

RELIGIONS, SECULARIZATIONS  
AND MODERNITIES\*

I USE THE plural morpheme for all three nouns because after reading these instructive books by two prominent British sociologists of religion, dealing with seemingly identical topics, one must ask whether it makes sociological sense to use the terms in the singular without further qualification. Both texts struggle with and help clarify the plurality of ambivalent and even contradictory meanings attached to the category of “religion”, not only in ordinary modern usage but within our inherited sociological theories of religion. Indeed, Bryan Turner and David Martin emphasize radically different conceptions of what they mean by “religion”.

Similarly ambivalent and contradictory meanings are built into our usages of the related terms “secular” and “secularization”. More than anybody else Martin has dedicated his life work to analyzing and illuminating the complex dialectics built historically into the relations between Christianity and “the world” (*saeculum*), between the religious and the secular, and particularly between post-axial transcendent religion and the immanent socially sacred. Coming on the heels of a major reformulation of his thesis, *On Secularization*, the recent essays gathered in *The Future of Christianity* offer an updated and forceful restatement of central themes one finds in Martin’s life work.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the essays collected in *Religion in Modern Society*, Turner offers also diverse and at times contradictory meanings of secularization as a socio-historical process, as he analyzes competing sociological theories. When he presents his own theory of secularization, however, which serves as one of the central theses of the book, it becomes evident that Turner’s and Martin’s theories of secularization are worlds apart.

This is particularly the case in the way in which their visions of secularization are bound with what Martin terms “dangerous ‘nouns

\* About Bryan S. TURNER, *Religion and Modern Society. Citizenship, Secularisation and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) and David MARTIN, *The Future of Christianity. Reflections on Violence and Democracy, Religion and Secularization* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2011).

<sup>1</sup> David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2005).

of process”, like modernization, rationalization, disenchantment (*Entzauberung*), and globalization. The terrain both books cover is similarly global. Despite the different emphasis, both texts discuss the same world religions: Christianity, Islam and Judaism, Confucianism, Hinduism and Buddhism. Moreover, some of the main themes are related: religion and politics, violence and the state, science and disenchantment, self-expressive individualism and modernity, nationalism and religious pluralism. Yet one cannot but have the impression that Turner and Martin are looking at different worlds from radically different sociological as well as political-theological perspectives. Of course, such a conclusion should not surprise anybody who has followed closely the prolific life work of these two prominent and influential senior British sociologists.

Both books are full of theoretical sociological insights as well of rich hermeneutic interpretations of contemporary global realities. Both address head on, with much sociological discernment and cultural sensibility, some of the most contested global public issues of our times, particularly the meaning of the return of religion to the public sphere and whether this entails some kind of “secularization in reverse” or “re-sacralization”. Albeit for significantly different reasons, Turner and Martin agree that notions of “global re-sacralization” or “de-secularization of the world” are problematic and misleading. Both are also equally critical of the new discourse of “post-secularity”. Both want to maintain certain components of the sociological theory of secularization as an empirically grounded analysis of relevant modern historical processes and resist the implication that secularization is just a European or a secularist “myth”. Both seem to accept the proposition that ours is a global “secular age”. Yet both draw radically different conclusions and offer different visions of the present vitality and the potential futures of Christianity and the other world religions in our global secular world.

*Turner’s radical theory of secularization as the end of the social*

*Religion and Modern Society* is most emphatically a rewarding sociological text, written to a large extent in critical conversation with other sociological texts, addressing key contemporary sociological debates about globalization, multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, consumerism, media and citizenship. Even though those are all hotly

contested public issues of wide interest beyond academic publics, Turner writes as a professional sociologist addressing primarily a social science academic audience. The book makes important contributions to globalization studies, to the comparative study of world religions and to secularization debates.

Part I addresses key theoretical analytical issues within the sociology of religion in critical conversation with classical and modern theorists. Each of the chapters on Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, Talcott Parsons, Mary Douglas and Pierre Bourdieu offers highly original interpretative reconstructions. Running across all of them a theme resonates that has been central to Turner's life work, namely the sociology of the body and the focus on ritual and embodied practices as being fundamental, indeed of primary relevance for any sociological study of religion.

Durkheim's emphasis on shared emotion and collective rituals, Douglas' emphasis on bodily symbolism and body techniques, and Bourdieu's categories of practice and habitus are well known. But Turner offers highly insightful reconstructions and applications of their theoretical insights to contemporary phenomena such as body piercing, fragmented urban "tribes" and what he views as irreversible de-ritualization, which he considers a key component of modern secularization. More interestingly, Turner offers an original though somewhat problematic revisionist interpretation of Weber's comparative studies in the economic ethics of the world religions not so much as a pioneering contribution to the comparative sociology of rationalization and the dialectics of ideal and material interests, but rather as a somewhat unconscious contribution to a comparative sociology of embodied piety, a theme which of course resonates within the contemporary anthropology of Islam. Turner also recovers a central though neglected component of Parsons' analysis of modern American society, namely his theory of "expressive individualism" as a key characteristic of what Parsons called the "expressive revolution". Turner is correct in viewing the expressive revolution as "the modern framework for the legacy of Protestant emotional piety", while simultaneously pointing out that "romantic love is an essential component of the contemporary consumer ethic" (p. 71). Yet, against Parsons' rather sanguine liberal view and following Alasdair MacIntyre's critique of modern "emotivism", Turner emphasizes the negative side of expressive individualism as a main contributor to "the incremental erosion of the communal foundations of both moral coherence and religious practice" and thus as a primary carrier

of ongoing processes of secularization, which Turner envisions most dramatically as “the end of the social”.

Part II addresses key substantive issues at the intersection of processes of globalization, secularization and religious transformations throughout the world. Turner’s ultimate ambition is to generate what he calls “a global sociology [...] of global religion” (xiv). By a genuinely global sociology he means not merely “a comparative sociology of global processes” that remains embedded in national paradigms. By global religion he means “the possibility of a generic religious consciousness” which needs to be distinguished from “global religions”, that is, from “the transformation of existing religions by globalizing processes” (xiii). According to Turner, “the emergence of global religious cosmopolitanism might be an example of the former and the rise of radical Islam and Christian fundamentalism examples of the latter” (xiii). But other than a few suggestive remarks concerning the growth of a global human-rights culture with a juridical-institutional dimension that encompasses “human rights, truth and reconciliation, international courts of justice, historical memory, genocide and the problem of evil”(xxi), there is practically no elaboration in the book of this important Durkheimian dimension of what could be called ongoing global processes of sacralization.

Subsequently, having downplayed the relevance of a comparative sociology of global processes which could show how these are transforming the existing global religions or to examine in turn how global religions are responding to the opportunity structures created by these global processes, it is not surprising perhaps to find so little sustained comparative historical analysis of globalization and religion. One of the few exceptions is his highly illuminating comparative analyses of authoritarian and liberal secular states management of religious pluralism. More typical throughout the book are the detached observations of a global cosmopolitan voyeur, full of critical sociological insights, practicing what Turner depicts as “cosmopolitan virtue.” Cosmopolitan virtue is characterized as a predisposition towards dialogical critical understanding that Turner finds embodied in Leibniz. It is informed by “a hermeneutics of generosity” and moved by “a moral imperative to learn from cultural diversity” (pp. 16-17). But Turner sees the need to complement this ecumenical commitment to dialogue with religious cultures with the “cosmopolitan skepticism” of Montaigne, who maintains an unresolved tension between sympathy and the quest for justice (pp. 248-249). Moreover, such a cosmopolitan perspective ought to be suffused as well with “cosmopolitan irony” and “the metaphysics of nostalgia” (p. 297), even though Turner himself indicates that “cosmopolitan irony is generally incompatible with nostalgia” (p. 253).

*Religion and Modern Society* is a collection of disparate essays written for separate occasions and in this respect one should not expect perhaps a sustained argument grounded in the empirical analysis of global processes adding up to some systematic general theoretical statements on religion and globalization. What one gets is a series of interrelated impressionist essays, written more in conversation with other texts than as an elaboration of observable empirical data, well-crafted and always full of enlightened insights. But ultimately it is the global view of a detached cosmopolitan observer from nowhere who constantly re-focuses his lenses from the UK to Singapore, from the US to China, from Indonesia to Eastern Europe, from the Muslim diasporas in the West to the Chinese diasporas in South East Asia. If there are any general theses sustained throughout the book they are not derived from these changing empirical observations but are rather deduced from received sociological theory and applied to the various places depending upon the changing locales and the textual interlocutors.

Let me reconstruct briefly Turner's analysis of global religions and his shifting perspective on secularization to illustrate my claim. Turner's point of departure is that a reflexive global perspective per force makes "the category 'religion' deeply problematic" and that "globalisation has had the paradoxical effect of making religions [...] more self-conscious of themselves as 'world religions'"(xiv). Indeed one could claim that what we now recognize as a global system of world religions only emerged in and through processes of globalization. Yet it is striking that Turner has so little to say about the ways in which the world religions are transformed by, or may in turn help to shape, processes of globalization.

Throughout the volume Turner identifies four main manifestations of the globalization of religion: a) "the rise of fundamentalism in various religious traditions"; b) "the pietisation of everyday life" particularly among women; c) "the growth of post-institutional spirituality in youth cultures"; and d) "some resurgence of traditional folk religion"(xii). Turner argues moreover that the common denominator within the category of "global religions" is the fact that "all forms of religion are now overlaid with consumerism and that many forms of religion have been commodified" (xii). One does not need to dispute the fact that those are indeed significant global religious phenomena. The question is whether a systematic and empirically grounded analysis of religion and globalization would focus on precisely those phenomena as being the most relevant ones. In my view, they serve to illustrate eloquently a particular theory of secularization and a deductive "end of the social

thesis” to which Turner appears to be deeply committed as his own sociological view of the world. But I must confess that it does not help me understand better the complex global processes, religious as well as secular, which one might observe throughout the world.

Let us look at the category of religious fundamentalism for instance. Turner never bothers to define it. But is it so evident that we know what “fundamentalism” is or means? Which aspects of the contemporary transformations of all world religions can be classified under the category “the rise of fundamentalism” and which ones would need to be classified under some other category? Turner makes frequent references to Islamic and American “fundamentalism”. But does the category of “fundamentalism” here help to illuminate or rather to obfuscate similarities and differences between the contemporary transformations of American Protestantism and the diverse and complex religious and political transformations one sees throughout the Muslim world? Here I fully concur with Martin’s comment in *The Future of Christianity* that “fundamentalism” rather than being a fruitful sociological analytical category is “a remarkably useful term of abuse and excommunication, because it enables one to catch so many disparate fish in the same basket to feed a liberal moral panic” (p. 52)

Given the critical early contributions of Turner to the study of Weber and Islam at a time when few Western sociologists considered this a relevant topic, one could have expected a more discerning engagement with the complexities of the various global forms of Muslim revival and reform or, as I prefer to call them in analogy to the modern Catholic transformations, of Muslim *aggiornamenti* to the contemporary global challenges. Disappointing in this respect is not only that Turner concentrates almost exclusively on the controversial aspects of the Western discourse on “Islam”, namely on fundamentalism, political Islamism, and “the veil”, but the fact that his analysis seems to fall so much within the parameters of the Western orientalist discourse. With respect to “political Islam”, Turner simply reiterates the well-known but reductionist theses of Gilles Kepel and Olivier Roy concerning the spectacular rise and fall of Islamism in the last twenty-five years. Are the diverse forms of democratization of Muslim politics in Indonesia, Turkey or Senegal, for instance, illustrations of the rise and fall of Islamism or do they point to some other forms of Muslim response to modern challenges, which would seem to deserve some more careful analysis?

Similarly, there is no doubt that the growth of post-institutional spirituality in youth cultures is an important global phenomenon,

particularly in highly secularized Western European societies. But the question one could pose to Turner is whether the growth of new forms of religiosity and spirituality within religious institutions in all world religions is not an equally relevant global phenomenon. At least looking at the United States, the place from which Turner himself draws most of his empirical references, one could say following Robert Wuthnow that the new forms of individualized religiosity and spirituality, which Wuthnow has documented with such phenomenological nuance, happen as much if not more within institutional religious settings as outside of them. In the case of the United States, moreover, this has been a continuous and well-documented process which was already visible during the First Great Awakening and exploded in all kinds of directions during the Second Great Awakening as part of the process of democratization of evangelical Christianity. Protestant Pietism has indeed become globalized and incorporated in different ways into all religious traditions. Indeed today one can find diverse forms of individualized pietism, expressive spiritualities and evangelical religiosities within global Pentecostalism and Catholicism, within Hinduism and Islam, within Buddhism and Chinese religions. Indeed, in the case of Asian religions one can witness a fusion of modern Western forms of expressive individualism and much older forms of inner-worldly mysticism. I do not think, however, that characterizing all the diverse types of “spirituality” as so many forms of “emotivism” that erode social cohesion advances a helpful interpretation of this global phenomenon.

Turner seems to have difficulties taking seriously what could be called the old world religions and their transformations under processes of globalization. Undoubtedly, Islam, Catholicism and Pentecostalism are the three most important global religions, both in terms of absolute numbers as well as in terms of their global extension, but one could claim that they are important also in terms of their present and future world-historical significance. Turner does provide a helpful discussion of Islam as a global religion, even if the focus of his analysis is somewhat narrow. But the discussion of Pentecostalism is rather dismissive, reducing it in his analysis to neo-Pentecostalism and the Prosperity Gospel, which of course serves to confirm Turner’s thesis of the commodification of all global religions (p. 282). Contemporary global Catholicism apparently does not even deserve any mention. Latin America, the region of the world in which the most significant global transformations of both Catholicism and Pentecostalism is taking place, and Africa, the region of the world in which intensive competition and influential interactions between Islam, Catholicism,

Pentecostalism and indigenous folk religions are taking place, do not even appear in the index of *Religion in Modern Society*.

The issue here is not so much one of geographical neglect. Nobody can cover the entire globe meaningfully and Turner does focus much of his attention upon Asia which is of course an increasingly influential global region likely to determine the direction of many future global trends. The problem is rather Turner's neglect of what could be called "traditional", "institutional" or simply "ordinary" global religions, that is, the religious traditions and the embodied practices to which the majority of the population of the world adhere today. This is, I would argue, evidence of an analytical-hermeneutic prejudice that derives from Turner's sociological theoretical premises that are built into his theory of religion and his related theory of secularization.

Turner's central thesis is that "everywhere we see (worldly) religion flourishing while the world of the sacred is shrinking" (xii) and that means that for Turner modern secularization and globalization produce simultaneously "the growth of institutional religions and the concurrent decline of the sacred" (xxii). This appears paradoxical only as long as one identifies the religious and the sacred. But in Turner's own terms, "secularisation is the modern development of the religious as the empty shell of the sacred" (p. 31). Turner begins with a Durkheimian theory of religion as the socially sacred but ends with a radical anti-Durkheimian theory of secularization as the end of the social. For Turner, "religion has become a set of institutions that function to support the secular world" (p. 31). Turner offers a radical reinterpretation of Durkheim by postulating "a parallel set of relations between the sacred and the religious on the one hand and the social and society on the other" (31). In the same way as modern religion is "the institutionalized outer framework or institutional casement of the sacred", modern "society" is "the institutional superstructure" of the social, which according to Turner becomes steadily eroded as "the social ties that bind people into communities are becoming thinner and weaker". Ultimately, Turner argues, "the religion-society complex is only parasitic on the sacred-social foundation" (p. 31).

Turner counters Durkheim's theory of modern organic solidarity and the analysis of the cult of the individual as the secular religion of modern societies with his thesis of commodification of the social and the expansion of religious individualism as a form of consumerism. Modern religions are impotent to counter the erosion of the social as they themselves become commodified and adjust to the secular world. Turner offers some concrete illustrations of these global processes. But



ultimately the force of the argument is logically deductive and derives from certain theoretical postulates based ultimately on the problematic binary distinction of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*.

This a-historical binary distinction between traditional “community” and modern “society” constitutes in my view the original categorical fallacy of most sociological theories of modernization. Turner’s theory of globalization is in this respect a radicalized version of the theory of Western modernization now extended to the globe at large. In a statement which formulates paradigmatically Bryan Wilson’s theory of secularization to whom Turner is clearly indebted he writes:

“In the transition from community (*gemeinschaft*) to association (*gesellschaft*), we have in Western capitalism lost our roots in a communal world of emotional social attachments. Secularisation in this framework is the erosion of those strong communal bonds that wrapped individuals into meaningful social groups” (p. 137).

Tocqueville offered an alternative and more persuasive theory of voluntary associations as the foundation of modern civil societies. It was precisely the voluntary religious congregation which he saw as the paradigmatic form of all modern voluntary associations. Today the model of the voluntary religious congregation has become globalized and institutionalized in all religious traditions. All the global cities from New York to Singapore, from London to Johannesburg, from Sao Paulo to Taipei, from Lagos to Mumbai are teeming with religious congregations of all types, from all the religious traditions, which continue to build strong communal bonds that wrap individuals into meaningful social groups. But apparently Turner’s global cosmopolitan gaze is focused elsewhere, since his theory of secularization discounts the contemporary relevance of these religious communities. Indeed he envisions the global mega-cities as disorganized anomic worlds which may become increasingly ungovernable. In a radically anti-Durkheimian mood Turner anticipates the end of the social as the apocalyptic nightmare of a dystopian “feral society” (p. 98).

Turner’s discussion of processes of secularization throughout the book is of course much more complex. Following James Beckford, he elaborates on the different aspects of secularization as it is correlated with processes of social differentiation of the religious and secular spheres, with the decline of religious authority, with rationalization and disenchantment, and with other aspects of modernization. He draws upon my own distinction of the three separate dimensions of secularization, namely “social differentiation”, “privatization”, and “decline of religion” in order to distinguish between “political” and “social”

secularization. This allows him to accept some aspects of my thesis of “de-privatization” of religion without questioning the predominance of social secularisation. He even acknowledges that “Parsons avoided one of the pitfalls of modern sociology, namely that secularization is uniform and an inevitable future of modernity” (p. 73) Following Parsons’ view that American denominational pluralism and the American value system were actually institutionalizations of Protestant Christianity, Turner even asserts that “in retrospect we can see secularization not as a necessary consequence of modernization, but more narrowly as a feature of European history” (p. 73).

But such a comparative historical analysis of the very different European and American processes of secularization is simply put aside in order to advance a grander general theory of social secularization. The end of the process is clearly articulated. “The sacred roots of collective culture are being eroded by globalization in the shape of commercialization and commodification and in this sense we face the end of the social” (pp. 296-297). But in fact, if one follows the logic of Turner’s argument, all of human history and the development of “society” should be understood as a progressive fall from the original elementary forms of the social sacred.

From such a perspective, the emergence of the historical or axial religions ought to be viewed also as a fateful step in this progressive dissolution of the sacred and of the social. According to Turner, in our global secular age religion itself is increasingly part and parcel of the market and is shaped by the dominant secular structures. Religion no longer lives in tension with the “world”; it has accommodated itself to it and has therefore lost its utopian, prophetic, or simply transcendent orientation. Turner even acknowledges in his conclusion that “this interpretation of our modern dilemma – the contraction of the sacred, the flourishing of religion as lifestyle, and the consequent erosion of the social – involves a metaphysics of nostalgia” (p. 297).

### *David Martin’s The Future of Christianity*

If Turner offers a nostalgic look into the eroding metaphysic world of the social, Martin offers a much more hopeful look not only into the future of Christianity but into the power of transcendent post-axial religions to offer alternative visions to the immanent socially sacred, to

the raw secularity of power politics and to the raw secularity of neo-Darwinian naturalisms.

Martin's sociological analysis of similar related themes is significantly different from that of Turner in three respects. Methodologically, Martin's approach is comparative and historical through and through. Secondly, the use of the various concepts of secularization is both much more nuanced and differentiated and also more consistent throughout Martin's writings. Finally, Martin's conception of "religion" is much more circumscribed to that of the historical axial religious traditions in all their historical mutations.

Martin insists again and again on the protean character of religion as well as on religion being a historically conditioned category. He questions both the possibility and even more the analytical utility of developing some general transhistorical and transcultural category of religion. But most importantly, Martin stresses that "it really is impossible to account for the variable presence and absence of religion, even supposing we know what that means, with an evolutionary constant" (p. 217) or with some universal unilateral trends. In this respect, he expresses serious doubts concerning both general sociological theories of religion as well as general developmental theories of what he terms dangerous "nouns of process" ending in -ation. He does not deny of course that such processes actually take place. But they are always greatly affected by different histories. In sum, "history matters and it is contingent" (p. 27). But Martin does not embrace unreflexive historicism. For him, "the classic procedure of sociology in the absence of controlled experiment is cross-cultural comparison" (p. 120).

He states that there is no substitute for comparative historical analysis, warning that "automatic recourse to generalized explanations, whether based on Weberian rationalization or Durkheimian anomie, is to be avoided" (p. 13). Above all he stresses the "need to subject nouns of process and binary distinctions of Now and Then to careful scrutiny" (p. 26). Careful scrutiny means accepting that there is *something*, for instance, in Turner's story, greatly influenced by Wilson, that "once upon a time there was Community and now there is Association". But for Martin such general story is always affected by diverse histories and moreover, he stresses, "it is not a straightforward story any more than the Durkheimian transition from Mechanical to Organic Solidarity or Gellner's rift between modernity and all previous periods is straightforward" (p. 26).

One can of course list numerous general tendencies inherent in secularization, or in any other similar noun of process such as

rationalization, modernization, globalization, etc. But they are always greatly affected by diverse histories and different histories can even reverse seemingly general tendencies. Not surprisingly, Martin's texts are always full of cross-national comparisons between let us say France and Poland, East Germany and West Germany, Europe and the United States, as well as full of cross-cultural comparisons between different world religions and between the different branches of Christianity. Well before the category of path-dependency became fashionable in comparative social science, Martin had made such analytical practice the core of his comparative historical approach. The chapters on "Secularization and the Future of Catholicism and Protestantism", "Has Secularization gone into Reverse?", "An Eastern European Pattern of Secularization?", and "East Germany: The World's Most Secular Society", exemplify Martin's cross-national and cross-cultural comparative approach.

But Martin's focus on the national unit of analysis should not be mistaken for an unreflexive adoption of the methodological nationalism so dominant in comparative social science. It is due rather to the well-articulated and central premise that "the analysis of religion, nationalism, and politics can be undertaken in a unified framework". (4) Rather than the relation between religion and economy which is so central in Turner's analysis, it is the relation between religion and politics, or more precisely the relation between what he terms "the history of the sacred", "the history of Christianity" and the relative historical constant of "the raw secularity of politics" that occupies central stage in Martin's analysis. The implication is not that "religion", by which Martin as we will see means mainly "post-axial religion", and politics are identical, but rather that both fields are subject to very similar processes and dynamics and therefore the ways in which both either collude or collide is crucial in his analysis.

As to the most dangerous noun of process, that of globalization, which appears as the most preeminent of all social processes in Turner's analysis, it is totally absent in Martin's analysis. The term globalization does not seem to appear even once in the text. But Martin's perspective, notwithstanding the seemingly parochial focus on Christianity, is genuinely global. Although he does not claim to offer any general theory of globalization, *The Future of Christianity* provides a most compelling empirical sociological analysis and global mapping of all the world religions. Moreover, although the focus is on Christianity and Martin even claims that secularization is primarily a Western Christian dynamic, his global perspective is paradoxically

less Euro-centric than Turner's detached cosmopolitan gaze, in so far as he works with the premise of multiple and diverse "modernities" and therefore does not conceive of global processes as the global expansion of Western secular modernity at large. In Martin's own words, "two propositions have been fundamental to my position from the mid-sixties till now", namely that "there are many versions of modernity apart from our Western European version, and all of them are compatible with religion in some form or other" (p. 7). As it turns out, from a global perspective, modernity is neither singular nor necessarily "secular".

Secularization is the most important single subject of Martin's book and one could claim has been the most important single subject of his life work. Having now published within three decades two classic and unsurpassed comparative historical books with the somewhat deceiving title "*A General Theory of Secularization*" nobody can challenge his undisputed title as dean of the field.<sup>2</sup> My own appreciation would be that whoever works in the field of secularization and does not feel indebted to Martin's work is probably misguided. One would have imagined that Martin could not possibly have much more new to say on the subject. Yet each of the essays in *The Future of Christianity* examines either fresh empirical data from all corners of the globe or offers surprisingly new insights on well-known themes from Martin's work: on Christianity and pacifism, on religion, politics and violence, on master narratives, Christian language and its mutations, on Protestantism and democracy, on science and disenchantment, and yet again on Pentecostalism in the global religious economy.

Martin's criticism of secularization theory has focused on those versions that treat secularization as "a universal and unilateral trend" (p. 5). Against proponents of the new American paradigm of religious economies, Martin emphatically states that "secularization is not a myth", even though most master narratives of secularization have profound mythic and ideological sources and resonances, which he has explored with much nuance and discernment throughout his work. Throughout the book and throughout his work, Martin uses the term

<sup>2</sup> David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1978), and *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2005). His first formulation actually goes back one decade earlier to a seminar chaired by Ernest Gellner. See, David Martin, "Towards a General Theory of Secularization", *European Journal of Sociology*, December 1969, pp; 192-201. Fortunately, almost by accident, he never followed his own even earlier recommendation: David Martin, "Towards Eliminating the Concept of Secularisation" in Julius Gould (ed.), *The Penguin Survey of the Social Sciences* (Hammondsworth, Penguin, 1965).

secularization in three distinctive and consistent ways. First of all, an empirical treatment such as the one exemplified in his *A General Theory of Secularization* has to delimit what is to be covered by secularization and Martin most of the time confines it to measurable “declines in more or less Christian belief in practice”. (5) He insisted then and continues to insist now that there is “a certain Christian specificity about secularization, even though one might reasonably talk about secularization (say) in Central Asia under the Soviets or in China under Mao”. (5)

As a general sociological category and as a noun of process Martin uses the term secularization, following Parsons, primarily as a correlate of “social differentiation” rather than of rationalization, modernization, privatization, or disenchantment. It refers to a particular historical and “clearly identifiable process whereby social spheres, such as the state, administration, welfare, education, and the arts, are no longer under ecclesiastical oversight or governed by the deliverances and modalities of theology” (p. 26). Martin insists, however, that “social differentiation allows for historical and cultural contingency and variability” (p. 124). The very terms, ecclesiastical oversight and theology, point to the specifically Christian and European character of the historical process with should not be confused as a general and universal developmental process of social secularization. Moreover, for Martin it is an open normative-theological question whether differentiation does “marginalize religion in its own specialized ghetto or does it create a space in which faith can discover its own specific character, freed from the constraints of establishment and seductive opportunities for political influence” (p. 26).

It is an equally open empirical question how the process of secularization as social differentiation is related with the first meaning of secularization as decline of religious belief and practice. In large regions of Europe, social differentiation is clearly associated historically with drastic declines of church religiosity. In the United States by contrast, as stressed by Tocqueville, a more radical process of social differentiation, signified by the stricter and much taller “wall of separation” between church and state, is actually associated with much higher and more vital rates of religious belief and practice. It is an equally open empirical question whether processes of modernization and social differentiation elsewhere throughout the globe are closer to the European or the American models. If one finds such a variation even within Western Christianity, the chances are that patterns of social differentiation elsewhere will also be inflected by diverse

histories and by specific cultural patterns associated with other religious traditions.

Neither the old discourse of American exceptionalism nor the newer discourse of European exceptionalism could possibly account, if my reading of Martin is correct, for the complex multiplicity of patterns of secularization throughout the world. Most emphatically he rejects the notion that secularization may have lately “gone into reverse”. He sees no evidence of any significant process of de-secularization within secularized societies, with the exception of former Communist societies in which Marxism and state enforced secularization have dramatically retreated. Actually, for Martin, de-secularization has relevance in two spheres only: the mass mobilization of peoples unhappy with secular modes of governance, and the partial reversal of communist-led secularization. The partial de-secularization in Islam “parallels the partial reversal of secularization imposed from above in Russia and China, and also the attempt of religious nationalists in what have been post-colonial secular states, like India and Israel, to recover a religious character” (p. 86). In all these cases secularization had been imposed by “western-influenced elites” and the reversal has come with the political mobilization of the masses, as Tocqueville would have predicted. In fact, Martin “would relate much of that reversal to the failure of the Marxist project” (p. 86). Martin always analyzes historical processes of secularization and de-secularization, never general developmental processes of secularization logically derived from other nouns of process.

Particularly the sobering analysis of East Germany as “The world’s most secular society” where one cannot find any evidence of de-secularization after the fall of the communist regime there, serves for Martin as a cautionary tale against the fashionable notion of “post-secularity” as well as against any evolutionary cognitive theory of religion as a universal anthropological constant or any sociological functionalist theory of religion as a social constant. But the explanation of East Germany’s hyper-secularity is not related to general processes of modernization, rationalization, or bureaucratization but is rather related to specific cultural historical processes that have crystallized into an extreme accumulative process of path dependency which was sealed by “a bargain struck by the communist victors releasing its demoralized people from Nazi guilt if they accepted the complete secularist package” (p. 14).

There is finally a third and most distinctive way in which Martin has used the term secularization throughout his work, namely the concept of “internal secularization” as a peculiar dynamic associated

with Christianity throughout its history from its dual origins in Hellenic-Roman Antiquity and in Israel to its contemporary global expansion and, Martin is not afraid to project ahead into, its plausible historical futures. In this respect, he stresses again and again, secularization is a peculiar Christian historical dynamic, which is programmed as it were into its memes, its language, and its cultural repertoires, although it is opened to constant new historical mutations.

From the start primitive Christianity functioned “as a secularizing movement, for example by removing the aura of the sacred from an elect people defined by ritual prescription in a promised land with a holy city and a holy temple, as well as by rejecting fate and fortune and the *sacramentum* of loyalty to the god-emperor” (19). No simplistic articulation of the religious-secular distinction can capture those shifts, “partly because what is sacred for Judaism in terms of ritual purity is profaned and secularized by Christianity”. But the same dynamic of profanation and secularization takes place in relation to the pagan Hellenic or Latin sacred.

But then, Martin adds, another “crucial shift occurs when Christianity itself succumbs to a partial secularization in terms of its original thrust by providing sacred insurance cover for the empire” (p. 19) through the Constantinian establishment, in a way which must appear quiet abhorrent to the secularizing impulse one finds in the Hebrew Scriptures concerning “sacred kingship”.

Yet it was in response to this problematic sacralized establishment that Augustine reformulated the neutral Latin term *saeculum* into a fateful Christian theological category which, as Martin points out, was going to determine the construction of the uniquely Western Christian binary distinction between religious and secular that, from now on, served to structure first the dualist system of Medieval Christendom and later all the Western dynamics of secularization, trying to bridge or eliminate the dualist system and inverting in the process the hierarchic relation between religious and secular. As Asad has so eloquently argued, both the modern category of “religion” and the modern hegemony of the “secular” have a direct Christian genealogy.<sup>3</sup> According to Martin, “the Enlightenment is yet another partial secularization, converting the visionary hopes of Christianity into rational potentialities in history, thereby generating the category of secular religion” (p. 179).

<sup>3</sup> Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991) and *Formations of the Secular* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2003).



In this respect, for Martin the history of Christianity is full of secularizing and de-secularizing zigzags and reversals, as it is intimately interrelated with “the history of the sacred” and with the raw secularity of power politics. The Christian West, according to Martin, has gone through four basic stages as the Christian repertoire undergoes from the beginning a crucial bifurcation. The first two “relate to the space (or the distinction) between God and Caesar, between the kingdoms of “this world” and the kingdom of God” (p. 171). While in its first three centuries Christianity was “a quasi-universal, non-violent, voluntary society” once established in power the space narrowed to comprise two mutually supporting and rivalrous jurisdictions, “with the ideal voluntary society implicitly shunted off into monastic sidings”. The second two stages involved first an interim stabilization in early modernity “in which the national sacred and its consensus remained in close alliance with the religious sacred and its consensus” (p. 171). Finally, in the North American context “the way was open to the kind of universal voluntarism embedded in the First Amendment” which is today being globalized by the transnational voluntarism of Pentecostalism.

Clearly these are four historical stages which in no way point to any progressive developmental process of secularization, much less to any historical telos, but rather serve as illustrations of what Martin views as a critical bifurcation built into the repertoire of Christianity as a religious historical tradition from its very beginning and that finds diverse manifestations historically in its various branches, Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant. According to Martin, “Christianity is distinctive in having derived part of its original repertoire from an ethnic group with an attachment to a territory”, and a wider vision of “the transnational voluntary association we call the early Church”. These are two radically different types of religion which may either alternate or compete with one another at any historical period, at least since the time of the Axial Age when the model of a religious community separate from the sacred social first emerged. Today both types of religion are in close competition around the globe. Indeed the high hopes which Martin seems to place on the future of Pentecostalism as the present paradigmatic manifestation of the de-territorialized voluntary form of Christianity does not blind him from recognizing that “Pentecostalism is certainly not all the future there is. It is in tension with older, profoundly resistant and sometimes resurgent forms of religion, whether Islamic, Catholic or even Buddhist, often rooted in the sacred union of a faith, a polity and a territory” (p. 63).

Like Turner, Martin also draws a basic distinction between the Durkheimian social sacred and “religion” proper, but the evaluation of the relationship between the two phenomena is radically different. Martin wants to reserve the category of “religion” for what he calls post-axial religions and certainly Martin does not view the social sacred as the elementary and most authentic form of religion. Axial religion for Martin is certainly not in any way the empty shell of the sacred. Nor is there a negative progression in social development from the sacred social to the religious, to the secular, marking the end of the social.

The discourse of axial religion which is central to Martin’s analysis introduces a radical break between “the history of the sacred” and “the history of religion”. As an axial religion, Christianity for Martin introduces a crucial challenge to the Durkheimian social sacred. The examples of Christian internal secularization indicate that “the meanings of the sacred and secular change places” (p. 19). As I have indicated in some of my recent writings, the axial age actually introduces an irreducible duality between the religious as transcendent and the sacred as social. If one adds debates concerning secular modernity, it becomes then obvious that we are dealing here with three different systems of binary classification, which are closely interrelated but are not co-extensive.<sup>4</sup> From the comparative perspective of the axial revolutions, the process of modern Western secularization appears as a radicalization of the great dis-embedding of the individual from the sacred cosmos and from society that is characteristic of the axial age. In the context of a general theory of “religious” evolution, one may understand this process as a redrawing of boundaries between sacred/profane, transcendence/immanence, religious/secular. All too often we tend to view these dichotomous pairs – sacred/profane, transcendent/immanent, religious/secular – as synonymous. But it should be obvious that these three dichotomous classificatory schemes do not fit neatly within one another. The sacred tends to be immanent in pre-axial societies, transcendence is

<sup>4</sup> Cf. José Casanova, “A Secular Age: Dawn or Twilight?” in Michael Warner, Craig Calhoun, and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, eds., *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age* (Cambridge, Harvard U.P., 2009) pp. 265-281; “Was für Religion braucht der Mensch? Religiöser Wandel im globalen Zeitalter”, in Bettina Holstein/Matthias Jung/Wolfgang Knöbl (Hg.) *Das Erbe von Historismus und Pragmatismus und die Zukunft der Sozialtheorie* (Frankfurt/New York, Campus, 2011) pp.169-190; “Exploring the Postsecular: Three Meanings of ‘the Secular’ and their Possible Transcendence”, in Craig Calhoun, Eduardo Mendieta, and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, eds. *Habermas and Religion* (Cambridge, UK, Polity Press, Fall 2012, forthcoming); and “Religion, the Axial Age and Secular Modernity in Bellah’s Theory of Religious Evolution”, in Robert N. Bellah and Hans Joas (eds.), *The Axial Age and Its Consequences* (Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 2012, forthcoming).

not necessarily religious in some axial civilizations, and obviously some secular reality (the nation, citizenship, the person and individual human rights) can become sacred in the modern secular age.

But Martin seems reluctant to adopt such a perspective of “religious” evolution and prefers to maintain the category of religion for post-axial religions proper. In his view, there are fundamental tensions between the social sacred, axial religious transcendence, and the religious secular that make him reluctant to use the same category of religion for all three formations. As he states, “I am not even sure it makes coherent sense to discuss religious forms based on inspired Nature as though they were on all fours with forms based on visions of transformation, personal, social, and natural” (p. 22).

It is the historical interactive dynamics between the two types of religion that for Martin are crucial for comparative sociological analysis. “Throughout my argument I am contrasting the kind of religion based on birthright, territory, and kinship with the kind based on a voluntary decision to join a fictive transnational fraternity – or sorority” (p. 96). Christianity, for Martin, includes both types of religion, “it grew out of a faith based primarily on birthright, as signaled by circumcision, and was then for three centuries a voluntary organization until adopted as the official religion of a territorial empire” (p. 96). It is the unresolved tension between these two types of religion which are crucial in his comparative analysis of the contemporary transformations of all branches of Christianity, as well as the global contemporary transformations of all world religions. It is rarely a question of either/or. Most frequently, it is a question of the complex entanglements and mutations of both types of religion as they encounter and become embedded in changing secular “worlds”.

While Martin stresses that voluntarism and multiculturalism are waves of the future, they do not represent all the future there is, having to compete with the equally attractive homogenizing logic of ethno-religious nationalism. The study of nationalism for Martin is the natural complement of the study of religion. Nationalism is clearly strong in the developing world, in India, Eastern Europe, Russia and throughout Dar el Islam (pp. 9-10). Nationalism resists the development of transnational voluntary religious associations. Under conditions of globalization, both types of religions are undergoing all kinds of unexpected mutations.

For Martin, Pentecostalism in company with Islam represents the largest shift in the contemporary global religious economy (p. 66).

He restates with fresh data on the growth of Pentecostalism in China and throughout the Chinese diasporas, in Korea and throughout the Pacific Basin, in Ukraine and throughout Africa his well-known theses concerning the global expansion of Pentecostalism. Pentecostalism is a metamorphosed Anglo-American version of Pietism and Methodism that combined black and white revivalism “in a potent mixture capable of crossing cultural barriers always resistant to more verbal, ethical, and cerebral expressions of mainstream Protestantism” (p. 39). It has the global advantage of being based on “semi-autonomous explosions of spiritual energy in places as widely separated as Korea, India, Wales, Norway, Chile, and South Africa” (p. 39). “It finds its characteristic location among the aspiring poor, particularly women, seeking moral integration, security, modernity, and respect” (p. 40). In a clearly hopeful note, Martin adds, “there seems to be an affinity between the Protestant and the Chinese spirit, which could prove very significant for the future of Christianity” (p. 41).

Martin insists on the need to integrate both the contemporary Islamic revival and the kind of Christian revival represented by Pentecostalism into our secularization theories, warning that “our observations as Europeans can be slanted by an exceptional historical experience and one which includes Enlightened anticipations” (p. 25). Martin acknowledges that empirically it is of course still unclear whether Pentecostalism is a transitional phenomenon en route to a more recognizably “western” secular modernity, as David Voas tends to argue, or rather an alternative way of being modern, as Martin himself repeatedly states. His main thesis is that “Pentecostalism is a major route to modernity rather than a reaction to it, in company with Marxism, several forms of liberalism, Catholicism, Buddhism, and Islam” (p. 9).

Ultimately for Martin the critical question is not so much “whether we are experiencing a unilinear movement to the secular but whether the successive and different incursions of Christianity into “the world”, including contemporary Pentecostalism, have finally used up its symbolic repertoire” (p. 20). Something much larger than the fate of the sociological theory of secularization seems to be at stake. For Martin, “the future of Christianity is going to be influenced by the question as to how far we have abandoned the tensions of transcendence and immanence, history and nature, either in favour of a paganism embedded in nature or a positivistic naturalism based on the manipulation of nature” (p. 43). Ultimately, it is the same question that has been asked lately by thinkers as diverse as Charles Taylor, Juergen

Habermas, Robert Bellah, and Hans Joas, namely whether we are still living within the religious, moral, and philosophical heritage of the Axial Age.

The last essay in *The Future of Christianity*, “Multiple Ironies and Necessary Paradoxes: A Review of Religion, Fanaticism, and Violence”, offers a critical *tour de force* through some of the most contested contemporary debates concerning the relation between religion and violence, pseudo-scientific evolutionary cognitive and neurological theories of religion, and the supposed end of all transcendent visions. Martin counters Turners’ metaphysics of nostalgia with a realistic assessment, or at least a wager for a simple human axial hope for transcendence. “Where Teehan (the cognitive scientist) suspects faith (aka ‘blind faith’) as socially dangerous, Toscano (the Marxist) celebrates a dangerous faith as at the same time our human glory, for if we have fully determined knowledge we deny any human hope of a better world to come” (p. 218).

Martin indicates that nothing less than a theory of human action is lurking here. “Our human ‘good causes’ shape and inform our horizons, our inspirations and aspirations, and are therefore ‘causal’ in exactly the same way as fighting for justice is causal. The ‘causes of things’ lie ahead of us and are within us, as well as pushing us from behind and acting on us from without. That is what ‘agency’ means” (p. 219). Martin’s final words are those of a realist Christian social scientist: “What Teehan’s perspective (of scientific naturalism) fails to grasp is the absence of conceptions like agency and liberation, let alone rational suasion, justice and truth, from the premises and discourse of science” (p. 219). That is why we cannot do without axial transcendent visions and the discourse of “the end of the social” cannot be taken seriously sociologically.

J O S É C A S A N O V A