out with the advance guard, and engages in successive rearguard actions or suffers successive translations. Among these translations might be the shift from personal faith to sincerity (that is, from a theological to a natural virtue) or from the genuine instincts of the assembled chosen and godly to the genuine instincts of *all* the chosen people in God's own country

ceaselessly invoked by American political leaders. The batons switch with different runners but the goal remains the same: the secular version of that 'one far-off divine event' at some secular end to history. Perhaps instead these are phases of secularization and sanctification such as I have described.

Notes

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