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Introduction: multiple secularities

Ira Katznelson and Gareth Stedman Jones

The brilliant sculptor Pietro Torrigiano mutilated a terracotta Pietà he had executed in early sixteenth-century Spain. He was convicted by the Inquisition for defiling a sacred image, and was imprisoned in Seville until he died in 1528.[1] There are moments and places where artists can still be persecuted for violating religious norms. That, for instance, is the situation of Maqbool Fida Husain, a leading nonagenarian and Muslim Indian contemporary painter who lives in Dubai, afraid to return home because of the controversy that surrounds his nude depictions of Hindu goddesses. Think also of the Taliban's wilful destruction of the monumental Buddhas of Bamyan in 2001, said to be idols forbidden by sharia law. But such instances are in the main shocking exceptions.

This book treats religion and the political imagination in the period spanning this transformation. Until quite recently, a rather simple story prevailed. 'Secularisation' purported to describe a universal transition from a traditional religious picture of the world to a rational conception. Every society was thought to be caught up in this global trajectory, even if each progressed along it at different speeds. In this approach, the division and differentiation of church and state into separate spheres was identified with a progressive separation of politics from religion, an overall shift from a religious to a rational and scientific mentality, and a waning acceptance of religious authority. This perspective has, for some time, lost its capacity to persuade. And yet, something profound did happen. How should it be understood, studied and analysed?

Just as it used to be asked, if capitalism was of a piece why were the working classes it called into life so diverse?,[2] so it may also be wondered

[1] Sir William Stirling Maxwell, *Annals of the artists of Spain*, vol. 1 (London: John Nimmo, 1891), pp. 125–7. Vasari gives the date of Torrigiano's death as 1522, but it is more conventionally given as 1528.

[2] Aristide Zolberg, 'How many exceptionalisms?', in Ira Katznelson and Aristide Zolberg (eds.), *Working-class formation: nineteenth-century patterns in western Europe and the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 397. See also the chapters by Klausen and Scolnicov in this book.

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why the supposedly universal process of secularisation has generated such varied relationships between religion and the political imagination. Liberated from the constraints imposed by this once-prevalent linear theory, this book presents a portrait of multiple forms of secularity by investigating a wide spectrum of interactions between religion and politics. Focusing on this borderland, the case histories found in this volume probe its shifting locations, character and permeability, paying particular attention to the implications of what John Rawls once termed 'fair terms of social cooperation between citizens' who are 'divided by profound doctrinal conflict' involving 'a transcendent element not admitting of compromise'.[3]

I

History has played a joke upon once-vibrant expectations that religion would wane as modern life advanced. Religion still possesses a powerful hold upon political imaginations. Ever since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, questions concerning the relationship between religion and politics have acquired an urgency unknown during the preceding century. This may be the result of a discernible global bifurcation in the pattern of relations between church and state. Throughout much of North Africa, the Middle East, South Asia and North America, secular forms of polity have been under pressure. The terrorist attacks of 2001 in New York, 2005 in London and Bali, and 2008 in Mumbai have highlighted a worldwide resurgence of extreme theocratic forms of Islamism. These events have been accompanied by the growth of aggressive forms of Hindu nationalism and by the religious extremism of some Jewish settlers in Palestine. During this period, the Christian right rose to become a formidable policy-making force in the United States. At the same time, important North American social movements, notably those that have concerned civil rights and the environment, have also found important support in both mainstream and evangelical churches; while in Latin America an analogous role has been played by radical movements inspired by liberation theology.

By contrast, in much of western and southern Europe, religious observance and compliance with church doctrine, whether in Catholic or Protestant regions, has continued a decline, visible since the 1960s and not as yet showing any clear signs of reversal. In these areas,

[3] John Rawls, *Political liberalism: expanded edition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. xxv, xxvi.

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churches have steadily lost power and influence, and the trend has been one of loosening ever further the residual ties that connect states with the inherited Christian cultures over which they preside. Most European countries now proclaim their pluralist rather than their Protestant or Catholic identities. Those regions, in which large parts of the population still define themselves in confessional terms, Ulster Protestants or Polish Catholics for example, appear aberrant or anachronistic.

But even in those parts of Europe most marked by a historic decline in the attractiveness, influence and robustness of the region's historic churches, the reduction of religion to a dwindling private commitment has been accompanied by its vivid reappearance in the public sphere. No longer just a legacy of times past, the arrival of newcomers with different and deep religious commitments has raised questions long thought dormant, including issues about public dress, the content of schooling, offensive imagery or speech, and religious architecture. There has also been pointed disagreement about the admission of a non-Christian state into the European Community, and about references to Christianity in the preamble to the proposed constitution of the European Union.[4] Even here, the current century cannot be identified as fully secular.

The rise of political forms of militant religious sectarianism, the stubborn resistance of religion to predictions of an ineluctable disappearance, the patently incorrect ideas about a necessary linear religious falling off, and the vibrant presence of religious issues in public life as subjects of political dispute have manifestly put into question an inherited and once virtually unchallenged set of historical and comparative assumptions that equated modernity with secularisation. The historical narrative underpinning this assumption that religion ultimately could not thrive, or even survive, was built upon sweeping post-Enlightenment expectations put forward in the theories of nineteenth-century Positivists, especially Auguste Comte, with roots going back to the beginnings of the Enlightenment criticism of revealed religion – to Spinoza, Bayle, Voltaire, Hume and others. These thinkers had targeted supernatural belief as forms of superstition and ecclesiastical institutions as unwanted rivals to secular state authority. Science and the secularisation of everyday assumptions about the world, it was assumed, were progressively replacing religion and magic, just as

[4] For a thoughtful overview of recent trends, including the role religion continues to play in the life of Europe's Christian majority, see Grace Davie, 'Religion in Europe in the 21st century: the factors to take into account', *European Journal of Sociology* 47/2 (2006), 271–96.

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knowledge supplanted superstition and dogma. Religion originated in mankind's fear of the unknown. Science was the hallmark of disciplined curiosity about the world. Religion would recede as knowledge increased.

From the late nineteenth century this interpretation of the world was carried forward by social scientists. It was thought to be associated with the West's rise to global dominance through the rationalisation of its commercial transactions, its social relations and its governmental forms. By the early twentieth century, this orientation to religion within the emerging social sciences had become familiar. Variants of Comte's position were shared by most of the era's leading thinkers, including Karl Marx, John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer. In the form in which it was depicted by Émile Durkheim, the first truly modern sociologist of religion, the process of social differentiation and its impact on the reduction of religion became the prevailing orthodoxy. In the most influential account of this process, Max Weber's *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* of 1904, the meticulous Calvinist accounting of time and expenditure, originally tethered to the promise of salvation, was said to provide underpinnings for the abstinent and calculative mentality of early capitalism. That in turn supplied the crucial psychic component at the core of the extraordinary expansion of commercial and industrial capitalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[5] A half-century later, theories that projected a further, even inevitable, compartmentalisation and decline of religion in an increasingly disenchanted and differentiated world had achieved nearly canonical status.[6]

[5] When canon law held sway in the West, secularisation referred 'to the legal (canonical) process whereby a "religious" person left the cloister to return to the "world" and its temptations, becoming thereby a "secular" person'. In analogous fashion, secularisation for Weber entailed the migration of such a religious calling to the worldly sphere. José Casanova, *Public religions in the modern world* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 13.

[6] So much so, Casanova comments, that 'the theory of secularization may be the only theory which was able to attain a truly paradigmatic status within the modern social sciences… Indeed, the consensus was such that not only did the theory remain uncontested but apparently it was not even necessary to test it, since everybody took it for granted.' Casanova, *Public religions*, p. 17. An account of this intellectual history linking antagonism to religion and the birth of modern social science is provided by Jeffrey K. Hadden, 'Towards desacralizing secularization theory', *Social Forces* 65 (1987), 587–611. A fascinating intellectual history that lies just to the side of this book is the debate between Karl Löwith and Hans Blumenberg about the status of secularisation in the birth of modernity: See Karl Löwith, *Meaning in history* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949); Hans Blumenberg, *The legitimacy of the modern age* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983). For Löwith, the modern idea of progress represents a 'secularisation' of biblical eschatology. For Blumenberg, this central modern idea was not an extension of traditional religious positions but a novel departure, a secular answer to the same zone of questions once answered by religion. 'What mainly occurred in the process that is interpreted as secularization', Blumenberg wrote, '. . . should be described

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The chapters brought together in this volume have been written by historians, sociologists and analysts of politics. All move well beyond the formerly influential ideas about religion and society, church and state, prevalent in the human sciences up until a generation ago.[7] These chapters put forward not one grand historical sweep, but a diversity of paths; not one narrative, but many. They resist even residual inclusive claims, those, for example, which argue that religion has lost its efficacious capacity to motivate thought and action under modern conditions, that religion has been permanently reduced to the zone of the private outside the public sphere in much of the world, or that religion has come to reflect deeper and more important causal factors like material patterns, the diffusion of scientific knowledge, or the growing capacity of human beings to control their natural and social environments. These chapters point in fresh directions to suggest how comparative and historically informed studies of religion and politics might help us understand the interplay between religion and the political imagination under modern conditions.

But the aim of this book is not to replace unconvincing theory by a demonstration of empirical diversity. To be sure, the instances discussed penetratingly call into question the position Charles Taylor has called 'mainstream secularisation'.[8] Much of the raw material upon which that thesis was built was a stylised history of the seventeenth-century scientific revolution (pre-eminently the story of Galileo) and the discredit or abandonment of 'sacred history' which followed during the time of the Enlightenment. But even within its own terms this story is contradictory. In England, for example, from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, there developed a strong alliance between science and a Christian-based natural philosophy, and there proved to be many ways there, and elsewhere, for Darwinism and Christianity to coexist. The United States shows how it is possible for an explicitly secular order, grounded not in divine right but in popular sovereignty, to house an

not as the *transposition* of authentically theological contents into secularized alienation from their origin, but rather as the *reoccupation* of answer positions that had become vacant and whose corresponding questions could not be eliminated', p. 65. See also the influential argument put forward by Carl Schmitt, that all political concepts are derived from theology. Carl Schmitt, *Political theology: four chapters on the concept of sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[7] The book's chapters make no pretence of covering the whole world. There is no discussion of East Asia, the Middle East, Latin America or Africa. Full coverage, though, is not the book's purpose.

[8] See Charles Taylor, *A secular age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 431, for the position entailing claims that religious faith and practice have weakened and that there has been a contraction to the capability, ambition and effects of religious institutions as a consequence of social differentiation, rationalisation and social knowledge associated with modernity.

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uncommonly religious population and to be exceptionally hospitable to religious vitality. This is the case despite the existence of strong distinctions between the public and the private, the religious and the secular, and despite an arguably increasing commitment to the modern values of individualism, voluntarism and pluralism grown over time. Unlike France, and much of Europe, where 'the Enlightenment has been configured as a *freedom from belief* . . . in the United States, the Enlightenment became something very different . . . a *freedom to believe*'.[9] This predominantly, but not exclusively, American experience has enabled the emergence of worlds in which doctrines, organisations, forms of worship and religious practices are only loosely coupled, with the effect that the meaning of religion itself becomes open to a plethora of possibilities.

Recognising the inadequacy of once-dominant views, the chapters in this volume press forward with a critique that has been proceeding ever since David Martin famously objected to secularisation theory as inherently facile, distorting and ideological, suggesting the concept should be purged from the lexicon of social science.[10] The challenge he posed is now well advanced. Many historical studies have now offered caveats and correctives to the mechanical and one-dimensional view.[11] Our purpose is less to bury older unsupportable claims than it is to point to more productive theory and to help advance more persuasive ways of

[9] Davie, 'Religion', 289.

[10] David Martin, 'Towards eliminating the concept of secularisation', in J. Gould (ed.), *Penguin survey of the social sciences* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965); reprinted in David Martin, *The religious and the secular: studies in secularization* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969). The effort to rethink secularisation was motivated in part by new empirical work that raised questions about the adequacy of traditional views. Especially important was Gerhard Lenski's *The religious factor* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961). For a contemporaneous overview, identifying six different meanings and calling for a moratorium on the use of the term, see Larry Shiner, 'The concept secularization in empirical research', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 6 (1967), 202–20.

[11] An important instance is Hugh McLeod's *Religion and the people of western Europe, 1789–1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981). McLeod stresses how variations to relationships among churches, urbanisation, clerical and anti-clerical impulses, and political disputations shaped the variety of outcomes. Three years later, an influential collection edited by Philip Hammond, *The sacred in a secular age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), called for a reassessment as 'in a period of religious decline the sacred seems remarkably alive' (p. 4). A similar point has been made by José Casanova, who asks, 'who still believes in the *myth* of secularization', in the simple form of the steady and sure subsumption of the secular by the profane? *Public religions*, p. 11. Writing in this spirit, the sociologist of religion Rodney Stark has offered 'final words . . . as secularization is laid to rest'. Rodney Stark, 'Secularization, R.I.P.', *Sociology of Religion* 60 (1999), 249–73.

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bringing together studies of religious change in the post-medieval world with accounts of political developments.

Such a venture, though, cannot proceed without grappling with the issues designated by secularisation and the predicaments for religion that it has identified. Not without a touch of irony, just over a decade after he counselled doing away with the concept, David Martin published a 'general theory of secularization' arguing that however much the too standard version fails to account for the array of modern experiences and forms, secularisation should be considered as a contextual variable, a feature of modern life that helps constitute a diversity of patterns. The religious universe of faiths, theologies and institutions did not remain constant; it developed – sometimes receding, marked by a withdrawal from churches and denominations, and sometimes marked by distinctly increased commitments and participation – within the ambit of the varieties of modern politics, economics and society. The aim, from this vantage-point, is not to decide whether secularisation exists or not, but to better specify the factors that affect the particular characteristics of religion at different times and places.[12]

This book, likewise, does not abjure any and all notions of secularisation. Rather than abandon the term and its questions entirely, it accepts as a point of departure Taylor's observation that 'belief in God isn't quite the same thing in 1500 and 2000'. With belief and religious practice having lost their compulsory status, we have been taken 'from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others ... Belief in God is no longer axiomatic. There are alternatives.'[13] These changes, moreover, came not only from outside religion, but from inside as well, especially through impulses towards reform. After the Reformation, all Christian faiths, including Catholicism against its own fierce preferences, became denominations.

It is this epochal change in the standing and character of religion in the western world – a change that transcended the way medieval thinkers conceptualised the division between the religious and the secular, and

[12] David Martin, *A general theory of secularisation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969). For a discussion of the development of his views, see David Martin, 'The secularisation issue: prospect and retrospect', *British Journal of Sociology* 42 (1991), 465–74. A notable contribution Martin makes is that of insisting that theory focus on differences despite similarities, rather than merely the other way around. A more recent overview along these lines building on Martin's work is David Lyon, 'Rethinking secularization: retrospect and prospect', *Review of Religious Research* 26 (1985), 228–43.

[13] Taylor, *Secular age*, pp. 13, 3.

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modified the profound capacity religious organisations and doctrines possess to organise, manage and control patterns of life, thought and behaviour in the worldly realm – that orients Taylor's magisterial rumination on what he calls 'the secular age'. This era is distinct from times past because religion and belief have become options among other possibilities even in the most stringently devout of places, if sometimes only by means of personal withdrawal and private affirmation. While the chronology of this shift distinguishing between then and now is not fixed or the same across locations, and while religious cultures were heterogeneous before and after, the distinction between 'yesterday' and 'today' broadly holds. And there is no turning back, no prospect of a return to yesterday.

The instances the chapters chronicle lie inside this movement starting off from what Taylor calls a 'naïve' circumstance, in which it was not necessary to think about religion as a distinct set of commitments and practices, and where a penumbra of faith existed as a background condition for all, and ending with a 'reflective' framework in which God, belief, and the encompassing and directive powers of religion no longer could be taken for granted. With this transformation, claims of religious organisations, clergy and doctrines largely came to be confined to a distinct domain, but not one ever entirely divorced from nation states and their politics.[14] This grand change, moreover, affected the status of religion not only in the West, but in areas of the globe touched by western conquest, by opening new options and patterns of contestation.

Before the transformation designated by secularisation was set in train, Christians, Muslims and Jews in Europe, North Africa and the Ottoman Empire had no option but to live encompassing and distinctively Christian, Muslim and Jewish lives, while conversion could rightfully move only in one direction. The existence of other faiths could be recognised, but in any given location and political space only one faith could dominate, separated by high walls from the others. After the transformation, plurality and the growth of choice became hallmarks of religious life, not in a manner that was identical across instances, and with no necessary diminution of private and public religious life.

Religion was supplanted in many places by other bases for political legitimacy. Across a range of regimes, modern states asserted their distinctive standing, rejecting claims of supremacy or control by the church over the state. Of course such claims had often been resisted by

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

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kings and courts, but with the Reformation's insistence on voluntarism and liberty of conscience, the impulse towards separate or at least highly distinctive spheres was significantly strengthened. Modern states of all kinds ordinarily do not utilise religion or the clergy to ground their claims to be sovereign over people and territory, to recruit personnel, to organise their ensemble of institutions, or motivate their normative stories. In this way, the frontiers of religion and politics became more varied and more open, and more charged as sites of conflict and uncertainty. Even in the first explicitly secular constitutional state in North America, the status of Christianity in public life has been a subject of controversy and division ever since its foundation.

An affirmation of a specific historical conjuncture and a large-scale adjustment to the condition, place and possibilities for religion designated by secularisation need not imply a 'once upon a time' fixed treatment of the pre-modern period anterior to the vast changes of modern life. Such an orientation is present, for example, in the idea that once there was a moment when to be a Christian and to be a citizen was the same thing. This wooden supposition is undermined and complicated, among many circumstances, by the diversity of beliefs in late Antiquity, by the presence of the Jews in various parts of medieval Europe and by the continual battle against heresy which preoccupied the medieval church. Indeed, the idea that all citizens were Christian was always more of a brute political imposition (the continuity between Christianity and the imperial cult of Antiquity) than a sociological reality. What this suggests more generally is that 'secularisation' should not be understood as a dominant and all-encompassing trajectory, but rather as one component of a larger and more contradictory history, which contains moments of sacralisation as well.

In rejecting one-directional views of secularisation and in recognising the vast expansion of possibilities, Taylor rightly takes care to reject its mirror image – the idea that religion has remained a constant despite massive transformations to how people live. 'On the contrary', he writes:

> the present scene, shorn of earlier forms, is different and unrecognisable to any earlier epoch. It is marked by an unheard of pluralism of outlooks, religious and non- and anti-religious, in which the number of possible positions seems to be increasing without end. It is marked in consequence by a great deal of fragilisation, and hence movement between different outlooks. It naturally depends on one's milieu, but it is harder and harder to find a niche where either belief or unbelief go without saying . . . Religious belief now exists in a field where there is also a wide range of other spiritual options. But the

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interesting story is not simply one of decline, but also of a new placement of the sacred or spiritual in relation to individual and social life.[15]

This, too, is secularisation, but secularisation with a difference. Spiritual life was not slain by modern conditions. It was reconstituted, reformed and recomposed in a field of possibilities that range from self-conscious and powerful reassertions of orthodox religion at one pole to militant unbelief and laicism at the other. The large space in-between has been occupied by once unheard-of combinations and configurations of lived religion.[16]

At issue is not whether but how religion survives, acts and influences. Understanding secularisation to compose not a single and global trajectory, but a congerie of mechanisms and social processes, the authors of the chapters in this book specify what happened, and consider the particular conditions, pressures and actions that shaped those results. By encouraging historically grounded ways to approach religion as a contingent and variable political phenomenon, they do more than call simple linear understandings into question, though they do that sharply. By constructing these instances analytically, the chapters widen the scope of our understanding of secularisation as a heterogeneous process, and encourage a more precise and more comparative approach to studies of religion and the political imagination that appreciates how secularisation broadened religion's variety. Located at the junction of history, social science and political thought, the chapters privilege questions that link the dynamics of religious change and diversity to the character and actions of political regimes, and they assess the implications of those relationships for key outcomes, especially prospects for toleration.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 437. Taylor's reflective history, which reminds us that secularity does not imply the absence but the diversification of religion and religious possibility, stops short of offering guidelines that might shape comparative-historical research. *A secular age*, moreover, is concerned in the main with themes of immanence and transcendence, with religious experience and questions about human convictions, with gains and losses for cultures as religious life has shifted in tone and character, and with the narrowing of the self and the flattening of the good under modern conditions. It is concerned less with matters that concern politics and the state, or the consequences of a variety of patterns of interaction between religious ideas and institutions and political regimes for religious persecution and intergroup toleration, each of which is a central theme of this book.

[16] This process also eroded older possibilities. As religious plurality advanced with the Reformation, the central ritual of the Mass was abolished for millions of Europeans; dance, drama and music associated with worship were suppressed; and various rites of passage were downgraded. New churches insisted on more demanding tests of religious adherence. Catholicism became less open, and more doctrinaire. Impulses of reason and control established tests for valid thought, tolerable practices and acceptable forms of material and symbolic expression.

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