

Professor David Martin delivered this lecture on Thursday 3rd November 2005 in the Queens Theatre, Emmanuel College, Cambridge. He was introduced by Professor Bob White. A list of suggested reading is found at the end of this transcript. The lecture was followed by a dinner/discussion at St Edmunds College.

Does the Advance of Science Mean Secularization?

I have a complicated brief, because this issue is bedevilled by the way people talk about 'religion' and 'the secular' (and latterly 'secularism') as if they knew some essential meaning attached to the terms they use. The same is true for 'science'. It is also bedevilled by the way some educated people talk about what they believe *ought* to be the case as though their belief could stand in for what actually *is* the case. 'Ought' has become 'is' on the basis of certain historic crises in the relation of science to religion which have acquired an almost mythic status, in spite of recent revisionist history, for example the writings of John Brooke at Oxford. I am thinking here of the Galileo controversy, of what Paul Hazard called the crisis in the European mind from the late-seventeenth to the early-eighteenth century, and of the controversy over Darwin.

As a result you may expect me to revisit the philosophical issues involved, for example about the status and freedom of humanity when, for the purposes of this lecture I am most of the time simply a sociologist. However, being simply a sociologist is not as simple as it seems because I have to begin by explaining what we do and do not take seriously with respect to theories of secularisation. That explanation does not involve jargon but it does involve a rapid dive into the inwardness of sociology with respect to concepts and procedures. That includes what is bound to look like a ragbag of different kinds of explanation from the advent of the car to the political alienation of the working class to the long-term processes of rationalisation. This does not make for easy writing or listening. Particularly awkward here is the distinction between science as a mode of understanding and the indirect consequences of science and technology for our everyday lives. I am assuming my brief is to discuss the impact of the former yet sociological theories of secularisation are more concerned, *inter alia*, with the latter.

The classic procedure of sociology in the absence of controlled experiment is cross-cultural comparison, so the core of what I argue has to turn on something so obvious, so crucial and to my mind so compelling that it is a sociological question as to why educated people do not take it on board. In terms of cross-cultural, that is cross-national comparison, countries at roughly the same level with regard to scientific advance have religious profiles pretty well across the complete range. But that means I have to offer explanation in terms of different histories, almost indeed in terms of different cultural gestalten. I set such general tendencies to secularisation as may exist (other things being equal) against the contingencies of history and against the particularities of cultural context where things are hardly ever equal. I also have to engage in informed speculation about mental space asking whether we, or some of us, entertain mental spaces where there is an either-or as between science and religion, or whether mental space is a manifold where we call upon different kinds and levels of discourse and understanding according both to our individual context and the degree of openness or closure of mental space made available to us by our culture, especially our national culture.

I also have briefly to discuss the kind of religious mutations brought about by modernity, apart from straightforward secularisation and the emergence or re-emergence in our recent modernity of magic, of spirituality, and of what Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead call *re-sacralisation*. Finally I have to bring into the open a theme implicit throughout, which is the power of master narratives, especially the Enlightenment master narrative, to occlude our understanding of what is sociologically obvious in favour of an 'obvious' but false hypothesis about religion receding as science advances. The French think master narratives have had their day but in my view that only tells us they have lost the plot. Our intellectual histories of the relationship of science and religion, and our dubious assumptions about the avant-garde, not only obscure the actual data about secularisation at the level of people at large, but actually ensure we are in a state of principled ignorance about our global reality. That is why it keeps surprising us. As Sir Bob Geldof, himself an atheist, has just reminded us, we do not understand what is happening globally unless we understand religion, rather than just waiting for the rest of the world to catch up with us. Waiting for the world to play catch-up with France and Sweden is a mug's game.

So much for my awkward brief as regards the recession of religion with the advance of science. As I have hinted, my colleagues in the field of the sociology of religion, for example Grace Davie, Steve Bruce and James Beckford in the United Kingdom, might well regard rebuttal of so crass an idea as precious time and energy misspent. Putting it mildly this is what the late Imre Lakatos, philosopher of science, would have called a 'radically deteriorating research programme'. Once upon a time, somewhat before Darwin, many human scientists had their own evolutionary schemes where something of this sort might have been seriously entertained: No longer. Its last representative to my knowledge was the late Baroness Barbara Wootton in the fifties. It was her confident affirmation of an either-or with respect to social science and religion, let alone natural science, that forced me to think furiously about why what was obviously true to her was obviously false.

What then *do* sociologists of religion take seriously? They take seriously the privatisation of religion, although not everybody is convinced about it, as one discovers on reading Jose Casanova's impressive rebuttal *Public Religions in the Modern World* (1994). What the privatisation of religion refers to is its declining social significance for public rhetoric, legitimation, debate and policy. A recent example might be Alistair Campbell's advice to the Prime Minister when he was about to address soldiers destined for Iraq: 'We don't do God'. Sociologists also take seriously an approach closely implicated in privatisation, which stresses individualisation. According to this approach we each and all put together our own personal bricolage of religious attitudes and ideas and build our own individual spiritual pathway. An example of this might be a comment of one of the Beatles: 'Why should ten thousand people believe the same thing?'

At this point I have to tip a ragbag of items from the repertoire of theories on to the floor. There is the effect of geographical and social mobility in breaking up dense communal relations, permeated by religion, and in breaking up the unity of the generations. There is a consumer hedonism inimical to long-term commitments of any kind and unwilling to invest time and energy in maintaining institutions, religious or otherwise. There are the rival attractions of a picnic in the car, or Sunday morning football for the under-thirteens, or week-end entertainment in front of the television. There is the impact of secular control of education and the media, so

that even personnel employed by the Church or in Church schools make pre-emptive strikes in favour of secular criteria and values alien to religion. Then, in the longer historical perspective, there is the displacement of religious solidarity by national solidarity or the claims of party political ideology. It is not easy to turn these assorted ideas and influences into a joined-up sociological narrative, but they clearly have little to do with the impact of science, unless we are thinking of the effect of the car and of television as among the indirect consequences of invention.

Sociologists also take seriously their empirical indices and their basic organising frameworks, such as rationalisation and social differentiation. I have already mentioned the organising framework of privatisation, and do not intend to pursue that further. As for empirical indices, religious belief and practice are routinely correlated with age, generation, gender, status, occupation, education, urbanisation and so on to produce patterns of change. However, the crude data are not entirely self-interpreting, so that you have to put questions to them, such as how far a decline in female practice is due to changing female life-styles. Or one can ask why it is that, according to Andrew Greeley, any association that may have existed between advanced education and irreligion has virtually disappeared in the youngest European generation. If we find, with Rodney Stark and Robert Wuthnow, that natural scientists and technologists are more religious than practitioners of the humanities and social sciences, that certainly seems to nudge us away from any idea that hard science is incompatible with religion. Stark's data show that the least scientific disciplines are the most irreligious, coming to a climax in my subject, and irreligion does not increase with increasing exposure to hard science. (One oddity worth looking at here is the way individual scientists do not believe the data about what they believe, any more than they accept the documented argument embraced here about the very minor role played by complex scientific findings in religious decline compared (say) to the invention of the Walkman. Attack a paradigm and it goes into denial, before there is a rethink.)

We come now to our two crucial organising frameworks for discussing secularisation: rationalisation and social differentiation. You will first of all notice that we have entered an intellectual world dominated by schemata and nouns of process ending in '-ation'. Nouns of process have a way of implying movement from state A, which is religious, to state B, which is secular. So too do schemata like the shift from Community to Association. That way we find ourselves tilted on a historical slope where any particular religious present is pregnant with a secular future. Michael Wheeler in his study of the religion of John Ruskin complains of precisely this way of thinking, and shows how unjust it is when trying to understand Ruskin. Another version of this approach is Herbert Butterfield's 'Whig Interpretation' of history. Clearly we are now beginning to canvass the way progressive master narratives govern our perception of historical change. I come to these master narratives later, only pausing to notice there are other master narratives of rotation, such as Sorokin's ideational and sensate periods, or narratives of decline such as Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*.

Rationalisation is a concept we owe to Max Weber and in his work it can be as much part of a narrative of decline towards the 'iron cage' as of progress. It does not refer to the advance of abstract reason but rather to the consequences of increasing technical efficiency in rendering the world both impersonal and disenchanted. Here we can pick up some of the indirect consequences of science, for example when we consider the increasingly rational and bureaucratic way in

which we today organise health. Once there were hospitals named after St. Bartholomew or St. Thomas, but that religious frame has now been hollowed out, and the sense of a vocation to heal is now confined to the private motivations of individual carers and doctors. Clearly health is a sphere where the white coat of medical science is most pure and respected. On the other hand the grey suits of health bureaucrats and administrators are less pure and less respected.

The advance of rational bureaucracy was very much a theme developed by the late Bryan Wilson, and for him it belonged to a narrative of bleak decline. As a major theorist of secularisation he envisaged a regression from the personal, communal, religious and conscientious to the impersonal, fragmented, irreligious and de-moralised. Once again this has little directly to do with the advance of science, at least of natural science, but it is significant that an agnostic should so bravely enter this fraught and contentious area to risk the coals of fire prepared for anyone linking the decline of religion to the decline of morality, personal responsibility and conscientiousness. The counterarguments are obvious and have recently been made by Paul Gregory. Is the contemporary United States so obviously virtuous? Was the England portrayed in Hogarth's *The Rake's Progress* or in Jacobean drama so obviously responsible and clean-living? Here enter the criminologist and sociologist of morality, Christie Davies, and his impressively documented *The Strange Death of Moral Britain* (2004). He plots the indices of the decline of religion against moral and criminal indices, fully alive to all the caveats and personally conscious of both gains and losses. His focus is the same as Bryan Wilson's, that is the nineteenth-century rise in Britain of a personally responsible and conscientious kind of religion, propagated by the Sunday School, voluntary charitable organisations and voluntary youth organisations, and the parallel onset of modernity. Different commentators date the moment when this declined differently but Christie Davies and the historian Simon Green agree on the trend. The point for our purposes is that any correlation between fewer enrolments in Sunday Schools and greater knowledge of the Special Theory of Relativity is adventitious. Christie Davies also relates these parallel changes to a shift from moral to 'causalist' understandings of human behaviour that owes something to social science and maybe genetics, as well as to a utilitarianism shifting from principles of moral justice to principles of minimum harm.

Again, the gains and losses are obvious and I do not think anyone can be unaware of what has happened, since even criminals themselves are expert manipulators of 'We are sick, we are sick, we are sick, sick, sick; we are sociologically sick'. The social scientific translation of a Christian vocabulary relating to forgiveness and victimage is also pretty clear. Philip Rieff has written eloquently of *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* and I recently heard the family of Herod the Great cosily characterised from the pulpit as 'dysfunctional'. So much for sin. It is all obvious.

Yet sociology should maintain its usual reservations about the obvious here, where it is sociology itself that seems to corrode religious language, rather than natural science. When I hear young people referring to the apparently demoralised worlds in which they so often live, I hear expressions and judgements about 'bastard' and 'inappropriate' behaviour saturated in morality. Even my social work relatives and friends resort to moral judgements outside the immediate environment of what is clearly a moral vocation. As for the close neighbours of 'dysfunctional' families, their comments are downright theological. These are families from, and going to 'hell'.

Therapeutic language persistently gravitates back to moral evaluation so that the adjective 'pathological' is a judgement posing as a description.

Of course, morality can be separated from religion both with respect to individual behaviour and in the context of moral philosophy. That is not at issue, nor am I suggesting that any inherent limit on the erasure of moral language is necessarily linked to an inherent limit on the erasure of religious language. I am saying, however, that religious language is bound at the hip to moral language *and* that moral language of itself throws up analogues of religious understandings, such as the gratuitous, the redemptive, the salutary, and the justified, as well as locutions implying vertical as well as horizontal dimensions. As a matter of mere observation I doubt whether either social or genetic determinism can erase the links implicit in linguistic usages.

My discussion of rationalisation has, following Bryan Wilson, included the role of technically efficient and impersonal means, in relation to morality. I now turn to 'social differentiation' which is my own primary framework for analysing secularisation, though you will notice the extent to which it overlaps the framework of rationalisation. In my view social differentiation, while bringing about certain convergences on the secular, also allows room for the historical particularity and cultural contingency on which I also place great emphasis. The concept of social differentiation has roots in the increasing division of labour and refers to the increasing autonomy of semi-discrete sectors of social life. One by one these sectors, for example law, social control, social legitimation, communication, health and education acquire their own proper autonomy from ecclesiastical regulation and influence and from religious modes of thinking. Theology is no longer the automatic queen of sciences. Just as we are all aware of the impact of rationalisation so we are all aware of social differentiation in relation to the autonomy, sometimes the conflict, of teacher vis-à-vis priest, in relation to the secular therapist vis-à-vis the priestly cure of souls, and in relation to the dilemmas sometimes faced by health professionals in Catholic hospitals or Catholic doctors in secular hospitals. If I wanted to show how both rationalisation and social differentiation offered evidence of the indirect consequences of science I might choose the partial edging out of the theologian on public bodies concerned with bio-ethics by philosophers or theologians talking philosophically. Fundamentally I see that change as part of a liberal claim to exercise universal objective jurisdiction as against all particular modes of thought and interest. Jurgen Habermas in my view rightly suspects this claim, specifically in relation to religion. But it is not clear what the alternative might be, especially given that liberalism is so often a Judeo-Christian mutation, as John Gray and Charles Taylor have both argued.

Since I believe social differentiation allows for historical and cultural contingency and variability I need to offer an illustration, and it is this. The order in which different cultural sectors are differentiated varies historically, and the partial and then absolute separation of Church and state in the United States had momentous positive consequences for religion from 1750 to the present day. By contrast the late separation of Church and state and/or Church and elite in Western Europe had momentous negative consequences for religion still working themselves out today. I also happen to believe rationalisation is equally inflected by history and culture, having lived in Dallas, Texas, which is simultaneously one of the most rationalised and religious metroplexes in the world. But rationalisation is patient of a much more universalising treatment at the expense of historical particularity. There are those who, perhaps rather ethnocentrically, see post-

Protestant Sweden and post-Catholic France as templates of the universal future. It might be nice but I suspect 'ought' and desire have once again run ahead of 'is' and historical plausibility. Iraq like Sweden ? Who, at least here, would not say Amen to that?

So far, then, we have looked at some of the variables sociologists take seriously, at empirical indices and interpretive frameworks like privatisation, rationalisation and social differentiation. We have insinuated worries about historically tilted slopes, Whig interpretations of history, and the extent to which we are working within master narratives, particularly Enlightenment ones, and even, maybe, Kuhnian paradigms.

The way looks clear for my presentation of cross-cultural and cross-national data showing no consistent relation between the degree of scientific advance and a reduced profile of religious influence, belief and practice. However, in a way all too typical of my sociological tribe, I need first to step back for an essential point about sociological interpretation, at least as I position myself in the tradition of 'verstehen' or understanding, and 'Geisteswissenschaften' or cultural sciences as expounded by Max Weber and Wilhelm Dilthey. I emphasise understanding of signs rather than explanation of indices. For our purposes I do that in the context of the depth and ambiguity of signs, in particular language, and the expansive manifold of mental space. Social analysis exemplifies for me emergent properties of action in the human universe not present in the physical or biological universes but eminently illustrated in the structure of motives in drama, including the constraints of options and alternatives for action in plotting, and freedom of interpretation based on anticipations built into cues and scripts. It is called the dramaturgical approach; and the point is to locate the right kind of scientific intentionality for any given problem.

Clearly the depth and ambiguity of symbols, signs, especially language, and the manifold character of mental space, bear quite directly on any notion of a zero-sum relation between science and religion. In mental space there is no such necessary either/or, because many different modes of ideation and discourse can be entertained simultaneously and selectively drawn upon according to context. And beyond that, the degree of openness and the degree of closure in mental space itself varies culturally, as between, for example, the constricted one-dimensional space of the former D.D.R. where either/or prevails, and the rather conspicuously wide open spaces of the United States, where angels, U.F.O.'s, and aliens happily cohabit with rocket science.

Allow me to press further this matter of the nature of mental space and to illustrate our recourse to different *kinds* of concept and discourse according to context. At a very simple level there is, for example, no difficulty about saying 'Your life in their hands', emphasising the autonomy of medical science and the doctor, and 'He's got the whole world in his hands', emphasising our dependence on profound, perhaps undergirding or overarching, spiritual resources. Already, of course, I have introduced linguistic signs of depth or height in 'undergirding' and 'overarching'. What, however, of the difference between 'Great is truth and shall prevail' and 'You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free' or 'I *am* the way, the truth and the life'? Here we enter into the phenomenology of being and freedom. I am not starting a discussion of being and freedom or of the nature of language games here, but only stressing the kinds and levels of discourse with which sociological observation has to deal if it is to do justice to social

complexity. There is more to sociology than causation, correlation, jargon, inverted commas and hobnail boots.

Now for my cross-cultural data. I am going to stay in the main with three revolutionary, scientifically advanced and rationalised societies, each with a widely different religious profile. I shall make one or two further observations, in particular about two other scientifically advanced and rationalised societies, Uruguay and Singapore, one where Christmas does not happen, except privately, and the other where everything happens in public and in private.

From a socio-historical perspective, the United States, founded on the basis of an Anglo-Protestant pluralism, experienced a relatively friendly relation between religion and Enlightenment, for example, the overlap of Episcopalianism and Masonry. Subsequent migration brought yet more Lutherans, Catholics, Jews and others, for whom religion was a residual anchor of distinct and sometimes regional identity in the American melting pot. Popular religion and elite Enlightenment mostly co-operated to support an inclusive civic nationalism. This was progressively based on common citizenship rather than an organic exclusive nationalism of ethnicity and language. That process came to an interim conclusion in the 1960's with the Civil Rights Movement. But the culture wars since the 1960's have not severed the ties of a common culture, for black and for white, for Hispanic and Anglo alike. By European standards these culture wars are mere skirmishes.

In France and in Quebec matters have been quite otherwise. In Quebec an organic, ethno-religious and linguistic nationalism emerged, persisting up to the sixties when religion and linguistic nationalism to some extent went their separate ways. Religious practice dropped as dramatically as it did in Holland over the same period. In France itself a civic and linguistic nationalism established by revolutionary violence warred against a religiously informed organic nationalism. The climax came after 1870 with the Third Republic. Religious practice began to fall, Church and state were separated in 1905, and laicity has been dominant ever since. I need only mention one more difference, which is between the decentralised governance of the United States, and the centralisation, particularly of education, in France. Decentralisation inhibits attempts at ideological monopoly by secular elites in the United States, where they are relatively unimportant, whereas centralisation assists monopoly by *secularist* elites in France, where they are important. Where else did the term 'bien pensant' come from?

As for East Germany (the former D.D.R.) centralisation reached its apogee under the Enlightened and secularist dictatorship from 1945-89, following the pagan interlude of blood and soil, 1933-45. Modernisation was dramatically held back and active religion reduced to a small minority, in spite of the fact that a Stasi-infiltrated Church was everywhere the springboard for bringing down the dictatorship in 1989.

What now of irreligious Uruguay and riotously religious Singapore? Uruguay is a fairly simple case given that the reds more or less beat the whites, and the maximum immigration from Europe coincided with maximum Church-state tension in the sending countries, Spain and Italy. A secularist university was created producing an elite for a 'Latin' country that does not even acknowledge Christmas. Uruguay is also 80% urban.

Singapore is much less simple, but clearly represents one of the most urban, multicultural and rationalised countries in the world. Religion in Singapore has been state-controlled in a rather neo-Confucian manner to underwrite the values of national cohesion and development. The changes in religion over the period of modernisation include some separating out of the rich syncretic and animistic mulch from classical Buddhism, an expansion among the socially mobile of a personal, close-knit, almost cellular form of Christianity, and straight secularity.

I want to stress that this separating out and this rise of a consciously personal religion is rather characteristic of modernising societies, as it was characteristic of modernising Europe . One finds similar changes in Brazil , Turkey and Indonesia . In an 80% Muslim country like Indonesia , highly educated women adopt the hitherto rare practice of wearing the headscarf as a sign of modernity and a protest against syncretism. Unfortunately the concentration in our western media on fundamentalism as a reaction against modernity completely neglects this alliance of Islam with modernity, as well as a similar alliance throughout the developing world between Christianity, hygiene, education, technology and transnational connections. Only in our traditional ex-Christendom or among nationalist intelligentsias elsewhere, is that connection not understood or else condemned as disturbing traditional life-styles. The assumption is that one can opt out of change and the global reality, keeping traditional culture intact for the tourist gaze and the anthropological gaze. As one aspiring and teetotal Pentecostal in Ecuador said to the anthropologist: 'Did you expect me to wear feathers, Miss?'

I pause, to emphasise the crucial variable implicit in all the considerations so far put forward. That variable is the role of the Church and/or religion in relation to cultural distance and/or disparities of political power and establishment. I pause also, to pursue the comparison and the contrast between Western Europe and the United States with respect to a couple of related contemporary developments. They are the return of magic and the rise of spirituality that Heelas and Woodhead speak of as 're-sacralisation'.

Regis Debray in his extraordinary biography of God over the last three thousand years claims that 'The Twilight of the Gods is Morning for the Magicians'. That is a phenomenon present both in Western Europe and the United States . However, in Western Europe there is a negative relation between Christianity and magic, indeed a further separating out of the two by modernity, at least north of the Mediterranean littoral, whereas in the wide open spaces of the United States the gods and the magicians enjoy high noon together. The same applies to spirituality. In Western Europe spirituality, with art and music as further sources of consolation and inspiration, is often encountered outside the churches. Spirituality tends to offer an alternative to faith, as it does, for example, in Germany . However, in the United States , according to Robert Wuthnow, spirituality and faith mostly move together. That I put down quite simply to my key variable: the way religion in the United States adapts to every cultural level in the context of a pervasive reliance on voluntary association, federalism and a religious pluralism with no specific institutional connection between *a* church and *the* state or between elite power and culture. The contrast between one and sometimes two centuries of the erosion of established Christendom in Western Europe is clear.

For complex reasons connected with Ottoman domination and secularist post-world war two dictatorships imposed by the Soviet Union , the situation in Eastern Europe has been patchily

different. The dictatorships successfully suppressed religion in the D.D.R., the Czech Republic and Estonia . However, in Greece, Romania and Serbia, and now in Russia, the revival of Eastern Orthodoxy is very evident, in spite of quasi-monopoly and a de facto or de jure establishment. The ethno-religious sentiments of repressed nations are very powerful and a long history of repression or defeat can for quite a while cancel out the effects of religious establishment on the achievement of independence. Islam's reaction to defeat as a religion programmed for victory is a large-scale instance of the same principle. In Russia it is not a matter of repressed nationhood but of a failed ideology giving place to an age-old union of faith and nation. Whereas in many parts of the world one observes a separating out of magic and religion with the onset of modernity that is not exactly evident in Eastern Orthodox Europe. In Greece one finds a startling degree of iconic protection and spiritual insurance available, together with a belief in the devil only rivalled in the United States . Given Greek history it is not difficult to see why, but plainly the advance of science is not the most evident factor at work.

I suggest the pictures I have offered of modern (and rapidly modernising) societies, from the United States to Russia, do not say much for any hypothesis about the decline of religiosity with the advance of science, at least so far as science is received by the people at large. What matters is the *reception* of science and technology with respect to religion, not some intellectual and sometimes mythic history of the relationship generated in the academy. The key lies in reception theory and it is notable that hardly anyone, even Owen Chadwick in his splendid *The Secularisation of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (1975) has brought together the social or popular history of religion and the intellectual history of ideas. Charles Taylor is a rare exception. In the academy, or what Peter Berger calls global faculty club culture, too many of us, including theologians, rely on the intellectual history of ideas to understand religion and secularisation and on the debates in the tiny world of intellectuals with this particular interest. Only this can explain why my late and admired colleague, Ernest Gellner, sometime Professor of Anthropology at Cambridge, should upbraid me for describing the United States as 'religious' given its intellectual representatives were people like Richard Rorty and John Rawls. On every conceivable criterion the U.S.A. is more religious than Western Europe , no matter what people living in Cambridge , Mass. may think.

Intellectual history remains affected by a master narrative treating religion as inchoate and backward superstition or as pathetic froth obscuring the surface of the real until blown away by revolution. Intellectual history is also too closely wedded to what John Weightman analysed in his *The Concept of the Avant Garde*. It is not that the concept of the avant garde never applies but that it's dangerous when taken for granted as it is almost daily in the press. It seems to me that the avant garde in the romantic and antinomian eighteen-nineties has gradually extended its influence down the social scale, first between the two world wars, and then in the sixties. On the other hand, Louis Menand's account in *The Metaphysical Club* of the secularisation inaugurated in the United States by the move to philosophical pragmatism, is only an irrelevant fifth wheel as concerns the religious history of Americans as a people. Theirs is a religious practicality not a philosophical pragmatism.

There is one particular and virulent version of the Enlightened master narrative that has had some modest popular success, though even more implausible than the idea that religion recedes as science advances. It gains a hearing in part because it combines the idea of scientific truth

dispersing religious error, with the idea of scientific truth and innocent virtue dispersing religious error and culpable vice. The appeal of this coupling comes less from any popular dismay about inadequacies in the argument from design than from a popular unease about a seeming association of religion with violence and intolerance. The damage caused by religion is what people worry about and hear about, not esoteric if important issues about design flaws in Creation. How many of those who may vaguely have heard of the Selfish Gene and its author think about the vivid popular language in which the idea is couched other than as an invitation from science itself to let rip your genetic constitution? The link between error and evil, whether promoted by scientists in the public eye, or over pints in pubs, seems plausible, and could take more time to disperse through sociological analysis than is available here, or indeed on the media. That is because it depends on a naïve and simplistic pointing at facts in Northern Ireland, the Middle East or wherever, backed up by a studied neglect of the all too complicated question of the way religion does and does not mesh with power and the dynamics of power. There is an equally studied neglect of an obvious process whereby a society partly converted (say) to Christianity, in turn partly converts Christianity to its own social structures, whether they are feudal, mercantile or capitalist. People are so scientific in relation to their own subjects, so carelessly opinionated about issues in the public world or the human sciences. It happens there is no continuing Enlightenment institution comparable to the Church in secular contexts available for negative comment on the corruptions of power. Torquemada can be held up as a *real* Christian exemplifying faith deploying political power, whereas Joseph Stalin cannot be held up as exemplifying secular Enlightenment in power because he was *not really* enlightened. Again Christianity can be blamed for what happened when adopted as the faith of the Roman Empire, whereas Darwinism can wash its hands as though innocent of what happened when converted by capitalist society into Social Darwinism or deployed by Nietzsche. Yet the metaphors of Darwinism are decidedly more susceptible to malign conversion than the metaphors of Christianity.

Claims to historical innocence are always suspect. If this sort of analysis does have any resonance, promoted as it is by biologists and geneticists skiing off-piste in the human sciences, it raises the possibility that religion might recede, however mildly, not with the advance of scientific truth but with the promotion of scientific error. It is worth adding that those scientific theories which build religion into our mental basement as a neurological programme acquired in remote pre-history to assist our survival, appear to restrict secularisation rather severely – on scientific or pseudo-scientific grounds. In Pascal Boyer's rendering of continuing emissions from the mental basement, only the hyper-intelligent can escape religion: an idea with obvious attractions for members of the faculty club. Religion remains immortal, at least among the Untermenschen. Lord Winston, the eminent gynaecologist, is now publishing a book about God sympathetically attempting to bridge the gap between science and religion by showing how religion has been built into the psyche for our better adaptation and survival. However, he also notes, quite correctly, that if that were so we ought all to be religious. It follows that it was only half built in as a kind of side effect. Whether that explains why the neuro-transmitters of religion have been turned off in East Germany or are blazing away in the United States or, are strongly on for over half the population of South Korea and simply off for the rest, remains mysterious.

Sociology is a humble affair and definitely not constructed after the model of rocket science or quantum mechanics. That is because it is a subject with a human *subject* matter. It does,

however, operate within certain evidential constraints on matters where mere opinion is supposed to be king, and I hope that within those constraints I have offered considerations undermining the idea that religion recedes as science advances. At least if I were an atheist anxious to disturb the faith of an intelligent young friend, I would recommend a course in biblical criticism, 'penny plain and tuppence coloured', or in psychobabble and sociobabble, or, best of all, a vigorous drench in romantic literary Weltschmerz. But not, definitely not, a bracing course in astrophysics. He or she might rather too easily suppose he or she was tracing 'the Mind of the Maker'.

Suggested Reading

Steve Bruce, (ed.), *Religion and Modernization* (1992)

David Martin, *On Secularization* (2005)

Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (1994)

Rodney Stark, *Acts of Faith* (2000)

Rodney Stark, *One True God* (2001)

Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God* (2003)

Andrew Greeley, *Religion in Europe at the End of the Second Millennium* (2003)

Hugh McLeod and Werner Usdorf, (eds.), *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe , 1750-2000* (2003)

Charles Harper, (ed.), *Spiritual Information. 100 Perspectives on Science and Religion* (2005)

David Martin delivered a lecture entitled 'Does the Advance of Science Mean Secularization?' on Thursday 3rd November 2005 in the Queens Theatre, Emmanuel College, Cambridge. The lecture was subsequently followed by a dinner/discussion with the speaker was held at St Edmunds College, Cambridge. An edited transcript of this discussion follows. It was chaired by Dr Denis Alexander (Babraham Institute) with introductory remarks by Prof. Roger Trigg (University of Warwick). The other contributors are described at the end of the discussion.

Discussion

Denis Alexander: We'll now move on to the open discussion part of the evening. What we normally do on these occasions is have somebody begin by giving a short response to the lecture and stimulating us with a few thoughts arising out of it. Roger Trigg has kindly agreed to do that this evening, so I'll just hand over to Roger.

Roger Trigg: Thank you very much. First can I say how much I enjoyed the lecture. There's a lot in it, so I'm sure people will pick out lots of different points.

One of the things that I noticed in the lecture was when you talked about secularisation and linked it to the general idea of progress - movement from "a" to "b". Of course, I suppose that's very much something that comes from the Judaeo-Christian background of history going towards a conclusion, in the end, of some kind of apocalyptic moment when everything would be revealed. Marxism took that over and secularised it. But there is very much an idea that there is a purpose, a goal, that we are going somewhere - in contrast, I suppose, to the more eastern view that everything is going round and round and we just get back into the same place.

I suppose this view is being taken over in sociology and words like "secularisation" rather do imply it. It suggests that there's a process which is inevitable, and it's interesting that the word inevitable occurs in the title of the lecture; I suppose again the shadow of Marxism rather hangs over some of this, the idea that there are social processes that involve a certain inevitability to a pre-ordained conclusion which are generally true. Indeed the task of social sciences perhaps is to uncover laws to explain all of this. I think we're on the edge of finding out what kind of science social science is - or indeed is it a science? You may remember there were big battles about this question twenty years ago when the then education secretary, Keith Joseph, wouldn't allow the social sciences to be called social sciences and the ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) was renamed after previously being called the Social Science Research Council. But there is an issue about just what we mean by science, and indeed whether the social sciences come under this rubric.

With words like "secularisation" I think there is a tendency to look for these general processes, general laws, and an idea therefore that these are going to have some kind of universal application so that once you uncover these laws, it will follow that what happens in one country will be happening in another; and that perhaps there's nothing we can do to stop it anyway.

As a view of social science I am not at all enamoured of any of that. I suppose that when one comes to look at the issue of religion particularly it seems to me that the idea that one's talking about any inevitability, particularly an inevitability of secularisation, just doesn't wash when you

look at the world around us. I think you could make a good case for saying that Marxism has been empirically disproved and that the whole view of inevitability from the Marxist point of view just didn't work out. But when one looks at the modern world I think one can certainly say this whole thesis of secularisation - and I guess I very much probably agree with some of this - does not actually apply generally: just because it applies here it doesn't mean it applies there. So indeed in many of the examples you have shown tonight, there's so much that's different going on in countries which nevertheless are subject to the same influences which are clear from science, so that you would expect that Britain would be affected by science in the same way as France, in the same way as the United States. Yet when you look at the place of religion in each of those three countries it's very different in each.

It seems to me what that shows is that there probably aren't any of these general laws, that the most sociologists actually can hope to do is talk about tendencies and that a sociologist is really describing, not prescribing. I really believe that sometimes people think that sociology is talking about laws like the law of gravity, and I wonder if there's a single law in social sciences one could produce. I don't think there is anything inevitable and so that means that one's got to look at what's happening in different countries. In fact, that means that even in neighbouring countries things may be happening very differently.

Just a few weeks ago I happened to be in Bratislava and I went into the cathedral and I was astonished to find that at a Wednesday midday mass, the cathedral was almost full. Now I had a vague idea in my mind that Slovakia, being an ex-communist country, would probably be therefore rather atheistic, but of course it's very different from the Czech Republic in being actually very, very much more religious and much more religious than Vienna, thirty or forty miles up the road. So you've got places that are literally neighbouring, to some extent with a shared history - though not in the last century so much - and yet their reactions are so very different. I think it's going to be very hard to say that there are the same laws from the social science point of view applying in the same way. It's just that perhaps their history is different. Austria and Slovakia have gone their separate ways particularly since the end of the First World War, and the whole business about nationality, language etc. will obviously matter, but that's something very particular.

What I'm really trying to say is that I think that in a lot of this, it isn't that one's looking for laws of secularisation or laws about this or that, or saying what science will do, it's a matter of looking in particular places at local influences. Just as with individuals, who will react differently to the same thing, you'll find that local traditions deal with perhaps the same challenges in very different ways. I think one of the most interesting things is the difference between this country and the United States in its religious outlook. It always seems to me that in this country the framework is religious although it actually isn't a very religious country, but in the United States the national framework isn't so religious, and the Supreme Court nowadays is doing its best to try and prise religion and society apart - and yet even so it's a deeply religious country. You would have thought that its science there is going to be very effective, but in fact people take a different view to science. There's a big debate going on at the moment culminating in a lawsuit in Pennsylvania about Intelligent Design. The way that people react in the United States to that kind of thing is very different from the way people react in this country. And yet *science* is the

same and in a sense the *challenges* from science are the same in each place and I would think that therefore it's a matter of historic contingency, a difference in history.

I was interested in what you said about imperialism. I'm sure that a lot of what goes on in this country is to do with a kind of post-imperialist guilt and neuroses of one kind and another and that can explain what's happening in a particular place. However it wouldn't explain what was happening in a different country because, again, you're not going to find these general rules or any inevitable progress, so just at the same time as this country and other countries in western Europe are getting less religious, as you were saying, countries in eastern Europe might be getting more religious. That's obviously to do with their own particular circumstances in recent history.

Perhaps what I'm saying is that I'm not sure how useful the subject of sociology actually is! It's very interesting as a matter of looking at different societies and, as you say, comparing them, but I think some sociologists have tried to over-reach themselves in the past and tried to explain too much and think that they can do to human society what physicists do with the physical world, and I don't think that works at all.

Denis Alexander: Thank you, Roger, for those comments. I think before we ask David to respond to some of those points maybe there are people who would like to pick up on some of the points that Roger is focusing around, especially involving that theme of trans-cultural differences. Does anyone want to pick up any of those points?

Bernice Martin: Can I just make a quick comment, as a sociologist? I think what lies behind quite a lot of what David was saying is that although the discipline came out of the Enlightenment and set itself up to be like the physical sciences, in fact it always had this other Enlightenment project which was apocalyptic, the idea that modernity had arrived today and when Comte was writing, or whoever, they were seeing the end of time, or the end of a process, as just around the corner. So as you say, you have a very confused set of secularised Judeo-Christian ideas about the movement of history and progress *and* ideas about looking for social laws. It's not until you get to Max Weber in this century that a bit of modesty starts setting in and sociologists begin to see that their grand schemes, which were based on ideas of evolution for example, really don't entirely fit the reality around them; so Weber is looking only for middle-range generalisations and looking for how you can tease out what the crucial variables might be, without being able to set up experiments.

I think I would want to make a case for sociology trying to do that in a more systematic way necessarily than historians, who sometimes have other projects on their mind. What David has been doing, for example, in his general theory of secularisation and everything since, is actually trying to isolate what the variables might be that could systematically explain these national time and place differences in the patterns of a degree of secularisation or a degree of revival of religion. I simply want to leave on the table a plea, to let sociology go on trying to see whether ransacking anthropology, history and all the rest of it, as well as straightforward empirical studies, can plausibly isolate some of the variables which, other things being equal, seem to make the big differences. That's why I think David was pointing to this history of the relationship between the power structure and the religious system as one of the key variables in

explaining why some societies get highly alienated from their established religious pattern, and others don't.

Janet Soskice: I was going to say that sociology might be highly useful - at least in the specific topic of science and religion - in a Popperian way, by falsifying an hypothesis accepted without warrant in many quarters that the increase of scientific knowledge in culture means the decline of religion and that there's some causal relation between these two. Everything that a clear-eyed person sees around the world about patterns of secularisation indicates that this is complete rubbish and yet it's been so dominant in the common mind: also indeed in the minds of certain parts of the academy, and even in the science and religion academy. So if sociologists can come up not with a positive chart for the mind of man but with just a few deflationary observations, they might have done a very great deal for us.

Paul Joshua: It was fascinating to hear of the different examples you brought up on the two countries: America and UK. This contrast that you say exists in their respective approaches to issues of church and state however led me to think about the situation in some Islamic countries, where you have not just a close relationship between State and religion but in many cases where you actually have a theocratic state. Yet it seems to me that unlike the UK, formal religion holds tremendous clout there. Why do you think it differs there? And what sort of secularisation processes do you think goes on in such contexts?

Denis Alexander: We have already got at least three or four points floating around and think we ought to come back to David now.

David Martin: Well let's start at the end, which is one of the more awkward things since I just mainly stick with about two thousand million people, that's to say Christianity, and I hadn't fully taken on board the one thousand two hundred million people that are involved in Islam. That would be half the population of the world, of course, if I were dealing with Islam plus Christianity. However, I do think there are some quite general things one may observe.

I don't want to call them general laws because that suggests that they're maintained over time and space, but they're general laws that hold "if-unless". They're very much "if-then" types. When it comes to Islam I would point to a subset of Christian cases where religion has been strengthened very much because it has been associated with a suppressed national identity. It's not difficult to work through which ones those are. They might be Ireland or Poland or Lithuania, or Slovakia (which is a very interesting case), or they might be regional sections of particular countries associated with micro-nationalisms, so that the Basque country and Galicia are much more religious than Madrid: you've got the centre of Spain with Madrid in the precise middle, and then there are different religiosities on the peripheries. The same could be true of a rather similar geographical square in France, where Brittany, Alsace, and various mountain areas are relatively religious. So there's a relationship between the dominant secular capital and the regions, and a parallel relationship between dominant nations and sub-nations. These can be arranged quite easily in patterns. Lithuania was such a sub-nation, though it's actually a nation on its own now. It has been suppressed as a nation and it has relied on its Catholicism to maintain its identity. These relationships, where you maintain your identity through religion in

the absence of a national state, can be found in all kinds of areas including Islam. I'm thinking of colonial Egypt, Pakistan, Indonesia.

Roger Trigg: Can I ask about Wales there? I wanted to make the point that Chapel was in a sense one of the main areas of Welsh identity and yet it's on the periphery now: chapel-going is collapsing there, religion is waning. Is it a bit like Quebec? Is something else now our national identity?

David Martin: I think nowadays it is partly language in both Wales and Quebec but it's very difficult to sort out all the different influences on secularisation. One major possibility may be the shift from religion to language, so that in a number of these regions where religion was the carrier of the local identity, language has semi taken over from religion. That seems to me the case in Wales but it is also in part Anglicisation. Wales had very considerably higher religious practice than England in the 1950s. It's not higher any more, and insofar as there are redoubts of religion they tend to be in the north. Language and chapel religion are in part alternatives, in part mutually reinforcing. The relationship of religion to language varies from case to case. You have to tease out the conditions under which it is one or the other, or the two combined, and that's a very complicated business.

So then there are large parts of Western Europe which have expressed their sense of identity through religion. Effectively they were colonised on a very large scale. Likewise much of Islamia has been colonised. There is also the Islamic sense of what went wrong over the last two to three hundred years, compared with the houses of Islam in earlier centuries. That creates different kinds of response. (I don't want to use the word 'reaction', by the way, because it suggests that cultures are simply reacting when they are actually making a creative response.) One response is to ask "Shall the elite adopt a western style" and leave the rest *not* adopting a western style which is quite frequent. Another response is to ask "Shall we find an Islamic path to modernity?" Yet another is to circle the wagons and maybe insist on Sharia law as the *only* way in which society should be organised and not really allow faith communities to flourish separately from the overall society.

Whether this sense of being cheated by recent history is justified is a separate question altogether. That was not how God meant things to be. So, circle the wagons, return to some form of Islam as the core of what made you great. The Polish or Irish situation has been replicated on a very large scale with several kinds of variations.

Denis Alexander: Before we move on can I just press you on one point that Roger raised which was that we agree, I think, that there are no such things as laws of sociology, and I think you were certainly propounding principles that are generalisations that hold true to many situations and you would defend that. That's correct isn't it?

David Martin: My general theory of secularisation was in fact not at all general because historical contingency is always present. At the same time, you can isolate trajectories and I had about six or seven of these. So there was a combination of generality with contingency and historical particularity. Very surprisingly this was a kind of breakthrough at the time, because nobody had really thought about showing how certain general tendencies to secularisation run

very differently in France from the way they do in Spain, and in Italy. Eastern Europe is very different from western Europe, and both are very different from the United States. With respect to the general tendencies, I am impressed by the impact of different articulations of the church-state relationship. I'm not saying this is *the* explanation, I'm saying that when you look at the difference between western Europe and the United States, the separation of church from the state and the separation of any one elite religious culture from 'the' state exercises a major influence. When those two things are not operative, then people are not alienated in the same way and religion adapts all the way down the social system to this group and to that group. This means that the conflict over religion as such doesn't operate in the USA in the same way it does in western Europe. Now that is a sort of generalisation.

Brian Heap: Could I pick up your point about science and religion? If I understood you correctly, you seemed to suggest that the relationship was not quite as strong as I would have expected you to say, that is, science has not been responsible for downgrading religion in certain countries. I was very interested in your historical analysis but I think when one comes to the practical side I find it very difficult to subscribe to your conclusions. In my experience with young people I have the strong suspicion that science has had a negative effect in terms of their serious consideration of religious insights.

Derek Burke: Can I add to that? I was encouraged, David, by your complimentary comments about the higher proportion of religious believers among scientists. But my experience, working in science all my life, is of an overwhelmingly secular society and culture. Certainly as a practising Christian I have found myself under all sorts of direct and indirect pressures all my life. So I'm surprised at what you say because for me working in science, secularism is the default position and you really have to work very hard inside science to persuade people that belief in God is at all credible to a scientist working in the 21st century. So we feel we've lost the battle – but you're telling us it's even worse elsewhere.

Jessica Martin: It occurs to me that something doesn't have to be true to be influential. I was struck both by you saying that when you talked to the very young they didn't know what the components were that they were playing with, so you might say of course it's obvious that because of evolution we can't believe in God. But if you ask them to tease that out they wouldn't be able to explain why, so presumably your points about reception theory are saying that a truth is being propounded and sort of spread that isn't in fact true and it's to do with education.

Denis Alexander: Can I throw in a slightly different view into this pot as another scientist before we come back to you because my own view would be that people justify their religious or metaphysical beliefs let's call them, by appeals to what they know about. If you talk to a scientist what they know about is science, if you talk to a historian what they know about is history, in my experience if they are an atheistic historian they will justify their "ism" by appeals as to what they know about, which is the history that they know about and I think scientists do the same. So my own view that I'm going to throw slightly more strongly than I believe would be that people are already an atheist or already a Christian on other grounds, completely different from their own professions or their academic professions, on the whole, but they will then justify their position by what they happen to know about. Therefore, of course, in the scientific community if we are living in a secular country, as we are, scientists generally as well as accountants and

lawyers and milkmen, and whoever else, whatever other profession people are in, will justify their belief or disbelief by their own particular context, whereas if they were living in a less secular country they would perhaps justify their greater level of belief likewise by the same science that in other countries people would use to justify their atheism. I'll throw that into the pot.

Derek Burke: Your move!

David Martin: Well, I certainly believe that most of us believe what we do by way of process of proving what we already believe on instinct, or perhaps not just instinct but by what our particular cultural situation inclines us to believe. There are subcultures where it would be very difficult to espouse Christian belief and you would have to be a rather vigorous thinker for a sort of natural dissenter from whatever's going on, to fight against it and work out a quite separate position. Most people don't work out separate positions. They take up the flotsam and jetsam that's lying around them, form it into some kind of position which they will then 'emit'. They will give forth views in the pub or in the common room, wherever it is. But they are not very closely worked out at all.

To pick up Jessica's point, most people have not the faintest idea of what we're talking about in relation to science and religion. They just have one or two tags that have floated into the public domain and it's these that they work by. The old kind of artisan atheism that was fed by The Thinkers Library or the National Secular Society in the 19th century is not very widespread now. You now have a kind of media flotsam and jetsam of opinion which has got very little relation to any kind of serious thinking at all. This is exactly what Bernice found in a small research project when she talked to young people. There was total inarticulacy about these things and I think it's important to distinguish what happens in Cambridge, which after all is one of the great Universities of the world, from what is actually going on in the world out there.

Brian Heap: That's true.

David Martin: So, as I said, the question of the argument from design or whether the anthropic principle really applies doesn't exactly impinge very strongly on most people in their view of religion. The operative elements are of that sort: that was my fundamental story and I did indicate what I thought were the operative elements. At the same time, there is a kind of narrative which John Brooke at Oxford has written about, currently focused on the Darwinian controversy and that includes Darwinian psychology. But how many people are actually affected by what Richard Dawkins says?

Derek Burke: I would say the great majority of working biologists –

David Martin: Yes, but how many working biologists are there?

Brian Heap: It's not just working biologists, it's much wider than that.

David Martin: I'm saying is it is Dawkins' *authority* as a scientist that has an impact. It's nothing to do with the arguments. I know that his books sell well because I can go down to the

bookshop and see that they sell well, but in terms of the general population it doesn't much matter.

Derek Burke: That's certainly not my perception of people inside the church, they really feel the pressure. It's widely assumed outside the churches that science has now made belief in God obsolete and that pressure is transmitted to us all. So they say to us "How can you still believe in God after what Dawkins has said?"

David Martin: Really?

Brian Heap: Not just in the churches. There is a very broad sweep throughout society in my experience.

Janet Soskice: Horses from the right, cavalry from the left! You get "How can you still believe in God when there's a problem of evil?" "How can you still believe in God when you're a feminist?" "How can you still believe in God when you're a woman?" These questions will come up if you're in a secular society and surely what we have inherently to look at is instances of secularisation, for instance in Greece, or Malta. I was in Malta for the first time last year and ninety per cent of the generation in their forties attend mass daily or weekly. There are very good churches at the centre of their lives, but eighteen and nineteen-year-olds aren't going. The forty-year olds are university graduates, they're physicists, they're biologists. The difference is not what their kids know about science, the difference is that they've got night clubs, international rock culture, Sony Walkmans, a higher standard of living: the same thing I was saying to David. I remember meeting a Greek lay theologian who told me in the sixties when the Greek theologians noticed the young people in France and Britain moving away from religious observance, they went to the hierarchy in Greece and said we should do some catechesis. The hierarchy said no, to be Greek is to be Orthodox, we don't need it, it was a problem with corrupt western cultures. But as soon as you began to get Sony Walkmans, motorinos and so on, you get people falling away because there are better things to do with your Sunday. You can go surfing, go snog with your girlfriend or something like that. And it just doesn't wash. These people don't know more about Einstein or Newton or Darwin than their parents did. You can take the spread across the middle classes or the working classes, it's not a difference in scientific culture and I am very much warm to your point that it's a difference in what people say in terms of rationalisation, or because I'm a woman, because I'm a feminist, because I believe in science, but I don't think you can apply that to the broader picture. I speak as someone who has only what I have observed with my eyes – I'm not a sociologist – but I don't see how you can look around the world at the different patterns of secularisation and see that that is a strong correlation, it's simply isn't and it seems to me an unscientific thesis that it is. So there!

Derek Burke: Thank you, Janet!

Brian Heap: That's a sociological interpretation!

Denis Alexander: Let's have some more comments from people who haven't spoken yet.

Alex Weber: Just to continue this discussion, I'd be interested to see what people think on whether or not the way that scientific ideas are communicated to the general public has changed. From my experience I would say that it's changed dramatically over the last hundred years or so, how much the man in the street knows about science or what's going on. I think maybe the media is getting that across more to the general public than in the past. That's why I would say that maybe those ideas suggest that secularisation has outdated science, maybe they have become more effectual because the media actually propagates scientific things more. Do people agree on that? The point I'm making is how science is perceived in the general public, whether it has changed a lot over the last several years and if that could bring about changes in how scientific ideas affect how people deal with secularisation.

David Martin: I don't think it's to do with scientific ideas very much at all. I think there is some minor effect of scientific authority, that is what the scientists say, I don't think there's much beyond that. I hardly ever encounter it and nobody has ever come to me and said "What do you think of the deficiencies and the argument from design as discussed by Dawkins" – *nobody* has ever said a thing like that! Would they? It would be delightful if they did!

Bob White: But we discuss that a lot!

David Martin: *You* do!

Bob White: Because we're scientists and so it matters.

David Martin: Of course it does! Of course it *matters*. I'm not saying it doesn't matter! I'm saying there's not an argument, I'm not saying there aren't problems about the argument from design, but what I *am* saying is that in the wide, wide world out there, from Africa to Latin America, to North America, to China, these things are of the most minor significance.

Brian Heap: No, I totally disagree.

Colin Humphreys: I think there's a large element of truth in what both Janet and Brian are saying. I think there's a huge indifference in the population now, so it's not that people are agnostic, it's not that people don't care, but I think if they are asked about religious faith then Dorothy Sayers had this nice conversation in a book between an interviewer and the man in the street. The man in the street was asked "What is religious faith?" and the man in the street said "Resolutely shutting your eyes to scientific fact" and I think that most people would say that now. I think that people don't think about it but if they are actually asked what religious faith is, they think it is shutting your eyes to scientific fact. That's almost an accepted given. I think it's then very difficult to talk to people about Christianity. So I think people are indifferent, but if they are actually asked about their religious beliefs or if they're asked about religious faith, they will say that it's against scientific belief.

Bernice Martin: Could I just add a sentence to that? They may be looking at their horoscopes, they may be organising their sitting rooms according to principles of feng shui, they may be going for all kinds of alternative therapies. Many of the young people I interviewed were sure that somebody called Darwin had done something that proved that the Bible was wrong, but they

believed in poltergeists, they believed in alien abductions, they believed in all sorts of things, they had an endless credulity. But they had somewhere heard this narrative that said science has disproved the Bible. But they neither knew what the science was, nor what the Bible was, that was being disproved except that some of them had an idea it was about Adam and Eve. So there is this story which in some curious way goes back to the Enlightenment grand narrative popularised and then souped up by the popularisation of Dawkins' ideas, but it does not exclude all kinds of non-scientific thinking, but extreme credulity.

Denis Alexander: Well I think that sheds a lot of light on the two streams of the discussion so far this evening in that we're actually comparing apples and oranges, we're comparing the academic context and scientific community where you have one set of discussions and ideas going on and then you have the wider public in general; isn't that really what we are talking about?

David Martin: I just wanted to bring out once again that I kept on saying that very frequently!

Brian Heap: People these days know much more about science, engineering and technology than ever before because of the influence of television. Consequently there's a much greater knowledge in the general community. I think it's rather patronising to say that they don't know what's going on.

David Martin: I'm not patronising. I have to report. I can't worry if it's patronising to doubt whether there is a knowledge of science, in terms of scientific method, in terms of modes of scientific understanding, apart from bits and pieces about this, that and the other. The number of people that understand the philosophy of science is *minute*, who reads Jerry Fodor? Who reads Feierabend or Popper? These are tiny groups of people.

Brian Heap: You've shifted your ground!

David Martin: No I haven't ! The mode of understanding of science is the crucial question. I said there are all kinds of influences that derive from technology which are picked up in this way and that, but in terms of the scientific mode of understanding, the number of people that have any grasp of it is utterly minute.

Stephen Watson: I want to change the subject slightly and talk about the distinction between religion as a belief system and religion as a practice. It has always seemed to me that much of the explanation for religion being followed in many parts of the world is because of its aspect as a practice, rather than its aspect as a belief system. We seemed to be talking about the belief system at the time but to me one of the problems is the intellectualisation of the culture we live in. For many people intellectualisation doesn't matter, what matters is the practice. So is there an explanation of the way religion is related to secularisation which can be explained just in terms of the practice, without bringing the belief systems into it?

David Martin: I don't happen to think that religion is all that propositional anyway. I think it is a response to certain kinds of sign and symbol what you might call 'signals of transcendence'. It's not to do with whether you believe in x, y or this, that and the other. This makes it all very

difficult for those sociologists who go along and say not *how* do you respond to a particular sign, but what do you *believe*. That is not how it works on the ground for most people. They find ways of articulating their experience in right and symbol and in what I might call responses to particular horizons. That's how it actually works. On-the-ground reality has got so little to do with working out a position. It is to do with how you in your context understand your situation and what kinds of meaning you discover within it; how certain signs and symbols take you beyond that situation and act so as to give you some kind of both judgement and assurance. These are the ways in which religion is concretely experienced.

There's a huge variety of these kinds of ways of responding to what you might call the existential core of one's situation and that's how religion actually works. In terms of the incarnation, you're responding to a manifestation of God in a human face, that's what you're talking about. Now you can intellectualise that and you can turn it into a very careful study of the nature of the Trinity and the relationship of the Father to the Son and so on. You can do all those things that are very, very important but you/they need to clarify; what people are actually doing is saying "How do I respond to this face, this name? What does that mean to me in terms of His identification with my experience, as a child, as someone who's preaching a kingdom, as somebody that's on a cross having faced the political and religious authorities of its time? How do I respond as somebody that's poured out love? Do I respond with love?" I'm talking about Christianity mostly here, but if these are the core elements, these other things that you're talking about in terms of belief, they *are* there and they need to be articulated because they do protect a kind of existential core of what's going on in a religion. But beliefs are rather specific to Christianity. Christianity, by virtue of having gone through the Greek prism, has tended to produce a set of really quite complicated beliefs. But how it works on the ground is something quite different. So hammering away at "Does the argument from design really work, do we need the ontological argument, what about the origins of the universe?", that's irrelevant.

Denis Alexander: Does anyone else want to come in?

Paul Shellard: You said it's irrelevant to society at large but it's not irrelevant to the scientific community.

David Martin: No, of course not.

Paul Shellard: The other thought I had is that secularisation here is both in the scientific community and in society but in the US it hasn't gone into society – although it's certainly in the scientific community. I don't see them as particularly different to us, the scientific establishment. What do you make then sociologically of the evolution/creation debate because that's the conflict, that's there, isn't it?

David Martin: But the issues that actually make these things operate are not intellectual issues. That's what I am trying to say. In England the Darwinian controversy was relatively short. In America it's continued and it's quite a lot to do with the position of the south after reconstruction in relation to the northeast. It's these kinds of political issues and the cultural distance they express that cause people hold them that are crucial. All the data I was presenting simply showed that the correlation between scientific advance in particular nations *and* religious practice *just*

isn't there. It's a scientific point. It seems to me impossible to get round the fact that that the crucial variables are not to do with the degree of apprehension of the argument from design. They are to do with people's sense of their cultural identity, people's sense of their existential position. Those are the things that really operate.

Now we in the academic community - of course I agree with you - have a particular very complicated task to cope with within sociology. I try to ask myself, for example, if I can give accounts of the distribution of religion in terms of these variables, how do they connect with the religious understanding of how these things happened. If you think that the Holy Spirit operates here or there, according to some random wave of the spirit, it seems to me from my scientific viewpoint that I can give accounts of why Quebec went through a particular fall in religious practice or I can give an account of the why the United States is five or six times as religious as most parts of western Europe and I can describe why in Uruguay religion is definitely a very small minority and in Singapore it's quite different.

Does that scientifically create a problem for Christian understanding of how the Holy Spirit works? That's the kind of issue that interests me, but who else besides me? I can't even get theologians interested in it. I've just put these things on the table and said "Please tell me what you think about this?" If I can discuss three different social milieux in the Yucatan and suggest the conditions under which they may or may not receive Pentecostalism *vis a vis* Catholicism, or the extent to which they are likely to receive a liberation Catholicism *vis a vis* a conservative Catholicism, is that a theological problem? Most people are not interested in this problem except when it comes to observing that your religion is largely a matter of what you are born. I have got my own solutions. I have to have. I have to work very hard at thinking through these kinds of things that are put to me by my 'scientific' activity.

Bob White: So what is your own solution? How does the Holy Spirit work?

David Martin: Oh, come on! Someone asked me to talk about Revelation and now I've got to talk about the Holy Spirit!

Bob White: Well, you brought it up!

David Martin: Yes, I know I did! Well, I think that the operation of the Holy Spirit, like everything that happens in human society, is patterned. That's the fundamental proposition that sociology is. There's not randomness, there is pattern.

Janet Soskice: Not going where it listeth, then.

David Martin: Exactly the quotation that was in my head – not going where it listeth! I remember how this problem came up when I was in Romania . I was talking to young evangelicals in Oradea in Transylvania . Evangelicals have spread in Transylvania , which is pluralistic, but there are certain parts in central Romania where such a spread is not very likely because they are part of a community in which to become something else would be to abandon your identity. In those areas, to be Romanian is to be Orthodox and my hearers were less likely to

be successful there than if they stayed in Transylvania , which is a multicultural society where people are conscious of different alternatives.

St. Paul made a similar point when he said not many rich people will enter the kingdom of heaven. He was conscious that the reception of Christianity was patterned. So I think there is a chart of pressures within which the Holy Spirit works. Otherwise we are confronted with a randomness that would make society incomprehensible and I want comprehensibility. That is even though, as Roger quite rightly says, there aren't the general rules that there are in physical or biological sciences where you see that under these conditions, this is likely to be the case, and you can state the conditions and the rubrics that govern them.

We have to state a few broad likelihoods and put a huge rubric along the side stating all the things that are not equal in this particular case. That's how it works I couldn't even operate without assuming there is some kind of patterning in our activities.

Denis Alexander: We are going to draw to a close in a few minutes, but I think Roger wanted to say something.

Roger Trigg: I do accept the idea of patterns in the sense that you can see that there are obstacles in some places that people would find harder to get over but it isn't just the Holy Spirit that worries me, it's also the question of human free will which again is an important theological concept. The more you up the ability of sociologists is to explain, the more you appear to make the individual just a creature of forces outside his or her control. That would worry me as well. I do wonder as well about sociology because although you can point to places, and I can quite see your argument that it would be more difficult in this place than that, nevertheless I do find sociology's ability to predict isn't very good sometimes. (**David Martin:**It's not!) Therefore these patterns aren't that great, they are not that obvious, are they? If you can't predict, then there's not really any great explanation that you're offering.

David Martin: No, I'm sorry – the relationship of explanation/prediction is not very close. A meteorologist knows very well how weather works. There is always an "if-then": they know that if *this* is the case then *that* is the likely outcome. Now that's a relatively easy situation because they actually can say within the specified range, that these are the likelihoods. There are a lot of patterns where one can say absolutely what's going to happen; that's to say if this happens then this is likely to happen.

What one cannot say is this is *definitely* going to happen in x place at y time. Sociologists have been appalling, as you quite rightly say, at predicting say the student revolution, predicting the revolution in eastern Europe, or in my case, the fact that there are now hundreds of millions of Penecostals all around the world. None of these huge changes has been predicted by sociologists and that's not because patterns don't operate. It's that we have such a huge range of possible unequal conditions affecting any given set of possibilities. But the patterns are still there and we are tremendously good at retrospective patterning. Think of the *range* of variables that I tried to present – the ragbag I tipped onto the table. They are all relevant, but making a consistent coherent narrative out of them, and arranging them in different levels and different hierarchies is a very complicated task.

About human freedom, perhaps this is the point where we should definitely come to an end. It does seem to me that human beings operate in terms of cultural habit, and that without a high degree of expectation and anticipation (not determinism, but expectation and anticipation), no social life can occur at all. At the person to person level I have to be able to anticipate what you will say: we have to anticipate each other. Now on the wider scale, there are all kinds of anticipations. For example, take the situation of Tony Blair at the moment. Is he tottering or not tottering? This is a sociological question and you have to ask yourself whether the fact that people think he's tottering is going to make him totter? It's the fact that human beings have their own input into the situation that they are observing that makes it very complicated. But it is still the case that you can give an account of human freedom within this structure of pretty firm anticipation, which is the basis of all social life.

Denis Alexander: I think finishing on a note of human freedom is a good place to finish. We have worked David very hard indeed this evening and have given him lots of hard and difficult questions, but it's been a great discussion; I'm glad that we've had a vigorous exchange of views, which is what this is all about, and we ought to thank David again very much.

Who's Who

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