

# Sacred and Secular

RELIGION AND POLITICS WORLDWIDE

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# Contents

<i>List of Tables</i>	<i>page ix</i>
<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Preface and Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xiii</i>

## **PART I UNDERSTANDING SECULARIZATION**

1 The Secularization Debate	3
2 Measuring Secularization	33
3 Comparing Secularization Worldwide	53

## **PART II CASE STUDIES OF RELIGION AND POLITICS**

4 The Puzzle of Secularization in the United States and Western Europe	83
5 A Religious Revival in Post-Communist Europe?	111
6 Religion and Politics in the Muslim World	133

## **PART III THE CONSEQUENCES OF SECULARIZATION**

7 Religion, the Protestant Ethic, and Moral Values	159
8 Religious Organizations and Social Capital	180
9 Religious Parties and Electoral Behavior	196

**CONCLUSIONS**

10	Secularization and Its Consequences	215
	<i>Appendix A: Classifications of Types of Society</i>	243
	<i>Appendix B: Concepts and Measures</i>	247
	<i>Appendix C: Technical Note on the Freedom of Religion Scale</i>	253
	<i>Notes</i>	255
	<i>Bibliography</i>	287
	<i>Index</i>	315

## The Secularization Debate

THE SEMINAL SOCIAL thinkers of the nineteenth century – Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud – all believed that religion would gradually fade in importance and cease to be significant with the advent of industrial society.<sup>1</sup> They were far from alone; ever since the Age of the Enlightenment, leading figures in philosophy, anthropology, and psychology have postulated that theological superstitions, symbolic liturgical rituals, and sacred practices are the product of the past that will be outgrown in the modern era. The death of religion was the conventional wisdom in the social sciences during most of the twentieth century; indeed it has been regarded as *the* master model of sociological inquiry, where secularization was ranked with bureaucratization, rationalization, and urbanization as the key historical revolutions transforming medieval agrarian societies into modern industrial nations. As C. Wright Mills summarized this process: “*Once the world was filled with the sacred – in thought, practice, and institutional form. After the Reformation and the Renaissance, the forces of modernization swept across the globe and secularization, a corollary historical process, loosened the dominance of the sacred. In due course, the sacred shall disappear altogether except, possibly, in the private realm.*”<sup>2</sup>

During the last decade, however, this thesis of the slow and steady death of religion has come under growing criticism; indeed, secularization theory is currently experiencing the most sustained challenge in its long history.

Critics point to multiple indicators of religious health and vitality today, ranging from the continued popularity of churchgoing in the United States to the emergence of New Age spirituality in Western Europe, the growth in fundamentalist movements and religious parties in the Muslim world, the evangelical revival sweeping through Latin America, and the upsurge of ethno-religious conflict in international affairs.<sup>3</sup> After reviewing these developments, Peter L. Berger, one of the foremost advocates of secularization during the 1960s, recanted his earlier claims: “*The world today, with some exceptions . . . is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever. This means that a whole body of literature by historians and social scientists loosely labeled ‘secularization theory’ is essentially mistaken.*”<sup>4</sup> In a fierce and sustained critique, Rodney Stark and Roger Finke suggest it is time to bury the secularization thesis: “*After nearly three centuries of utterly failed prophecies and misrepresentations of both present and past, it seems time to carry the secularization doctrine to the graveyard of failed theories, and there to whisper ‘requiescat in pace.’*”<sup>5</sup>

Were Comte, Durkheim, Weber, and Marx completely misled in their beliefs about religious decline in industrialized societies? Was the predominant sociological view during the twentieth century totally misguided? Has the debate been settled? We think not. Talk of burying the secularization theory is premature. The critique relies too heavily on selected anomalies and focuses too heavily on the United States (which happens to be a striking deviant case) rather than comparing systematic evidence across a broad range of rich and poor societies.<sup>6</sup> We need to move beyond studies of Catholic and Protestant church attendance in Europe (where attendance is falling) and the United States (where attendance remains stable) if we are to understand broader trends in religious vitality in churches, mosques, shrines, synagogues, and temples around the globe.

There is no question that the traditional secularization thesis needs updating. It is obvious that religion has not disappeared from the world, nor does it seem likely to do so. Nevertheless, the concept of secularization captures an important part of what is going on. This book develops a revised version of secularization theory that emphasizes the extent to which people have a sense of existential security – that is, the feeling that survival is secure enough that it can be taken for granted. We build on key elements of traditional sociological accounts while revising others. We believe that the importance of religiosity persists most strongly among vulnerable populations, especially those living in poorer nations, facing personal survival-threatening risks. We argue that feelings of vulnerability to physical, societal, and personal risks are a key factor driving religiosity

and we demonstrate that the process of secularization – a systematic erosion of religious practices, values, and beliefs – has occurred most clearly among the most prosperous social sectors living in affluent and secure post-industrial nations.

Secularization is a tendency, not an iron law. One can easily think of striking exceptions, such as Osama bin Laden, who is (or was) extremely rich and fanatically religious. But when we go beyond anecdotal evidence such as this, we find that the overwhelming bulk of evidence points in the opposite direction: people who experience ego-tropic risks during their formative years (posing direct threats to themselves and their families) or socio-tropic risks (threatening their community) tend to be far more religious than those who grow up under safer, comfortable, and more predictable conditions. In relatively secure societies, the remnants of religion have not died away; in surveys most Europeans still express formal belief in God, or identify themselves as Protestants or Catholics on official forms. But in these societies the importance and vitality of religion, its ever-present influence on how people live their daily lives, has gradually eroded.

The most persuasive evidence about secularization in rich nations concerns values and behavior: the critical test is what people say is important to their lives and what they actually *do*. As this book will document, during the twentieth century in nearly all postindustrial nations – ranging from Canada and Sweden to France, Britain, and Australia – official church records report that where once the public flocked to Sabbath worship services, the pews are now almost deserted. The surveys monitoring European church-going during the last fifty years confirm this phenomenon. The United States remains exceptional in this regard, for reasons explained in detail later in Chapter 4.

Despite trends in secularization occurring in rich nations, this does not mean that the world as a whole has become less religious. As this book will demonstrate:

1. The publics of virtually all advanced industrial societies have been moving toward more secular orientations during the past fifty years. Nevertheless,
2. The world as a whole now has more people with traditional religious views than ever before – and they constitute a growing proportion of the world's population.

Though these two propositions may initially seem contradictory, they are not. As we will show, the fact that the first proposition is true helps

account for the second – because secularization and human development have a powerful negative impact on human fertility rates. Practically all of the countries in which secularization is most advanced show fertility rates far below the replacement level – while societies with traditional religious orientations have fertility rates that are two or three times the replacement level. They contain a growing share of the world's population. The expanding gap between sacred and secular around the globe has important consequences for cultural change, society, and world politics.

Part I uses this theoretical framework to develop and test a series of propositions, demonstrating how religiosity is systematically related to (i) levels of societal modernization, human security, and economic inequality; (ii) the predominant type of religious culture in any nation; (iii) generational shifts in values; (iv) different social sectors; and (v) patterns of demography, fertility rates, and population change. Part II analyzes detailed regional case studies comparing religiosity in the United States and Western Europe, the Muslim world, and post-Communist Europe. Part III then examines the social and political consequences of secularization, and its ramifications for cultural and moral values, religious organizations and social capital, and voting support for religious parties. The conclusion summarizes the key findings and highlights the demographic patterns generating the widening gap over religion around the world.

This study draws on a massive base of new evidence generated by the four waves of the World Values Survey executed from 1981 to 2001. The World Values Survey has carried out representative national surveys in almost eighty societies, covering all of the world's major faiths. We also examine other evidence concerning religiosity from multiple sources, including Gallup International polls, the International Social Survey Program, and Eurobarometer surveys. At one level, there is nothing novel or startling about our claims. A mainstream tradition in sociology, anthropology, history, and social psychology has long theorized that cross-cultural differences in religiosity exist in many societies worldwide. But traditional secularization theory has come under powerful and sustained criticism from many influential scholars during the past decade. Systematic survey evidence comparing cultural attitudes toward religion across many developing nations remains scattered and inconclusive, with most studies limited to a handful of affluent postindustrial societies and established democracies in Western Europe and North America. As well as reconceptualizing and refining secularization theory, our study examines the wealth of survey evidence for religiosity from a broader perspective and in a wider range of countries than ever before.

## Traditional Theories of Secularization

The most influential strands of thought shaping the debate over secularization can be broadly subdivided into two perspectives. On the one hand, *demand-side* theories, which focus “bottom up” on the mass public, suggest that as societies industrialize, almost regardless of what religious leaders and organizations attempt, religious habits will gradually erode, and the public will become indifferent to spiritual appeals. By contrast, the *supply-side* theory, which focuses “top-down” on religious organizations, emphasizes that the public demand for religion is constant and any cross-national variations in the vitality of spiritual life are the product of its supply in religious markets.<sup>7</sup> Supply-siders argue that religious organizations and leaders play a strategic role in aggressively building and maintaining congregations, essentially suggesting that “if you build a church, people will come.” After outlining these alternative accounts, we conclude that, although the original theory of secularization was flawed in certain regards, it was correct in the demand-side perspective. We then summarize our alternative theory of secularization, based on conditions of existential security, which is developed fully throughout this study.

## The Rational Weltanschauung: The Loss of Faith

The idea that the rise of a rational worldview has undermined the foundations of faith in the supernatural, the mysterious, and the magical predated the thought of Max Weber, but it was strongly influenced by his work in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904) and in *Economics and Society* (1933).<sup>8</sup> Many leading sociologists advanced the rationalist argument farther during the 1960s and 1970s, foremost among them Peter Berger, David Martin, and Brian Wilson.<sup>9</sup>

In this perspective, the era of the Enlightenment generated a rational view of the world based on empirical standards of proof, scientific knowledge of natural phenomena, and technological mastery of the universe. Rationalism was thought to have rendered the central claims of the Church implausible in modern societies, blowing away the vestiges of superstitious dogma in Western Europe. The loss of faith was thought to cause religion to unravel, eroding habitual churchgoing practices and observance of ceremonial rituals, eviscerating the social meaning of denominational identities, and undermining active engagement in faith-based organizations and support for religious parties in civic society.



Science and religion could confront each other directly in a zero-sum game where scientific explanations undermined the literal interpretation of Biblical teachings from Genesis 1 and 2, exemplified by the Darwinian theory of evolution that challenged ideas of special creation by God.<sup>10</sup> Even more importantly, scientific knowledge, its applications through technology and engineering, and the expansion of mass education could have a broader and more diffuse social impact by ushering in a new cultural era. Following the European enlightenment, rational calculation was thought to have gradually undercut the foundations of core metaphysical beliefs. The idea of the mysterious was regarded by Weber as something to be conquered by human reason and mastered by the products of technology, subject to logical explanations found in physics, biology, and chemistry rather than to divine forces outside this world. The dazzling achievements of medicine, engineering, and mathematics – as well as the material products generated by the rise of modern capitalism, technology, and manufacturing industry during the nineteenth century – emphasized and reinforced the idea of mankind's control of nature.<sup>11</sup> Personal catastrophes, contagious diseases, disastrous floods, and international wars, once attributed to supernatural forces, primitive magic, and divine intervention, or to blind fate, came to be regarded as the outcome of predictable and preventable causes. Priests, ministers, popes, rabbis, and mullahs appealing to divine authority became only one source of knowledge in modern societies, and not necessarily the most important or trusted one in many dimensions of life, when competing with the specialized expertise, certified training, and practical skills of professional economists, physicists, physicians, or engineers.<sup>12</sup> The division of church and state, and the rise of secular-rational bureaucratic states and representative governments, displaced the rule of spiritual leaders, ecclesiastical institutions, and hereditary rulers claiming authority from God. As Bruce summarized this argument:

Industrialization brought with it a series of social changes – the fragmentation of the life-world, 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.<sup>13</sup>

The core Weberian thesis concerns the impact of the Reformation and the Industrial Revolution occurring many centuries earlier, so it remains difficult to scrutinize systematically with any contemporary empirical evidence. But if a rational worldview generates widespread skepticism about the existence of God and belief in the metaphysical, then those societies

that express most confidence in science might be expected to prove least religious; in fact, as documented in Chapter 3, we find the reverse.

### **Functional Evolution: The Loss of Purpose**

A related explanation is offered by theories of functional differentiation in industrialized societies, predicting the loss of the central role of religious institutions in society. This argument originated from the seminal work of Émile Durkheim in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912), and by the 1950s the functionalist perspective had become the predominant sociological view.<sup>14</sup> Contemporary theorists who developed this account further include Steve Bruce, Thomas Luckman, and Karel Dobbelaere.<sup>15</sup>

Functionalists emphasize that religion is not simply a system of beliefs and ideas (as Weber suggests); it is also a system of actions involving formal rituals and symbolic ceremonies to mark the major passages of birth, marriage, and death, as well as the regular seasonal celebrations. These rituals played an essential function for society as a whole, Durkheim suggested, by sustaining social solidarity and cohesion, maintaining order and stability, thereby generating collective benefits. Durkheim argued that industrialized societies are characterized by functional differentiation, where specialized professionals and organizations, dedicated to healthcare, education, social control, politics, and welfare, replaced most of the tasks once carried out exclusively in Western Europe by monasteries, priests, and parish churches. Faith-based voluntary and charitable organizations in the medieval era – the alms-house, the seminary, and the hospice – were displaced in Europe by the expansion of the welfare state during the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The growth of the state created publicly funded schools, healthcare, and welfare safety nets to care for the unemployed, the elderly, and the destitute. Stripped of their core social purposes, Durkheim predicted that the residual spiritual and moral roles of religious institutions would gradually waste away in industrial societies, beyond the traditional formal rites of births, marriages, and death, and the observance of special holidays.

The theory of evolutionary functionalism became the popular orthodoxy in the sociology of religion during the postwar decades. Jagodzinski and Dobbelaere, for example, proposed such an explanation to account for the shrinking church-going congregations in Western Europe: *“All the empirical evidence in this chapter is compatible with the assumption that functional rationalization related to functional differentiation, detraditionalization, and ensuring*

*individualization have a cumulative impact on the decline of church involvement, especially among the post-war generation.*<sup>16</sup> If this thesis is correct, one implication is that church congregations should have fallen further and fastest in affluent societies that have developed extensive welfare states, such as in Sweden, the Netherlands, and France – and indeed much of the evidence is consistent with this account.<sup>17</sup>

Yet in recent decades growing numbers of critics have expressed reservations about the core claims of the functionalist version of societal development. An erosion of the *social* purpose of the church through functional differentiation does not necessarily mean that the core moral and spiritual roles of religious institutions are diminished or lost – indeed, they could become more important. Functionalist theory, which dominated the literature on social development during the 1950s and 1960s, gradually fell out of intellectual fashion; the idea that all societies progress along a single deterministic pathway of socioeconomic development toward a common end-point – the modern secular democratic state – came under increasing challenge in anthropology, comparative sociology, and comparative politics from a multicultural perspective emphasizing that communities, societies, and states experience diverse forms of change.<sup>18</sup> Rather than an inevitable and steady loss of spiritual faith or purpose as societies modernize, critics argue that more complex historical and cross-country patterns are evident, where religion rises and falls in popularity at different periods in different societies, fueled by specific factors, such as the charisma of particular spiritual leaders, the impact of contingent events, or the mobilization of faith-based movements. To support this argument, observers point to a resurgence of religiosity evident in the success of Islamic parties in Pakistan, the popularity of Evangelicalism in Latin America, outbreaks of ethno-religious bloodshed in Nigeria, and international conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq in the aftermath of the events of 9/11.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, elsewhere religious faith may flounder, and the church may experience a crisis of mass support, due to contingent events and local circumstances, such as the American public's reaction toward sex abuse scandals among the Roman Catholic clergy, or deep divisions within the international Anglican Church leadership over the issue of homosexuality. Hence Andrew Greeley argues that diverse patterns of religiosity exist today, even among affluent European nations, rather than observing any consistent and steady conversion toward atheism or agnosticism, or any loss of faith in God.<sup>20</sup>

The demand-side accounts of secularization initiated by the work of Weber and Durkheim have been subjected to massive intellectual battering

during the last decade. After reviewing the historical evidence of church-going in Europe, Rodney Stark concludes that secularization is a pervasive myth, based on failed prophecies and ideological polemic, unsupported by systematic data: *“The evidence is clear that claims about a major decline in religious participation [in Europe] are based in part on very exaggerated perceptions of past religiousness. Participation may be very low today in many nations, but not because of modernization; therefore the secularization thesis is irrelevant.”*<sup>21</sup> For Jeffrey Hadden, the assumptions within secularization constitute a doctrine or dogma more than a well-tested rigorous theory: *“a taken-for-granted ideology rather than a systematic set of interrelated propositions.”*<sup>22</sup> He argues that benign neglect, rather than confirming evidence, kept the claims of secularization intact for so long. The idea that religion would shrink and eventually vanish was a product of the social and cultural milieu of its time, fitting the evolutionary functional model of modernization. The emergence of new spiritual movements, and the way that religion remains entangled in politics, suggests, Hadden believes, that secularization is not happening as predicted. He argues that those who claim that secularization has occurred have exaggerated and romanticized the depth of religious practices in the European past and also simultaneously underestimated the power and popularity of religious movements in the present era, exemplified by an evangelical revival in Latin America and New Age spirituality in Western Europe. The body of scholarship that arose during the last decade has generated a vigorous debate about the contemporary vitality of religious life, raising important questions about the links that were assumed to connect the process of modernization with secularization.

### **The Theory of Religious Markets: The Loss of Competition**

Traditional secularization theory is now widely challenged, but no single theoretical framework has yet won general acceptance to replace it. The supply-side school of rational choice theorists that emerged in the early 1990s, although remaining controversial, provides the most popular alternative. Indeed, Warner claims that this represents a “new paradigm,” as the model has stimulated numerous studies during the last decade.<sup>23</sup> The religious market model disregards the public’s “demand” for religion, which is assumed to be constant, but focuses instead on how conditions of religious freedom, and the work of competing religious institutions, actively generate its “supply.” The principal proponents include, among others, Roger

Finke, Rodney Stark, Lawrence R. Iannaccone, William Sims Bainbridge, and R. Stephen Warner.<sup>24</sup>

The earlier prevailing view was that pluralism *eroded* religious faith. The Protestant Reformation led to the fragmentation of Western Christendom, with diverse sects and denominations emphasizing alternative beliefs and doctrines. For Durkheim this process destroyed the hegemonic power of a single pervasive theological faith, sowing the seeds of skepticism and doubt.<sup>25</sup> Drawing heavily upon the analogy of firms struggling for customers in the economic market, supply-side theory assumes the exact opposite. The core proposition in the religious market approach is the notion that vigorous competition between religious denominations has a *positive* effect on religious involvement. The explanation why religion flourishes in some places while languishing in others rests upon the energies and activities of religious leaders and organizations. The more churches, denominations, creeds, and sects compete in a local community, the theory assumes, the harder rival leaders need to strive to maintain their congregations. Proponents argue that the continued vitality of religious beliefs and practices in the United States can plausibly be explained by the sheer diversity of American faith-based organizations, strong pluralistic competition among religious institutions, freedom of religion, and the constitutional division of church and state.<sup>26</sup> Older mainstream denominations in America, such as Catholics, Episcopalians, and Lutherans, have been challenged by rival evangelical churches which demand more time and energies, but also offer a more vigorous religious experience.<sup>27</sup>

By contrast, communities where a single religious organization predominates through government regulation and subsidies, for example establishment churches, are conditions thought to encourage a complacent clergy and moribund congregations, stultifying ecclesiastical life in the same way that state-owned industries, corporate monopolies, and business cartels are believed to generate inefficiencies, structural rigidities, and lack of innovation in the economic market. Stark and Finke suggest that Northern Europe is dominated by “socialized religion,” where state regulations favor established churches, through fiscal subsidies or restrictions on rival churches. This process, they suggest, reinforces religious monopolies, and complacent and apathetic clergy, leading to indifferent publics and the half-empty pews evident in Scandinavia.<sup>28</sup>

Yet, after more than a decade of debate and study, the supply-side claim that religious pluralism fosters religious participation remains in dispute (as discussed more fully in Chapter 4). Critics suggest that some of the comparative evidence is inconsistent with the theory, for example this account

has trouble explaining the continuing strength of congregations in many countries in Southern Europe, despite the monopolistic role of the Catholic Church.<sup>29</sup> One of the most common empirical measures of religious pluralism used to support this account was subsequently discovered to be flawed and statistically contaminated.<sup>30</sup> A thorough meta-review of the series of more than two dozen empirical studies published in the academic literature on the sociology of religion, conducted by Chaves and Gorski, concluded with harsh criticism of the theory:

The claim that religious pluralism and religious participation are generally and positively associated with one another – the core empirical hypothesis of the market approach to the study of religion – is not supported, and attempts to discredit countervailing evidence on methodological grounds must be rejected. A positive relationship between religious pluralism and religious participation can be found only in a limited number of contexts, while the concepts themselves translate poorly to non-modern settings.<sup>31</sup>

The contemporary debate has therefore thrown considerable doubt on the traditional Weberian and Durkheimian versions of the secularization thesis, but the grounds for accepting religious market theory are based on faith more than fact. The supply-side account has not yet won general acceptance in the social sciences.

## **The Thesis of Secularization Based on Existential Security**

The classic version of secularization theory clearly needs to be updated; but to simply reject it entirely would be a major mistake, for it is correct in some major respects. Stark and Finke conclude: “*What is needed is not a simple-minded theory of inevitable religious decline, but a theory to explain variation.*”<sup>32</sup> We agree. Our theory of secularization based on existential security rests on two simple axioms or premises that prove extremely powerful in accounting for most of the variations in religious practices found around the world. The core axioms and hypotheses are illustrated schematically in Figure 1.1. What is the underlying logic of our argument?

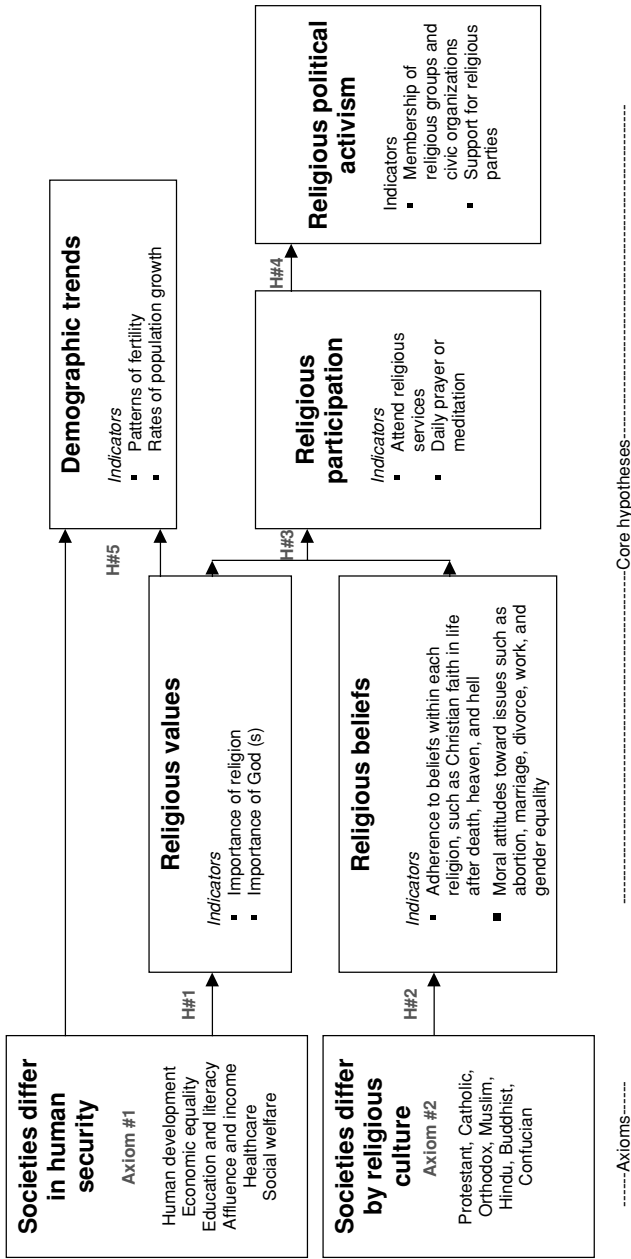
### **The Security Axiom**

The first basic building block of our theory is the assumption that rich and poor nations around the globe differ sharply in their levels of sustainable human development and socioeconomic inequality, and thus also in the basic

living conditions of human security and vulnerability to risks. The idea of human security has emerged in recent years as an important objective of international development, although the concept is complex and multiple definitions exist in the literature.<sup>33</sup> At its simplest, the core idea of security denotes freedom from various risks and dangers.<sup>34</sup> The traditional view focused upon using military strength to ensure the territorial integrity and security of nation states. During the last decade this view was revised as analysts began to recognize that this definition was excessively narrow, with many other risks also contributing to human security, ranging from environmental degradation to natural and manmade disasters such as floods, earthquakes, tornadoes, and droughts, as well as the threat of disease epidemics, violations of human rights, humanitarian crisis, and poverty. The wide range of dangers means that the concept of human security can become so broad and overloaded that it can lose all coherence and practical utility, as well as becoming difficult or even impossible to gauge with a single composite measure. Nevertheless, the core idea of human security, irrespective of the specific nature of the risks, is one that is widely recognized as important to well-being, and we regard the absence of human security as critical for religiosity.

The inhabitants of poor nations remain highly susceptible to premature death – above all from hunger and hunger-related diseases. They also face sudden disasters from drought or flood, or weather-related emergencies. Poor nations have limited access to the basic conditions of survival, including the provision of uncontaminated water and adequate food, access to effective public services offering basic healthcare, literacy, and schooling, and an adequate income. These countries also often face endemic problems of pollution from environmental degradation, conditions of widespread gender inequality, and a legacy of deep-rooted ethnic conflict. Lack of capacity to overcome these difficulties arises from corruption in government, an ineffective public sector, and political instability. Poor nations often have weak defenses against external invasion, threats of internal coup d'état, and, in extreme cases, state failure.

Where poorer agrarian economies develop into moderate industrial societies, and then progress further to becoming more affluent postindustrial societies, this process brings broadly similar trajectories generally improving the basic conditions of human security. The process of industrialization and human development helps lift developing countries out of extreme poverty, greatly reducing the uncertainty and daily risks to survival that people face, as documented in the extensive literature on development published by the United National Development Program and the World Bank.<sup>35</sup> The



**Figure 1.1.** Schematic Model Explaining Religiosity



move from subsistence rural farming to moderate-income manufacturing generally helps to lift the most vulnerable population out of dire poverty and commonly improves standards of living, bringing urbanization, better nutrition, sanitation, and access to clean water. More developed societies also usually have better hospitals, trained healthcare professionals, access to basic drugs and medicine, and public services reducing infant and child mortality, immunization programs, family planning, and more adequate prevention and treatment against the ravages of HIV/AIDS. Schooling, and the essential literacy and numeric skills, become more widely available for boys *and* girls. This development, combined with the diffusion of mass communications, gradually creates a more informed and politically aware public. The expansion of the professional and managerial service sectors brings middle-class employees access to health insurance, pensions, and greater material assets. Meanwhile, the growth of the welfare safety net, and more effective delivery of government services as societies develop, ensures the less well-off against the worst risks of ill health and old age, penury and destitution. For all these reasons, the first stage of societal modernization transforms the living conditions for many people, reducing their vulnerability to sudden, unpredictable risks.

Yet economic development is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition to create human security. In many developing nations, pockets of deep-rooted poverty often remain among the least well-off sectors. In Mexico, Colombia, or Brazil, for example, extreme poverty exists among residents in urban favelas, shantytowns, and isolated rural villages, along with a growing bourgeoisie. Conditions of socioeconomic inequality are critical for widespread conditions of human security; otherwise growth only enriches the affluent elite and the governing classes, a common pattern in many mineral and oil-rich nations such as Nigeria, Venezuela, and Saudi Arabia.

Moreover, there is an important distinction to be drawn between our account and some simpler and more mechanical versions of modernization theory. Although we believe that human development and conditions of economic equality usually generate growing levels of security, this generalization should be understood as probabilistic, *not* deterministic; situation-specific factors make it impossible to predict exactly what will happen in any given society. We believe that the public generally gains conditions of greater security during the process of modern development, but this process can always be momentarily halted or temporarily reversed, even in rich countries, by particular dramatic events such as major natural disasters, experience of wars, or severe recessions. Even the most affluent postindustrial nations may experience a sudden widespread resurgence of insecurity; for

example, fears of terrorism arose sharply in the United States, especially for residents on the East Coast, immediately after the events of September 11, 2001.<sup>36</sup> Another example is the recent experience of Argentina, a country rich in agricultural and natural resources, with a well-educated workforce, a democratic political system, and one of South America's largest economies. But economic growth experienced a sudden crisis; a deep recession was the prelude to economic collapse in 2001, leaving more than half the population living in poverty. The country struggled with record debt defaults, a ruined banking system, deep cynicism about politics, and currency devaluation. Formerly middle-class professionals who lost their savings and their jobs – teachers, office workers, and civil servants – suddenly became dependent upon soup kitchens, bartering, and garbage collections to feed their children. Through modernization, we believe that rising levels of security become increasingly likely to occur. But these changes are not mechanical or deterministic; specific events and leaders can hinder or advance the pace of human development in a society.

### The Cultural Traditions Axiom

The second building block for our theory assumes that the distinctive worldviews that were originally linked with religious traditions have shaped the cultures of each nation in an enduring fashion; today, these distinctive values are transmitted to the citizens even if they never set foot in a church, temple, or mosque. Thus, although only about 5% of the Swedish public attends church weekly, the Swedish public as a whole manifests a distinctive Protestant value system that they hold in common with the citizens of other historically Protestant societies such as Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Germany, and the Netherlands. Today, these values are not transmitted primarily by the church, but by the educational system and the mass media, with the result that although the value systems of historically Protestant countries differ markedly and consistently from those of historically Catholic countries – the value systems of Dutch Catholics are much more similar to those of Dutch Protestants than to those of French, Italian, or Spanish Catholics. Even in highly secular societies, the historical legacy of given religions continues to shape worldviews and to define cultural zones. As a distinguished Estonian colleague put it, in explaining the difference between the worldviews of Estonians and Russians, “We are all atheists; but I am a Lutheran atheist, and they are Orthodox atheists.” Thus we assume that the values and norms in Catholic and Protestant societies, for example orientations toward the work ethic, sexual liberalization, and democracy,

will vary systematically based on past historical traditions, as well as varying in Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, Orthodox, and Muslim societies, even among people living in these societies who do not adhere to these faiths or feel that they belong to any church, temple, or mosque.

## Hypotheses

If we can accept these two basic axioms as reasonable and relatively uncontroversial, they suggest a series of propositions or hypotheses that are tested throughout this book to see if they stand up to scrutiny against the empirical evidence.

### 1. *The Religious Values Hypothesis*

Religious market theorists assume that demand is constant, so that variance in religiosity must be generated by supply. We start from very different premises since we believe that the experience of living under conditions of human security during a person's formative years will shape the demand for religion and therefore the priority that people give to religious values. In particular, we hypothesize that, all things being equal, *the experiences of growing up in less secure societies will heighten the importance of religious values, while conversely experience of more secure conditions will lessen it.*

Modernization theories suggest that economic and political changes go together with cultural developments in coherent and consistent ways. We demonstrate later that the process of human development has significant consequences for religiosity; as societies transition from agrarian to industrial economies, and then develop into postindustrial societies, the conditions of growing security that usually accompany this process tends to reduce the importance of religious values. The main reason, we believe, is that the need for religious reassurance becomes less pressing under conditions of greater security. These effects operate at both the societal level (socio-tropic) and the personal level (ego-tropic), although we suspect that the former is more important. Greater protection and control, longevity, and health found in postindustrial nations mean that fewer people in these societies regard traditional spiritual values, beliefs, and practices as vital to their lives, or to the lives of their community. This does not imply that all forms of religion necessarily disappear as societies develop; residual and symbolic elements often remain, such as formal adherence to religious identities, even when their substantive meaning has faded away. But we expect that people living in advanced industrial societies will often grow increasingly indifferent to traditional religious leaders and institutions, and

become less willing to engage in spiritual activities. Contrary to the religious markets school, we assume that the “demand” for spirituality is far from constant; instead, striking variations are evident due to experience of the basic living conditions found in rich and poor nations.

Virtually all of the world’s major religious cultures provide reassurance that, even though the individual alone can’t understand or predict what lies ahead, a higher power will ensure that things work out. Both religion and secular ideologies assure people that the universe follows a plan, which guarantees that if you follow the rules, everything will turn out well, in this world or the next. This belief reduces stress, enabling people to shut out anxiety and focus on coping with their immediate problems. Without such a belief system, extreme stress tends to produce withdrawal reactions. Under conditions of insecurity, people have a powerful need to see authority as both strong and benevolent – even in the face of evidence to the contrary.

Individuals experiencing stress have a need for rigid, predictable rules. They need to be sure of what is going to happen because they are in danger – their margin for error is slender and they need maximum predictability. Conversely, people raised under conditions of relative security can tolerate more ambiguity and have less need for the absolute and rigidly predictable rules that religious sanctions provide. People with relatively high levels of existential security can more readily accept deviations from familiar patterns than people who feel anxiety concerning their basic existential needs. In economically secure industrial societies, with an established basic safety net safeguarding against the risks of absolute poverty and a relatively egalitarian distribution of household incomes, an increasing sense of safety brings a diminishing need for absolute rules, which contributes to the decline of traditional religious norms.

In agrarian societies, humanity remains at the mercy of inscrutable and uncontrollable natural forces. Because their causes were dimly understood, people tended to attribute whatever happened to anthropomorphic spirits or gods. The vast majority of the population made their living from agriculture, and were largely dependent on things that came from heaven, like the sun and rain. Farmers prayed for good weather, for relief from disease, or from plagues of insects.

Industrialization brings a cognitive mismatch between traditional normative systems and the world most people know from their first-hand experience. The symbols and worldview of the established religions are no longer as persuasive or compelling as they were in their original setting. In industrial society, production moved indoors into a manmade environment. Workers did not passively wait for the sun to rise and the seasons to

change. When it got dark, people turned on the lights; when it got cold, people turned up the heating. Factory workers did not pray for good crops – manufacturing production depended on machines created by human ingenuity. With the discovery of germs and antibiotics, even disease ceased to be seen as a divine visitation; it became a problem within human control.

Such profound changes in people's daily experience led to changes in the prevailing cosmology. In industrial society, where the factory was the center of production, a mechanistic view of the universe seemed natural. Initially, this gave rise to the concept of God as a great watchmaker who had constructed the universe and then left it to run largely on its own. But as human control of the environment increased, the role ascribed to God dwindled. Materialistic ideologies arose that proposed secular interpretations of history and secular utopias to be attained by human engineering. As people moved into a knowledge society, the mechanical world of the factory became less pervasive. People's life experiences dealt more with ideas than with material things. In the knowledge society, productivity depends less on material constraints than on information, innovation, and imagination. But under the conditions of existential insecurity that have dominated the lives of most of humanity throughout most of history, the great theological questions concerned a relatively narrow constituency; the vast majority of the population was most strongly concerned with the need for reassurance in the face of a world where survival was uncertain, and this was the dominant factor explaining the grip of traditional religion on mass publics.

## 2. *The Religious Culture Hypothesis*

The predominant religious cultural traditions in any society, such as the legacy of Protestantism and Catholicism in Western Europe, are expected to leave a distinct imprint upon the contemporary moral beliefs and social attitudes that are widespread among the public in these nations. Nevertheless, if secularization has occurred in postindustrial nations, as we suggest, then the influence of religious traditions can be expected to have faded most in these societies.

Predominant religious cultures are understood here as path-dependent, adapting and evolving in response to developments in the contemporary world, and yet also strongly reflecting the legacy of the past centuries.<sup>37</sup> The major faiths of the world express divergent teachings and doctrines on many moral values and normative beliefs, such as those surrounding the roles of women and men, the sanctity of life, and the importance of marriage and the family. To focus our analysis, we examine the impact of the predominant religious culture on contemporary societies in the context

of Max Weber's theory of the Protestant ethic and the rise of capitalism,<sup>38</sup> and also the more recent claims about the importance of Western and Muslim religious cultures made by Samuel Huntington's theory of a "clash of civilizations."<sup>39</sup>

### 3. *The Religious Participation Hypothesis*

We anticipate that the declining importance of religious values in postindustrial nations has in turn eroded regular participation in religious practices, exemplified by attendance at services of worship and engagement in regular prayer or meditation.

Each major religion defines its own important and distinct practices in spiritual rituals, ceremonies, and observances, often associated with the life-changes of birth, marriage, and death, as well as celebration of certain holy days, and there are multiple variations within each religion's sects, denominations, and communities. Christian religious practices are exemplified by habitual church attendance on Sundays and special holidays, as well as by the role of prayer, charitable giving, the significance of communion, and the rituals of baptism, confirmation, and marriage. But within this common repertoire, Anglicans, Methodists, and Baptists each emphasize their own specific rituals. Elsewhere meditation rituals and ceremonies are central to Buddhism, along with the observation of festivals, blessings and initiations, and the role of monastic communities. For Muslims, the Qur'an specifies the five Pillars of Islam, including public profession of faith by recitation of the shahada, daily performance of the salat prayer ritual, annual giving of obligatory alms, fasting during Ramadan, and performance once in a lifetime in the rituals of the Great Pilgrimage to Mecca (the Hajj). Alternative New Age forms of spirituality involve an even wider range of activities, including psychic, pagan, metaphysical, personal growth, and holistic healthcare, with practices exemplified by yoga, meditation, aroma therapies, channeling, divination, and astrology.

In this limited study, we cannot hope to compare all the varied forms of religious behavior found in each of the world's major religions, but, as discussed in the next chapter, we can analyze the most common aspects of religious practices, symbolized by attendance at services of worship and regular engagement in prayer or meditation. We predict that the strongest decline in religious participation will occur in affluent and secure nations, where the importance of religion has faded most. By contrast, where religious values remain a vital part of people's everyday lives, in poor agrarian societies, we also expect that people will be most active in worship and prayer.

#### 4. *The Civic Engagement Hypothesis*

In turn, there are good reasons to believe that regular religious participation, particularly collective acts at services of worship, will probably encourage political and social engagement and also electoral support for religious parties.

Theories of social capital claim that, in the United States, regular church-going encourages belonging to faith-based organizations and joining a broader range of community groups in civic society. Mainline Protestant churches in the United States have long been regarded as playing a central role in the lives of their local communities by providing places for people to meet, fostering informal social networks of friends and neighbors, developing leadership skills, informing people about public affairs, drawing together people from diverse social and ethnic backgrounds, and encouraging active involvement in associational groups concerned with education, youth development, and human services. The role of churches in the United States raises important questions: in particular, do religious institutions function in similar ways in other countries, fostering social networks, associational activism, and civic engagement? And, if so, has secularization contributed to an erosion of social capital? Classic theories of voting behavior have also long claimed that in Western Europe electoral cleavages between Protestants and Catholics, reinforced by the organizational links between the Catholic Church and Christian Democratic parties, encourage the religious to vote for parties of the right. Yet again if religious participation and values have eroded in postindustrial societies, as we argue, then we would also expect to see a process of religious dealignment, with denominational identities playing a less important role in voting behavior. By contrast, in developing societies we would predict that religion would continue to play an important role in politics.

#### 5. *The Demographic Hypothesis*

Yet while this series of hypotheses might lead to the assumption that secularization is spreading worldwide, in fact the situation is far more complex. We find that human development and growing conditions of existential security erode the importance of religious values, and thereby also reduce rates of population growth in postindustrial societies. Thus we expect to find that rich societies are becoming more secular in their values but at the same time they are also shrinking in population size. By contrast we expect that poor nations will remain deeply religious in their values, and also will

display far higher fertility rates and growing populations. One of the most central injunctions of virtually all traditional religions is to strengthen the family, to encourage people to have children, to encourage women to stay home and raise children, and to forbid abortion, divorce, or anything that interferes with high rates of reproduction. As a result of these two interlocking trends, rich nations are becoming more secular, but the world as a whole is becoming more religious.

Cultures have been defined as survival strategies for a society, and one can see this as a competition between two fundamentally different survival strategies. (1) Rich, secular societies produce fewer people, but with relatively high investment in each individual, producing knowledge societies with high levels of education, long life expectancies, and advanced economic and technological levels. This also provides greatly enhanced military potential and national security, but because families are placing an important investment in few offspring, these societies place a relatively high valuation on each individual and show a relatively low willingness to risk lives in war. On the other hand (2) poorer traditional societies produce large numbers of children, investing much less in each individual. Sons are valued more highly than daughters, but if one has several sons, the loss of one or two is tragic but not catastrophic. Infant mortality rates and death rates are sufficiently high that people implicitly do not expect all of their children to survive.

The modern strategy emphasizes high investment in relatively few individuals, with equal investment in both sons and daughters and a heavy investment of human capital in a smaller but more highly skilled workforce in which women are utilized as fully as men. The traditional strategy narrowly limits women's opportunities for education and the paid workforce, leaving few options except motherhood and family, with much less investment in each individual.<sup>40</sup> Within this strategy, talented women are not educated and are not allowed careers outside the home, which means that their potential contribution to society beyond the home is wasted. This strategy also has an indirect cost: it means that uneducated mothers raise children, so girls and boys receive less intellectual stimulation in their crucial early years. On the other hand, this strategy produces far greater numbers of children.

It is not clear which strategy is more effective. The modern strategy produces a much higher standard of living, higher life expectancy, and greater subjective well-being, and modern nations have greater technological and military power. But insofar as sheer numbers count, traditional societies are clearly winning: they are becoming an increasingly large proportion of the



world's population. As a result we expect to find, and indeed demonstrate, enormous contrasts between the fertility rates of traditional and modern societies. Today, virtually all advanced industrial societies have fertility rates far below the population replacement level – and some of them are producing only about half as many children as would be needed to replace the adult population. Conversely, poorer societies have birth rates well above the population replacement level, and many are producing two or three times as many children as would be needed to replace the adult population. The net effect is that the religious population is growing fast, while the secular number is shrinking, despite the fact that the secularization process is progressing steadily in rich nations.

### 6. *The Religious Market Hypothesis*

Yet we do not rest our argument upon simply proving this series of propositions. To consider the core proposition of the alternative religious market school, we also test the empirical evidence for the assumptions at the heart of this rival theory. Religious market theory expects that religious participation will be influenced by the supply of religion, in particular: greater religious pluralism and also greater religious freedom will both increase religious participation.

To examine the evidence for these propositions, in subsequent chapters we compare the impact on religious participation (frequency of attending services of worship) of both religious pluralism (computing the standard Herfindahl Index) and a new 20-point Religious Freedom Index. We demonstrate that pluralism has no positive relationship with participation, either within postindustrial societies or in worldwide perspective. The theory fits the American case but the problem is that it fails to work elsewhere. State regulation provides a more plausible explanation of patterns of churchgoing in affluent societies, but even here the relationship is weak and the correlation may well be spurious. In post-Communist Europe, religious pluralism and religious freedom have a negative relationship with participation. Overall we conclude that the degree of religious pluralism in a society is far less important than people's experience with whether survival is seen as secure or insecure.

## Conclusions

Three important conclusions flow from this study. First, we conclude that due to rising levels of human security, *the publics of virtually all*

*advanced industrial societies have been moving toward more secular orientations.* We demonstrate that “modernization” (the process of industrialization, urbanization, and rising levels of education and wealth) greatly weakens the influence of religious institutions in affluent societies, bringing lower rates of attendance at religious services, and making religion subjectively less important in people’s lives.

The overall trend is clear: within most advanced industrial societies, church attendance has fallen, not risen, over the past several decades; moreover, the clergy have largely lost their authority over the public and are no longer able to dictate to them on such matters as birth control, divorce, abortion, sexual orientation, and the necessity of marriage before childbirth. Secularization is not taking place only in Western Europe, as some critics have claimed (though it was first observed there). It is occurring in most advanced industrial societies, including Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and Canada. The United States remains an outlier among postindustrial societies, having a public that holds much more traditional worldviews than that of any other rich country except Ireland. But even in America, there has been a lesser but perceptible trend toward secularization; the trend has been partly masked by massive immigration of people with relatively traditional worldviews (and high fertility rates) from Hispanic countries as well as by relatively high levels of economic inequality; but when one controls for these factors, even within the United States there has been a significant movement toward secularization.

Nevertheless, it would be a major mistake to assume that secularization is triumphantly advancing and that religion will eventually disappear throughout the world. Our second conclusion is that *due to demographic trends in poorer societies, the world as a whole now has more people with traditional religious views than ever before* – and they constitute a growing proportion of the world’s population. Rich societies are secularizing but they contain a dwindling share of the world’s population; while poor societies are not secularizing and they contain a rising share of the world’s population. Thus, modernization does indeed bring a de-emphasis on religion within virtually any country that experiences it, but the percentage of the world’s population for whom religion is important, is rising.

The differential fertility rates of religious and secular societies is by no means a sheer coincidence; quite the contrary, it is directly linked with secularization. The shift from traditional religious values to secular-rational values brings a cultural shift from an emphasis on a traditional role for women, whose lives are largely limited to producing and raising many children, first under the authority of their fathers and then their husbands,

with little autonomy and few options outside the home, to a world in which women have an increasingly broad range of life choices, and most women have careers and interests outside the home. This cultural shift is linked with a dramatic decline in fertility rates. Both religiosity and human development have a powerful impact on fertility rates, as we will demonstrate. The evidence suggests that human development leads to cultural changes that drastically reduce (1) religiosity and (2) fertility rates. Rising affluence does not automatically produce these changes, but it has a high probability of doing so, because it tends to bring about important changes in mass belief systems and social structure.

Lastly we predict, although we cannot yet demonstrate, that *the expanding gap between the sacred and the secular societies around the globe will have important consequences for world politics, raising the role of religion on the international agenda*. Despite popular commentary, this does not mean that this situation will necessarily generate more intense ethno-religious conflict, within or between nations. In the aftermath of 9/11, and U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq, many commentators believe that these events reflect a deep-rooted clash of civilizations, but we should not assume a simple monocausal explanation. In recent years, many protracted civil wars have been settled through negotiated settlements, including in Angola, Somalia, and Sudan. The most reliable independent estimate of the number and severity of incidents of ethnic conflict and major wars around the globe suggests that a sizeable “peace dividend” has occurred during the post-Cold War era. The Minorities at Risk report estimates that the number of such incidents peaked in the mid-1980s, and subsequently declined, so that by late-2002 ethnic conflict had reached its lowest level since the early 1960s.<sup>41</sup> We do believe, however, that the accommodation of divergent attitudes toward moral issues found in traditional and modern societies, exemplified by approval or disapproval of sexual liberalization, women’s equality, divorce, abortion, and gay rights, provides an important challenge to social tolerance. The contemporary debate over these issues is symbolized by the potential schism within the Anglican Church surrounding the consecration in the United States of Canon Gene Robinson, an openly gay bishop. Cultural contrasts between more religious and more secular values will probably fuel heated debate about many other complex ethical questions, such as the legalization of euthanasia in the Netherlands, the enforcement of strict Sharia laws for the punishment of adultery in Nigeria, or the availability of reproductive rights in the United States. Nevertheless we remain strictly agnostic about whether cultural differences over religious values will inevitably generate outbreaks of protracted violence, armed hostilities,

or international conflict, an important issue well beyond the scope of this study.

## Demonstrating the Theory

This book will examine systematic evidence concerning this series of propositions, probing into whether societal development levels are consistently related to patterns of religious values, beliefs, and behavior. If we are correct, we should find marked contrasts between agrarian, industrial, and postindustrial societies in indicators of religiosity, such as participation in daily prayer and regular churchgoing, beyond the purely symbolic rituals associated with birth, marriage, and death, and the celebration of religious holidays.

This study examines evidence for the alternative cognitive, functionalist, and supply-side accounts of secularization we have discussed, finding little evidence consistently supporting these theories. The central claim in the Weberian argument is that the spread of scientific knowledge and rising levels of education will bring a universal trend toward an increasingly rational worldview, in all industrial societies. If this is correct, then it suggests that secularization should have progressed furthest among the most educated and those who emphasize and respect science. Yet we do not find any such universal trend: as we shall demonstrate, secularization is most closely linked with whether the public of a given society has experienced relatively high levels of economic and physical security. Moreover, the Weberian interpretation emphasizes cognitive factors that tend to be irreversible and universal: the spread of scientific knowledge does not disappear in times of crisis or economic downturn. If this were the dominant cause of secularization, we would not expect to find the fluctuations in religiosity that are linked with varying levels of security.

If this revised theory of secularization based on existential security is correct, and if cultural patterns of religiosity are coherent and predictable, then certain specific propositions or hypotheses follow – each of which will be tested in this study using cross-national comparisons, time-series trends, and generational analysis.

### *(i) Cross-National Comparisons*

Our first basic proposition is that levels of societal modernization, human development, and economic equality shape the strength of religiosity – meaning the *values*, *beliefs*, and *practices* of religion existing in any society.

We expect that poorer pre-industrial societies, which are most vulnerable to the threat of natural disasters and social risks, are most likely to emphasize the central importance of religion. By contrast, religion will be given lower priority by the publics of affluent postindustrial societies, who live under higher levels of physical and social security. We expect to find similar comparisons for many other indicators of religiosity, including the strength of religious identities, theological beliefs, adherence to traditional moral attitudes, and habits of religious observance and practices such as prayer and attendance at services of worship. The fact that we have survey data from almost eighty societies, covering the full range of variance from low-income economies to affluent postindustrial nations, and including all major religious traditions, makes it possible to test these hypotheses in a more conclusive fashion than has ever before been possible.

*(ii) Comparing Predominant Religious Cultures*

Yet we also expect that each society's historical legacy of predominant religious traditions will help shape adherence to particular religious values, beliefs, and practices. Consequently, we expect that the predominant religious culture will stamp its mark on each society, affecting how societal modernization influences patterns of religious beliefs and practices. As a result, important variations in religiosity can exist even among societies at similar levels of socioeconomic development. To examine this proposition, we will compare societies classified according to their predominant religious culture.

*(iii) Generational Comparisons*

In societies that have experienced sustained periods of rising economic growth and physical security (such as Germany, the United States, and Japan), or very rapid economic growth (such as South Korea and Taiwan), we expect to find substantial differences in the religious values held by older and younger generations. In such societies, the young should prove least religious in their values, attitudes, and practices while the older cohorts should display more traditional orientations, since basic values do not change overnight; instead, socialization theory suggests that we should find a substantial time lag between changing economic circumstances and their impact on prevailing religious values, because adults retain the norms, values, and beliefs that were instilled during their formative pre-adult years.<sup>42</sup> Cultural values change as younger birth cohorts, shaped by distinctive formative experiences, replace their elders. Since we hypothesize that these generational differences reflect economic growth and human development,

we would not expect to find large generational differences concerning religion in societies such as Nigeria, Algeria, or Bangladesh, that have not experienced major progress toward human development over the past several decades. In such cases we would expect the young to be fully as religious as their elders. The decline of religiosity does not reflect the inevitable spread of scientific knowledge and education; it is contingent on whether a society's people have experienced rising existential security – or whether they have experienced economic stagnation, state failure, or the collapse of the welfare state, as has happened in the less successful post-Communist economies.

*(iv) Sectoral Comparisons*

The thesis of secularization based on existential security suggests that the primary cleavage predicting religiosity will be the contrast between rich and poor societies. We also expect that more vulnerable social sectors *within* any given society, such as the poor, the elderly, those with lower education and literacy, and women, will be more religious, even in postindustrial societies. Furthermore, the largest social differences are expected in countries where income is most unequally distributed.

*(v) Patterns of Demography, Fertility Rates, and Population Change*

Our thesis argues that fertility rates are systematically linked to the strength of religiosity and human development. Although life expectancy is far lower in poorer societies, we expect to find that countries with the strongest religiosity have much greater population growth than secular societies.

*(vi) Social and Political Consequences*

Where the process of secularization has occurred, we expect this to have important consequences for society and for politics, in particular by weakening the influence of religiosity on the acquisition of moral, social, economic, and political values, as well as by eroding active engagement in religious organizations and parties, and by reducing the salience of religious identities and ethno-religious conflict in societies.

## **Plan of the Book**

To develop and test these propositions, Chapter 2 describes our research design, the comparative framework, and our main data source – the World Values Survey and European Values Survey. We outline the procedure used

to classify 191 societies worldwide by their predominant religious culture, allowing us to compare Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, Muslims, Hindus, and others. Chapter 3 goes on to examine global trends in religiosity and secularization. If cultural shifts were predictable, we would expect patterns of religiosity in each society to be consistently associated with levels of human development and economic equality. More specifically, we expect religious beliefs and practices to be strongest in poorer, pre-industrial societies; while by contrast the publics of the most affluent, secure, and egalitarian societies will prove most secular. Within any society in which substantial economic development has occurred, we expect secularization to have progressed furthest among the younger generations, who will be less religious than their parents and grandparents. With data from the Values Surveys we can test these core propositions more systematically than ever before, using cross-national comparisons, time-series trends, and generational analysis.

In Part II we go on to consider specific regional case studies in greater depth. Much of the previous literature has focused on the distinctive imprint of religion in specific countries or regions of the world, and the role of the state and organized religion. Most of the literature has examined patterns of churchgoing and religious beliefs in the United States and Western Europe, focusing on affluent postindustrial societies with similar levels of education and mass communications, and sharing a common Christian heritage. Chapter 4 considers the longstanding puzzle of why religiosity appears to have remained stable in the United States; while most studies find that churchgoing practices have eroded in other rich countries. We explore the evidence for trends and explanations for these differences offered by functionalist and by religious market theories. Chapter 5 analyzes whether religion has seen an erosion in Central and Eastern Europe, similar to the secularization process experienced in Western Europe, or whether, as supply-side theory suggests, the last decade has witnessed a resurgence of religiosity after the Soviet policy of state atheism was abolished. On the other hand, these patterns might be affected by other developments. For example, where the church became associated with nationalistic protest for the independence forces against control by the Soviet Union, in Catholic Poland or Lutheran Estonia, then once the Berlin Wall fell after a temporary “honeymoon” effect we might expect an erosion of religiosity. Chapter 5 examines the most extensive body of systematic cross-national survey evidence ever assembled concerning Muslim values and beliefs, from a wide range of countries around the world. In particular we focus on whether there is a cultural clash between the democratic values held in Western

Christianity and those held by the Muslim world, as Huntington argues.<sup>43</sup> We compare predominantly Islamic societies in the Middle East and elsewhere, such as Indonesia, Egypt, Iran, Nigeria, Indonesia, and Pakistan.

Theories of secularization are important in themselves, but they also have major social and political implications, as discussed in Part III. Although most people continue to express nominal adherence to traditional denominational identities, where religiosity has declined, it is unclear how far these identities matter. One of the strongest, most enduring, and yet contentious claims in the literature is Weber's theory that the Protestant Reformation generated a distinctive work ethos, which generated the underlying conditions leading to the rise of bourgeois capitalism. We cannot examine the historical patterns, but if religious cultural traditions have left an enduring legacy, we can examine the contemporary evidence. Chapter 7 compares the extent to which orientations toward work, and broader attitudes toward capitalism, differ by the type of religious faith. Chapter 8 considers the role of organized religion on social capital. The work of Robert Putnam has stimulated a recent revival of interest in whether social networks, social trust, and the norms and values generally associated with cooperative behavior, are shaped by participation in religious organizations.<sup>44</sup> While studies have examined this issue in depth within the United States, few have analyzed whether this relationship holds across different types of religious faith. Chapter 9 analyzes the strength of the linkages between religious identities and support for political parties, and in particular whether there is evidence of religious dealignment in postindustrial societies, but of strong relationships with religiosity continuing to predict electoral behavior and party support in agrarian societies. There is some evidence supporting these claims. In European countries where the Protestant and Catholic populations were once strongly "pillarized" into segmented party and social networks, exemplified by the Netherlands, the religious-based "pillars" have lost much of their relevance for electoral behavior.<sup>45</sup> Also in Western Europe, religious dealignment appears to have eroded denominational identities as a social cue guiding patterns of partisanship and voting choice. Adherence to the Catholic Church has become less closely related to electoral support for Christian Democratic parties in France, Italy, and Belgium.<sup>46</sup> But in the United States religiosity appears to have exerted a stronger impact on partisan divisions in the electorate in recent years.<sup>47</sup> It remains unclear how far religion, especially fundamentalist appeals, has shaped support for political parties and patterns of voting behavior in poorer developing societies and in newer electoral democracies. To draw together



the analysis, the conclusion in Chapter 10 summarizes the key findings throughout the book and considers their broader implications for economic and political development and for demographic change. Chapter 2 provides technical details about our research design and methods; those who are mainly interested in the substantive results may prefer to skip directly to Chapter 3, which starts to examine the evidence.