

# SECULARIZATION AND CULTURE CHANGE: AN APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING CHANGING SYSTEMS OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF

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Change is certainly not peculiar to modern times. But just as certainly, the changes taking place in contemporary societies and cultures are unusual, if their scope, rate, intensity, and ramifications are considered. Wilbert E. Moore has suggested that contemporary change is peculiar in several important respects: that in any particular society it occurs frequently; that it occurs in sequential chains and is therefore not isolated in space or time; that it is probable everywhere and its results are potentially significant everywhere; that much more of it is planned, or comes about as an indirect result of something that is planned; that its effects are cumulative, because of the rapid expansion of material technology and social strategies; and finally, that change, when it occurs, affects a wider range of individual experience and has more likelihood of affecting the way societies function than ever before.<sup>1</sup> One may correctly infer from these characteristics of contemporary change that it is highly probable that changes taking place in one part of a social or cultural system will have a tendency to reverberate throughout the system. If this theoretical point is accepted, it is not necessary at the outset to commit oneself to a foregone conclusion as to which variables in the system under consideration are dependent and which independent, or to any fixed notion as to what constants are parts of the system. What does seem to be required, theoretically, is acceptance of the view that the parts of a social or cultural system interact reciprocally with each other. In this paper, I shall be primarily concerned to look at the ways in which the concept of secularization may illumine our understanding of certain changes that seem to be taking place in the ideological sphere of contemporary Western cultures, namely changes in the area of religious belief systems.

In the light of this primary concern, the purposes of the paper may be set forth in the following terms: (1) to examine the concept of secularization as a tool for understanding certain religious aspects of culture

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<sup>1</sup>Moore, Wilbert E., *Social Change*, (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 2.

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change in modern Western societies; (2) to contrast a theological approach to the understanding of secularization with a sociological view of this process, noting in the process some of the theoretical and interpretive consequences of the way secularization is understood; and (3) to describe some of the manifestations of secularization as they appear in socio-structural terms, and in noetic-epistemological terms, culminating in a phenomenological understanding of *Weltanschauung*. The socio-structural manifestations of secularization are to be described in terms of their consequences for religious institutions; the noetic-epistemological manifestations of secularization are to be explored in terms of the consequences of secularization as they affect the "consciousness" of modern man.

## I

### THE MEANING OF "SECULARIZATION": SOME THEORETICAL OPTIONS

In a perceptive and comprehensive review of the concept of secularization as it has been employed in empirical research, Larry Shiner has pointed out that, in the main, the concept has been used in at least six related, but analytically separate ways. It has been used to mean: (1) the decline of religion; (2) conformity with "this world;" (3) disengagement of society from religion; (4) transposition of religious beliefs and institutions; (5) desacralization of the world; and (6) movement from sacred to secular society.<sup>2</sup> A review of some of the work done from each of these points of view will provide a convenient and comprehensive summary of the changes in religious belief that have been occurring in the past several decades, and of the light that understanding these changes as parts of a process of secularization can throw on changes in the ideological sphere of culture.

If secularization is understood as the process by which the decline of religion in society takes place, then the end-point of the process would be a society without religion. J. Milton Yinger, a sociologist, defines secularization as the process "in which traditional religious symbols and forms have lost force and appeal,"<sup>3</sup> and in the context of this definition observes that even the so-called "return to religion" that was so widely believed to have taken place in the late 1950s "can be understood by noting the simultaneous secularization of the church," so that what one returned to was an institution so secularized that to join it was very much like joining the Kiwanis Club.<sup>4</sup> Operating with similar theoretical clues, sociologists Charles Glock and Rodney Stark

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<sup>2</sup>Shiner, Larry, "The Concept of Secularization in Empirical Research," *Journal for Scientific Study of Religion*, VI, (1967), 207-220.

<sup>3</sup>Yinger, J. Milton, *Religion, Society, and the Individual*, (New York, Macmillan, 1957), p. 119.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 280.

have pursued a research program in which secularization is understood to mean that "the mystical and supernatural elements of traditional Christianity have been replaced by a demythologized, ethical rather than theological, religion,"<sup>5</sup> and they argue that changes of this kind have certainly taken place. Relentlessly pursuing the matter, they have most recently, in a study of the nature of religious commitment, expressed the view that "the religious beliefs which have been bedrocks of Christian faith for nearly two millenia are on their way out; this may very well be the dawn of a post-Christian era."<sup>6</sup> Even the success of ecumenism in the 1960s is, they say, a sign of the trend indicated, since a diminution of concern for traditional doctrine is a precondition of ecumenism.<sup>7</sup> Their evidence convinces them that it would not be accurate to describe what has been happening in the religious sphere as change; it must rather be called decline, for persons in our society are increasingly inclined to regard the church as irrelevant.<sup>8</sup>

Oxford sociologist Bryan R. Wilson has also understood secularization as referring to the decline of religion. In his study of religion in secular society, he remarks that the concept of secularization "is not employed in any ideological sense. . . . It is taken simply as a fact that religion—seen as a way of thinking, as the performance of particular practices, and as the institutionalization of these patterns of thought and action—has lost influence in both England and the United States in particular, as it has in other western societies."<sup>9</sup> Secularization means, then, "the process whereby religious thinking, practice, and institutions lose social significance."<sup>10</sup> Man's problems of meaning in life have not been solved in the process of secularization, nor has his need for emotional reassurance diminished. The fact is, however, that religion as commonly understood appears to be no longer able to meet these needs for meaning and reassurance.<sup>11</sup> So true is this that "the man who chooses to avoid religion altogether can now also escape religious regulation of his social life in a way not previously possible."<sup>12</sup> Wilson sees a beginning of the secularization process in the *Entzau-berung der Welt*, a major concern of Max Weber in his understanding of modern western man's *Weltanschauung* (about which we shall have more to say below). Wilson's account of the secularization process

<sup>5</sup>Glock, Charles Y., and Stark, Rodney, *Religion and Society in Tension*, (Chicago, Rand McNally, 1965), p. 116.

<sup>6</sup>Stark, Rodney, and Glock, Charles Y., *American Piety*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1968), p. 205.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 213, 220.

<sup>9</sup>Wilson, Bryan R., *Religion in Secular Society*, London, C. A. Watts & Co., (1966), p. xi.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. xiv.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. xvii.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 30.

cannot be followed out here in all the richness of its detail, since to do this would take us too far from the primary concerns of this paper. It will suffice to say here that the sum of the matter is this. "The whole significance of the secularization process is that society does not, in the modern world, derive its values from certain religious preconceptions which are then the basis for social organization and social action."<sup>13</sup> This must be said despite the acknowledgement of the fact that "the secular society of the present. . . is none the less the inheritor of values, dispositions, and orientations from the religious past."<sup>14</sup> This is, however, simply to recognize that the process of secularization is not yet complete, or that a completely secularized society is empirically impossible, although in this view the theoretical niche in which to place such a society is certainly envisaged.

If secularization is defined as a process of increasing conformity with the world, then its theoretical limit would be reached when a society has become completely absorbed in the pursuit of instrumental tasks, and when it has become impossible to distinguish "religious" groups from the rest of the society. In a general sense, the literature in the sociology of religion dealing with the sect-to-denomination process in a variety of religious groups is to be understood as operating implicitly, if not always explicitly, from within the frame of reference suggested by this meaning of secularization. This is certainly true of H. Richard Niebuhr's classic study of *THE SOCIAL SOURCES OF DENOMINATIONALISM*, and in varying degrees of Earl Brewer's study of Methodism, Harold Pfautz' work on *Christians Science*, Pauline Young's account of *THE PILGRIMS OF RUSSIAN-TOWN*, John Hostetler's interpretation of *AMISH SOCIETY*, and of my own study of *Christian Church—Disciples of Christ, TRUMPET CALL OF REFORMATION*.<sup>15</sup>

As Larry Shiner indicates, the use of the concept of secularization to mean the process of increasing conformity to the world can be traced back at least as far as the work of Adolf von Harnack on monasticism. "Thus it is," writes Harnack, "that at the middle of the third century we find the church furnished with all the forces that a State and its culture could offer her, entering on all the relations of life, and ready

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 227

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 233.

<sup>15</sup>The Niebuhr volume was first published in 1929. It has since been reprinted, in 1954, by The Shoestring Press, Hamden, Connecticut, and is now available in a soft-cover edition, put out by Meridian Books. Brewer's study is reported in *Social Forces*, XXX, (1951-52), pp. 400-408. Pfautz' work is to be found in *Social Forces*, XXXIV, (1955-56), pp. 246-251, and in *American Journal of Sociology*, LXI (1955-56), pp. 121-128. *Amish Society* (1963) was published by The John Hopkins Press, Baltimore. Pauline Young's work on the Molokan sect was published by University of Chicago Press in 1932. My study of *Christian Church—Disciples of Christ* was published (1959) by Bethany Press, St. Louis.

for any concession which did not concern her creed.”<sup>16</sup> This can readily be seen as a statement about secularization if it is recognized that the phrase “ready for any concession which did not concern her creed” really refers to a what has so often turned out to be a cultural Achilles’ heel—the illusion that the consequences of a concession in one area of culture can be successfully quarantined.

That this understanding of secularization has a certain theoretical viability and contemporary relevance is made clear in Harold Pfautz’ use of the concept in this way. Defining secularization as “the tendency of sectarian religious movements and groups to become both part of and like ‘the world,’”<sup>17</sup> Pautz concludes on the basis of his data that the Christian Science movement has exhibited the process of secularization, as shown by “a tendency for the proportion of traditional and purposeful rational motives to increase, accompanied with a trend to decreasing affectual orientation; and. . . an increasingly secular social psychological texture.”<sup>18</sup> The referent for the terms “social psychological texture” here is type of motivation that predominantly informs the social relationships in the movement. In connection with the same study, Pfautz develops a typology of religious groups arranged in the order of increasing secularization: cult, sect, institutionalized sect, church, denomination. In constructing these types, the sociological perspectives employed were demographic, ecological, associational, structural, and social-psychological. On this basis, he rather convincingly shows that the sect-to-denomination process is one instance of the more general process of secularization, which, as he points out, is a general social process affecting economic and political, as well as religious, institutions.<sup>19</sup>

John Hostetler’s study of the Amish is interesting in connection with the view of secularization as increasing conformity to the world because, while tracing instances of secularization in this group, he also indicates some evidence of counter trends. “All human communities,” he writes, “. . . are changing. . . . Furthermore, social change is not a change in one direction. Change is not unidirectional but multidirectional. Social change does not necessarily proceed from the simple to the complex, nor do all societies go through certain presumed stages in the social evolutionary process. Changes in Amish society are not predestined to proceed from the sacred to the secular. . . . Not only have

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<sup>16</sup>Harnack, Adolph, *Monasticism: Its Ideals and History*. . . , Trans. E.E. Kellett, (New York, G. P. Putnam’s Sons, n.d.), pp. 28-29.

<sup>17</sup>Pfautz, Harold, “Christian Science: A Case Study of the Social Psychological Aspect of Secularization,” *Social Forces*, XXXIV, (1955-56), p. 246.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 251

<sup>19</sup>Pfautz, Harold, “The Sociology of Secularization: Religious Groups,” *American Journal of Sociology*, LXI, (1955-56), pp. 121, 128.

we found . . . a number of instances of secularization, but also the process of becoming more sacred, or what is called 'sacralization.'"<sup>20</sup> It is well to have this reminder, since it calls attention to the inadequacy of theories of social and cultural change that are based on notions of unilinearity.<sup>21</sup> A related point is that the Amish study also calls attention to the fact that secularization in general, and the sect-to-denomination in particular, are not inevitable; whether or not they have occurred is a matter for empirical investigation not determination on the basis of some *a priori* scheme.

While she does not use the term secularization (it does not even appear in the Index), Pauline Young's account of the Spiritual Christians of the Sect of Jumpers, otherwise known as the Molokans, is a vivid portrayal of the impact of secularization—understood as conformity to the world—upon a religious group. The struggle to perpetuate Molokanism in the urban environment of Los Angeles was apparently doomed to failure from the beginning (which is not to say inevitable—here a species of intellectual Monday-morning quarterbacking). Their life, we are told, "is strange and alien, first . . . because the Molokans are Russian; second, because they are a rural people . . . and finally, because they are a sect, a primitive religious group, who have sought to find somewhere within the limits of the world that is every day growing smaller . . . a place of refuge and escape from that world."<sup>22</sup> In the end, however, the search proved futile, for accommodation to the surrounding society, and the ways of its culture, did, in fact, take place. "The strict discipline within sect, the unquestioning loyalty of the members to its leaders, its ideals and its goals, its cherished traditions and its organized defenses, slowly weaken when the enemy without the walls ceases to attack the sect, or even assumes an indifferent attitude toward it. In the new urban environment the sectarian finds that it is not at all a dangerous enterprise to venture out into the outside world. In fact, if he is to subsist, he must cross the line sooner or later and participate in the industrial and economic world."<sup>23</sup> The theory of secularization as increasing conformity to the world has seldom been put more succinctly.

If secularization is seen as the process of disengagement of society from religion its end-result theoretically would be a situation in which

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<sup>20</sup>Hostetler, John, *Amish Society*, (Baltimore, John Hopkins Press, 1963), pp. 307-308.

<sup>21</sup>For a critique of unilinear conceptions of change, see Julian H. Steward, *Theory of Culture Change*, (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1955).

<sup>22</sup>Young, Pauline, *The Pilgrims of Russian-Town*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1932), pp. 2-3.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 274

religion would be of a purely inward character, thoroughly domesticated within the religious group, and having little or no effect upon institutional arrangements or corporate actions in the society. According to Shiner, the disengagement view gets us into intellectual difficulties, because it is almost impossible to decide when secularization in this sense has occurred, and because the notion of disengagement seems inevitably tinged with ideology. I shall reserve judgment on this until the next section of the paper. Here the important next move is to look at Shiner's suggestion that the difficulties to which he refers can be remedied by putting in the place of disengagement the idea of differentiation. Sociologists, notably Talcott Parsons, use this concept to refer to "the process by which simple structures are divided into *functionally* differing components, these components becoming relatively independent of one another, and then recombined into more complex structures in which the functions of the differentiated units are complementary."<sup>24</sup> The changes interpreted as differentiation do not lead to any tendency toward the dissolution of the structures involved. There may be, for any particular structure (such as familial or religious) a loss of functions, but this does not necessarily require us to conclude that these functions disappear from the society.<sup>25</sup> In fact, the chances that the function will be performed is increased by differentiation. "When two functions, previously embedded in the same structure, are subsequently performed by two newly differentiated structures, they can *both* be fulfilled more intensively and with a greater degree of freedom, of mobility."<sup>26</sup> Directly relevant to our present interest is the parallel that Parsons draws between what has happened to the family and what has happened to the church. "Churches," he points out, ". . . constitute only a small fraction of the framework of organization of a complex modern society while the rest of the society is specifically categorized as secular. . . . (T)he family has . . . also become a more differentiated, specialized agency, less diffusely embedded in larger social structures. . . . This differentiation does not . . . imply that . . . both have lost most of their 'importance' in modern society. It means that the influence they do exert is not through organizational jurisdiction over certain spheres of life . . . but through the value-commitments and motivational commitments of individuals."<sup>27</sup> Interpreted in this way, the changes in society and culture referred to as differentiation may lead to increasing inwardness and privatization of religion, but it does not necessarily follow that

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<sup>24</sup>Parsons, Talcott, *Social Structure and Personality*, (New York, The Free Press, 1964), p. 161.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 212-213.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 228.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 307.

religion has no effect upon institutional arrangements or corporate actions in society. To be sure, the situation is different from what it was in Medieval society. What seems to be crucial is how that difference is to be understood in terms of the functions of religion in personality, society, and culture.<sup>28</sup>

That structural differentiation may be a more accurate way to conceptualize the way in which contemporary social, economic, and cultural change may have affected the religious sphere than is disengagement is to be inferred from what sociologists Richard Peterson and N. J. Demerath III have pointed out in their Introduction to the softcover edition of Liston Pope's classic study of Gastonia, North Carolina, *MILLHANDS AND PREACHERS*. As is well-known, the processes of industrialization, urbanization, and bureaucratization are frequently cited as sources of both the "eclipse of community" (a phrase borrowed from the title of Maurice Stein's book on the subject) and the increasing evidence of secularization in society. Peterson and Demerath suggest that what the studies of American communities show is really more accurately viewed as structural differentiation. "In this process," they argue, "institutions are pulled out of the close articulation that characterizes the undifferentiated community. Politics, education, the family, the economy, and even religion become more specialized and more autonomous. The possibility of one dominating another grows more remote as each becomes an island unto itself."<sup>29</sup> With regard to the issue with which I am concerned in this paper—secularization, culture change, and religion—they are quite specific. "What are the implications of structural differentiation for religion?" they ask. "(I)n nondifferentiated communities the church is frequently forced to take sides whenever conflict occurs. Moreover, it is generally necessary for it to side with the dominant party. . . . But differentiation conduces to a new neutrality."<sup>30</sup> Specialization means that the church is often unaware of what is going on in other parts of the society, and very often crucial issues are decided in ways that cannot be reached by church influence. Differentiation may, then, relegate the church to the periphery, but this may be interpreted as both a gain and a loss. The price paid for ideological freedom may be the definition of the church as irrelevant. But how does one decide between them, if these are the choices? Peterson and Demerath's line of thought, then, would

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<sup>28</sup>Parsons explores this matter rather fully in his paper, "Christianity and Modern Industrial Society," in Tiryakian, Edward A., *Sociological Theory, Values, and Socio-Cultural Change*. (New York, The Free Press, 1963), pp. 33-70.

<sup>29</sup>Introduction to Pope, Liston, *Millhands and Preachers*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, Soft-cover Edition, 1965), pp. xxvi-xxvii.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, p. xxix



perhaps lend support to the notion that structural differentiation is a more useful approach to secularization than is the concept of disengagement, although they do not discuss the issue in these terms.

Shiner calls attention to the fact that historians who have pursued the disengagement approach to secularization view disengagement as taking both an institutional and an intellectual-existential form. The discussion of structural differentiation as preferable to disengagement has already included attention to the institutional aspect of the changes dealt with in terms of this approach. Something needs to be said about the intellectual-existential aspect. In terms of this aspect, secularization may be thought of as the process of attempting to establish "an autonomous sphere of knowledge purged of supernatural, fideistic presuppositions."<sup>81</sup> The details of the description of this process are recounted in any serious study of the intellectual history of western man. The process has had its greatest impact at the point of the development of science. The intellectual and practical success of science (and its outcomes in technology) were, in an important sense, made possible by the disengagement of the pursuit of certain kinds of knowledge from the prevailing world-view in the western world, from the sixteenth century until the present (the date is arbitrary). "As long as men looked for scientific knowledge primarily as theologians or as artists," writes historian John Nef, "they were unable to handle it with the peculiar precision and positive accuracy that characterize modern science. . . . What distinguishes modern science from all science of the past is . . . the rigor with which the scientists have confined themselves . . . to the objective analysis and examination of matter, space, time and motion. . . . The price was a divorce of the subject-matter and the methods of science from those of art."<sup>82</sup> This disengagement certainly involved a gradual shift in world-view which made it possible for the pursuit of knowledge to go on on terms other than those set by religious authority or theological considerations. The shift in world-view involved a radical change in the view taken of the relation of man and nature. "Just as it was thoroughly natural for medieval thinkers to view nature as subservient to man's knowledge, purpose, and destiny," writes Edwin A. Burt, "so now it has become natural to view her as existing and operating in her own self-contained independence, and so far as man's ultimate relation to her is clear at all, to consider his knowledge and purpose somehow produced by her, and his destiny wholly de-

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<sup>81</sup>Groethuysen, Bernhard, *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, XIII, (New York, Macmillan, 1934), p. 631.

<sup>82</sup>Nef, John U., *Cultural Foundations of Industrial Civilization*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1958), p. 23.

pendent on her.”<sup>33</sup> Secularization in intellectual-existential terms, then, has been (in so far as it has taken place) a matter not only of the disengagement of the pursuit of knowledge from religious sanction, but also of a kind of new spirit, expressing an increasing interest in human life as it might be lived out in *this* space and *this* time, without any reference to, or concern for, any future destiny.<sup>34</sup>

If secularization is taken to be a process of the transposition of religious beliefs and institutions, then what is involved is that things once understood to be of divine origin are increasingly viewed as being of human creation. The theoretical limit of secularization viewed in this way would be a society in which the functions performed by religion have been taken over by other agencies. In this connection, Ernst Troeltsch speaks of the “secularization of intense religious emotions”<sup>35</sup> that has taken place in modern art and poetry (in both of which sexual feelings have been severed from the notion of original sin), and of the “secularization of Christian eschatology”<sup>36</sup> that is evident in the development of the notion of progress. Concerning the secularization of Christian eschatology, it is instructive to turn to the comments of Carl Becker, who, in his little classic in the history of ideas and the sociology of knowledge, *THE HEAVENLY CITY OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY PHILOSOPHERS*, traces what happened to the kingdom of God at the hands of the philosophers of the enlightenment “(T)he doctrine of progress, of perfectibility, became an essential article of faith in the new religion of humanity. . . . (T)he utopian dream of perfection, that necessary compensation for the limitations and frustrations of the present state, having been long identified with the golden age or the Garden of Eden or life eternal in the Heavenly City of God, and then by the sophisticated transferred to remote or imagined lands (the moon or Atlantis or Nowhere, Tahiti or Pennsylvania or Peking), was at last projected into the life of man on earth and identified with the desired and hoped-for-regeneration of society.”<sup>37</sup> Like the kingdom of God, this one did not come either, for what men who hoped for the coming of this heavenly city got instead was the French Revolution. There have been variations on this theme, one of which is the idea that the Marxist version of the revolution can

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<sup>33</sup>Burt, Edwin A., *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science*, (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1927) pp. 10-11.

<sup>34</sup>On the developments briefly referred to here, see the old, but still very useful volume by John Herman Randall, *The Making of the Modern Mind*, (New York, Houghton-Mifflin, 1926).

<sup>35</sup>Troeltsch, Ernst, *Protestantism and Progress*, (Boston, Beacon Press, 1953), p. 96.

<sup>36</sup>Troeltsch, Ernst, *Der Historismus und seine Probleme*, (Tubingen, M.C.B. Mohr, 1922), p. 57.

<sup>37</sup>Becker, Carl L., *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1932), p. 139.

be traced back to some roots in the eschatological ideology of the Judeo-Christian faith.

Under the rubric of secularization as transposition it has also been suggested that psychotherapy represents a secularization of the confessional, that it is the end-point in a series of developments that take us from the shepherd-flock relationship of the priest and his people to the professional-client relationship of the therapist and his patients. I cannot trace these developments here, but I think it is of the utmost importance to recognize, with Phillip Rieff, that we now live in the age of psychological man, the chief characteristic of which is, in his phrase **THE TRIUMPH OF THE THERAPEUTIC**. There is an important sense in which this triumph may be described as an instance of secularization by transposition. Rieff puts it this way. "Religious man was born to be saved; psychological man is born to be pleased. The difference was established long ago, when 'I believe,' the cry of the ascetic, lost precedence to 'one feels,' the caveat of the therapeutic. And if the therapeutic is to win out, then surely the psychotherapist will be his secular spiritual guide."<sup>38</sup> Both the continuity and discontinuity of contemporary psychotherapy (especially in its group form) with earlier forms of religious belief and expression are striking. The comparison between the earlier form (religious) and the later form (psychotherapeutic) of this kind of human behavior seems to offer some warrant for thinking that the development of psychotherapy may indeed be an instance of secularization by transposition. Thus, Rieff goes on to say that "inevitably, group therapies develop sacramental modes of overcoming individual isolation. Group psychotherapy follows the form of commitment therapy without its doctrinal content. It is as if Wesley's famous classes continued to meet, for intense supportive discussions, without the basic conceptual scheme expressed in the theology. . ."<sup>39</sup> Psychotherapy may, Rieff believes, finally be reconciled with religiosity, finding its legitimation in society as a post-religious science of moral management, but churchmen will be able fully to participate in this movement only if they divest themselves completely of their traditional religious involvements. At least, that is the way the world looks to psychological man, now under the sway of the therapeutic Weltanschauung.<sup>40</sup>

If secularization is defined as the desacralization of the world, the process is one in which man and nature are increasingly thought of as *objects* of rational explanation, to be manipulated for pragmatic and

<sup>38</sup>Rieff, Phillip, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, (New York, Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 24-25.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 77-78

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 259, 251-252.

this-worldly ends, a process which would ultimately culminate in a completely rational society, from which all traces of the supernatural and of feeling for the mystery of existence have been removed. The essence of this (as of the others already discussed) view of secularization has been captured by the writings of historian Eric Kahler, whose *MAN THE MEASURE* is a brilliant account of many of the trends we have been tracing. Describing secularization as desacralization, he writes that "it was the crumbling of the idea of a sanctified universe and the withering of the power of religion over man, it was, in brief, the process of secularization that divorced man from nature and freed his reason for mastering, exploring, and exploiting the forces of the profane and material world."<sup>41</sup> The process could be seen, Kahler argues, even in the development of asceticism, as reinterpreted by Luther, for whom asceticism meant doing one's daily work wherever God saw fit to place him. When holy work is minimized, and man is justified by faith alone, that faith can finally be demonstrated only by profane works, that is, in a worldly calling.<sup>42</sup> In the final analysis, then, secularization comes to mean that "the earthly realm becomes autonomous, that man became independent of religion and lived by reason, face to face with objectivated, physical nature."<sup>43</sup> Kahler certainly envisaged that secularization *could* reach its culmination (indeed he says that it already *has* done so), for he points out that "this process of secularization culminated either in the complete dissolution of religion, or — in so far as it still persisted — in its elimination from everyday life."<sup>44</sup>

No discussion of secularization as desacralization would be complete without reference to Max Weber's work on "disenchantment of the world." Weber's central rubric for the interpretation of trends in western society was the principle of rationalization. The concept of rationalization is relevant to the present subject, since for Weber "the extent and direction of 'rationalization' is measured negatively in terms of the degree to which magical elements of thought are displaced, or positively by the extent to which ideas gain in systematic coherence and naturalistic consistency."<sup>45</sup> The process of rationalization, as it unfolds, changes men's sense of his place in the world; man becomes disenchanted as more and more of his world becomes desacralized. Concerning this, Weber says in an essay on "Science as a Vocation,"

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<sup>41</sup>Kahler, Eric, *Man the Measure*, (New York, George Braziller, 1956), p 236

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid*, p 253

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid*, p 333

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid*, p 465

<sup>45</sup>Gerth, Hans H and Mills, C Wright, *From Max Weber Essays in Sociology*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1946), p 51

that as Hellenic man at times sacrificed to Aphrodite and at other times to Apollo, . . . so do we still nowadays, only the bearing of man has been disenchantment and denuded of its mystical but inwardly genuine plasticity."<sup>46</sup> A thoroughly rationalized conception of the world, and of life, Weber says, has the effect of shifting religion into the realm of the irrational,<sup>47</sup> and there is always tension between religion and the sphere of intellect when rationalization has proceeded far enough to bring about "the disenchantment of the world and its transformation into a causal mechanism."<sup>48</sup> Weber seems to have held the view that rationalization would become, in the end, its own nemesis.<sup>49</sup> For the purposes of this paper, however, the exegesis of Weber's thought cannot be pursued further.

The understanding of secularization as desecralization has been pursued most recently by theologian Harvey Cox, whose work on secularization is cited here primarily because his volume *THE SECULAR CITY* has been so widely discussed in religious circles, and because his response to the process expresses a somewhat unexpected development, the secularization of theology to the point where it becomes necessary to speak, perhaps paradoxically, of the emergence of the secular theologians. For Cox, secularization — the getting rid of religious and quasi-religious understandings of the world, the dispelling of closed world-views, the breaking of supernatural myths and symbols, the defatalization of the world — is a cause for celebration.<sup>50</sup> The beginnings of secularization are to be found in the faith expressed in the Bible, where it takes the forms of disenchantment of nature, desecralization of politics, and deconsecration of values.<sup>51</sup> The Hebrew view of creation broke through the magical world-view of primitive man when it separated nature from God and distinguished man from nature, and this is the beginning of the disenchantment process. Nature could then be seen in a matter-of-fact way, and need not be viewed as having a quasi-divine status.<sup>52</sup> The desecralization of politics can be traced to the exodus of the Hebrews out of Egypt, for in this event it became possible to encounter the divine (Yahweh) not through natural phenomena, but through an historical event. The Exodus symbolized man's deliverance from the political sphere understood as sacred into the world of history and change. Attempts have been made since to return

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 148

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 281

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 350.

<sup>49</sup>On this problem of Weber exegesis and interpretation, see Robert Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition*, (New York, Basic Books, 1966), especially pp. 292-300.

<sup>50</sup>Cox, Harvey, *The Secular City*, (New York, Macmillan, 1965), p. 2.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 22.

the political to the sacral realm, but they have in most cases failed.<sup>53</sup> The deconsecration of values is related to the Old Testament belief in Yahweh, whose commandment against idolatry specifically stated in the prohibition against the making of idols or images) lays the groundwork for the relativizing of all gods and values.<sup>54</sup> Since the origins of secularization lie in the faith set forth in the Bible, those whose orientation to life is shaped by that faith should not become adversaries of secularization, but instead should oppose movements that would thwart or try to reverse the trend.<sup>55</sup> At the moment, I am not concerned to discuss the question of whether this is a correct, relevant, or viable response to the secularization process. I note only the fact that this is one response that it is possible to make, and that it is influential among certain theologians.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>56</sup>The literature on this is too voluminous to take full note of here. A few of the sources would include Bishop John A.T. Robinson's *Honest to God*, (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1963); Paul Van Buren's *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel*, (New York, Macmillan, 1966); Larry Shiner, *The Secularization of History*, (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1966); Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, (London, Collins, Fontana Books, 1959); A counter view is stated by E. L. Mascall, in his *The Secularization of Christianity*, (London, Libra Books, 1965).

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