

THE SECULARIZATION  
OF THE  
EUROPEAN MIND  
IN THE  
NINETEENTH CENTURY

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# I

## INTRODUCTION

### I

I want to write a historical preface to the treatment of a theme much talked of in our contemporary faculties of sociology and history. The theme is not philosophical, in the common tradition of this Gifford foundation. Its matter concerns students of human society; especially students of society in the relatively recent past. The historian starts to feel scruple when confronted by the will of Lord Gifford. For Lord Gifford wanted to know what was true, or wanted men to confirm what he already believed to be true. The historians of the last hundred years have eschewed, or have looked as though they eschewed, any attempt to answer questions on whether a belief is true, and have devoted their endeavour to questions appropriate to their discipline, why belief arose, how it was believed, how its axioms affected society, and in what manner it faded away. Lord Gifford preferred lecturers who prove that witches are powerless. Historians refrained from any such bold assertion, and asked themselves only how men came to think witches powerless when their power looked obvious. And therefore the historian, confronted by Lord Gifford's will, suffers a twinge of scruple.

A student of this theme, however, may console himself that he is nearer to Lord Gifford than the fringe of some subsidiary enquiry which can be relegated to a trivial appendix in a future system of philosophy. Lord Gifford wanted his men to diffuse the study of natural theology 'in the widest sense of that term, in other words the knowledge of God', and 'of the foundation of ethics'. Historical study is not knowledge of God but part of it is knowledge about knowledge of God. It looks at first sight as though Gifford wanted us to deal in metaphysics whereas the historian is bound to deal in human beings. But, religion being what it is, the relation between a society and the systems of metaphysics professed within it may easily bear upon the nature of those metaphysics. Though religious doctrines reach upward towards a realm conceived (usually) as beyond the material world, they are also doctrines about human beings; at least imply doctrines about human beings. History can affect

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divinity, by discovering new documents like scrolls from the desert. It can affect divinity, also, in more indirect ways. If it were proved by historians, for example, that whole societies spent untold centuries believing in a god or gods and then within a hundred years suffered such an intellectual *bouleversement* that they no longer believed in any such person or things, it would have momentous consequences for those whose business is not history but a study of the nature of religious experience.

So far, then, by way of dismissing the tiny scruple that comes like a shadow cast over the lecturer's desk by the grateful memory of Lord Gifford and his generosity.

The next people whom I must dispose of, if I can, are those who say that the subject which I propose to you does not exist. They say that secularization only exists in the minds of those who wish it to occur and who are puzzled that it does not occur; in short that it is merely a word of propaganda; and that we shall therefore do better not to use it. Their excuse lies in the perception that a goodly number of those who write about secularization write out of dogma and not out of open-minded enquiry. The dogma has been caricatured by David Martin as 'God is dead. Therefore secularization must be occurring. Therefore secularization is a coherent notion.' 'The whole concept appears as a tool of counter-religious ideologies which identify the "real" element in religion for polemical purposes and then arbitrarily relate it to the notion of a unitary and irreversible process.' The word, says this sociologist, 'should be erased from the sociological dictionary'.<sup>1</sup>

Without subscribing to any of these hard sayings I think the warning is salutary. This is a subject infested by the doctrinaire.

But what of a dictionary which concerns us more intimately, that of the historian? The historian often has to use words to describe large processes. He finds it handy to write of the Renaissance. Driven by his enquiries or by ruthless critics, he finds it hard to say precisely what the Renaissance was: a mysterious movement of ideas in men and society incapable, by its nature, of statistical definition and frequently failing to conform to the expectations of romantic historians of culture or philosophy or politics. From these difficulties of definition it does not follow that the umbrella-word is misused. It is often easier to be sure that a process is happening than to define precisely what the process contains and how it happens. It is easier to be sure that there was a Renaissance in the fifteenth century than to explain what you mean when you say that there was a

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Renaissance in the fifteenth century. In this respect secularization, as a large idea used by historians, is no different from other such large ideas. By the nature of historical science, vagueness, blurred edges, recognition of the unchartable mystery in human motives and attitudes and decisions, are no necessary obstacle to an authentic though broad judgment in history. At least they offer scope for that humility of heart and openness of mind which are proverbially said to be indispensable to historical understanding.

Descriptions of historical process often suffer from one concealed assumption, and none more than the theme before us: the assumption that all was well, or at least was plain and coherent, at the point where the process is believed to start; the historiographical sin known as *Decline and Fall* history; where the writer knows that he is setting out, for example, to describe a steady decline in civilization until he reaches the point which he thinks of as 'the triumph of barbarism and religion', and consequently, like Edward Gibbon with the Antonines, must start with an idyllic picture of the hill-top from which men began to slide. Like Kenelm Digby or the romantic historians of the Middle Ages a century and a half ago, they imagined an age of faith, where bishops were prime ministers, religion the only source of physics or astronomy or morality, kings deposable by popes, all art inspired by gospel narratives, and theology queen of sciences. From this paradise or this hell, according to the point of view, all that followed was decline or progress. Then any change in constitutions or in society since the thirteenth century can be labelled secularization.<sup>2</sup> A man enquires into a process and understands the process so far as the evidence allows him, and then postulates an imaginary picture of society before he starts his enquiry in order to make the process easier for him to understand, not just as one thing after another, but as process.

Paradise or hell. Two can play at this game and we need to be on the watch for both of them. 'The nineteenth century', say you, 'is the age par excellence of secularization.' You are imagining a religious society before the nineteenth century which never existed. Look how respectable in French upper-class society was atheism before the end of the reign of Louis XIV. Look at the statistics of illegitimate births in Toulouse: 1668-75: 1/59; 1676-99: 1/36; 1700-19: 1/17; 1720-31: 1/10.6; 1732-43: 1/8.4; 1751: 1/7.2; 1788: 1/4. From figures like these you might ask yourself, as a brilliant enquirer has asked, what would be left of the French Church of the eighteenth century if you removed from it:

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all mere formality  
all mere rejection of the world, with no religious motive  
all magic  
all Manichaeism  
all religion of fear

What, he asks, would remain? 'Have we not too long called by the name of Christianity a jumble of practices and doctrines which had only a remote connexion with the gospel message – and, if so, have we to talk of *dechristianisation*?'<sup>3</sup>

The point is taken. We cannot begin our quest for secularization by postulating a dream-society that once upon a time was not secular. The world drank barrels of sack and fornicated though Zeal-of-the-land Busy stalked through Bartholomew Fair crying of enormity. Yet still we have the uneasy feeling that a question is somewhere begged. Remove from Christianity all mere conformity – when is conformity mere? Remove from Christianity all religion of fear – is it certain that religion may not be religion of fear and still authentic? You can be aware that there was never a world that was not secular. And yet you need to beware of defining your religion in narrow terms with the object of enabling yourself thereafter to plead that 'true' religion never declined, and so to make the quest for secularization into a quest for a misnomer. When describing a historical process, you may as easily place your unproven axiom at the end of the process as at the beginning.

If you place your historical axiom at the beginning, you say that there was never a merry world since fairies left off dancing and priests could take wives. If you place your historical axiom at the end, you assume that religion as seen round us is 'true' religion and everything not part of that is not true religion. Therefore anything jettisoned over the last two centuries, like belief in witches or belief in devils or belief in Noah's flood, was the dropping of the irrelevant, or of noxious clutter, and has not touched the gold of religious faith and practice.

Of course I do not deny that such stripping has been in part the banishment of clutter. At the moment I only want to speak a warning against treating the axiom as a basis for a view of a historical process which ought to be judged, not from any axiom whatever, but from evidence.

I next need to defend the plan to talk more about the nineteenth century than the eighteenth.

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This subject, though not quite in this form, was invented by students of the European mind in the eighteenth century. Here, in the years between 1650 and 1750, the age of Sir Isaac Newton and Leibniz, of Fontenelle and Spinoza, of John Locke and David Hume, and finally of Diderot and Voltaire, were the seminal years of modern intellectual history. In these years the Middle Ages ended at last. Here men could study the distant origins of modern science, the beginnings of the idea of progress, the first historical criticism of the Biblical records, the discoveries of the true nature of other great religions and cultures of the world. If you want to know about this theme, it may be said, you must ask questions about the Enlightenment, and its revolution in men's thinking. Old-fashioned histories of this subject dealt in the Enlightenment, usually in nothing but the Enlightenment.

No one denies that that age was seminal in the European mind. The distant origins of modern science, the idea of progress, the first true investigation of the Bible, these were all momentous. Why then do I call these histories – Lecky on rationalism or on morals, Bury on the law of progress, Robertson on the history of Free Thought – *old-fashioned*? Because, by the progress of enquiry, the subject as we now have it is not quite the same subject.

As we meet the theme today, it was invented by the faculties of social science, not by the faculties of history. The founders of modern sociology could hardly conceive of any branch of enquiry more pressing than this.

Durkheim was the nearest claimant to the proud title of founder of the modern social sciences. Looking back to Auguste Comte as his master, he accepted Comte's axiom that religion was one of the foundations of social and moral life. As a positivist by education and early conviction, he was bound rather to observe and criticize religion than to practise it. But he had no doubt that social life hung as firm upon religion as religion upon social life, and the more experienced he became the more prominent became this aspect of his thinking. In order to isolate the problem he selected a small and closely-knit society with limited evidence, the aborigines of Australia and their totemism, and wrote: *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*. In this study he believed that he proved how a society, to cohere at all, shares principles or axioms, the beliefs which are necessary if it is to remain a society; and how religion is a part of these shared principles. He always saw religion in the context of a social pattern of order, of the self-preservation of society as society.



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Making his ultimate distinctions between sacred and secular, beliefs and rituals, he brought out as no one before him brought out, the non-rational, sub-conscious inarticulate elements in a society, its moral axioms and its attitudes to the world. The analysis became afterwards, and has remained, controversial. But it was an analysis of such power and penetration that it changed men's ideas over the place of religion in society. Henceforth no one could any more write the history of modern religion in the terms which Lecky and Bury thought sensible. You proved that Noah's flood did not cover the whole earth, and so you weakened the authority of the Bible, and in this way reason started to drive religion out of men's minds – these well-trodden paths of intellectual history suddenly looked as though they stopped short of entering the forest which they were formerly supposed to open to the explorer. Instead of solving the riddle, they were superficial. They talked more about symptoms than causes. Durkheim, whose attention was fixed upon modern society and not at all upon history, changed the conditions of a momentous historical enquiry.

The Victorian father goes to church. The Edwardian son stays at home. Is 'reason' the cause? Did 'reason' prove or suggest that the activity was unprofitable, or meaningless, or even harmful? Did 'reason' suggest that the origins of religious awe lay in fear of earthquake or wind, uncontrollable terrors of nature, and now that we are afraid no longer we can do without awe? After Durkheim, no one who thought about the matter could answer these questions so easily and cheerfully.

Going to church is ritual. Do men believe something about the world and then make a ritual to express their belief? If so, when their belief about the world is shaken or disturbed, their practice of the ritual will weaken or fade away. But, perhaps, men sometimes make ritual, and then the ritual needs explanation. Sometimes prayer comes before creed instead of after. Perhaps the disturbance to ritual is what matters, some half-conscious distaste for its underlying symbolism, and disturbance to belief is but secondary. Durkheim showed that a society held certain things sacred, but to assert the cause of the sacredness of this or that object easily ran beyond evidence that anyone could get. The sacredness of an object was not caused by rational thinking. Therefore the end of that sacredness could not be caused only by rational thinking.

Durkheim showed how the religious ideas of a society were related to their ultimate social values. Changes in religious ideas were

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bound to mean changes in ultimate values – or, rather, changes in ultimate values were bound to mean changes of religious ideas. The positivists, and every adherent of a scientific theory of society, began with the axiom, *religion is a social phenomenon*. But Durkheim, it is said by one of his expositors, accepts the axiom and yet comes near to inverting it into another axiom, *society is a religious phenomenon*.<sup>4</sup>

The student of reason and religion among aboriginal tribes might be presumed to be in error if he made from his observations too dogmatic inferences about reason and religion in western Europe. But without convincing the world of all his argument, Durkheim shattered the theories of intellectual advance which passed for orthodoxy among Whig intellectual historians of western Europe. *If* religion declined in western Europe, orthodoxy supposed that it declined because men got knowledge and education and so rid themselves of irrationality. Durkheim shattered the axiom that men could, or had, rid themselves of irrationality.

Therefore the new school of sociology, stemming ultimately from Auguste Comte, but with Durkheim as its real founder, focussed attention upon the relation between societies and their religion; that is, among other things, the place of religion in contemporary society. They began to approach the problem of secular and sacred with fresh insight. Thereby they cut obliquely across the mental habits of historians of intellectual Europe. The problem of 'enlightenment' began to turn into the new problem of 'secularization'.

This interest of sociology in religions was fostered by the second of its founder-giants. Max Weber is known to English readers of history as the author of the thesis on *religion and the rise of capitalism*. And as this thesis is regarded by most historians as fallacious, they are inclined to undervalue Weber. But the famous title of Tawney's book on that theme represents an important truth about Weber. Convinced like Durkheim that religion was creative in forms of social life and organization, he looked to find examples from an unusual range of historical sources in the sixteenth century; in order to show how not merely moral consensus but social and economic structure were conditioned by the nature of religion in society. Whether or not the particular evidence stood up to the weight which Weber thrust upon it, all his system of enquiry went to show how religion was immensely more powerful in intangible or hardly to be discovered ways, than in the upper intellectual assertions, that is, formulas in which it was taught or understood. When he argued

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that Calvinist ethic led insensibly towards the spirit of mind which lay beneath a capitalist economy, he was not so crude as to argue that this happened only by the pronouncements of religious leaders, or suppose that capitalism owed its origins merely to an open mind about credit and rates of interest among Reformers. The Reformation made all secular life into a vocation of God. It was like a baptism of the secular world. It refused any longer to regard the specially religious calling of priest or monk as higher in moral scale than the calling of cobbler or of prince. Christian energy was turned away from the still and the contemplative towards action. The man who would leave the world turned into the man who would change it. Religion centred upon ritual veered towards religion centred upon ethic. Supreme good which once was Being now began to be Doing. Once they waited for the New Jerusalem which should descend from heaven, now they resolved not to cease from strife till they had built it in this green and pleasant land.

The historical right and wrong of Weber's famous theory hardly concerns us here (though there is an element in it which touches us later). What concerns us now is the cutting of new social theory into the traditions of intellectual enquiry pursued in schools of history. Like Durkheim, though in a way very different from Durkheim, Weber thrust before the public the power of ethical attitudes, related to religion, within a relatively advanced society. Weber's thesis caused controversy for more than one reason. It was controverted partly because it was wrong – that is, what Weber said about the Reformation had truth but its link with the origins of capitalist economies was more tenuous than he supposed. It was controverted also because it was unfamiliar to the habits of mind prevailing in schools of history. The intellectual historian of that age thought that a man had a new idea and this new idea was slowly accepted in a society until the attitude of the society changed. Calvin was not rigid against lending money at interest, and so the willingness of Christians to accept interest became ever more common. Some of those who assailed Weber assailed him because they supposed that this was all that he was saying.

The study of the history of ideas moved into a new phase. You could no longer explain the movement of minds by seizing only upon what was expressed in formal propositions, articulately. These could be due to movements of men's minds which ran deeper, of which men's outward teachings were more result than cause. Simultaneously, historical study moved away from élites, a history of kings

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and prime ministers and patriarchs, to seek out feelings and ways of life among ordinary men and women; a history not of the visible few but of the invisible many.

That is why the problem of secularization is not the same as the problem of enlightenment. Enlightenment was of the few. Secularization is of the many.

Naturally, this made the historical problem far more difficult. That is why it has produced dogmas more frequently than evidence. To track the course of one man is hard enough for the historian. A single mind is mystery enough; what shall we say of the 'mind' of Britain or even the 'mind' of Europe? But the social question, of course, is the more important question. Leslie Stephen became a clergyman and then suffered conversion and became an agnostic. Why this happened is an interesting study. But of itself it tells us little enough about the social and intellectual condition of the age which made it possible.

Paul Hazard wrote a justly famous book, called in a literal translation *The Crisis of the European Conscience*. Here was a study of an intellectual shattering of Christian foundations at the end of the seventeenth century, the background of the European Enlightenment. That shattering was an intellectual crux in the appearance of habits of mind that concern our enquiry. The book reported the arguments of an intellectual élite. The social historians have been little interested in intellectual élites until their conclusions are seized upon by a society which is ready to seize upon them.

Father Mersenne provided a celebrated statistic: that the Paris of 1623 housed no fewer than 50,000 atheists. That is a statistic useful if we want to confute men who imagine so religious a world of their dreams. Here men are complaining of men's irreligion now and they can console themselves that Paris in 1623 had 50,000 atheists.

This phalanx of 50,000 atheists has marched into all the books of reference. I do not like its smell. By what Gallup poll or mass observation did Father Mersenne discover the opinions of 50,000 men or women, and of all the other men or women who did not share the opinion of the 50,000? This statistic is no statistic. It is on a par with the pious severity of the Princess Palatine, when nearly a hundred years later she refused to believe that 'in all Paris, clerical or lay, there are more than a hundred people who have the true faith and even who believe in our Lord'. We shall not take Father Mersenne too literally. Just at the same time that he counted his

heads, another observer reckoned that Paris held five atheists and three of those were Italians.<sup>5</sup>

Even if we could rely on information like this, it concerns élites: academic debate, aristocrats speculating over their soirées, blue-stockings in French salons, middle-class merchants arguing in cafés. Voltaire refused to let men talk atheism in front of the maids. 'I want my lawyer, tailor, valets, even my wife, to believe in God; I think that if they do I shall be robbed less and cheated less.' So long as the argument kept out of the kitchen, it does not quite meet our needs. The attitude went on into the nineteenth century, if not beyond. Mérimée said to Cousin at dinner, 'Yes, you go to mass, but you are only a hypocrite, and you don't believe any more than I do.' Cousin said 'Sh! Look out for the servants. You can be cynical in front of the important but not in front of the unimportant. . . Do you believe that I could make the governess and the cook understand the morality of my philosophy? It is easier if I appear to accept the form of their faith; because at bottom I believe as they do, though in another form; in their faith they find the virtue to serve me honestly and devotedly.'<sup>6</sup> The middle class of the nineteenth century still refrained, for the most part, from being atheists in front of the maids. But after a time this was not much use, because the maids could read these things for themselves.

Here we enter one of the difficult and inconclusively debated problems of contemporary historical writing: the nature of intellectual history. At first sight a study of secularization examines how men's minds work; whether by new knowledge, or better logic, or prophetic insight. Therefore this is a proper subject of intellectual history; which would start with Descartes and move through Bayle and the new science into the Enlightenment and pass via the Encyclopaedists into Kant or the Utilitarians and the new philosophers of the nineteenth century. Half a century ago this, and nothing but this, would have formed the substance of this course of lectures. A man gets an idea, or proves a proposition. He advocates it. Slowly, because it fits the available evidence, it commends itself to other minds. The pebble is thrown into the pond and ripples move outwards. A hundred years later the idea becomes axiom of a whole society, accepted by a mass of people who do not understand the reasons behind it. Intellectual history moves like the advance of a scientific theory, say the force of gravity or the structure of the solar system. Of course the proposition need not be true to work in this way. To say nothing of erroneous theories at one time believed

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by the people, like ether, we cannot forget a proposition of Rousseau which is still potent though everyone knows it to be false: *Men are born free but everywhere they are in chains*. Many shelves of reputable books used to assert that Rousseau's ideas were 'the cause' of the French Revolution.

Modern social science made too sharp an impact upon the study of history to make that traditional theory of intellectual history either pleasing or credible. The theory of historical truth in Karl Marx is easy to caricature; but it unexpectedly proved to be one of the most influential ideas in the inheritance which he left for western Europe. Man's material advance controls the nature of his society and the nature of the society begets the ideas which enable that society both to be stable and to advance. Then the social scientists came in to look for the social origins of social ideas. Men did not need Rousseau to tell them that they were hungry. If you are hungry it is impossible not to know it. Because they were hungry they started to listen to Rousseau. And when men like Durkheim came into the debate, they brought with them knowledge that a society has a 'collective consciousness', consisting of a body of feelings and beliefs which are shared by the average majority of the society; together with the insight that this body of feelings and beliefs is not the same as the sum total of all the individual beliefs of the separate members of the society, but has a life of its own, a development independent, in some manner, of the individual opinions in the mass. Durkheim found this easy to see in primitive peoples. He began to apply it by analogy, and fruitfully, to modern Europe. Society threw up the idea of God because it needed him. Now it needs him no longer, and he will die.

The phrase, *the secularization of the European mind*, is a phrase of Heinrich Hermelink.<sup>7</sup> He meant, the intellectual processes of intellectual history. But if the social historians are right we ought to be asking a different and more fundamental question: what changes in economic or social order lay under the willingness of a society to jettison notions which hitherto were conceived as necessary to its very existence?

We still find both approaches. It seems to depend a little upon the standpoint from which a man starts. Vernon Pratt<sup>8</sup> has no doubt that the cause of all is change in intellectual ideas and better logic; that clever men thought cleverly and unclever slowly followed. To the contrary, Alasdair MacIntyre<sup>9</sup> has no doubt that the social process caused the intellectual process, that ordinary men and women

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experienced new forms of social life, and then clever men were clever in suiting their mental gymnastics to the new forms. 'It is not the case', he wrote (p. 54), 'that men first stopped believing in God and in the authority of the Church, and then started behaving differently. It seems clear that men first of all lost any overall social agreement as to the right ways to live together, and so ceased to be able to make sense of any claims to moral authority.' Putting this question in an antique form, as the early Victorians in their troubled time might have put it: does Doubt produce Sin, or does Sin produce Doubt? Vernon Pratt, the intellectual theorist, is sure that Doubt begets Sin though he would not call it Sin. Alasdair MacIntyre, who though a philosopher is also a social theorist, restates in a fascinating modern form the old conviction that Sin begets Doubt.

The philosopher certainly (because concepts can be precise) and the social theorist possibly (because social classes, especially theoretical social classes, behave less variably than people) can deal in tidier worlds than the historian. Early social scientists were often trained in a school derived from French positivism. And though the association between social sciences and a narrow positivist background has long been broken as the subject broadened its base and deepened its enquiries, we still find a certain attitude, sometimes, which dismisses the intellectual aspect of this double problem as unworthy of further consideration. Nothing has more easily caused the unwarranted assertion of dogmas.

Social history or intellectual history? Orthodox Christianity was proved untrue because miracles became improbable, and Genesis was proved to be myth by science, and philosophical axioms were transformed by intellectual processes derived from the Enlightenment, and the intellectual revolution passed from universities to newspaper, and newspaper to drawing-room, and drawing-room to housekeeper's parlour, and newspaper to working-men's clubs – are *ideas* what move the souls of men? Or did the working-man, thrust by economic development into a new and more impersonal class-structure, develop a consciousness of his class, and distrust or hatred of the middle class, and find the churches middle-class institutions, and start to beat them with whatever sticks lay to hand, and found the weapons of atheist pamphleteers and potted handbooks of evolutionary science? Did men's minds move because educated men told them their axioms about God needed changing, or did they move because they felt a need to be 'free' from their fellow-men and that seemed to mean being 'free' from God? Was the process

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the result of new knowledge, or the result of a new development of society?

The problem is easier – easier for the historian, I mean – if the Marxist historians were right. To see why German radicals of the 1840s hated churches is simpler to chronicle by external signs and events, than to see how some men changed from believing in God to believing in no God. Everyone knows how impossible the autobiographer finds it to describe, intelligibly to others, what moved his mind at its deepest well. St Augustine beautifully if misleadingly explained the course of his mental and devotional history until the moment of conversion. In that moment we have only beauty and no more explanation. Newman eloquently justified his past against Kingsley's attack and left the decision to become a Roman Catholic almost as intellectually mysterious as when he began. C. S. Lewis wrote an autobiography with personal and devotional insights on (if we exclude one repellent chapter) most of his pages. Yet readers find his change from philosophical theism to Christianity the least convincing paragraphs of the book. These inward movements are too profound for those who experience them to articulate successfully. They can give hints and suggestions and poetic phrases. Biographer or historian can hardly pass beyond such little lights.

But when you have interrogated Rousseau, or Karl Marx, or Bakunin, or Proudhon, on the why of their mental intricacies, you have scarcely begun. The word God is not a word which could be replaced by the phrase 'that opinion', or 'that philosophy'. We could not say that some Victorian radical or dissenter, a Clough or a Francis Newman, changed from being Christian to not Christian as a man ceased to follow Plato and followed Aristotle. We have to probe what difference is made, not merely what different language was used. Whatever Christianity is, it contains a way of life. The question before us, so far as it concerns individuals, is not just a question about opinion. Power lies hidden within what we seek; power over the individual and his future on one side, over society on the other. Among the numerous insights of Karl Marx, this was an insight which historians took to their hearts as true. Men do not fathom intellectual history if they ask about nothing but the intellect.

The evidence so far collected supports the social historian. It is easier to collect evidence that tithe mattered than evidence that utilitarian philosophy mattered. What is not clear is whether this weighting in favour of social rather than intellectual issues is due to the nature of historical enquiry. Is the evidence about tithe more



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plentiful solely because measuring tithes is easier for the historian than measuring the inside of John Stuart Mill?

I think – and believe this judgment to be derived from inspection of history and not from desire in my soul – that without the intellectual enquiry the social enquiry is fated to crash; as fated as was the intellectual enquiry when historians asked no questions about the nature of the society in which ideas were propagated or repudiated.

The subject, treated historically (at least in this new form, as thrust upon us by the social sciences), is not far from its beginnings. It will eventually depend in part, though never totally, upon a mass of localized statistical investigations which have only begun in recent years and which will take many men and many years before they can be synthesized. My aim in these lectures is the modest one of offering some considerations near the beginning of a relatively new branch of research. No one will think that what I adduce will be thought by its author to be more than prolegomena to an enquiry.

### 2

I need to say what I take secularization *not* to be. It is not a change in fashion or custom.

In 1905 the prime minister of Great Britain, Mr Balfour, was observed to play golf on a Sunday. He was also a Scotsman. His appearance on a golf course was publicly regretted by various critics. Was this a mark of a new neglect of the Lord's day and therefore a symptom of a society always more neglectful of the traditional ordinances of religion? Then we remember how, in the early 1840s, the grandfathers of the same critics publicly lamented when young Queen Victoria drove through London to a theatre in Lent. What we are chronicling is not specially to do with religion but changes in custom and social acceptability, like the new fashion in length of hair on men's faces after the Crimean war. All men do not adjust at once to new fashion and occasionally attribute moral obliquity to innovation. In the same year, 1905, Dean Wace of Canterbury illustrated a decline in the moral fibre of the nation by citing the new provisions to enable boys in boarding schools to stand under a shower after football.<sup>10</sup>

Not that custom is irrelevant to our theme. Custom is part of the unspoken axioms which make up consensus in society. Changes in custom can have consequences beyond custom. Part of the reason for a decline in churchgoing, during the last decade and more of the