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Religion in the Modern World: Between Secularization  
and Resurgence

Martin Riesebrodt



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**Abstract**

For many decades the master narrative in the social scientific study of religion has been the secularization paradigm. Scholars firmly believed that religion would play an increasingly marginal political and social role in modern societies. However, the global resurgence of religions and their politicization since the 1980s led to sudden conversions. Many argued that secularization had nothing to do with Western modernity but only with religious market conditions. Presently, scholars hotly debate whether we witness secularization or a resurgence of religion. In my view, we are witnessing both: secularization and the resurgence of religion, and we should analyze them not as contradictions but as interrelated processes. In order to do so, we should revisit two basic concepts: religion and secularization. We need to break down the mega-concept of secularization into empirically observable trends and conceptualize religion in a way that helps explaining its resurgence.

**Keywords**

Secularization; resurgence of religion.

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Until the late 1970s most sociologists knew exactly the role religion would play in the modern world. As part of the process of Western modernization all societies were also undergoing a process of secularization. Religion would not disappear, but would be marginalized and privatized. Sociological theories since the 1960s described modernization more-or-less in Weberian fashion, as rationalization through institutional differentiation.

Differentiation produces relatively autonomous social spheres and frees them from religious control. This applies in particular to the separation of church and state, but also leads to the emergence of various institutional orders, like the economy, politics, and secular culture, which now can pursue their own goals and develop their own rules without being constrained by religion. But, obviously, this process of differentiation also institutionalizes religion as a separate social sphere. It was this displacement of religion from a force permeating society as a whole to a sphere of its own that originally has been understood to be the central feature of secularization and was believed to be an undisputed necessity for the emergence of truly modern societies.<sup>1</sup>

Had secularization theorists stuck solely to the thesis of institutional differentiation, the secularization debate would have been less confusing. But, unfortunately, most scholars made the concept of secularization much more complex. Many reasoned that this institutional differentiation should imply a general decline of religion. Religion would be relegated from the center of society to the periphery; science would replace religious beliefs; religion would disappear from the public sphere and become primarily a private matter; religious associations and participation in religious ritual practices would decrease.

Often somewhat limited evidence from various European countries was sufficient to transform this prediction of religious decline into a universal law. Unfortunately, these theorists did not explain how these occasionally concurrent processes of institutional differentiation, disenchantment, and privatization were actually linked. Instead they just assumed that they were all part of a complex epochal process called secularization. This assumption of a general and necessary religious decline turned out also to be a poor marketing strategy for the sociology of religion. By predicting the demise of its object of study, it also attested to its own future irrelevance.

Given these strong opinions about the role of religion in the modern world, hardly anybody was prepared for the dramatic resurgence of religion that happened since the late 1970s. Just to remind you of some events:

- in 1979 we witnessed the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the war of the Islamic mujahidin against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.
- in 1980 Ronald Reagan was elected president of the United States with the support of politicized evangelical Christians, but also Catholics, Jews, and Mormons.
- in Israel religious nationalists challenged secular Zionism.
- in Palestine the first Intifada shifted power from secular nationalists to Islamist groups.
- in India Sikh separatists challenged the secular state; and after the violent conquest of the Golden temple in Amritsar, Sikh bodyguards assassinated Indira Gandhi. The 1980s also saw the rise of the Hindu-nationalist BJP party.
- in Poland Solidarnosc with support from the Catholic Church challenged the Communist state.

These few examples should suffice to demonstrate that the resurgence of religion into politics was for

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<sup>1</sup> Berger, Peter L. (1967): *The Sacred Canopy*. Garden City, N.Y.; Berger, Peter (1979): *The Heretical Imperative. Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation*. Garden City, N.Y.; Dobbelaere, Karel (2002): *Secularization. An Analysis at Three Levels*. Brüssel, New York; Thomas Luckmann (1991); Wilson, Bryan (1982): *Religion in Sociological Perspective*. Oxford

real.<sup>2</sup> Since the late 1970s religion had re-emerged as a public force, as a marker of ethnic identities, as a shaper of modern subjects and their ways of life. This renewed political importance of religion turned out to be a global phenomenon, occurring in North America, the Middle East, Africa, South and East Asia, as well as Latin America and even Europe where Yugoslavia fell apart along religious lines.

These events had a profound impact on the study of religion. Most important, it challenged conventional theories of secularization. After all the talk about the marginalization of religion, religions were claiming again a place at the center. After all the emphasis on invisible, privatized religions, there were suddenly plenty of visible ones. After all the attention that had been paid to subjectivist forms of religion, to “spirituality” or “implicit” religion, there were rather explicit religions with strong ontological claims and political agendas. Contrary to expectations of secularization, religious movements challenged the secular state and social theorists had to cope with their cognitive dissonance. The two most typical reactions were denial and instant conversion.

Some authors simply insisted that their expectations of modernization and secularization were basically sound. Europe was normal, the rest of the world an exception to the rule. The United States had always been somewhat strange and religious. In Poland religion only means nationalism. And the resurgence of religion outside the modern West was still part of an ongoing, modernizing process. Accordingly, scholars detected a “Puritan spirit” or an “inner-worldly asceticism” in various religious movements, honoring our patron saint Max Weber.<sup>3</sup>

Other authors chose the opposite route of “instant conversion” by denying any general trend towards secularization in the West and elsewhere. For them, secularization has nothing to do with modernity, but is just an effect of market conditions. Using supply-side models of economics, rational choice theorists claimed that secularization happens when big lazy firms, called churches, have no incentives to vigorously pursue growth in their membership. But, where many small firms compete with each other, like in the United States, religion has been strong throughout history and also in modernity.<sup>4</sup>

Much of this debate took place as a tribal dispute between European “advocates” and American “deniers of secularization, who accuse each other of using their own historical experience as the sole basis for their claims. In my view, both have narrowed the understanding of secularization and share a rather limited, Euro-American perspective. Market theorists have changed the label of secularization, by redefining it solely in terms of membership in religious associations and religious beliefs. They do acknowledge institutional differentiation as a fact, but no longer call it secularization.<sup>5</sup> They reject any broader theoretical perspective on the condition of modernity and believe that their market model of religion works across history and civilizations.

Some European secularization theorists have stuck to their complex model of secularization as the coincidence of institutional differentiation, disenchantment, and privatization; others have adopted the criteria of membership in religious associations and religious beliefs of the market theorists. They tirelessly try to show that both are indeed shrinking, at least in the West.<sup>6</sup> For example, the sociologist of religion, Detlef Pollack, interprets as proof of secularization the fact that the number of people in the United States who no longer feel attached to a religion grew from 3% to 20% over the last decades.

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<sup>2</sup> Juergensmeyer, Mark (1993): *The New ColdWar? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*. Berkeley. Riesebrodt, Martin (2000): *Die Rückkehr der Religionen. Fundamentalismus und der <Kampf der Kulturen>*. München.

<sup>3</sup> Gellner; Waardenburg Gellner Gellner, Ernest (1981): *Muslim Society*. Cambridge.

1981, 131-48; Waardenburg (1983) Waardenburg, Jacques (1983): ‘The Puritan Pattern in Islamic Revival Movements’. In: *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 3, 687-702

<sup>4</sup> Finke, Roger und Rodney Stark (1992): *The Churching of America, 1776–1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*. New Brunswick; Iannaccone, Lawrence (1998): ‘Introduction to the Economics of Religion’. In *Journal of Economic Literature*, vol. 36, 1465–1496; Warner, Stephen: ‘Work in Progress Toward a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States’. In: *American Journal of Sociology*, 98, 1044–1093; Young, Lawrence A. (Hg.) (1997): *Rational Choice Theory and Religion*. New York

<sup>5</sup> Stark, Rodney (1999): ‘Secularization, R.I.P.’ In: *Sociology of Religion*, 60, 249-73

<sup>6</sup> Bruce, Steve (2002): *God is Dead. Secularization in the West*. Oxford



I find this less convincing than he does, since the number shows that after 200 years of secularization still 80% belong to a religion.<sup>7</sup>

When confronted with non-European evidence of religious resurgence in obviously modernizing societies, like China, India, or South Korea, secularization theorists now often retreat to the position that their thesis applies only to Western societies. But if they abandon their originally universal claims, they also abandon the theoretical ambitions they once had.

Explanations of rational choice theories also fail when it comes to cases beyond the United States or Europe, since their assumptions are based on an organizational model taken from the USA, where a competitive market exists and religions are organized as exclusive voluntary associations. There one is free to change membership, but one can be a member of only one religious association. The group exerts a certain degree of social control over one's conduct of life and one is expected to actively participate in the social life of the association.

To the best of my knowledge, all this does not apply to most East Asian countries, where – nevertheless – religious vitality can be observed. Moreover, rational choice theories assume that individuals rationally calculate advantages and disadvantages of religious engagement free of traditional customs and loyalties. This is not even true for the American case, where conversions within the same religious tradition are more likely to happen than conversions across traditions.

In my view, neither secularization theories nor rational choice theories are able to describe and explain the role of religion in the modern world, and especially its resurgence, adequately. Therefore, instead of turning from one deficient theory (of modernization and secularization) to another (market theory of religion), let us pause and analyze what exactly went wrong with secularization theories and the general failure of sociology to predict the resurgence of religion.

The real task at hand is not to decide whether there is secularization OR a resurgence of religion. What we need instead is an explanation of how these processes are interrelated. In order to do this, we have to revise the concept of secularization as well as the theories of religion that have dominated sociology for a long time. Let me begin with secularization.

1. Nobody seriously doubts that secularization processes have indeed taken place. But, and here I quite agree with José Casanova, one should break down the mega-concept and distinguish between institutional differentiation, disenchantment, and privatization as three processes that can coincide but don't have to.<sup>8</sup> None of these three processes has the status of a historical law, but of a contingent and contradictory historical development.

2. Institutional differentiation does not automatically lead to a loss of significance of religion in modern societies. Such a consequence is neither logically necessary nor historically true. Social differentiation restructures the relationship between various institutional orders. The economy, politics, secular culture, as well as religion all gain more autonomy in relationship to the other spheres. It is true that the role of religion in the regulation of economic, political, and cultural affairs diminishes. But it is equally true that political control over religious institutions decreases as well. Religious institutions can create their own public sphere and participate in general public discourses. One could even argue that because of social differentiation, religion gains in autonomy and legitimacy to critique these other spheres.

3. Secularization in terms of institutional differentiation has obviously taken place in the West, and not only in the West, but in diverse forms and with uneven consistency. In the US the disestablishment of religion, the “wall of separation” between state and religion, has been institutionalized quite consistently, first on the federal level, later in the various states of the Union. In many European countries, however, religion was not strictly differentiated but, rather, nationalized. Even now European countries, like England, Denmark and Norway, still know established state churches.

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<sup>7</sup> [https://www.uni-muenster.de/Religion-und\\_Moderne/aktuelles/forschung/standpunkte/pollack\\_usa\\_saekularisierung.html](https://www.uni-muenster.de/Religion-und_Moderne/aktuelles/forschung/standpunkte/pollack_usa_saekularisierung.html) (21.1.2014)

<sup>8</sup> Casanova, José (1994): *Public Religions in the Modern World*. Chicago; also Casanova, 'Rethinking Secularization', in *Hedgehog Review*, Spring/Summer 2006, pp. 7-22

The democratic liberal and the authoritarian tradition have left their traces. Whereas in the US the state even today does not have statistics about membership in religious associations (they probably let the NSA handle it), the German state even collects taxes for the churches. The German welfare state has handed over major parts of its services to the big churches. With over a million employees, the two biggest employers in Germany are the social services of the Catholic and Lutheran churches (“Caritas” and “Diakonie”), sponsored by the state.<sup>9</sup> If secularism is understood as the neutrality of the state vis-à-vis all religious associations and creeds and their equal treatment, most European countries are far from having realized this ideal.

The diverse forms institutional differentiation has produced, and the continuing debates about the boundaries between religion and politics, prove that institutional differentiation only partially follows from structural necessities of modernity; but the degree and forms are the result of political power structures and negotiations.

4. This all suggests that secularism should be understood as an ideal type. Almost no state and society is totally secular, not even in the West. There exist only various approximations to the ideal type of secularism and their degree and quality vary according to pre-existing institutional structures and the distribution of power between secularist and anti-secularist forces.

When we understand secularization as disenchantment, the situation is similar. In part, religious thought has been replaced with scientific thought. Scientific thinking dominates all our major institutions, like governments, universities, industries, hospitals, or the organization of transportation. Science has become so much the standard that conservative religious groups in the US oppose the teaching of the theory of evolution in the name of “scientific creationism.”

However, scientific thought has by no means replaced religious thought, disenchantment has been always accompanied by re-enchantment. There exist many industries, which profit from the re-enchantment of the world. Hollywood and Bollywood produce modern myths, stores offer a huge selection of books on spirituality, esotericism, mysticism, and new age, and many Internet sites are specialized on do-it-yourself religions. Obviously, disenchantment and re-enchantment take place simultaneously. For many people they do not seem to compete with each other. They believe in medicine but also bring offerings to a temple and pray.

Also, the trend towards the internal rationalization of religion is ambiguous. On the one hand, liturgical reforms eliminating cultic objects and “magical” practices have taken place since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, especially in Protestant Christianity and Judaism. And Asian religious reform movements, for example in Theravada Buddhism and Hinduism, have also modeled themselves after Protestant missionary organizations.<sup>10</sup> But, on the other hand, new religious movements with strong ecstatic features already emerged parallel to rationalizing reform movements during the Enlightenment, like Pietism or Methodism. And presently Pentecostalism and other charismatic currents within Christianity are globally among the fastest growing religions. Their members speak in tongues and believe in miracles and the power of the devil.

To sum up: secularization theorists have exaggerated the extent to which institutional differentiation and disenchantment have actually taken place in Western societies. They have failed to point out the ambiguity of these processes and the various forms and degrees in which they were actually implemented. They made secularization prescriptive, treating it as a necessary historical step in order to reach the promised land of Western modernity.

### **Secularization as Politics**

The diversity of outcomes of secularization processes alone attests to the fact that secularization has always had a strong political component. Of course, such policies were prepared by the pressures created through the inefficiency and lack of legitimacy of existing regimes. In Europe Enlightened Absolutism restructured state and society according to criteria of rational administration overcoming the arbitrariness of the nobility and the churches. But, instead of looking at secularization as the implementation of historic reason, we should also analyze it from the perspective of power struggles

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<sup>9</sup> Graf, Friedrich Wilhelm: *Kirchendämmerung*. München: C.H. Beck 2013

<sup>10</sup> Richard Gombrich & Gananath Obeyesekere: *Buddhism Transformed*. Princeton 1988, pp. 202-240

between different social groups, classes, and cultural milieus. How far secularization policies can go always depends on the power structures in each country.

Advocates of secularization tend to be also advocates of a centralized bureaucratic state, in which local elites have been replaced by national elites of lawyers, bureaucrats, and professionals. Accordingly, secularization is also a process that implies political centralization, the erosion of local and regional autonomies, the marginalization and disestablishment of old elites. It also tends to represent a revolution in social morals. The secular state produces an image of the human as an abstract individual that is stripped of all particularities of gender, age, ethnicity, and religion. All are treated as equals in stark contrast to traditional social formations, where they express hierarchies.

Let me illustrate such conflicts using the example of pre-revolutionary Iran. Among the most frequently articulated criticisms of the Shah were the centralization of the state and its secularizing policies. The land reform undermined the power of the landed aristocracy and the religious endowments. The creation of a state-sponsored Islam undermined the power of the Shi'a hierarchy. The policy of women's emancipation undermined the moral authority of Islamic scholars and preachers. The harassment of the Bazar merchants and artisans was aimed at the destruction of the social and financial base of the clergy. And the attempted disestablishment of Islam expressed through the invention of a pre-Islamic, Achaemenidian foundation of the monarchy and the abolition of the Islamic calendar, were an outright declaration of war against Shi'a Islam.<sup>11</sup>

Similar examples could be provided from other Western and non-Western societies in order to show that secularization should not only be viewed in technocratic terms as institutional differentiation for the sake of rational and fair governance, but also as a culture war between various social formations in any given society. Secularization represents a social revolution from above and, as such, it invites resistance. Religious fundamentalisms offer the most radical counter-vision of secularist ideals. But such counter-visions do not simply use a religious idiom in order to pursue ultimately universally shared secular goals. They reject the ideal order and the anthropology of secular regimes.<sup>12</sup>

## Understanding Religion

Religion is not just the most obvious ideology to fight secularism; it is also a classical option in order to cope with the contingencies of life. This means that the failures and deficiencies of secular regimes can be ideally addressed through religious resources. In order to see that, one has to revisit the very concept of religion.

For many decades, sociologists have interpreted religion either as civil religion, ethics, values, worldview, or as 'spirituality' (whatever that means). None of these definitions is particularly helpful in explaining the resurgence of religion and the central topics addressed by religious protest movements. Therefore, I will propose a perspective on religion that can better explain the resurgence of religions into the political sphere.

When we introduce a concept and theory of religion we cannot but address the fundamental post-modern critique of the concept itself. I will keep it brief, however, since I have addressed this critique elsewhere in more detail.<sup>13</sup> I find it very unhelpful and historically inaccurate, to reduce the concept of religion to a solely modern Western liberal, privatized, and depoliticized understanding of religion.

First of all, in the discourse of Western modernity many different understandings of religion have competed with each other over the last two hundred years. For example, we know religion as divine gift of reason, as experience of revelation, as projection, as proto-science, as affect and affect

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<sup>11</sup> Martin Riesebrodt: *Pious Passion*. Berkeley 1993

<sup>12</sup> Marty, M. E. and Appleby, R. S. (eds) (1991) *Fundamentalisms Observed*; (1993a) *Fundamentalisms and Society*. (1993b) *Fundamentalisms and the State*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>13</sup> The following exposition follows Martin Riesebrodt, *The Promise of Salvation. A Theory of Religion*. Chicago: Chicago University Press 2010.

control, as sacralized norms, ideals, and categories of thought, as interest in salvation, as function of the brain, and as commodity.<sup>14</sup>

Second, the concept of religion is much older. Almost all societies have compared their practices and beliefs related to superhuman powers to those of others. Religious actors and institutions have recognized each other as similar. All empires have known religious policies and even created offices overseeing religious affairs. And finally, the most sophisticated pre-modern classifications of religions actually stem from Muslim scholars of the 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century, like Shahrastani, not least because taxation in Islam was based on religious affiliation.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, I am confident that we can use religion as a general concept if we define it adequately.

Unfortunately, in the sociology of religion a formalistic, functional definition of religion has been widespread, which dilutes the concept until it becomes useless. Stimulated by a very superficial reading of Durkheim, all phenomena that express collective emotions and thereby serve social integration or identity formation are subsumed under the concept of religion. Anything becomes religious “somehow” or “implicitly”, be it barbecues, football games, or art exhibitions.

But even classical approaches to religion have been more interested in the effects of religion on political and economic behavior than on religious behavior proper. Religions were studied as if religious practices had no meaning and goal of their own. In order to define religion, we have to focus on specific structures of meaning embedded in social relations expressed in religious practices. Therefore, no particular religion or religious tradition should serve as a model. The concept of religion I propose is not like Christianity but rather like kinship, a category that refers to a web of relationships including their meanings, norms, and rules of interaction.

Accordingly, I define religion as a system of meaningful practices with reference to superhuman powers. This reference to superhuman powers expresses a social relationship like the concept of kinship that structures human behavior. The superhuman quality of these powers consists in the belief that they are capable of influencing or controlling dimensions of the practitioners’ lives that the practitioners themselves are unable to control. Usually these dimensions are related to the mortality of the human body, the control of natural forces, and the precariousness of social relations (like inequality, changes in social status, or conflicts).

The practices are culturally imagined ways to communicate with these powers, manipulate them, or internally activate them if they are believed to reside in human beings. This definition draws a clear boundary that is compatible with commonsense understandings of religion and allows for non-theistic religions. It also directs our attention to practices, i.e. observable social action instead of beliefs, and relates doctrines and ethics to such practices, instead of theologies of intellectuals.

This definition also implies that we should distinguish between religion, religious tradition, and religiosity. A religion is a system of practices in time and space, whereas a religious tradition represents the intellectual construction of symbolic continuities across time and space. And religiosity I call the subjective appropriation of religion. Accordingly, Buddhism and Christianity are not religions but religious traditions. They contain or contribute as a resource to religions as concrete systems of practices. But properly one should only speak of Buddhisms or Christianities in the plural.

How do we identify the meaning of religious practices? Let me illustrate this by drawing an analogy to the theater. The meaning of a theater play cannot be identified by asking theater critics, the actors, or the audience, but only through the script and its interpretation in the performance. The same holds true for religion. The meaning of religious traditions can be extracted from the discourses of intellectuals who construct them. The meaning of religiosity can be known through the practicing subjects. But the meaning of systems of religious practices can only be identified through an analysis of liturgies, i.e. the scripts that inform and structure the intercourse with superhuman powers and the promises and expectations inscribed in this operation. Liturgies express the meanings of religious practices objectively because they are standardized, obligatory, and independent of subjective beliefs.

What do liturgies tell us about the meaning of religious practices? The liturgies of all religions of all times contain the promise that through the communication with superhuman powers, or their

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<sup>14</sup> Riesebrodt, *Promise*, pp. 46-70

<sup>15</sup> Riesebrodt, *Promise*, pp. 21-45

manipulation, misfortune can be averted, crises can be overcome, and blessings and salvation can be obtained. This content of liturgies explains what religions promise their practitioners and therefore allows us to conclude that these promises are related to the reasons why people practice religions. It also explains the power and authority of religious institutions as mediators and gatekeepers controlling the access to superhuman powers.

### **The Public Resurgence of Religions**

How does this interpretation of religion allow us to better understand the resurgence of religion? Whereas functional explanations of religion deduce the meaning of religion from societal requirements, I propose to read religious practices as a seismograph of the social. If the meaning of religious practices lies centrally in averting misfortune, coping with crises, and providing blessings and salvation, then religious practices – carefully analyzed – should inform us about the misfortune to be averted, about the crises to be overcome, about the blessings hoped for, and the imagination of eternal happiness.

Religious practices express the anxieties and hopes, the problems and imagined solutions of individuals and families, of kinship groups and ethnic groups, of religious communities and nations, of men and women, of the young and the old, of the privileged and the underprivileged. Religions always have addressed the mortality of the human body, the lack of control over the natural environment, and the fragility of human relations based on differences in power and wealth. The more people are exposed to crises they cannot manage with the human means available, the more likely they will take refuge in religious powers. Such crises are recurrent, but change their social location.

For a long time Western modernity could convincingly instill the belief in its growing ability to rationally control nature, the human body, and social order. Progress in medicine and technology has been impressive indeed. Illnesses that would have killed people a hundred years ago are now easily curable. Life expectancy has increased. Science and the welfare state have made human life much more secure and protected.

However, at the same time new dimensions of crises and threats have emerged. Humanity faces the risks of atomic, chemical, and biological warfare, the destruction of the environment, global warming, and new epidemics. Many people die from the achievements of our technological civilization.

Capitalism, the most powerful and most secular force, has in part produced great wealth, even for the masses and not only in the West. But it is a revolutionary force that permanently transforms social conditions according to market conditions and technological innovations. It creates new subjects, transforms the traditional life-chances of people, their structure of needs and their relations to others. Capitalism offers great social advancement but also dramatic decline; it undermines patriarchal authority, destroys families and kinship groups, imposes demographic mobility, defines work and income as the measure of the value of human beings, and exposes us all to the irrationality of the market.

Max Weber once suggested, with respect to the ancient Near East and Greece, that “epochs of strong prophetic propaganda”, in all its different forms, are related to “the reconstitution of the great world empires in Asia, and the resumption and intensification of international commerce.”<sup>16</sup> These processes in the ancient world may exhibit some interesting parallels to what we presently like to call “globalization.” Being exposed to incomprehensible and uncontrollable market forces, capitalism itself is often taken for a magical power that can be controlled only by magical means.

If we understand religion to be a cultural resource for coping with misfortune, managing crises, and attaining blessings and salvation through meaningful action, we hardly expect religion to disappear with modernization. Quite the contrary, if modernization implies a certain degree of secularization, religion remains one of the obvious alternatives to criticize and oppose what are perceived to be the failures and exaggerations of the secular state, the corruption of secular elites, and – from a religious point of view – the depravity of secular morality.

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<sup>16</sup> Max Weber, *Sociology of Religion* Boston, p. 48

The Western experience with the secular state has often been quite positive, when we, for example, consider the enfranchisement of the working classes, of women, or African Americans in the United States. Experiences of non-Western countries have often been much less benign, when we think of the abuses of Stalinist regimes or military dictatorships in the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America.

As long as the secular forces of capitalism and bureaucracy exist, they will produce those who feel uprooted, marginalized, left behind, and disenfranchised and therefore will oppose secularism for reasons we might find justified or unjustified. For these people religious associations represent one option to articulate their grievances and organize against the secular state. For leaders of religious associations this represents an opportunity to revive and renew their organizations by giving these people a voice and exposing the secular state and secular institutions to religious criticism. This dialectic of secularization and religious resurgence is unlikely to disappear in the near future, and in some countries it remains to be seen which side will gain the upper hand.

