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Title of extract: **The Erosion of the Supernatural**

Name of Author: **Bruce, S.**

Title/Author of book/edition (if applicable): **Religion in the Modern World. Bruce, S.**

Name of Visual Creator or other acknowledgement (if applicable):

Journal details –title/Vol/Year (if applicable):

Publisher: **Oxford University Press**

Pages scanned: **25 - 68**

Course of Study (Module name and number): **Religion, Spirituality and Secularisation TRDL7077**

Name of Designated Person

authorising scanning: *E-L-Ham*

Date authorised: 19.05.17.

Moodle/Powerpoint

THE EROSION OF THE SUPERNATURAL

TRADITIONAL worlds were religious places. Indeed some primitive societies were so thoroughly permeated by religion, superstition, and magic that it is hard to separate religion from other parts of those worlds. Things we would regard as mundane and this-worldly, such as hunting or fishing, were enmeshed with religious ritual. Unless the rituals were properly performed, the hunting or fishing would not be productive. Such societies simply did not divide the supernatural from the natural in the way we do.

The social institutions of modern societies have become sufficiently specialized for us to see religion as a distinct sphere of activity and it is thus possible to talk about its influence and popularity. The fundamental point of such talk is that the modern urban industrial societies of Western Europe, North America, and Australasia—and it is those that are the concern of this book—are considerably less religious than the formations that preceded them. This change—secularization—will be described and explained in this chapter. The examples will be drawn initially from Britain, but we can be confident, both from the evidence from other countries which I will add, and from the fact that many of the scholars on whose work I draw were themselves basing their conclusions on examples gathered more widely, that, though elements of the script are particular to Britain, the drama is one that was played out across the industrializing West.

First, two qualifications. As should be clear, this study is concerned with religion in so far as it is visible or 'empirically given'. That is, we are concerned with the changing popularity and place of certain beliefs and types of behaviour; we are not in the business of

judging the quality of those beliefs and actions or the sincerity of those who adhere to them. In talking of a decline in religion, we want to avoid making any judgement about what is 'true religion'. It may well be that all that has changed has been the loss of a nominal adherence to churches, the performance of religious rites primarily for social reasons, a shallow acceptance of prevailing ideas, and an unnecessary entanglement of religious roles and institutions with secular matters. It is possible to argue that what those of us who remain attached to religion now possess is a purer, more 'religious' faith. But such judgements are not in the competence of the social scientist.

The second qualification: it should also be stressed that the social scientist is primarily concerned with the social significance of religion. What effect do religious beliefs have on the operation of the social system, on the lives of societies? Of course, that must be closely related to the importance of religion for individuals. While some nineteenth-century church adherence can be explained by the pressure to conform to the prevailing *mores*, it should be obvious that people only go to church because they feel that the community requires it of them if someone (and it must be either a majority of the someones or a majority of the important someones) actually believes. It is thus likely that a decline in the social significance of religion will be accompanied by a decline in the popularity and importance of religion *per se*. Or at least, if it is the case that religion is no longer important for a particular society but remains vital for many of the individuals who compose it, then there has been a highly significant change in the way that people live out their beliefs.

Secularization may be sought in the following three related changes: the decline of popular involvement with the churches; the decline in scope and influence of religious institutions; and the decline in the popularity and impact of religious beliefs. I will offer some evidence for those changes now and insert other data at relevant points in the rest of the book.

But first we should have an accurate sense of the major changes in context. There is no point in inappropriate cross-cultural comparisons. As I suggested in the explanation of this book's title in the Introduction, the relationship of the individual to the religious culture at the period where this study begins—in the medieval world—was very different from that which obtains in the modern world. Church membership itself is a modern idea. The unitary church of the pre-Reformation feudal society did not have members; it repre-

sented the entire people. It was financially supported primarily by the rental or produce from gifts of land given by the king and the gentry. Its offices were performed according to the calendar irrespective of popular attendance. They were thought to be effective in pleasing God even if, as in the case of the daily Masses said in most churches in the fifteenth century, none of the common people attended. That the religious activity of the Middle Ages did not rest on the involvement of individual members of the laity was clear from the very architecture of churches and the forms of the services. In small parish churches, away from the high ceremonial of the cathedral, 'frequently the priest read the entire service in a low and inaudible voice with his back to the congregation throughout'.¹ The laity were not discouraged from hearing Offices in places where they were publicly sung, but 'unless they understood Latin there was little inducement for them to do so'.² The remarkable point of contrast with our situation is that, with so little encouragement, so many people in the pre-Reformation world did regularly attend services, and attendance at church for rituals concerned with major life events—birth, marriage, and death—was almost universal. In some parts of England, the Puritan Reformers were highly critical of the ritual of 'churching' mothers a month after childbirth. One reformer listed it as 'No. 55' of the serious errors of the Church of England. Nevertheless, in late Elizabethan Salisbury more than three-quarters of mothers were 'churched'.³

Hamilton's judgement of the impact of Christianity seems sensible: 'The medieval world was Christian in the sense that everybody shared a common understanding of the world in which they lived based on Christian premises. Only the very learned had full and detailed knowledge of the whole world picture, but everybody understood some part of it.'⁴ He goes on to note that 'Everybody knew the *Our Father*', that 'People in the Middle Ages were willing to spend considerable sums of money in payment for masses', that 'Everybody believed that man had an immortal soul', and that 'Most people seem to have accepted that it was necessary to make reparation to God for serious and wilful sins either in this life or the next.'⁵

However dimly comprehended, the Christian faith had enough impact on popular attitudes for the swearing of oaths on the Bible to be an effective form of social control and for people to go to great lengths to avoid blaspheming. In writing of the various sacraments, Keith Thomas says: 'Before a man died . . . he was extended . . . extreme unction, whereby the recipient was anointed with holy oil

and tendered the viaticum. In the eyes of everyone this was a dreadful ritual . . .⁶ Rituals that are not widely believed in hardly inspire dread.

Thomas also documents in fascinating detail the strength of popular belief in the supernatural, especially in malign spiritual forces. Belief in the Devil was strong and widespread, as was the corresponding belief that the Christian Church had the power to protect against evil. As Hamilton writes: 'People wanted their houses blessed, their fields blessed, their food blessed, their weapons blessed.'⁷

The Reformation, by fragmenting Christendom and introducing the voluntary principle, inadvertently created the notion of church membership (though the practice of trying to count members accurately dates from the Methodist movement). Each wave of Protestant religious dissent brought an increase in individual knowledge of religion as the sectarians argued and proselytized and taught their new beliefs, and as the established churches were obliged to argue against the new heretics. In many European countries there developed a division between the religious life of the towns and cities, where the dissenters and sectarians prospered, and the rural areas, which were slow to change from the pre-Reformation model. A respected modern historian of Methodism has used Flora Thompson's description of the religious life of the village of Lark Rise to exemplify nineteenth-century rural religion, and, if one removed the reference to anti-Catholicism and inserted mention of an obsessive interest in supernatural powers, it could stand for most pre-Reformation settings.

Thompson . . . estimates that nine out of ten Lark Rise inhabitants would have declared themselves members of the Church of England, having been christened and married in the parish church. In addition, they buried their dead at church, attended festivals at Christmas, Easter and harvest time, visited the rectory on May Day, qualified themselves for the valuable charities dispensed by clerical families, paraded their finery and singing voices on Sundays, and could even be roused under certain circumstances to exhibit half-hearted displays of anti-Catholic sentiment. The majority, of course, never darkened the church's door outside festival time, unless closely bound by deference to squire or clergyman, and most of them, especially the men, resented clerical visits, particularly if the subject of religion was mentioned.⁸

The people of the towns and cities were more thoroughly divided into the godly and the ungodly, with class emerging as an important issue. With the exception of the Catholic Church, which in England

and Scotland retained the affections of the poor, religion was more appealing the higher one's status. Especially in the cities, the class division was often seen as an incentive to evangelistic activity. Turning the ungodly into the godly would also transform the dangerous masses into respectable honest artisans.⁹

Modern Decline

Though there were still many places like Lark Rise, by the nineteenth century the voluntary principle had become so well established that individual church adherence was a matter of concern and attempts were made to assess it. There are considerable technical difficulties involved in making inferences from various records, but we are unlikely to be far wrong if we suppose that about 18 per cent of the adult population of England were church 'members' in 1800, that this rose to 27 per cent by 1850, declined slightly to 26 per cent in 1900, and then continued to decline so that the corresponding figure for 1990 would be about 14 per cent or less.¹⁰ As the two extremes of personal enthusiasm and personal indifference to religion replaced simply living in a religious culture, the proportion of people who might be described as 'belonging' to a church or sect rose and then began a long decline which has not yet ended. Membership of the Protestant denominations—which until recently represented the vast bulk of British Christianity—fell from 22 per cent of the adult population in 1900 to just 7 per cent in 1990.¹¹

It may require far less effort to have one's name on a church roll than to attend its services. A better sense of the penetration of formal religion might be gained from looking at the proportion of the people who were prepared to take part in public acts of commitment. As far back as we have records, the Church of England and the Church of Scotland have had far more people on their rolls than have attended church.¹² Nominal association is even greater for the Roman Catholic Church, which counts as Catholic anyone baptized as such. The proportion of baptized Roman Catholics who actually attend Mass has declined from 47 per cent in 1900 to 33 per cent in 1990. Generally only the small and more sectarian Protestant churches have had more people in their congregations than on their books. According to a major 1984 census of the Scottish churches,

only the small Baptist Church was attended by more people than claimed membership.¹³

Although they vary greatly in the quality of the data they produced, there were many surveys of church attendance in the nineteenth century, often inspired by increasingly bitter arguments about the privileges of the state churches. Newspapers organized local surveys, the Churches themselves collected figures, and in 1851 there was the national Census of Religious Worship conducted by Horace Mann. There are technical problems in interpreting Mann's Census.¹⁴ Especially for Scotland, where the returns were less complete than for England and Wales, there are doubts about some of the original figures. The Census enumerates attendances rather than attenders and many people attended more than once on any Sunday. Some scholars add together morning, afternoon, and evening attendances and make the point that the disappearance of multiple attendance is itself a significant mark of declining commitment that should be noted. Others take only the figures for the best-attended service, whichever that is for any particular congregation. Attendances at church represented 61 per cent of the Scottish population and 58 per cent of the population of England and Wales. One estimate put the number of church-goers at around half of the attendances; that is, it is assumed that most church-goers went twice on a Sunday.¹⁵ Very few people would have attended three services, so we can guess that about one-third of the British people attended church on the census Sunday in 1851. By the 1980s 'double sitting' was confined to the very small evangelical Protestant sects and we can take the figure for attendances to be the same as the figure for attenders: in Scotland 17 per cent of the population, in Wales 13 per cent, and in England 9 per cent.¹⁶

Many of the technical problems with the 1851 Census data have been resolved by Gill, who has also brought together an impressive array of other local and church-based surveys. In noting the effects of weather, Gill says that 'total attendances on an exceedingly wet day in Cheltenham, 29 January 1882, amounted to 47.7% of the population, whereas those just a week later, but on a fine day, amounted to 61.4%'.¹⁷ Not even bourgeois Cheltenham could now hope to exceed 12 per cent, no matter what the weather! Gill has studied the records of churches in rural Northumberland in particular detail. He notes that Anglican attendances peaked in 1866 and declined thereafter. The zenith for the Presbyterians was in the 1860s and 1870s. Roman Catholic attendances peaked earlier: 'Their com-

bined Easter Mass attendances were 234 in 1849, 480 in 1855, but had declined to 297 in 1861, to 187 in 1892, and to just 109 in 1899.' Gill's own census of the remaining twenty-nine buildings in use in the area (out of a total of forty-five in 1901) found that only 9 per cent of the total population attended morning services.¹⁸ The timing may have been slightly different for urban areas, but the general trajectory is the same: 'a careful analysis of London and Liverpool census data suggests that there has been a continuous process of declining Sunday attendances in the Church of England since the 1851 Religious Census.'¹⁹ Gill adds: 'Free-Church attendances overall have declined since the 1880s. In Greater London they declined from 13 per cent in 1887, to 11 per cent in 1903, and to 4 per cent in 1979.'²⁰

As we would expect, the changing vision of the place of religion and the competition that came with the proliferation of dissenting sects and denominations saw an increase in popular involvement with formal religion. Membership and attendance then peaked and began the steady decline which is so far unabated. Social historians of religion disagree about the precise shape of the curve and the placing of the peak, but, whatever objections they might raise to this or that measure, they are agreed that there are now far fewer church members and church-goers than there were in 1950, 1900, 1850, or 1800.²¹

The shrinking of the British churches can be seen as clearly in the number of clergy. In 1900 there were just over 20,000 Church of England clerics. By 1984 that had halved to just over 10,000. Across the Channel a very similar pattern emerges in the main church. France in 1948 had almost 43,000 Roman Catholic clergy; by 1987 this had declined to 28,000. Since 1975 there have been fewer than 100 ordinations a year.²² Ordinations to the Catholic Church in England have also now fallen below replacement levels.²³ In Belgium in the 1950s it was normal to go to church; half the population did it. By 1990 only 18 per cent of Belgians attended Mass regularly.²⁴ To take an example from the other side of the globe, the percentage of Australians claiming 'no religion' in the decennial censuses has increased from eleven in 1961 to twenty-three in 1991.²⁵ Different countries show different rates of decline and different sorts of measures show different aspects of the change, but the direction of change in all indices of involvement in institutional religion is the same: downwards. Of all societies in the industrial West, only the United States is an exception to this pattern, and it will be discussed at length in Chapter 6.

What of the churches' involvement in the community? Calling on the churches to celebrate important social events certainly remains more popular than membership or attendance, but here too we see signs of decline. The ritual churching of women has completely gone. The relative size of the Church of England and its role as the national church means that we can take its baptismal records as a good index of Protestant baptism in England. In 1900, 65 per cent of live births were baptized in the Anglican Church. In 1927, it was 71 per cent; in 1960, 55 per cent, in 1970, 47 per cent, and in 1993, it was 27 per cent.²⁶ White weddings are still popular but less so than they were. At the start of the century almost 70 per cent of English couples marrying did so in the state church. By 1990, this had fallen to 53 per cent. In early Victorian Scotland almost all marriages were religious ceremonies; for example, in 1876, 98.9 per cent of weddings were solemnized in church. In 1990 it was 57 per cent.²⁷

Church involvement is not the only expression of religious sentiment nor is it a necessary one. We cannot immediately assume that, because we are far less likely than our grandparents to be churchgoers, ours is a less religious society. However, it is not enough to assert that a significant number of those Britons who are not involved in any of the vast range of religious activities that are on offer are none the less 'religious'. Some evidence must be adduced. Unless people act on a certain belief or opinion, we can only discern what they think or feel by asking them. In order to ask a large enough number of people to be confident that the answers are representative of a large social group, we need to use the pre-structured question-and-answer format of the social survey and we are well aware of the weaknesses in data generated by such instruments. Even if we assume that survey respondents are really doing their best to give accurate and truthful answers to questions, we still have the problem of having to believe that all respondents interpret our questions in the same way and mean the same thing by their answers. Generally speaking, the more concrete the issue, the more reliable the response. Surveys are better at discovering the ownership of televisions than they are at discerning attitudes and the more abstract the matter in hand the less useful the data. Asking people if they agree with the government's privatization of the water supply will produce more reliable responses than asking if they believe in God. None the less, surveys have asked people if they believe in God, if they are religious, and so on, and, provided we are careful in the conclusions we draw from them, such data are worth reporting.

A consistent finding of such surveys is that a very high proportion of people in Europe assert some confessional or denominational identification. In Britain, generally less than a quarter of respondents in a variety of surveys claim 'no religion'. To be more specific, few people claim to be atheists or agnostics: in the 1991 British Social Attitudes (hereafter BSA) survey, 10 and 13 per cent respectively.²⁸ However, the unbelievers are now more numerous than a decade earlier, when only 4 per cent identified themselves as 'atheists'. In 1947 only 6 per cent said, to use the Gallup formula, that they 'Don't really think there is any sort of spirit/God or life force'; in 1968 it was 11 per cent.

Secondly, and this is not just a restatement of the previous point, most people say they believe in some sort of God. In the BSA survey, 72 per cent claimed to believe in some sort of supernatural power. When asked a differently worded question later in the same survey, only 50 per cent said they believed in God. Of those, only half felt close to God, and almost a quarter felt 'not close at all'. The BSA survey also asked about changes in belief: those who had once believed but no longer did outnumbered by two to one those who had become believers.

It requires something of an act of faith to take the results of surveys conducted years apart, even when they use an identical form of words for their questions, as evidence of the nature or extent of change. If we make that assumption, the traditional Christian view of God as a person is now less popular than a very wide range of non-theistic visions of the supernatural. Between 1947 and 1987 the proportion of respondents who agreed that 'There is a personal God' fell from 45 to 37 per cent, while those who choose the option 'There is some sort of spirit or vital force which controls life' increased from 39 to 42 per cent. The various agnostic and atheistic positions increased in popularity from 16 to 21 per cent. To take the central Christian claim, 71 per cent of Gallup respondents in 1951 agreed that 'Jesus Christ is the Son of God'. In 1965 it was 64 per cent and in 1982 it was only 43 per cent. In a 1957 survey 54 per cent said they believed in life after death. In the BSA survey only 27 per cent made the same claim. Other traditional beliefs were similarly unpopular. Only 24 per cent of respondents said they believed in the Devil or in hell.²⁹

The BSA survey asked people if they were religious and gave them seven options. They could describe themselves as 'religious', 'very religious', and 'extremely religious', as 'neither religious nor

non-religious', or as one of the corresponding three degrees of 'non-religious'. A large proportion—41 per cent—described themselves as religious, but almost all of them choose the weakest of the three positions. Taken together, the neutral category and the three non-religious ones outnumbered the religious. We do not have corresponding survey data from previous centuries, but, given everything we know from newspapers, diaries, letters, church statistics, and the political debates of the time, it seems inconceivable that, had such questions been asked in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, the 'religious' would have been outnumbered by the rest.

If it is the case that a large part of the unchurched retain a strong interest in religion despite losing interest in the churches, there ought to be some evidence of this apart from verbal assent to survey questions. To cite a parallel, we know that many people who very rarely attend football matches remain keen on football because they watch it on television and they subscribe to satellite services to watch foreigners play it. We know that the sales of newspapers can be affected by the amount and quality of their football coverage. It is very hard to find any similar mark of religious interest among the unchurched. Sales of religious books have declined.³⁰ The space given to church and spiritual matters in the popular press is now vestigial; only a sex scandal (for the tabloids) or a money scandal (for the broadsheets) will get the churches out of a bottom corner on an inside page. Although religious programmes on television commanded large audiences in the 1960s, this seems to have been largely a matter of supply. With only two television channels, an agreement to preserve a prime-time slot on Sunday evenings for religious programming and the willingness of a large part of the audience to watch whatever was on ensured that the church-goers who enjoyed the BBC's *Songs of Praise* or ITV's *Stars on Sunday* were boosted to a healthy audience share. Now that the 'God slot' has been abandoned and there are four terrestrial television channels and a plethora of others on satellite, the audience for religious programming has declined from three-quarters of the number of viewers of the most popular secular programmes to under a quarter. The conclusions of the third in a series of detailed studies of responses to religious programming are clear:

The 1968 survey showed that 40 per cent of respondents deliberately turned on to watch a religious programme and over half said they paid attention when a religious programme was on. By 1987, this was found to

have changed, with only seven per cent of people saying they deliberately turned on when a religious programme was being shown.³¹

When we put these observations together with the evidence of decline in the popularity of the churches, we can see an increasingly secular people gradually losing faith in the specific teachings of the Christian tradition but retaining a nostalgic fondness for it—many of us want the great cathedrals to be preserved so that we can visit them for carol-singing at Christmas time—and continuing to make vague and weak religious affirmations.

A clue to explaining the apparent tension between the popularity of claiming to be religious and the unpopularity of every expression of religious beliefs and values can be found in Richard Hoggart's rich description of working-class life in northern towns in the first half of the twentieth century. Discussing attitudes to the churches, Hoggart wryly observes that the term 'Christian' was taken to mean decent, honest, and ethical.³² Something similar seems to be the case with modern claims to be 'religious'. In Northern Ireland the working-class description for someone who becomes a committed Christian is 'good living'. In describing themselves as 'religious', survey respondents are asserting their continued commitment to the general social values that they take to be the consequences of Christianity rather than saying that they are Christian in the traditional sense.

It is important to note just how weak are the measures of 'religiosity' used in modern surveys. Let us recall the beliefs which historians of the Middle Ages readily describe as taken for granted: the existence of a real heaven and hell, the reality of the Mass as a repeat of Christ's real sacrifice for our sins, and the effectiveness of the Church's means of ensuring our salvation.³³ These are extremely 'religious' beliefs, quite at odds with the cosmology of the modern world. They were once common; they are now rare.

Talking of the content of religious belief systems brings us to an important point. The decline in popularity of the churches and the culture they promote is not the only evidence of the increasing implausibility of religious ideas. There are also important changes within the churches. Though they are interesting in their own right, I have in mind, not the sometimes spectacular rejection of orthodox beliefs by radical theologians but the more subtle and general sidelining of what were once taken to be central tenets of the faith. Much of the Thirty-nine Articles, the statement of faith of the

Church of England, would embarrass most contemporary Anglican clergymen, and the ideological centre of the Presbyterian churches has shifted so far from their origins that when new ordinands assent that they accept the Westminster Confession of Faith as the subordinate standard of their church (subordinate to the Bible, that is) they do so with considerable reservations. One senior Church of Scotland minister told me, only slightly facetiously, that he had recently reread the Confession and been surprised to find something there that he could agree with.

It is not much of an exaggeration to say that the main churches have themselves become secularized in the sense of reducing the specifically supernatural in their product. Major elements of the Christian faith—the miracles, the Virgin Birth, the bodily resurrection of Christ, the expectation of Christ's return, the reality of eternal damnation—have quietly been dropped from the teachings of the major Christian churches.

Along with the gradual disappearance of specific Christian tenets there has been a fundamental redirection of many doctrines. What used to be regarded as objective truths have been 'psychologized'. They are now held to apply only in so far as people choose to believe in them and then they apply only subjectively, for the psyche of the individual. What were previously taken to be true stories about the real world (there was actually a person called Christ who was the Son of God and who died for our sins) have been reoriented as propositions which become true when they have the desired effect on the mind of the believer. Essentially the faith has been relativized so that it is now just one of a range of belief systems which are to be judged not by how accurately they describe a single past, present, and future but by how useful are the effects they have on adherents.

The new understanding of the status of the faith allows a new attitude to other faiths. What were once competing convictions are now seen as being all, in some sense, equally valid. And that courtesy has been extended beyond the Christian churches so that they no longer divide the world into the saved and the damned, the righteous and the unregenerate; now, however unaware we may be of this fact, we are all God's children. The ecumenical movement began at the start of this century with evangelical Protestants discovering common interests. As it grew, it embraced first the less radical wings of the main Protestant churches and then the Orthodox churches and the Roman Catholic Church. The World Council of Churches now includes among its members various African

churches (such as the Kimbanguist Church of Zaire and the Aladura Church of the Lord in Nigeria) which profess some, from a Christian standpoint, highly deviant views. It has even had its congresses attended by representatives of North American nativist religions.³⁴

More will be said about the way in which the Christianity of the West has changed this century. At this point it is enough to note that it would be a blinkered vision that considered only the popularity of formal religious organizations and did not also note that the Churches themselves had changed.

As I shall show below, the religious cultures of different societies have developed in very different ways. However, as a starting-point, we may note that, with the partial exception of the USA (which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6), the pattern of decline in the social significance and popularity of religion sketched above is common to most industrial societies and there is widespread agreement that such evolution is driven by common social forces and hence that a general explanation of secularization is possible.

Explaining Secularization

Nothing as complex as a massive change in culture and social behaviour across a variety of very different societies is going to have a simple explanation. However, it is possible to distinguish the broad contours of an explanation and I will do that by sketching first the 'deep structure' and then adding the 'surface structure'.

First we must eliminate one persistent but misleading explanation of secularization. It is not the case that religion has declined because people have become better educated and less credulous.³⁵ Committed atheists—the sort of people who join rationalist and humanist associations—and some very liberal Christians believe that religion has lost its medieval dominance because modern people are too clever to believe in old superstitions. Some critics of religion like to portray it as an infantile delusion which societies have grown out of as science has replaced religious falsehood with secular truth. Auguste Comte, the nineteenth-century Frenchman who was one of the founding fathers of sociology, believed that the new science of sociology would replace the old myths.³⁶ Sigmund Freud declared his hand when he called one of his essays on religion *The Future of an Illusion*.³⁷

Increasing knowledge and maturity cannot explain the decline of religion. There are too many examples of modern people believing the most dreadful nonsense to suppose that people change from one set of beliefs to another just because the second lot are better ideas. The history of the human ability to believe very strongly in things that turn out not to be true suggests that whether something is true and whether it becomes widely accepted are two very different questions. Whether any particular religion is true is a theological, not a sociological, question. Fortunately we can avoid such unprofitable terrain by recognizing that all beliefs—true ones as much as false ones—need explaining.³⁸ Hence we can ask what is it about our societies, other than our supposed greater maturity, that explains why religious beliefs are less plausible or credible than they once were.

Let us begin with 'modernization'. Clearly modernization has something to do with economic growth. Marion Levy has suggested that it be defined as the growing ratio between inanimate and animate source of power.³⁹ Men and animals built the pyramids. We build with machines driven by fossil fuels. As we shall see, technology brings with it major changes in social structures, social relations, and the ways that people think. Though Levy's definition raises some problems that we need not address, it has the useful consequence of reminding us that to talk of modern societies (with the implied contrast with 'pre-modern' societies) is actually a short cut for talking about a range of positions along an axis. It also reminds us that we are talking about stages in that process rather than a particular time in history. Hence this book is about religion in the First and Second Worlds rather than about religion 'now'. That Iran or Burma is unlike Britain or Norway goes without saying. Like the Weber thesis, the argument of this book is in the first instance an attempt to explain a set of changes that occurred at a particular time in a particular place. Again, like the Weber thesis, because my explanation involves a number of causes which are general rather than context-specific, there is the possibility that some of the processes described here will also occur in very different societies, but, prior to detailed study, it is only a possibility. A sensitive reading of my argument would allow us to identify those features of Iran and Burma that make it more and less likely that their religious cultures will develop in ways recognizably similar to those of Britain or Norway, but that is too great a work to be undertaken here.

Most sociologists believe that there are features of the modern

societies which make them unconducive to religion. Three seem to be particularly salient: the fragmentation of societies and of social life, the disappearance of the community and the growth of the massive bureaucracies (national and international), and increasing rationalization.

Fragmentation

One obvious feature of modernization is the division of single social institutions into smaller but more specialized units. The family was once a unit of economic production as well as the site for biological and cultural reproduction. It no longer is; production is now organized in factories. The family was once the site for all education and socialization. Now we have special places called schools to which people go to be educated by professional educators.

In this general process, religious institutions have been pushed out of, or have withdrawn from, many spheres of life. The first and most significant exclusion is from the economy. Ideas from the world of production and exchange—the need to increase efficiency, supply, and demand as the fixer of price, and so on—are so powerful in our culture that it is difficult to believe that the medieval Church made a valiant attempt to control such matters. In the fourteenth century, lending money for profit was regarded as sinful and the Church's own courts claimed jurisdiction over usurers. A century before, the craft guilds used church courts to enforce their restrictive practices. Breaches of contract were tried before church courts.

Modernization saw the freeing of economic activity from religiously sanctioned controls and the development of the world of work as a domain of human life driven only by its own values. Gradually other spheres went the same way. Consider the range of activities engaged in by the Church of Scotland in the eighteenth century. It provided education. The local minister was often also the school teacher and ran the school. If the parish was big enough to have a separate teacher, he was usually a trainee minister and was paid by the Church. It provided social welfare. Money was raised either in special collections or through taxes and given to the beggars of the parish, who were licensed to beg by the elders of the Church. It provided social control. One way of raising money for the beggars' fund was to fine parishioners who engaged in pre-marital sex or other morally unacceptable acts. They would be called before

the Kirk session and 'tried'. If they were found guilty, the Church administered the punishment.

The pre-Reformation church was often also the government bureaucracy and the keeper of national records. When in 1291 King Edward I of England wanted to prove his claim to the vacant Scottish throne, he sent letters of enquiry to the English monasteries asking for relevant historical information to support his case.⁴⁰ At a specially convened meeting near the border, magnates of both realms presented their historical proofs, failed to agree, and returned to the more common form of settling such disputes: warfare. But the diplomatic battle continued and much of it was conducted through letters to the Pope. Even though he had secured the Scottish throne and repelled the English, Robert Bruce sought the Pope's blessing.⁴¹ That example pointedly reminds us how constrained the authority of religion has become. It also shows the impact of individualism. The governments of the West no longer seek legitimacy from bishops or popes; they claim to represent the will of the people. What medieval monarchs sought from God's representative on earth, democratic governments seek from the ballot box.

The church was also involved in what we now call 'health care'. Many of the first hospitals and infirmaries were religious foundations or adjuncts to monasteries.⁴²

The process by which specific areas of social life became distinguished from each other and dominated by a specialized institution proceeded slowly and unevenly. At first the new institutions continued to be dominated by religious professionals but in time they were eclipsed as ever more specialized professionals were trained, and new bodies of knowledge or skill were generated in which religious professionals were not routinely trained to the same advanced levels. There were valiant attempts to regain lost ground. In the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the leading Church of Scotland evangelical Thomas Chalmers tried to recreate in a Glasgow parish the all-encompassing institutions of the previous order.⁴³ Churches continued (and still continue) to supplement the provisions of secular institutions, but, even when they are a major provider of services, they operate within the logic of the secular world. The Church of Scotland's Board of Social Responsibility is now the largest voluntary social work agency in Scotland and is second only to Strathclyde Region's social work department, but religious affiliation plays no part in the selection or training of the

personnel who provide its services, which are indistinguishable from those of local authorities. Although the Catholic Church maintains clerical control over appointments and promotions in its schools, the majority of its staff are secular professionals and in most countries there is little about Catholic schooling that now distinguishes it from secular alternatives. Indeed, at the level of higher education, there is almost nothing about such American Catholic academies as Notre Dame or Loyola which distinguishes them from secular universities.

The division of life into ever-more specialized areas was accompanied by the division of people into distinct classes and social groups. Economic growth led to the emergence of an ever greater range of occupation and life-situation. Feudal societies had considerable disparities of wealth, but most people lived similar lives and they lived cheek-by-jowl. In medieval tower houses and castles, the gentry and their servants often slept in the same room, separated only by curtains. They ate at the same table, with the salt dish marking the gentry from the riff-raff. Because there was a strong hierarchical social structure which was quite open and clear about differences in status, superiors did not feel threatened by the presence of their minions and could inhabit the same physical and mental space.

This physical closeness of different 'degrees' was destroyed by increasing prosperity and increasing egalitarianism. As people of differing status became more alike in principle, they moved further apart in practice. Innovation and economic expansion brought with them occupational mobility. People no longer did the job they had always done simply because their family had always done that job. Occupational change made it hard for people to internalise visions of themselves that supposed permanent inferiority. People cannot improve themselves and their class position at the same time as thinking of themselves as having a 'station' or a 'degree' in a fixed hierarchical world. Modern societies are thus inherently egalitarian.

Furthermore, economic growth brought more contact with strangers. Profound inequalities of status can only be tolerable and not to lead to constant friction if the ranking system is widely known and accepted. Soldiers can move from one regiment to another and still know their place because there is a uniform (in both senses) ranking system. In a complex and mobile society, there is no way of ensuring that we know whether we are superior or subordinate to this new person. Once people had trouble knowing who

should bow first, they gave up bowing. Basic equality became the normal presumption.

Thirdly, the separation of work and home, of the public and the private, made for equality. One could not be a serf from sunrise to sunset and an autonomous individual for the evening and at weekends. A real serf had to be full-time. A temporary work-role is not a full identity, and, though work-roles are usually part of a hierarchy, they could no longer structure the whole world-view. In the absence of a shared belief system which sanctioned inequality and subjection (and the decline of religion usually removes that), egalitarianism became the default position.⁴⁴

Democracy was slow to come, but the creation of a modern economy brought with it the general interactional presumption that we are 'much of a muchness'. The better off, now a little unsure about the legitimacy of their superiority, moved to safeguard their prerogatives by physically moving away from their subordinates. As towns and cities developed, they did so with clear class divisions. About 1775 the Edinburgh bourgeoisie began to abandon the old town, where judges and poor artisans had inhabited flats (of very different quality) in the same tenement building, for the social exclusiveness of the New Town.⁴⁵ As the world became more clearly separated into private and public spheres and the public realm became more egalitarian, those who could afford to used their privacy to distance themselves from the rest.

Economic growth deepened the division of labour and widened the gulf between classes. Especially with the shift to the cities and the growth of big 'manufactories', people spent more of their time with others in the same economic circumstances and less time with their superiors or subordinates. Different social groups began to see the world in different ways. The idea of a single moral universe in which all manner and condition of persons have a place in some single grand design became less and less plausible.⁴⁶ Traditional integrated organic conceptions of the moral and supernatural order fragmented into a welter of competing conceptions as different classes developed religious world-views which made sense of their lives and interests. The Church of England is an episcopalian church. At the top is God, who talks to the archbishop, who talks to the bishop (*episcopus* is the Greek for bishop), who talks to the dean, who talks to the clergy, who tell lay people what to believe and do. When, in the post-Reformation period, there was argument about the correct organizational form for the true church, most of the upper

classes could be found arguing for episcopacy on the grounds that the hierarchy of this divinely ordained social institution would legitimate other hierarchies. James VI of Scotland put it succinctly when he said 'No bishop, no king'. To this day the landed classes tend to remain in the Church of England because they like the model of the world as an organic community built around a stable ordered structure of authority with people ranked in their proper stations and them at the top. And the gentry kept their peasants in line. So we have the pattern in England of the Episcopalian church being strongest among the gentry and their farm servants. The independent farmers and the emerging middle classes who broke away from aristocratic control in the late eighteenth century preferred a more democratic form of organization. They liked the idea that we are all equal in the eyes of God and they liked to run their own affairs. Hence the appeal to them of those forms of Protestantism that stressed the priesthood of all believers: Presbyterianism, Methodism, and Congregationalism. In Northern Ireland the pattern is very clear: the small farmers of County Down and County Antrim are Presbyterians but the landed gentry and their estate workers of Fermanagh and Tyrone are Episcopalians.

As societies grew and became more complex, they fragmented into distinct classes and regional groups, and, where the religious culture allowed it, the dominant tradition also split into competing churches. As we saw in the previous chapter, one of the great innovations of the Protestant Reformation was the idea that we are all able to discern God's will for ourselves. We do not need a professional cadre of priests to do that for us. An unintended consequence of that innovation was the possibility of schism.

The possibility, however, is not the reality. Where the religious culture did not allow it—in Roman Catholic countries—there was a more radical and abrupt division with some classes remaining faithful to the Church and others breaking off completely. Hence in Scotland and England, there are twenty denominations. In France, Italy, and Spain there is a smaller Catholic Church and a large secular anti-Catholic and Communist section.

The Eclipse of Community

The general fragmentation of community and social life is accompanied by a matching phenomenon which Bryan Wilson has called

'societalization', the process by which 'life is increasingly enmeshed and organized, not locally but societally (that society being most evidently, but not uniquely, the nation state)'.⁴⁷ Close-knit, integrated, small-scale communities have disappeared, undermined by the growth of large-scale industrial and commercial enterprise; by the emergence of modern nation-states co-ordinated through massive, impersonal bureaucracies; and by the development of the anonymous city.

Religion, Wilson argues, has its source in, and draws strength from, the community. As the society rather than the community has increasingly become the locus of the individual's life, religion has lost many of its purposes. In his study of *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* Durkheim argued that religion was explained by its social functions. When traditional people worshipped their Gods, they were really worshipping their own commonality. The point of religion was to create and sustain a common sense of identity.⁴⁸ Even if one does not accept that religion came into being and persisted because of its role as social cement, one can readily recognize that religion traditionally ritualized and legitimated local life. When every birth, marriage, and death in generation after generation was celebrated and marked with the same rituals in the same building, then the religion that legitimated those rituals was powerful and persuasive because it was woven into the life of the village. When the total, all-embracing community, working and playing together, gives way to the dormitory town or suburb, there is less held in common to celebrate. The decline of the community and the previously mentioned process of social differentiation means that people are no longer raised in one shared set of values and can no longer be controlled by the 'conscience' placed in them by the community and reinforced by informal social controls. The societal system relies less on the inculcation of a moral order and more on the use of efficient technical means of eliciting and monitoring appropriate behaviour. Policing is now more important for controlling people than are appeals to conscience; surveillance video cameras a greater deterrent than the disapproval of neighbours.⁴⁹

Governments and public figures may continue to talk about God (usually in the context of linking the fate of the nation and God's will), but in order to avoid offending large sections of the population of a culturally plural society, such talk has to be extremely vague. American politicians from Lincoln (with his famous Gettysburg address) through John F. Kennedy to Ronald Reagan have invoked

the divinity but none has been able to commit himself even to a Christian God, let alone to any of the competing versions offered within Christianity.

The decline of the community and its replacement by a society (typically a nation-state) which contains within it a number of different cultures and religions not only has important public policy consequences for religious institutions. It also has serious consequences for the plausibility of religious beliefs.⁵⁰

Imagine you are born into a small stable society—the anthropologist's tribe by the lagoon—in which everyone believes that the giant squid is God. Every important life-event (births, marriages, deaths, and so on) has attached to it Squid-worshipping events. Every day, in hundreds of small bits of interaction, the divinity of the Squid is evidenced by such things as explaining bad weather by the anger of the Squid and casually dropping 'The Squid be blessed' into conversation. In such a world, the idea that the Squid is God is not a belief; it is a fact. It is just how the world is and is nearly incontestable for anyone raised in that society. Now imagine that a sudden increase in population and in the ease of travel means that the Squid tribe comes into contact with three or four other civilizations, none of which worships the Squid. Suddenly the divinity of the Squid is not a fact; it is a belief and it is a belief that is earnestly contested. The Squid tribe may still have faith in the Squid and may even start missionary societies to convert the others to Squid worship, but they can never return to the earlier condition of a naïvely taken-for-granted world-view.

Modern societies are culturally diverse places. Anything approaching the innocence of the tribe by the lagoon with its shared single world-view is no longer possible. In some settings diversity was created by migration as peoples with different cultures mingled with one another. In others the expansion of the political unit brought a range of cultures into an emerging nation-state. A third source of cultural pluralism was the internal fragmentation of the dominant culture, and I want to dwell on this case because the social psychological impact seems greater than in the other two instances. This is a caricature, of course, but the cognitive threat from strangers is always less than that from one's own people. When the Roman Catholic Irish started to settle in large numbers in lowland Scotland in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Presbyterian Scots did not conclude that Catholicism was a different but equally plausible religion. They turned to invidious stereotypes

to reinforce their own beliefs and dismiss those of the Irish. Why should we take their religion seriously? After all, they are no-account, alcohol-soaked, priest-ridden illiterate beggars. Finding reasons not to take seriously the carriers of a competing religion is easy and commonplace. But it becomes less easy to protect beliefs in that way when the challenge is being posed by members of one's own people who have broken away from the true faith. Between the Reformation and the middle of the nineteenth century, Scotland went from having one national church to having three nationally distributed and large churches and some ten other popular churches, each claiming to have the truth. In those circumstances it becomes hard for people to hold their beliefs with the conviction shown by our hypothetical Squid worshippers. The nineteenth-century Scot, as well as knowing that, somewhere out there, were African pagans and Arab Muslims, and, closer to home, Irish Catholics and English Episcopalians, had to come to terms with the presence among his own people of divisions into Kirk, Free Church, Free Presbyterian Kirk, Old Seceders, United Seceders, Brethren, and Baptists. As Berger neatly puts it, the big change is that, however willingly we choose our religion, we know that we choose God rather than God choosing us.⁵¹

Religion is no longer a matter of necessity; it is a question of preference. We are forced to make a choice and, for the 'deep-structure' reasons being outlined here, we choose in circumstances that make it less and less important and likely that we will choose to believe in any religion. The very fact of being challenged means that those who do choose to believe will often do so with an intensity and enthusiasm which would have surprised those of early periods who simply took their faith for granted. As we see in the efforts of the Methodists or the Scottish Free Church evangelicals, the challenge to evangelize can inspire a powerful movement, but what is gained in individual intensity is lost in background affirmation. Becoming religious is attended by more dramatic behaviour consequences, but fewer people do it. There are now more zealots but fewer believers.

To summarize so far, differentiation and societalization reduce the plausibility of the idea of a single overarching moral and religious system to which we all belong. The single 'sacred canopy', to use Berger's phrase, is displaced by competing conceptions of the supernatural which have little to do with how we perform our social roles in what is now a largely anonymous and impersonal public domain and more to do with how we live our domestic lives.⁵²

Religion may retain subjective plausibility, but it does so at the price of its objective taken-for-grantedness. Religion becomes privatized and is pushed to the margins and interstices of the social order. Its focus narrows to the individual. As a study of modern Catholicism in rural France shows:

The notion of an atoning ordeal and sacrifice and the age-old and dominant problem of sin and redemption is disappearing. The contemporary emphasis on the close personal relationship with God as a source of fulfilment and on the riches of relationships with others, is shifting parochial Catholics towards a 'transcendent humanism', offering an 'ethico-affective' and predominantly this-worldly conception of salvation.⁵³

To express the same point in terms of functions, the primary function of religion—the expression of the relationship between God and humankind, the natural and the supernatural—remains the same, but there is a shift in the secondary or latent functions from the social to the personal, from the life of the community to the life of the individual self.⁵⁴

The fragmentation of society, the break-up of the religious culture, and the shrinking of the role of churches are closely related. A church could sensibly and reasonably exercise a wide range of social functions when everyone belonged to the same church and the parish structure mirrored the evolved boundaries of communities. When people are split into a variety of competing churches, maintaining a wide range of roles becomes difficult for any church—difficult to do effectively and difficult to justify against opposition. The first response of the dominant religious tradition to defections was to try to enforce conformity, to use the power of the law and the state to press people back into the state church, but, as more and more people broke away, the social costs of trying to coerce them into the parish church became too great and the state gave up.⁵⁵ Except in one or two trivial ways (such as having seats in the House of Lords), the Church of England now has to compete with all other denominations on an equal footing.

Rationalization

The rise of rationality was discussed in the previous chapter. Here I want to look at its consequences for the plausibility of religion. By rationality, we mean a concern with routines and procedures, with

predictability and order, with a search for ever-increasing efficiency. We could allow DHSS clerks to give as much money as they liked to claimants on the basis of their personnel prejudices, their religion, or their family connections. Those methods have all been used for allocating resources in previous societies. Yet we believe that the fairest and most efficient way of organizing anything on a large scale is to establish rules and procedures which constrain actions and decisions to the matter in hand. Bureaucratic organization replaces personal preference. Having created procedures, we do not view them as sacred and immutable. If someone can suggest a more efficient means of achieving the same end, we change our methods.

We can readily see how a world of rationality is less conducive to religion than a traditional society. Everything is seen as potentially improvable. Everything can be made more efficient. We find it very easy to talk about means and procedures but very difficult to discuss transcendental ends. *The Shorter Catechism*, that seventeenth-century distillation of the key points that was used to teach Scottish Presbyterians their faith, has as its first question: 'What is the chief end of man?'.⁵⁶ In our societies such a question is rarely asked because we know that we could not agree on an answer.

We also suppose predictability; that what worked yesterday will work today. We live in a world of timetables and calendars which allow us to record appointments for next year. Very few of us expect a sudden invasion of the supernatural. Very conservative Protestant churches still have on their notice boards 'Meeting 11 a.m. (DV)', but that 'God willing' is a residue. In practice almost no one expects that God will intervene to prevent the next service taking place.⁵⁷

Thus far there has been no mention of science and that delay has been deliberate. When asked to explain the decline of religion, a lot of people mention the rise of Western science and the competition between scientific explanations and religious ones. They point out that many of the beliefs of the early Christians have been shown to be wrong. The earth is round and not flat. The earth moves round the sun and not the sun around the earth. The earth and human life are vastly older than the ages traditionally taken from biblical accounts. While scientists recognize that there are still huge gaps in our knowledge, there is a consensus that an evolutionary model along the lines of Darwinism offers a better explanation of the origins of species than does the account of divine creation in seven days given in the Old Testament book of Genesis.

For all that, I do not actually think that science has directly con-

tributed much to secularization. The argument between Darwin and the Church of England Bishop Samuel Wilberforce was gripping for middle-class Victorians, but it hardly penetrated to ordinary people.⁵⁸ Anyway, to insist that one set of beliefs lost popularity because another proved them to be wrong is to miss the difference between truth and plausibility. There are all sorts of ways in which we can insulate our beliefs from apparently contradicting evidence if we want to. We can easily avoid hearing the troublesome evidence. We can dismiss it by blackening the character of those who bring the bad news. For example, many American fundamentalists who want to believe in Genesis diminish the threat from evolutionists by accusing them of being sexually promiscuous and left wing. But such strategies require social support. The person who stands against the consensus is a lunatic and will be treated as such. In order to maintain a shared belief system we need a social strategy which organizes shared defences against the cognitive threats. Where such resources are available, new ideas, no matter that they might be better supported by the evidence, can readily be ignored or rejected.

Although it would be hard to draw a single line between the two classes of ideas, it is useful to distinguish between specific propositions (for example, species evolved by natural selection) and more subtle assumptions about the nature of the world. My point is that, with the right social support and in the right social context, the threat to our beliefs from specific counter-propositions can be neutralized. It is far less easy to avoid being influenced by widespread and powerful but subtle assumptions about the nature of the world. Berger, Berger, and Kellner argue that, irrespective of the extent to which we are aware of it, modern technology brings with it a 'technological consciousness'.⁵⁹ An example of what they mean is 'componentiality'. The application of modern machines to production involves the assumption that the most complex entities can be broken down into their 'components' and that each of those components is replaceable. Any 1976 Vauxhall Viva radiator will fit any 1976 Vauxhall Viva. The relationship between the engine and one radiator is expected to be exactly the same as that between the engine and any other matching radiator. There is nothing sacred about any particular bond. Another fundamental assumption is 'reproducibility'. Technological production takes it for granted that any creative complex of actions can be subdivided into simple acts which can be repeated infinitely and always with the same consequence. While there is no obvious clash between these assumptions

and the teachings of most major religions, there are serious incompatibilities of approach. There is little space for the eruption of the divine.

Science and technology have given us a notion of cause and effect that makes us look first for the natural causal explanation of an event. When an aeroplane crashes with the loss of many lives, we ask not what moral purpose the event had but what was its natural cause. And, in so far as we keep finding those causes (a loose engine nut or a terrorist bomb), we are subtly discouraged from seeking the moral significance.

Pluralism is also implicated in the primacy of scientific explanations in that it weakens the plausibility of alternatives. The rational basis of science, and the social structures of training, examination, and dissemination of results which protect that base, mean that there are fewer disagreements among scientists than there are among the clergy. Despite the recent and growing disillusionment with the authority of the secular professions, they still command the sort of respect enjoyed by the medieval Church. If the crash investigators say it was a bomb, almost all of us will agree it was a bomb. We may then wish to add a divine or supernatural additional explanation of why it was this bomb on this flight, but, because we do not share a religious culture, we will not be able to agree on whether it is even appropriate to search for such religious significance, let alone what the significance might be. Concentrating our explanations of life events on the material world brings more agreement than searching for religious messages. That the religious culture is badly fragmented weakens the ability of religious explanations to complement, let alone compete with, naturalistic ones.

Our attention is further concentrated on the natural world by the success of technology in delivering the goods. Technically efficient machinery and procedures reduce uncertainty and our need for the supernatural. There is simply no need to turn to the Gods for help with ringworm in cattle when you can buy a drench which has proved over and over again to be an excellent cure for the condition. Technology reduces the domain over which religion offers the most compelling explanations and the most predictable outcomes. The growth of technical rationality gradually displaces supernatural influence and moral considerations from ever wider areas of public life, replacing them by considerations of objective performance and practical expedience. When people had no idea what caused plague and no way of preventing it, shared rituals of repentance were a pop-

ular response. Now that we know what causes plague and how to prevent it, a whole series of occasions for a revival of religious interest has been removed.

There is a further subtle way in which science and technology reduce the place for religion and that is through the social power of the institutions that are based on scientific knowledge. Despite the recent interest of some parts of the middle class in 'natural' birth and death, these two crucial events in the lives of individuals, families, and communities are now mostly administered and arranged by doctors and medical technicians in hospitals.

In modern worlds, religion is most used for the dark recessive areas of human life over which control has not been established by technology: unhappiness, extreme stress, and the like. When we have tried every cure for cancer, we pray. When we have revised for our examinations, we pray. We do not pray instead of studying, and even committed believers suppose that a research programme is more likely than a mass prayer meeting to produce a cure for AIDS. Our notion of the scope of the divine is then much smaller than that of pre-industrial man.⁶⁰

This is not to trivialize the events and problems which still cause many of us to turn to God. The unexpected death of a loved one or the injustice of some act of suffering may be enormously important to us. In that sense, the 'gaps' in our rational control and intellectual understanding of our world may loom very large. But they do so in an individualized manner. They are personal, not social problems.

To summarize, I am suggesting that the effect of science and technology on the plausibility of religious belief is often misunderstood. The clash of ideas between science and religion is far less significant than the more subtle impact of naturalistic ways of thinking about the world. Science and technology have not made us atheists. Rather, the fundamental assumptions underlying them which we can summarily describe as 'rationality'—the material world as an amoral series of invariant relationships of cause and effect, the componentiality of objects, the reproducibility of actions, the expectation of constant change in our exploitation of the material world, the insistence on innovation—make it unlikely that we will often entertain the notion of the divine.

It is not an accident that most modern societies are largely secular. Industrialization brought with it a series of social changes—the fragmentation of the life-world, the decline of community, the rise

of bureaucracy, technological consciousness—which together made religion less arresting and less plausible than it had been in pre-modern societies.

Criticisms of the Secularization Thesis

Not everyone would accept either the general claim that modernization has been accompanied by secularization or all of the elements of the explanation of that process which I have offered. The bulk of the social-science community has no doubt that modern societies are less religious than traditional ones. Compare, for example, the attention given to religion by historians of nineteenth-century Britain, France, or Germany with the topic's absence from recent studies of class and power. Yet a number of American sociologists of religion have taken to resolutely denying secularization.⁶¹ The place of religion in American society will be considered in detail later. Here I want to consider briefly some of the most commonly offered general objections to the secularization thesis.

The first and most easily dealt with is the claim that the secularization thesis is merely an ideology; that those of us who offer versions of the above are not trying to describe and explain reality but are instead pursuing the ideological agenda of getting rid of religion. One ready rejoinder is to point out that those sociologists who support aspects of the approach outlined above are not all unbelievers who welcome what they claim to observe. David Martin, who has questioned some elements of the above account but who has also formulated *A General Theory of Secularization*, is an ordained Church of England clergyman. Bryan Wilson is an atheist, but he is also a political conservative who thinks that shared religions are important for social cohesion and mourns their passing. Peter Berger is a committed Lutheran. Wallis was an atheist who shared many of Wilson's misgivings about the secular modern world.

A second rejoinder is to point out that why someone promotes a particular theory and the value of that theory are always separable issues. It may be fascinating as gossip to know what (other than a desire to discover the truth) motivates this or that scholar, but in the end such sociological explanation of the desire to see a certain case realized tells us little or nothing about its truth. Why Galileo

wanted the earth to rotate around the sun is neither here nor there for determining if he was right.

A more pressing criticism of the secularization thesis is that it mistakenly implies some earlier golden age of religious orthodoxy.⁶² As I argued above in describing the changing notion of church membership, we need to be very careful not to view the distant past anachronistically through the expectations of the present. There is evidence that medieval people were not terribly attentive Christians, but this needs to be interpreted with more caution than is usually demonstrated. Studies of medieval court records show peasants being hauled up for playing cards and firing off shotguns in church, for failing to attend church, or for engaging in pagan rites and rituals,⁶³ but consider the nature of such records. The church courts were charged with enforcing religious discipline. To rest our estimate of the past on such records is as sensible as judging present attitudes to the law by citing only criminal court cases. Secondly, what is often being complained about in such records is not irreverence but the wrong religion.

Thirdly, in taking the modern enthusiast as our model of the religious person we fail to appreciate others ways of expressing commitment. A personal anecdote may illustrate the point. I once had to interview a Jewish businessman and we arranged to meet at the synagogue. I expected to see him before or after the service and was initially shocked to find us talking about mundane matters in the very doorway of the room in which the prayers were being said. While we talked, he stood with one foot inside the room. This, he explained, was because his presence was required to make the quorum necessary for prayers. My first reaction was to think that this was a man who did not take his religion seriously; where was the attentive posture redolent of piety? Later I realized that his attitude expressed absolute certainty, a conviction that there was a God, that God required ritual prayers, that for the prayers to be effective there had to be a quorum of male Jews, and that his toe in the door met those requirements and thus glorified God.

Let us go back to the apparent irreverence of medieval Christians. Because there were no seats in churches and most of the business was muttered in Latin by a priest facing away from the audience, people used to mill about and gossip with their neighbours. We might find that disrespectful and see it as evidence of a lack of personal piety but we would miss the more important point that people still felt obliged, by God as much as by social pressure, to be

there even when there was so little for them to do. Furthermore, it is clear from the specific questions that lay people used to address to church authorities about which parts of the divine Offices they had to pay particular attention to, that they thought involvement in certain parts of the services was a matter of great importance. During the Elevation of the Host, which was signalled by the ringing of a bell, people stopped milling about and knelt in reverent silence.⁶⁴ When our present church leaders agonize about how they might make church services more interesting and exciting for young people, the fact that such large numbers of people in the Middle Ages attended church services which made almost no concessions to their presence suggests that, despite their failure to comport themselves in the manner that we now expect of church-goers, our medieval ancestors were religious people.

Studies of sixteenth-century wills show that it was common for money to be left to pay for religious services. In 1546 Gilbert Kirk of Exeter bequeathed 4d. to each householder in St Mary Arches parish 'to pray to Our Lord God to have mercy on my soul and all Christian souls'. Robert Hone donated 1d. to each spectator at his burial in return for their prayers and forgave his debtors on the condition that they prayed for him. He also left 12d. to each of his godchildren 'to say a *Pater Noster*, Ave and Creed, praying for my soul'.⁶⁵ Where it succeeded, the Reformation brought an end to prayers for the dead and may, as Whiting argues, have briefly blunted religious interest in some places, but the foremost historian of Elizabethan and Jacobean England, Patrick Collinson, demonstrates that the 'godly' people made up a considerably greater part of the population than they now do.⁶⁶

Without wishing to concede its accuracy, I would add that the 'golden-age' criticism partly misses the point. The secularization thesis does not require that pre-modern people were all well-informed active participants in their local churches. There were parts of the country where religious services were rare. Many clerics were barely literate and could hardly preach at all, while others preached way above the heads of their congregations. None the less, the evidence shows that most medieval people believed in the supernatural and frequently called on its powers for assistance in this world. Even among the ungodly, a fundamental supernaturalism was more widespread than it is now. If one takes the notion broadly, Christian beliefs were obviously far more widespread and far more central to the lives of ordinary people. Contemporary Protestants

may not be able to make provision in their wills for prayers for their souls, but they could leave money for ministerial training, or to fund missionary work or subsidize church building. Benefactors today, however, are far more likely to leave money to animal charities than to the promotion of religious activities.

It is no easy matter to judge the religious climate of an age so different from our own and so remote. Margaret Spufford wrote the following, initially as a reply to Keith Thomas's demonstration that superstition and magic were more important than orthodox Christianity:

The degree of importance that religion held in the lives of non-gentle parishioners in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries will never be established. The beliefs of such people were not normally of interest even to the ecclesiastical authorities. . . . Genuine popular devotion of a humble kind leaves very little trace upon the records of any given time. The believer, especially the conforming believer, makes less impact than the dissident. At no periods is it possible to distinguish the conforming believer from the apathetic church-goer who merely wished to stay out of trouble.

It is possible, therefore, for the historian to start from the very probable thesis that 'the hold of any kind of organized religion upon the Mass of the population was never more than partial', add the complaints of puritan reforming ministers about their flocks' performance of their uncongenial duties, support these with figures of the considerable minority who were presented for absenteeism in the church courts, and point the case further with the disrespectful remarks of a further minority, which was also presented in the church courts. If it is set against this background, the importance of astrology and magic . . . then seems very great. Yet the negative picture that emerges is based on the silence of the majority of witnesses.

An alternative picture, illustrating the convictions of the humble, also depends on the selection of examples which may be atypical. It runs from the demonstration of bequests to the church lights, altar and fabric normally made by every parishioner who left a will before the Reformation, through the remarkably concrete fact that over half the Marian martyrs listed by Foxe whose social status is known were agricultural labourers. It continues by showing that the rural laity were actively involved in the complaints against scandalous ministers and in the anti-Laudian petitions of the 1640s.⁶⁷

In further remarks four years later, Spufford reminds us that complaints to church courts were themselves 'religious' acts of people trying to change the Church in this or that direction. In some places enthusiastic clergy and elders prevented people from taking communion because they were judged to be 'unregenerate' and then

reported them for not communicating! This tells us a lot about struggles for the soul of the Church of England, but it means that such data as can be extracted from church court records and ecclesiastical correspondence cannot be taken as evidence of the extent or nature of lay church involvement without a degree of sophistication that is missing from most sociological uses of the historical literature. Spufford concludes: 'I have been searching for sources which permit me to quantify genuine religious conviction of all types for some fifteen years. Until I find more, I shall continue to feel that although measurement and its instruments . . . should all be used to their fullest sensible limit . . . there are areas beyond its reach.'⁶⁸

Fortunately, those areas are not beyond the reach of the other skills of the historian, and, having no grounds to challenge their judgements, we have to be guided by the consensus among the experts. Despite the fuss made by a few sociologists keen to challenge the secularization thesis, that consensus is very clear: our medieval past was considerably more religious than our modern present. The challenge posed by Thomas, the only British historian cited by such revisionists as Stark and Iannaccone, is far more limited than they appreciate. In showing the extent to which pre-Christian superstitions and magical practices continued alongside the orthodox teachings of the Christian Church, Thomas amply illustrates the importance of those superstitions. Church officials may have despaired at the perversions of their teachings peddled by the laity, but, if we are to be impressed by the high proportion of our contemporaries who, despite having no church connection, now claim to be religious and to believe in God, how much more should we be impressed by the ordinary people of the sixteenth or seventeenth century who made offerings to the shrines of saints, took seriously oaths sworn on the Bible, left money to pay for Masses and for church decoration, attended church services that were a complete mystery to them, and sprinkled holy water on their houses, fields, and sheep.

The secularization approach can be challenged from the other end of the implied trajectory by arguing that it underestimates the present popularity of religion. The resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism in Iran and in parts of the Arab world is sometimes offered as evidence that religion is still of considerable social and political significance, which of course it is. Some confusion is caused here by using terms such as 'modernity' and the 'modern world'

when what we mean is the 'First World': those societies which modernized in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

More to the point, it can be argued that the First World is not as secular as it looks. It has been argued that the collapse of Christianity in, say, Britain or Holland reflects a lack of faith in the major religious institutions rather than a lack of faith in their beliefs. This point has already been addressed. Only a little facetiously, I will summarize the counter-argument by using again the case of someone who asserts that he is a keen football fan but when pressed admits that he has not been to a game since his father stopped taking him at the age of 5, never watches matches on the television, does not read the football sections of newspapers, does not support any team, does not encourage his son to attend matches, and cannot name any prominent footballer.

Put simply, the revision downwards of our estimate of how religious was the past and upwards of how religious is the present depends on making inappropriately light of signs of religiosity in the pre-modern period and making inappropriately much of weak rhetorical affirmations in the present. For example, the authors of a 1976 survey which asked a very large sample if they were 'aware of, or influenced by, a presence or power, whether referred to as God or not, which is different from their everyday lives' are impressed that 36 per cent of the sample claimed such an awareness.⁶⁹ However, that a much larger number (which interestingly included some church-goers!) asserted the very strong negative 'never in my life' seems more significant, as does the fact that, of those who reported some sort of spiritual experience, two-thirds claimed it only 'once or twice' and only a quarter were aware of a power or presence 'often' or 'all the time'. Furthermore, when the authors pursued those supernatural experiences, they found that they included such occurrences as surviving unharmed a violent motor accident that should have caused severe damage.⁷⁰

In Chapters 7 and 8 I will look in detail at present-day interest in the supernatural as it is expressed outside the confines of traditional religions. Here I want to consider just what sort of challenge is offered to the secularization thesis by the evidence of assertions of religious interest and sentiment by the unchurched. First, as I have already suggested, before we interpret the results of such surveys we need to think about the nature of the research process and the likely bias it will produce. Peter Brierley, Britain's leading recorder of indices of religious belief and behaviour, explains the exaggerated

claims for church attendance produced by surveys as follows: "The reason is . . . that they ask people what their behaviour is, and their memory . . . [is] not always accurate, or they wish to please the interviewer by answering more positively than perhaps they might otherwise."⁷¹ Given that there are still strong residues of Christianity in the cultures of most Western societies, we should be a little cautious of self-descriptions as 'religious'.

The critics of the secularization approach want to present such residues as evidence of an enduring latent demand for religion. It might just be that, but there is a more obvious depiction. Like the house of a once-rich person who has fallen on hard times and has been forced gradually to sell off the family possessions, the culture of a once-Christian society still possesses a few remnants, a few reminders of its past. If we can take the results of a series of disparate surveys as evidence of a trend, that trend is clear. Those marks of an enduring interest in religion that persist outside the churches are themselves becoming weaker and more rare. If one wants to call those residues 'implicit religion', then one has to recognize that the implicit is decaying in the same way as the explicit. It is not a compensating alternative.

Secondly, it should be no surprise that, though there are more avowed atheists than there were twenty years ago, they remain rare. Self-conscious atheism and agnosticism are features of religious cultures and were at their height in the Victorian era.⁷² They are postures adopted in a world where people are keenly interested in religion.

Thirdly, it should be accepted without reservation that people have not replaced a Christian world by the rational law-governed world of the caricatured scientist. The beneficiaries of twelve years of compulsory education and high technology can still believe that Granny spoke to them from the other side. This is good evidence against Comte's view of secularization as intellectual maturing, but, as I stressed at the start of this explanation of secularization, that is not my argument, nor is it that of Wilson, Martin, Berger, or any other modern sociologist. That the decline in the mainstream religious traditions allows space for people to entertain a very wide range of diffuse and privatized beliefs is precisely what we would expect. The point that needs to be made is that individual beliefs which are not regularly articulated and affirmed in a group, which are not refined and burnished by shared ceremonies, which are not the object of regular and systematic elaboration, and which are not

taught to the next generation or to outsiders are unlikely to exert much influence on the actions of those who hold them and are even less likely to have significant social consequences.

The evidence of diffuse and ambiguous beliefs in some sort of supernatural sphere shows that this 'implicit religion' (if that phrase does not exaggerate its cohesion or salience) is declining in tandem with explicit religion. To see it as a counter to the collapse of institutional religion is wishful thinking. But, even if it were important, I see no reason why the shift from institutional religion to some amorphous supernaturalism should not be described as 'secularization'.

The Surface Structures

Thus far I have sketched the major social forces that produced secularization and briefly responded to the most commonly offered criticisms of this approach. Though social scientists search for general patterns under the historical particulars, we are well aware of the very different careers of religious change in different cultures, and it is to those variations that I now turn. David Martin has suggested that the range of variations in societies' religious experiences can be understood in terms of a limited number of patterns which typically have to do with the date of the onset of industrialization and the nature of the dominant form of religion in that society.⁷³

First, there are states in which the Reformation era left the Catholic Church dominant but which were greatly affected by the French Revolution. That period saw the Church ally itself with the old regime and the social élite against the forces of social reform. For the many who espoused the Revolution, the Church was discredited by its anti-revolutionary stance, and these countries have since the late eighteenth century been largely divided between believers—often the more rural people—and secularists, who were often concentrated in the more urbanized and industrialized areas. These secularists are also often overtly anti-clerical. Thus a traditional monolithic religious bloc is confronted by the equally monolithic organic ideology of Communism and socialism. Just such a radical division can be seen in France, Italy, Spain, and Portugal: on the one side, the traditional highly committed

Catholics; on the other, socialists and Communists. The Catholic states of Western and southern Europe fall into this category.

In a second type of society, where Protestantism became dominant, broad state churches, allied with national élites, were confronted by liberal and socialist movements which were able to draw upon dissenting strands within the Protestant faith. Because many of the radicals were also religious sectarians (usually Baptists or Methodists), religion itself did not become a central focus of conflict. The arguments concerned only the discriminatory way in which certain types of religion were privileged. The masses found themselves little served by a state church which drew its professionals from the upper classes and advanced the ideological perspectives of the socially dominant, but they reacted towards it by withdrawal from anything more than a nominal attachment, rather than by overt hostility. Alternatively, they dropped away in the course of major social dislocations (in England, during the Civil War, the Restoration of the Stewart monarchy, the Industrial Revolution, the First and Second World Wars). The northern European states of Britain and Scandinavia fall into this category (with some of the Scandinavian countries drifting slightly towards the Catholic pattern, an outcome of the only partially reformed character of Lutheran Churches).

Thirdly, there are the Protestant migrant societies. These have been largely formed since the late eighteenth century by migration, initially of Protestants and only later of Catholics. What is significant about these societies is that, although they are dominated by Protestantism, they do not show the typical pattern of secularization seen in the second type just described. Rather, despite being highly modernised, they have rather high church attendance rates. The specific case of the USA will be looked at in detail in a separate chapter, but here I briefly note the following. First, migration itself gives religion an important additional significance as one of the few sources of cohesive identity for the migrating people. Secondly, urbanization came much later in these societies than it did in Britain and Western Europe.⁷⁴ Thirdly, the successive waves of migration brought a great deal of ethnic conflict and competition, especially between the first white Anglo-Saxon Protestant settlers and the later Irish and southern European Catholics. For reasons that will be discussed in Chapter 5, ethnic competition gave religious identity an importance it did not have in the old country. Finally, in many rural parts of the new world, each religious minority was able to con-

struct for itself a society in which it was dominant to a degree reminiscent of the pre-Reformation world and was thus able to blunt many of the secularizing forces that come with pluralism. Thus, for example, while Canada as a whole might have shown a great deal of religious diversity, many parts of Canada were Catholic or Protestant strongholds.

The greater the plurality of religious expressions available (that is, the greater the variety of dissent), the stronger the continued involvement of the masses in religious institutions in Protestant-dominated settings. (The extreme case here is the USA, which, at the level of the nation-state, if not of every state, county, and town, represents the universalization of dissent.⁷⁵) No one religious expression was uniquely identified with the social élite, and a multiplicity of forms were imported or invented to appeal to all manner and condition of persons. In this type of society, religious freedom represents a central value of the nation. Religious adherence is an aspect of commitment to the national identity, but religious expressions themselves tend to adapt to the secular values of the society.⁷⁶

To return to the basic patterns, all the Protestant-dominated immigrant-based societies display (to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the degree of priority retained by the Anglican Church) the ability to combine a great variety of dissent with the continued involvement of the masses in religious institutions.

However, it is worth noting that the relative strength of religion in migrant-based societies might be expected to characterize only the early phase in the development of such societies. After a number of generations, the proportion of the population which has arrived by migration declines as native birth takes over and whatever peculiarities that came from migration disappear. As we would expect, the church attendance and membership rates for Australia, New Zealand, and Canada have been declining rapidly since the 1970s.⁷⁷

The fourth pattern describes those societies which the Reformation era left fairly equally divided between Catholics and Protestants. Here 'pillarization' occurs: each confession encapsulates its own and provides distinctive institutions to serve their social and political needs. While religious attachments remain relatively high, Catholics and Protestants have increasingly collaborate to retain a Christian character to the society in the face of liberal and secularist forces.⁷⁸ Such collaboration, however, can take place only where both sides have agreed on the issue of national sovereignty—

often in the course of securing freedom from imperialistic domination (as was the case in Switzerland, Holland, and, though it has a very small non-Catholic population, Belgium). Where the issue of national sovereignty is unresolved, religion is likely to be the basis of divergent national aspirations and thus a symbolic focus of dispute. The obvious case is that of Northern Ireland.⁷⁹

Finally, to cover the broad territory of Western Europe, there is the case of Catholic states in which class formation and social differentiation did not produce widespread and sharp antagonism towards the Church, because the Church provided a central focus of cultural identity in opposition to an imperialistic neighbour which sought to impose an alien set of cultural values and identities upon a reluctant populace. Religious adherence remained strong as an expression of protest, of rejection of alien values and domination, and of cultural and social integrity. The obvious cases are Poland and the Irish Republic.

Conclusion

Putting together the account of the deep structure of secularization and the surface variations in patterns of change suggests a very broad principle: modernization generates secularization except where religion finds or retains work to do other than relating individuals to the supernatural. This principle helps explain not only some of the patterns outlined above, but also some of those to be found within particular societies. We might say that religion diminishes in social significance except in two broad contexts which will be the subject of Chapter 5: cultural defence and cultural transition.

Notes

1. Bernard Hamilton, *Religion in the Medieval West* (London: Edward Arnold, 1986), 55.
2. *Ibid.* 56.
3. David Cressy, 'Purification, Thanksgiving and the Churching of Women in Post-Reformation England', *Past and Present*, 141 (Nov. 1993), 115.
4. Hamilton, *Religion*, 87.
5. *Ibid.* 105-7.

6. Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Harmondsworth, Middx.: Penguin, 1973), 41.
7. Hamilton, *Religion*, 106.
8. David Hempton, 'Popular Religion and Irreligion in Victorian Fiction', *Historical Studies*, 16 (1987), 185-6.
9. For various studies of religion and respectability, see T. W. Lacquer, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture 1780-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); Robert Q. Gray, *The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976); and Hugh McLeod, 'White Collar Values and the Role of Religion', in Geoffrey Crossick (ed.), *The Lower Middle Class in Britain 1870-1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1977).
10. These data were calculated from the series in the appendices to Robert Currie, Alan D. Gilbert, and Lee Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). So that the definition of 'membership' is rigorous, Anglican figures are of those who took communion on Easter Day rather than of those on the electoral rolls, which are generally twice as large. Catholic estimates have been derived by reducing the baptismal total in proportion to those attending Mass on an average Sunday.
11. Peter Brierley, *A Century of British Christianity: Historical Statistics 1900-1985 with Projections to 2000* (London: MARC Europe, 1989).
12. The parallel figures for membership and attendance in Currie, Gilbert, and Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers*, show clearly that more people belong than attend, yet one recent attempt to persuade us that the present is not significantly more secular than the past follows a presentation of church-membership figures with the assertion: 'Moreover, the British may be far less inclined than are Americans or Canadians to actually see to it that they are signed up as church members, since a far larger percentage of the British population claims to attend church with some frequency than are counted on church rolls' (Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, 'A Supply-Side Reinterpretation of the "Secularization" of Europe', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 33 (1994), 243).
13. Peter Bisset, 'Size and Growth', in Peter Brierley and Fergus Macdonald (eds.), *Prospects for Scotland: From a Census of the Churches in 1984* (London: MARC Europe, 1985), 17-25.
14. For discussions of the technical issues as well as the results, see Keith S. Inglis, 'Patterns of Religious Worship in 1851', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 11 (1960), 74-87; Donald J. Withrington, 'The 1851 Census of Religious Worship and Education: With a Note on Church Accommodation in Mid-19th Century Scotland', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 18 (1974), 133-48; and Robin Gill, *The Myth of the Empty Church* (London: SPCK, 1993).
15. Callum Brown, *The Social History of Religion in Scotland since 1730* (London: Methuen, 1987), 19, and *The People in the Pews: Religion and Society in Scotland since 1780* (Glasgow: Economic and Social History Society of Scotland, 1993), 7.
16. Fergus Macdonald, 'Introduction', in Brierley and Macdonald (eds.), *Prospects for Scotland*, 5.
17. Gill, *Myth*, 26.
18. *Ibid.* 35-8.
19. *Ibid.* 76.

20. Robin Gill, 'Secularization and Census Data', in Steve Bruce (ed.), *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 109.
21. It is worth noting that even Callum Brown, who is cited by Stark and Iannaccone as an opponent of the secularization thesis, says: 'Scotland, like both England and Wales and the United States showed strong growth in church adherence *per capita* from 1840 to 1905 . . . to be followed by very slow and erratic decline until 1956 when rapid and sustained decline commenced' (*The People in the Pews*, 30). In case the meaning of the repeated word 'decline' is in doubt, he later says: 'It was only after 1956, and especially after 1963, when church adherence started its presently unstoppable plummet' (p. 44).
22. Danièle Hervieu-Léger, 'Religion and Modernity in the French Context: For a New Approach to Secularization', *Sociological Analysis*, 51 (1990), S15–25.
23. Michael P. Hornsby-Smith, *The Changing Parish: A Study of Parishes, Priests and Parishioners after Vatican II* (London: Routledge, 1989), 37.
24. Anne Van Meerback, 'The Importance of a Religious Service at Birth: the Persistent Demand for Baptism in Flanders', *Social Compass*, 42 (1995), 47–58. See also Karel Dobbelaere and Lilianne Voyé, 'From Pillar to Postmodernity: The Changing Situation of Religion in Belgium', *Sociological Analysis*, 51 (1990), S1–S13.
25. Phillip J. Hughes, *Religion: A View from the Australian Census* (Sydney: Christian Research Association, 1993).
26. Brierley, *A Century of British Christianity*, and Andrew Brown, 'Birth Celebration Without Religion Offered', *Independent*, 23 July 1994.
27. Phillip Rose (ed.), *Social Trends 23* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1993), table 11.7.
28. The reports on the 1991 British Social Attitudes survey are from my own analysis of the original data sets, which are available from the Economic and Social Research Council's Data Archive at the University of Essex.
29. The 1947, 1951, 1957, and 1965 figures are from George H. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls: Great Britain 1937–1975* (New York: Random House, 1976). The 1981 data are from David Gerard, 'Religious Attitudes and Values', in Mark Abrams, David Gerard, and Noel Timms (eds.), *Values and Social Change in Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1985), 50–92. The 1987 data are from Michael Svennevig, Ian Haldane, Sharon Speirs, and Barrie Gunter, *Godwatching: Viewers, Religion and Television* (London: John Libbey/Independent Broadcasting Authority, 1989).
30. Brierley, *A Century of British Christianity*.
31. Barrie Gunter and Rachel Viney, *Seeing is Believing: Religion and Television in the 1990s* (London: John Libbey/Independent Television Commission, 1994), 53.
32. Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (Harmondsworth, Middx.: Penguin, 1962), 113.
33. Hamilton, *Religion*, 87–108.
34. For a history of the ecumenical movement, see W. H. T. Gairdner, 'Edinburgh 1910': *An Account and Interpretation of the World Missionary Conference* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1910), and Barry Till, *The Churches Search for Unity* (Harmondsworth, Middx.: Penguin, 1972).
35. Stark and Iannaccone ('A Supply-Side Re-interpretation') assert that the secu-

- larization thesis supposes that enlightenment has eroded religious belief. They offer no evidence that Berger, Wilson, Martin, or any other modern sociologist of secularization holds this view.
36. Ronald Fletcher, *The Making of Sociology, i. Beginnings and Foundation* (London: Nelson, 1971).
37. *The Future of an Illusion* is now available in *Civilization, Society and Religion etc.* (Pelican Freud Library, 12; Harmondsworth, Middx.: Penguin, 1986).
38. Here I am explicitly endorsing the sociology-of-knowledge perspective of Peter Berger, which argues that all 'knowledge' needs to be similarly explained. This is a radical departure from the common notion that ideas divide into 'truth' and 'ideology' and that, while the former requires no explanation, we need to explain people's mistakes in accepting falsehood. The most dramatic example of such 'explanatory dualism' is the Marxist treatment of ideology but it is also common in non-Marxist forms; see e.g. Karl Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952).
39. See Peter L. Berger, Brigitte Berger, and Hansfried Kellner, *The Homeless Mind* (Harmondsworth, Middx.: Penguin, 1974), 15.
40. E. L. G. Stone, 'The Appeal to History in Anglo-Scottish Relations between 1291 and 1401: Part 1', *Archives*, 9 (1969–70), 11–21.
41. Grant Simpson, 'The Declaration of Arbroath Revitalised', *Scottish Historical Review*, 56 (1977), 11–34.
42. Many monastery 'infirmaries' cared only for their own monks but others took in the lay ill.
43. On Chalmers in Glasgow, see Andrew L. Drummond and James Bulloch, *The Scottish Church 1688–1843* (Edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 1973).
44. This account is taken from Gellner's theory of nationalism. See Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983).
45. H. G. Graham, *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century* (London: A. & C. Black, 1937), 263.
46. This point is made in a number of places by Bryan R. Wilson: see *Religion in Secular Society* (London: C. A. Watts, 1966), and *Contemporary Transformations of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).
47. Bryan R. Wilson, *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 154.
48. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971). For an account of Durkheim's ideas, see Kenneth Thompson, *Emile Durkheim* (London: Tavistock, 1982).
49. This case is argued persuasively in Bryan R. Wilson, 'Morality in the Evolution of the Modern Social System', *British Journal of Sociology*, 36 (1985), 315–32.
50. This section is heavily influenced by Peter Berger's synthesis of the phenomenology of Alfred Schutz and the American tradition of symbolic interactionism; see Peter L. Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion* (London: Faber & Faber, 1969), and Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Harmondsworth, Middx.: Penguin, 1973).
51. Peter L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (London: Collins, 1980).
52. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1967) was the American title of the book published in Britain as *The Social Reality of Religion* (see n. 50).

53. Hornsby-Smith, *The Changing Parish*, 60, summarizing the conclusions of Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Vers un nouveau christianisme: Introduction à la sociologie du christianisme* (Paris: Cerf, 1986).
54. Bryan R. Wilson, 'The Functions of Religion: A Reappraisal', *Religion*, 18 (1988), 199–210.
55. This point is argued at length with illustrations in Steve Bruce, *A House Divided: Protestantism, Schism and Secularization* (London: Routledge, 1990).
56. Thomas Vincent, *The Shorter Catechism Explained from Scripture* (1674; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1980).
57. The extent to which belief in the imminence of the supernatural has become attenuated, even among conservative Christians, is clear in the extent to which even conservative Protestant churches accept secular definitions of mental illness.
58. A. Symondson, *The Victorian Crisis of Faith* (London: SPCK, 1970).
59. Berger, Berger, and Kellner, *Homeless Mind*.
60. It is worth adding here that a sociologist who spent thirteen years in detailed study of an Australian outback community doubts that religion serves even this attenuated role. He concludes that his study 'fails to confirm the claims of Berger, Mol and Wallace that church-oriented religion has the potential for at least partially meeting a wider range of fundamental socio-psychological needs' (Ken Dempsey, 'Is Religion Still Relevant in the Private Sphere? The State of Organized Religion in an Australian Rural Community', *Sociological Analysis*, 50 (1989), 247–63).
61. In one of the least plausible but best-known examples of such arguments (it was reprinted in a collection of readings which accompanies a best-selling introductory sociology textbook), Hadden shows a complete misunderstanding of the scope of most secularization theories by offering Iranian fundamentalism as strong counter-evidence; see Jeffrey K. Hadden, 'Toward Desacralizing Secularization Theory', *Social Forces*, 65 (1987), 587–611; repr. in slightly abridged form as Reading 48 in Anthony Giddens (ed.), *Human Societies: A Reader* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 230–7. The matter is frequently confused by scholars using the secularization thesis as a peg on which to hang arguments and observations that have little or nothing to do with the secularization arguments as presented by Wilson, Martin, Berger, and others. For example, Liebman situates his observations on religious extremism by saying in the abstract of a journal article that 'contrary to prevailing paradigms of modernization and secularization . . . extremism is the religious norm' (Charles S. Liebman, 'Extremism as a Religious Norm', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 22 (1983), 75). See also R. Stephen Warner, 'Work in Progress towards a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States', *American Journal of Sociology*, 98 (1993), 1044–93.
62. R. Martin Goodridge, 'The Ages of Faith: Romance or Reality', *Sociological Review*, 23 (1975), 381–96.
63. Much of this sort of material can be found in Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*.
64. Hamilton, *Religion*, 115–18.
65. Robert Whiting, *The Blind Devotion of the People: Popular Religion in the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 70.
66. Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants: The Church in English Society*

- 1559–1625 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), and *Godly People: Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism* (London: Hambledon Press, 1983).
67. Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories* (London: Methuen, 1981), 194–5.
68. Margaret Spufford, 'Can We Count the "Godly" and the "Conformable" in the Seventeenth Century?', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 36 (1985), 437–8.
69. David Hay and Ann Morisy, 'Reports of Ecstatic, Paranormal or Religious Experience in Great Britain and the United States: A Comparison of Trends', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 17 (1978), 255. It is worth noting that Hay and Morisy's data show a very strong connection between conventional indices of religiosity and the experiences they document and measure, which hardly supports the general claim that 'implicit' religion is an alternative to, and compensation for the absence of, conventional religion. Bibby tried and failed to find evidence of implicit religion in Canadian survey data. He concluded 'lack of empirically identifiable invisible religion is further evident in the answers posed to the so-called ultimate questions. Only the theme of traditional religious commitment is consistently associated with clear-cut answers to such questions' (Reginald Bibby, 'Searching for Invisible Thread: Meaning Systems in Contemporary Canada', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 22 (1983), 117). For an introductory discussion of implicit religion, see Edward Bailey, 'The Implicit Religion of Contemporary Society: An Orientation and a Plea for its Study', *Religion*, 13 (1983), 69–83.
70. David Hay and Ann Morisy, 'Secular Society/Religious Meaning: A Contemporary Paradox', unpublished paper, 1981.
71. Private communication, 6 July 1994.
72. Susan Budd, *Varieties of Unbelief: Atheists and Agnostics in English Society 1850–1960* (London: Heinemann, 1977).
73. The following is in effect a summary of David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978). For an empirical elaboration, see Liana Giorgi, 'Religious Involvement in a Secularized Society: An Empirical Confirmation of Martin's General Theory of Secularisation', *British Journal of Sociology*, 43 (1992), 639–56.
74. The specific question of the supposed relationship between urbanization, pluralism, and secularization has been much debated. Often the arguments are highly technical and concern the relative merits of different statistical techniques for measuring each variable. The more general disagreements concern the already mentioned (and I believe mistaken) assumption of the critics of the secularization approach that it requires steady and unrelieved decline in institutional religion. As I have argued in this chapter, it is quite possible to accept (a) that elements of urbanization encouraged greater personal commitment, deepened individual religious knowledge, and strengthened social ties to fellow-believers in voluntary associations and (b) that industrialization and urbanization promoted social, political, and cultural changes that made the general environment less fertile for religious belief. For recent contributions to the arguments, see Callum Brown, 'Did Urbanization Secularize Britain?', *Urban History Yearbook* (1988), 1–14; Steve Bruce, 'Pluralism and Religious Vitality', in Bruce (ed.), *Religion and Modernization*, 170–94; Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, 'Religious Economies and Sacred Canopies: Religious Mobilization in American Cities, 1906', *American Sociological Review*, 53 (1988), 41–9; and Kevin

- D. Breault, 'New Evidence on Religious Pluralism, Urbanism and Religious Participation', *American Sociological Review*, 54 (1989), 1048-53.
75. David Martin, *General Theory*, 30.
76. This case is argued at length in Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), and Bryan R. Wilson, 'Religion and the Churches in America', in William G. McLoughlin and Robert N. Bellah (eds.), *Religion in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), 73-110.
77. For data on declining church attendance in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, see notes to Chapter 4. For a comprehensive review of religion in those countries, North America, and Western Europe up to the 1970s, see Hans Mol (ed.), *Western Religion: A Country by Country Sociological Inquiry* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972).
78. G. A. Irwin and J. J. M. Van Holsteyn, 'Decline of the Structured Model of Electoral Competition', *Western European Politics*, 12 (1989), 21-41.
79. Steve Bruce, *God Save Ulster! The Religion and Politics of Paisleyism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), and John Fulton, *The Tragedy of Belief: Division, Politics and Religion in Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).