

## The 2000 Paul Hanly Furfey Lecture

# Reflections on the Sociology of Religion Today

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Let me say, first of all, that I am very honored to be asked to give this lecture. When José Casanova invited me, he said that I was free to choose my topic, and he also added that I should feel free to reminisce. This is tempting. I could relive past moments of glory, settle old scores, reveal outrageous secrets. Upon some reflection, though, I decided to reject the temptation. I don't think that a useful purpose would be served by my subjecting you to this sort of geriatric muttering. Instead, I decided to speak about what I see as the most interesting problems of the sociology of religion today, and I will leave any exercise in (probably selective) reminiscence to such private conversations as may follow this lecture.

Since its inception, presumably dated in the classical period of Durkheim and Weber, the sociology of religion has been fascinated by the phenomenon of secularization. This term, of course, has been endlessly debated, modified and occasionally repudiated. But for most purposes it could be defined quite simply as a process in which religion diminishes in importance both in society and in the consciousness of individuals. And most sociologists looking at this phenomenon have shared the view that secularization is the direct result of modernization. Put simply, the idea has been that the relation between religion and modernity is inverse — the more of the former, the less of the latter. Different reasons have been put forward for this relation. Most often it was ascribed to the ascendancy of modern scientific thinking, making the world more rationally comprehensible and manageable, and thus, supposedly, leaving less and less space for the supernatural. This interpretation was eloquently expressed in Weber's phrase of "the disenchantment of the world." Other reasons have been cited — the progressive differentiation of modern institutions (this was Parson's favorite paradigm), the severance of the linkage of state and church in modern democratic regimes making religious affiliation a voluntary matter, and last but not least the massive modern process of migration, urbanization and mass

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communication that undermined traditional ways of life. By the time I started my own work in this area, there was a body of theory and empirical work that could reasonably be called (and was so called) secularization theory.

It is worth noting that this understanding of the place of religion in the modern world was not necessarily driven by an anti-religion ideology. Durkheim could probably be described as philosophically inclined toward atheism, but Weber was, if anything, an agnostic with religious nostalgias, and the assumption of secularization theory were shared by those who deplored and those who welcomed the alleged decline of religion. Not least among the deplorers were theologians of both major Christian confessions, and some theologians even managed to join the welcomers. The central drama of Protestant theology at least since the middle of the nineteenth century has been the question of how one can cope intellectually and practically with the necessity of living in a secular world. In somewhat different form this drama was replicated in the Roman Catholic Church, with reactions ranging from defiant resistance against secularity to a cautious adjustment to it (*aggiornamento*). I continue to be impressed by the widespread assumptions in the religious circles to the effect that we are indeed living in a secular world (and not only in Europe, where this is understandable, but in America, where ordinary experience would make this assumption rather questionable).

A good example of this is provided by the development of so-called *sociologie religieuse* in Catholic Europe in the 1930s. In painstaking empirical research the decline of religious practice and belief was mapped, consciously in the service of fashioning a strategy by which the church might cope with this situation. Thus in one of his numerous works Gabriel LeBras, the father of *sociologie religieuse*, studied the effect on their religion as people migrated from Normandy (then the most Catholic region in France) to Paris — a quite devastating effect. LeBras doesn't make for lively reading, but in one of his most eloquent passages he mentions the Gare du Nord, the railway station in which Norman migrants would arrive in Paris, and suggests tongue-in-cheek that in this station there must be a magical piece of pavement — as soon as one steps on it, one ceases to be a Catholic. The strategy to cope with this was aptly caught in a Catholic publication shortly after World War II — *France, Pays de Mission* — “France, Mission Territory.” If today we have good reason to be skeptical of the old secularization theory, the work of LeBras and many others like him serves to remind us that the theory was not without empirical foundations (and, incidentally, it serves to reassure those of us, including myself, who once held to the theory and later gave it up, that we were not altogether foolish in our younger years!).

It is fair to say that the majority of sociologists dealing with religion today no longer adhere to the question of modernity and secularization. Some still do (bravely so, I would say), among them Bryan Wilson, who continues to make significant contributions while adhering to a feisty version of secularization

theory. In my own thinking about the sociology of contemporary religion, the major change-of-mind has been, precisely, the abandonment of the old secularization theory — not, I would like to emphasize, because of some philosophical or theological change, but because the theory seemed less and less capable of making sense of the empirical evidence from different parts of the world (not least the United States). But as I like to tell my students, one of the advantages of being a sociologist (as against, say, being a philosopher or theologian) is that one can have as much fun when one's theories are shot out of the water as when they are supported empirically!

As I see the evidence, the world, with some notable exceptions (of which more in a moment), is as religious as it has ever been, and in some places is more religious than ever. This, however, does not mean that there is no such thing as secularization; it only means that this phenomenon is by no means the direct and inevitable result of modernity. It thus becomes an important task for the sociology of religion *to map the phenomenon of secularization* — both geographically and sociologically — not as *the* paradigmatic situation of religion in the contemporary world, but as one situation among others. I can not possibly draw such a map in any detail here. It seems clear that in much of the world there are extremely powerful upsurges of religious movements, some of them having far-reaching social and political consequences. Paramount among these are two — the wide resurgence of Islam, both throughout the Muslim countries and in the Muslim diaspora — and the less widely noted explosion of Evangelical Protestantism, especially in its Pentecostal version, over wide regions of the developing world, most dramatically in Latin America (I would refer here to the work of David Martin). However, these two cases are not unique (though, arguably, they are the most important). There are powerful revitalizations in all the other major religious communities — among Roman Catholics (especially in developing countries), Eastern Orthodox Christians (quite dramatically in Russia), Jews (in Israel and in the diaspora), Hindus and Buddhists. Put simply, most of the world is bubbling with religious passions. And where secular political and cultural elites have been established, they find themselves on the defensive against the resurgent religious movements — for example, in Turkey, in Israel and in India — and, last but not least, in the United States!

Where, then, does secularity fit on this map? I would say, in two places. First, there is a thin but very influential stratum of intellectuals — broadly defined, as people with Western-style higher education, especially in the humanities and social sciences. They constitute a secular internationale, whose members can be encountered in every country. Again, I can not here go into the question of why this kind of education has secularizing effects (I suspect that it is mainly because of the corrosive insight into the relativity of beliefs and values). But I would point out that this peculiar internationale helps to explain the continuing plausibility of secularization theory among many Western intellectuals: When they travel to, say, Istanbul, Jerusalem or New Delhi, they almost

exclusively meet with other intellectuals — that is, people much like themselves — and they can then jump to the conclusion that this or that faculty club faithfully reflects the cultural situation outside — a fatal mistake indeed! (Need I add that it would be equally mistaken to believe that, say, the Harvard Faculty Club reflects the place of religion in American culture?) There is also, secondly, a geographical exception to the pulsating ubiquity of religion in the contemporary world — as that in western and central Europe. This is, I think, the only major part of the world in which the old secularization theory continues to be empirically tenable. The question of why this is so is tantalizing.

Indeed, I would propose that this is the single-most interesting question for the sociology of religion today: *Is Europe religiously different, and if so why?* The question posits a European exceptionalism which, at least in this matter, stands on its head the usual question about *American* exceptionalism. It has often been observed that, in contrast to Europe, the United States is a very religious country. But that is not exceptional; in this, America conforms to what is the worldwide pattern. Europe is, or seems to be, the big exception. And once one accepts the ubiquity of religion in the modern world, one becomes interested in secularization in a new and very intriguing way — secularization, not as the modern norm, but as a curious case of deviance that requires explanation. In recent years, for understandable reasons, there has been much scholarly interest in the phenomenon labeled “fundamentalism.” Leave aside here the point that this term refers to a specific development in the history of American Protestantism and can be very misleading when applied elsewhere; in common parlance, the term is used to describe just about any militant religious movement with a claim to authority and certitude. To be sure, it is interesting to ask, for example, why and how militant Islam came to power in the Iranian revolution at a particular time. But the phenomenon as such, in this or that form, has always been around. It is the exception, not the norm, that invites critical scrutiny. In other words, sociologists of religion should pay less attention to Iranian mullahs, and more to Harvard professors and to ordinary people in London or Paris.

How does European secularity manifest itself empirically? It does most clearly in behavior related to the churches. Throughout western and central Europe there has been a dramatic decline in people’s participation in church life, in the influence of religion in public life, and in the number of people choosing religious vocations. But it also manifests itself in the declining number of people who profess traditional religious beliefs. What is also interesting is that this cultural constellation, which in an earlier period (say, up to the 1960s) was concentrated in northern Europe (both in Protestant and Catholic regions), subsequently spread rapidly and massively into southern Europe — most dramatically in Spain (especially after the demise of the Franco regime), but also in Italy and Portugal. Some conservative Catholics in those countries have blamed this development on the alleged subversion of church authority by the

Second Vatican Council and the reforms that followed. But exactly the same phenomenon can be observed in Greece, whose Orthodox people couldn't care less about changes in the Roman church! Rather, there seems to have arisen a distinctive Euro-secularity, part and parcel of a cross-national European culture that simply carries it along: As a country is absorbed into Europe economically and politically, it gets Euro-secularity along with the rest of the package. This is what happened as the Pyrenees ceased to be a barrier between Spain and all those (from Franco's point of view) northern aberrations. Most recently, it has been happening dramatically in Ireland and in Poland. Curiously enough, it also happened in Quebec (an odd case of what might be Europeanization at a distance).

There is not much dispute about these facts, but the interpretations vary. There is a group of analysts who dispute the description of the European case in terms of secularization. Prominent among them is Danièle Hervieu-Léger in France, Grace Davie in Britain, and Paul Zulehner who focuses on the German-speaking countries. They view the situation as a shift away from the traditional churches (already in the 1960s some German analysts used the term *Entkirchlichung* — “de-churchification” — to describe this shift), with large numbers of people defining and practicing their religiosity in non-traditional, individualized and institutionally loose ways. This obviously constitutes a serious problem for the churches; it should not dictate the perspective of sociologists. The latter should instead concentrate on studying these new forms of religiosity, rather than doing (as it were) negative market research for the churches.

Let me say that I have not been fully persuaded by these arguments; I still think that the European case can be subsumed under the category of secularization. But even if one agrees with Hervieu-Léger and others that the category fails to grasp the European situation, it is still the case that Europe is different from any other major region in the world, and that this difference calls out for explanation. We need a more detailed topography of the people who, paraphrasing the title of Davie's recent book on religion in Britain, “believe without belonging.” We also need a more detailed analysis of how churches, despite empty pews and a shortage of clergy, can continue to be privileged institutions in the public spheres; José Casanova has analyzed this phenomenon, which, turning around Davie's phrase, one could describe as “belonging without believing.”

In any revised sociology of secularization the comparison between Europe and America is, obviously, very useful. The comparison makes the equation modernity/secularization extremely difficult to sustain: America is so much more religious, but can hardly be called less modern than Europe. Why, then, the difference? Let me admit that I have no answer to this question. An answer will almost certainly require a collaboration between sociologists and historians; I believe that the secularizing process began in Europe in the nineteenth century (of course with different starting points and trajectories in different countries).

My assumption would be that no important historical development has a single cause, thus a number of factors must have gone into the creation of Eurosecularity. The most commonly mentioned factor is political — a close relation between church and state (in contrast to America), with the result that political opposition often contained an anti-clerical component. Let me at least tease you with another factor which, I would hypothesize, helps to explain the difference between the two continents — this one having to do with education. In most of Europe public education has been mainly in the hands of the state which sends out teachers into all corners of the land; many of these teachers were, so to speak, foot-soldiers in the army of secular enlightenment. When primary and secondary education became compulsory, many parents had no way of shielding their children from the secularizing influence of the school. Until very recently a vastly different situation existed in the United States — the schools were under local authorities, and thus much more amenable to the wishes of parents. Put simply, European parents had to put up with the teachers sent by the educational authorities; American parents — however unenlightened — could fire the teachers. A plausible explanation? Maybe, maybe not. But I would suggest to you that this question could launch a hundred doctoral dissertations!

One important element of American religion that is quite negligible in Europe is Evangelical Protestantism — the millions of Americans who define themselves as “born-again Christians.” These too are not a homogeneous group, but that point can not be pursued here. However, there is an interesting similarity that opens up another important issue for the sociology of religion — the strong presence of what Robert Wuthnow has called “patchwork religion.” In one study after another in America, not only by Wuthnow but by others (notably Wade Clark Roof and Nancy Ammerman), one finds people who put together an individualized religion, taking bits and pieces from different traditions, and coming up with a religious profile that does not fit easily into any of the organized denominations. Many of them assert that they are not “religious” at all, but are pursuing a quest for “spirituality.” Very similar data came up in European research. Hervieu-Léger uses Claude Levi-Strauss’ term “*bricolage*” to describe this form of religiosity — people putting together a religion of their own like children tinkering with a lego-set, picking and choosing from the available religious “material.” It is important to note that such people can be found inside and outside the churches, both among those who claim to be orthodox in terms of their institutional affiliation and among those who admit the heterodoxy. A significant difference though: In America this group is much more frequently affiliated (thus providing another instance of the American proclivity for association, which incidentally serves to put in question the myth of American “rugged individualism” — but that is another story).

This brings me to another area for the sociology of religion today — a fuller understanding of the dynamics of pluralism. If I look back at my own work, I think that I understood this quite adequately a long time ago; what I

misunderstood was the relation of pluralism and secularization. Let me outline this in the form of two simple propositions: *Modernity pluralizes the lifeworlds of individuals and consequently undermines all taken-for-granted certainties. This pluralization may or may not be secularizing, depending on other factors in a given situation.* If these propositions are taken as hypotheses, a fascinating area of empirical research opens up. And again, the comparison between Europe and America is likely to be fruitful, with America a “lead society” of modern pluralism, yet lagging far behind Europe in the matter of secularization.

There is no great mystery about the causes of modern pluralism — these are the classical process of modernization — urbanization, migration, mass education, the mass media of communication, all of these gaining additional potency under democratic conditions where the state refrains from trying to impose a monopolistic worldview. Social psychology has demonstrated the importance of social support for an individual’s definition of reality; where this support is weak or divided, the definitions of reality lose their taken-for-granted status in consciousness and become a matter of individual choices. I continue to think that the most useful way of incorporating these social-psychological insights within sociology is through Arnold Gehlen’s theory of institutions. Be this as it may, however, to say that religious beliefs are chosen rather than taken for granted is not the same as saying that these beliefs are no longer held. Put simply, I would propose that pluralism affects the *how* rather than the *what* of religious beliefs and practice — and that is something quite different from secularization.

As far as the sociology of American religion is concerned, I would think that a central arena of concern should be the still-expanding area of religious pluralism. A benchmark could be Will Herberg’s influential book *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, published in 1955 and, I think, giving a good account of the state of American pluralism in mid-twentieth century. How much has changed since then! Even in the three broad categories of Herber’s title: Still to come was the powerful upsurge of Evangelicalism among Protestants, the earthquake of Vatican II among Catholics, the rise of Jewish Orthodoxy, and cutting across all denominational lines the cultural revolution of the 1960s and 1970s (most notably in the form of feminism). Christian Eastern Orthodoxy (perhaps a sleeping giant on the American religious scene) was off Herberg’s map, not to mention the subsequent rise of Islam, Buddhism and (less important) Hinduism. All of this has important political consequences: It was also in the 1950s that it became commonplace to say that American democracy was based on “Judeo-Christian values” — historically, perhaps, a plausible proposition. To understand the political problematic posed by the newer pluralism, I suggest that you imagine yourself as a high-school civics teacher in Hawaii. You look at a class of children preponderantly of Asian ancestry, the majority of which are likely to be neither Christian nor Jewish: Will you still say that American democracy is based on “Judeo-Christian” values? And if not, whose values will you cite? Or

will you have to fall back on a secularist position, saying that there is no religious way of legitimating the American regime? Demographic trends make it very likely that Hawaii-like conditions will spread to more and more regions on the American mainland. To be sure, this raises interesting questions for political philosophy. But let me suggest that it also suggests very interesting avenues for research in the sociology of American religion.

It is fair to say that, for close to a century now, the ghost of Max Weber has been hovering over the enterprise that we have come to call the sociology of religion. I would add that the ghost continues to show remarkable signs of life. Thus the question of the relationship between capitalist culture and an ethic of "inner-worldly asceticism" is as relevant today as when Weber wrote his essay on the Protestant ethic. Just look at the debate still raging over the introduction of a market economy in the post-Communist societies, with the recurring question as to whether cultural factors (for example, in Russia) have been hindering the success of such an economy, or conversely whether some cultures (for example, in China) may facilitate the economic transition. I can not recall Weber's name having been mentioned in this debate, but I am sure that his ghost has been chuckling! Here, then, is a continuing problematic for the sociology of religion — *the relation of religion and economic development*.

Here, again following in Weber's footsteps, only a broadly cross-national approach holds some promise of success. Take the explosive growth of Evangelical Protestantism that I mentioned earlier: Does this religious movement today promote the same or a similar ethic as the one that, according to Weber, facilitated the advent of modern capitalism in Europe and North America? The work of David Martin on the movement in Latin America strongly suggests a positive answer. One must remember, of course, that this movement is very new (the explosive growth only began in the 1950s) and most of its adherents are, still, very poor. But in areas of Latin America where the objective economic circumstances give a chance to people who work hard, save rather than consume, have strong families and pay attention to the education of their children — for example, in Chile — one can already see the beginnings of a Protestant middle class with remarkable similarity with its distant Anglo-American predecessors. Indeed, the research in Chile by Martin and his associates in the Centro de Estudios Publicos suggests the following proposition (perhaps we could call it a proposition in the style of "magical realism?") — "Max Weber is alive and well, and living on the outskirts of Santiago de Chile!" There exists now what could be called an Evangelical internationale growing in wide areas of the developing world — not only in Latin America but in the Chinese societies of eastern and southeastern Asia. The research on the socio-economic consequences of this remarkable religious phenomenon is as yet scattered and unintegrated cross-nationally, but I think that a tentative generalization is by now possible: This type of robust Protestantism has behavioral consequences



that, mostly unintentionally, have an affinity with the requirements of nascent capitalism and are therefore conducive to upward social mobility.

Having satisfied himself that the ethic of Protestantism was a factor in the genesis of modern capitalism, Weber undertook his vast enterprise in comparative sociology of religion with the intention of finding instances of “inner-worldly asceticism” in other religious traditions. He thought that there were none. In this, he was almost certainly mistaken. In recent years, Shmuel Eisenstadt and others have looked for functional equivalents of the Protestant ethic. The most promising candidate has been the so-called post-Confucian ethic. As you know, a fierce debate has been going on about this alleged phenomenon.

The debate, of course, was triggered by the meteoric economic ascendancy of the east-Asian capitalist societies and driven further by the (still problematic) successes that ensued after the introduction of market economics in mainland China. How to explain the economic success, not only of Japan and the “Little Dragons” (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore), but even more spectacularly of the Chinese diaspora in southeast Asia (where, as in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines, often very small Chinese minorities control the most successful sectors of the economy)? What all these cases have in common is a culture strongly influenced by Confucianism, and it is understandable that various scholars proposed that this cultural factor helps to explain the economic success stories. Here too is an ethic of hard work, discipline, frugality, strong family ties and great respect for education — in short, an ethic of “inner-worldly asceticism.” Weber, of course, in his work on Confucianism concluded that its ethic was inner-worldly but *not* ascetic, and he was probably correct with regard to the official Confucianism of imperial China. The “post-Confucian ethic” of the recent debate, however, was not that of the elegant literati studied by Weber. Rather, it was the ethic of what Robert Bellah felicitously called “bourgeois Confucianism” — the values and lifestyles of ordinary people, most of whom had never read or heard of the great Confucian classics. I don’t want to take a strong position on this debate, and I am reasonably sure that cultural factors other than Confucianism have been in play here (notably east-Asian folk religion and, in Japan, Shinto). However, I think that it is safe to say that culture, much of it religiously legitimated, has been an important factor in the recent economic history of eastern Asia.

The institute for the Study of Economic Culture at Boston University, which I have been directing since 1985, has as its agenda (a “neo-Weberian” one, if you will) precisely the relation of culture and economic behavior — and in most of the world culture is virtually synonymous with religion. The institute sponsored the research of David Martin mentioned before, as well as Gordon Redding’s work on the culture of Overseas Chinese entrepreneurs. I will take the liberty of mentioning two other projects of the Institute — Robert Hefner’s on Islam in Indonesia, and Joan Estruch’s on Opus Dei in Spain. The conventional

view of Islam is that, unlike Protestantism, it does *not* have an affinity with modern economic behavior. Hefner has been studying Islamic movements in Indonesia which seem to contradict the conventional view, suggesting that under certain conditions (which do not prevail everywhere) a self-consciously Islamic movement can promote values that are compatible with modern capitalism (and indeed with pluralism and democracy). The case of Opus Dei is fascinating, not least because it offers a great example of Weber's idea of unintended consequences: Here is a movement that is staunchly conservative in terms of Catholic orthodoxy, and has remained so, but which played an important role in the introduction of market economics in the final years of the Franco regime and which was probably helpful in the subsequent transition to democracy — a Catholic case of “inner-worldly asceticism,” with a somewhat ironic trajectory. In my own mind, Estruch's work can be summarized as follows: Opus Dei, which intended to make Spain a suburb of Fatima, helped make Spain a suburb of Brussels!

I would like to add yet another question here: If it is clear that some sort of “inner-worldly asceticism” is functional under conditions of *nascent* capitalism, is that still so under conditions of *mature* (or, if you prefer, “post-industrial” or “postmodern”) capitalism? Let me put the question graphically: If hard work and delayed gratification are conducive to mobility out of the *favelas* of Latin America, is it so for people who want to make it in Silicon Valley? I don't know. However, I would suggest a fruitful hypothesis for research: An ethic of inner-worldly *hedonism* has an affinity with the culture of creativity demanded by the new knowledge economy. This hypothesis would be troubling to moralists, but sociologists, I believe, must take the risk of *epater les bourgeois!*

There is a related but distinct question — that of *the relation between religion and democracy*. To some extent this question overlaps with the preceding one about religion and modern economics, but (contrary to currently fashionable political rhetoric) the relation between democracy and capitalism is not a simple symmetrical one. In the history of the United States, going back to the colonial period, it is very likely that, just as the Puritan morality was conducive to the economic behavior required by early capitalism, so was the Puritan's congregational polity conducive to democratic participation in the public arena. In other countries, though, there is no such neat synergy between the economic and the political consequences of religion. In terms of the great cross-national religious movements of our time, I would venture the hypothesis that Evangelical Protestantism, with its lay leadership and congregational activism, can provide a sort of proto-democratic schooling for its adherents. I would be more cautious with regard to the Islamic resurgence, though I am persuaded by Robert Hefner's work that there is nothing *intrinsically* antagonistic to democracy in the Islamic tradition. (I may observe in passing that there are proto-democratic elements both in the Quran and in the period of the so-called orthodox caliphs — far beyond anything to be found in the Christendom of this

period.) There is much room for research here, as well on the other major religious traditions. It is important to note in this connection that traditions can change, sometimes dramatically, under the force of circumstances. I have already mentioned the curious story of Opus Dei in Spain. This is part of a larger picture: Samuel Huntington, writing on what he called the “third wave of democracy,” has argued persuasively that the new attitude toward democracy taken by the Catholic church since Vatican II has been an important factor in processes of democratization in different countries – notably so in southern Europe, in Latin America, in the Philippines, and in the Catholic regions of the former Soviet empire.

It is not just democracy in the narrow sense of a political mechanism that can be religiously legitimated or de-legitimated. There is a penumbra of what can be called peri-democratic values and institutions without which the democratic mechanism remains a hollow and exceedingly fragile shell. These are the values of free association and of tolerance that are commonly subsumed under the category of “civil society.” In Western societies, with or without religious legitimations, these are usually propagated in categories derived from the Enlightenment. One can trace this rhetoric from the great declarations of human rights of the eighteenth century to the declarations on this subject by the United Nations. This rhetoric often grates on the ears of people in non-Western societies, people who have different conceptions of the relation between the individual and the community — as it did on the ears of traditional Catholics in the West itself. It was the work of theologians like Jacques Maritain and John Courtney Murray that made possible the redirection of Vatican II. The Catholic church could then go beyond a stance of reluctant concession to one of positive endorsement, because these theologians had formulated a Catholic rationale for tolerance, pluralism and democracy. My colleague Adam Seligman is currently engaged in a project that seeks to discover similar rationales within traditional Judaism and Islam — obviously an enterprise of great political importance in Israel and throughout the Muslim world. Similar questions, of course, can be asked with regard to Eastern Christian Orthodoxy as well as with regard to the religious traditions of southern and eastern Asia.

Since my own reputation in the sociology of religion was originally based on theoretical work, you might expect me to say some things about theory. Alas, I must disappoint you. In the 1960s, along with Thomas Luckmann and some other friends, I felt it made sense to do some foundational work on a theory for the sociology of religion. As some of you will know, what we came up with was a sort of theoretical marriage between Max Weber and Alfred Schutz, placing the sociology of religion within the wider context of the sociology of knowledge. I mentioned before that one part of this theoretical enterprise, the one that incorporated secularization theory, I was compelled to abandon. And I added a few bits and pieces to the theory later, notably in the understanding of pluralism. Beyond that, however, I have remained smugly satisfied with the theoretical

approach we concocted in those early years — and, consequently, not very much impressed with more recent efforts (including most emphatically, much of the work that, to my embarrassment, calls itself “constructivist”). But that is yet another story. In any case, as I increasingly turned from theory to empirical problems, I found the sociology-of-knowledge paradigm of my early work very useful and have not been motivated to exchange it for another.

There is, however, one topic, briefly discussed earlier, on which, it seems to me, some interesting theoretical work could be done — this is the topic of pluralism. We could use a broadly cross-national theory of the psychological and social dynamics of pluralism, which has engendered a curious dialect between openness and closure. In the extreme case, this is a dialectic between relativism and dogmatism, with individuals jumping with remarkable ease from one to another. Danièle Hervieu-Léger, the previously mentioned sociologist of religion, has given a vivid description of some aspects of this phenomenon in her recent book, *Pelerins et convertis* (not yet translated). Her “pilgrims” are the denizens of what, in the American context, has been called the “quest culture” by Wade Clark Roof. Her “converts” are, as it were, the refugees from the openness of pilgrimage; they find a comforting closure through a total commitment to this or that dogmatic community.

Such a theory of pluralism would, I think, be interesting in itself, strengthening the linkage between social psychology and the sociology of knowledge/religion. But it would also be of practical help to individuals and communities facing the difficulties of meaning-construction in the absence of taken-for-granted certainties. These difficulties, of course, are practically painful for theologians and religious people generally. Perhaps sociology can make here a modest contribution to all those who seek a middle ground between relativism and dogmatism.