

The Secularization Myth Revisited

Secularism as Christianity in Disguise

Robert H. Nelson
School of Public Policy
University of Maryland

This article examines recent developments in the study of implicit religion and applies these insights to the secularization thesis in sociology. Secularization, rather than being opposed to religion, actually manifests itself as an implicit religion, carrying marks of the previously dominant religious tradition in any given society. Thus, where various Christian traditions were once dominant, one may speak of “secular Protestantism,” “secular Catholicism,” or “secular Orthodoxy.” Secular religion is not as secular as most social scientists once expected. The idea of secularization itself may even be classed as an aspiration of secular religion’s faith in progress. The article concludes by way of example with an examination of modern environmentalism as a form of implicit Calvinism.

Introduction

As the American social scientists Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart recently observed, “The seminal thinkers of the nineteenth century—Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud—all believed that religion would gradually fade in importance and cease to be significant with the advent of industrial society.”¹ Freud, for example, wrote that religion is a great “illusion” that is “comparable to a childhood neurosis.” Seen from a scientific perspective, he wrote that we must now “view religious teachings, as it were, as neurotic relics, and we may now argue that the time has probably come . . . for replacing the [religious] effects of [psychological] repression by the results of the rational operation of the intellect.”² Such negative views about the future of religion seemed for many to be confirmed in the twentieth century as

“the death of religion became the conventional wisdom in the social sciences.”³ One result was that the serious study of religion in such circles faded.

By some measures Freud and other social scientists who doubted that religion had much of a future proved prophetic.⁴ The current state of religion in the United States was described in a 2012 report of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, based on a recent religious survey of the American public.⁵ The most striking finding was that the number of people who said they had “no religious affiliation” rose from 15 percent of Americans in 2007 to 20 percent in 2012, a remarkably rapid and large shift for such a short time period (among those in the eighteen through twenty-nine age category, the unaffiliated by 2012 had reached 32 percent). Such “nones” had become the second largest religious category in the United States, surpassing both mainline Protestants and evangelical Protestants, trailing only Roman Catholics (many of whom continue to identify themselves as Catholic even as they participate minimally in church activities).

Self-identified Protestants (of all kinds) in the United States declined from 62 percent in 1972 to 48 percent in 2012, while Catholics declined over this period from 26 to 22 percent. Once the dominant religious group in the United States, the largest Protestant declines occurred among “mainline” Protestant churches—according to one estimate, from 31 million members of such churches (Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Congregational, and others) in 1965 to 25 million members in 1988, and further still to 21 million in 2005.⁶ If showing a less severe long-term decline in such absolute numbers (estimates of totals of people with particular religious affiliations are not an exact science), the 2012 Pew report found that this mainline Protestant free fall has continued with its share of the American population down to 18 percent in 2007 and then a mere 15 percent in 2012.

Thus, at least as judged by trends in mainline Protestantism, whose origins lie in the historically most influential religions of the United States (Congregationalism was derived from the original Puritan churches in New England; Harvard, Yale, and Princeton were all founded as Calvinist religious institutions), the common social science prediction of the twentieth century of a sharp and continuing decline of religion has in fact been confirmed by the data. To be sure, this may simply reflect the fact that the mainline religions had already been substantially secularized by the 1960s in their actual religious messages (such as the Protestant social gospel that focused on saving this world), and their rapid loss of membership since then has simply formally confirmed their previous underlying secular character, which increasingly did not any longer need to be expressed in a church setting.

Such secularizing trends have extended further into the general populations of most European countries. According to a Pew study of global religion as of

2010, the largest percent of religiously unaffiliated in the world was found in the Czech Republic (76 percent), followed by Estonia (59 percent)—outside Europe, Japan (57 percent) and China (52 percent) ranked third and fourth in the world.⁷ In Europe, other countries with higher numbers of the religiously unaffiliated than the United States included Latvia (44 percent), the Netherlands (42 percent), Belgium (29 percent), France (28 percent), Sweden (27 percent), Germany (25 percent), and the United Kingdom (21 percent).

In Lutheran Scandinavia (except to a lesser extent for Sweden) and in Catholic southern Europe, self-declared religious affiliation remains high, around 75 percent or more. Surprisingly, by the measure of religious affiliation, secularization in Europe as a whole (18 percent unaffiliated in 2010) is little different from North America as a whole (17 percent unaffiliated). Other measures, however, show considerably greater differences.

Regular church attendance is more difficult to measure reliably than the results of a single survey of religious affiliation. Measured by regular church attendance, the available evidence in Europe suggests that it has now widely fallen to around 15 percent or below, even in some of the European countries where self-declared religious affiliation may still be much higher (this is the case in Scandinavia in particular). The American figure for regular attendance, in the range of 20 to 40 percent, is much higher than typical estimates for Europe. The wide American range partly reflects the fact that some researchers in the United States have found that many people may overreport their church attendance in surveys. Long a bastion of European Catholicism, remarkably enough, Spain has now legalized divorce, abortion, and same-sex marriage.

There are admittedly significant limitations to measuring the current state of religion in a society by the levels of stated affiliation with recognized religious bodies or by regular attendance at a church service. As the sociologist Grace Davie reports with respect to Great Britain, religion there has been increasingly characterized in the second half of the twentieth century by “believing without belonging,” a circumstance involving much greater “persistence of the sacred in contemporary society despite the undoubted decline in churchgoing.”⁸ Elaine Graham reports similarly that according to some credible estimates “as many as 33 percent of the people in the United States identify as ‘spiritual but not religious.’”⁹ Claims of increasing secularization based on the diminished state of organized religions thus may much overstate the level of religious decline in a society; it may actually be the form of religious expression (leaving aside for the moment the additional complications raised by secular religion) that is changing, not the level of genuine religious belief.

Proponents of the secularization thesis expected in the decades before and following World War II that its effects would gradually extend across the entire world. That has, to the surprise of many social scientists, also not happened.¹⁰ While mainline Protestantism went into rapid decline in the United States from the 1960s onward, evangelical Protestantism retained its vitality and even increased US adherents.¹¹ In the Muslim world, Islamic fundamentalism made an even greater comeback in nations such as Turkey and Pakistan. Elsewhere around the world, such as with Hinduism in India, other religious fundamentalisms have gained in influence as well. Catholic and other branches of Christianity have been growing very rapidly in Africa.¹² The secularization thesis has thus come under strong criticism since the 1990s as an inaccurate empirical prediction of religious events outside Europe. Indeed, even Peter Berger, a former leading proponent of the secularization thesis in the 1960s, has since recanted his own earlier theories.¹³

Another important if less widely recognized challenge to the secularization thesis is that, even within nominally secular societies today in Europe, the cultural influence of historic religion often remains surprisingly large.¹⁴ Thus, based in part on the results of World Values Surveys and European Values Surveys over many years, Pippa Norris of Harvard University and Ronald Inglehart of the University of Michigan write in 2011 that in secular circumstances around the world, “the distinctive worldviews that were originally linked with religious traditions have shaped the cultures of each nation in an enduring fashion; today, these distinctive values are transmitted to the citizens even if they never set foot in a church, temple or mosque.” For example, “although only about 5% of the Swedish public attends church weekly, the Swedish public as a whole manifests a distinctively Protestant value system that they hold in common with other historically Protestant societies such as Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Germany and the Netherlands.” Moreover, these national Protestant value systems still today differ “markedly and consistently from those of historically Catholic countries” of Europe such as France, Italy, and Spain. There is not only a Protestant-Catholic cultural divide in Europe but “as a distinguished Estonian colleague put it, in explaining the difference between the worldviews of Estonians and Russians, ‘we are all atheists, but I am a Lutheran atheist, and they are Orthodox atheists.’”¹⁵

According to the secularization thesis, the continuing secularization of the world would include the spread of much the same rational and scientific ways of thinking to all societies. Pippa and Inglehart do not attempt to explain why secularization in Europe has instead taken different forms according to the religious history of a nation. One plausible explanation is that current secular cultures

still implicitly retain many of the core values and assumptions of their religious pasts. As the American sociologist of religion Christian Smith observes, “In some circles it is unfashionable to talk about secularization as religious decline; the focus instead is on the ‘relocation’ or ‘restructuring’ of religion.”¹⁶ In many cases, lacking greater exposure to the long history of religion, many young Europeans today may not have much awareness of the traditional religious roots that still inform their own current “secular” thinking.

Such an argument is made, among others, by Edward Bailey who in England began writing about “implicit religion” in the 1970s and founded the Centre for the Study of Implicit Religion and Contemporary Spirituality in 1995—the publisher since 1998 of the journal *Implicit Religion*. Bailey writes in 2012 that there is much to be gained if we recognize the presence of large implicit elements that “we usually call ‘religion,’ even when it seems to be ‘secular.’” Thus, we may advance significantly in our religious understanding of the world today if we “apply something of what we now know about [traditionally] religious life, to ordinary secular life” where it may still be present in disguised forms.¹⁷

As one might say, secular Europe is now seemingly divided among three main religious traditions, secular Protestantism, secular Catholicism, and secular Orthodoxy. Secular religion is seemingly not as secular as most social scientists once expected. Of course, it is always possible that the processes of secularization work considerably more slowly than had once been assumed, and given enough time, the existing secular religious differences in Europe and elsewhere will eventually disappear altogether. However, this is not a statement of empirically demonstrated scientific fact but of a secular religious faith.

Secularism as Religion

Hence, another large problem with the secularization thesis is that secularism itself may best be understood as a religion.¹⁸ There was a fundamental paradox in twentieth-century thinking and expectations about the processes of secularization. Supposedly, secularization would mean the marginalization of religion. As recently as 2011, Steve Bruce, a strong contemporary advocate for the secularization thesis, wrote that “the secularization paradigm aims to explain one of the greatest changes in social structure and culture: the displacement of religion from the centre of human life.”¹⁹ But what if secularism is itself an actual form of religion, as a number of people have in recent years been suggesting? Edward Norman, a prominent British theologian, thus writes that “secularization now is the recognition as quintessentially Christian of the priority of welfare materialism.”²⁰ How can something marginalize itself?

Some may suggest that this argument trivializes the concept of religion by extending it to secular ideas that do not rely explicitly on a key role for a supernatural God. This would in effect say that religion must follow the models of Judaism and Christianity as traditionally practiced over the long history of Western civilization. That would, among other problems, then recast the discussions of secularization to mean not the decline of religion in general but the fate of specifically institutional Jewish and Christian religion. The study of the secularization thesis would then become a matter of the study of official Jewish and Christian history, not of the full dimensions of world religious faiths.

The justification for introducing the concept of *religion* (a term that only came into wide use a few hundred years ago) was to recognize that there were fundamental commonalities among Judaism and Christianity and many other belief systems around the world (including some forms of Buddhism that do not have any belief in a supernatural God).²¹ Theologians, philosophers, and social scientists have sought—if without any consensus to date—to identify these fundamental commonalities of belief that could then be taken to demonstrate the presence of an actual religion.

Early in the twentieth century, based on his Gifford Lectures in Scotland, the American philosopher William James wrote in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*—leaving any necessary presence of a supernatural God out of the answer—that if one were “asked to characterize the life of religion in the broadest and most general terms possible, one might say that it consists of the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto.”²² By this measure, physical science—with its astonishing ability to reveal an unseen mathematical order of the physical universe—would seem to be a religion. Isaac Newton might then be said to have rivaled Jesus Christ as an authoritative prophet of religion. Indeed, for many modern people following after Newton, science would become for them the source of the most authoritative truths about the world—as one might say, their new voice of God.

Social science might then be seen as the extension of the scientifically revelatory methods of Newton to those domains of human existence extending beyond the natural world. This would mean that, like Newtonian physical science itself, they would then be an expression of religion. As I argued in 1991 in *Reaching for Heaven on Earth: The Theological Meaning of Economics*, and later in 2001 in *Economics as Religion*, a social science such as economics can indeed be regarded literally as a religion—not merely in a metaphorical or functional sense.²³ Economic religion offers a new path to heaven on earth, based on the redeeming powers of economic progress; based on a core theological assumption that bad behavior (in older terms, *sinfulness*) in the world derives from the pervasive

existence of material scarcity—and can thus be abolished by sufficient economic progress.²⁴ In economic religion, human beings are not inherently sinful; there was no fall in the garden of Eden, but it is their external environments, especially the material aspects of those environments, that makes them so.²⁵

Following after James in seeking to characterize the legitimate scope of religion, Émile Durkheim wrote in 1912, “in the first place, there are great religions from which the idea of gods and spirits is absent, or plays only a secondary and inconspicuous role.” The necessary identifying feature of a religion for Durkheim was that it “is a unified system of beliefs and practices relating to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.”²⁶

The American theologian Richard Neuhaus wrote in 1971 that “in the view of the early nature romanticists who fostered the conservation movement [in the United States] the sacred was clearly located in extra-human nature.... This is a viewpoint characteristic of the bulk of today’s ecological writing,” and thus by Durkheim’s understanding, putting secular environmentalism today within the category of an actual religion.²⁷ In his magisterial *A Religious History of the American People*, Yale professor Sydney Ahlstrom wrote that the radical new events in American society of the 1960s, including the civil rights movement and the rise of belief systems such as environmentalism and feminism, amounted to a “violent and sudden . . . moral and theological transformation” of the nation.²⁸

Well before such novel secular American religious developments commenced in the 1960s, Paul Tillich, a leading theologian of the twentieth century who fled Nazi Germany in 1933 to come to the United States (at the age of forty-seven) had written on many occasions that a religion is a comprehensive belief system that deals with matters of “ultimate concern.”²⁹ As early as 1926, Tillich had explained that it was now often true that “the most important religious movements are developing outside of [traditional] religion.”³⁰ He could not of course have anticipated in 1926 the full horrors of “Nazi religion,” but they served to make his point—this particular secular religion was undoubtedly more important to the overall history of the twentieth century than anything that took place in the officially recognized Christian churches of Europe of the time. A recent student of Tillich’s theology writes that in the twentieth century “what is most significant [religiously] for Tillich is not the encounter of Christianity with other world religions but the encounter of [traditional] world religions with secular quasi-religions.” Quasi-religions, moreover, are not to be excluded from the general category of all religion. As Francis Yip explains, “religion in the full sense” extends to include “quasi-religion as a subset.”³¹

However, the wider implications of such ways of thinking about religion have not yet been well integrated into their overall thinking by either social scientists or theologians. As one consequence, theology schools and departments of religious studies in most leading universities today have failed to recognize adequately—and thus to give close theological scrutiny to—many of the most important religious developments of our times. They might, for example, incorporate the history of economic thought (of “economic religion”) into their programs of theological and religious studies. The economic religion of Marxism might in the future be a standard subject for explicitly theological inquiry, exploring the many important parallels of its message with Christianity.

At the same time, most professionals in the various disciplines of the social sciences—including economics and psychology as the most important social sciences in terms of their impacts on society today—have also failed to recognize the deeply religious character of their own professional thinking and activities. Economics departments, for their part, may have to introduce theology into their future course of studies if they hope to encompass the deeper wellsprings of their own economic thinking (to address explicitly many key matters that are now simply taken for granted as unspoken beginning assumptions of professional economic theory and life).³²

Recent Related Developments

There have admittedly been some recent signs of movement in such directions. As the American sociologists Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen comment in a 2011 book, at the deepest level, the social sciences have operated under “a relatively unexamined set of assumptions” that shaped their basic goals and methods. As they write, the “dominant ‘modes of secularism’” within the social sciences have “recently come under intensified scrutiny.” In the future it will be necessary to develop “more nuanced analyses of secularization and religious expansion ... more sophisticated treatments of the complex pattern of religion’s growth and decline in the contemporary world, and ... a thoroughgoing rethinking of contemporary understandings of secularism.” They thus state that the overall purpose in their collection of essays is “to take stock of the ongoing research on, and debates over, multiple forms of secularism.” They are seeking to “reframe discussions of religion in the social sciences by drawing attention to the central issue of how ‘the secular’ is constituted and understood and to how new understandings of both religion and secularism [should] shape analytical perspectives in the social sciences.”³³

Similarly, on the theological side, a prominent American theologian (a former student of Tillich's), Max Stackhouse, wrote in 2007 that a religion is "a comprehensive worldview or 'metaphysical moral vision' that is accepted as binding because it is held to be, in itself, basically true and just, even if all dimensions of it cannot be either finally confirmed or refuted." Stackhouse explains further that "by this definition, worldviews such as a philosophical-ethical Confucianism, an atheistic spirituality such as Buddhism, or a secular-humanistic ideology such as Marxism ... can properly be seen as faiths." Besides the fundamentally religious content of such belief systems, they also "function as 'religions,' shaping an ethos, even if they are opposed to theistic traditions or do not recognize themselves as religious. They are also subject to theological analysis, for they inevitably contain a 'metaphysical-moral vision'—an ontology, a theory of history and ethic—that involves some view of transcendence."³⁴ Stackhouse thus sees a need for the extension of theological forms of analysis to secular belief systems.

Studying a secular religion as an exercise in theological analysis will include evaluating this religion in terms of the merits—or lack of such—of its truth claims. This will be well removed admittedly from the current approach to the study of religion of the social sciences. When they have studied religion, social scientists have typically focused on the functional roles that religion plays in society—in what ways religion may be useful (or in some cases harmful). More recently, a few economists have sought to "explain" religion in economic terms. A church might be seen as a special form of business activity, for example,³⁵ or the level of participation of an individual in religious life might be a product of that person's education, income, age, gender, and other such variables familiar to social science analysis.³⁶

Nevertheless, the social sciences do not at present ask whether a religion is true. Indeed, many—probably most—social scientists would be uncomfortable with this way of thinking because they no longer profess to believe in any overarching idea of "the truth"—certainly they do not believe that they have any special ability as social science professionals to make authoritative pronouncements on such matters. Rather, a good social scientist should focus functionally on studying the workings of society, including discovering the scientific laws that underlie these workings. If religion happens to be important to the workings of society, they should study it as such.

Social scientists in this respect, however, are typically naïve about their own role and activities in society because there is an implicit transcendent goal present in all this: the knowledge produced by the social sciences can contribute significantly to the continuing scientific and economic progress of society that will save the world. This assumed truth is taken as in essence a matter of faith,

not of any economic or other scientific demonstration itself. As one might say, most social scientists take the transcendent importance of modern progress for granted in the manner that the medieval period took God for granted.

From a theological perspective, an essential element of all religions is that they are believed to be true by their followers. An important part of theological analysis thus consists of analyzing the fundamental truth claims made by a religion and the arguments made by the leaders and other believers in the religion in the support of such claims. In terms of the social sciences, such a theological analysis would consist of an examination of the actual transcendent powers of progress to save the world. What is the evidence of the past two hundred years of extraordinary economic growth in the most developed parts of the world? In the United States, as will be discussed below, the questioning of this religious expectation of a transforming power of progress has recently fallen most of all to the environmental movement that has been gaining influence in American life since the 1960s.³⁷

Based on a theological analysis, it is possible, despite conventional social science thinking, to reach judgments about the absolute merits of such religious arguments. One might, for example, conclude that, judged by the historical evidence, literal Christian creationism fails by various scientific tests and thus is objectively “false” theologically as a fundamental truth claim. This might be true even if such creationism might be psychologically reassuring for many true believers and indeed might actually even improve their lives functionally—as an economist would put it, increase their “level of utility.”

This kind of theological analysis of fundamental truth claims can also be applied to secular systems of thought—as one might say, doing “secular theology.” It might be that the basic truth claim of economic religion—that economic progress will save the world—is today difficult to defend in light of the dark history of the twentieth century. One might distinguish doing secular theology from doing philosophy by the greater willingness of the former to reach basic conclusions of ultimate value and merit.

In identifying the existence of a religion, one good criterion thus might be whether it makes fundamental truth claims about the workings of the universe and the place therein of human beings and whether these claims are believed to be literally true by significant numbers of human beings. Another person currently writing in this area is William Grassie, the founder of the Metanexus Institute on Religion and Science (in the past a recipient of grants from the John Templeton Foundation). As Grassie noted in 2008, attempts to define precisely the terms *religion* and *spirituality* can prove to be elusive. The term *religion* encompasses not only the familiar Christian forms but also is appropriately used more broadly

“to designate a bounded belief system and set of practices, as in the religions of the Greeks, Romans, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Chinese, and others.”³⁸

Recognizing that some genuine religions go so far as to deny their own religious character, Grassie describes a common worship in modern times of a “God-by-whatever name.” Ironically, it is possible to have a “religion of no religion.” He observes that the term *spiritual* “derives from the Latin *spiritus*. The Latin verb root is *spirare*, literally to ‘breathe or blow.’ The connotation is that we are surrounded by a divine reality as pervasive, intimate, necessary, and invisible as the air we breathe.” In the end, for Grassie every religion can be identified as such by the fact that it is “making universal truth claims about the fundamental character of the universe as a whole.”³⁹ By this standard, secularism would qualify.

Although not himself a theologian, the distinguished American legal philosopher Ronald Dworkin took an important step in 2013 to advance such an understanding of religion. In *Religion Without God* (the book was published posthumously and thus is a partly unfinished work), Dworkin explicitly recognized that the secular is often religion in a new name. Dworkin now considers that “expanding the territory of religion improves clarity by making plain the importance of what is shared across that territory” in all its full modern diversity of expression. As Dworkin writes, we can thus speak, literally, not just metaphorically, of religious atheism as one prominent form of contemporary religious belief. Such secular forms of religion share with traditional religion the objective to inquire “more fundamentally about the meaning of human life and what living well means.” Recognizing the full scope of religion today, Dworkin declares that “the new religious wars are now really culture wars,” frequently involving competing secular understandings of the human condition and its prospects.⁴⁰

Christianity in Disguise

Even if one accepts that secularism may be a new modern category of religion, it might be argued that there is nothing to be gained from integrating the study of these two broad categories of religion (traditional religion with Judaism and Christianity at the center and secular religion with science at the center) into Western civilization. This argument faces a large practical difficulty, however, in that the social sciences have had few (if any) scientific successes to match the astonishing gains in knowledge of the physical world as achieved by physicists, chemists, and molecular biologists. For the social sciences, achieving such genuinely scientific successes mostly remains a goal for the future, the actual likelihood of which is an article of faith more than a scientific fact.⁴¹

Indeed, the long-run record of the social sciences is unfortunately all too often one of making grand claims that have later fallen apart under closer scrutiny and with the benefit of historical hindsight. The two social scientists with the greatest impacts on the twentieth century, Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud, for example, are now generally regarded as discredited as scientists, their influence increasingly seen as attributable to their role as great prophets of Marxism and Freudianism, two belief systems that actually achieved far greater religious than scientific successes, attracting many millions of followers across the world—and whose associated religious revolutions actually did do much to shape the course of twentieth-century history.

The tenability of maintaining a clear theological distinction between secular religion and traditional religion is still further undermined by the growing recognition of the large degree to which secular religions have actually advanced what are essentially Jewish and Christian truth claims in disguise.⁴² The outward forms may have differed greatly, but much of the inner content of a secular religion is typically that of a traditional Jewish or Christian religion. This outcome might be regarded in one of three ways: (1) as the modern rise of a brand new form of (secular) religion out of Christianity (such as Islam arose in the seventh century); (2) as a modern major adaptation within Christian religion itself following many other large changes in the two-thousand year history of Christianity (such as the Protestant Reformation); or (3) as secular religions, that for the contemporary Christian devout might be seen as the source of new “Christian heresies” (as Protestantism was originally perceived in Rome).

The British political philosopher John Gray writes in 2004 that the many modern political and economic “projects of universal emancipation are earthly renditions of the Christian promise of salvation.” Indeed, “the idea of progress,” so central to secular religion, “is a secular version of Christian eschatology. In Christianity, history cannot be senseless: it is a moral drama, beginning with a rebellion against God and ending with the Last Judgment. Christians therefore think of salvation as a historical event.” This is in contrast, for example, to “Hindus and Buddhists, [for whom] it [salvation] means liberation from time.”⁴³

The Christian roots of secular thought are well illustrated by Marxism that offered a recast story of an original happy and natural harmony in the world; a terrible fall into sin and depravity, now owing to the class struggle and resulting in human alienation—a new version of original sin; a future moment of the apocalypse; and the coming of a new heaven to earth as the culminating event in human history. Paul Tillich declared that, as a matter of objective historical influence, if not of the predictive accuracy of his economic theories, Karl Marx was “the most successful of all theologians since the [Protestant] Reformation.”⁴⁴

A leading contemporary philosopher, Alasdair MacIntyre, declares that “Marxism shares in good measure both the content and the functions of Christianity as an interpretation of human existence, and it does so because it is [or was until recently] the historical successor of Christianity.”⁴⁵ A contemporary American historian reports that in Russia in the 1930s “the Stalinist leadership’s continuing commitment to social transformation” reflected the determination of “Stalin’s government . . . to instill socialist values in all members of society and to transform human nature itself”—a secularization of the Christian goal to end sin in the world and bring the kingdom of God to earth.⁴⁶

Igal Halfin is a contemporary Israeli historian who concluded in 2000, for example, based on extensive archival research, that the eschatological elements of Russian communism, borrowed from Christianity, were decisive influences in determining the very categories of thought that shaped the former Soviet Union’s government and economy in its first decades. It was not economics that determined religion, as so many committed economic determinists firmly believed over the course of the twentieth century but actually more the opposite. During the 1920s and 1930s, Soviet universities functioned as “a grand laboratory, designing techniques for the perfection of humanity.” Life in revolutionary Russia was everywhere a reflection of “messianic aspirations,” as the teachings of Marxist religion “shaped the identity of the Soviet citizen; it did not just coerce preexisting, fully formed citizens to adjust to a Soviet reality that was somehow external to them.”⁴⁷ Rather, for the communist faithful, Marxism formed the basis for their very way of comprehending their own existence in the world.

The presentation of a Christian message in a disguised scientific form was no doubt a key to the enormous historical impact of Marxism and communism. As Halfin reports, “Marxists would doubtless have renounced notions such as good, evil, messiah, and salvation as baseless religious superstitions that had nothing to do with the revolutionary experience. Yet, these concepts, translated into a secular key, continued to animate Communist discourse” in Russia for many years. Most Russian Communists were nevertheless altogether blind to the reality of the close “affinity” of Russian communism “with Christian messianism.”⁴⁸ Yet, as described by Halfin, the parallels are obvious to us today:

The Marxist concept of universal History was essentially inspired by the Judeo-Christian bracketing of historical time between the Fall of Adam and the Apocalypse. The Original Expropriation, at the beginning of time, represented a rupture in the timeless primitive Communism, which inaugurated History and set humanity on a course of self-alienation. The universal Revolution, an abrupt and absolute event, was to return humanity to itself in a fiery cataclysm.... Imbuing time with a historical teleology that gave meaning to events, Marxist

eschatology described [human] history as moral progression from the darkness of class society to the light of Communism.⁴⁹

What is more, at the turn of the twenty-first century, another contemporary historian reached similar conclusions with respect to the implicit Christian elements on which the Nazi regime in part rode to power in Germany. As Michael Burleigh comments, “Interest in political religions is currently undergoing a renaissance,” partly reflecting the waning faith in standard economic and other materialist understandings of history and partly reflecting a new recognition of the potentially great power of ideas—and most importantly, religious ideas—to shape societies. The conflicts between the Soviet Union and Germany might be seen as a revival of religious warfare in Europe, now inspired by outwardly secular faiths. Indeed, the period from 1914 to 1945 might be described as a new thirty-years’ religious war at the heart of Europe, following after its seventeenth-century counterpart.

Burleigh thus writes that the leaders of both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union “utilised sacred language and rites, even when they aggressively rejected religion” in any explicit traditional form. As Burleigh finds, the popularity of Nazism partly reflected its wide use of “pseudo-liturgical rites and deliberate evocations of the Bible,” all part of a wider European pattern in which “totalitarian ideologies themselves shadowed the belief patterns of conventional religion,” all of them promising in new secular credos that “salvation would not be long in coming.”⁵⁰

In 2005 the American historian David Redles described such developments in Germany in *Hitler’s Millennial Reich*. As he reports, “Many Germans and non-Germans ... accepted Hitler’s messianic self-perception, his role as both prophet and messiah, interpreting him as a Christ or Godlike figure, sent from heaven to save Germany from utter annihilation.” Looking back on their early involvement with National Socialism, many German Nazis later described the initial moments as involving a “conversion experience.” Redles writes that “in keeping with the religious nature of the Nazi conversion experience, the new faith was almost always referred to with a sense of righteousness; it was the ‘correct’ or ‘right’ path to salvation.” It frequently invoked a profound sense “of moving from confusion to clarity, from darkness to light ... a [personal] perception of order collapsed into disorder and then having that sense of order reconstructed. The sense of order generated by Nazi apocalyptic cosmology was experienced as a revelation of simple but profound truths” among millions of Germans, including a surprising number of university professors and other intellectuals.⁵¹

As Hitler himself later wrote, describing the reactions of many fellow Germans—and especially the young—to his messages delivered early in the Nazi years,

You will sense the inner conversion [among Hitler's audience]; then you will realize the new faith is awakening out of the lethargy of a corrupt epoch and taking to the march—the faith in divine justice, in heavenly truth; the faith in an unworldly, paradisiacal future, where the lust for power, force and enmity gives way to equality and fraternity, the spirit of sacrifice, love and loyalty, and the will to stand before the throne of the Almighty with the open heart of one ready to believe in God. And they will have sufficient greatness to stammer out the prayer for their [non-believing German] brothers and fathers, "Forgive them, Lord, for they knew not what they did." It is on this basis alone that the new world will be built. To lay this groundwork is our task.⁵²

In *Hitler's Theology: A Study in Political Religion* (2011), German theologian Rainer Bucher notes that some readers will be surprised to see Hitler's writings and speeches described as offering a theology as such. Yet it is possible to identify "in great detail the theological origins of many of the hackneyed phrases of Hitler's discourse." Although some people might consider all this a mere "rhetorical strategy," it was much more than that for Hitler. Indeed, Bucher writes, "Hitler's theological terminology shapes founding principles of his thought and of his political project. The inspection of Hitler's texts ... shows that Hitler's discourse is continuously laced with theological terminology throughout all phases of his political biography." It is of course true that "Hitler is neither a Christian nor an academic theologian, but he announces his political project in the name of a god, and he does this from the start of his public orations up until his last documented comments." As a result, any full attempt to understand the historical phenomenon of Hitler must include close study of "the theology of these pronouncements. Hitler's texts embody a genuine theological discourse."⁵³ Perhaps such theological study of National Socialism should be undertaken in the same schools of theology that at present typically limit their greatest areas of concern to the explicitly Christian past on which Hitler drew so freely in creating his new religion.

The Church of the American Nation State

America has also been fertile ground for secular religion, although one that has fortunately been more lasting than many largely defunct twentieth-century ideologies. American secular religion has traditionally placed much more emphasis

on human freedom, with many desirable results (sufficient to motivate tens of millions of European immigrants to move there—including my own relatives from Finland and Sweden about one hundred years ago). A leading historian of the American Revolution, Gordon Wood, observes that “although some of the Founders . . . were fairly devout Christians, most leading Founders were not deeply religious men and few of them had much of a spiritual life.” Indeed, “many of them shared the [common eighteenth century] views of an enlightened speaker before the American Philosophical Society in 1793 who abhorred ‘that gloomy superstition disseminated by ignorant [Calvinist] illiberal preachers.’”⁵⁴

As long ago as 1932, however, the American intellectual historian Carl Becker was pointing out that the Founders may have rejected old-fashioned Calvinism but not Christianity itself. Indeed, leading American and other thinkers of the late eighteenth century took a vision of “life eternal in the Heavenly City of God” which they then “projected into the life of man on earth and identified with the desired and hoped-for regeneration of society.” It was “to the future [that such Enlightenment] Philosophers therefore look, as to a promised land, a new millennium” here on earth. If faith in traditional Christianity was waning, they somehow understood that “the best hope” for its continued influence in the world “lay in recasting it, and in bringing it up to date” to fit the scientific expectations of the eighteenth century. In short, as Becker declared, “the task of the Philosophers was to present another interpretation of the past, the present, and the future state of mankind”—a seemingly new secular “religion of humanity.”⁵⁵

One hears frequently of “anti-Americanism” in the world but seldom of “anti-Englishism,” “anti-Germanism,” or “anti-Chineseism.” Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington thus wrote in 2004 that “becoming an American” is a process “comparable to conversion to a new religion and with similar consequences.”⁵⁶ Because America is the product of waves of immigration over several centuries, the national bonding agent had to be a unifying faith, also necessarily secular to avoid the old religious divisions that had plagued Europe in previous centuries. No one faith, whether Jewish, Christian, or any other older faith, could hold Americans of so many races and backgrounds together. The necessary integrating force, Huntington explains, was thus “a nondenominational, national religion and, in its articulated form, not expressly a Christian religion.” Its civil religion “converts Americans from religious people of many denominations into a [single] nation with the soul of a church.”⁵⁷

The unifying faith of America, however, is secular mainly in outward appearance. The fundamental reality, Huntington writes, is that the American nation state is, in essence, “a church that is profoundly Christian in its origins, symbolism, spirit, accoutrements, and, most importantly, its basic assumptions about the na-

ture of man, history, right and wrong. The Christian Bible, Christian references, biblical allusions and metaphors, permeate expressions of the [American] civil religion.” The American religion is not, to be sure, identical to Christianity. As Huntington notes, the American civil religion allows for the frequent use of the word *God*—as on the nation’s coins, for example. However, “two words ... do not appear in civil religion statements and ceremonies. They are ‘Jesus Christ.’” This omission is of great religious significance. Many religions believe in a God, but only Christianity believes in the divinity of Christ. Again, though, the reality can be deceptive; as Huntington finds, even with little explicit mention, “the American civil religion is Christianity without Christ.”⁵⁸

Admittedly, this may raise basic theological questions for those who think of themselves as being both great American patriots and devout Christian believers as well. This may be a bit like declaring both “I am a Catholic” and “I am a Protestant” in the same breath, a concern that some prominent American theologians and philosophers have recently articulated in forceful terms. As Stanley Hauerwas thus writes, too many devout American Christians “fail to see how the story of America can tempt [such] Christians to lose our own story and in the process to fail to notice the god we worship is no longer the God of Israel” but instead the god of America.⁵⁹

Huntington was following in the path of the American sociologist Robert Bellah who had earlier developed similar themes in his 1967 essay, “Civil Religion in America,” among the most influential articles of American social science of the past fifty years.⁶⁰ Bellah wrote there of a “civil religion” that for the United States had provided its “national religious self-understanding” and in this capacity had played a central role throughout American history. The national religion was “a collection of beliefs, symbols, and rituals with respect to sacred things and institutionalized in a collectivity”—the American nation. For Bellah, all this represented a “religion—there seems no other word for it” in a literal, not merely a metaphorical, sense.⁶¹

As with most secular religions of the West, there were large borrowings from Christianity even though the American civil religion, in Bellah’s view, “is clearly not itself Christianity.” In terms of its content, as Bellah wrote, the “God of the civil religion is not only rather ‘unitarian,’ he is also on the austere side, much more related to order, law and right than to salvation and love”—thus exhibiting elements of an old fashioned Calvinism, as one might have expected of a nation with deep Puritan roots. Nevertheless, the deity of American civil religion was “actively interested and involved in history, with a special concern for America.” In some respects, American civil religion had more of an Old Testament than a New Testament cast. Indeed, in the American civil religion, “Europe is Egypt;

America, the promised land.” So, also, the Atlantic Ocean would be seen as the Red Sea across which a perilous journey had been undertaken to build a model kingdom of God in the Massachusetts wilderness—a “city on a hill” to shine a beacon to all mankind (as the seventeenth-century Puritan settlers thought of themselves).⁶²

Bellah’s article was important partly because, while he was far from the first to make the argument, it spread more widely the idea of secular religion as having a literally religious content. It also showed clearly how the boundaries between secular religion and traditional religion were more blurred than many people realized. Bellah explained that “behind the civil religion at every point lie biblical archetypes; Exodus, Chosen People, Promised Land, New Jerusalem, and Sacrificial Death and Rebirth. But it is also genuinely American and genuinely new. It has its own prophets and its own martyrs, its own sacred events and sacred places, its own solemn rituals and symbols.” George Washington was the Moses figure and Abraham Lincoln (he gave his life to save the Union) the Christ figure. Bellah also considered that it was not a fixed religion; that “it is not evident that it is incapable of growth and new insight.”⁶³

In 1988 Sanford Levinson published *Constitutional Faith*, a product, as he described it, of his own efforts to be a “legal theologian,” supplementing his daily job as a law professor at the University of Texas.⁶⁴ Levinson explained that for most Americans the US Constitution is seen in terms similar to the Christian Bible. The constitution is America’s “sacred text” that represents the foundational document for the American “civil religion.” Quoting approvingly from a *Stanford Law Review* article, “The Constitution as Scripture,” Levinson agrees that “America would have no national church . . . yet the worship of the Constitution would serve the unifying function of a national civil religion” for the people of the United States.⁶⁵

As the ultimate adjudicators, the members of the Supreme Court not only dress and act like priests, but the American nation has in fact substituted a “priesthood of lawyers for a pontifical Court” in Rome. For Levinson, the contemporary legal debates about constitutional original intent versus a “living constitution” reenact much older theological disagreements between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. The Catholic Church historically saw Christianity as refined through the prism of centuries of the writings of Catholic scholars, church interpretation, papal encyclicals, church councils, and other historic events. For early Protestants, such Catholic thinking was heresy, effectively substituting the efforts of fallen human beings in place of God’s directly revealed truths in the Bible. Today, in the American legal system, according to Levinson, there is

a similar clash among “Protestant” and “Catholic” secular legal authorities in constitutional interpretation; the new “protestant position is that it is the [US] constitutional text alone [that is relevant], while the [new] catholic position is that the source of doctrine is the text of the Constitution plus unwritten tradition.”⁶⁶

In 2007 Walter Russell Mead, formerly a Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, took note of this growing body of historical reinterpretation of the twentieth century in newly religious terms. He characterized *secular modernism* as constituting in reality a new “fourth faith” within the West. The first faith was Judaism, which 2,000 years ago gave rise to the second faith, Christianity, which was followed 650 years later by the third faith, Islam—all three tracing their origins to the biblical Abraham. In the modern age, as Mead argues, yet another Abrahamic faith has emerged as a powerful new religious movement, even as no one has yet given it a suitable name (“secular religion” seems to be about the best we have at present). Mead acknowledges that “believers in the fourth faith don’t always like to be called believers” in any form of religion (they are sometimes more comfortable with being described as *spiritual*). Indeed, many followers in the new secular religions “argue that unlike the superstitious and emotionally driven convictions of religious believers, the fourth faith is based in the clear light of science and reason.”⁶⁷

This sense of secular rationality and modern uniqueness, however, is itself a religious statement. As Mead comments, “the fourth faith, like the first three, fits the definition of faith given in the Epistle to the Hebrews in the New Testament.” All four faiths are part of an “ongoing Abrahamic revolution in human affairs” that continues to shape the world; all “provide explanations of things that are seen and known, as well as predictions concerning things that are not yet seen.” Like traditional Christianity, there are many “denominations” of the fourth faith—many secular forms of modern religion. The believers in fourth-faith forms of religion are often as righteously convinced of their own special access to the truths of the world as other religious believers of the past. Mead thus observes that “most devotees of the new [fourth faith] believe that their own particular version of it is the one sure way, and that history will culminate in the triumph of the true faith.”⁶⁸ Monotheism was a great contribution of the Abrahamic faiths to world religion, now being reworked to new modern secular understandings of the one great truth of the world. The secularization trends of the twentieth century thus were not actually about diminishing the role of religion as a central concern of society but about changing its outward forms, even as most secularists were blind to this reality.

While Marxism, social Darwinism, Freudianism, and many other so-called twentieth-century denominations of the fourth faith have been fading into history, a more generic “scientific materialism” that follows in their path still retains a large influence—especially among the American elites. At the heart of this secular religion are beliefs such as

1. the only legitimate access to truth must come from science,
2. all events in the world ultimately are explainable in natural terms (and thus are amenable to definitive analysis with scientific methods),
3. other competing religions with conflicting truth claims by contrast are assertions of faith that cannot be rationally demonstrated,
4. the future prospects for the human condition depend on the world becoming more rational and scientific,
5. modern economic progress and its continuing advances will help to make that possible as well as other related secular themes.

In its more strident forms, one finds such thinking, for example, in the recent writings of the British evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins and his American philosopher compatriot Daniel Dennett.⁶⁹

Environmental Calvinism

For most of the modern age, there would be many competing secular explanations of the correct route of human progress—democratic socialism, capitalism, social Darwinism, Marxism, the market mechanism of the welfare state, globalism, and so on. Owing to intellectual confusions, misunderstandings, and other failings, some of these supposed paths of scientific and economic progress turned out to have the opposite consequence. After Jean Jacques Rousseau in the eighteenth century, however, no intellectual of such high stature rejected the very goal of scientific and economic progress itself, and the fundamental benefits that its successful pursuit would offer for the human condition. With the rise of environmentalism in the last decades of the twentieth century, however, this began to change.

Many of the central events of twentieth-century history—the vast destructiveness of World War I to no seeming purpose, the equally great carnage of World War II, the horrors of the Holocaust, the building and use of the atom bomb, the worldwide loss of plant and animal habitat (leading in some cases to the extinction of species), human-induced climate change, and many other developments—called

into question the modern secular religious assumption that economic progress would save the world. In response, the environmental movement has led the way in challenging the redemptive claims for economic progress. One environmental philosopher was even motivated to write an article on the good reasons why “environmentalists hate mainstream economists.”⁷⁰

Environmentalism nevertheless showed one large continuity with earlier modern trends of thought. The messages of environmental religion again drew heavily on familiar Christian themes.⁷¹ Human beings in their consuming drive to assert complete mastery over nature were now “playing God” with the world. Given the frailties of the fallen human condition, this was bound to exceed limited human capabilities. Not only would human beings fail in practice to achieve the desired human control over nature, but also the modern age was worshipping false idols. As in the Bible, severe punishments would therefore soon be forthcoming. I have recently written in an article in *Implicit Religion* that

in the Old Testament, God’s punishments for those who violate his commands typically take the form of great floods, droughts, famines, pestilence, earthquakes and other environmental calamities. It is not a coincidence that Al Gore and other American environmentalists now warn that a warming climate will bring rising seas, spreading malaria, severe shortages of food, more severe hurricanes, and other environmental catastrophes, all on a truly biblical scale. Contemporary American environmentalism owes a large debt to Deuteronomy and Jeremiah.⁷²

Over the long course of Christianity’s history, the faithful have regarded the natural world as a product of the handiwork of God at the creation. Christians could thus learn about the mind of God, they believed, by experiencing nature as God originally planned it, as wonderfully revealed in “the Book of Nature.” As John Calvin once said, “the knowledge of God [is] sown in their minds out of the wonderful workmanship of nature.”⁷³ The great American theologian Jonathan Edwards wrote similarly in the eighteenth century that the experience of nature “will tend to convey instruction to our minds, and to impress things on the mind and to affect the mind, that we may, as it were, have God speaking to us.”⁷⁴ Such ideas were translated to more secular keys in the nineteenth century by transcendentalists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau and later by environmental followers such as John Muir (founder of the Sierra Club in 1892).

Environmentalists today usually leave out any such explicit references to God, but otherwise the message is not greatly altered. They speak of experiencing powerful spiritual feelings in the presence of wild nature. They can more clearly

see the humble place of human beings in a large and wonderful universe that gives meaning to their lives.

There is, moreover, a deeply ascetic and Calvinist side to contemporary environmentalism. The continual accumulation of goods and services is seen, not as the path to a greater individual and social happiness, but as a distraction from higher and better things.⁷⁵ A 1970s Sierra Club book was entitled *Muddling Towards Frugality*.⁷⁶ Economic optimism in the eighteenth century displaced the Calvinist pessimism that had long seen human beings living in a state of depravity, many of them predestined by God for damnation in the hereafter. Looking back on the human savagery of so much twentieth-century history, it suggested that perhaps a larger dose of Calvinist pessimism was newly warranted.

Perhaps the most influential book in spreading the new environmental gospel in the United States was Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, appearing in 1962. Carson wrote that human beings had lived for many thousands of years in an Eden-like natural environment that, given the very limited tools available at the time, could not be altered in any essential—and potentially harmful—way by human actions. Although there were cancer-causing elements in this environment such as the radiation of the sun, “over the eons of unhurried time that is nature's, life reached an adjustment with destructive forces” through the workings of biological evolution.⁷⁷

In almost a late twentieth-century echo of Rousseau, however, for Carson there had been a recent moment of the fall: the modern spread of scientific and economic progress over the world. As she explains, “With the dawn of the industrial era the world became a place of continuous, ever-accelerating change. Instead of the natural environment there was rapidly substituted an artificial one composed of new chemical and physical agents, many of them possessing powerful capacities for inducing biologic change.” Having turned away from the possibility of living in a natural and thus ecologically balanced world, modern human beings now encountered large exposures to “carcinogens which his own activities had created” and against which “man had no protection.”⁷⁸ The very gene structure of human beings, for example, had been “shaped through long eons of evolution.” Our natural “genetic heritage” is for the human species “infinitely more valuable than individual life.” Here again, however, through their own misplaced human pride and greed, ending up in the pervasive unnatural assaults on the natural world by the modern industrial system, human beings now faced a genetic future that would yield not only an epidemic of cancer but also alienation and despair.

A remarkable number of American environmental leaders, including not only Carson herself but also John Muir, David Brower, Edward Abbey, Dave Foreman,

and still others were brought up in the Presbyterian church (the Scottish branch of Calvinism), or one or another of its American offshoots. Environmental historian Mark Stoll thus comments that today's "environmentalists rally in defense of virtuous nature against the amoral forces who let themselves be overcome by greed." This reflects the "Calvinistic moral and activist roots" of the contemporary environmental movement. Indeed, recasting in new language "the doctrines laid down by John Calvin," one finds today in the environmental movement a "moral outrage, activism, and appeal to government intervention [that] draw on the same account. [In this vision] the world has been transformed with new answers that are often only old ones rephrased" from past American religious history.⁷⁹

In Europe, environmentalism has also exerted its largest public policy influence in northern nations with a Protestant heritage. Finding that all these Protestant connections are more than a mere coincidence, the distinguished environmental historian Donald Worster notes that the intense desire to purge the world of its spreading evils was combined in early Protestantism with a strong sense of ascetic discipline. There was, as Worster explains, "a deep suspicion in the Protestant mind of unrestrained play, extravagant consumption, and self-indulgence, a suspicion that tended to be very skeptical of human nature, to fear that humans were born depraved and were in need of strict management." Worster now finds that the very echoes of this more pessimistic way of thinking are often prominently featured among current environmentalists for whom "too often for the public they sound like gloomy echoes of Gilbert Burnet's ringing jeremiad of 1679: 'The whole Nation is corrupted ... and we may justly look for unheard of Calamities.'" Worster suggests that in our own time of wide individual devotion to personal pleasures and consumption, "the Protestant ascetic tradition may someday survive only among the nation's environmentalists, who ... compulsively turn off the lights."⁸⁰

Worster's observation was amusingly illustrated by a Washington, DC, resident who recently described her heroic pursuit of environmental purity. A bitter billing dispute with her electric company changed environmentalist Keya Chatterjee's life for the better, as she discovered,

Battling Pepco over charges for electricity at her Washington, D.C., row house in the dead of winter six years ago, Chatterjee eventually just ordered the utility to shut off the power. She and her husband lived in the dark and cold for a few months, an experience that convinced them that even when they turned the lights back on, they could use less power.

They went on a strict energy diet, one that has only increased since having a baby two-and-a-half years ago.

"Getting mad at Pepco was like a gateway drug to sustainability," Chatterjee said. "Then we started getting rid of everything."⁸¹

Conclusion

In 1994 the distinguished British sociologist David Martin speculated that “it may be that the ‘grand narratives’ of the enlightenment are themselves collapsing” today.⁸² The secularization thesis ranks among the most important of these Enlightenment grand narratives, but it now seems that secularization is not what it has appeared. Instead of a retreat from religion, secularization is the transformation of religion from an older form to a newer one. Rather than a rejection of the Christian messages of Western civilization, secularism is actually the recasting of these Christian messages in a new disguise. The conflicts within secularism, moreover, are in large part reenactments of past theological conflicts that once occurred within Christianity itself.⁸³

According to one hypothesis, secularization might thus be seen as the solution to the following problem. Beginning in the Enlightenment, and then accelerating under the influence of Darwin, traditional Christianity could no longer sustain its historic truth claims for large parts of the populations of Europe and the United States. The core religious truths of Christianity might, however, have more enduring validity than the historical Christian way of expressing them. These truths might therefore have to be rediscovered now in the name of science, which for many people had replaced the Bible and God as the leading source of the authoritative truths of the world. Secular religion has been equally as diverse in modern times as traditional Christianity, but its various denominations have fallen within the encompassing framework of an overarching modern secularism that has pushed the original religious antecedents below the surface.

If this hypothesis, and others that might further unravel the contemporary masks of secularism, are to be further explored, two developments would facilitate matters. The study of religion in schools of theology should be extended to incorporate secular religion explicitly into the legitimate field of religious study. A new field of secular theology would thus be established. On the social science side, the social sciences—having represented a main vehicle for the religious truth claims of the modern age—should recognize their actual implicit religious role and content in contemporary society and begin to apply theological methods—along with continuing to use the more technical methods appropriate to narrower questions of the workings of society—to achieving a clearer understanding of the foundational beliefs, values, and justifications for their own social-science thinking and activities.

Notes

1. Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3.
2. Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (New York: Norton, 1989), 68, 56.
3. Norris and Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular*, 3.
4. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).
5. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, “Nones” on the Rise: One in Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation, October 9, 2012, available at <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>.
6. See Ellen W. Linder, ed., *Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches: 2009* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009).
7. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *The Global Religious Landscape: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World’s Major Religious Groups as of 2010*, December 2012, available at <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/>.
8. Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1994), 94.
9. Elaine Graham, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Public Theology in a Post-Secular Age* (London: SCM Press, 2013), 8.
10. See David Martin, “The Secularization Issue: Prospect and Retrospect,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 42, no. 3 (September 1991): 465–74.
11. See Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010); Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
12. Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing in the Bible in the Global South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).
13. Peter Berger, *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).
14. Robert H. Nelson, “Is Max Weber Newly Relevant? The Protestant-Catholic Divide in Europe Today,” *Finnish Journal of Theology* 5 (November 2012): 420–45.
15. Pippa and Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular*, 17.
16. Christian Smith, *The Secular Revolution: Power, Interests and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 6.

17. Edward Bailey, "Implicit Religion?": What Might That Be?" *Implicit Religion* 15, no. 2 (2012): 196. See also Edward Bailey, "Implicit Religion: A Bibliographical Introduction," *Social Compass* 37 (1990); Edward Bailey, *Implicit Religion in Contemporary Society* (Kampen, Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1997); Edward Bailey, *Implicit Religion: An Introduction* (London: Middlesex University Press, 1998); Edward Bailey, "Implicit Religion," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Peter B. Clarke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 801–16; and Edward Bailey "Implicit Religion" *Religion* 40, no. 4 (2010): 271–78.
18. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006).
19. Steve Bruce, *Secularization: In Defense of an Unfashionable Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1.
20. Edward Norman, *Secularization: New Century Theology* (London: Continuum, 2002), x.
21. See William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
22. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902; repr., New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 53.
23. See Robert H. Nelson, *Reaching for Heaven on Earth: The Theological Meaning of Economics* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991); Robert H. Nelson, *Economics as Religion: From Samuelson to Chicago and Beyond* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001).
24. Robert H. Nelson, "What Is 'Economic Theology,'" *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* (February 2004): 58–79.
25. See Robert H. Nelson, "The Secular Religions of Progress," *The New Atlantis*, Summer 2013, 38–50; Robert H. Nelson, "Markets, Free Trade, and Religion," *Philosophy and Public Policy Quarterly* (Winter 2013): 19–26.
26. Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen A. Fields (1912; repr., New York: Free Press, 1995), 28, 44.
27. Richard Neuhaus, *In Defense of People: Ecology and the Seduction of Radicalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 198.
28. Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 1091.
29. Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1957), 5. See also Mackenzie D. Brown, ed., *Ultimate Concern: Tillich in Dialogue* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).

30. Paul Tillich, *The Religious Situation*, trans. H. Richard Niebuhr (1926; repr., New York: Thames and Hudson, 1956), 157.
31. Francis Ching-Wah Yip, *Capitalism as Religion? A Study of Paul Tillich's Interpretation of Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 143.
32. Robert H. Nelson, "Bringing Religion into Economic Policy Analysis," *Regulation* (Spring 2014): 52–57.
33. Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, introduction to *Rethinking Secularism*, ed. Craig Calhoun et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4.
34. See Max L. Stackhouse, *Globalization and Grace* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 7–8.
35. Roger Finke and Rodney Starke, *The Churching of America, 1776–2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*, rev. ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005).
36. See Laurence R. Iannaccone, "The Economics of Religion: A Survey of Recent Work," *Journal of Economic Literature* 36 (September 1998): 1465–96.
37. Robert H. Nelson, *The New Holy Wars: Economic Religion versus Environmental Religion in Contemporary America* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).
38. William Grassie, "The New Sciences of Religion," *Zygon* 43, no. 1 (March 2008): 128, 130.
39. Grassie, "The New Sciences of Religion," 30.
40. Ronald Dworkin, "Religion Without God," *New York Review of Books*, April 4, 2013, excerpted from Ronald Dworkin, *Religion Without God* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 9.
41. Robert H. Nelson, "Scholasticism versus Pietism: The Battle for the Soul of Economics," *Econ Journal Watch* 1, no. 3 (December 2004): 473–97.
42. Roland Robinson, "Globalization, Theocratization, and Politicized Civil Religion," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, 451–77.
43. John Gray, "An Illusion with a Future," *Daedalus* 133, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 11. See also John Gray, *Heresies: Against Progress and Other Illusions* (London: Granta, 2004).
44. Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought: From Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), 476.

45. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Marxism and Christianity* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 6.
46. David L. Hoffman, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917–1941* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 3.
47. Igal Halfin, *From Darkness to Light: Class, Consciousness, and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 37.
48. Halfin, *From Darkness to Light*, 39.
49. Halfin, *From Darkness to Light*, 40.
50. Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 11–12. See also Michael Burleigh, *Earthly Powers: The Clash of Religion and Politics in Europe from the French Revolution to the Great War* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006); and Michael Burleigh, *Sacred Causes: The Clash of Religion and Politics from the Great War to the War on Terror* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007).
51. See David Redles, *Hitler's Millennial Reich: Apocalyptic Belief and the Search for Salvation* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 158, 85, 89. See also Max Weinreich, *Hitler's Professors: The Part of Scholarship in Germany's Crimes Against the Jewish People*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).
52. Redles, *Hitler's Millennial Reich*, 79.
53. Rainer Bucher, *Hitler's Theology: A Study in Political Religion*, trans. by Rebecca Pohl (London: Continuum, 2011), 13–14.
54. Gordon S. Wood, "Praying with the Founders," *New York Review of Books*, May 1, 2008, 54.
55. Carl L. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (1932; repr., New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 139, 118, 123, 122.
56. Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We?: Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 191, 127, 106.
57. Huntington, *Who Are We?*, 127.
58. Huntington, *Who Are We?*, 106.
59. Stanley Hauerwas, "On Being a Christian and an American," in *Meaning and Modernity: Religion, Polity and Self*, ed. Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 230.
60. Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 96 (1967): 1.

61. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," 8.
62. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," 7–8.
63. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," 18.
64. Sanford Levinson, *Constitutional Faith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 27.
65. Levinson, *Constitutional Faith*, 121, 55.
66. Levinson, *Constitutional Faith*, 47, 27, 29.
67. Walter Russell Mead, *God and Gold: Britain, America, and the Making of the Modern World* (New York: Knopf, 2007), 283.
68. Mead, *God and Gold*, 283.
69. See Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006); Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007).
70. Bryan G. Norton, "Thoreau's Insect Analogies: Or, Why Environmentalists Hate Mainstream Economists," *Environmental Ethics* 13, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 250.
71. Nelson, *The New Holy Wars*, pts. 2 and 3. See also Robert H. Nelson, "Unoriginal Sin: The Judeo-Christian Roots of Ecotheology," *Policy Review* 53 (Summer 1990): 52–59; Robert H. Nelson, "Environmental Religion: A Theological Critique," *Case Western Reserve Law Review* 55, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 51–80; and Robert H. Nelson, "Economics and Environmentalism: Belief Systems at Odds," *The Independent Review* 17, no. 1 (Summer 2012): 5–17.
72. Robert H. Nelson, "Calvinism Without God: American Environmentalism as Implicit Calvinism," *Implicit Religion* 17, no. 3 (2014): 249–73.
73. Hugh T. Kerr, ed., *Calvin's Institutes: A New Compendium* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 26–27.
74. Jonathan Edwards, *The Images and Shadows of Things Divine*, ed. Perry Miller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 69.
75. Robert H. Nelson, "Environmental Calvinism: The Judeo-Christian Roots of Environmental Theology," in *Taking the Environment Seriously*, ed. Roger E. Meiners and Bruce Yandle (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993), 233–55.
76. See Warren Johnson, *Muddling Towards Frugality* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1978).

77. Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (1962; repr., Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), 219. See also Robert H. Nelson, “*Silent Spring* as Secular Religion,” in *Silent Spring at 50*, ed. Roger Meiners, Pierre Desrochers, and Andrew Morriss (Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 2012), 61–96.
78. Carson, *Silent Spring*, 219–20.
79. Mark Stoll, *Protestantism, Capitalism, and Nature in America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 52.
80. Donald Worster, “John Muir and the Roots of American Environmentalism,” in *The Wealth of Nature*, ed. Donald Worster (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 195–96.
81. Allison Winter, “How This Environmental Activist Learned to ‘Walk the Walk,’” *Greenwire*, July 31, 2013.
82. David Martin, foreword to *Religion in Britain Since 1945*, by Grace Davie (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), ix. See also David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2005); and David Martin, *The Future of Christianity: Reflections on Violence and Democracy, Religion and Secularization* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2011).
83. Nelson, *Reaching for Heaven on Earth*.