

MODERNITY: RELIGIOUS TRENDS

■ NICOS MOUZELIS

By conceptualising modernity in sociostructural rather than cultural terms, I will try (a) to show how modernity's sociostructural features are linked to religious developments – particularly in the anglosaxon world; (b) to examine critically the ongoing secularization debate in the social sciences. Modernity can be seen as the type of social organization which became dominant in the west after the English industrial revolution and the French revolution. It entails three broad structural traits which render modern society unique – unique in the sense that the above characteristics, in their combination, are not to be found in any pre-modern social formation. These characteristics are:

- The demise of segmental localism and the mobilisation/inclusion of a whole population into the national centre/nation state;
- The overall differentiation of institutional spheres;
- The spread of individualization from the elite to the non elite level.

1. Massive inclusion into the national centre: The process of religious rationalization

A) Employing Durkheimian terminology, one can argue that pre-modern, traditional communities had a non-differentiated, segmental social organization. In this respect they were self-sufficient, relatively autonomous vis-à-vis more inclusive social units. In the west, this localist self-containment/autonomy was first undermined by the absolutist model of governance which took its more developed form in Louis XIV's France.¹ Given technological develop-

¹ The French monarchy and its administration, as it was finally shaped under Louis XIV, was the prototype of European absolutist rule, a model imitated all over Europe. Up to the seventeenth century the French nobility managed to maintain some of its political functions by exercising constitutional opposition to the crown through the Estates General, and the local parliaments. But the Bourbons, unlike the English Kings, gradually managed to reduce its local power. The provincial governing positions ceased to be the hereditary fiefs of the nobility and the autonomy of the local parliaments was destroyed, their powers being regulated by the Royal Council. The famous intendants, the crown representatives to the provinces, first appeared in the sixteenth century. With their powers extended by Richelieu, they gradually managed to weaken aristocratic self-government till they became the effective masters of all local affairs. See Clark 1969: 176-97.

ments in the military sphere and inter-state competition at the time, the absolutist model, although challenged in seventeenth-century England, spread widely in continental Europe,² thus paving the way for the large-scale dominance of the nation-state in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This, in combination with the dominance of industrial capitalism³ at about the same period, led to the gradual decline of segmental localism and the unprecedented large-scale mobilization and inclusion⁴ of the population into the wider economic, political, social, and cultural arenas of the nation-state. This ‘drawing-in’ process can be thought of as a vast shift of human and non-human resources from the periphery to the national centre. From an actor/agency perspective it can (following Marx and Weber) be conceptualized as a process of concentration at the top of not only the means of economic production, but also those of violence/domination, as well as those of influence or cultural production. As the local economic producers, political potentates, and virtuosi of particularistic rituals and narratives were losing control and/or ownership of their means of economic, political and cultural production, there emerged not only a concentration of power in the hands of national elites, but also a shift in people’s identifications and attachments from the local communities to the symbols and ideologies of what B. Anderson has called the ‘imagined community’ of the nation-state (Anderson 1974).

What made this massive process of drawing into the centre possible was initially the extraordinary expansion of the state’s administrative and surveillance mechanisms. In fact, the nation-state, by using newly developed bureaucratic and military technologies managed to penetrate into the periphery to a degree unknown to any pre-modern, pre-industrial social formation, however complex or despotic.⁵

² For the spread of the absolutist state, see Anderson 1974.

³ For the great transformative power of industrial capital, see Dobb 1968.

⁴ Inclusion in this context does not necessarily entail the notion of empowerment of the population at large. Inclusion can take both autonomous and heteronomous forms. See below footnote eleven.

⁵ For the development of such technologies which enhanced the ‘infrastructural powers’ of the state, see M. Mann 1995. It is worth mentioning here that the motor force from pre-modernity to the creation of the nation state had initially less an economic and more an administrative/political character. Given the 17th century scientific revolution and the subsequent development of formidable military and organizational technologies we see, particularly during the Napoleonic period, the creation of mass armies. Mass armies require resources which only a highly ‘penetrative’ state apparatus could extract from its subjects. These developments preceded the dominance of industrial capitalism in the late 19th century (Tilly 1975). To put it in terms of our definition of modernity, mass inclusion into the political arena preceded the mass inclusion into the national economic sphere.

B) Inclusion into the centre and the concentration of the means of economic, political and cultural production at the top meant that the pre-modern *dualism* between a traditional, non differentiated periphery and a differentiated centre was attenuated. In the religious sphere the pre-modern dualism was between an elite and a folk, popular religiosity. The former was characterised by scripturalism, a focus on sacred texts and their 'correct' interpretation and by an internal coherence/rationality of theological doctrine. Popular religiosity on the other hand was less 'pure', since communal and religious traditions were inextricably linked together – Christian religious beliefs coexisting with superstitions and magical or pagan ideas and practices. With modernization the above religious divide was attenuated as elements of the official doctrine spread 'downwards'.⁶

More specifically, if we focus on pre-industrial Christian Europe, in the rural areas a hybrid situation prevailed. Christian dogmas and rituals coming from above were coexisting with non-Christian ones, the latter emanating from communal/village pagan traditions and from beliefs in magical codes, spirits, demons etc. Gradually the latter beliefs and practices were marginalised and church organizations penetrated the rural periphery, exercising a more direct influence on both local clergy and laity. The attenuation of the chasm between official and popular religiosity meant a *homogenization* of the religious sphere proper. Given that homogenization processes had on the whole a top → bottom direction, it did not necessarily lead to decreasing inequalities – rather the opposite occurred. For the homogenizing process tends to enhance the control that religious elites have over the laity. If in modernity we see a concentration of the means of production, domination and violence at the national centre, the same can be said about the 'means of religious influence or indoctrination'. Elites at the centre are more capable of imposing religious 'orthodoxy' to those at the periphery.

Growing homogenization tends to increase power inequalities between religious elites and non elites; at the same time it also increases *religious rationalization*. Following Max Weber, religious rationalization not only entails successful attempts at spreading the official doctrine downwards – eliminating thus elements that are magical or foreign to that doctrine; it may also entail rendering the church's belief system (via for instance more flexible interpretation of sacred texts) more consistent internally or more compatible with scientific developments (Weber 1978: 538ff).

⁶ For the chasm between elite and popular religiosity in several religious traditions, see Sharot 2001.

However, if religious rationalization entails the elimination of magical elements from the ecclesiastical space, one should stress that rationalizing tendencies in late modernity can go hand in hand with ‘derationalizing’ ones. The latter tendencies may refer, for instance, to the type of hybridity which consists in combining church membership and attendance with beliefs and practices incompatible or foreign to the official dogma – such as Buddhist meditation techniques, beliefs in reincarnation etc. Therefore the pre-modern, traditional hybridity entailing a mixture of Christian and superstitious/magical elements is replaced in globalised modernity by a post-modern hybridity entailing a mixture of elements derived from various religious traditions. It may also entail the revival of magic, this time in a de-traditionalized social context.

At this point, it is necessary to examine briefly the distinction between religion and magic. The distinction is not of course clear-cut, but in ideal typical terms it is possible to differentiate the magical from the religious logic. For Marcel Mauss (1972) for instance magical practices tend to be more secretive and esoteric. The magician, in order to maintain his/her secret knowledge does not perform publicly, s/he is usually not related to any organization; s/he is self-employed, basing her/his authority less on a bureaucratic/organizational position and more on charisma and on extraordinary occult powers. Weber on the other hand stresses more the fact that magic is less oriented to the worship or contemplation of the divine and more to its use for achieving specific results: ‘Whoever possesses the requisite charisma for employing the proper means is stronger even than the god, whom he can compel to do his will. In these cases, religious behaviour is not worship of the God but rather coercion of the God, and invocation is not prayers but rather the exercise of magical formulae’ (1978: 422).

The analytic distinction between the magical and the religious, despite its fuzziness, is important to make here because the former via innumerable publications, the mass media and the internet, has ceased to characterise the activities of illiterate peasants or of a small number of initiates. As the shelves of major bookshops the world over testify, the global market for books on witchcraft, occultism, astrology and related themes is huge and growing in geometrical fashion. Perhaps nothing indicates better the global, late modern interest in the magical than the Harry Potter books which have been translated in more than a hundred languages and have sold millions of copies. Of course the interest in magicians, sorcerers and witches does not mean an active participation in or exercise of magical/occult practices. But, at least indirectly, it clearly indicates a marked trend towards the ‘remagicalization’ of the world. In the light of the above, one can argue that, on the one hand modernity’s

inclusionary processes have weakened the chasm between elite and popular religiosity, eliminating thus the magical/superstitious elements of the traditional, local communal culture – thus leading to religious rationalization. On the other hand, however, particularly in the non-institutionalized religious space of late modernity the magical reappears and acquires global dimensions, strengthening thus derationalization processes.

A last point about modernity's inclusionary processes. The spreading of elite elements 'downwards' does not only entail the trend towards religious rationalization. For if secularity (in the form of indifference to religion, agnosticism or atheism) was in pre-modern times limited among philosophers and a small fraction of the educated classes, with the advent of modernity secular orientations are also spreading downwards among people in all walks of life. This brings us to an examination of the secularization debate.

2. Top-down differentiation of institutional spheres: The issue of secularization

A) Moving to the second sociostructural feature of modernity, the decline of localism and the massive mobilization/inclusion into the national centre was not merely a quantitative move from the small to the large. In systemic terms, the drawing in process took place in a context of rapid and thorough differentiation as institutional spheres (economic, political, social, religious, cultural) started portraying their own logic, their own reproductive technologies, their own historical trajectories.

Structural-functional differentiation is not, of course, unique to modernity. Complex pre-industrial social formations such as empires also portray a considerable degree of differentiation (Eisenstadt 1963). But as Marx (1964) and others have pointed out, in such societies this process was limited to the top. The differentiated parts or subsystems of the centre were superimposed on the non-differentiated, segmentally organised peripheries. This means that the degree of penetration of the centralized economic, political, and cultural apparatuses is both very weak and highly uneven (Mann 1986). It is only in modernity that differentiation took a top-down character. It reached, in other terms, society's social base.

B) The above processes had an important impact in the religious sphere. Growing social differentiation meant that religion had a lesser direct impact on the other institutional spheres – educational, recreational, professional, artistic etc. This *interinstitutional* secularization occurred gradually and had neither a linear nor a unidirectional character. For, on the one hand there was a weakening of the overall integrative role that the church was exercising in pre-modern times, but on the other hand, in late modernity there

was a process of a new involvement of the church in the political or public sphere (i.e. a process of dedifferentiation), as the clearcut distinction between 'God' and 'Caesar' was often blurred. For instance, the critique of liberal protestant religious elites in the United Kingdom against neo-liberal, thacherite social policies undermined the strict differentiation between the religious and the public sphere. And this is more so in the case of liberation theology and the dynamic political involvement of catholic priests in several Latin American countries. And equally striking, as an example of dedifferentiation between the religious and the political, is the growth of the evangelical right in the USA.⁷ Finally the ethno-religious features of orthodox churches in eastern and southern Europe (e.g. Poland and Greece) shows if not dedifferentiation, a patriotic/nationalist resistance to the differentiation between church and polity.

All the above cases of interinstitutional desecularization/dedifferentiation however disprove the linear version of the secularization thesis but not the non linear, 'general evolution' one. At least as far as Christianity is concerned, the *overall* loss of direct control of the churches over other institutional spheres, as a general trend, is both dominant and irreversible. The crucial, society-wide integrative role of religion, its deep intrusion in all social spheres that we see in most pre-modern situations has disappeared for good – at least in the West.⁸

C) If in interinstitutional terms (i.e. in terms of the relationship between the religious and society's other institutional spheres) secularization as a long term process is evident, the same does not apply when we focus on developments within the religious sphere itself. Here the secularization thesis is much weaker. The strength and vitality of various denominations in

⁷ These cases of the churches' political involvement indicate a reversal of the privatization trend which characterised the early postwar period (see Martin 2011: 23-4).

⁸ The situation is quite different in the Islamic world. Here not only the non differentiation between polity and religion is fully legitised by the Qur'an, but also the partial secularization that occurred during the shah period in Iran was reversed by a revolution which led to a theocracy. Present day Iran is of course modern – in the sense that the core sociostructural features of modernity are present. In fact we see in the contemporary Iranian society the demise of segmental localism, state penetration of the periphery and massive inclusion into the national centre, as well as overall individualization. But the integration of the differentiated spheres is achieved in a levelling rather than balancing fashion; the religious logic penetrates and reduces the autonomy of most other institutional spheres (educational, recreational, professional etc.). Therefore in the Iranian case we do not have *substantive* but *formal* differentiation or dedifferentiation (see Mouzelis 2008: 15-1).

the USA, the rapid growth of the so-called new religious movements, the proliferation of religious informal groups or networks loosely linked to established churches and the phenomenal dynamism of Pentecostalism both in the first and third world (Martin 2005: 26-43) – all the above indicate a weakening of *intra-institutional* secularization. They indicate clearly that intra-institutional secularity is not a constitutive element of late modernity. Modern social structures are compatible with both secularity and non secularity. In other terms, further industrialization/modernization in the first and third world, contra Bryan Wilson (1966, 1982, 2001), does not necessarily lead to secularization within the religious sphere. In many cases the opposite prevails. At present the reaction to the logocentrism and to the faith in scientific and technological ‘progress’ that the 18th century enlightenment culture propagated, render atheism and particularly the militant atheism of the R. Dawkins type, rather ineffective.

Steve Bruce, in a recent attempt (2011) to defend the secularization thesis (both the inter- and intra-institutional one) considers religious liberalization as secularization. According to Bruce, once the medieval church was fragmented, there were steps towards secularity. This was true about the Reformation and even more so about the religious revival of the seventies. Given the latter’s hostility to organizational authority and its focus on individual choice, the new religious phenomena are fragile, they are bound to decline and to lead to further secularization.

However, if secularization is defined in such an all-inclusive manner, one saves the theory but at the price of reducing it to obviousness. Against Bruce’s thesis one can argue that the move from the non fragmented, traditional medieval Catholicism to the Reformation is not a step towards secularity, but towards a different type of religiosity. And the same is true about the move, following Charles Taylor’s typology (see below), from the denominational/‘mobilisation’ to the ‘expressivist’ postsecular model. That the latter, particularly when it refers to nonchurched believers, is less institutionalised, more fragile, does not mean that it is bound to fizzle out, to lead to total religious indifference or atheism.

Steve Bruce referring to Parsons’ theory of religious development, argues that ‘freedom from entanglements with secular power allowed churches to concentrate on their core task and thus become what Talcott Parsons called “a more specialised agency”, their removal from the centre of public life reduced their contact with, and relevance for, the general population’ (2011: 35-6). Now it is true of course that in terms of the differentiation between the religious from the other social spheres (i.e. in interinstitutional terms) religion, with some exceptions, has been removed ‘from the centre

of public life'. But this does not entail, in intra-institutional terms, a weakening of faith. Bruce takes seriously into account only the part of Parsonian theory which stresses the differentiation between religion and the public sphere. But he does not take into account that for the American theorist differentiation entails both the relative shrinking of the church's influence in relation to other social spheres and a certain religious deepening among believers. To take two extreme cases, the automatic, taken for granted attitude of the traditional peasant towards the church is not more 'religious' than that of today's nonchurched believers. The beliefs of the latter may be more fragile, but one can argue that, at the same time, they are more 'authentic' in the sense that they entail a continuous turning inwards, an internal process of exploration which is absent in the former case. Therefore 'fragility' is not necessarily the last step before full secularization.

As far as future developments are concerned, I think that in addition to the rapid global growth of Evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity, nonchurched religiosity – given growing individualization (see below) – has a great growth potential, particularly among the young. Bruce's idea that the young generation, through socialisation, adopt their parents' secular values (2011: 69–71) does not take into account intergenerational conflict – a phenomenon particularly marked from the counter-cultural sixties up to the present. After all, the reaction to enlightenment's faith in instrumental reason is not limited to the restricted circles of postsecular theologians and philosophers; postsecularity is also spreading downwards. I believe that this reaction, as well as the turn to an ultra-individualistic form of religiosity, is here to stay.

D) A different type of critique of the secularization thesis is developed by the distinguished British sociologist David Martin. In his more recent works (2005, 2011), he has developed a general theory of secularization. He has argued, quite convincingly, against a linear view of the secularization process. Equally convincingly he claimed that the only secularising process which is in the long term irreversible is the one linked to social differentiation.

With this as a background, he has put forward the interesting idea that, from a macro-historical point of view, rather than growing secularization or desecularisation, what we see in the west is a constant dialectic between the secular and the non-secular. Within the religious sphere there are periods of intense religious flourishing which at some point is weakening leading to secularising tendencies. In turn the latter tendencies are undermined by a new religious revival. Thus there is a tension between 'spirit' and 'nature', between a transforming Christian vision of peace and compassion and the realities of power and violence. As the spirit (divine grace) pene-

trates the ‘world’, at some point the vision’s initial élan is diminished and the religious thrust recoils.⁹ As for the character of the recoil, it is affected by the cost that each religious drive entails: ‘Crucially I argue that instead of regarding secularization as once-for-all unilateral process, one might rather think in terms of successive Christianizations followed or accompanied by recoils. Each Christianization is a salient of faith driven into the secular from a different angle, each pays a characteristic cost which affects the character of the recoil, and each undergoes a partial collapse into some version of “nature”’ (Martin 2005: 3).

David Martin considers his secularization–desecularization dialectic as a general theory which applies at least in the Christian world, from the late antiquity up to the present. This broad scope however raises serious difficulties. When he refers for instance to the early Catholic Christianization entailing the ‘conversion of monarchs (and so of peoples)’ (2005: 3), he does not take seriously into account that secularity (in the forms of atheism, agnosticism, total indifference to religious matters etc.), during the first centuries of the church’s history was limited to the elite level. Secularity in other terms was, during this early period, an exception. The bulk of the population was religious in a variety of ways, Christian, non-Christian or mixtures of both. As I have already argued, it is only with the dominance of modernity in the 19th century that the secular as well as the religious (in its non pagan, elite form) spreads to the social base. In early Christianity as well as in the Middle Ages the major dynamic was less between the secular and the religious and more between different types of religiosity: between Christian and pagan religiosity, between eastern and western Christianity, between official versions of the Christian doctrine and a huge variety of ‘heresies’ etc. Although David Martin does not specify when the move of the monarch type of Catholic Christianization recoils or what form the recoil takes, it certainly did not take the secular form – since secularity, to repeat, was in pre-modernity restricted at the elite level.

In the light of the above I would argue that Martin’s theory makes more sense if it is applied much later, in the period (from the 19th century onwards) when the three social structural features of western modernity were becoming dominant. It is during this period that massive inclusion into the national centre, top-down differentiation and widespread individualization created a relatively differentiated, autonomous religious sphere within which

⁹ The spirit–nature or the vision–power dialectic reminds one of Weber’s charisma–routinization dialectic (Weber 1978: 246–54). The routinization or bureaucratization of charisma is analogous to the ‘naturalization’ or institutionalization of the vision.

the chasm between official and popular religiosity receded – thus leading to the spread of elite religious elements downwards while at the same time secularity spread from intellectuals, philosophers and the educated classes to the popular strata. It is within this new ‘spreading downwards’ context that it is useful to examine the dialectic between secularization and desecularization. One sees this dialectic, as Martin points out, in the various religious ‘awakenings’ in the United States – awakenings leading to religious expansion followed by ‘recoiling’.

It should be stressed however that the recoiling of the Christian spirit may lead to ‘nature’ and/or domination; but, it may also lead to non-Christian religious traditions and subcultures. If the former can be viewed from a ‘spirit-nature’ or secularization-desecularization dialectic, the latter refers to a different type of dialectic – dialectic between Christian and non-Christian beliefs, or between different types of religious hybridities. In late modernity the turning away from the Christian faith and the consequent developments of the new religious movements or of the New Age spiritualities cannot be dismissed as trivial and as bound to disappear. Given modernity’s widespread individualization (see below), despite the lack of solid institutional supports and rituals, the new spirituality and the *à la carte* construction of one’s religious voyage is here to stay – even to grow. A general theory of secularization should explore the conditions under which the decline or recoiling of the Christian faith leads to secularity and those under which it leads to non-Christian or hybrid religious forms.

Another type of dialectic which is particularly important today is the liberal vs conservative one. As is well known, the counter culture of the sixties¹⁰ and the new spiritualities which followed have led to a subjectivist, expressivist religiosity which stresses less attachment to sacred texts, dogmas and organizational authority and more ‘heart work’, direct experience of the divine and, more generally, the existential dimension of religious life. The rapid growth of the latter type of religious subculture has created severe tensions within the established churches between those who accepted and tried to introduce the new, liberal spirituality into the ecclesiastical order, and those conservative forces which reacted to the liberalising tendencies of sections of the clergy and laity. The extreme reaction to church liberalization occurred in the United States where the evangelical right tried to expand its message of ‘return to the fundamentals’ – a return to be achieved by media control and the creation of powerful lobbies in Congress (Am-

¹⁰ On the counter-culture of the sixties and the reaction to it, see Tipton 1982.

merman 1994: 43ff).¹¹ Furthermore, the liberal-conservative religious conflict entered more forcefully the public sphere as ethical problems such as in vitro fertilization, abortion, euthanasia etc. became issues of popular concern. This brings us to the third sociostructural feature of modernity, that of overall individualization.

3. Overall individualization: The new spiritualities

A) As Giddens has pointed out, in traditional social orders, codes of 'formulaic truth' delineate rigidly an individual's space of decision-making. From mundane decisions concerning marriage, family size and everyday conduct, to those concerning ultimate existential problems of life or death, tradition provides recipes for action that individuals adhere to as a matter of course. In early modernity, on the other hand, traditional certainties are replaced by 'collectivist' ones. Progressivism (the Enlightenment faith in the unlimited perfectability of human beings and of social orders based on science and technical rationality), the bureaucracies of the nation-state imposing 'internal pacification' and exercising all-pervasive surveillance, collective class organization, universal welfare providing all with a minimum of security against 'external' and non-manufactured risks – all these mechanisms operate in early modernity in a manner quite similar to tradition in pre-modern contexts. They provide social members with a meaning in life and with clear guidelines or rules that drastically reduce the social spaces where decisions have to be made.

In late, globalised modernity, however, both traditional and collectivist certainties decline or disappear. Such basic developments as the globalization of financial markets and services, instant electronic communication and, more generally, the drastic 'compression of time and space' have led to 'de-traditionalization'. Via such processes as disembedding, increases in medi-

¹¹ The liberal-authoritarian dialectic relates to modernity's inclusionary feature. In a general way, the mass inclusion into the national centre can take both autonomous and heteronomous forms. In the former case civil, political, socioeconomic and cultural rights spread downwards (e.g. 19th century England), whereas in the latter case people are 'brought in' in an authoritarian manner, without the granting of rights (e.g. 19th century Prussia). One can argue that analogous processes have occurred in the differentiated religious sphere. One can identify, on the one hand, an open, liberal inclusionary process which stresses a flexible, symbolic interpretation of the bible, gender equality, genuine respect of other religious traditions etc. On the other hand, there is an authoritarian, inclusionary mode which discourages choice and demands strict compliance to dogmas and ethical rules.

ated experience, pluralization of the life-worlds, and the emergence of contingent knowledge, detraditionalization creates a situation where routines lose their meaningfulness and their unquestioned moral authority. It creates a situation where individuals can resort to neither traditional truths nor collectivist certainties when making decisions in their everyday lives. Deprived of traditional or collectivist guidance, they must, in other words, deal with 'empty spaces'. From whether or not to marry and have children, to what life-style to adopt and what type of identity to form (even what type of physical make-up to aim for via dietary regimes, aesthetic surgery, etc.) – in all these areas the individual has to be highly reflexive, and must construct 'his/her own biography' (Giddens 1994).

One can argue of course that highly reflexive modes of existence can be found on the elite level in several pre-modern, complex societies. It is, however, only in late modernity that, given massive inclusion into the centre and top-down differentiation, subjects on the non elite level are called, under conditions of detraditionalization, to create their own rules, to create 'a life of their own' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2003).

B) In the religious sphere now, the above bring us from Wilson's and Bruce's secularization thesis and Martin's secularization-desecularization dialectic to Charles Taylor's views on the secular age and beyond. The Catholic philosopher's magisterial analysis (2007) is partly based on the construction of a threefold typology. The first ideal typical model, the *ancien regime* or *paleo-Durkheimian* one is not clearly differentiated from the traditional local community. Within it the faithful do not choose – in the sense that they accept unquestionably the church's dogmas and ritual practices and are church members from birth to death. The second *neo-Durkheimian* or mobilisation model has its origins in the Reformation and refers to a situation where established churches adopt practices which focus less on dogma and strict rituals and more on a flexible, liberal framework. Particularly in the flourishing American denominations, the idea of choice becomes dominant, i.e. the idea that no church, no denomination has the monopoly of truth and that therefore the faithful have the right to explore and to choose. The third *expressivist* model, having its roots in 19th century romanticism, has developed in a spectacular manner among the youth from the seventies onwards. I will focus on the latter model since it is directly relevant to modernity's feature of widespread individualization.

Charles Taylor calls the complex of values underlying the above model *expressive individualism*. Expressive individualism reacts against dogmas and the authority of hierarchically organised religious elites. Religious truth cannot be found in sacramental mysteries, ex cathedra theological discourses or sacred

texts. The authentic search for the divine is based on unmediated experience, on a turning inwards in an attempt to approach the divine existentially, in a manner resembling more the way of the mystic rather than that of the assiduous follower of rules and beliefs emanating from priestly authority.

Expressive individualism can be found both within the established churches and outside them. In the former case one sees a growing flexibility, a tolerance of diverging religious views¹² as well as a more general 'liberalization' of beliefs and practices. As far as the space outside the well established religious organizations, this is occupied by the so-called new religious movements which may be Christian or may be oriented to other religious traditions (Glock and Bellah 1976; Robbins 1988). It is also occupied by fluid informal groups and networks which are usually loosely connected to more stable Christian denominations or congregations. Finally within this extra-ecclesiastical space one finds 'seekers' who are in a constant search, a continuous quest moving from one religion network or guru to another, often eclectically choosing elements from a variety of religious traditions both Christian and non-Christian.¹³ Therefore in this particular case, in an attempt to achieve 'authenticity' (Taylor 2002: 83), the subject constructs a religious path of her/his own; to paraphrase Giddens' terminology, s/he constructs her/his own 'religious biography' (Giddens 1994). It is here of course that the individualizing, expressivist features of modernity reach their zenith.

According to Taylor this type of ultra-subjectivistic, privatised religiosity can often lead to a trivialization of the religious life, to a situation where the picking and choosing from the global spiritual supermarket leads to an arid hybridity. On the other hand however he thinks that not all 'New Age' type of developments can or should be dismissed in a facile manner. Some of these developments indicate young people's genuine search for a meaning in life that the globalised, consumerist, mediatised world cannot provide.

Assessing the present condition, the Catholic philosopher posits two ways of leading a meaningful existence: 'exclusive humanism' and 'transcendental flourishing'. Exclusive humanism can lead to an immanent, non religious spirituality via the universalization of moral codes, the concern with

¹² This growing tolerance relates of course to the marked relativization of religious belief that globalisation has brought about. Globalised modernity brings religious traditions closer to each other and this leads to hybrid forms of religiosity (Robertson 1989 and Beyer 1994).

¹³ For accounts of the 'new spirituality', see Roof 2001, Fuller 2001, Herrick 2003, Heelas and Woodhead 2005, Heelas 2008, Wuthnow 1998, Tipton 1983, Glock and Bellah 1976, Beckford and Luckman 1989, Robbins 1988, Carrete and King 2005.

nature, the struggles against world poverty etc. However this type of humanism disconnects human beings from the cosmos and the mysteries of human existence. It leads to an 'immanent flourishing', which is more limiting than the religious, transcendental spirituality of the Christian believer. Both however, according to Taylor, should be respected (2007: 618ff).

What I would like to add to the above is that between the secular, exclusive humanism and the transcendental flourishing there is a type of flourishing which is difficult to classify as secular or non secular, a type of flourishing which is in the interface between secularity and non secularity. This refers to the notion of the 'indwelling God'.

C) This is the view of those who believe that there is no God outside the human being, that the divine resides within us. God is entirely or exclusively indwelling. To put it differently, spiritual flourishing occurs when we discover and develop the internal to the subject 'divine spark'. Here as well there is infinity, but it is an 'immanent infinity' – an infinity referring to the depths and mysteries of the human soul. From this anthropocentric point of view to believe in an external deity leads to spiritual heteronomy, to an alienating type of religiosity. As Don Cupitt puts it 'unless religiousness is truly autonomous and subjective it is not religiously commendable. Piety cannot in any way be validated from the outside. Religious activity must be purely disinterested and therefore cannot depend upon any external facts such as an objective God or life after death. Furthermore, spiritual autonomy must not on any account be prejudiced, because there is no salvation without it. So it is spiritual vulgarity and immaturity to demand an extra religious reality of God' (1980: 10).¹⁴

In the light of the above, if the religious entails a belief in an external to the individual divinity, belief in an exclusively 'internal' God comes very near to secularity – but it is not exactly secular since secularity entails unbelief, agnosticism or indifference in religious matters. If negative theology, in its western or eastern/orthodox version, considers that the divine, in its essence is external but unknowable, secular theology of the Don Cupitt or the J. Robinson (1963) type transforms external unknownability into the 'internal' knownability of an exclusively indwelling deity. Needless to say

¹⁴ Continuing his argument, Cupitt affirms that 'there can be for us nothing but the worlds that are constituted for us by our own language and activities. All meaning and truth and value are man-made and could not be otherwise' (1984: 20). The fact however that our language constitutes the reality we know cannot lead to the conclusion that there are no other realities. The reality of the mystic for instance is one that emerges when linguistic categories are suspended.

the 'indwelling God' theme is not limited in the restricted circle of secular theologians. As the secular and the non secular, so the in-between theme has spread widely from the level of religious elites to the popular level. Heelas who called this trend *immanent spirituality* or *humanistic expressivism*, argues that a major feature of several New Age spiritualities is that God is not an external to the human being but a higher part of the self (Heelas and Woodhead 2005: 71ff; Heelas 2008: 55-8).

D) Another typical case situated between the secular and the non secular is that of the so called 'spiritual seeker'. As Charles Taylor and many other observers have pointed out, expressive religiosity can take the form of a seeker's continuous spiritual quest, a seeker who rejects the dogmas, rituals and the bureaucratic authority of established churches and opts for an individualistic, continuous religious exploration. Such a spiritual exploration can be of two kinds. In the first case the seeker tries to explore the religious sphere in a proactive manner. She or he becomes familiar with the sacred texts and moral codes of various religions in an attempt to find elements which make sense to him/her, which meet her/his spiritual needs. In other terms here we have the case of the subject who in an activist, decisionistic manner selects from the innumerable choices that the global religious market offers in order to construct his/her own unique, tailored made religious journey.¹⁵

The other type of seeker, the one that interest us here, explores the spiritual space not in an energetic, voluntaristic, cataphatic manner but apophatically. Apophatic in Greek means negative or negatory. In eastern orthodox theology apophatism entails two basic elements. First that the divine, in its *essence* is totally transcendental and therefore unknowable, whereas in its *energies* it is approachable in a personal, direct, non mediated manner. Second, the way to come near the divine energies is by getting rid of all passions, all calculations, all thoughts or even images. In this way the apophatically oriented subject achieves *kenosis* (emptying out), s/he creates an internal void or rather becomes an 'empty vessel' ready to receive God's energies or grace.¹⁶

Whereas apophatism in the eastern orthodox tradition entails a belief in an external but unknowable (in its essence) God, there is a type of

¹⁵ This is the type of reflexivity that Giddens analyses when he refers to the process of reflexive modernization in post-traditional orders (Giddens 1994). See, on this point, Mouzelis 1999: 84-7. For those who 'believe without belonging', see Davie 1994.

¹⁶ Apophatic theology, which has common elements with the western negative theology, was closely but not entirely linked with hesychasm (*hesichia* meaning quietness), a spiritual movement that acquired importance in the late Byzantine period. Its major representative was St. Gregory Palamas (Meyendorff 1974).

seeker who brackets so to speak the problem of God's existence. She or he tries, through contemplation and various meditation techniques, to get rid of all thoughts, including beliefs in the existence of a divine force. Therefore in this case the seeker does not construct a 'religious path of one's own'; rather s/he deconstructs habitual ways of acting and thinking, since the latter constitute obstacles to his/her self-realization. From this perspective the adoption of any type of belief system is anti-spiritual. It is an obstacle in the attempt to achieve an empty space within which how to live and what to do emerges spontaneously from within. In this way the 'tyranny of choices' is overcome. What to do in any specific situation does not entail thinking, it rather entails not thinking.

Perhaps the spiritual leader who has developed most this type of faithless spirituality is J. Krishnamurti. For the Indian sage thinking and being are antithetical processes, the more one thinks the more one is getting away from the spiritual mode of being. Not only mundane thinking, ruminations or calculations but even believing in a transcendental reality or in an after life takes one away from genuine spirituality in the here and now. Belief of any kind is not only irrelevant but it also constitutes a serious obstacle to the spiritual quest. For spirituality is a 'pathless way'. It basically entails constantly observing what goes on inside the self in a wordless, conceptless, detached manner. When one comes near to this type of condition, the dualism between the observer and the observed disappears. What emerges is a limitless compassion vis a vis the self, the other and nature (1978, 1985). This type of 'agnostic' spirituality which comes very near Zen Buddhism cannot be called religious since it does not entail a belief in a transcendental or external to the subject divine reality. On the other hand it is not covered by Taylor's exclusive humanism. As with the 'indwelling God' it lies in the in-between between the secular and the non secular.

Finally it should be stressed that the distinction between cataphatic and apophatic spirituality is an ideal type one. In actual situations, the orientations of both types of seeker contain both cataphatic and apophatic elements. According to the type of search, however, one of the two is dominant.

Concluding remarks

I have tried to examine the linkages between late modern religious developments and the three sociostructural features of modernity – the massive inclusion into the centre, top-down social differentiation and widespread individualization.

(i) As far as modernity's *inclusionary processes* are concerned, these lead to both secularization and desecularization. They also allow for both reli-

gious rationalization and derationalization. What is common to all four processes and what are constitutive elements of modernity, is the massive mobilisation/inclusion into the centre, which, in the religious sphere, led to the attenuation of the dualism between religious centre and religious periphery. This meant that not only elements of the official religiosity 'spread downwards', but also that secularity as well has spread from cultural elites to the population at large. From this point of view, a central task of the sociology of religion is to examine how the four processes (secularization, desecularization, rationalization and derationalization) are dialectically linked to each other.

(ii) In terms of modernity's *social differentiation processes*, in the Christian west inter-institutional secularization (given modernity's top-down differentiation) is quite irreversible. The separation between church and state is not of course watertight. Religious elites enter the public sphere in their attempt to influence social policies. There are also attempts of more direct interventions into the political sphere by the evangelical right in the United States, by radical priests in Latin America and by other religious activists. But despite the above, religion has ceased irreversibly to be an overall regulator of social life. On the other hand, in intra-institutional terms, i.e. within the differentiated religious sphere proper, one sees in late modernity a process of desecularization or religious revival. Particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world, the values underlying C. Taylor's expressivist model have, in varying degrees, penetrated most non fundamentalist established churches. The latter, in an attempt to 'move with the times', have become more liberal both in theological and political terms. Theologically there is less emphasis on the dogmatic dimension (i.e. the search for the 'correct' belief system) and more on the expressive and existential dimension of religiosity. Politically the orientations of the so-called 'progressive milieu' (concern for world poverty, inequalities and environmental deterioration, focus on gay rights and women's empowerment) are appealing to spiritually oriented people inside and outside the established churches.¹⁷ This liberal wave has of course generated a variety of reactions. Conservatives try to go 'against the times' opposing the 'sexual revolution', gay and women priests, women's right to abortion etc.

(iii) Moving to *widespread individualization*, the third major sociostructural feature of modernity, as far as religiosity is concerned, it enhances the non institutionalised, extra-ecclesiastical space of the new religious movements or cults and the informal groups and religious networks – whether

¹⁷ On the 'progressive milieu' notion, see Lynch 2007.

the latter are linked to established churches or not. It also leads to the multiplication of individual 'seekers' who, when cataphatically oriented, in a highly selective manner try to construct a religious 'path of their own'. When apophatically oriented, they are less interested in the variety of belief systems that the global spiritual supermarket offers and more to meditative practices. The latter are either used for therapeutic purposes or, less superficially, for the creation of an internal space, a void which is a precondition for the spontaneous emergence of a spiritual mode of relating to the self, the other and the divine. Although non-churched spirituality has not replaced established religiosity, there is no doubt that the so called 'cultic' or 'holistic' or 'progressive' milieu grows very fast indeed (Heelas 2008). As to Pentecostalism, the other rapidly ascending global religious force, it also has elective affinities with widespread individualization – both in terms of its marked expressivity and in terms of its similarities with the protestant ethic, with its emphasis, particularly in the Third World, on hard work, strict moral standards and individual economic success.

I close by stressing once more that the three sociostructural features of modernity allow both secular and non secular modes of existence. Given this, the relation between the two will be shaped in the future not only by structural but also by a variety of conjunctural developments – economic or ecological crises, scientific discoveries, the future of Islamic fundamentalism etc. From this point of view neither the idea of a long-term secularization within the religious sphere, nor the idea of a secularization–desecularization dialectic help us to foresee the future linkages between the secular and the non secular.

As far as modernity is concerned, what is certain is that given the demise of segmental localism, the massive inclusion into the centre, top-down differentiation and overall individualization, choice is a key element for understanding the present and future religious landscape. In matters religious, choice ceases to be the privilege or 'burden' of the few, it spreads downwards. In other terms, it is not only religious elites, intellectuals or philosophers who ponder the meaning of life and the pros and cons of a secular or non secular mode of existence. Religious affiliation ceases to be taken for granted; it is an issue which concerns people in all social strata. After all, in existential and religious matters, generalised choice, real or imagined, is what modernity is all about.

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