

CHAPTER ONE

The Secularization Paradigm

Introduction

If argument in the social sciences is to be useful rather than merely entertaining, it must treat competing positions in their own terms and as fairly as possible. Sadly many contemporary debates about the fate of religion in the modern world are mulched in layers of caricature. One generation's misrepresentations are taken as authoritative and accurate by a younger generation that lacks the time or inclination to read the work of those they are inclined to disdain. In 1985, when Rodney Stark and William S. Bainbridge (1985: 430) wanted to represent the secularization paradigm (in order to show it false), they ignored the sociologists who had developed those ideas and instead cited a 1960s undergraduate textbook written by an anthropologist. Despite others pointing out that Anthony Wallace's view – 'the evolutionary future of religion is extinction' – might not be representative, Stark used this quotation repeatedly for the next fifteen years (see Stark and Finke 2000: 58). It became so firmly established that others (for example, Buckser 1996) saved themselves the trouble of reading old sociology by repeating it. The waters then became further clouded when scholars sympathetic to the secularization approach took such caricatures as an accurate account of what the paradigm entailed. They devised responses that they presented as 'neo-secularization theory', despite them differing little from the forgotten originals. In so doing, they made respectable the caricatures of what they sought to defend (Yamane 1997).

The point of this chapter is to clear the way for sensible debate about secularization. It presents little evidence; that can be found in later chapters. What I want to do here is lay out as clearly and as briefly as possible just what modern sociologists mean by secularization. Of course, this is a personal selection and interpretation, but I believe I am sufficiently well acquainted with the work I summarize for it to

be representative and reasonable. As will become clear, there is no one secularization theory. Rather, there are clusters of descriptions and explanations that cohere reasonably well. I take my remit as summarizing *sociological* contributions from Max Weber onwards. Interesting though they are, I have no brief for defending the views of psychiatrists such as Sigmund Freud or the overambitious evolutionary models of social development popular with such nineteenth-century thinkers as Auguste Comte and Karl Marx. In the last part of the chapter I will discuss some criticisms of the paradigm that are not dealt with at length in other chapters.

The basic proposition is that modernization creates problems for religion. Modernization is itself a multifaceted notion, which encompasses the industrialization of work; the shift from villages to towns and cities; the replacement of the small community by the society; the rise of individualism; the rise of egalitarianism; and the rationalization both of thought and of social organization. It is not necessary to spend a lot of time at this point on the meanings of these terms; they will become clear as we proceed. Nor is it necessary to agonize over the meaning of 'religion' (though there is plenty of that in later chapters). For reasons considered in detail in chapter 10, I follow common usage in defining religion substantively as *beliefs, actions and institutions predicated on the existence of entities with powers of agency (that is, gods) or impersonal powers or processes possessed of moral purpose (the Hindu notion of karma, for example), which can set the conditions of, or intervene in, human affairs*. Although rather long-winded, this seems to cover most of what we mean when we talk about religion and offers a reasonable starting place.

Defining secularization in advance of offering explanations of it is less easy because scholars often conflate their definitions and explanations, but two quotations will suffice to begin the account. Berger and Luckmann (1966: 74) point to the declining social power of religion in their definition of secularization as 'the progressive autonomization of societal sectors from the domination of religious meaning and institutions'. Wilson made the same point in more detail and added explicit references to the thinking and behaviour of individuals when he said of secularization:

Its application covers such things as the sequestration by political powers of the property and facilities of religious agencies; the shift from religious to secular control of various of the erstwhile activities and functions of religion; the decline in the proportion of their time, energy and resources which men devote to supra-empirical concerns; the decay of religious

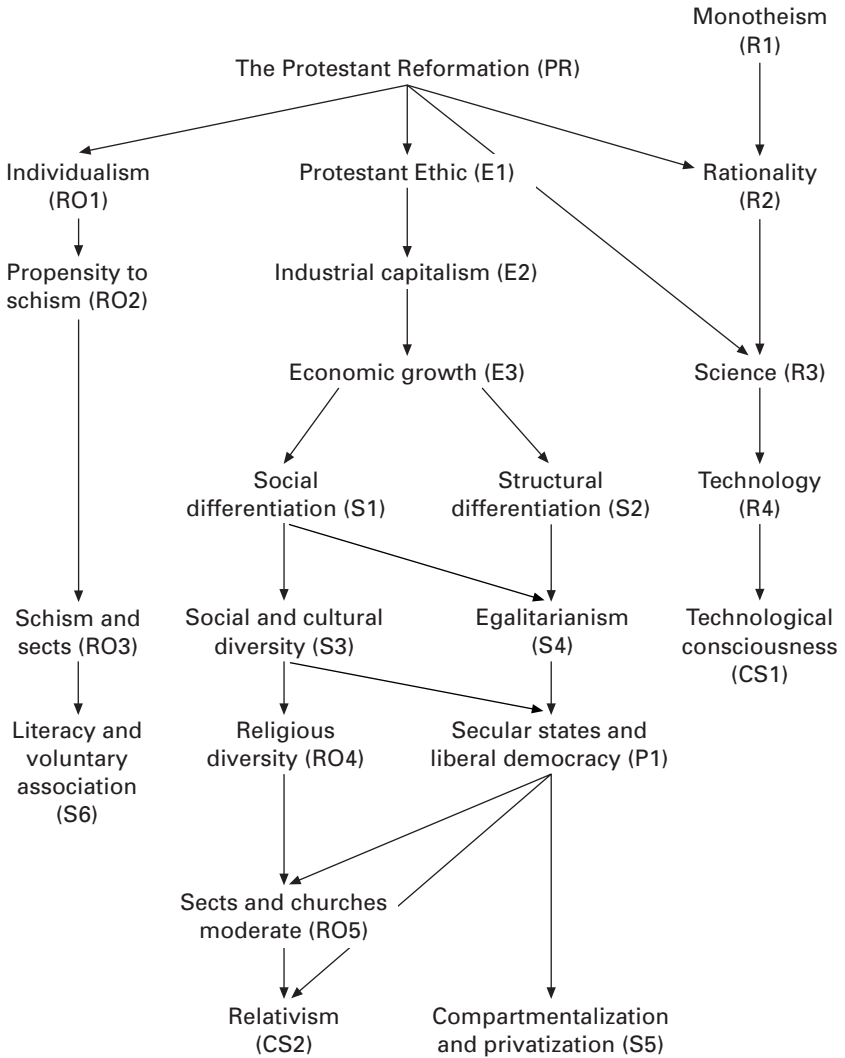
institutions; the supplanting, in matters of behaviour, of religious precepts by demands that accord with strictly technical criteria; and the gradual replacement of a specifically religious consciousness (which might range from dependence on charms, rites, spells or prayers, to a broadly spiritually-inspired ethical concern) by an empirical, rational, instrumental orientation; the abandonment of mythical, poetic, and artistic interpretations of nature and society in favour of matter-of-fact description and, with it, the rigorous separation of evaluative and emotive dispositions from cognitive and positivistic orientations. (1982: 149)

This depiction is complex because it involves the place of religion in the social system, the social standing of religious institutions, and individual beliefs and behaviour. Although they are here presented as a package and Wilson believes them to be related, it is obvious that the societies we hope to encompass with our generalizations differ sufficiently within and between themselves that not all elements will develop in exactly the same way in every setting. Nonetheless, a degree of generalization does seem possible.

Wilson is careful to distinguish between the social significance of religion and religion as such. We should not foreclose on the possibility that religion may cease to be of any great social importance while remaining a matter of great import for those who have some. However, as I will argue, there is a very clear implication that three things are causally related: the social importance of religion, the number of people who take it seriously, and how seriously anyone takes it. It is possible that a country that is formally and publicly secular may nonetheless contain among its populace a large number of people who are deeply religious. But, in a number of these chapters, I will show ways in which the declining social significance of religion causes a decline in the number of religious people and the extent to which people are religious.¹

In brief, I see secularization as a social condition manifest in (a) the declining importance of religion for the operation of non-religious roles and institutions such as those of the state and the economy; (b) a decline in the social standing of religious roles and institutions; and (c) a decline in the extent to which people engage in religious practices, display beliefs of a religious kind, and conduct other aspects of their lives in a manner informed by such beliefs.

As a final preliminary we may note that the secularization paradigm is very largely concerned with what it is now popular to call the 'demand' for religion. It supposes that changes in religious belief and behaviour are best explained by changes in social structure and culture

Figure 1.1 The secularization paradigm

Key: R = Rationalization; RO = Religious organization; E = Economy;
S = Society; P = Polity; CS = Cognitive style

that make religion more or less plausible and more or less desirable. As we will see in the following chapters, some of the criticisms of secularization are less challenges to specific propositions and more a blanket rejection of the focus of study. Rodney Stark and his associates argue that the main determinants of religious vitality lie not in causes of varying demand but in features of the religious marketplace that affect the 'supply' of religious goods (Stark and Finke 2000). I have considered their rational-choice approach to religion at considerable length elsewhere (Bruce 1999) and will refer to it a number of times in subsequent chapters.

The paradigm

Figure 1.1 is a diagrammatic representation of the key elements and connections in the secularization paradigm. As each is well known and has its own extensive literature, in working my way through them, I will confine myself to brief elaborations.

I should stress two points about the status of the causal connections being identified. First, I am not suggesting that these causes are by themselves *sufficient* to produce their purported effects. Many other conditions, themselves deserving book-length treatment, are required. For example, the E1 to E2 link describes a change in ways of thinking about work that stimulated material changes already underway. In identifying the role of the Protestant ethic in the rise of modern capitalism, Weber is not suggesting that a Protestant culture could produce capitalism in any circumstance: the material conditions had to be right. Where they were not, Puritans simply experienced the frustration of their intentions (as in the Scottish case; see Marshall 1980). Secondly, I am not suggesting that any of these causes were enduringly *necessary*. To continue with the Weber example, once rational capitalism was well established and its virtues obvious, it could be adopted by people with very different psychologies in very different cultures (as we see in the example of Japan) – that is, many social innovations, once established, become free of their origins.

Monotheism (R1)

I will begin with the rationalization column, not because it is the most important, but because it has the earliest starting point. Rationalization largely involves changes in the way people think and consequentially

in the way they act. Following Weber, Berger has plausibly argued that the rationality of the West has Jewish and Christian roots. The religion of the Old Testament differed from that of surrounding cultures in a number of important respects. The religions of Egypt and Mesopotamia were profoundly cosmological. The human world was embedded in a cosmic order that embraced the entire universe, with no sharp distinction between the human and the non-human, the empirical and the supra-empirical. Greek and Roman gods even mated with humans. Such continuity between people and the gods was broken by the religion of the Jews. As Berger puts it: 'The Old Testament posits a God who stands outside the cosmos, which is his creation but which he confronts and does not permeate' (1969: 115). He created it and he would end it, but, between start and finish, the world could be seen as having its own structure and logic. The God of Ancient Israel was a radically transcendent God. He made consistent ethical demands upon his followers and he was so remote as to be beyond magical manipulation. We could learn his laws and obey them, but we could not bribe, cajole or trick him into doing our will. There was a thoroughly demythologized universe between humankind and God.

In the myths of ancient Rome and Greece, a horde of gods or spirits, often behaving in an arbitrary fashion and at cross purposes, made the relationship of supernatural to natural worlds unpredictable. First Judaism and then Christianity were rationalizing forces. By having only one God, they simplified the supernatural and allowed the worship of God to become systematized. Pleasing God became less a matter of trying to anticipate the whims of an erratic despot and more a matter of correct ethical behaviour.

As the Christian Church evolved, the cosmos was remythologized with angels and semi-divine saints. The Virgin Mary was elevated as a mediator and co-redeemer with Jesus. The idea that God could be manipulated through ritual, confession and penance undermined the tendency to regulate behaviour with a standardized and rational ethical code. No matter how awful one's life, redemption could be bought by funding the Church. However, this trend was reversed as the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries again demythologized the world, eliminated the ritual and sacramental manipulation of God, and restored the process of ethical rationalization.

Making formal what was pleasing to God made it possible for morality and ethics to become detached from beliefs about the supernatural. The codes could be followed for their own sake and could even attract

alternative justifications. For example, 'Do unto others as you would be done by' could be given an entirely utilitarian justification in a way that 'Placate this God or suffer' could not. In that sense, the rationalizing tendency of Christianity created space for secular alternatives.

So we can summarize these points with the links R1 to R2 (monotheism encourages rationality) and PR to R2 (the Reformation further stimulates rationality). A common red herring can be eliminated if we appreciate that no particular virtue is implied in the use of the term 'rational'. We may also note that Weber and Berger are not concerned primarily with the structure of individual thought in the sense of philosophizing. Rather, the supposed variable is the extent to which means–ends rationality is embedded in social organizations (of which the modern rule-governed bureaucracy is the clearest embodiment). As Wilson puts it: 'Men may have become more rational, and their thinking may have become more matter-of-fact, as Veblen expressed it, but perhaps even more important is their sustained involvement in rational organizations, which impose rational behaviour upon them' (1966: 7).

The Protestant Ethic (E1)

Max Weber argued that the Reformation had the unintended consequence of creating a new attitude to work. In attacking the narrow priestly notion of vocation, Martin Luther elevated all work (excluding, of course, the servicing of vanities and vices) to the status of a *calling* that glorified God. By arguing against confession, penance and absolution, the Reformers deprived people of a way of periodically wiping away their sins. They thus increased the psychological strain of trying to live a Christian life and made it all the more important to avoid temptation; hence the additional premium on work. By insisting that God had already divided all people into the saved and the unsaved, the chosen and the rejected (that is, our fate is *predestined*), John Calvin and his followers inadvertently created a climate in which the Puritans could see worldly success, provided it was achieved honestly and diligently by pious people, as proof of divine favour. These elements combined to produce a new 'ethic'. Whereas previously especially religious people had cut themselves off from the world in monasteries and in hermitages (or, in the case of Simon Stylites, on top of a column), the Puritans exemplified what Weber called 'this-worldly asceticism'.

The link E2 to E3 represents the simple fact that those countries that first adopted industrial capitalism prospered ahead of their rivals and, as we will see below, prosperity itself has contributed to the weakening of religious commitments.

Structural differentiation (S2)

Modernization entails structural and functional differentiation, by which I mean the fragmentation of social life as specialized roles and institutions are created to handle specific features or functions previously embodied in or carried out by one role or institution (Parsons 1964).² The family was once a unit of production as well as the social institution through which society was reproduced. With industrialization, economic activity became divorced from the home. It also became increasingly informed by its own values (that is, S2 is informed by R2). At work we are supposed to be rational, instrumental and pragmatic. We are also supposed to be universalistic: to treat customers alike, paying attention only to the matter in hand. We are not supposed to vary our prices according to the race or religion of the purchaser. The private sphere, by contrast, is taken to be expressive, indulgent and emotional.

In addition to the indirect effects described shortly, increased specialization has the direct effect of secularizing many social functions that in the Middle Ages either were the exclusive preserve of the Christian Church or were dominated by the clergy.³ Education, health care, welfare and social control were once all in the domain of religious institutions; now we have specialist institutions for each. The shift of control was gradual and proceeded at various speeds in different settings, but religious professionals were replaced as specialist professionals were trained and new bodies of knowledge or skill were generated. Where religious institutions retain what we would now regard as secular functions, those functions are performed by lay professionals trained and accredited by secular bodies, and are exercised within an essential secular value frame. For example, the Church of England provides various forms of residential social care, but its social workers are tested in secular expertise, not piety, and they are answerable to state- rather than church-determined standards. Spiritual values may inspire the Church's involvement in social work but there is very little in the expression of that inspiration that distinguishes it from secular provision.

Social differentiation (S1)

As Marx noted in his theory of class formation (Giddens 1971: 35–45), as the functions of society become increasingly differentiated, so the people also become divided and separated from each other – that is, structural differentiation was accompanied by social differentiation. The economic growth implicit in modernization led to the emergence of an ever-greater range of occupation and life situation. The creation of new social classes often led to class conflict; it was certainly accompanied by class avoidance. In feudal societies, masters and servants lived cheek by jowl. The master might ride while the servant walked, but they travelled together. The straw given to the master might be clean, but master and servant often slept in the same room. In medieval Edinburgh all manner of people occupied the same tenements and threw their excrement into the same street. Such mixing was possible because everyone knew his or her place in the social order. ‘Stations’ were so firmly fixed that the gentry need not fear that allowing the lower orders to occupy the same space would give them ideas ‘above their station’. As the social structure became more fluid, those who could afford to do so replaced the previously effective social distance with literal space. When Edinburgh’s Georgian New Town was constructed, the bourgeoisie moved out of the old city.

The plausibility of a single moral universe in which all people have a place depends on the social structure being relatively stable. With the proliferation of new social roles and increasing social mobility, traditional integrated organic or communal conceptions of the moral and supernatural order began to fragment. When the community broke into competing social groups, the religiously sanctified vision of that community, united under its God, also broke up. As classes and social fragments became more distinctive, so they generated metaphysical and salvational systems along lines more suited to their interests (MacIntyre 1967). People came to see the supernatural world as they saw the material world. Thus feudal agricultural societies tended to have a hierarchically structured religion where the great pyramid of pope, bishops, priests and laity reflected the social pyramid of king, nobles, gentry and peasants. Independent small farmers or the rising business class preferred a more democratic religion; hence their attraction to such early Protestant sects as the Presbyterians, Baptists and Quakers.

However, modernization was not simply a matter of the religious culture responding to changes in the social, economic and political

structures. Religion itself had a considerable effect on social and cultural diversity (S3). To explain this I must go back a stage to the link between the Reformation, the rise of individualism and the propensity to schism.

Individualism (RO1)

David Martin neatly summarized a major unintended consequence of the Reformation when he wrote that 'The logic of Protestantism is clearly in favour of the voluntary principle, to a degree that eventually makes it sociologically unrealistic' (1978a: 9). Belief systems differ greatly in their propensity to fragment (R. Wallis 1979; Bruce 1985). Much of the variation can be explained by the assumptions about the availability of authoritative knowledge that lie at the heart of the beliefs. To simplify the possibilities in two polar types, some religions claim a unique grasp of the truth while others allow that there are many ways to salvation. The Catholic Church claims that Christ's authority was passed to Peter, the first bishop of Rome, and was then institutionalized in the office of pope. The Church claims ultimate control of the means to salvation and the right finally to arbitrate all disputes about God's will. So long as that central assertion is not disputed, the Catholic Church is relatively immune to fission and schism. As the beliefs that one needs to abandon in order to depart from Rome go right to the heart of what one believed when one was a Catholic, such departures are difficult and are associated with extreme social upheavals, such as the French Revolution. Thus in Catholic countries the fragmentation of the religious culture that follows from structural and social differentiation tends to take the form of a sharp divide between those who remain within the religious tradition and those who openly oppose it. So Italy and Spain have conservative Catholic traditions and powerful Communist parties.

In contrast, the religion created by the Protestant Reformation was extremely vulnerable to fragmentation because it removed the institution of the church as a source of authority between God and man. Although Catholics sometimes use this as a stick with which to beat Protestants, it is a sociological, not a theological, observation. If, by reading the Scriptures, we are all able to discern God's will, then how do we settle disputes between the various discernings that are produced? Being theists who believed in one God, one Holy Spirit that dwelt in all of God's creation, and one Bible, the Reformers could hope that the righteous would readily and naturally agree, but history proved

that hope false. Tradition, habit, respect for learning, or admiration for personal piety all restrained the tendency to split, but they did not prevent schism. The consequence of the Reformation was not one Christian church purified and strengthened but a large number of competing perspectives and institutions. In Protestant countries, social differentiation took the form not of a radical divide between clerical and secular elements but of a series of schisms from the dominant traditions. Rising social classes were able to express their new aspirations and ambitions by reworking the familiar religion into shapes that accorded with their self-image.

We might add a secular version of RO1. The notion of individualism, although crucially stimulated by the Reformation, gradually developed an autonomous dynamic as the egalitarianism I have located in the diagram as S4. It is placed there because I want to stress that the idea of individualism and the closely associated social reality of diversity (S3) could develop only in propitious circumstances and those where provided by structural differentiation (S2) and economic growth (E3).

The link between modernization and inequality is paradoxical. We need not explore the many differences between modern and traditional sources of power to note that, at the same time as creating classes shaped by what Marx called the forces of production, industrialization brought a basic egalitarianism. We should recognize the contribution that religious innovation made here. Although the Protestant Reformers were far from being democrats, one major unintended consequence of their religious revolution was a profound change in the relative importance of the community and the individual. By denying the special status of the priesthood and by removing the possibility that religious merit could be transferred from one person to another (by, for example, saying masses for the souls of the dead), Luther and Calvin reasserted what was implicit in early Christianity: that we are all severally (rather than jointly) equal in the eyes of God. For the Reformers, that equality lay in our sinfulness and in our obligations, but the idea could not indefinitely be confined to duty. Equality in the eyes of God laid the foundations for equality in the eyes of man and before the law. Equal obligations eventually became equal rights.

Though the details of case need not concern us here, Gellner has plausibly argued that egalitarianism is a requirement for industrialization; a society sharply divided between high and low cultures could not develop a modern economy (1983, 1991). The spread of a shared national culture required the replacement of a fixed hierarchy of stations

and estates by more flexible class divisions. Economic development brought change and the expectation of further change. And it brought occupational mobility. People no longer did the job they always did because their family always did that job. As it became more common for people to better themselves, it also became more common for them to think better of themselves. However badly paid, the industrial worker did not see himself as a serf.

The medieval serf occupied just one role in a single all-embracing hierarchy and that role shaped his entire life. A tin-miner in Cornwall in 1800 might have been sore oppressed at work, but in the late evening and on Sunday he could change his clothes and his persona to become a Baptist lay preacher. As such he was a man of prestige and standing. The possibility of such alternation marks a crucial change. Once occupation became freed from an entire all-embracing hierarchy and became task specific, it was possible for people to occupy different positions in different hierarchies. In turn, that made it possible to distinguish between the role and the person who played it. Roles could still be ranked and accorded very different degrees of respect, power or status, but the people behind the roles could be seen as in some sense equal. To put it the other way round, so long as people were seen in terms of just one identity in one hierarchy, the powerful had a strong incentive to resist egalitarianism: treating alike a peasant and his feudal superior threatened to turn the world upside down. But once an occupational position could be judged apart from the person who filled it, it became possible to maintain a necessary order in the factory, for example, while operating a different system of judgements outside the work context. The mine-owner could rule his workforce but sit alongside (or even under) his foreman in the local church. Of course, power and status are often transferable. Being a force in one sphere increases the chances of influence in another. The factory-owner who built the church could expect to dominate the congregation, but he would do so only if his wealth was matched by manifest piety. If it was not, his fellow churchgoers could respond to any attempt to impose his will by defecting to a neighbouring congregation.

Societalization

A number of important themes combine to produce a major change in the nature of societies that has a profound impact on the social roles and plausibility of religious belief systems. Societalization is the

term given by Wilson to the way in which 'life is increasingly enmeshed and organized, not locally but societally (that society being most evidently, but not uniquely, the nation state)' (1982: 154). If social differentiation (S1) and individualism (RO1) can be seen as a blow to small-scale communities from below, societalization was the corresponding attack from above. Close-knit, integrated, communities gradually lost power and presence to large-scale industrial and commercial enterprises, to modern states coordinated through massive, impersonal bureaucracies, and to cities. This is the classic community-to-society transition delineated by Ferdinand Tönnies (1955).

Following Durkheim, Wilson argues that religion has its source in, and draws its strength from, the community. As the society rather than the community has increasingly become the locus of the individual's life, so religion has been shorn of its functions. The church of the Middle Ages baptized, christened and confirmed children, married young adults, and buried the dead. Its calendar of services mapped onto the temporal order of the seasons. It celebrated and legitimated local life. In turn, it drew considerable plausibility from being frequently reaffirmed through the participation of the local community in its activities. In 1898 almost the entire population of my local village celebrated the successful end of the harvest by bringing tokens of their produce into the church. In 1998 a very small number of people in my village (only one of them a farmer) celebrated the Harvest festival by bringing to the church vegetables and tinned goods (many of foreign provenance) bought in the local branch of an international supermarket chain. In the first case the church provided a religious interpretation of an event of vital significance to the entire community. In the second, a small self-selecting group of Christians engaged in an act of dubious symbolic value. Instead of celebrating the harvest, the service thanked God for all his creation. In listing things for which we should be grateful, one hymn mentioned 'jet planes refuelling in the sky'! By broadening the symbolism, the service solved the problem of relevance but at the cost of losing direct connection with the lives of those involved. When the total, all-embracing community of like-situated people working and playing together gives way to the dormitory town or suburb, there is little held in common left to celebrate.

The consequence of differentiation and societalization is that the plausibility of any single overarching moral and religious system declined, to be displaced by competing conceptions that, while they may have had much to say to privatized, individual experience, could have

little connection to the performance of social roles or the operation of social systems. Religion retained subjective plausibility for some people, but lost its objective taken-for-grantedness. It was no longer a matter of necessity; it was a preference.

Again it is worth stressing the interaction of social and cultural forces. The fragmentation of the religious tradition (RO3) that resulted from the Reformation hastened the development of the religiously neutral state (P1). The development of a successful economy required a high degree of integration: effective communication, a shared legal code to enforce contracts, a climate of trust, and so on (Gellner 1991). And this required an integrated national culture. Where there was religious consensus, a national 'high culture' could be provided through the dominant religious tradition. The clergy could continue to be the schoolteachers, historians, propagandists, public administrators and military strategists. Where there was little consensus, the growth of the state tended to be secular. In Ireland and the Scandinavian countries, a national education system was created through the Catholic and Lutheran churches respectively. In Britain and the United States it was largely created by the state directly. However, even where a dominant church retained formal ownership of areas of activity, those still came to be informed primarily by secular values. Church schools may 'top and tail' their product with their distinctive religious traditions, but the mathematics, chemistry and economics lessons are the same in Ireland's church schools as in England's state schools.

After summarizing this case, James Beckford warned that 'the connection between religion, obligatory beliefs and community may be an historical contingency. Religion has, in the past, been primarily associated with local communities for sound sociological reasons, but it does not follow that this is the only modality in which religion can operate' (1989: 110). This is correct. I am certainly not assuming that, because religion used to be closely woven into the social life of stable communities, the decline of community must, as in a mathematical proof, logically entail the eclipse of religion. Instead I will argue for an empirical connection. In subsequent chapters, I will consider the nature of modern individualized religion and show that, first, it lacks the social significance of the communal type and, secondly, that it is difficult to reproduce. I am thus not tautologically eliding the decline of community and the decline of religion but seeking to establish causal connections between the two.

Schism and Sects (RO3)

It is useful at this point to backtrack and draw a new line of subsidiary connections between some consequences of the Reformation and the E2–E3 strand relating to industrialization. The Reformation provided a powerful stimulus to the spread of mass literacy and later the creation of voluntary associations (S6). With the power of the clergy much reduced and all of us required to answer to God individually, it became vital to give ordinary people the resources necessary to meet that new responsibility. Hence the pressure to translate the Bible from the Latin and Greek into vernacular languages; the rapid advance in printing; the spread of literacy and the movement better to educate the masses. And, as Gellner and others have argued, the spread of education was both essential to, and a consequence of, economic growth. Thus the sectarian competitive spirit of the RO line interacted with the requirements of the E line to produce a literate and educated laity, which in turn encouraged the general emphasis on the importance and rights of the individual and the growth of egalitarianism (S4) and liberal democracy (P1).

The growth of the Protestant sects also had a very direct influence on P1 in that they provided a new model for social organization. Reformed religion may have had the individual soul at its centre, but it encouraged those individuals to band together for encouragement, edification, evangelism and social control. As an alternative to the organic community in which position was largely inherited and ascribed, the sectarians established the voluntary association of like-minded individuals coming together out of choice to pursue common goals. Such associations could be thoroughly authoritarian. The Quakers sometimes exercised severe social control by shunning those who failed to live up to the required standards, even to the extent of expelling from fellowship those whose businesses had failed through no discernible fault of their own. Yet the authority of the voluntary association was firmly circumscribed because it was merely one form of association and one source of identity in an increasingly complex and differentiated society. And, unlike the organic community, participation was voluntary.

As well as creating a new form of association well suited to industrial society, the Protestant sects provided an important source of leadership skills training for the rising social classes.

Social and cultural diversity (S3)

Social and cultural diversity were central to the development of a secular state (and I include in that the secularization not just of the government but also of major public agencies and of the climate generally; what Neuhaus (1984) called ‘the public square’). For the time being, I want to leave aside (a) those cases where a secular state was produced by the violent overthrow of a religious establishment by secular forces (the two obvious examples being the French Revolution of 1789–92 and the Bolshevik Revolution of 1919) and (b) those cases, such as the Lutheran Nordic countries, where the state was secularized late as a result of the autonomous appeal of the idea of liberal democracy (P1).

It is not just ethnocentrism that causes me to put Britain (and its settler-society offshoots) first. I want to argue that there is an additional charge to the secularization of the state that arises from social necessity. Modernization brought with it increased cultural diversity in three different ways. First, populations moved and brought their language, religion and social mores with them into a new setting. Secondly, the expansion of the increasingly expansive nation state meant that new groups were brought into the state. But thirdly, as I have already suggested, even without such changes in the population that had to be encompassed by the state, modernization created cultural pluralism through the proliferation of classes and class fragments with increasingly diverse interests. Especially in Protestant societies, where such class formation was accompanied by the generation of competing sects, the result was a paradox. At the same time as the nation state was attempting to create a unified national culture out of thousands of small communities, it was having to come to terms with increasing religious diversity.

As this has been misunderstood surprisingly often, I will risk losing the reader with repetition and stress that diversity need force the secularization of the state only in the context of a culture that accepts a basic egalitarianism (S4) and a polity that is more or less democratic (P1). A society in which almost everyone shares a particular religion can give that faith pride of place in its operations. The imposition of theocracy in the Iranian revolution in 1979 was possible because the vast majority of Iranians shared the same religion: the Shia strand of Islam. An authoritarian hierarchical society can ignore or suppress religious minorities (and even religious majorities): dissenters need not be tolerated, they can be oppressed (the fate of the Bahais in the

Islamic Republic of Iran) or exiled to the Gulag Archipelago (the fate of many Protestants in the Soviet Union). But a society that was becoming increasingly egalitarian and democratic and more culturally diverse had to place social harmony before the endorsement of religious orthodoxy. The result was an increasingly neutral state. Religious establishments were abandoned altogether (as with the constitution of the United States) or were neutered (the British case). As already noted, this reduced the social power and scope of organized religion. While freedom from embarrassing entanglements with secular power may have allowed churches to become more clearly 'spiritual', the removal of the churches from the centre of public life reduced their contact with, and relevance for, the general population.

The separation of church and state was one consequence of diversity. Another, equally important for understanding secularization, was the break between community and religious worldview. This is the crucial difference between popular or demotic secularization and state suppression of religion. In sixteenth-century England, every significant event in the life cycle of the individual and the community was celebrated in church and given a religious gloss. Birth, marriage and death, and the passage of the agricultural seasons, because they were managed by the church, all reaffirmed the essentially Christian worldview of the people. The church's techniques were used to bless the sick, sweeten the soil and increase animal productivity. Every significant act of testimony, every contract and every promise was reinforced by oaths sworn on the Bible and before God. But beyond the special events that saw the majority of the people in the parish troop into the church, a huge amount of credibility was given to the religious worldview simply through everyday social interaction. People commented on the weather by saying God be praised and on parting wished each other 'God speed' or 'Goodbye' (which we often forget is an abbreviation for 'God be with you').

The consequences of increasing diversity for the place of religion in the life of the state or even the local community are fairly obvious. Equally important but less often considered is the social-psychological consequence of increasing diversity: it calls into question the certainty that believers can accord their religion (Berger 1980).

Ideas are most convincing when they are universally shared. Then they are not beliefs at all; they are just an accurate account of how things are. The elaboration of alternatives provides a profound challenge. Of course, believers need not fall on their swords just because

they discover that others disagree with them. Where clashes of ideologies occur in the context of social conflict (of which more below), or when alternatives are promoted by people who can be plausibly described as a lower order and thus need not be seriously entertained, the cognitive challenge can be dismissed. One may even elaborate a coherent theory that both explains why there are a variety of religions and reasserts the superiority of one's own. This is exactly what the evolutionary minded Presbyterian missionaries did in the nineteenth century. They argued that God in his wisdom had revealed himself in different ways to different cultures. The animism of African tribes was suitable for their stage of social development, as was the ritualistic Catholicism of the southern Europeans. As these people evolved, they would move up to the most fulsome understanding of God, which was Scottish Presbyterianism! It is this ability to neutralize cognitive threats (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 133) that explains why the secularizing effect of diversity that results from the internal fragmentation of a society is greater than that which results from either inward migration or the outward expansion of the state. It is easier to dismiss the views of strangers than those of friends and kind.

When the oracle speaks with a single clear voice, it is easy to believe it is the voice of God. When it speaks with twenty different voices, it is tempting to look behind the screen. As Berger puts it in explaining the title of *The Heretical Imperative* (1980), the position of the modern believer is quite unlike that of the Christian of the Middle Ages in that, while we may still believe, we cannot avoid the knowledge that many people (including many people like us) believe differently.

In a final observation about the impact of pluralism, I would like to trace a small but important connection between diversity and the persuasive power of science and technology (between S3 and R3 and R4). To mention this here runs the risk of confirming mistaken views about the role of science in the decline of religion (on that see chapter 5) and I should stress that I do not see the direct contest between scientific and religious ideas as central to the secularization process. Rather the connection is a more subtle one about displacement and salience. Religious pluralism is implicated in the primacy of scientific explanations in that it weakens the plausibility of alternatives. The rational basis of science and the social structures of training, examination and dissemination of results that protect that base mean that there are fewer disagreements among scientists than there are among the clergy. Or, to put it more carefully, although scientists often argue

at the front lines of their disciplines, they share a considerable body of common knowledge about the hinterland they have conquered. The basic principles of mechanics, physics, chemistry and biology are not in doubt. Except when they abandon all their specific beliefs, the clergy of competing churches and sects disagree on fundamentals. Despite the disillusionment with the authority of the secular professions commonly voiced in the last quarter of the twentieth century (see chapter 6), science still commands the sort of respect enjoyed by the medieval church. If pathologists say that forty-seven elderly people in Lanarkshire died of bacterium *E. coli*, almost all of us will agree with the conclusion. We may then wish to add a divine or supernatural explanation of why *those* people ate the contaminated meat. This is the logic of Zande witchcraft explanations of why a man was killed by a grainstore collapsing on him. The Zande know that termites eat wood but they can also agree on the supplementary explanation that this man was bewitched. Because we do not share a common religious culture, we will not be able to agree on whether it is even appropriate to search for such religious significance, let alone what the significance might be. While the *E. coli* explanation will have the support of the scientific consensus, any religious glosses will be contested minority views. Concentrating our explanations of life events on the material world brings more agreement than searching for religious messages. That the religious culture is badly fragmented thus weakens the ability of religious explanations to complement, let alone compete with, naturalistic ones. When religious explanations are sustained, it has to be in a distinct compartment; not as an equally plausible alternative but as an additional layer of interpretation. Precisely because it is additional, it can be neglected. The spread of AIDS may be God's judgement on homosexuals, as some US fundamentalists argue (though it is not clear what God has against haemophiliacs and west African heterosexuals), but as we have identified compelling and effective explanations (and treatments) for AIDS that do not involve positing divine judgement, those that do become optional.

Compartmentalization and privatization (S5)

A key element of the secularization paradigm is the individual response to differentiation, societalization and pluralism. One way for believers to reconcile their faith with the fact of variety is to seek reintegration at a higher level of abstraction by supposing that all

religions are, in some sense, the same. This is discussed further in chapters 4 and 6. Another possibility (and they are not incompatible) is to confine one's faith to a particular compartment of social life. Indeed, a powerful observation about modernity introduced to the English-reading world by Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* (1973) was that differentiation required us to live, not in a single world, but in a number of worlds, each informed by its own values and logics. With compartmentalization comes privatization – the sense that the reach of religion is shortened to just those who accept the teachings of this or that faith. As Luckmann puts it:

This development reflects the dissolution of *one* hierarchy of significance in the world view. Based on the complex institutional structure and social stratification of industrial societies different 'versions' of the world view emerge. . . . With the pervasiveness of the consumer orientation and the sense of autonomy, the individual is more likely to confront the culture and the sacred cosmos as a 'buyer'. Once religion is defined as a 'private affair', the individual may choose from the assortment of 'ultimate' meanings as he sees fit. (1970: 98–9)

Daniel Bell has taken issue with Wilson's linking of privatization and a decline in the significance or popularity of religion. After agreeing that modernization has brought 'the shrinkage of institutional authority over the spheres of public life, the retreat to a private world where religions have authority only over their followers', he adds, 'there is no necessary, determinate shrinkage in the character and extent of beliefs' (1977: 427). This neatly presents us with a summary of a crucial element in the debate over the secularization paradigm. I will argue in subsequent chapters the point I have made in various places above: the privatization of religion removes much of the social support that is vital to reinforcing beliefs, makes the maintenance of distinct lifestyles very difficult, weakens the impetus to evangelize and encourages a *de facto* relativism that is fatal to shared beliefs. Of course, this is an empirical issue that must be settled by evidence. On that point it is worth noting that, although Bell's essay is entitled 'The Return of the Gods', he provides almost no evidence for his anti-Wilsonian case that privatization does not weaken religion.

Jose Casanova (1994) has made an important contribution to the debate by arguing that differentiation (which he fully accepts) has not caused privatization. His case is that the major churches, having now accepted the rules of liberal democracy and the basic principles of

individual rights, are able to regain a public role. They have achieved this not by returning to the old model of a compact between a dominant church and the state, but by acting as pressure groups in civil society. This may well be true, but to present it as a counter to the secularization paradigm is to miss a number of important points. First, it is clear from the recent fate of the 'new Christian right' in the United States (on which see Garvey 1993 and Bruce 1998b) that religious interest groups have been effective in the public arena only when they have presented their case in secular terms. Hence creationism has to be presented as 'creation science', apparently every bit as compatible with the scientific record as any evolutionary model of the origins of species and open to testing in the same way. The case against abortion is made in terms of the inalienable rights of the individual. Divorce and homosexuality are damned as socially dysfunctional. That is, religious interest groups can be effective in civil society only when they accept the privatization of their distinctive religious beliefs and move on to secular ground. Secondly, even if Casanova does not exaggerate the influence of religious groups in modern societies, he does not address the social-psychological consequences of privatization.

Secular states and liberal democracy (P1)

I have been at pains to stress repeatedly the relative autonomy of many elements of this complex model. The obvious point is that social innovations, once established, can have an appeal that goes far beyond the initial motive to innovate. That is almost inevitable given that many innovations were not initially desired at all but were the unintended consequences of actions taken for quite different reasons. We can see this very clearly in the consequences of the 'Protestant Ethic'. Luther and Calvin would have been horrified to find that centuries after their reforms a secularized version of their ideas was being used to justify the pursuit of wealth (which, like most pious people, they saw as a major threat to the pursuit of godliness).

Although the creation of secular liberal democracy was initially a necessary accommodation to the egalitarianism (S4) that was made possible by structural differentiation (S2), and to the social and cultural diversity (S3) created by a combination of the fissiparousness of Protestantism (RO2) and social differentiation (S1), it became attractive in its own right and in the late nineteenth century we find societies that had no great practical necessity for them introducing the same

principles as part and parcel of other political reforms. For example, in the Nordic countries we find that, despite growing religious diversity being largely contained within the Lutheran churches (or at least within the Lutheran tradition), the introduction of representative democracy and the weakening of the monarchy (or Grand Duchy) was accompanied by a gradual scaling-down of the power of the Lutheran Church (which largely retained its diverse social functions by presenting them universally as secular social services).

That similar reforms after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War in such successor states as Turkey were at best only partial successes raises questions about the economic and social requirements for effective democracy, but they nonetheless illustrate the point that social innovations can become free of their historical roots (Robertson 1993).

Sects and churches moderate (RO5)

This element brings us close to the heart of contemporary criticisms of the secularization paradigm. Stark and a number of associates have argued on the basis of what they take to be the US experience that competition between providers of religious products increases levels of religious vitality. That argument is elaborated in subsequent chapters and elsewhere (see Bruce 1999 and Stark and Finke 2000). The secularization case is that diversity weakens religious commitments by removing the social support for any one religion and by encouraging people to confine their religious beliefs to specific compartments (S5) and to remove the specific and contested elements from their beliefs. The sect, by proliferating competing alternatives (RO3), is thus its own grave-digger.

This later case is made for one important site of secularization by H. R. Niebuhr (1962) in his extension of observations originally made by Ernst Troeltsch about the evolution of sects. Niebuhr notes that time and again what began life as a radical sect gradually evolved into a comfortable denomination on easy terms with the world around it (see chapter 4 for an elaboration of the terms 'sect' and 'denomination'). The Quaker movement began as a radical alternative to the religion of the established Church of England and its founders suffered considerable penalties for their nonconformity. Within a few generations, the movement had moderated both its demands of its members and its criticisms of alternatives. The Methodists mutated in a similar

way. Isichei correctly notes that Quaker development was far more complex than Niebuhr's abbreviated account suggests, but she admits that 'in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Friends were coming to accept the values of their environment and respect for worldly rank and titles was often mentioned as one of their characteristics' (Isichei 1967: 162).

That such mutation has happened often suggests common social forces at work and Niebuhr attempted to elaborate these.⁴ Three points are relevant to the secularization paradigm. First, Niebuhr argues that commitment is inevitably reduced because increasingly large parts of generations subsequent to that of the founders inherited rather than chose their faith. The first generation (and subsequent adult joiners) elected to be sectarians and did so in the full knowledge of the penalties that their dissent would incur. Hence they began with very high levels of commitment and, to the extent that they were victimized, their subsequent experiences of suffering for their God strengthened that commitment. Those who were born into the movement might be strenuously socialized into the tenets of the sect but they had not chosen it. Secondly, a common inadvertent consequence of sect membership was increasing wealth and upward social mobility. Partly this was merely a matter of historical accident. Despite slumps and recessions, industrial economies have grown and most people have become richer. But sectarian Protestants tended to progress ahead of the average, partly for the 'Protestant Ethic' reasons elaborated by Weber (E1) and partly because their asceticism and piety made them widely trusted. It is not an accident that almost the entire British banking system developed from family firms run by Quakers: the Barclays, Backhouses, Trittons and Gurneys. If you had to ask someone to look after your money, ask a Quaker. The problem of increasing wealth (and the social status and public acceptance that came with it) is that it proportionately increases the costs of being an ascetic Protestant. The banking Barclays who in the nineteenth century shifted from the Society of Friends to the evangelical wing of the Church of England faced far greater temptations than did the sect's founders.

A third element of the Niebuhr thesis was also elaborated by the German political scientist Robert Michels (1962) in his study of oligarchy in left-wing trade unions and political parties. Although most sects began as primitive democracies, with the equality of all believers and little or no formal organization, gradually a professional leadership cadre emerged. Especially after the founding charismatic leader

died, there was a need to educate and train the preachers and teachers who would sustain the movement. If this was successful, there was a need to coordinate a growing organization. There were assets to be safeguarded and books to be published and distributed. With organization came paid officials and such people had a vested interest in reducing the degree of conflict between the sect and the wider society. They could also compare themselves to the clergy of the established church and (initially for the status of their faith rather than their own reward) desire the same levels of training, remuneration and social status. The case that Michels plausibly makes from the study of left-wing movements is that organization inevitably brings oligarchy and oligarchy subverts the initial radical impetus.

If the sect can isolate itself completely from the wider society so that its beliefs and culture form the 'taken-for-granted' backcloth to life, then it can sustain itself. The Amish, Hutterites and Doukobhors provide examples. But in most cases the sect is only slightly removed from the wider society and cannot avoid the social-psychological effects of diversity described above. Having failed to win over the majority of the population and hence having to come to terms with being only a 'saved remnant', the sect can find good reasons for moderating its claims and coming to see itself, not as the sole embodiment of God's will, but simply as one expression of what is pleasing to God.

The case of the Niebuhr and Michels theses is that the sectarian project is largely self-defeating. It sets out radically to purify a corrupt religious establishment and after a few generations moderates to become just another comfortable denomination. But, as well as failing in its own terms, it hastens secularization by weakening the dominant religious tradition and increasing the extent of diversity with all the consequences outlined above.

I might add that there are exceptions. Some sects stay sects and Wilson (1990, 1993) has elaborated the circumstances in which persistence is likely. Isichei (1967) makes the point that mutation can be paradoxical. While the English Quakers relaxed many of their behavioural standards, in terms of structure, the Society actually returned to its primitive democracy after flirting with a professional leadership. Nonetheless, the general pattern of accommodation identified by Niebuhr is found sufficiently often to be accepted as an important mediating mechanism in the secularization paradigm.

Under this heading I will add the corollary of the moderation of sects: the moderation of churches. The point has already been made under

other headings. Faced with widespread defection and the loss of authority, most churches reduce the claims they make for the uniqueness of their revelation and come to view themselves as just one among others. The change is not always made willingly. For example, the Episcopal Church in Ireland bitterly resisted disestablishment, as did its counterpart in Wales. As late as the final quarter of the nineteenth century and despite representing a minority of Presbyterians, the Church of Scotland was still trying to ensure that it was the channel for the state-funded expansion of public schooling. It failed. By the start of the twentieth century most state churches were willing to cooperate with other Christian organizations. By the end of it, most were desperately trying to find a new role by presenting themselves as the senior spokesman for all religions against a largely secular climate.

Economic growth (E3)

The fate of the Protestants sects can be generalized. In one way or another very many commentators have noted that increasing prosperity reduces religious fervour (Inglehart 1990, 1997). This is partly a specific claim about the content of most religious traditions. Most of the major strands of the great religions have associated piety with asceticism, at least in theory. It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. The more pleasant this life, the harder it is to concentrate on the next. The more satisfying being human, the harder to be mindful of God. It is also an observation about 'regression to the mean' (on which see chapter 7). Economic marginality provides one source of insulation against the world. The dispossessed often elaborate comforting theodicies that intimately connect their deprived circumstances and their religion so that what would otherwise be seen as privations are re-interpreted as signs of blessing and divine favour: blessed are the poor. Hence it is no surprise that, when material circumstances improve, the religion needs to be rewritten and in the process it may well lose much of its power. An example would be the way that the Pentecostalism of southern whites in the USA evolved over the second half of the twentieth century. Pentecostalists such as Oral Roberts (Harrell 1985) and Tammy Faye Bakker (Barnhart 1988) grew up in impoverished conditions that made it easy and satisfying to denounce flashy clothes, make-up, Hollywood movies, social dancing and television.

As they prospered and began to be able to afford what had previously been the work of the Devil, they compromised their ascetic principles. Although their morals were slower to change, fundamentalists' attitudes to sexuality have also relaxed. For example, divorce, though still regretted, is widely accepted.

Of course, this does not of itself mean that southern fundamentalists are becoming less religious. I am not cheating by defining behavioural change as evidence of secularization at the ideological level. However, I am supposing a causal connection: that the disappearance of distinctive ways of life makes the maintenance of distinctive beliefs harder.

Science (R3) and technology (R4)

For reasons I will elaborate in subsequent chapters, I have left the secularizing effects of science until this point. Various critics of the secularization paradigm misrepresent it by following popular misconceptions and elevating science to a central position. Quite erroneously, Stark says: 'implicit in all versions, and explicit in most, is the claim that of all aspects of modernization, it is science that has the most deadly implications for religion' (Stark and Finke 2000: 61). Put briefly, I assume that a starting assumption of modern sociology is that reality is socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann 1973). By this slogan we draw attention to the role of social relationships and social interests in making ideas more or less persuasive. I have already mentioned various ways in which people can seek to preserve their beliefs against what disinterested outsiders might see as overwhelming refutation. It is a mistake to assume that ideas and observations are of themselves persuasive or that, while we need to explain why people hold false beliefs, somehow the 'truth' stands in no need of explanation.

The Enlightenment zero-sum view of knowledge (with rational thought and scientific knowledge gradually conquering territory from superstition) was carried into sociology by Comte and Marx among others, but it is not part of the modern secularization paradigm. Wilson stated the position very clearly when he followed observations about the increasing influence of science and technology with: 'All of this is not to suggest . . . that the confrontation of science and religion was in itself harmful to religion. Indeed religion and science can co-exist as alternative orientations to the world' (1966: 43). The crucial connections are far more subtle and complex than those implied in some zero-sum knowledge competition.

The secularizing effects of science as seen by modern sociologists are not primarily those of a direct clash of factual claims. Rather they are the more nebulous consequences of assumptions about the orderliness of the world and our mastery over it.

One of the most powerful connections was drawn by Robert Merton (1970) in his work on Puritan scientists. Merton argues that many seventeenth-century Protestant scientists were inspired to natural science by a desire to demonstrate the glory of God's creation, by the rationalizing attitude of the Protestant ethic and by an interest in controlling the corrupt world.⁵ The end result was the same irony that followed from the general rationalization of ethics. Because the Puritan scientists were able to demonstrate the fundamental rule-governed nature of the material world, they made it possible for subsequent generations to do science without topping and tailing their work with the assertion that 'This shows God's glory'. At any stage in the growth of knowledge, God could be summoned to fill a gap. Newton, for example, believed God periodically took a hand in the movement of the planets to rectify a slight irregularity. Later improved models managed without the divine corrections. Science became autonomous and generated explanatory models of the world that did not require the divine.

We can also draw causal connections between the RO line and the rise of science. The fissiparousness of Protestantism enhanced the autonomy of science by weakening the power of the Church to dominate all fields of intellectual endeavour.

More important than science was the development of effective technologies. We should not forget that in the Middle Ages (and to this day in pre-technological societies) religion was often practical. Holy water cured ailments and prayers improved crop quality. Wilson among others has argued that technology has a powerful secularizing effect by reducing the occasions on which people have recourse to religion. Again, rather than see a direct conflict, we should see the change as a matter of 'bypass'. The farmers of Buchan did not stop praying to God to save their sheep from maggots because the invention of an agri-chemical sheep dip persuaded them that God was not very well informed. The gradual accumulation of scientific knowledge gave people insight into, and mastery over, an area that had once been a mystery; the need and opportunity for recourse to the religious gradually declined. Science and technology do not create atheists; they just reduce the frequency and seriousness with which people attend to religion.

More generally, as David Martin puts it, with the growth of science and technology 'the general sense of human power is increased, the play of contingency is restricted, and the overwhelming sense of divine limits which afflicted previous generations is much diminished' (1969: 116).

Technology (R4) and technological consciousness (CS1)

Although Berger's early writings are widely associated with the secularization approach, one particular strand of his thought has been neglected. In an exploration of the social psychological effects of certain styles of modern work, Berger, Berger and Kellner (1974) argue that, irrespective of the extent to which we are aware of it, modern technology brings with it a 'technological consciousness', a certain style of thought that is difficult to reconcile with a sense of the sacred.⁶ An example is 'componentiality'. The application of modern machines to production involves the assumption that the most complex entities can be broken down into their components, which are infinitely replaceable. Any 1990 Volkswagen Golf radiator will fit any 1990 Golf. The relationship between the engine and one radiator is expected to be exactly the same as that between the engine and any other matching radiator. There is nothing sacred about any particular bond. Another fundamental assumption is 'reproducibility'. Technological production takes it for granted that any creative complex of actions can be subdivided into simple acts that can be repeated infinitely and always with the same consequence. This attitude is carried over from manufacture to the management of people in manufacture (a style known after its heroic promoter as 'Fordism') and to bureaucracy generally. While there is no obvious clash between these assumptions and the teachings of most religions, there are serious incompatibilities of approach. There is little space for the eruption of the divine.

To summarize the R line, I am suggesting that the effects of science and technology on the plausibility of religious belief are often misunderstood. The clash of ideas between science and religion is less significant than the more subtle impact of naturalistic ways of thinking about the world. Science and technology have not made us atheists. Rather, the fundamental assumptions that underlie them, which we can summarily describe as 'rationality' – the material world as an amoral series of invariant relationships of cause and effect, the componentiality

of objects, the reproducibility of actions, the expectation of constant change in our exploitation of the material world, the insistence on innovation – make us less likely than our forebears to entertain the notion of the divine. As Weber put it:

The increasing intellectualization and rationalization do *not* . . . indicate an increased general knowledge of the conditions under which one lives. It means something else namely, the knowledge, or the belief, that if one but wished one *could* learn it at any time. Hence, it means that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. Technical means and calculations perform the service. (1948: 139)

Relativism (CS2)

Relativism is perhaps the most potent and the most neglected part of the secularization paradigm. In subsequent chapters I will frequently refer to relativism in explanations of weakening religious commitment.

Finding precisely the right term is not easy; ‘relativism’ is perhaps misleading if it suggests an articulate philosophical attitude. I mean something closer to an operating principle or a cognitive style. I am concerned with the pragmatic concerns of what standing and what reach we accord our own ideas and how we view those who disagree with us. The Christian Church of the Middle Ages was firmly authoritarian and exclusive in its attitude to knowledge. There was a single truth and it knew what it was. Increasingly social and cultural diversity combines with egalitarianism to undermine all claims to authoritative knowledge. While compartmentalization can serve as a holding operation, it is difficult to live in a world that treats as equally valid a large number of incompatible beliefs, and that shies away from authoritative assertions, without coming to suppose that there is no one truth. While we may retain a certain preference for our worldview, we find it hard to insist that what is true for us must also be true for everyone else. The tolerance that is necessary for harmony in diverse egalitarian societies weakens religion (as it weakens most forms of knowledge and codes of behaviour) by forcing us to live as if there were no possibility of knowing the will of God.

First summary

Before turning to important qualifications to the paradigm I will very briefly summarize the case so far. In figure 1.1, I try to show the connections between a variety of changes in the industrial democracies of the West that for brevity we call ‘modernization’. In different ways, elements of that package cause religion to mutate so that it loses social significance. I have gone further than some of those associated with the paradigm (though, in the case of Wilson, for example, I see that extension as merely making explicit what is already implicit) in adding that the decline of social significance and communal support causes a decline in the plausibility of religious beliefs. Changes at the structural and cultural level bring about changes in religious vitality that we see in the declining proportion of people who hold conventional religious beliefs and the commitment they bring to those beliefs. The bottom line is this: individualism, diversity and egalitarianism in the context of liberal democracy undermine the authority of religious beliefs.

Counter-tendencies

The previous sections explain what Berger described as ‘the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols’ and the associated increase in the number of people ‘who look upon the world and their own lives without the benefit of religious interpretations’ (1969: 107–8).

To stop there would be to create a false impression. Berger, Wilson, Martin and Wallis and many others have also written extensively about settings where religion remains seriously implicated in the central operations of economies, politics and societies, and continues to play a major part of shaping people’s lives. My work on the Northern Ireland conflict (Bruce 1986, 1998b) has been much criticized for exaggerating the importance of religion. Our critics might gloss our work as predicting the imminent disappearance of religion, but this is not our view. Our case can be summarized as saying that religion diminishes in social significance, becomes increasingly privatized, and loses personal salience *except where it finds work to do other than relating individuals to the supernatural*. Such work can be described under two broad headings: cultural defence and cultural transition. To pre-empt the criticism that what follows is some recently conceived

patch-up designed to preserve the secularization paradigm from refutation, I should stress that I have held what follows as long as I have held the ideas explained above. The basic framework was given by Roy Wallis in lectures in 1972 and he always attributed it to Bryan Wilson.

In previous formulations, I have simply presented these two clusters as counter-trends. Here I want to be a bit more specific about the relationship of each to modernization. One way of expressing the difference is to say that, while both sources of religious vitality involve responding to current conditions (and in that sense are modern), the cultural defence role of religion requires one 'pre-modern' element.

Cultural defence

What many settings where religion remains a powerful social force have in common is that religion is implicated in group identity, primarily of an ethnic or national character. Where culture, identity and sense of worth are challenged by a source promoting either an alien religion or rampant secularism and that source is negatively valued, secularization will be inhibited. Religion often provides resources for the defence of a national, local, ethnic or status-group culture. Poland and the Irish Republic are prime examples, but Northern Ireland can also be included, as, in more attenuated form, can other 'dual' societies, or the peripheries of secularizing societies, resistant to the alien encroachment of the centre. As David Martin put it: 'An indissoluble union of church and nation arises in those situations where the church has been the sole available vehicle of nationality against foreign domination: Greece, Poland, Belgium, Ireland, Croatia. In such countries bishops have spoken for nations and in Cyprus one actually led in the independence struggle' (1978b: 107).

I will go back over the basic elements of the secularization thesis and note how ethnic conflict can inhibit their development. Consider structural differentiation. My previous account assumed that there were no obstacles to the increasing autonomy of social functions, but clearly hostility between religio-ethnic groups can prevent or retard the process. For example, where its people have been unable to dominate a national culture, the Catholic Church has insisted on maintaining its own school system and has often generated parallel versions of secular institutions such as trade unions and professional associations. Though a minority rarely evades the state's social control systems, it

may still prefer pre-emptively to exercise its own church-based controls on the behaviour of members.

In the classic model of functional differentiation, the first sphere to become freed of cultural encumbrances is the economy. Yet even in what we regard as the pre-eminent site for rational choice, ethnic identification may inhibit the 'maximizing behaviour' that is the fundamental principle of economic rationality. In Northern Ireland attempts to impose rationality on the world of work (through 'fair employment' legislation) have largely failed to prevent the exercise of religio-ethnic preferences in hiring policies (especially in small firms that do not depend on the state for contracts and thus cannot be easily controlled). People also exhibit their ethnic identity in personal consumption, which is beyond state regulation. The Northern Ireland small-business sector is irrational in that small towns often support one Protestant and one Catholic enterprise, each only marginally viable, where the market can profitably sustain only one. Especially at times of heightened tension, Protestants and Catholics boycott each others' businesses and travel considerable distances to engage in commerce with their own sort.

Consider societalization. A beleaguered minority may try to prevent the erosion of the community. Deviants who attempt to order their lives in the societal rather than the community mode may be regarded as disloyal and treacherous and punished accordingly. For example, in the ethnic conflicts in Bosnia and Northern Ireland, those who marry across the divide have been frequent targets for vigilantes keen to clarify and maintain their boundaries.

Finally, ethnic conflict mutes the cognitive consequences of pluralism because the power of invidious stereotypes allows alternative cultures to be much more thoroughly stigmatized. The gradual shift to relativism as a way of accommodating those with whom we differ depends on us taking those people seriously. If we have good reasons to hate them, such consideration is neither necessary nor desirable. Where religious differences are strongly embedded in ethnic identities, the cognitive threat of the ideas of the others is relatively weak. Thus Scottish Protestants in the nineteenth century deployed caricatures of the social vices of the immigrant Irish Catholics as a way of avoiding having to consider them as Christian.

In this sort of account, we usually treat religion as the dependent variable and look for the social roots that explain why religious and national identities remain closed tied. This is only part of the story. In his *General Theory of Secularization*, David Martin (1978b) shows that

a major determinant of the different patterns found across Europe is the religious complexion of the country in question and that is not just a matter of contrasting homogenous and diverse cultures. In explaining why some religious cultures were better than others at sustaining national identity and leading nationalist opposition to communism in eastern Europe, I argued that the nature of the religion is itself a vital consideration (Bruce 1999). The differences are complex but I will mention one because it shows the observations being made here do mesh consistently with the secularization paradigm. The example thus serves against the charge that I am merely hedging my bets.

A major fault line (there are others) is between Protestantism and Catholicism. It was primarily the overwhelmingly Catholic countries that most effectively mobilized religio-ethnic identity against Communism – Poland and Lithuania being the two main cases. There are many reasons for this. For example, the international nature of Roman Catholicism provided the local Catholic Church with vital resources for resistance to incorporation. But the cause I want to draw attention to is the communal and organic nature of Catholicism. Or, to look at it from the other end, the individualism of Protestantism and its essential potential for fission encourages cultural diversity and weakens any sort of collectivist response.

Although I have repeatedly stressed that the secularization paradigm should not be taken as a universal template, it is important to note that all major cultural defence cases involve religion (or the church) *continuing* to play a role as the embodiment of collective identity. None of them is an example of a religion acquiring this role after it has been lost. Where church has become separated from state, or religion has become privatized (to put it more generally) because of the press of cultural diversity (rather than from a minority coup, as in Turkey, Russia or pre-1978 Iran), no amount of social pressure can restore the close bond. For example, the initial British hostility to Irish immigrants in the early nineteenth century was often religious. But the successful integration of that immigrant block and the secularization of the culture meant that opposition to Muslim migrants in the last quarter of the twentieth century was secular and racist and made no appeals to religious identity. The point is obvious and can be seen very clearly in comparing the resistance to communism of the three Baltic states. Lithuania, which was overwhelmingly Catholic, was better able to maintain its sense of identity vis-à-vis Russian communism than was Estonia and Latvia, which were religiously

diverse. Religion can serve as a major component in cultural defence only if the people share the same religion. As there is no sign of major religious revivals reuniting religiously diverse populations, we can reasonably see the historical change as being one way. This does not mean that all religio-ethnic movements are merely survivals of pre-modern structural arrangements; they are also reactions to troublesome aspects of modernization. We do not need to consider much detail to appreciate that the Iranian revolution of 1979, for example, was in large part a reaction to Western exploitation of Iran and to the failure of the Shah's attempts to impose Western culture. To use the terms of the theory I have advanced above, there was considerable forced differentiation and the intention of the Iranian revolution was to roll that back. In that sense, 'de-differentiation' is possible where the original change was artificially imposed. However, the crucial point is that religion could play the role of cultural defence in Iran only because the vast majority of Iranians shared the same religion and such differentiation as had occurred had been short lived, unpopular and imposed from outside, rather than emerging slowly and 'naturally' from indigenous social development (Bruce 2001b).

To put the case formally, the relative absence of the sort of differentiation that occurred in most parts of the stable democracies of western Europe is a necessary condition for movements of cultural defence.

Cultural transition

The other major cluster of cases of religion retaining social significance can be glossed as 'cultural transition'. Where social identity is threatened in the course of major cultural transitions, religion may provide resources for negotiating such transitions or asserting a new claim to a sense of worth. Will Herberg (1983) made this point the centre for his explanation of what he termed the American paradox. On the one hand, Americans are fond of churches; on the other, much American religion does not seem especially religious. The explanation lay in the social functions of religion for migrants to the United States: religious institutions provided resources for the assimilation of immigrants into American society. Ethnic religious groups provided a mechanism for easing the transition between homeland and the new identity. The church offered a supportive group that spoke one's language, shared one's assumptions and values, but that also had experience of, and contacts within, the new social and cultural milieu.

A similar pattern was evident among Irish migrants to nineteenth-century Britain. They congregated where others had gone before. They established a religious community and its appropriate institutions and roles as soon as they could, and within that community they reasserted their cultural integrity and their sense of self-worth. They often fell away from observance before families and cultural institutions were established, but they often became more observant – perhaps even more observant than they were at home – when these were in place.

There is another important manifestation of the tendency for religion to retain significance, even temporarily to grow in significance, where it comes to play a role in cultural transition, and that is in the course of modernization itself. Modernization disrupts communities, traditional employment patterns and status hierarchies. By extending the range of communication, it makes the social peripheries and hinterlands more aware of the manners and mores, life styles and values, of the centre and metropolis, and vice versa. Those at the centre of the society, the carriers of modernization, missionize the rest, seeking to assimilate them, by educating them and socializing them in 'respectable' beliefs and practices. They wish to improve and elevate the rural masses and those who move to the fringes of the cities and there form a potentially dangerous mob. Sectors of the social periphery in turn are motivated to embrace the models of respectable performance offered to them, especially when they are already in the process of upward mobility and self-improvement.

Industrialization and urbanization therefore tended to give rise to movements of revival and reform, drawing the lapsed and heterodox into the orbit of orthodoxy. The new converts and their overenthusiastic religion often offended the dominant religious organizations. They solved the awkwardness of their position by seceding (or being expelled) and forming new sects. Methodism in late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain is a prominent example. By religious dissent the formerly deferential middling and lower orders marked their withdrawal from the old system of dependency on parson and squire, asserted their autonomy, and embraced the religious values and practices that endorsed their recently acquired socio-economic and democratic aspirations. Evangelicalism gave a spiritual legitimation to the desire for improvement within these strata, while inculcating the values and habits of thrift, conscientious hard work, self-discipline, sobriety and the deferral of gratification that would assist them to realize those

values. Industrialization gave people the chance to get on; evangelical religion encouraged the desire to do so.

Although industrialization and urbanization tend in the long term to undermine traditional community and thereby to subvert the basis on which religion can most readily flourish, in the short term they can be associated with an increase in attachment to religious bodies. To summarise, modernization can create a new role for religion as a socializing agent in times of rapid social change.

Second summary

It is not an accident that most modern societies are largely secular. Industrialization brought with it a series of social changes – the fragmentation of the lifeworld, the decline of community, the rise of bureaucracy, technological consciousness – that together made religion less arresting and less plausible than it had been in pre-modern societies. That is the conclusion of most social scientists, historians and church leaders in the Western world. If there is any originality in my account of these changes, it is only in the stress I give to diversity. Where others have begun their explanation for the decline of religion with the increasingly neutral state, I have drawn attention to the cause of that neutrality. Although the idea that citizens should not have their rights constrained by religious affiliation had become sufficiently well established as part of liberal and democratic discourse by the middle of the nineteenth century that it became part of democratic reform, it was born out of necessity. The cultural diversity created by the interaction of the fragmenting religious culture and structural and social differentiation pushed religious identity (and with it all but the blandest religious ideas) out of the public arena and into the private sphere.

Again it is largely a matter of emphasis, but I have also stressed the impact of diversity on the way in which people who wish to remain religious can hold their religious beliefs. The removal of support at the level of social structure has a corresponding effect on the social psychology of belief. The dogmatic certainties of the church and sect are replaced by the weak affirmations of the denomination and the cult.

However, as I have just argued, there are counter-trends that can retard or prevent secularization. The secularizing impact of diversity depends to a very great extent on an egalitarian culture and a democratic polity. In their absence, diversity may heighten racial and ethnic conflict and deepen commitment to a communal religious identity.

My observations about the role of religion in cultural defence and cultural transition are not lately added qualifications. They are part and parcel of my general approach – a necessary reflection of the fact that social development and religious history are complex. Hence any explanation must be complex.

What the paradigm does not assert

Later chapters will consider in great detail a number of objections of the secularization paradigm and will in those contexts further clarify its claims and remit. Here I want briefly to eliminate some of the objections that stem from basic misunderstanding and answer some criticisms that will not be discussed below.

Secularization is universal and inevitable

In common with many critics, Jeffrey Hadden (1987) has offered as a compelling reason to reject the secularization paradigm the importance of religion in countries such as Iran. This would be germane only if the paradigm was intended as a universal model. Anyone who had actually read Weber, Troeltsch, Niebuhr, Wilson, Berger or Martin (and Hadden cites none of them) would appreciate that they did not see themselves as discovering universal laws comparable to the basic findings of natural science.⁷ Like Weber's Protestant Ethic thesis, the secularization story is an attempt to explain a historically and geographically specific cluster of changes. It is an account of what has happened to religion in western Europe (and its North American and Australasian offshoots) since the Reformation. Whether any parts of the explanation have implications for other societies is an empirical matter and must rest on the extent to which the causal variables found in the original setting are repeated elsewhere. Although careful comparative analysis, by highlighting the 'all other things' that are not equal, can shed further light on the secularization approach, of itself that religion in Iran in 1980 or Chile in 1990 is not like religion in Belgium is neither here nor there.

The secularization paradigm does not imply that the changes it describes and explains are inevitable. There is nothing inevitable about human life except death and taxes and I can think of very few social scientists who would think otherwise. After all, people are sentient beings who can change. However, it does seem reasonable to see some

social changes as accumulating in a 'value-added process' (Smelser 1966) so that, once they have occurred, it is very difficult to see how their effects can be reversed in any circumstances that are at all likely. Egalitarianism is now so firmly embedded in the West that I cannot imagine the United States, for example, again restricting the franchise to white people or preventing married women taking paid employment. To use the example given above, it is difficult to see how a religiously diverse liberal democracy can again become religiously homogeneous while religion retains much substance. Proponents of competing religions can converge by gradually dropping what divides them (the general pattern of sects and churches becoming denominations) but the mass conversion required to make all US citizens Protestant fundamentalists or make all Germans Mormons is very unlikely in a diverse culture that stresses the rights of the individual. We are claiming irreversibility, rather than inevitability.

The paradigm is progressive and secularist

As far as I know, Berger, Wilson, Martin, Dobbelaere and Wallis have never cited Comte, Freud or Huxley as intellectual progenitors, but it is still common for critics to denigrate the secularizationists for the humanist arrogance of supposing that religion has declined because people have become more sophisticated, clever, mature or well informed. Peter Glassner, for example, criticizes the paradigm for being nothing more than 'generalizations from limited empirical findings used by sociologists to bolster an implicit ideology of progress' (1977: 64). In reply to the assertion of 'limited empirical findings', we could note that the twenty-five years since Glassner made that claim have seen the addition of very large amounts of data to support the paradigm and very little to undermine it. But it is the second point that concerns me here. While some secularizationists have been neutral about the changes they describe and explain, many have been anything but in favour. Weber's description of the modern ethos as 'the iron cage of rationality' hardly sounds like endorsement. In unusually predictive mode, Wilson wrote: 'Religion in modern society will remain peripheral, relatively weak, providing comfort for men in the interstices of a soulless social system of which men are the half-witting, half-restless prisoners' (1976b: 276). In case the pessimism in that assessment is not obvious, consider the following assessment of the effects of the decline of community and of secularization:

Because such developments facilitate a variety of criminal or antisocial behavior, such breakdown of moral control leads inevitably to the threat of more oppressive measures for the maintenance of public order. . . . Modern governments, even in the modern liberal states . . . contemplate or institute such devices as data retrieval systems, video monitoring of public space, the electronic tagging of offenders, 'three-strike' convictions, reimposition of visa requirements for migrants, boot camps, zero tolerance and the like. (Wilson 2000: 46)

Far from seeing modernity as liberating, Wilson believes that the erosion of shared values will make life decidedly less pleasant.

The paradigm is poor theory

In his omnibus critique, Hadden includes being 'a hodge-podge of loosely employed ideas rather than a systematic theory' (1987: 587). Remove the insulting language and I would agree but regard it as a virtue. In their concern to make sense of the relationship between the modernization of the West and the decline in the power and popularity of religion, thousands of scholars have studied cases that run from Anabaptists in eighteenth-century Germany and Freethinkers in 1920s London to Moonies in 1960s California. So large a phenomenon could be comprehended by a 'systematic theory' only if (as has been the case with both of Stark's theories of religion) it is so abstract as to be worthless. There is no secularization theory. There is a cluster of testable explanations that cohere as well as anything in the social sciences. That they are sometimes 'loosely employed' is neither here nor there. What matters is that they can be tightly employed.

Secularization must have an even trajectory

The secularization paradigm is not the sociological equivalent of synchronized swimming. It does not require or expect that all indices of religious vitality will decline at the same speed or evenly. The process is bound to be lumpy because the world is complex. In the 1970s, parts of Birmingham would have defied the expectation of declining religious vitality because the secular English were being displaced by Pakistani Muslims. Migration changed the religious complexion. That would refute the secularization paradigm only if the secular English had moved towards Pakistan's level of religious observance. The reverse is the case; as they become English in every other respect, the third generation of Muslims is also approaching the English level of religious

indifference. Sociological explanation requires that all other things be equal. They very rarely are.

Unlike the laws of the material sciences, our propositions are generalities. That there has always been the maverick peer of the realm who supports anarcho-syndicalism does not invalidate the claim that the British aristocracy supports the interests of the rentier and the capitalist classes. That a few thousand people become Moonies need not defeat the secularization paradigm.

It is in the nature of sociology to seek the general social changes that explain whatever interests us. We should never forget that such perceived changes are abstractions created by colour-washing the jagged edges of events in the real world. That, on close acquaintance, the history shows that things could have been very different is not refutation of the secularization paradigm; it is merely the normal relationship between history and sociology. The jagged bits are a problem only if it can be plausibly argued that a different abstraction can be better drawn from the same material. If there are too many exceptions, then we should consider painting 'growth' or even just 'random fluctuations'. But some small reversals need not trouble the paradigm.

A further reason for lumpiness is that organizations have their own histories. It is here (rather than as a general theory of religion) that some of the supply-side observations of Stark and his colleagues have value. Whatever the general level of demand for religion, churches, sects, denominations and cults can vary their support by their actions. Or, to put it more generally, social life is not predetermined. Individuals, groups and organizations can make more or less of what is possible. By its support for Franco, the Catholic Church in Spain probably alienated a large part of the population. By virtue of his forceful personality and single-mindedness, Ian Paisley was able to create a sect of over 100 congregations.

The hard social determinist line is that such things do not affect the big picture. Had it not been Paisley, it would have been someone else. Had it not been support for Franco, it would have been something else. We do not need to take sides in this ancient quarrel between old-fashioned history and high sociology. We need only recognize that there is some freedom in the system: individuals and agencies can behave more or less competently. Hence religious change, even if following a pattern we can explain, will be uneven. Even if the social changes that strengthen or weaken the plausibility of religious beliefs were to press equally on every part of a society (and they do not),

that people can respond in different ways to the same stimuli will ensure that religious change will never be even.

All of which is a long way to this point. Unevenness of itself does not refute the secularization paradigm; what matters is the overall direction of trends and their long-term stability. The religious revival in the fishing communities of Norfolk and the north-east of Scotland (Griffin 2000) does not disprove secularization, but a recurrence in any Western country of anything on the scale of John Wesley's Methodist revivals most certainly will.

The endpoint is atheism

One common misattribution is to gloss the secularization paradigm as predicting (and hence requiring for its fulfilment) that everyone becomes an atheist. Prominent US sociologist of religion Andrew Greeley frequently uses the numbers of what he calls 'hard-core atheists' as a measure of secularization (for example, Jagodzinski and Greeley 2001). Paul Heelas (2001) refers repeatedly to the small number of people who in surveys describe themselves as atheists and agnostics as a reason to be sceptical of the secularization approach. I will say more about this in chapter 10 but it seems an arrogance on the part of believers to assume that those who do not share their beliefs must nonetheless find them so important as deliberately to disavow them.

Wilson has always been quite clear about this. In one place he says the secularization approach 'does not imply . . . that all men have acquired a secularized consciousness. It does not even require that most individuals have relinquished all their interest in religion, even though that may be the case. It maintains no more than that religion ceases to be significant in the working of the social system' (1982: 149–50). In another he says 'Religion is not eliminated by the process of secularization, and only the crudest of secularist interpretations could ever have reached the conclusion that it would be' (1987: 8).

I would go further than Wilson and argue that the decline in the social significance of religion, in turn, reduces the number of people interested in religion. That is, the connection is causal rather than a matter of definition. But, even in my more radical view, there is no expectation that religion will disappear.

That many people continue to be in some sense religious could be taken as proof that the changes we see in the religious life of Britain is not 'secularization'. I do not see any major difficulty in using a term

to describe a process that has no fixed destination. Take, for example, the idea of 'fragmentation'. If a political party with, say, 1,000 members divides into ten competing factions, I would describe that as 'fragmentation'; even though the process has not reached its potential endpoint of 1,000 one-person parties. Fragmentation takes its sense not from where it is going but from where it has been. In the same way, secularization can take its sense from meaning 'becoming less religious'.

In so far as I can imagine an endpoint, it would not be self-conscious irreligion; you have to care too much about religion to be irreligious. It would be widespread indifference (what Weber called being religiously unmusical); no socially significant shared religion; and religious ideas being no more common than would be the case if all minds were wiped blank and people began from scratch to think about the world and their place in it. This is an important point, because the critics often assume that the secularization paradigm supposes the human default position to be instrumental, materialist atheism. Of course, what people are 'essentially' like, stripped of their culture and history, is unknowable, because we are all products of culture and history. But, as it has a bearing on what would count as fulfilment of the paradigm, this requires some consideration.

If we imagined away all traces of previous religious traditions and started with completely blank minds, some of us would produce religious ideas and elaborate rituals. I say this not because I suppose there is an inevitable need for religion but because there is obviously the logical possibility of some religious propositions arising from any contemplation of the human situation. To say 'Ethel has died and is no more' is to imply other possibilities: Ethel has gone to another world; Ethel's body has died but we can still communicate with Ethelness; Ethel has not died but has gone into hiding and will reappear when we deserve her; the essence of Ethel has left her worn-out frame and reappeared in a baby born the same day as she died, and so on.

The difference between a religious and a secular world is not the possibility of imagining religious ideas. Anything can be imagined by someone. It is the likelihood of them catching on. The removal-of-supports approach to secularization does not posit secularity as an endpoint. Indeed it posits no endpoint. Rather it explains why shared ideas are no longer as persuasive as they once were. It does not rule out the possibility of someone putting together strange claims about

space travel, the likelihood of life on other planets, and the unlikelihood of people having built the pyramids, marinating these with a large dose of wishful thinking, and coming up with Bo and Peep's flying saucer cult (Balch 1982), a group that hit the news in 1997 when, as Heaven's Gate, its thirty-nine members committed suicide. What it does rule out is the possibility of any such theories becoming very widely accepted, under the political, social and economic circumstances that we can presently imagine. David Martin, who has criticized clumsy secularization theories, while making some of the most important contributions to the paradigm, said of his intentions in writing *A Sociology of English Religion*: 'I hoped to show among other things that the decline of religion was followed not by rationality but by subterranean theologies and nonrational sentiments and superstitions' (2000: 35). Provided that he agrees that none of those theologies has become very popular, that the non-rational sentiments are confined to small parts of the lifeworld, and that the superstitions remain a pale shadow of those of the Middle Ages, I have no quarrel at all with Martin's judgement of what follows religion.

To restate the crucial principle, while the proportion of atheists in a population is an interesting secondary indicator (and it is steadily increasing in the West), it is not the primary test. For Wilson that would be data on the social significance of religion and the endpoint would be 'very little'. Others (I among them) would add a second consideration. As I expect that ideologies that lose relevance will also lose plausibility, I see the popularity of religious beliefs as a useful index of secularization. I expect the proportion of people who are largely indifferent to religious ideas to increase and the seriously religious to become a small minority.

Conclusion

Marxism as a political programme was killed by its dismal failure to deliver; Marxism as a social scientific theory was killed by being endlessly qualified to preserve it from refutation. Too many lifesavers may smother the drowning man. I hope the above clarifications have not saved the secularization paradigm from being disproved at the price of making it untestable. My aim is to ensure that we are testing the right things. The paradigm does not require secularization to be universal or even; it is not thinly disguised Progressivism; it is a set of associated explanations rather than a single theory, but that is no

bad thing; it does not suppose the course of history to be smooth and hence is not refuted by humps and lumps; and it does not suppose that the only alternative to religion is irreligion. What the paradigm does require is a long-term decline in the power, popularity and prestige of religious beliefs and rituals.