
Secularism in Retreat

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Peter L. Berger

A FEW YEARS AGO the first volume coming out of the Fundamentalism Project landed on my desk. The Fundamentalism Project was generously funded by the MacArthur Foundation and chaired by Martin Marty, the distinguished church historian at the University of Chicago. While a number of very reputable scholars took part in it, and although the published results are of generally excellent quality, my contemplation of this first volume evoked in me what has been called an *Aha!* experience.

Now, the book was very big. Sitting there on my desk, massively, it was of the “book-weapon” type, the kind with which one could do serious injury. So I asked myself: Why would the MacArthur Foundation pay out several million dollars to support an international study of religious fundamentalists? Two answers came to mind. The first was obvious and not very interesting: The MacArthur Foundation is a very progressive outfit; it understands fundamentalists to be anti-progressive; the Project, then, was a matter of knowing one’s enemies. The second was a more interesting answer: So-called fundamentalism was assumed to be a strange, difficult-to-understand phenomenon;

the purpose of the Project was to delve into this alien world and make it more understandable.

But here came another question: *Who* finds this world strange, and to *whom* must it be made understandable? The answer to that question was easy: people to whom the officials of the MacArthur Foundation normally talk, such as professors at American elite universities. And with this came the *Aha!* experience: The concern that must have led to this Project was based on an upside-down perception of the world. The notion here was that so-called fundamentalism (which, when all is said and done, usually refers to any sort of passionate religious movement) is a rare, hard-to-explain thing. But in fact it is not rare at all, neither if one looks at history, nor if one looks around the contemporary world. On the contrary, what is rare is people who think otherwise. Put simply: The difficult-to-understand phenomenon is *not* Iranian mullahs but American university professors. (Would it, perhaps, be worth a multi-million-dollar project to try to explain the latter group?)

The point of this little story is that the assumption that we live in a secularized world is false: The world today, with some exceptions attended to below, is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever. This means that a whole body of literature written by historians and social scientists over the course of the 1950s and ‘60s, loosely labeled as “secularization theory”, was essentially mistaken. In my early

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work I contributed to this literature and was in good company so doing—most sociologists of religion had similar views. There were good reasons for holding these views at the time, and some of these writings still stand up. But the core premise does not.

The key idea of secularization theory is simple and can be traced to the Enlightenment: Modernization necessarily leads to a decline of religion, both in society and in the minds of individuals. It is precisely this key idea that has turned out to be wrong. To be sure, modernization has had some secularizing effects, more in some places than in others. But it has also provoked powerful movements of counter-secularization. Also, secularization on the societal level is not necessarily linked to secularization on the level of individual consciousness. Thus, certain religious institutions have lost power and influence in many societies, but both old and new religious beliefs and practices have nevertheless continued in the lives of individuals, sometimes taking new institutional forms and sometimes leading to great explosions of religious fervor. Conversely, religiously-identified institutions can play social or political roles even when very few people believe or practice the religion supposedly represented by these institutions. To say the least, the relation between religion and modernity is rather complicated.

Rejection and Adaptation

THE PROPOSITION that modernity necessarily leads to a decline of religion is, in principle, “value-free.” That is, it can be affirmed both by people who think it is good news and by people who think that it is very bad news indeed. Most Enlightenment thinkers and most progressive-minded people ever since have tended toward the idea that secularization is a good thing, at least insofar as it does away with religious phenomena that are “backward”, “superstitious”, or “reactionary” (a religious residue purged of these negative characteris-

tics may still be deemed acceptable). But religious people, including those with very traditional or orthodox beliefs, have also affirmed the modernity/secularity linkage, and have greatly bemoaned it. Some have defined modernity as the enemy, to be fought whenever possible. Others have, on the contrary, seen modernity as an invincible worldview to which religious beliefs and practices should adapt themselves. In other words, *rejection* and *adaptation* are two strategies open to religious communities in a world understood to be secularized. As is always the case when strategies are based on mistaken perception of the terrain, both strategies have had very doubtful results.

It is possible, of course, to reject any number of modern ideas and values theoretically, but to make this rejection stick in the lives of people is much more difficult. To do that, one can try to take over society as a whole and make one’s counter-modern religion obligatory for everyone—a difficult enterprise in most countries in the contemporary world. Franco tried in Spain, and failed; the mullahs are still at it in Iran and a couple of other places; in most of the world such exercises in religious conquest are unlikely to succeed. And this unlikelihood *does* have to do with modernization, which brings about very heterogeneous societies and a quantum leap in intercultural communication, two factors favoring pluralism and *not* favoring the establishment (or re-establishment) of religious monopolies. Another form of rejection strategy is to create religious subcultures so designed as to exclude the influences of the outside society. That is a more promising exercise than religious revolution, but it too is fraught with difficulty. Where it has taken root, modern culture is a very powerful force, and an immense effort is required to maintain enclaves with an airtight defense system. Ask the Amish in eastern Pennsylvania, or a Hasidic rabbi in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn.

Notwithstanding the apparent power of modern secular culture, secularization theory

has been falsified even more dramatically by the results of adaptation strategies attempted by religious institutions. If we really lived in a highly secularized world, then religious institutions could be expected to survive to the degree that they manage to adapt to secularity. That, indeed, has been the empirical assumption of adaptation strategies. What has in fact occurred is that, by and large, religious communities have survived and indeed flourished to the degree that they have *not* tried to adapt themselves to the alleged requirements of a secularized world. Put simply, experiments with secularized religion have generally failed; religious movements with beliefs and practices dripping with “reactionary supernaturalism” (the kind utterly beyond the pale at self-respecting faculty parties) have widely succeeded.

The struggle with modernity in the Roman Catholic Church nicely illustrates the difficulties of various rejection and adaptation strategies. In the wake of the Enlightenment and its multiple revolutions, the initial response by the Church was militant and then defiant rejection. Perhaps the most magnificent moment of that defiance came in 1870, when the First Vatican Council solemnly proclaimed the infallibility of the Pope and the immaculate conception of Mary, literally in the face of the Enlightenment about to occupy Rome in the shape of the army of Victor Emmanuel I. The disdain was mutual: The Roman monument to the Bersaglieri, the elite army units that occupied the Eternal City in the name of the Italian Risorgimento, places the heroic figure in his Bersaglieri uniform so that he is positioned with his behind pointing exactly toward the Vatican. The Second Vatican Council, almost a hundred years later, considerably modified this rejectionist stance, guided as it was by the notion of *aggiornamento*—literally, bringing the church “up-to-date” with the modern world. (I remember a conversation I had with a Protestant theologian, whom I asked what he thought would happen at the Council, this before it

had actually convened; he replied that he didn’t know, but that he was sure that they would not read the minutes of the first Council meeting.)

The Second Vatican Council was supposed to open windows, specifically the windows of the anti-secular Catholic subculture that had been constructed when it became clear that the overall society could not be reconquered. (In the United States this Catholic subculture was quite impressive right up to the very recent past.) The trouble with opening windows is that you cannot control what comes in through them, and a lot has come in—indeed, the whole turbulent world of modern culture—that has been very troubling to the Church. Under the current pontificate the Church has been steering a nuanced course in between rejection and adaptation, with mixed results in different countries.

If one looks at the international religious scene objectively, that of the Roman Catholics as well as virtually all others, one must observe that it is conservative or orthodox or traditionalist movements that are on the rise almost everywhere. These movements, whatever adjective one may choose for them, are precisely those that rejected an *aggiornamento* as defined by progressive intellectuals. Conversely, religious movements and institutions that have made great efforts to conform to a perceived modernity are almost everywhere on the decline. In the United States this has been a much commented-upon fact, exemplified by the decline of so-called mainline Protestantism and the concomitant rise of Evangelicalism; but the United States is by no means unusual in this. Nor is Protestantism.

The conservative thrust in the Roman Catholic church under John Paul II has borne fruit in both the number of converts and in the renewed enthusiasm among native Catholics, especially in non-Western countries. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, too, there occurred a remarkable revival of the Orthodox Church in Russia.

The most rapidly growing Jewish groups, both in Israel and in the diaspora, are Orthodox groups. There have been similarly vigorous upsurges of conservative religion in all the other major religious communities—Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism—as well as revival movements in smaller communities (such as Shinto in Japan and Sikhism in India).

Of course, these developments differ greatly, not only in religious content (which is obvious), but in their social and political implications. What they have in common, though, is their unambiguously *religious* inspiration. In their aggregate they provide a massive falsification of the idea that modernization and secularization are cognate phenomena. Minimally, one must note that *counter*-secularization is at least as important a phenomenon in the contemporary world as secularization.

Two Revivals . . .

BOTH IN THE media and in scholarly publications these religious movements are often subsumed under the category of “fundamentalism.” This is not a felicitous term, not only because it carries a pejorative undertone, but because it derives from the history of American Protestantism, where it has a specific reference that is distortive if extended to other religious traditions. All the same, the term has some suggestive use if one tries to explain the aforementioned developments: It suggests a combination of several features—great religious passion, a defiance of what others have defined as the *Zeitgeist*, and a return to traditional sources of religious authority. These are indeed common features across cultural boundaries. And they do reflect the presence of secularizing forces, since they must be understood as a reaction *against* them. (In that sense, at least, something of the old secularization theory may be said to hold up, albeit in a rather back-handed way.) Clearly, one of the most important topics for a sociology of contemporary religion is precisely this

interplay of secularizing and counter-secularizing forces. This is because modernity, for fully understandable reasons, undermines all the old certainties; uncertainty, in turn is a condition that many people find very hard to bear; therefore, any movement (not only a religious one) that promises to provide or to renew certainty has a ready market.

While the aforementioned common features are important, an analysis of the social and political impact of the various religious upsurges must take full account of their differences. This becomes clear when one looks at what are arguably the two most dynamic religious upsurges in the world today, the Islamic and the Evangelical ones. Comparison also underlines the weakness of the category “fundamentalism” as applied to both.

The Islamic upsurge, because of its more immediately obvious political ramifications, is the better known of the two. Yet it would be a serious error to see it only through a political lens. It is an impressive revival of emphatically *religious* commitments. And it is of vast geographical scope, affecting every Muslim country from North Africa to Southeast Asia. It continues to gain converts, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, where it is often in head-on competition with Christianity. It is becoming very visible in the burgeoning Muslim communities in Europe and, to a much lesser extent, in North America. Everywhere it is bringing about a restoration not only of Islamic beliefs, but of distinctively Islamic lifestyles, which in many ways directly contradict modern ideas—such as the relation of religion and the state, the role of women, moral codes of everyday behavior and, last but not least, the boundaries of religious and moral tolerance.

An important characteristic of the Islamic revival is that it is by no means restricted to the less modernized or “backward” sectors of society, as progressive intellectuals still like to think. On the contrary, it is very strong in cities with a high degree of modernization, and in a number of countries it is particularly visible among people with

Western-style higher education; in Egypt and Turkey, for example, it is often the daughters of secularized professionals who are putting on the veil and other accoutrements expressing so-called Islamic modesty.

Yet there are also very great differences. Even within the Middle East, the Islamic heartland, there are both religiously and politically important distinctions to be made between Sunni and Shi'a revivals—Islamic conservatism means very different things in, say, Saudi Arabia and Iran. As one moves away from the Middle East, the differences become even greater. Thus in Indonesia, the most populous Muslim country in the world, a very powerful revival movement, the Nahdatul-Ulama, is avowedly pro-democracy and pro-pluralism, the very opposite of what is commonly viewed as Muslim “fundamentalism.” Where the political circumstances allow it, there is a lively discussion about the relationship of Islam to various modern realities, and there are sharp disagreements between individuals who are equally committed to a revitalized Islam. Still, for reasons deeply grounded in the core of the tradition, it is probably fair to say that, on the whole, Islam has had a difficult time coming to terms with key modern institutions—such as pluralism, democracy, and the market economy.

The Evangelical upsurge is just as breathtaking in scope. Geographically that scope is even wider than that of the Islamic revival. It has gained huge numbers of converts in East Asia—in all the Chinese communities (including, despite severe persecution, in mainland China) and in South Korea, the Philippines, across the South Pacific, throughout sub-Saharan Africa (where it is often synthesized with elements of traditional African religion), and apparently in parts of ex-communist Europe. But the most remarkable success has occurred in Latin America; it is estimated that there are now between forty and fifty million Evangelical Protestants south of the U.S. border, the great majority of them first-generation Protestants.

The most numerous component within the Evangelical upsurge is Pentecostal, combining Biblical orthodoxy and a rigorous morality with an ecstatic form of worship and an emphasis on spiritual healing. Especially in Latin America, conversion to Protestantism brings about a cultural transformation—new attitudes toward work and consumption, a new educational ethos, a violent rejection of traditional *machismo* (women play a key role in the Evangelical churches). The origins of this worldwide Evangelical upsurge are in the United States, from where the missionaries were first dispatched. But it is very important to understand that virtually everywhere, and emphatically in Latin America, the new Evangelicalism is thoroughly indigenous and is no longer dependent on support from U.S. fellow-believers. Indeed, Latin American Evangelicals have been sending missionaries to the Hispanic community in this country, where there has been a comparable flurry of conversions.

Needless to say, the religious contents of the Islamic and Evangelical revivals are totally different. So are the social and political consequences (of which more below). But the two developments also differ in that the Islamic movement is occurring primarily in countries that are already Muslim or among Muslim emigrants (as in Europe); by contrast, the Evangelical movement is growing dramatically throughout the world in countries where this type of religion was previously unknown or very marginal.

... *And Two Exceptions*

THE WORLD today, then, is massively religious, and it is anything but the secularized world that had been predicted (be it joyfully or despondently) by so many analysts of modernity. There are two exceptions to this proposition, one somewhat unclear, the other very obvious.

The first apparent exception is in Western Europe, where, if nowhere else, the old secularization theory seems to hold.

With increasing modernization there has been an increase in the key indicators of secularization: on the level of expressed beliefs (especially such as could be called orthodox in Protestant or Catholic terms), and dramatically on the level of church-related behavior (attendance at services of worship, adherence to church-dictated codes of personal behavior—especially with regard to sexuality, reproduction, and marriage), and finally, with respect to recruitment to the clergy. These phenomena had been observed for a long time in the northern countries of the continent; since the Second World War they have quickly engulfed the south. Thus Italy and Spain have experienced a rapid decline in church-related religion—as has Greece (thus undercutting the claim of Catholic conservatives that Vatican II is to be blamed for the decline). There is now a massively secular Euro-culture and what has happened in the south can be simply described (though not thereby explained) as the invasion of these countries by that culture. It is not fanciful to predict that there will be similar developments in Eastern Europe, precisely to the degree that these countries too will be integrated into the new Europe.

While these facts are not in dispute, a number of recent works in the sociology of religion (notably in France, Britain, and Scandinavia) have questioned the term “secularization” as applied to these developments. There is now a body of data indicating strong survivals of religion, most of it generally Christian in nature, despite the widespread alienation from the organized churches. If the data hold up to scrutiny, a shift in the institutional location of religion, rather than secularization, would then be a more accurate description of the European situation. All the same, Europe stands out as quite different from other parts of the world. It certainly differs sharply from the religious situation in the United States. One of the most interesting puzzles in the sociology of religion is why Americans are so much more religious as well as more churchly than Europeans.

The other exception to the desecularization thesis is less ambiguous: There exists an international subculture composed of people with Western-type higher education, especially in the humanities and social sciences, which is indeed secularized by any measure. This subculture is the principal “carrier” of progressive, Enlightenment beliefs and values. While the people in this subculture are relatively thin on the ground, they are very influential, as they control the institutions that provide the “official” definitions of reality (notably the educational system, the media of mass communication, and the higher reaches of the legal system). They are remarkably similar all over the world today as they have been for a long time (though, as we have seen, there are also defectors from this subculture, especially in the Muslim countries). Why it is that people with this type of education should be so prone to secularization is not entirely clear, but there is, without question, a globalized *elite* culture. It follows, then, that in country after country religious upsurges have a strongly populist character: Over and beyond the purely religious motives, these are movements of protest and resistance *against* a secular elite. The so-called “culture war” in the United States emphatically shares this feature.

Questions and Answers

THIS SOMEWHAT breathless *tour d’horizon* of the global religious scene raises several questions: What are the origins of the worldwide resurgence of religion? What is the likely future course of this religious resurgence? Do resurgent religions differ in their critique of the secular order? How is religious resurgence related to a number of issues not ordinarily linked to religion? Let us take these questions in turn.

As to the origins of the worldwide resurgence of religion, two possible answers have already been mentioned. The first is that modernity tends to undermine the taken-for-granted certainties by which people lived

throughout most of history. This is an uncomfortable state of affairs, for many an intolerable one, and religious movements that claim to give certainty have great appeal by easing that discomfort. The second is that a purely secular view of reality has its principal social location in an elite culture that, not surprisingly, is resented by large numbers of people who are not part of it but who nevertheless feel its influence (most troublingly, as their children are subjected to an education that ignores or even directly attacks their own beliefs and values). Religious movements with a strongly anti-secular bent can therefore appeal to people with resentments that sometimes have quite non-religious sources.

But there is yet another answer, which recalls my opening story about certain American foundation officials worrying about “fundamentalism.” In one sense, there is nothing to explain here. Strongly felt religion has always been around: what needs explanation is its absence rather than its presence. Modern secularity is a much more puzzling phenomenon than all these religious explosions—and the University of Chicago is a more interesting topic for the sociology of religion than are the Islamic schools of Qom. In other words, at one level the phenomena under consideration simply serve to demonstrate *continuity* in the place of religion in human experience.

As to the likely future course of this religious resurgence, it would make little sense to venture a prognosis with regard to the entire global scene, given the considerable variety of important religious movements in the contemporary world. Predictions, if one dares to make them at all, will be more useful if applied to much narrower situations. One, though, can be made with some assurance: There is no reason to think that the world of the twenty-first century will be any less religious than the world is today.

There is, it must be said, a minority of sociologists of religion who have been trying to salvage the old secularization theory by

what may be called the last-gasp thesis: Modernization *does* secularize, and movements like the Islamic and the Evangelical ones represent last-ditch defenses by religion that cannot last. Eventually, secularity will triumph—or, to put it less respectfully, eventually Iranian mullahs, Pentecostal preachers, and Tibetan lamas will all think and act like professors of literature at American universities. This thesis is singularly unpersuasive.

Nonetheless, one will have to speculate very differently regarding different sectors of the religious scene. For example, the most militant Islamic movements will have difficulty maintaining their present stance *vis-à-vis* modernity should they succeed in taking over the governments of their countries (as, it seems, is already happening in Iran). It is also unlikely that Pentecostalism, as it exists today among mostly poor and uneducated people, will retain its present religious and moral characteristics unchanged as many of these people experience upward social mobility (this has already been observed extensively in the United States). Generally, many of these religious movements are linked to non-religious forces of one sort or another, and the future course of the former will be at least partially determined by the course of the latter. Thus in the United States, for instance, the future course of militant Evangelicalism will be different if some of its causes succeed—or continue to be frustrated—in the political and legal arenas.

Finally, in religion as in every other area of human endeavor, individual personalities play a much larger role than most social scientists and historians are willing to concede. Thus there might have been an Islamic revolution in Iran without the Ayatollah Khomeini, but it would probably have looked quite different. No one can predict the appearance of charismatic figures who will launch powerful religious movements in places where no one expects them. Who knows—perhaps the next religious upsurge in America will occur among disenchanting postmodernist academics!

DO THE RESURGENT religions differ in their critique of the secular order? Yes, of course they do, depending on their respective belief systems. Cardinal Ratzinger and the Dalai Lama will be troubled by different aspects of contemporary secular culture. What both, however, will agree upon is the shallowness of a culture that tries to get by without any transcendent points of reference. And there, certainly, they will have good reasons for criticism.

The religious impulse, the quest for meaning that transcends the restricted space of empirical existence in this world, has been a perennial feature of humanity. (This assertion is not a theological statement but an anthropological one—an agnostic or even an atheist philosopher may well agree with it.) It would require something close to a mutation of the species to finally extinguish this impulse. The more radical thinkers of the Enlightenment, and their more recent intellectual descendants, hoped for something like such a mutation, of course. Thus far this has not happened and it is unlikely to happen anytime in the foreseeable future. The critique of secularity common to all the resurgent movements is that human existence bereft of transcendence is an impoverished and finally untenable condition.

To the extent that secularity today has a specifically modern form (there were earlier forms, for example, in versions of Confucianism and Hellenistic culture), the critique of secularity also entails a critique of at least these aspects of modernity. Beyond that, however, different religious movements differ in their relation to modernity.

As noted, an argument can be made that the Islamic resurgence has a strong tendency toward a negative view of modernity; in places it is downright anti-modern or counter-modernizing (as in its view on the role of women). By contrast, the Evangelical resurgence is positively modernizing in most places where it occurs, clearly so in Latin America. The new Evangelicals throw aside many of the traditions that have been obsta-

cles to modernization (*machismo*, for one, also the subservience to hierarchy that has been endemic to Iberian Catholicism), and their churches encourage values and behavior patterns that contribute to modernization. Just to take one important case in point: In order to participate fully in the life of their congregations, Evangelicals will want to read the Bible and to be able to join in the discussion of congregational affairs that are largely in the hands of lay persons (indeed, largely in the hands of women). The desire to read the Bible encourages literacy, and, beyond this, a positive attitude toward education and self-improvement. The running of local churches by lay persons necessitates training in various administrative skills, including the conduct of public meetings and the keeping of financial accounts. It is not fanciful to suggest that in this way Evangelical congregations serve (inadvertently, to be sure) as schools for democracy and for social mobility.

HOW DOES THE religious resurgence relate to a number of issues that are not usually linked to religion? First let us take international politics. Here one comes up head on against the thesis, eloquently proposed by Samuel Huntington, to the effect that, with the end of the Cold War, international affairs will be affected by a “clash of civilizations” rather than by ideological conflicts. There is something to be said for this thesis. The great ideological conflict that animated the Cold War is certainly dormant for the moment, though I, for one, would not bet on its final demise. Nor can one be sure that new and different ideological conflicts may not arise in the future. Indeed, to the extent that nationalism is an ideology (more accurately, *each* nationalism has its own ideology), ideology is alive and well in a long list of countries.

It is also plausible that, in the absence of the overarching confrontation between Soviet communism and the American-led West, cultural animosities suppressed during the Cold War period are resurfacing. Some

of these animosities have themselves taken on an ideological form—as in the assertion of a distinctive Asian identity by a number of governments and intellectual groups in East and Southeast Asia. This particular ideology has become especially visible in debates over the allegedly ethnocentric/Eurocentric character of human rights as propagated by the United States and other Western governments and non-governmental organizations. But it would probably be an exaggeration to see these debates as signaling a clash of civilizations. The closest thing to a religiously defined clash of civilizations would come about if the radical Islamic interpretation of the world came to be established within a wider spectrum of Muslim countries, and actually became the basis of their foreign policies. As yet, this has not happened.

Religion in World Politics

TO ASSESS THE ROLE of religion in international politics, it would be useful to distinguish between political movements that are genuinely inspired by religion and those that use religion as a convenient legitimation for political agendas based on non-religious interests. Such a distinction is difficult but not impossible. Thus there is no reason to doubt that the suicide bombers of the Islamic Hamas movement truly believe in the religious motives they avow. By contrast, there is good reason to doubt that the three parties involved in the Bosnian conflict, which is commonly represented as a clash between religions, are really inspired by religious ideas. I think it was P.J. O'Rourke who observed that these three parties are of the same race, speak the same language, and are distinguished only by their religion—in which none of them believe. The same skepticism about the religious nature of an allegedly religious conflict is expressed in the joke from Northern Ireland (which also worked perfectly in the context of the Lebanese civil war): A man walks down a dark street in Belfast, when a gunman jumps out of a doorway, holds a gun to his head, and

asks: "Are you Protestant or Catholic?" The man stutters, "Well, actually I'm an atheist." "Ah yes", says the gunman, "But are you a Protestant or a Catholic atheist?"

It would be very nice if one could say that religion is everywhere a force for peace. Unfortunately, this is not the case. While it is difficult to pinpoint a frequency distribution, very probably religion much more often fosters war, both between and within nations, rather than peace. If so, that is hardly new in history. Religious institutions and movements are fanning wars and civil wars on the Indian subcontinent, in the Balkans, in the Middle East, and in Africa. Occasionally, religious institutions do try to resist warlike policies or to mediate between conflicting parties. The Vatican mediated successfully in some international disputes in Latin America. There have been religiously inspired peace movements in several countries (including the United States, during the Vietnam War). Both Protestant and Catholic clergy have tried to mediate the conflict in Northern Ireland, with notable lack of success. But it is probably a mistake to focus simply on the actions of formal religious institutions or groups. There may be a diffusion of religious values in a society that could have peace-prone consequences even in the absence of formal actions by church bodies. For example, some analysts have argued that the wide diffusion of Christian values played a mediating role in the process that ended the apartheid regime in South Africa, despite the fact that the churches themselves were mostly polarized between the two sides of the conflict (at least until the last few years of the regime, when the Dutch Reformed Church reversed its position on apartheid).

Relatedly, a religious resurgence may well have important implications for economic development. The basic text on the relation between religion and economic development is, of course, Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Scholars have been arguing over the thesis of this book for over ninety years. However one comes out on this (I happen to be an unreconstructed

Weberian), it is clear that some values foster modern economic development more than others. Something like Weber's "Protestant ethic" is probably functional in an early phase of capitalist growth—an ethic, whether religiously inspired or not, that values personal discipline, hard work, frugality, and a respect for learning.

The new Evangelicalism in Latin America exhibits these values in virtually crystalline purity. Conversely, Iberian Catholicism, as it was well established in Latin America, clearly does *not* foster such values. But religious traditions can change. Spain experienced a remarkably successful period of economic development beginning in the waning years of the Franco regime, and one of the important factors was the influence of Opus Dei, which combined rigorous theological orthodoxy with market-friendly openness in economic matters. Islam, by and large, has difficulties with a modern market economy—especially with modern banking—yet Muslim emigrants have done remarkably well in a number of countries (for instance, in sub-Saharan Africa), and there is a powerful Islamic movement in Indonesia—the aforementioned Nahdatul-Ulama—that might yet play a role analogous to that of Opus Dei in the Catholic world. For years now, too, there has been an extended debate over the part played by Confucian-inspired values in the economic success stories of East Asia; if one is to credit the "post-Confucian thesis" (and also allow that Confucianism is a religion), then here would be a very important religious contribution to economic development.

One morally troubling aspect of this matter is that values functional at one period of economic development may not be functional at another. The values of the "Protestant ethic", or a functional equivalent thereof, are probably essential during the phase that Walt Rostow called "the take-off." It is not at all clear that this is the case in a later phase. Much *less* austere values may be *more* functional in the so-called post-industrial economies of Europe, North America, and

East Asia. Frugality, however admirable from a moral viewpoint, may now actually be a vice, economically speaking. Undisciplined hedonists have a hard time climbing out of primitive poverty but, if they are bright enough, they can do very well in the high-tech, knowledge-driven economies of the advanced societies.

Finally, there is the effect of the religious resurgence on human rights and social justice worldwide. Religious institutions have, of course, made many statements on human rights and social justice. Some of these have had important political consequences, as in the civil rights struggle in the United States or in the collapse of communist regimes in Europe. But, as has already been mentioned, there are different religiously articulated views about the nature of human rights. The same goes for ideas about social justice; what is justice to some groups is gross injustice to others. Sometimes it is very clear that positions taken by religious groups on such matters are based on a religious rationale, as with the principled opposition to abortion and contraception by the Roman Catholic Church. At other times, though, positions on social justice, even if legitimated by religious rhetoric, reflect the location of the religious functionaries in this or that network of non-religious social classes and interests. To stay with the same example, most of the positions taken by American Catholic institutions on social justice issues other than those relating to sexuality and reproduction fall into this category.

This mixed analysis is emblematic of what must be our general conclusion. Both those who have great hopes for the role of religion in the affairs of this world and those who fear this role must be disappointed by the factual evidence, which, in the final analysis, points in not just one but several directions simultaneously. In assessing this role, there is no alternative to a nuanced, case-by-case approach. But one statement can be made with great confidence: Those who neglect religion in their analyses of contemporary affairs do so at great peril. □