



# Religion and Modern Society

Citizenship, Secularisation and the State


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# *Introduction: the state of the sociology of religion*

## **Defining the field**

In this Introduction, I outline some of the major issues in the contemporary sociology of religion and in the process offer a short overview of recent developments in the sub-field. Within this framework, I provide an interpretation of various key issues, such as secularisation, the state and the regulation of religious life, youth cultures and spirituality, the complex relationships between the sacred and the profane, and the nature of religion itself. However, the major issues confronting any understanding of religion in modern societies are all related to globalisation. Two obvious examples are fundamentalism and religious violence. Perhaps the dominant interpretation of these phenomena is that, with the massive disruption to traditional societies and economies, religious cultures provide the raw ideological material of violent protest. The violent secular groups of the 1960s and 1970s – the Red Brigade and the *Baader-Meinhof* – have simply been replaced by the *jihadists* of this century. However, my approach in this volume is to downplay the themes of religious violence and radicalism, looking instead at the development of religious revivalism and piety among diverse urban communities and the consequences of these pious practices for secular societies.

As a consequence of globalisation, modern societies are predominantly multicultural and consequently they are also multi-faith societies in which the state more and more intervenes to organise and regulate religion through diverse policies that I collectively refer to under the notion of ‘the management of religions’. In every multicultural society, there are, almost invariably, many typically large diasporic communities that are held together less by the secular ties of citizenship than by a shared religious culture. However, with the creation of these ethnically complex and spatially diasporic communities, religions are also modified by the diverse processes of exclusion, accommodation

or integration. In these transformations, the Internet plays a critical role for displaced communities that would otherwise exist without any formal or established religious leadership (Bunt, 2009). Because labour migration typically involves the movement of young people, there has also been an expansion, with the facility of the Internet, of unorthodox, transient religion that is often referred to as 'spirituality'. These expressions of modern subjectivity are not so much religion on line, as on-line religion. The result has been a blossoming of post-institutional, hybrid and post-orthodox religiosity. In the language of Zygmunt Bauman (2000), who has been particularly observant of such social forms of post-modernity, we might use the expression 'liquid religion' to capture the flavour of such post-institutional spirituality. This urban milieu of the transient, the underprivileged and the marginalised worker is also a recruiting ground for more radical, oppositional expressions of social resentment expressed in the garment of religion. In Islam, while the Internet facilitates discussion and promotes understanding, apostates can also develop blogs to defend their counter-position, as in the case of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who maintains a Dutch blog in many languages (Varisco, 2010).

With the contemporary eruption of radical religious movements, religious nationalism and the war on terror, there has also been a transformation of civil society which, with increasing securitisation, may also evolve towards what I have called 'the enclave society' (Turner, 2007a). With the emergence, of enclaves, ghettos, diasporas and walled communities, society as a whole is divided and fragmented. My argument is that the development of global and mobile societies is therefore producing an 'immobility regime' in which the movement of people is in fact severely restricted by the new demands for security. One indication of these restrictions is the regulation of borders by the erection of walls and various security installations. Religious diversity, cultural fragmentation, parallel communities and social 'enclavement' pose significant problems for liberalism, democracy and multiculturalism.

The socio-cultural problems of multicultural liberal societies are thus compounded by the growing securitisation of society by the state in response to real or imagined threats to the stability of civil society. There is therefore a serious risk to the continued enjoyment of civil liberties. Within this scenario of growing risk, the state, both liberal and authoritarian, is drawn into the management of religion through

diverse policies such as the re-education of religious leaders or the regulation of dress codes or legislation to control marriage and divorce customs. The regulation of female dress codes through restrictions on the veil is the paramount example. Islamic dress codes in particular have become a site for debates not simply about liberalism but about modernity itself (Göle, 1996). In this politically charged environment, the veil – as a shorthand for women, social rights, sexual equality, patriarchy and democratic participation – has become the major point of division between Islam and the West (Lewis, 1993).

These developments often lead to pessimistic and bleak conclusions in the social sciences that predict the erosion of liberty, the breakdown of the public sphere and the growth of urban disorder. There are, however, other developments with globalisation that may give rise to less troublesome outcomes and more optimistic responses. One possibility is the development of various forms of cosmopolitanism that might outweigh the fissiparous tendencies of civil society. Cosmopolitanism, starting with the Stoics, has been associated with secularism and Western elites, but there are other formations such as vernacular and Islamic cosmopolitanism (Iqtidar, 2010). The universalism of the message of Saint Paul in Galatians (3.28) – ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female’ – can also be regarded as a foundation of Christian cosmopolitanism that makes Paul our contemporary (Badiou, 2003). As a result, religion – in all its complexity and diversity – stands at the heart of these problematic political and social developments, and therefore the study of religion and religions has achieved an intellectual and political urgency and importance it has not had for decades.

With this eruption of the religious in the public sphere, the notion that modern societies are secular has been seriously challenged and various alternatives to secularisation have been proposed, such as de-secularisation, re-sacralisation and the emergence of a post-secular society. In the modern world, religion, contrary to the conventional understanding of the process of modernisation as necessarily entailing secularisation, continues to play a major role in politics, society and culture. Indeed, that public role appears if anything to be expanding rather than contracting and hence in recent years there has been a flurry of academic activity around such ideas as ‘political religion’, ‘public religions’ and ‘religious nationalism’. In broad terms, the separation between church and state has become unclear and possibly

unworkable, and religion appears to be increasingly an important component of public culture rather than simply a matter of private belief and practice.

Of course, the salience of religion in modern culture depends a great deal on which society we are looking at. While northern Europe has been associated with secularisation in terms of declining participation in church life and with the erosion of orthodox belief, religious vitality has been seen as a consistent aspect of ‘American exceptionalism’ (Torpey, 2010). It is, in any case, more accurate to talk about the ‘de-Christianisation’ of Europe rather than its secularisation, and hence about a ‘post-Christian Europe’ rather than a secular Europe (Davie, 2006; 2010). Outside Europe, Pentecostalism, charismatic movements and religious revivalism are important social developments, and such movements have challenged the historical hegemony of the Catholic Church in Latin America (Lehmann, 1996). In Europe, the growth of diasporic communities with large religious minorities has also changed the cultural map of what were thought to be predominantly secular societies. In Britain, while the Church of England declines, migration from former African colonies has brought African fundamentalism into the predominantly secular culture of British cities, where it facilitates transnational networks and provides a haven for new migrants. The Assemblies of God for migrants from Zimbabwe is one example (Lehmann, 2002). Pentecostalism, having transformed much of African Christianity, is now having an impact on European and American congregations, not only through migration, but also through their evangelical outreach and reverse missionary activity (Adogame, 2010).

There is naturally a temptation to think that, after 9/11 and the terrorist bombings in London, Madrid, Bali and Istanbul, the revival of interest in religion is merely a function of the political importance of understanding radical versions of Islam. The work of Mark Juergensmeyer has been influential in this respect, in such publications as *Terror on the Mind of God* (2000) and *Global Rebellion* (2008). There has been considerable scholarly interest in ‘radical Islam’, ‘political Islam’, ‘globalised Islam’ and so forth (Kepel, 2002; Roy, 1994), but these prejudicial labels can create a false and discriminatory picture of Islamic revivalism as a whole. In the majority of Muslim communities, there is little evidence of political radicalism and even less for naked violence. Comparative research shows that, while Muslims

may be critical of American foreign policy, they admire Western-style democracy and want economic development and improvements in education (Hassan, 2002; 2008). The majority of Muslims world-wide condemned the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers, but remained hostile to the Bush administration (Saikal, 2003). Muslims may often be dissatisfied and frustrated, but they are rarely politically hostile to their host environment, and in France, despite the conflict over headscarves in public schools, the majority of Muslims believe that French democracy is a success (Joppke, 2009).

Scholarly interest in 'public religions' in modernity cannot, and should not, be confined simply to the study of Islam. Scholars have also drawn our attention to the radicalisation of all three Abrahamic religions – Islam, Christianity and Judaism (Kepel, 2004b). The academic study of religion and religions cannot afford to limit its scope to the radicalisation of religious consciousness (Islamic or otherwise) and hence we need to think more carefully about the broader implications of globalisation.

In this volume I will identify various manifestations of the globalisation of religion. These include the rise of fundamentalism in various religious traditions, which is associated in large part with the competition between religions. Secondly, there is a related development in the pietisation of everyday life as more people, but especially women, move into the formal labour market, become urbanised and acquire some education and literacy. Thirdly, there is the growth of post-institutional spirituality in youth cultures and finally there is some resurgence of traditional folk religion, often associated with magical practices and witchcraft (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999; 2000). The differences within the category of 'global religions' raises an obvious question: Is there any common denominator within the globalisation of religion and religions? In this study, I argue that all forms of religion are now overlaid with consumerism and that many forms of religion have been commodified. The global market has had significant effects on religious life and, as a result, I argue that we are not in a post-secular environment, but on the contrary the separation of the world (the profane) and religion (the sacred) has largely evaporated. Without some significant tensions between the religious and the secular, it is difficult to believe that we are entering a post-secular or re-sacralised civilisation. I explore the further paradox that everywhere we see (worldly) religion flourishing, while the world of the sacred is shrinking. My argument therefore hinges in part on a traditional set of

distinctions in religious studies which includes faith and religion, the sacred and religion, the religious impulse and the religious institution (Hervieu-Leger, 2000). This argument is laid out more fully in [Chapter 1](#) and underpins many subsequent chapters.

## Globalisation studies

Attempts to understand religion in a global context raise interesting conceptual problems about the definition of religion and methodological questions about the nature of global sociology. We can distinguish between global religion (the possibility of a generic religious consciousness) and global religions (the transformation of existing religions by globalising processes). The emergence of global religious cosmopolitanism might be an example of the former and the rise of radical Islam and Christian fundamentalism examples of the latter. Research in globalisation studies has, generally speaking, been concerned to study how existing religions have, for one reason or another, become more global and what consequences that has for belief and practice. Little research in fact has been devoted to the idea of the possible emergence of a new global religion, while more attention has been given to the transformation of an existing culture such as Hinduism into a world-wide religion. In this Introduction I propose to use the contemporary discussion of globalisation as a framework for a more general commentary on religion. Before looking more seriously into the issue of global religion, let us take stock of globalisation as such.

Global sociology is not simply international or comparative sociology. A genuinely global sociology may be difficult to create, but it is not merely the comparative sociology of global processes. It needs to address emergent global phenomena that are specifically aspects of contemporary globalisation (Turner and Khondker, 2010). Secondly, the sociology of religion in the global age has to be more than a macro-sociology of religion in modern societies. The fundamental question is whether globalisation (the increasing interconnectedness of the social world and the shrinkage of time and space) produces new phenomena rather than simply a modification of existing social reality. This argument is somewhat parallel to the position taken by Manuel Castells (1996) and John Urry (2000; 2007), that we need a ‘mobile sociology’ of global flows and networks



to deal with the social changes brought about by globalisation. The specific issue that lies behind this notion of ‘mobilities’ is whether we can generate a global sociology (a sociology not embedded in local or national paradigms) of global religion (religious phenomena that are not simply the products of the international connectedness of separate and distinct religious cultures). In fact, research into religious globalisation has so far been inclined to suggest that the effect of globalisation has been unsurprisingly to create an interaction between the local and the global. Roland Robertson (1992a: 173–4) coined the phrase ‘glocalisation’ to describe this phenomenon.

These global processes are inherently contradictory, and hence any general theory of religious globalisation will have to take into account its fundamentally incongruent social character and consequences. The ways in which we explore these processes may require us to transform our underlying philosophy of social science, or more narrowly our epistemological, paradigms. In the jargon of contemporary sociology, in a global world, we will need to become more reflexive about our constitutive presuppositions. The result of this reflexivity about sociology and its understanding of ‘globality’ is to make the category ‘religion’ deeply problematical. Is there anything in common between the myriad forms of cultural life about which we, partly for convenience, employ the term ‘religion’? To open up this discussion, which preoccupies this study of religion, I shall undertake a somewhat discursive overview of the basic issues.

We can begin a discussion of globalisation with an analysis of the notion of religion as an actual system of belief and practice. Globalisation has been significant in the development of diffuse religious civilisations into formal and specific religious systems. There has been a historical process in which ancient religious cultures have been reconstructed as religious systems. This process of institutional reification has transformed local, diverse and fragmented cultural practices into recognisable systems of religion. Globalisation has had the paradoxical effect of making religions, through their religious intellectuals (their theologians, philosophers and religious leaders), more self-conscious of themselves as ‘world religions’. Scholars have often referred to Islam, for example, in the plural (‘Islams’) to indicate its diversity and complexity, but ‘modern conditions have made religions more self-consciously global in character’ (Smart 1989: 556) and in the process there is a need to make a religion more coherent. We can

trace this development of a global consciousness of a system of religions (Luhmann, 1995) back, for example, to the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893, when religious representatives were suddenly more conscious of the transnational issues of mission and the political significance of being recognised as a religion with world-wide implications. Subsequent parliaments in 1999, 2004 and 2009 sought to promote religious harmony, reconciliation with aboriginal communities and addressed pressing human problems. New media of communication have intensified the interactions between religions, creating a reflexive awareness of religions as separate, differentiated areas of social activity – a development anticipated in Max Weber's discussion of the separate value spheres (religion, economics, politics, aesthetics, the erotic sphere, and intellectual sphere) in the famous 'Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions' (*Zwischenbetrachtung*) (Weber, 2009). The outcome has been the promotion of the idea of 'world religions' as a global system within which the various religions compete for influence on a global stage. Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, Jainism and so on have joined the monotheistic Abrahamic traditions as 'world religions' with the creeds, leadership and institutional apparatus that we expect a religion to possess.

To take another example, the growth of religious fundamentalism is often regarded as the principal or indeed the only consequence of globalisation (as the most recent aspect of modernisation). Fundamentalism is a common development in the three Abrahamic religions, but it is also present in various reform movements in Buddhism (Marty and Appleby, 1991). Religious fundamentalism is often mistakenly defined as traditionalism, because it is seen to be anti-modern (Lechner and Boli, 2004). Religious revivalism is thus seen to be a protest against the secular consequences of global consumerism and Westernisation. There is obviously evidence to show how fundamentalism has attempted to constrain and contain the growth of cultural hybridisation, to sustain religious authority and orthodoxy, and in particular to curb the growth of women's movements and to oppose the public recognition of homosexuality. This view is questionable for at least two reasons. First, fundamentalist movements employ the full range of modern means of communication and organisation, and secondly they are specifically anti-traditionalist in rejecting the taken-for-granted assumptions of traditional practice (Antoun, 2001). Fundamentalism is characteristically urban and its target has often been the rural

manifestations of folk religion. In Islam, since the formation of the Muslim Brothers in the 1920s, fundamentalists have consistently rejected traditional religion, specifically traditional forms of Sufism. If we consider fundamentalism as a verb, 'to fundamentalise' a religion can be seen as a strategy for an alternative modernity, not a traditional strategy against modernity (Eisenstadt, 2002; 2004).

However, fundamentalism is only one aspect of modern religious change. It is often claimed that globalisation produces cultural hybridisation, because the interaction of different cultures through migration and the growth of diasporic communities creates, primarily in global cities, a new cultural complexity (Appadurai, 2001). With cultural hybridity, there is also religious experimentation. These hybrid forms of religion are often constructed self-consciously and they are closely related to youth movements and to generational change (Edmunds and Turner, 2002). Global, hybrid religiosity can be interpreted as a form of religious popular culture. In the United States, for example, sociologists have identified the emergence of a 'quest culture' that attempts to find meaning experimentally from different and diverse traditions. The result is growing religious hybridity. The mechanism by which these hybrid religious styles emerge is through a 'spiritual market place' (Roof, 1993; 1999). These quest cultures have been critically evaluated as forms of expressive individualism, because they are related to what Talcott Parsons (1974) called the 'expressive revolution', which gave more emphasis to emotions, individualism and subjectivity. New Age communities have become a popular topic of sociological research (Heelas, 1996), but we need to understand more precisely how the spiritual market-place functions globally and how its various components are connected through the Internet (Hadden and Cowan, 2000). Spiritual markets, religious individualism and hybridisation create problems for traditional forms of authority, and their individualism is often incompatible with the collective organisation of traditional religiosity (Bellah, 1964).

There is another common argument in globalisation studies that connects population growth and the educational revolution of the last century with religious radicalism. Improvements in diet and public health in many societies in the second half of the twentieth century produced a rapid growth of populations. In many developing societies, these demographic changes often occurred alongside an expansion of formal education and the growth of literacy. Developing societies

often found themselves with a large cohort of young people who were educated but also unemployed or underemployed. Rapid population growth, expansion in university education, and the inequalities of the neo-liberal economic strategy of the 1980s resulted in disconnected and discontented youthful populations (Stiglitz, 2002). In the West, the post-war growth of universities was able to absorb the socially mobile lower-middle classes and, while the student movements in the late 1960s were troublesome, student radicalism in Western universities only rarely evolved into revolutionary politics. Radical religious movements, in a post-communist environment, have given global expression to waves of young people with high expectations and equally low satisfaction.

Religious radicalism and student political radicalism in general became a feature of campus life. Olivier Roy (1994) in *The Failure of Political Islam* claimed that these circumstances gave rise to the 'new Muslim intellectual' who created an ideological montage of political and religious beliefs, typically blending Marxism and the Qur'an to develop an anti-Western discourse. The Iranian radicals took over traditional notions such as *mustadafin* ('damned of the earth') and relocated them within a Marxist vision of class struggle and the collapse of capitalism. While radicals wanted violent change, the neo-fundamentalist, combining 'popularized scientific information with the strands of a religious sermon' (p. 98) wanted the re-Islamisation of society rather than a revolution, thereby allowing an alliance between neo-fundamentalism and the traditional clergy.

The growth of these student movements has been important in the evolution of 'political religions'. Islamic fundamentalism and political Islam are the classic illustrations. With the decline of communism, radical religion replaced secular politics as the rallying point of those who have experienced disappointment and alienation as a result of the failures of post-colonial nationalism. This argument – religion as an expression of the social disappointment and dislocation of economic change – is now inevitably associated with the clash of civilisations thesis (Huntington, 1993) and with the 'Jihad v. McWorld' dichotomy (Barber, 2001).

The Internet and the construction of global network technology provided the communication apparatus that transformed local student discontent into a world-wide oppositional politics. Simple technology such as the use of cassettes was important in the circulation of radical

sermons and played an important role in the early development of fundamentalist movements. The Internet has been generally important in preserving social and cultural connections between minorities, diasporic communities and societies of origin. The Internet now plays a significant role in religious education and missions in the world religions, but paradoxically it has democratic characteristics that are also corrosive of religious authority. The modern Internet is devolved, local and flexible. It permits the growth of alternative religious cultures, providing sites for the organisation of followers and disciples around local charismatic leaders. From a sociological point of view, the Internet poses a radical challenge to authority and legitimacy. How can traditional, text-based and oral authority survive in a post-textual society? How can traditional forms of pedagogy be sustained in a digital culture? Some aspects of these global transformations in religious authority are discussed in [Chapters 11 and 12](#).

In the developing world, religious radicalism is also associated with rapid urbanisation and the destruction of traditional communities and rural occupations. In Iran, this urbanisation produced a floating population of first-generation urban poor. However, in Western societies, these arguments cannot explain religious radicalism. Although there is a plausible argument to connect religious radicalism with social deprivation, some radical movements have also recruited from the lower-middle and middle classes among the children of migrants. Recent arrests in Britain appear to indicate that recruits to radical terrorist organisations can also be drawn from established third-generation Pakistani youth who are British citizens. We need more subtle and complex notions of ‘alienation’ in order to explain their sense of isolation from mainstream society and their identification with global Islam. In addition there are important differences between migrant alienation, religious identity and citizenship in different European societies and hence it is inappropriate to make hasty generalisations from superficial observations about such Muslim communities.

Although social scientists have examined many dimensions of globalisation, the legal dimensions have often been neglected. There are few general analyses of legal globalisation – an exception is William Twining’s (2000) *Globalisation and Legal Theory*. One aspect of Islamic fundamentalism has been the revival of the *Shari’a*, or an attempt to extend the *Shari’a* into the public domain. In practice, the globalisation of Islamic law also involves a modernisation of

traditional legal practice – a set of social changes that have been explored by Michael Peletz's (2002) *Islamic Modern*. The revival of Islamic law is a growing source of conflict (in Nigeria, Sudan, France and the Middle East). If the framework for national identity in the nineteenth century was citizenship, then the political framework for political membership in the twenty-first century is unclear. Religious globalisation appears to be closely connected with the national development of what Benedict Anderson (1991) called 'imaginary communities'. As these migrant communities become more established in the West, the question of legal pluralism emerges an important test of the depth of liberal commitment to multicultural and multi-faith societies. This problem of religion, social diversity and legal pluralism is addressed in [Chapter 8](#).

One important aspect of law and globalisation has been the rise of human rights in the twentieth century and what I want to call a human-rights consciousness. The human-rights agenda of this period cannot be easily disconnected from an emerging religious cosmopolitanism which followed the collapse of empires and imperialism. The post-war European settlement saw the destruction of three large multi-ethnic political systems (the Ottoman empire, the Austro-Hungarian empire and the Russian state) and massive displacement of people resulting in cohorts of stateless peoples. The large-scale destruction of civilian populations in the Second World War and the problem of displaced peoples were important factors in the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations in 1948.

Religious assumptions about suffering and healing have played an important role in shaping human-rights institutions, especially the evolution of truth commissions (Wilkinson, 2005). History has become a crucial aspect of human-rights processes, because reparations and justice require adequate records if trials are to take place. Collective memory is not only a condition of bringing criminals to justice, but also an important part of therapy for survivors. History has become a contested part of the legal process of human rights in framing collective memory, especially in relation to National Socialism and the Holocaust. These historical disputes do raise an important ethical and political problem: Is responsibility transmitted across generations indefinitely? Sustaining the idea of intergenerational guilt may be difficult, but without acceptance of responsibility it is difficult to see how forgiveness could have some therapeutic role. Recognition appears to be a precondition of

forgiveness. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa has been criticised on the grounds that truth-telling often secures an amnesty, but leaves the survivors without a sense of justice. The collective narrative of the African National Congress (ANC) is also under strain with tensions between those who suffered in South Africa and were imprisoned, and those who were exiled and spent their adolescence outside the country; there are tensions between the revolutionary ambitions of the founders and the inevitable normalisation of post-apartheid South Africa. How are collective memories constructed and sustained?

In an important essay *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, Jacques Derrida (2001) attempts to unravel the growing importance of forgiveness and repentance in international law that has its origins in the Nuremberg Trials (a series of military tribunals) and the Eichmann trial. Derrida argues that the legal language of forgiveness for crimes against humanity only makes sense within a religious (that is, Christian) framework. Hence this globalisation of a religious language entails a 'globalatinisation' – the spread of Christian values into a global legal framework. Derrida sees an inevitable paradox in the legal quest for forgiveness: forgiveness only forgives the unforgivable. We are searching for the possibility of forgiving unforgivable crimes such as the Holocaust or the genocide of the Armenians. We also expect the criminals to ask for forgiveness, but the unforgivable nature of their crimes normally precludes such motives. Unforgivable crimes are inexpiable and irreparable. Who has the authority to forgive the unforgivable? This question requires a religious answer – only the sovereign has the grace and the right of forgiveness because the sovereign acts on behalf of God. For Derrida, states are always constructed by an act of violence such as the seizure of land or people. But because the sovereignty of the state is typically founded by an act of violence, how can the state distribute the grace of forgiveness? Can we have a notion of 'crimes against humanity' without a notion of evil?

The growth of a human-rights culture with notions of evil, forgiveness, confession and reparations is an example of the creation of a global religious consciousness and not simply the globalisation of an existing legal tradition. Obviously, legal institutions relating to confession and immunity were aspects of medieval Christianity, but the idea that heads of state can be held personally responsible for crimes against their own people before an international court is a product of modern globalisation and, I want to argue, the product of religious

globalisation and not just the globalisation of religion. Therefore this process is not just Westernisation, or 'globalatinisation' to use Derrida's expression, because these values also become embedded in local cultures and they call forth indigenous ideas about rights. One interesting example has been the role of Theravada Buddhist values in the reconciliation process in contemporary Cambodia (Ledgerwood and Un, 2003). While Cambodian Buddhist culture had little understanding of individual rights, Theravada Buddhist values proved to be easily reconciled with a human-rights culture (Luckmann, 1988). Buddhist values of compassion, tolerance and non-violence provided a fertile framework for programmes to promote human-rights values in war-torn Cambodia. Buddhist leaders saw the crisis of the civil war as a consequence of the breakdown of morality, and respect for human rights could only be achieved by the restoration of the basic Buddhist precepts in the community.

The human-rights discourse is a new cosmology that involves a bundle of notions that are profoundly religious: crimes against humanity, forgiveness, reparations, sacrifice and evil. This new culture involves further assumptions about cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitan virtue – essentially respect for and care of the Other. Following Derrida, Judaeo-Christian religious assumptions have been globalised in the reparations culture. However, notions of vulnerability, human precariousness and dependency are not exclusively Western. Both Buddhism and Jainism have highly developed notions about suffering, impermanence, inter-dependency and care (Turner, 2006). This juridical-culture complex – human rights, truth and reconciliation commissions, international courts of justice, historical memory, genocide and the problem of evil – is one of the most significant, and one of the most neglected, aspects of religious globalisation (Brudholm and Cushman, 2009). The centre stage of scholarly activity has been preoccupied with violence and political religion and has ignored this quiet voice of peace, which currently sits off-stage.

Throughout this volume, I attempt to avoid excessive concentration on religious violence and radicalism. Instead, I look at religion and everyday life and, rather than referring to fundamentalism, I am more concerned to study the growth of piety movements, especially among educated women. In order to understand piety, we need to consider how people try to follow religious rules in their routine encounters with the secular everyday world. At the centre of these



piety rules, there is the discipline or management of the body. While the study of violence concentrates obviously on torture and the abuse of the human body, religious practice typically involves a regulation (diet) of the body (Turner, 1992; 1997; 2008a). In the last twenty years, the human body has become increasingly a major focus of modern economy, politics and culture. The importance of the body in modern political debate is a consequence of the bio-technology industry, modern military strategy and techniques, the greying of the populations of the advanced societies, changes in medical technology (such as new reproductive technologies), ethnic cleansing and the globalisation of disease (SARS for example). Perhaps this global consciousness of the body has been enhanced most notably by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. There is a sense of crisis in relation to the human body as signalled by the publication of influential books such as Francis Fukuyama's study of post-humanism in his *Our Posthuman Future* (2002), but what we do not know yet is how these changes are transforming traditional religious cosmologies. These social changes are obvious: new reproductive technologies that have separated sex from reproduction; the transformation of family life by new medical technologies; genetically modified food; the existence of therapeutic cloning and the possibility of human cloning; the applications of neuropharmacology in social control; and the potential for freezing humans by the method of cryonics. When considering the globalisation of religion, we should also think about the globalisation of the body.

### **Comparative religious studies and the construction of Buddhism**

Throughout this study, the distinction between religion and the sacred becomes both a useful tool and a foil for defending aspects of the original secularisation thesis. If we can sustain a distinction between religion and the sacred, then one version of the secularisation thesis can recognise the modern growth of institutional religions and the concurrent decline of the sacred. This distinction emerged in traditional comparative sociology of religion. Religious studies should be in particular concerned with the social setting and historical origins of religion, its social and political consequences, and its impact on civilisations. In short, it should be sociological. This distinction is

useful in evaluating most theories of secularisation which can often be parochial observations on local developments.

In part, I agree with the critical response of Steve Bruce (2001), who has consistently argued that there is little empirical support for the idea of a 're-sacralisation' of society. As sociologists, we do not need to recant our earlier views about the growth of secular societies. However, I depart from Bruce's defence of the secularisation thesis only in the sense that he concentrates too much on religion in Europe and North America. The picture is very different in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It follows that one cannot confront the secularisation thesis without undertaking comparative research seriously and increasingly, I would argue, globalisation research. It is in this context that the value of a distinction between the sacred and the religious becomes obvious.

Of course, this distinction takes us back to classical sociology. The consistent question in the background of this debate – from Émile Durkheim onwards – has been whether Buddhism is a religion at all. The beliefs and practices of Buddhism on the surface appear to be so different from the Abrahamic faiths that it consistently presents itself as the litmus test of both generic and particular definitions of religion. This issue provides one reason for some attention to the work of Trevor Ling, who was professor of comparative religion at the University of Manchester in the United Kingdom. He wrote extensively on Buddhism (Ling, 1973) and also produced an influential textbook on comparative religion (Ling, 1968). Because Ling wanted to understand religions from a historical perspective, he also thought that we should not study religions separately, but simultaneously, in order to examine how they interact with each other, including how they borrow from and influence each other. He looked at the historical origins of the great 'world religions' and explored how they were interrelated in time and space. The argument here is that we should not impose our contemporary and historically specific understanding of 'religion' on a range of civilisations and social movements that may have very different characteristics.

Within a religious studies framework, we cannot take 'religion' for granted as though it referred to a discrete, distinct and unchanging set of phenomena. Ling approached this issue from several dimensions. Like other scholars of his period, he distinguished between religion (generic) and 'religions' (specific historical manifestations). He explored

the differences between the human quest for the sacred (or faith) and the particular institutionalisation of these human endeavours. In this respect he followed Max Weber's idea about charismatic change and the institutionalisation of charismatic figures, or Rudolf Otto's concept of the holy ([1923] 2003). This approach was to some extent dependent on Wilfred Cantwell Smith's influential *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1962). The argument in summary is that 'religious inspiration' is historically transformed into 'religious institutions'; this formulation opens up the possibility that the latter is a corruption of the former. Because Ling wanted to treat the history of religions very seriously and drew a distinction between 'the religious impulse' and 'the religious system', he wanted to pay special attention to the founders and founding of religion.

Ling's approach was to claim that religion in the modern period (from the middle of the seventeenth century) had in the West been transformed into a private conscience of the individual, involving a separation of church and state, and the decline of public rituals and a religious calendar. Ling argued that outside Christianity things had been very different. In *The Buddha* (1973) he argued that Buddha Gautama had not been interested in founding a 'religion' in the Western sense, but wanted to combat individualism through a reform of society. Buddhism was a social philosophy that assumed a close involvement between state and religious community (the *sangha*). The Buddha sought not a new religion but a new society. With respect to the foundations of early Islam, Ling also concluded that the Prophet also sought a new society which was, for example, expressed through the Constitution of Medina. Similar arguments can be developed in terms of Confucianism. The philosophy of Confucius was not meant to create a personalised, individual form of religion, but on the contrary to develop a blueprint for the proper ordering of society and government.

Another special feature therefore of Ling's approach in this critical exploration of religious institutions was to draw out a paradoxical parallel between Marxism and Buddhism. Karl Marx had been a nineteenth-century critic of organised Christianity, which had been an aspect of the alienation of the working class. Marx wanted to reject the Christian view of the world in order to create a new society based on equality, and in which private property and individualism would be destroyed. In Germany Marx saw an alliance between the repressive

Prussian state and Protestantism. In books such as *Karl Marx and Religion* (1980) and *Buddha, Marx and God* (1966), Ling drew a parallel between Marx's criticisms of excessive individualism in capitalism and the Buddha's criticisms of excessive individualism in the emerging cities of north-eastern India in his own day.

Ling, in these historical, comparative and sociological studies, had been profoundly influenced by Max Weber, especially the series in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialforschung* and subsequently published as *The Religion of India* (1958a), *The Religion of China* (1951) and *Ancient Judaism* ([1921] 1952). However, he profoundly disagreed with Weber's characterisation of 'ancient Buddhism' in *The Religion of India*, where Weber said 'it is a specifically unpolitical and anti-political status religion, more precisely a religious "technology" of wandering and of intellectually-schooled mendicant monks . . . it is a "salvation religion" if one is to use the name "religion" for an ethical movement without a deity and without a cult' (Weber, [1921] 1952: 206). Ling disagreed completely, arguing that Buddhism had very clear political concerns for the reform of society, and it was not simply a movement of isolated monks, but had to build a *sangha* to carry out the reform of society. Ling did agree that the atheistic framework of Buddhism made the use of the word 'religion' problematic in this context.

Ling's work brings out, therefore, many of the issues associated with the comparative study of religion in which Buddhism, with its antipathy to the monotheistic, prophetic traditions, cannot be easily classified. Ling's solution was to treat Buddhism as a civilisation with a particular conception of the collective life of the individual. Ling's approach does, however, bring out yet another problem, which is that it is very difficult for contemporary considerations of Buddhism not to see Buddhism through the lens of Buddhist studies. In thinking about Buddhism it is difficult to avoid its prior interpretation in religious studies as a result of its interaction with, among other influences, Christian missions and Western colonialism (Newell, 2010).

Western Buddhist scholarship took shape in the 1850s, when academic scholars were relatively uninterested in Buddhism as it was actually practised in British Ceylon and Burma or in French Indo-China. Instead, they favoured the study of the classical Buddhist texts. This preference for ancient texts was partly driven by the impact of Protestantism on European cultures, because Protestantism also

emphasised the importance of textual research in Biblical criticism and regarded the survival of ritual in Roman Catholicism as an aberration. Catholicism was seen by its Reformed critics as a corruption of the primitive church, and Protestant missionaries saw nineteenth-century folk Buddhism as a corruption of the lofty ideals of the original Buddhist community. Buddhist scholars as a result preferred Theravada Buddhism over Mahayana and Tantric Buddhism, and treated Tibetan Buddhism with its rich ritual life and pantheon of gods and goddesses as ‘Lamaism’, which they equated with Catholicism (Lopez, 2002). Early Buddhist studies were also fascinated with the problem of recreating the life of the Buddha, just as biblical scholars were at the time in search of ‘the historical Jesus’. The historical Buddha was implicitly placed alongside Martin Luther, because they were both seen to be religious reformers. The Buddha’s criticisms of the caste system were seen to place him in the role of an Asian social reformer. Against this legacy, modern Buddhist studies are more influenced by anthropological and sociological research that examines the actuality, not the ‘textuality’, of Buddhism (Schopen, 1997), and as a consequence there has been a re-evaluation of the status of Tibetan Buddhism.

Although Ling’s account of Buddhism was also influenced by this legacy, in that for him Buddha was a social reformer, he recognised that one cannot interpret Buddhism via Weber as a socially withdrawn, soteriological community of intellectuals. There is finally one further aspect of Ling’s career that raises an issue that remains somewhat submerged in this volume – apart from resurfacing briefly in my discussion of Pierre Bourdieu in [Chapter 6](#). Ling was a critic of ‘religions’, while being himself profoundly religious. That is, he was conscious of the problems associated with the exclusionary claims of religion as it became institutionalised as a religious system. His encounter with Indian spirituality had opened a depth of personal experience that could no longer be comfortably housed within his own Christian identity. In this respect he saw himself as more Buddhist than Christian, indeed he followed the philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore in arguing that the way of the Buddha is the elimination of all limits of love. His life and work raised in an acute form the enduring question of the relationship between faith and knowledge. Can a scientific scholar of religion also be religious? For Ling, in taking a broad and comparative definition of religion as civilisation, the

combination of faith and reason was not an insuperable problem. He was able to manage sociology and theology simultaneously and so believing and knowing were not separate realms.

### **Conclusion: the end of the social?**

My approach to the sociology of religion, and to sociology more generally, has been deeply influenced by the intellectual contributions of Alasdair MacIntyre, who was both sociologist and philosopher, and combined historical insight with political criticism. In this study, my approach to the definition of religion and the sacred, and to the broad processes of secularisation and de-secularisation, can be regarded as an attempt to combine the sociological legacy of Durkheim with the philosophical brilliance of MacIntyre. For both Durkheim and MacIntyre, secularisation involved the dilution of the collective and emotional character of religious practices alongside the erosion of community by modernisation. In modernity, there is an inevitable erosion of the authority of collective religious belief and a greater indeterminacy about religious practice, as individuals become more reflexive about underlying classificatory principles. The social roots of belief are slowly destroyed by the growth of modern individualism and by the technologies of communication that bypass embedded social relationships.

Why has there been a revival of religion in the public sphere? Why have forms of religious nationalism become so prevalent? One answer is that religious cosmologies and symbolisation have a collective force that was not fully available to the ideological systems of humanism, communism and nationalism. By contrast, religion allows a national community to express its history in deep-rooted myths or sacred time as if that national history had a universal significance, namely to express the mythical history of a nation in terms of a story of suffering and survival about humanity as a whole. The implication is that social life can never be an entirely secular arrangement.