Religious Mobilizations

Charles Taylor

For those who see secularism as part of modernity, and modernity as fundamentally progress, the last few decades have been painful and bewildering. Powerful political mobilizations that appear to center on religion seem to betoken a return of what had already been safely relegated to the past. Religion seemed to be wreaking a terrible revenge for its previous marginalization, not only in the world at large but even in the most powerful Western liberal democracy, the United States. Liberals spoke darkly of a relapse into the medieval, into irrationality.

There is some truth in this picture. The notion of revenge here does point to the way in which these religious mobilizations are reactive, at times feeding on a previous process of secularization perceived as a threat. But in general, this common view suffers from a defective understanding of both modernity and secularization. There is not one thing, called "religion," which previously receded and is now coming back, like some raging tsunami. What we call secularization is a process that deeply destabilized and marginalized earlier forms of religion; but, partly as a consequence of this, new forms have arisen. The forms that are now "returning" in strength are thoroughly modern, and we cannot understand either them or modernity if we ignore this.

Ironically, the most obvious site of novelty lies in what are called, in the rough and rather confused language of media commentary, "fundamentalisms." These are usually so called because they see themselves as harking back to earlier, purer forms of religion, beyond the recent compromises of modernism. So Protestant fundamentalism sees itself as returning to the purity of the Reformation *sola scriptura* (by scripture alone), which in turn saw itself as a return to primitive Christianity. Influential Islamicist Sayyid Qutb proposes to return to the principles alive in the first polity established by the Prophet and his companions. The irony and pathos here lie in the fact that precisely these attempts to return to purer

Public Culture 18:2 DOI 10.1215/08992363-2006-004

forms are the sites of the most startling innovations; what is more, they feed on those innovations that are usually seen as quintessentially modern.

Thus the notion of literal Biblical inerrancy, with its clear distinction from and hostility to the figurative, is plainly part of the culture that has developed around modern positivistic science. Evolutionary theory has to be opposed by "creation science." Augustine, one of the great reference figures for Western Protestantism, would be bewildered by this discourse, recognizing as he did many levels of meaning in the Biblical text. Protestant fundamentalists deviate from age-old Christian orthodoxy precisely in their wholesale acceptance of this modern positivist literalism, all the while loudly proclaiming their fidelity to the original pure form of Christianity.

In this essay, I want to explore some of these contemporary forms of religion, which are modern partly in that they involve what we can call *mobilization*. What do I mean by mobilization here? One obvious facet of its meaning is that it designates a process whereby people are persuaded, pushed, dragooned, or bullied into new forms of social and religious association. This generally means that they are induced through the actions of governments, church hierarchies, or other elites not only to adopt new structures but also, to some extent, to alter their social imaginaries and sense of legitimacy, as well as their sense of what is crucially important in their lives or society. Described in this way, mobilization was already taking place during the English Reformation and the French Counter-Reformation of the seventeenth century. But these changes were taking place within a wider social context, that of the political kingdom and church, which were seen not as the products of mobilization but, on the contrary, as already there, the unchanging and unchangeable backdrop of all legitimacy.

But in an age of mobilization, this backdrop is no longer there. It becomes clearer and clearer that whatever political, social, and ecclesial structures we desire must be mobilized into existence. This eventually becomes evident even to "reactionaries," whose paradigms are found in the ancien régime. They are often forced to act on this understanding before they can bring themselves to recognize it. But sooner or later, their discourse changes, and the features of the old order that they want to reinstate become forms to be established—eternally valid, perhaps, because willed by God or in conformity with Nature, but still an ideal yet to be realized and not already there. As this understanding dawns across the political and ecclesial spectrum, we enter the age of mobilization.

The ancien régime model interwove church and state, and it presented us as living in a hierarchical order that had divine endorsement. In societies, on this model, the presence of God was unavoidable; authority itself was bound up with

the divine, and various invocations of God were inseparable from public life. But there was more than one form of this in our past. Between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, we moved from that original model, which was alive in the Middle Ages and in a number of non-Western cultures, to another, very different one. It is this second one that defines what I want to call the "mobilization type."

The earlier, ancien régime form was connected to what one might call an "enchanted world." This is obviously borrowing from Max Weber and introducing the antonym to his term disenchanted. In an enchanted world there is a strong contrast between the sacred and the profane. By the sacred, I mean certain places (such as churches), certain agents (such as priests), certain times (such as high feasts), and certain actions (such as saying the Mass) in which the divine or the holy is present. In comparison to these, other places, people, times, and actions may count as profane.

In an enchanted world, there is an obvious way in which God can be present in society: in the locus of the sacred. Political society can be closely connected to these sacred forms and can itself be thought to exist on a higher plane. Ernst Kantorowicz tells us that one of the first uses of the term *mystical body* in European history referred to the French kingdom.[1] The king himself could be one of the links between the planes, represented respectively by the king's mortal and undying bodies.

In other words, in these earlier societies, the kingdom existed not only in ordinary, secular time, in which a strong transitivity rule held, but also in higher times. There are, of course, different kinds of higher times—Platonist eternity, where there is a level in which we are beyond the flux altogether; God's eternity as understood in the Christian tradition, as a kind of gathering of time together; and various times of origins, in Mircea Eliade's sense.

Now, with advancing disenchantment (especially in Protestant societies), another model took shape, with relation to both the cosmos and the polity. In this, the notion of design was crucial. As this model manifested itself in regard to the cosmos, there was a shift from the enchanted world to a cosmos conceived in conformity with post-Newtonian science, in which there is absolutely no question of higher meanings being expressed in the universe around us. But there is still, with someone like Newton himself, for instance, a strong sense that the universe declares the glory of God. This is evident in its design, its beauty, its regularity, but also in its having evidently been shaped to conduce to the welfare

1. Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997).

of his creatures, particularly ourselves, the superior creatures who cap it all off. Now the presence of God no longer lies in the sacred, because this category fades in a disenchanted world. But he can be thought to be no less powerfully present through his design.

This presence of God in the cosmos is matched by another idea: his presence in the polity. Here an analogous change takes place. The divine isn't present in a king who straddles the planes. But it can be present to the extent that we build a society that plainly follows God's design. This can be supplemented with an idea of moral order that is seen as established by God, in the way invoked, for example, in the American Declaration of Independence: men have been created equal and have been endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights.

The idea of moral order that is expressed in this declaration, and which has since become dominant in our world, is what I have been calling the modern moral order. It is quite different from the orders that preceded it, because it starts from individuals and doesn't see them as set a priori within a hierarchical order outside of which they wouldn't be fully human agents. Its members are not agents who are essentially embedded in a society that in turn reflects and connects with the cosmos but, rather, disembedded individuals who come to associate together. The design underlying the association is that each, in pursuing his or her own purposes in life, acts in mutual benefit with others. It calls for a society structured for mutual benefit, in which each respects the rights of others and which offers them mutual help of certain kinds. The most influential early articulator of this formula is John Locke, but the basic conception of such an order of mutual service has come down to us through a series of variants, including more radical ones such as those presented by Rousseau and Marx.[2]

But in the earlier days, when the plan was understood as providential and the order seen as natural law, which is the same as the law of God, building a society that fulfills these requirements was seen as fulfilling the design of God. To live in such a society was to live in one where God was present—not at all in the way that belonged to the enchanted world, through the sacred, but because that society was following his design. God is present as the designer of the way we live. We see ourselves, to quote a famous phrase, as "one nation under God."

In taking the United States as a paradigm case of this new idea of order, I am following Robert Bellah's tremendously fertile idea of an American "civil

2. I have discussed this at greater length in *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004).

religion."[3] Of course, the concept is understandably and rightly contested today because some of the conditions of this religion are now being challenged, but there is no doubt that Bellah has captured something essential about American society, both at its inception and for about two centuries thereafter.

The fundamental idea that America had a vocation to carry out God's purposes, which alone makes sense of the passages Bellah quotes (for instance, Kennedy's inaugural address and Lincoln's second inaugural address) and which can seem strange and threatening to many unbelievers in America today, has to be understood in relation to this conception of order involving free, rights-bearing individuals. This was what was invoked in the Declaration of Independence, which appealed to "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God." The rightness of these laws, for both deists and theists, was grounded in their being part of the providential design. What the activism of the American revolutionaries added to this was a view of history as the theater in which this design was to be progressively realized, and of their own society as the place where this realization was to be consummated—what Lincoln would later refer to as "the last best hope on earth." It was this notion of themselves as fulfilling divine purposes that, along with the Biblical culture of Protestant America, facilitated the analogy with ancient Israel that often recurred in early American official rhetoric.[4]

The confusion today arises from the fact that there is both continuity and discontinuity. What continues is the importance of some form of the modern idea of moral order. It is this that gives the sense that Americans are still operating on the same principles as the country's founders. The rift comes from the fact that what makes this order the right one is, for many (though not, by any means, for all), no longer God's Providence; the order is grounded in nature alone, or in some concept of civilization, or even in supposedly unchallengeable a priori principles, often inspired by Kant. Thus some Americans want to rescue the Constitution from God, whereas others, with deeper historical roots, see this as doing violence to it: hence the contemporary American Kulturkampf.

I will call this kind of link between religion and the state "neo-Durkheimian,"[5] contrasting it, on the one hand, to the paleo-Durkheimian mode of baroque Catholic societies and, on the other, to more recent societal forms in which the

3. Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," in *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

4. See Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," chapter 9.

5. For a fuller discussion of this term, see my *Varieties of Religion Today* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), chapter 3.

spiritual dimension of existence is quite unhooked from the political. The "paleo" phase corresponds to a situation in which a sense of the ontic dependence of the state on God and higher times is still alive, even though it may be weakened by disenchantment and an instrumental spirit; whereas in "neo" societies, God is present because it is his design around which society is organized. It is this which we concur on as the identifying common description of our society and what we could call its political identity.

If we look at this anglophone trajectory, we can see that, unlike the baroque one, where the church almost inevitably generated counterforces, it can sustain a high level of religious belief and practice. Resentment at the power of elites and estrangement from their spiritual style can find expression in another mode of Christian life and worship. Popular groups can find and live by their own spiritual style, as the "enthusiastic" Methodists did in eighteenth-century England, the Baptists did in the rural United States, and the Evangelicals and the Pentecostalists are doing today in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Alienation from a Northeast dominated by genteel Episcopalians and Presbyterians can take the form of passionate, born-again Evangelicalism in the South and West.

At the same time, belief is sustained by the neo-Durkheimian identification with the state. Over a long period, for many English, Christianity of a certain Protestant variety was identified with certain moral standards, often summed up using the word *decency*,[6] and England was thought to be the preeminent carrier of this variety on the world scene. This complex of beliefs and norms was what we could call the "established synthesis," and, for many people, was central to the creation of English patriotism. Many Protestant Americans, and latterly some Catholic ones, have thought that the United States has a providential mission to spread liberal democracy among the rest of humankind.

In this neo-Durkheimian form, religious belonging is central to political identity. But the religious dimension also figures in what we might call the civilizational identity, the sense people have that the basic order by which they live, even imperfectly, is good and (usually) is superior to the ways of life of outsiders, be they "barbarians," "savages," or (in more polite contemporary language) "less developed" peoples.

In fact, most of the time, we relate to the order established in our civilization the way people have always related to their most fundamental sense of order: we have a sense of security in believing that order actually exists in our world, and

6. The connection of Christianity with decency in England has been noted by David Martin in *Dilemmas of Contemporary Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), 122.

we also have a sense of our own superiority and goodness deriving from the confidence that we participate in it and uphold it. This means that we can react with great insecurity when we see that our order can be breached from outside, as at the World Trade Center, but also that we are even more shaken when we feel that it might be undermined from within, or that we might be betraying it. In the latter case, it is not only our security that is threatened, it is also our sense of our own integrity and goodness. To see this questioned is profoundly unsettling, threatening ultimately our ability to act.

This is why, in earlier times, we see people lashing out at such moments of threat in scapegoating violence against "the enemy within." In other words, they meet the threat to their security by dealing with the threat to their group's integrity, deflecting the threatening features onto scapegoats. In earlier periods of Latin Christendom, Jews and witches were cast in this unenviable role. The evidence that we are still tempted to turn to similar mechanisms in our so-called enlightened age is unsettling. But it would not be the first such paradox in history if a doctrine of peaceful universalism were invoked to mobilize scapegoating violence.[7]

The point I want to make about British and later American patriotism, based as it was at first on the sense of fulfilling God's design, is that national identity was based on a self-ascribed preeminence in realizing a certain civilizational superiority. The superiority may have ultimately been understood as that of Christendom over infidel religions, but within Christendom, Britain and America stood at the cutting edge.

This sense of superiority was, of course, originally religious. It goes without saying that in Christendom the sense of civilizational order was inseparable from Christianity. But what this meant evolved over time; and here too we must make a distinction between premodern and modern forms. Reformation, in both its Catholic and Protestant variants, involved a strong moralization—that is, the Christian faith was identified with a more stringent code of order and self-restraint.

We can see many examples of this link between Reformation and moral stringency, but the most impressive connection is visible in what are loosely called "evangelical" modes of revival, which were widespread in Britain and America from the end of the eighteenth century.[8] At their most intense, these centered on

7. This whole issue of violence in modernity deserves further extensive treatment, especially taking account of the pathbreaking work of René Girard.

8. I have drawn here on the valuable discussions in Hugh McLeod's *Religion and the People of Western Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 36–43; John Wolffe's *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland, 1843–1945* (London: Routledge, 1994),

certain central doctrines of the Reformation: our sinful condition and the need for conversion, turning to God in faith, which would open us to his grace. The stress was often on this conversion as a personal act, undertaken for oneself, rather than as a disposition inhering in the group; and it was often taken, dramatically, under the press of powerful emotions and in public.

Here was a powerful transformation perspective, in the terms of my earlier discussion: defined, on the one side, by a deep, potentially overpowering sense of sin and imperfection and, on the other, by an overwhelming feeling of the love of God and its power to heal—amazing grace. As in the earlier Reformation, this new empowerment was meant to yield fruit in an ordered life. And order and disorder were conceived in terms that were very understandable given the common predicament of many at that time who were often struggling to find their feet in a more and more market-driven economy, where survival often depended on adaptation to new conditions such as migration and new work disciplines outside of traditional social forms. The danger was of sinking into forms of behavior that were idle, irresponsible, undisciplined, and wasteful. And behind these lay the lure of traditional modes of recreation and conviviality that could immure you in such dysfunctional forms—traditions such as, in the first place, drink and the tavern. This is why temperance was one of the central goals of evangelical cultures, in a way that sounds totally excessive to many contemporary ears. We are perhaps sobered (if that's the word), however, when we learn how much of a curse drink could be; for instance, in the United States in the 1820s, the liquor consumption per capita was four times what it is today.[9]

Along with drink (also aiding and abetting it) were other favored activities: cruel sports, gambling, sexual promiscuity. This understanding of disorder targeted certain long-standing male forms of conviviality outside the family. The new understanding of order was family-centered, and it often involved identifying the male as the source of potential disruption and the female as victim and guardian of this ordered domestic space. Callum Brown even speaks here of a "demonization" of male qualities, and a "feminization of piety."[10] Order required the male to be a family man and a good provider, and this required that he become edu-

20–30; and David Hempton's *Religion and Political Culture in Britain and Ireland: From the Glorious Revolution to the Decline of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), chapter 2.

9. Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 206.

10. Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London: Routledge, 2001), chapters 4–5.

cated, disciplined, and a hard worker. Sobriety, industry, and discipline were the principal virtues. Education and self-help were highly valued qualities. By attaining these, the man acquired a certain dignity, that of a free, self-governing agent. The goal could be captured in two terms: on the one hand, the respectability that went with an ordered life has been much stressed; but, along with this, we should place free agency and the dignity of the citizen. Evangelicalism was basically an antihierarchical force, thus part of the drive for democracy.

This connection of salvation and sanctity with a certain moral order in our lives reminds us of the Reformation, of which evangelicalism is in a sense a reprise, in different circumstances and with an even more central emphasis on personal commitment. We can also look in the other direction and note how this movement carries on in our day, not so much in its home terrain of Britain and the United States (though it is still very strong in the latter), but nowadays in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.[11] In these places we can note the same connection between accepting salvation and putting a certain kind of order in one's life, so that men in Latin America become more family centered, deserting certain kinds of male conviviality that stress machismo and becoming sober and good providers. Indeed, we might even extend the comparison to include non-Christian movements like the Nation of Islam in the United States.[12]

Quite naturally, then, the modern sense of civilizational order is closely bound up with a stringent moral code. Our order is dependent on our maintaining this code, rather than in our fidelity to certain rituals or our maintaining a certain spiritual stance, as is the case with other links between religion and civilization.

Thus in the beleaguered and embattled Catholic churches of Europe, in the aftermath of the French Revolution, the sense was strong that they offered the only possible bulwark of civilizational order. The claim was frequently made by the church in France, and accepted by many in the possessing classes, that Catholicism was the only defense against the destructive disorders of revolution, whose return was a constant menace. But the idea was not just that only the church could persuade people to obey due authority, it was also that the very basis of morality and social and family life would crumble away without the constant and patient work of dedicated clergy. As the Curé d'Ars himself once put it: "Laissez une

11. See David Martin's *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) and *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

12. Sociologists have noticed similar effects flowing from strong (re)conversions to Islam in contemporary France; see Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Le pélerin et le converti* (*The Pilgrim and the Convert*) (Paris: Flammarion, 1999), 142–43.

paroisse vingt ans sans prêtre, on y adorera des bêtes" ("Leave a parish twenty years, and they'll be adoring beasts").[13]

Here was a strongly clericalist form of the doctrine; but without this nuance, there were analogies to views held across the Channel by Evangelicals, and indeed many others, to the effect that basic morality could not long survive the demise of religion. A common view among churchgoers was, as Jeffrey Cox put it, that "society would fall apart without morality, morality was impossible without religion, and religion would disappear without the churches."[14] To quote from the Duke of Devonshire in a speech to supporters of the South London Church Fund,

> Can you imagine for one moment what England would have been like today without those churches and all that those churches mean? . . . Certainly it would not have been safe to walk the streets. All respect, decency, all those things which tend to make modern civilization what it is would not have been in existence. You can imagine what we should have had to pay for our police, for lunatic asylums, for criminal asylums. . . . The charges would have been increased hundredfold if it had not been for the work the church has done and is doing today.[15]

The Duke was perhaps mainly referring to the churches' philanthropic work in this speech, but this was plainly part of a more fundamental point about the moral bases of civilizational order.

In most Christian sentiment of this age, the issue was not the one many believers might raise today: whether one should restrict one's goals to a purely human fulfillment or open a transcendent perspective to something more than this. In the dominant outlook, then, this first option didn't exist. Unless one reached out to something beyond, to God and salvation through Jesus Christ, the conditions of even the most basic human fulfillment would crumble in immorality and disorder. This view is still defended in some circles today, but a century ago it was standard and hegemonic among Christian believers.

Now this religio-moral link can and does undergo a secularization as the sense of civilizational superiority becomes detached from Providence and attributed

13. Philippe Boutry, *Prêtres et paroisses* (*Priests and Parishes*) (Paris: Cerf, 1986), 344, also 380, where he speaks of the self-given "mission morale, sociale, et pour tout dire civilisatrice de l'Église dans le 'monde.'" Yves-Marie Hilaire evokes the same idea in *Une Chrétienneté au XIXe Siècle* (*A Christendom in the Nineteenth Century*) (Lille, France: PUL, 1977), 1:305.

14. Jeffrey Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 271.

15. Cox, *The English Churches*, 109–10.

to race, or Enlightenment, or even some combination of the two. But the point of identifying here this sense of order is that it provides another niche, as it were, in which God can be present in our lives, or in our social imaginary—as the author not just of the design that defines our political identity, but also of the design that defines civilizational order.

But why distinguish them, when they so obviously go together in the paradigm case of the United States? Because they don't always fit together in this way but can operate separately. It is a notion absolutely crucial to much of Christian apologetics, from the French Revolution onward, that the Christian faith is essential to the maintenance of civilizational order, whether this is defined in terms of the modern moral order or in terms of an earlier hierarchical complementarity. This is the very staple of counterrevolutionary thought as it flows from the pen, for instance, of Joseph de Maistre. But one can hear something similar today, in a quite neo-Durkheimian context, from some parts of the religious Right in the United States. The doctrine is that our order is not stable unless based on an explicit recognition that we are following God's plan. So much for the belief involved.

But this belief issues in a social imaginary that either our order is now stable, because we are following God's plan, or our order is threatened, because we are deviating from the plan. This sense of the presence (or the threatened absence) of God in our world, as the designer and guarantor of the civilizational order, can be very present, even where it is not linked with a sense that our nation singles itself out by its preeminence in realizing his order. It may be relatively unhooked from our political identity. At the risk of calling attention to my personal standpoint, I will say that the self-arrogation of such a vanguard position is more likely (at least over the long run) among hegemonic powers. It's more difficult to think that you are at the cutting edge of human history if you come from Norway, or Belgium, or Canada. But people in these smaller nations can still have a sense of God as the basis of their civilizational order.

But it may also work the other way around. God may be central to our political identity without this identity being essential to the broader social order. Thus, in the course of modern history, confessional allegiances have come to be woven into the sense of identity of certain ethnic, national, class, or regional groups.

We can discern here one application of a pattern that is central to what we might call the age of mobilization. The modern citizen social imaginary contrasts with various premodern forms in that these latter forms reflect an embedded understanding of human life. In relation to an ancien régime kingdom, we are seen as already defined (and having been so since time out of mind) as subjects of the king; or, placed even more exactly, as serfs of a lord, who holds from a

duke, who holds from the king; or, alternatively, as bourgeois of this city; or as members of this cathedral chapter, which is under this bishop, who relates to both pope and king; and so on. Our relation to the whole is mediated. The modern citizen imaginary, on the other hand, sees us all as coming together to form this political entity, to which we all relate in the same way, as equal members. This entity has to be (or had to be, if it's already up and running) constructed. However much various modern ideologies, like nationalism, may convince us that we were always members of people *X* (even though our ancestors didn't fully realize it and were even forced or induced to speak people *Y*'s language), and however much this gives us the vocation to construct our own state, *X*-land, nevertheless this state has (or had) to be constructed. People need to be convinced that they were really *X*s, and not *Y*s.

Two related ideas are crucial to this self-understanding. The first is that realizing who we really are (*X*s) requires mobilization. We had to be brought to act together to erect our state: rebel against the *Y*s, or appeal to the League of Nations, and so forth. And the second is that this mobilization is inseparable from a (re)definition of identity: we have to define ourselves, saliently, even sometimes primarily, as *X*s, and not as a host of other things that we also are or could be (Catholic-Uniates, or members of a certain village, or just peasants).

These new entities—citizen states or other products of mobilization—are ordered around certain common poles of identity; let's call them political identities. This doesn't have to be focused around a linguistically defined nation, of course (though it often has been in the West). The pole of identity can be a religious confession, it can be certain principles of government (as in revolutionary France and the United States), it can be historical links, and so on.

This allows us to see the U.S. case as one example of a widespread feature of the modern world, in the age of mobilization. Political identities can also be woven around religious or confessional definitions. Britain and the United States are powerful, independent nations. But the confessional kind of identification often happens with marginal or oppressed populations. The Polish and Irish Catholic identities are well-known cases in point. The erstwhile French Canadian case is another.

The link here between group and confession is not of the ancien régime type that we saw in counterrevolutionary France, even though the same Catholic Church is involved. The throne and the altar can't be allied, because the throne is alien—not just when it is Lutheran, Anglican, or Orthodox, but even when or where it is Catholic (as in Vienna). Resentment toward elites becomes marginal to the extent that these elites lose power and privilege. But the sense of national

domination and oppression, the sense of virtue in suffering and struggle, is deeply interwoven with religious belief and allegiance—even to the point of such rhetorical excesses as the depiction of Poland as Christ crucified among the nations. The result is what I'm calling a neo-Durkheimian effect, where the senses of belonging to group and confession are fused, and the moral issues of the group's history tend to be coded in religious categories. (The rival language for oppressed people was always that of the French Revolution, which had its moments in each of the subaltern nations mentioned here: the United Irish, Papineau's rebellion in 1837, Dabrowski's legion; but in each case, the Catholic coding later took the upper hand.)

My neo-Durkheimian category can even be expanded to include a founding of political identity on an antireligious philosophical stance, such as we saw with the long-standing republican French identity. The long-standing *guerre franco-française*, the French ideological civil war, was in this sense fought between two neo-Durkheimian identities. These then contrast with other kinds of political identities, those founded on a supposed linguistic-historical nation, for instance, or on a certain constitutional order.

This last, French case shows that neo-Durkheimian identity mobilization extends well beyond established nations, or even wannabe nations, like Poland or Ireland. There are also cases of confessional mobilization that aims at political impact, even where this is purely defensive and can't hope to result in independent nationhood, as with Catholics in Germany during the Kulturkampf or Dutch pillarization.

Now this phenomenon, religiously defined political-identity mobilization, obviously has a tremendous present and (I fear) future in our world. I want to return to this in a later section of this essay. But for the moment, I want to point out that, where this phenomenon takes hold, a potential decline in belief and practice is retarded or fails to occur. This easily gives rise to a misunderstanding in the climate of contemporary sociology with its rather secular mind-set. Once again, as with Evangelicalism or the anglophone nations mentioned above, we may be tempted to say of these situations that religion is performing an "integrating function," or in Bruce's language, a function of "cultural defense."[16] The slide is easy to the thesis that religious belief is the dependent variable here, its integrative function being the explanatory factor.

But I think it would be less distortive to say that the religious language is the one in which people find it meaningful to code their strong moral and political

16. Steve Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), chapter 1.

experience, either of oppression or of successful state building around certain moral principles. The point of citing the different predicaments of the Polish or Irish peasants and workers, on one hand, and their Spanish or French counterparts, on the other, is that the former offered inducements and little resistance to coding in a Catholic language, whereas for the latter, life in a baroque regime generates experiences that are strong deterrents to doing so.

I have been identifying in the preceding pages, either centrally or peripherally, various religious forms that are "modern," in the sense that they figure prominently in what I've been calling the age of mobilization; in some cases they make sense only within this age. I want to mention three of these forms.

1. First, there is a phenomenon that I touched on only glancingly in the previous discussion, when I spoke of evangelical revivals. These are paradigmatic examples of movements that weave together the meeting of spiritual and devotional aspirations with personal and often collective empowerment. These are familiar in the Protestant world, but there are analogous forms elsewhere: for instance, the various movements of the Catholic Action network and Catholic prayer and devotion, as well as the Nation of Islam among African Americans. Other examples could be cited in other religious milieus. Let's call these modes of empowering devotion.
2. Then, there are the interweavings of religious or confessional belonging with political identities: the neo-Durkheimian phenomenon.
3. Finally, there are the various ways in which religious or confessional faith becomes connected, via a strong moral code, to our sense of civilizational order and the sense of security or superiority that connects to this. Let's call this the civilizational connection.

These can be happily intertwined, as in anglophone Protestantism over many centuries, or they can exist quite separately from each other, as with various evangelical or Catholic movements in the south (where Christians are in a minority), which are modes of (1) unconnected to (2) or (3); or in Catholic or Polish nationalism, where (2) exists without any necessary linkage to (1) or (3). And (3) notoriously can exist alone among beleaguered elites, who sense that their society is going to the dogs. Or (2) and (3) can be alloyed without (1), as with nineteenth-century German *Kulturprotestantismus*.

At the outset of this essay, I mentioned the highly conflictual "return of religion" that secular liberals have been noting with alarm in recent decades. My point was that the religion that underlies these conflicts was not really returning, because the forms that powered the challenge to secular hegemony were in fact

relatively new and belonged to the modern age. Can the three forms I have just identified help us to understand these conflicts?

Let's take the battle that is most on the minds of American liberals, and to some extent those in other Western countries: the culture wars of the United States. From a European perspective these seem to be a peculiarly American phenomenon. Indeed, educated, cultivated Europeans are extremely uncomfortable with any overt manifestations of either strong nationalism or religious sentiment. The contrast to the United States in this regard has often been remarked upon. It might help to take up here one of the most debated issues in the field of secularization theory, that of the American exception—or, if one likes, as seen from a broader perspective, the European exception. Put either way, we are faced with a strong, even if not uniform, pattern of decline in European societies and virtually nothing of the sort in the United States. How can this difference be explained?

Various attempts have been made to do so. For instance, Bruce attributes the strength of religion in America partly to the immigrant context. Immigrants needed to group together with those of similar origins in order to ease their transition into American society. The rallying point was often a shared religion, and the main agency was often a church.[17]

If we take the United Kingdom as representative of Europe, another important factor in explaining the contrast may have been the hierarchical nature of British society. British elites, and particularly the intelligentsia, have been living in a fractured culture since the eighteenth century; the saliency of unbelief may have been lower in certain periods of strong piety, but it was always there. Something similar may also have been true of the American intelligentsia, but the position it occupied in U.S. society was very different. In deferential British society, the pattern of elite life has a prestige that it largely lacks in the United States. This means that elite unbelief can both more effectively resist conforming and also more readily provide models for people at other levels. There are parallels with other European societies, which all, in this respect, contrast with the United States.[18]

But perhaps the most important factors explaining the transatlantic difference may be susceptible to formulation in the terms I have been developing here. From this point of view there are three facets to the American exception. I have been speaking of the undermining of social matrices that have hitherto kept large numbers of people within the churches, or at least within the faith. But what has been

17. Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World*, chapter 6.

18. This is close to a thesis made by Martin in *Tongues of Fire*, 56, 68.

undermined is different in the two cases. The heart of the American exception is that this society is the only one that from the beginning (if we leave aside the countries of the old British Commonwealth) was entirely within the neo-Durkheimian mold. All European societies had some element of the ancien régime or the paleo-Durkheimian, perhaps more vestigial than real, like the rituals surrounding even constitutional monarchies, but often important enough—such as the presence of (at least would-be) state churches or of rural communities with their *religion du terroir* (local forms of religion). The proportions of paleo- and neo-Durkheimian elements are very different as we move from Spain to Britain or Sweden, but all European states contain some mix of the two, whereas American religious life was entirely in the age of mobilization.

This means that, in varying degrees, some of the dynamics arising from ancien régime structures will take place in all the Old World societies. One of these dynamics is the reaction against a state church in the context of an inegalitarian society, where the temptation to align established religion with power and privilege is almost irresistible. This cannot fail to produce anticlerical reactions, which can easily turn, given the availability of exclusive humanist options since the eighteenth century, into militant unbelief, which is then available to canalize the full force of popular discontent with established clergy. We see this dynamic played out in France, Spain, and even, to some extent, Prussia. In Britain, on the other hand, we saw that much popular anticlericalism found expression in nonconformity. But even here an alternative stream was there from the beginning, in figures like Tom Paine and William Godwin, whereas such ideas didn't have the same impact in the early history of the United States. The imprint of an impressive array of deists among the founders, most notably Thomas Jefferson, seems to have been largely effaced by the second Great Awakening.

The other important dynamic in these cases is that the perturbing effect on religious belief of destabilization, which is affecting both ancien régime forms and mobilization forms at one and the same time, is obviously greater than a challenge addressed to neo-Durkheimian structures alone. If peasants being turned into Frenchmen can be rescued from unbelief only by modes of neo-Durkheimian mobilization, then the undermining of these modes has a much more profoundly destabilizing effect on belief, or at least practice. In a society, on the other hand, where the move to the age of mobilization has been completed without any significant lessening of belief, the effect of undermining the previously dominant modes of this mobilization will obviously be much less.

This is one facet of the American exception. A second is perhaps this: the actual undermining of neo-Durkheimian modes has been far less severe in Amer-

ica than it has elsewhere. In particular, the constitutional-moral patriotism, what I called above the reigning synthesis between nation, morality, and religion, which was very similar in Britain and the United States, was nevertheless much less strong in Britain; indeed, it was much more strongly contested. This was particularly so in the aftermath of the First World War, which was much more traumatic for British society than for American society. The challenge to civilization in Britain that this cataclysm represented was certainly lived by many as a challenge to their faith, as I argued above. The strong sense generated by a neo-Durkheimian effect that everyone shares a certain moral or spiritual coding, and that this is how we must understand our strong collective moral experience, thus faded more rapidly in Britain and weakened the code, whereas in the American case, many people felt and have gone on feeling that you can show your Americanness by joining a church. In this respect, following the above argument, other European societies are similar to Britain and have gone through the same historical experiences, with similar results.[19]

Against this argument has to be set the triple attack that the family-religion-patriotism complex of the 1950s suffered in the era of civil rights, Vietnam, and the expressive revolution. Was this not the analogue in the American case to the First World War for the British? Perhaps, but plainly not everyone sees it this way. Indeed, the different reactions to this era seem to underlie the culture wars of contemporary U.S. politics. It seems that that fusion of faith, family values, and patriotism is still extremely important to one half of American society, and that they are dismayed to see it challenged, both in its central values (for example, the fight over abortion or gay marriage) and in the link between their faith and the polity (fights over school prayer, the phrase "under God," and the like).

In addition, lots of Americans, even those who are not on the Right, still feel quite at home with the idea of the United States as being "one nation under God." Those made uncomfortable by this identity are vocal and dominant in universities and (some) media but are not all that numerous. And besides, groups of non-Christian and non-Jewish immigrants, who might be thought natural allies of those who want to resist a Biblical coding of the American identity, are themselves anxious to be co-opted into a suitably widened variation of it. Imams are now alongside priests and rabbis at public prayers, and this panreligious unity surfaces especially at moments of crisis or disaster, as after 9/11.

Now this is partly the result of the sheer difference in numbers of people who

19. Again, there is a similarity to the thesis outlined by Martin, if I understand him correctly, in *Tongues of Fire*, 53.

adhere to some religion in the United States, as against Europe. But it has also to do with the respective attitudes toward national identity. Europe in the second half of the twentieth century has been full of reticence about its former senses of nationhood, and the events of the first half of this century explain why. The European Union is built on the attempt to go beyond the earlier forms, in the full consciousness of how destructive they have been. The full-throated assertions of the older self-exalting nationalisms are now reserved for the radical Right, which is felt by everyone else to represent a pestilence, a possibly deadly disease, and which in turn is anti-European. War, even righteous war, as an expression of the superiority of the national project, makes most Europeans profoundly uneasy.

Quite different is the attitude of the United States. This may be partly because Americans have fewer skeletons in the family closet to confront than their European cousins. But I think the answer is simpler than that. It is easier to be unreservedly confident in your own rightness when you are the hegemonic power. The skeletons are there, but they can be resolutely ignored, in spite of the efforts of a gallant band of scholars who are engaged in the "history wars." Most Germans have to cringe when they are reminded of the First World War slogan *Gott mit uns* (God is with us)—and about the Second World War, the less said, the better. But most Americans have few doubts about whose side God is on. In this context, the traditional neo-Durkheimian definition is far easier to live with.

So in terms of my discussion a few paragraphs back, the traditional American synthesis—of civil religion, a strong neo-Durkheimian identity originally based around a nondenominational Christianity, and a strong connection to civilizational order—is still in a hot phase, unlike its British counterpart. The original civil religion gradually extended beyond its Protestant base, but it has now come to a stage where, while the link to civilizational order remains strong, the connection to religion is now challenged by a broad range of secularists and liberal believers. Issues like the banning of school prayer, abortion, and, more recently, homosexual marriage become highly charged. I spoke above of a culture war, but another analogy might be *la guerre franco-française*, two strongly opposed ideological codings of the same nation's identity, in a context where nationalism (not to say great power chauvinism) remains powerful. This is the recipe for bitter struggles.[20]

Perhaps a control case can be found in the societies of the old British Common-

20. This hot identity may also help to explain the differences between Europe and America that emerged on the occasion of the recent war in Iraq. Some commentators have tried to capture this in the memorable phrase: "Americans are from Mars, Europeans are from Venus." See Robert Kagan, "The U.S.–Europe Divide," *Washington Post*, May 26, 2002.

wealth: Canada, Australia, New Zealand. Like the United States, and (almost) from the beginning, they have been in the age of mobilization. But their faith-related neo-Durkhemian definitions haven't fared as well. Either they lived in a British identity, which has since decayed in the mother country as well as the ex-colony, or (as in the case of Quebec) they have undergone a turnover that much more resembles the European model. But above all, they are not hegemonic powers; one case, Canada, is constantly reminded of this fact by its proximity to the nation that is. So it is not surprising to find the figures for religious belief and practice somewhat between European and U.S. ones. It is also not surprising that the issue of gay marriage, while it has been upsetting for Conservatives in Canada as well, has not awakened the same degree of heat and indignation in Canada as in its neighbor to the south.

There is a third way of stating the American exception, which overlaps in some respects with the two points above. The United States since the early nineteenth century has been a home of religious freedom, expressed in a very American way: that is, it has been a country of religious choice. People move, form new denominations, join ones that they weren't brought up in, break away from existing ones, and so on. Their whole religious culture was in some way prepared for the age of authenticity, even before this became a facet of mass culture in the latter part of the twentieth century. This whole shift was therefore much less destabilizing. We have just to think of the contrast with Germany and France, where the new cults deeply disturb people. Even French atheists are a trifle horrified when religion doesn't take the standard Catholic form that they love to hate. It is harder to see the discontinuity in America, and indeed, the discontinuity was, in a sense, less, since the culture of authenticity was, before the 1960s, present everywhere among cultured elites, and the educated were a much larger proportion of the U.S. population even before the postwar expansion of universities.

When all is said and done, however, I have to admit that this list of factors, while probably valid, doesn't satisfy as an answer to the question of why the gamut of options that spiritual seekers choose among is so much more tilted toward the believing end in the United States than in Europe. This is one of the big unresolved issues of the secularization debate.

But in relation to the question being considered here, how to understand the intensity of the (partly) religion-inspired conflict, it is the second factor that seems decisive, that is, the continuing strength of a neo-Durkheimian identity, linking a nondenominational theism to the national project via a strong conception of religio-moral civilizational order. Or, one might say it is both the strength and the weakness of that identity. It once was hegemonic—even relatively skeptical elites felt

they had to acknowledge it—but, in the latter half of the twentieth century, another liberal consensus arose which interpreted the political ethic defining the American way (freedom, rights, democracy) as calling for neutrality, not just between denominations, but between belief and unbelief. This has become strong enough to challenge the original theistically anchored identity but not enough to displace it. The result is a bitter struggle between two definitions of the national identity, each of which considers the other to be a betrayal. For liberals, the religious Right is guilty of transgressing the core American principle of the separation of church and state; the religious Right, in turn, cannot accept this accusation because they distinguish separating church from state and separating state from (nondenominational) religion. They see liberals as betraying the original and essential anchoring of the American project in the supremacy of God and the moral code ("family values").

As is often the case in this kind of struggle, and as one saw in France in the nineteenth century, the result is a kind of bunching of issues into packages: to be on one or the other side is to have an obligatory position on gun control, redistributive taxation, wilderness protection, gas-guzzling vehicles, and the like. In a less ideologically heated environment, people might pick and choose a combination of stands on these issues that made sense to them in the light of the considerations valid for each one. But the pressure of the ideological battle tends to drive these (one might think, more rational) crosscutting stands to the margins. People feel they have to vote their package. So the actual facts in some issue area—say, the war in Iraq—become irrelevant; one votes the package, by focusing on issues that are most powerfully emblematic of it (like "morals" or "family values").

The worrying thing is that the polarization seems to be intensifying. Erstwhile crosscutters, like the former liberal Republicans, have become an endangered species, as we can see in the fate of the Bush dynasty as it swings from liberal Northeast Republicans to raging Texas ideologues in two generations. The rest of the world looks on, alarmed and despondent, as a new macho-militarist unilateralism becomes an integral part of one of the packages—the one that is now winning out. American culture wars now endanger the planet.

Is this a "return of religion"? Well, it certainly represents a reaction of some believers to the drift of the contemporary world: the sexual revolution, the age of authenticity, the rise of the new liberal definition of the American way. But, first, this is not the reaction of believers as such: there are many people of faith on the liberal side. Second, the virulence of the conflict comes from the intrication of religion in a tripartite neo-Durkheimian identity, uniting faith, morals, and nation—something that is rather recent, and, one might add, something that is, from a faith point of view, perhaps highly questionable.