

# A Supply-Side Reinterpretation of the "Secularization" of Europe\*

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We propose a theory of religious mobilization that accounts for variations in religious participation on the basis of variations in the degree of regulation of religious economies and consequent variations in their levels of religious competition. To account for the apparent "secularization" of many European nations, we stress supply-side weaknesses — inefficient religious organizations within highly regulated religious economies — rather than a lack of individual religious demand. We test the theory with both quantitative and historical data and, based on the results, suggest that the concept of secularization be dropped for lack of cases to which it could apply.

For years everyone has agreed that many nations in Europe are extremely secularized — that few attend church services, that belief is on the wane, and that the power and presence of religion in public life has faded to a shadow of past glories. Or, to quote the most influential definition of secularization, Europe's "religious institutions, actions, and consciousness, [have lost] their social significance" (Wilson 1982:149). There also has been nearly universal agreement that Europe's secularization represented the future of all societies — that the spread of science and modernity doomed religion. As Anthony F. C. Wallace (1966:265) explained:

The evolutionary future of religion is extinction. Belief in supernatural beings and supernatural forces that affect nature without obeying nature's laws will erode and become only an interesting historical memory. . . . Belief in supernatural powers is doomed to die out, all over the world, as the result of the increasing adequacy and diffusion of scientific knowledge.

Not only has secularization been regarded as inevitable, the dominant view has been that secularization is an absorbing state — that once achieved it is irreversible, instilling mystical immunity. Frank Lechner (1991:1111) put it this way:

Once progress has disconfirmed most general religious explanations, once alternative social and cultural systems are firmly institutionalized, once a pattern of free and frequent disaffiliation by individuals has become accepted, it is hard to see how the process can be reversed.

Low church attendance rates in many European nations are interpreted as supporting these views, but the enormous vigor of religion in the United States causes great difficulty for the secularization thesis. Despite the immense popularity of science and the prevalence of higher education here, religion shows no signs of decline (Greeley 1989). In fact, church membership rates are at an all-time high in the United States (Finke and Stark 1992).

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Consequently, the focus of secularization theorizing and research has shifted to America as scholars have struggled to explain this "deviant case." Few have been willing to accept Tocqueville's (1956:319) elegant solution that the secularization theory is simply wrong — "Unfortunately, the facts by no means accord with their theory." Instead, they have labored over the thesis of "American exceptionalism" (Tiryakian, 1993). As David Martin (1969:10) pointed out, a common "solution" has been to characterize the United States as "a case of arrested development, whose evolution has been delayed." Other solutions have been more creative. One of the more thoughtful of these incorrectly' attributes the high levels of North American religiousness to ethnic and racial diversity (Wallis 1986), while others have argued that America isn't an exception after all, that American religiosity is mere facade. After his tour of America, Max Weber (1958:307) claimed that he was able to penetrate the illusion of religious America to discover widespread secularization: "Closer scrutiny revealed the steady progress of the characteristic process of 'secularization,' to which in modern times all phenomena that originated in religious conceptions succumb." Echoing Weber, Bryan Wilson claims that, in effect, Americans express their secularization by going to church!

In the book that established him as Europe's leading proponent of the secularization thesis, Wilson (1966:126) claimed that "religious attendance is itself a secular value in America." He then argued that "the decline in membership and attendance in Britain, and the secular meaning of such affiliation in America together with the lack of depth of many religious manifestations in the United States suggest that religion is in decline in both countries" (Wilson 1966:126). In a more recent book Wilson (1982:152) repeated his claim, noting that "few observers doubt that the actual content of what goes on in the major churches in Britain is very much more 'religious' than what occurs in American churches."

Rather than attempt to convince readers that a Baptist service in America can achieve at least as much "depth" as can high church Anglican rites, we propose a far greater heresy. We dispute the claim that any European nation is very secularized. Taking this heresy even further, we propose dropping the term secularization from all theoretical discourse, first, on the grounds that it is has served only ideological and polemical, not theoretical, functions — as David Martin (1969) has long argued; second, because observable instances to which to apply it seem lacking. Indeed, what is needed is not a theory of the decline or decay of religion, but of religious change, providing for rises as well as for declines in the level of religiousness found in societies, and indeed a theory that can account for long periods of stability<sup>2</sup> (Greeley 1989; Brown 1992).

1. Wallis (1986:51-52) rested his thesis on this claim: "This argument [that ethnic diversity is the source of America's religious vitality] is strengthened by the fact that we find similarly high levels of religious vitality in other immigrant based societies such as Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. Religious participation is closer to that in the United States than it is to that in Western Europe, despite the closer relationship between church and state, and the much more restricted range of denominational and sectarian diversity than has prevailed in America." Wallis offered no evidence of this "fact" and, in fact, it is not factual. The data show that Australia and New Zealand have low levels of weekly church attendance, closely resembling Britain and West Germany. Canada displays a higher rate, and the United States is well above them all.

	% Attend Church Weekly
United States	43
Canada	31
Australia	21
New Zealand	20
Great Britain	14
West Germany	21

Source: Iannaccone, 1991

2. This aspect of theories tends to be ignored by social scientists who, as David Martin (1969) has put it, prefer to believe they are "living on an inclined historical plane."

To this end, we propose a theory of religious mobilization. It consists of seven theoretical propositions concerning religious economies, placing primary emphasis on the changing behavior of religious *firms* rather than on the changing attitudes of religious *consumers* — hence the mention of “supply-side” in the title of this essay. The theory allows us to predict levels of religious mobilization in societies under various conditions. These predictions seem fully compatible with a variety of pertinent cases, both historical and contemporary, and are sustained by quantitative analysis. But the predictions are incompatible with the traditional view of secularization and with the claims that some European nations are highly secularized. We also distinguish between *organized* religious behavior and subjective religious attitudes, suggesting that the former varies far more than the latter.

### A THEORY OF RELIGIOUS MOBILIZATION

The theory we present below is based on our previous efforts to apply economic models of the market to the operation of religious economies (Finke and Stark 1992; Iannaccone 1991, 1992, 1994; Iannaccone and Finke 1993; Stark 1985a, 1985b, 1992; Stark and Bainbridge 1985, 1987; Stark and Iannaccone 1992, 1993). As noted, among the many innovations made possible by this approach is the capacity to focus on the behavior of religious firms rather than only upon religious *consumers*. Past discussions of secularization usually postulate a decline in the *demand* for religion, claiming that potential consumers in a modern, enlightened age no longer find a need for faith in the supernatural. In contrast, we propose to focus not so much on religious consumers as on religious *suppliers*. Under what conditions are religious firms able to create a demand? What happens when only a few, lazy religious firms confront the potential religious consumer? More concretely, does the low level of religious mobilization in Scandinavia, for instance, reflect weak demand primarily, or an unattractive product, badly marketed, within a highly regulated and distorted religious economy?

Three definitions are basic to our discussions:

*Religion* is any system of beliefs and practices concerned with ultimate meaning that assumes the existence of the supernatural.

*Religious Firms* are social enterprises whose primary purpose is to create, maintain and supply religion to some set of individuals.

*Religious Economy* consists of all the religious activity going on in any society. Religious *economies* are like *commercial* economies in that they consist of a market of current and potential customers, a set of firms seeking to serve that market, and the religious “product lines” offered by the various firms.

Now, let us consider a set of propositions and additional definitions.

**Prop. 1:** *The capacity of a single religious firm to monopolize a religious economy depends upon the degree to which the state uses coercive force to regulate the religious economy.*

**Prop. 2:** *To the degree that a religious economy is unregulated, it will tend to be very pluralistic.*

By *pluralistic* we mean the number of firms active in the economy: the more firms having a significant market share, the greater the degree of pluralism.

**Prop. 3:** *To the degree that a religious economy is pluralistic, firms will specialize.*

To *specialize*, a firm caters to the special needs and tastes of specific market segments.

Propositions 1 through 3 are highly interconnected. Moreover, each is somewhat dependent on micro propositions that establish the existence of natural segments in any religious market on the basis of “normal” variations in the human condition, such as social class, age, gender, health, life experiences, and socialization (Stark and Bainbridge 1985; 1987; Iannaccone, 1988; Stark and Iannaccone 1993). Given such normal market segments, the ‘natural’ condition of religious *economies* is one with many specialized and competing firms. This arises because of the inherent inability of a single religious product line to satisfy divergent tastes. More specifically, pluralism arises in unregulated markets because of the inability of a single religious firm to be at once worldly and otherworldly, strict and permissive, exclusive and inclusive, expressive and reserved, and market segments will exist with strong preferences on each of these aspects of religion.

By the same logic, it becomes clear that religious economies never can be fully monopolized, even when backed by the full coercive *powers* of the state. Indeed, even at the height of its temporal power, the medieval church was surrounded by heresy and dissent. Of course, when the repressive efforts of the state are sufficiently intense, religious firms competing with the state-sponsored monopoly will be forced to operate underground. But, whenever and wherever repression eases, pluralism will begin to develop.

**Prop. 4:** *To the degree that a religious economy is competitive and pluralistic, overall levels of religious participation will tend to be high. Conversely, to the degree that a religious economy is monopolized by one or two state-supported firms, overall levels of participation will tend to be low.*

Obviously, a set of specialized firms will, together, be able to appeal to a far greater proportion of consumers than can be the case when only one faith is available without risk of sanctions. Moreover, because so much of the religious product necessarily is intangible and *concerns* the far distant future, *vigorous* marketing activity is needed to achieve high levels of consumption<sup>3</sup> (Stark and Bainbridge 1987; Iannaccone 1992; Stark and Iannaccone 1993). But that is not how state-supported monopoly firms function. It is a major proposition of economics that such firms tend to be inefficient (Mueller 1989). Writing in 1776 about established religions in general and the Church of England in particular, Adam Smith noted their lack of “exertion” and “zeal”:

the clergy, reposing themselves upon their benefices, had neglected to keep up the fervour of faith and devotion of the great body of the people; and having given themselves up to indolence, were incapable of making vigorous exertion in defence even of their own establishment. ((1776)1937:741)

This point was echoed by a series of nineteenth-century European visitors to America who used explicitly economic terms and the principle that competition creates vigorous organizations to explain the vitality of religion in this country. Summing up generations of work on “American exceptionalism,” Edward Tiryakian (1993:45) noted that “there is a consensus that religion is usually better off, in terms of its social vitality, in societies where it is not a state-regulated monopoly.” Modern economists regard this view as fundamental. Having pointed out that “the economic approach is not restricted to material goods and wants,” Gary S. Becker (1976:6) noted that one of its most central theorems is that “competitive markets satisfy consumer preferences more effectively than monopolistic markets, be it the market for aluminum or the market for ideas.” We shall have more to say about the weaknesses of “monopoly” faiths after developing several other propositions.

3. See the discussion of religion as risky goods and how this necessitates religious organizations that demand much from their members (in contrast with the low levels of demand typical of monopoly faiths) in Iannaccone 1992.

**Prop. 5:** *To the degree that a religious firm achieves a monopoly, it will seek to exert its influence over other institutions and thus the society will be sacralized.*

By *sacralized* we mean that the primary aspects of life, from family to politics, will be suffused with religious symbols, rhetoric, and ritual.

Sacralization is a familiar phenomenon that evokes images of annual ceremonies when priests bless the fishing fleet, of classrooms dominated by a crucifix, and especially of religious ceremonies intrinsic to the public, political spheres of life. Leaders of monopoly faiths often lend their presence to public political occasions and ceremonies. Moreover, in such societies political leadership itself often will have a distinctly religious hue.

Close ties between religion and politics are well known: Religious elites often have ratified claims by political elites that their power has divine sanction. What we are attempting here is to formulate more precisely this relationship. Sacralization of the political sphere is the *quid pro quo* by which a particular religious firm enlists the coercive powers of the state against competing firms.

**Prop. 6:** *To the degree that deregulation occurs in a previously highly regulated religious economy, the society will be desacralized.*

When the state, for whatever reasons, no longer recognizes claims of exclusive legitimacy by the monopoly faith, desacralization must ensue. Where there is a plurality of religious firms, no one of them is sufficiently potent to sustain *sacralization*.<sup>4</sup> Nor can *sacralization* be sustained by some coalition of competing religious firms, for any statements emitted by such a group must be limited to vague generalizations to which all can assent. Perhaps such is the stuff of "civil religion" (Bellah 1967), but it is not the stuff of sacralization. But, then, neither is it necessarily a symptom of religious decline.

In our judgment, many scholars mistakenly interpret desacralization as *secularization*, thus linking a decline in influence of an erstwhile monopoly firm to a decline in religious influence in general. Indeed, European studies of secularization routinely begin with a definition equivalent to our definition of *desacralization*.<sup>5</sup> Next, the authors demonstrate that these changes have taken place (as indeed they have). But then, in their conclusions, many of these writers suddenly shift their terms to identify secularization as loss of personal faith in religion. This absence of any link between the data examined and the final conclusions disqualifies much of the scholarly basis for claims about secularization in Europe. That is, observers have noted the dismantling of some European religious monopolies and have associated this with a massive and *lasting* decline in the extent and depth of religious commitment among members of these societies. Quite aside from the empirical omissions of this argument, there are rather strong theoretical objections to it. Propositions 3 and 4 assert that any declines in personal piety accompanying desacralization, should they in fact occur, ought to be *temporary* and that as more firms (and more motivated firms) gain free access to the market, levels of individual religious commitment ought to increase.

Keep in mind that there will be a lag between the onset of desacralization and the rise of a vigorous religious pluralism. Thus, although the Roman Catholic Church, for example, has been stripped of its monopoly standing and much of its temporal power in many parts of

4. This may well be the reason that sociologists regard religious monopolies as the basis for strong faith and pluralism as inevitably eroding faith. If Peter Berger's notion of the "sacred canopy" is equated with the sacralization of societies, then it is true that a single canopy is necessary, and that multiple canopies don't suffice. But, when the sacred canopy line of thought is construed to mean that personal piety is more abundant under monopoly faith, that is clearly wrong.

5. We must acknowledge that this is how the dictionary defines secularization as well.

Europe and Latin America, this did not *immediately* create unregulated religious economies tilled with *eager* firms competing for souls. Considerable desacralization will tend to occur before there is *sufficient* pluralism to greatly increase religious participation. Thus, over the short term, desacralization *can give the appearance* of secularization. We must emphasize, however, that this sort of "secularization" is temporary and largely limited to a decline in religious participation — it never is the "extinction" of religion proposed by the standard theories of secularization.

Many factors can slow the development of vigorous pluralism. For one thing, deregulation of a religious economy *often* is more apparent than real. The government may announce a policy of religious freedom, or at least of religious toleration, but continue to grant special privileges and financial aid to the traditional monopoly firm, while imposing many hindrances upon new firms. Fully developed pluralism can thus be distorted and delayed by de facto establishment. In Scandinavia, for example, the Lutheran clergy are civil servants and do not depend upon satisfied customers for their support.

In addition, cultural inertia (tradition) will delay the acceptance of new firms as normal and legitimate. The stigmas attached to its competitors by the old monopoly faith will linger. For example, despite the easing of official policies restricting Protestant activities in most of Latin America, Protestant clergy and converts are still very frequently victims of assault and even murder (Stoll 1990; Martin 1990). Similarly, although the Jehovah's Witnesses finally gained legal status in Italy through a series of ministerial decrees in the late 1970s, they have continued to be the occasional victims of mob *violence*.<sup>6</sup>

Another cause of delay in the development of pluralism is that, to the extent that new firms are branches of outside firms, their success must await the development of social ties between missionaries and locals. Network ties must exist or be created in order for religious firms to attract members (Lofland and Stark 1965; Stark and Bainbridge 1985, 1987). Thus, for example, American Evangelical Protestant missionaries have been active in Latin America for decades, but growth was extremely slow until after World War II, when the primary missionary work was progressively taken over by local converts. Subsequently, growth has been so rapid that by now Evangelical Protestant bodies claim very substantial followings in most of the continent — in many nations Protestants now *make* up the majority of those actually in church on Sunday (Stoll 1990; Martin 1990).

Finally, it must be recognized that much of the "decline" in consumer commitment that accompanies desacralization is illusory. Monopoly churches always manage to appear vastly more popular and pervasive than they actually are. A major effect of desacralization in Europe and Latin America may have been to *reveal* widespread apathy, rather than reflect a decline in piety. Keep in mind, too, that monopolists always claim that should they be dislodged, religious life will suffer (and social scientists have been too quick to believe them).

**Prop. 7:** *The relationship between the degree of regulation of the religious economy and start-up costs for new religious organizations is curvilinear — declining as the state exerts less coercion on behalf of a monopoly firm, but rising again as fully developed pluralism produces a crowded marketplace of effective and successful firms.*

*Start-up costs* consist of the resources (human as well as material) that must be expended before a firm becomes self-sustaining. There are two rather independent sources of start-up costs that new religious firms must overcome. The first stems from repression. When the state seeks out and punishes heretics, it is very costly to compete with the *official*

6. Before legalization, the police frequently broke up private gatherings of Witnesses and there were many ugly incidents involving mob violence, sometimes led by local priests.

church. As the state becomes lax and fails to act on complaints of heresy, start-up costs decline and new religions proliferate. But., as religious deregulation continues and the number of competitors increases, successful entry becomes more difficult and less profitable.' Indeed, in such a situation new firms will enter the economy primarily through the process of sect formation and new sects will succeed only to the extent that the fervor of some established firms has eroded, leaving an opening in the market.

### EUROPE'S REGULATED AND MONOPOLIZED RELIGIOUS ECONOMIES

Although it is abundantly clear that an immense amount of **desacralization** has occurred in much of Europe, especially in the Protestant North, it is equally clear that unregulated and pluralistic religious *economies* are, at best, only beginning to appear. In most of these nations, and especially in those counted as among the most secularized, religious subsidies and regulation, both official and de facto, continue to distort and stunt the religious marketplace. Let us examine some typical situations.

#### Catholic "Monopolies"

Writing in 1882, William F. Bainbridge,<sup>8</sup> head of American Baptist Home and Foreign Missions, reported that during a visit to Rome "the police detectives of Pius IX searched all our baggage to keep us from taking a Bible into the Holy City" (247). That was, of course, long ago. However, as recently as the 1970s, only Catholic priests could perform valid religious marriage services in Italy and Protestants could not obtain marriage annulment-s, since these could only be granted by the Catholic Church. Moreover, Italian law still specifies that criminal offenses committed against Catholic clergy are "aggravated," while similar offenses against Protestant ministers are not. The government-owned radio and television services broadcast many hours of Catholic programming weekly. Since 1973, Protestants have been granted 20 minutes a week on radio and 15 minutes a week on TV (Barrett 1982).

On October 30, 1981, the Belgian government finally withdrew its absolute ban on the transportation of Jehovah's Witnesses' publications, including Bibles, by the railroad or postal systems (Yearbook 1984:110). Similarly, until the Witnesses were given legal recognition in December 1974, the police in Portugal routinely confiscated Bibles and tracts from them, and often beat them severely as well. Lisbon's newspaper *Diario Popular* greeted legalization with the admission that until that time "to be one of Jehovah's Witnesses was dangerous and even subversive. But times have changed. Now it is possible not only to be a Witness in Portugal but also to assemble in public" (quoted in Yearbook 1983:235) In January 1991, Portugal amended a law that permitted only Catholics to teach religion, extending the right to Protestants as well.

In 1970 Spain passed a religious toleration act, giving non-Catholics the right to hold services. In 1992 the Spanish government extended tax exempt status to a federation of evangelical Protestant groups, gave them the right to organize schools, and recognized "Protestant minister" as a legal profession. However, these new rights were not extended to Protestant groups that were not part of the federation, nor to non-Christians (Miller 1991).

7. This is an application of microeconomics "zero profit theorem," which states that entry into a competitive market will continue until all opportunities for profit are exhausted. We acknowledge that religious firms typically are "nonprofit," but the theorem applies if one assumes that "profit" in this instance means the capacity to attract sufficient followers and resources to be self-sustaining.

8. Great-grandfather of our colleague William Sims Bainbridge.

Thus, although the Catholic monopolies have weakened in many parts of Europe, most of Europe's "Catholic" nations do not yet have truly unregulated religious economies, nor have they any substantial pluralism.

#### Protestant "Monopolies"

In most of Europe's Protestant nations the state continues to offer "free" religion — or at least religion that the consumer already has paid for through taxes — and to impose bureaucratic difficulties on other firms seeking to enter or to operate in their religious market. In some nations there are several subsidized denominations, in others only one. Free religion not only impedes competition, but the clergy of these Protestant state churches are inclined to repose "themselves upon their benefices" even beyond Adam Smith's expectations. A close look at the Swedish religious economy is informative.

Swedish Lutheranism epitomizes the state church syndrome. Since its inception, the Church of Sweden has served as an organ of the state. Numerous special laws regulate its role, and the King, as head of the Church, names the archbishop and bishops to their positions. Swedish citizens obtain automatic membership in the Church at birth, and before 1951 could not request release from membership unless they claimed membership in another faith. Until 1862 all Swedish citizens were required by law to attend church at least once a year. From 1604 until 1873, Swedish citizens could not become Catholics — any who did so were exiled (Pettersson 1990). Even today, when only two percent of Swedes attend the Church's Sunday services in any given week (while four percent attend other churches), social pressures are such that 90% retain official church membership and 80% have their children baptized and confirmed in the Church (Hamberg 1993). Most of these remain "members" in name only, and 10% actually belong to other denominations.

Like any massive state concern, the Church runs on tax funds. The state imposes a special church tax, and even those not belonging to the state church must pay 40% of this assessment.. Tax money pays the salaries of the Lutheran clergy and covers the cost of church construction and maintenance. Direct contributions and payments from worshippers amount to almost nothing. As civil servants, the clergy maintain the country's vital statistics and perform other municipal functions. They are

integrated into the ordinary bureaucracy. About 65 percent of them are members of trade unions, negotiating with their employer — the government — over salaries, the number of working hours and pensions. Like other Swedish civil servants they have the legal right to strike, though they have not yet exercised that right. But they are dissatisfied with their long working week, and their union steward often threatens to strike. (Rydenfelt 1965)

The Swedish clergy are well paid and have civil service job security. Indeed, the archbishop's salary is nearly as high as that of the prime minister. Not surprisingly, the Church of Sweden suffers from high costs and low productivity. Typically, Sunday services in huge cathedrals able to seat many hundreds, even thousands, of people are attended by a handful of individuals. These tiny congregations are served by large staffs. In the end, "only a very small fraction of capacity is ever utilized" (Rydenfelt 1985).<sup>9</sup>

One might suppose that Sweden's Social Democratic Party would have managed to dismantle or disestablish the Church. With its original atheistic ideology, the Party

9. One of our friends, an American Lutheran minister, had the following experience at the Cathedral of Stockholm many years ago. He went there to attend Sunday services and found himself in a huge structure, surrounded by mere handfuls of fellow worshippers. At the of the service, he spoke to the priest, who bemoaned the paucity of worshippers, and described the large, professional staff attached to the Cathedral. Our friend remarked, "But sure the staff and their family alone should have made up a much larger audience." The Priest replied, "Yes, but they work so hard all week. They like to take Sunday off."

initially demanded the separation of church and state. However, after coming to power in the 1930s the socialists became supporters of continued establishment. In retrospect, it appears that the Church bought continued support at the cost of whatever autonomy it still possessed. Indeed, David Martin (1978:23) has argued that Lutheran State Churches

are more subject to the state than the Catholic church and for that reason adapt themselves more rapidly to changes in the character of the state. Hence as the establishment becomes more liberal or socialist the church adapts itself to the new situation.

In fact, many Swedish clergy became strong supporters of state socialism. Moreover, they acquiesced when control of the Church passed into the hands of avowed atheists:

Members of parish boards and the church council are elected more for their political positions and convictions than for their religious faith. No religious qualifications are required of the candidates — indeed, they need not even be baptized or confirmed. The state church is governed by a majority of nonbelievers — citizens who seldom or never attend church services. (Rydenfelt 1985)

Indeed, for some years Sweden's Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs was Alva Myrdal, wife of Gunnar Myrdal and herself a famous leftist economist and nonbeliever. It is both typical and diagnostic of the situation of the Swedish Church that in 1972 Myrdal appointed a government commission to compose a new translation of the New Testament for "general cultural reasons" (Asberg 1990:16). Even its ardent supporters acknowledged that the translation, published in 1981, contained "sweeping transformation[s] of accepted interpretations. . . . In important ways, it must of necessity run against the grain of Bible traditions"<sup>10</sup> (Asberg 1990:18). This translation is now the official Church of Sweden version.

Through all this, the spiritual mission of the church has received little attention. The clergy do not complain of a lack of members, since "everybody" belongs, nor are they concerned for a lack of contributions — their civil service salaries are secure. However, the indifference of the Lutheran clergy does not extend to potential competitors. Thus, although Sweden permits other faiths to operate, it is not really true that they enjoy complete religious freedom, despite being called "free churches." For example, evangelical Protestant groups often find it difficult to get the proper permits to qualify a building as suitable for public meetings and to otherwise deal with a state bureaucracy that has no sympathy for unnecessary challenges to state Lutheranism. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the free churches enroll only one tenth of the population, most Swedes in church on any Sunday attend the free churches — which often turn out 70% of their members (Barrett 1982: 649).

Elsewhere in Scandinavia similar conditions prevail. Peter Lodberg (1989:7), General Secretary of the Ecumenical Council in Denmark, noted that "Parliament still has the absolute power in the Administration of the National Church [the Evangelical Lutheran Church]." As an example, he pointed out that Parliament had passed a law authorizing female pastors in the state church over the opposition of all but one of the bishops. Lodberg commented:

It is characteristic that this question was not seen as a matter of the inner life of the church, but as something concerning the administrative system of the National Church, that is, it was regarded as being an issue for Parliament rather than the bishops. (7)

Lodberg also acknowledged that the clergy of the National Church regard all other Christian denominations "as either superfluous or directly harmful." And, echoing Adam Smith, Lodberg remarked

10. Our Swedish colleague Eva M. Hamberg informed us that members of the theological faculties at Swedish Universities regard this translation as theologically superior to the one it replaced

Another important implication of the religious monopoly is that the National Church is marked by the same tendencies as other National Churches in Scandinavia. The participation in Sunday Morning Worship is low. (1989:7)

## QUANTIFYING RELIGIOUS REGULATION

Recently, Mark Chaves and David E. Cann (1992:280) quantified the regulation of religious economies in 18 nations on the basis of a six-item scale: "whether or not (1) there is a single, officially designated state church; (2) there is official state recognition of some denominations but not others; (3) the state appoints or approves the appointment of church leaders; (4) the state directly pays church personnel salaries; (5) there is a system of ecclesiastical tax collection; (6) the state directly subsidizes, beyond mere tax breaks, the operating, maintenance, or capital expenses for churches."

Nations received one point for each criterion of regulation they met. Those nations that scored zero, as having unregulated religious economies, were Australia, Canada, Ireland, Netherlands, New Zealand, and the United States. France received a score of one. Spain and Austria were scored two. Belgium, Britain, Italy, Switzerland, and West Germany were scored three. Norway and Denmark scored five. Sweden and Finland scored six.

Chaves and Cann's coding clearly shows the general lack of free-market religious economies in Europe. Only two of the major European nations — Ireland and the Netherlands — score on a par with the United States, and questions can be raised about even these two cases. In our judgment, the Netherlands should be scored as substantially more regulated.<sup>11</sup> As for Ireland, we do not dispute that it should be scored zero on this index, but we must note that this is a very recent change that could not yet be expected to have any noticeable impact on pluralism. Article 44 of the Constitution of the Republic of Ireland, adopted in 1937, acknowledged that "public worship is due almighty God," and noted the "special position of the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church as guardian of the faith," and prohibited the state from legalizing divorce. A special referendum in 1972 abolished Article 44. The elimination of legal ties between church and state is a major step toward a free market religious economy and the eventual emergence of vigorous pluralism. In accord with our propositions, however, de facto regulation will linger for a while and pluralism will not arise overnight.

## PRELIMINARY TESTS OF THE THEORY

If we are correct about the impact of pluralism and regulation on the vigor of religious firms and therefore on the overall levels of religious participation in societies, then we ought to be able to use measures of the former to explain variations in the latter.

A first attempt to test such hypotheses was based on 14 European nations, plus Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States (Iannaccone, 1991). Pluralism was measured with a classic index of market concentration (the Herfindahl Index) and rates of weekly church attendance operationalized religious participation. Regression results proved very strong, with pluralism accounting for more than 90% of the variation in church atten-

11. According to Barrett (1982:512) (Chaves and Cann's primary source) the state does have the right of approval over at least some church leaders: "state approval is required when a church confers an ecclesiastical office on an expatriate." Moreover, the state directly pays the salaries of at least some church personnel. For example, the state pays faculty in the theological seminaries operated by the nation's three leading denominations, and the "state also meets supplementary costs relating to professional posts for training ministers of other communities." Further, the state subsidizes parochial schools and has sometimes paid subsidies of up to 30% for church construction. This would not seem to be an entirely unregulated religious economy in the American mode, albeit the Netherlands' economy is far less regulated than those of Scandinavia.

dance.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the United States is not a deviant case, but lies close to the regression line — its unusually high rate of weekly church attendance is consistent with its highly developed pluralism — and has a Herfindahl Index score of 12 as compared with Denmark's score of 94 (the higher the score, the less pluralism).

A second test of the theory focused on Catholicism (Stark 1992). Based on 45 nations within which the **Roman** Catholic Church is active, the paper tested the proposition that the level of commitment of the average Catholic varies across nations *inversely* to the proportion of Catholics in the population. That is, the Catholic Church will be more effective in mobilizing its members where it is confronted either by pluralistic religious economies or by Protestant semimonopolies and will be least effective where it most closely approximates a monopoly. Other research had demonstrated the validity of the number of priests per 10,000 nominal Catholics as a measure of member commitment (Stark and McCann 1993). The correlation between priests and the percent nominally Catholic was **-.73**. Suitable controls did not reduce the correlation.

A third test of the theory operationalized the concept of regulation as described above (Chaves and Cann 1992). The data were limited to the same 18 nations used by Iannaccone (1991). The findings were that regulation strongly predicted church attendance rates: The more regulation, the less attendance.

Three additional tests of the theory explored the impact of **pluralism** within societies. Using data based on American cities in 1906, Finke and Stark (1988) found a very strong relationship between religious diversity (measured by the **Herfindahl** Index) and rates of church membership. Subsequently, Land, Deane, and Blau (1991) used religious census data from early in the century to examine pluralism and church membership rates for the counties of the United States, and claimed to have discovered support for the traditional position that pluralism harms religious commitment. What their data actually showed was a positive effect of pluralism for the urban counties and a negative effect limited to the rural counties. However, all findings based on the rural counties are questionable because of severe measurement problems.<sup>13</sup> In the instance at hand, church membership statistics for the rural counties are very inaccurate, because all members of a given congregation are assigned to the county in which the church is located. Consequently, some counties have membership rates far above 100 percent and others have no members, since farmers often cross county boundaries to attend church. These problems are minimized in urban counties, and hence only the positive urban results obtained by Land, Deane, and Blau are trustworthy.

A third study, by **Hamberg** and Pettersson, included in this issue, is based on 284 municipalities of Sweden and also uses the **Herfindahl** Index to measure the diversity not only of denominations, but also of Sunday services, and again found huge effects on rates of attendance. This study is of particular interest because the low levels of church attendance and the quite limited pluralism found in Sweden minimized variation — and still robust findings turned up.

Finally, a study based on 198 nations found a huge, positive effect of pluralism on rates of religious conversion or religious switching (Duke, Johnson, and Duke 1993). Granted, one would not expect much religious switching where few alternatives are available, although in principle there could be as much switching where there are only two faiths as where there are 192. One also would expect little switching where it is illegal to change faiths, as in many Islamic nations. However, religious switching also can be interpreted as a

12. The **six** European nations in which more than 80% of the population are nominally Catholic were excluded from the analysis.

13. As an additional example of these problems, many counties have far more than 100% of their land classified as under cultivation because when farms cross county lines the entire farm is assigned to the county having the larger portion.

measure of religious activity within societies — that where conversion rates are high, significant numbers of people have been activated to the extent that they are willing to take the relatively dramatic action of embracing a faith in which they were not raised.

Thus, the available data support the supply-side insight that where regulation stifles competition among religious firms, religious participation also is stifled. put *another* way, where people are not confronted with a range of **efficient** religious suppliers, low levels of religious consumption exist.

Unfortunately, for many sociologists, their commitment to secularization is such that even when they seem to fully recognize the supply-side explanation they are unable to follow it to its **logical** conclusions. In a recent paper, Frank J. Lechner (1991:1111) seemed to echo our position:

In a society with a tradition of revivalism and an open religious marketplace, where new enterprises can be started easily and legitimately and where religious choice and change by individuals are socially legitimate, revivals and innovation are indeed to be expected. But nothing similar is to be found in most Western European countries.

However, rather than pursue this line of reasoning by asking what might happen if European religious economies were deregulated so that they could more closely approximate the American situation, Lechner was content to have thus “explained” American exceptionalism and thereby to have defended the view that the European situation can only change in the direction of ever greater secularization.

In any event, several questions must be answered if our theory is to gain even provisional plausibility. Even if we are correct about why religious participation is so low in many of these nations, the fact remains that it *is* low. Does it not follow that these societies meet Wilson's definition of secularization — places where religious institutions, actions, and consciousness have lost their social significance? And why are religious monopolies only weak today? How can a supply-side approach account for the powerful religious monopolies of times past? We now address these questions.

#### MASS PIETY IN SACRALIZED SOCIETIES

Everyone knows that religion has crumbled since medieval times when all Europe walked secure in faith and grace. Indeed, the presumed universal piety during medieval Europe's “Age of Faith” constitutes the primary benchmark against which scholars measure modern secularization. Thus medieval times stand as a major challenge to a supply-side theory of religious activity. After all, these were sacralized societies wherein the state supported efforts to monopolize the religious economy — they should have been notable for religious indifference, not for universal piety.

We think it significant that we first formulated our theory *before* we knew that in recent years a number of religious historians have assembled evidence that the medieval masses were, in fact, remarkably irreligious, at least in terms of religious participation, just as the theory predicts (Thomas 1971; Johnson 1976; Delumeau 1977; Schneider 1990; Gentilcore 1992). Andrew *Greeley* (forthcoming) has summarized these historical conclusions with characteristic succinctness:

There is no reason to believe that the peasant masses of Europe were ever very devout Christians, not in the sense that we usually mean when we use these words. There could be no deChristianization as the term is normally used because there was never any Christianization in the first place. Christian Europe never existed.

The celebrated medieval piety *might* have characterized the nobility, but religious participation among the medieval populace seems to have been very low. Jean Delumeau

(1977) has concluded that the middle ages weren't even Christian in any meaningful sense of the term, but that the peasants were simple spirit worshippers whose folklore included some Christian content. Similarly, Jane Schneider (1990) described the religion of medieval Europe as "animism," noting that Christian saints made up only a portion of the **supernatural** creatures with whom the peasants bartered for protection and favor. The reason for this state of affairs was that the peasants were essentially ignored by the medieval Church which, according to Greeley (forthcoming), lacked the resources "and perhaps the motivation to catechize (if that be the appropriate word for the time) the peasant masses." As Paul Johnson (1976:228-229) noted, the Church typically made little or no effort to reach the peasantry, at a time when nearly everyone was a peasant:

The truth is that the Church tended to be hostile to the peasants. There were very few peasant saints. Medieval clerical writers emphasize the bestiality, violence and avarice of the peasant. We get few glimpses of peasant life in the documents.. [the church] was increasingly an urban phenomenon. it was rare to see a priest in the country districts.

Max Weber (1961:1139) also noted that "the churches of the Middle Ages" held an "extremely derogatory" attitude towards the peasants.

In their study of popular religion during the Middle Ages, Rosalind and Christopher Brooke (1984:116) noted that an extensive survey of surviving parish churches across Europe revealed the typical church to be "a small box with a tiny chancel, the whole being no larger than a moderately large living room in a modern house." The Brookes emphasize the intimacy this made possible between priest and parishioners during mass, but these tiny churches are also indicative of widespread indifference. Given that most medieval parishes covered a substantial area, it would have been impossible to cram more than a small fraction of the population into such quarters.

In his classic work, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, the British historian Keith Thomas (1971:159) noted that in late medieval times "it is problematical as to whether certain sections of the population [of Britain] at this time had any religion at all" and "that many of those who did [go to church] went with considerable reluctance." When the common people did show up in church, often under compulsion, they so misbehaved "as to turn the service into a travesty of what was intended" according to Thomas (1971:161). Presentations before ecclesiastical courts and scores of clerical memoirs report how "members of the population jostled for pews, nudged their neighbours, hawked and spat, knitted, made coarse remarks, told jokes, fell asleep, and even let off guns" (Thomas 1971:161). Church records tell of a man in Cambridgeshire who was charged **with** misbehaving in church in 1598 after his "most loathsome farting, striking, and scoffing speeches" had resulted in "the great offence of the good and the great rejoicing of the bad" (quoted in Thomas 1971:162). A man who issued loathsome **farts** in church today surely would not draw cheers from part of the congregation in any British church, not even if he accompanied his efforts with **scoffing** speeches,

But it wasn't only the masses who failed to measure up to our cherished image of medieval piety. In 1551 the Bishop of Gloucester systematically tested his diocesan clergy. Of 311 pastors, 171 could not repeat the Ten Commandments and 27 did not know the author of the Lords Prayer (Gardner, quoted in Thomas 1971:164). Similarly, in 1547 Archbishop Giovanni Bovio, of the Brindisi-Oria diocese in southern Italy, found that most of his priests "could barely read and could not understand Latin" (Gentilcore 1992:42). Moreover, the majority kept concubines, and had fathered children and complaints of **sexual** improprieties on the part of priests, including rape and adultery, were rife. In fact, many priests failed to perform their pastoral duties — "there were often no priests to celebrate mass or perform extreme unction" (Gentilcore, 1992:42).

As Europe passed out of medieval times, religious participation seems not to have improved — however, the statistics on religious behavior do. Some of the best of these can be

found in the reports written by various Anglican Bishops and Archbishops following lengthy visitation trips to their parishes. Thus the Oxford Diocesan Visitations report that 30 parishes in Oxfordshire **drew a combined** total of 911 **communicants** in 1738, based on the four "Great Festivals" — Easter, Ascension, **Whitsun**, and Christmas. This turnout amounted to far less than live percent of the total population of these parishes. Other Visitation reports yield similarly low rates of participation in communion over the remainder of the eighteenth century (Currie, Gilbert, and Horsley 1977). Indeed, Peter Laslett (1965) reported that only 125 of 400 adults in a particular English village took Easter communion late in the eighteenth century. He went on to note "much smaller **attendances**" in other villages. Incredibly, Laslett uses these data to demonstrate the unanimity of faith in this era<sup>14</sup> — the title of his book is *The World We Have Lost*. Were these twentieth-century statistics, they would be cited routinely as proof of massive secularization. As things stand, however, they might well be cited as evidence of a recent increase in popular piety — which actually may be the case! If we use 1800 as the benchmark, then church membership in Britain is substantially higher today.

In 1800 there were a total of 1,230,000 church members (Protestant dissenters and Catholics, as well as Anglicans) from a population of 10,686,000 (England, Scotland, and Wales). That comes to 11.5% of the population. In 1850 there were 3,423,000 church members, or 16.7% of the population. The 1900 church membership **rate** was 18.6% (calculated from Currie, Gilbert, and Horsley 1977 and Mitchell 1962). In 1980, the church membership rate was 15.2 — a decline, but hardly a precipitous one (calculated<sup>15</sup> from Longly 1989). These findings are in agreement with others calculated by Brown (1992). Moreover, the British may be far less inclined than are Americans and Canadians to actually see to it that they are signed up church members, since a far larger percentage of the British population claims to attend church with some frequency than are counted on church rolls — 24% claimed to attend at least once a month during 1982 (World Values Survey). In any event, if modern-day Britain seems to fall short of universal piety, that can be used as proof of secularization only by falsely postulating a pious past.

But if medieval times weren't pious, what about modern Ireland? Who would classify pious and Catholic Ireland early in the nineteenth century as a secular society? Nevertheless, in those days Ireland displayed precisely the level of religious indifference that we expect to **find** in monopolized religious economies. Larkin (1972:636) reported that

if, for example, all the priests in Ireland **celebrated** the two **masses** they were allowed on a given Sunday in 1840 there would have been 4,300 masses for 6,500,000 people, or one **mass** for every 1,500 people in attendance, and there were no chapels and very few churches in pre-famine Ireland that would accommodate a thousand worshippers.

There is solid evidence that less than a third of the Irish attended mass in 1840 (Larkin 1972) and that attendance was never higher than this as far back as anyone can tell. The celebrated Irish piety — with mass attendance hovering around 90% — arose subsequent to the Potato Famine when the Church became the primary organizational vehicle for Irish nationalism resisting external domination. Indeed, under these conditions, high levels of religious participation are typical in highly monopolized religious economies as also has also been the case in Poland, Malta, and Quebec (Martin 1978; for an extended discussion see Stark 1992).

Just as medieval Europe has been described in terms of nearly universal piety, colonial New England is remembered as a bastion of faith. Indeed, the Church of England's

14. He also wrote (7) that "All our ancestors were literal Christian believers, all of the time."

16. Non-Christians have been factored into the data.

Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts reported that New England was the "only well-churched area in the American colonies." But, there was no well-churched area in colonial America. Fewer than 20% of the **inhabitants** of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts belonged to a church — about the same rate as in the other colonies (Stark and Finke 1988). This level of participation reflects what we would expect in a society **within** which pluralism barely stirred. Congregationalism was the established church of Massachusetts until 1833, and before the Revolutionary War it often brutally repressed other **faiths**.<sup>16</sup> However, if New England was relatively unchurched, it was a highly **sacralized** society and, having enshrined Puritan norms into legal codes, managed to give the illusion of universal piety.

Nevertheless, church membership and attendance rates remained low in New England and in the new nation as a whole, until deregulation created a pluralistic religious economy dominated by aggressive firms. Thus, the combined efforts of the Methodists and the Baptists (with a modest assist from the Roman Catholics) nearly doubled the rate of church membership in New England by 1850 — as was the case for the nation overall (Finke and Stark 1992).

### SUBJECTIVE RELIGION AND POTENTIAL DEMAND

Despite evidence of low levels of religious activity, many will reject the claim that medieval Europe, colonial New England, and pre-famine Ireland were highly secularized societies because it seems likely that the average person in each of these settings was in some general sense religious. That is, many people, perhaps even most of them, probably possessed some semblance of religious beliefs, even if these were somewhat vague and included as much magic and animism as Christianity. We entirely agree. Moreover, we interpret these mass religious tendencies as representing a potential **demand** for organized religion in these societies — potential in the sense that it awaited activation by aggressive suppliers. However, rather than restoring a benchmark of past piety against which to demonstrate the secularization of modern-day Europe, we think the same observation applies with equal force today. That is, the secularization thesis seems strong when measured in terms of participation in organized religion, but it seems false when religion is measured subjectively. Let us pursue this matter.

Because Iceland has often been proposed as the most secularized nation on earth (cf. Tomasson 1980), it seems an appropriate **first** case to consider. The claim that Iceland is extremely secularized is based on two observations: first, that church attendance is extremely low (about two percent attend weekly); and, second, that **sexual norms** are very liberal — these same standards have been used to define all the Scandinavian nations as secularized societies (Swatos 1984; Tomasson 1968). Nevertheless, William Swatos (1984) reported high levels of in-the-home religion in Iceland today, high rates of Baptism, and that nearly all weddings occur in church and "**affirmations** of personal immortality are typical" in newspaper obituaries, which usually are written by a close friend of the deceased rather than by a newswriter. This is not what one would expect of the worlds most secularized society. Indeed, as shown in Table 1, when asked "Independently of whether you go to church or not, would you say you are a religious person?" 66% of Icelanders say "yes." Moreover, 75% of the

16. In 1656 Massachusetts officials learned that two Quaker women were aboard a ship anchored in Boston Harbor. The ship was boarded, the two were jailed, their books were confiscated, they were stripped naked and examined for signs of witchcraft, and then they were deported to Barbados. Several days later eight Quakers were detected on another ship. They spent eleven weeks in jail and then were deported to England. In the aftermath of these events, the Colony passed a law that would fine a ship's master 100 pounds for bringing a Quaker to the Colony, impose a fine of 5 pounds on anyone caught with Quaker literature, and providing for the arrest, whipping, and deportation of any and all Quakers (Ahlestrom, 1975).

population of Iceland claim to believe in God and only 2% say they are "convinced" atheists. Surely this is not what usually is meant by secularization. Indeed, these totals are not so different from those for the United States, where 74% regard themselves as religious persons, 95% claim belief in God, and 1% agree they are atheists. Thus, when the focus is on personal, subjective religiousness, Americans and Icelanders do not seem all that different. But, when church attendance rates are the basis for comparison, Americans are about 20 times more apt than Icelanders to be classified as religious.

TABLE 1

#### CONTRASTING RELIGIOUS PARTICIPATION WITH SUBJECTIVE RELIGIOUSNESS IN THE "MOST SECULARIZED" EUROPEAN NATIONS

Nation	% Attend Church Weekly	% Believe in God	% Convinced Atheist	% Religious Person
Iceland	2	15	2	66
Denmark	3	56	5	58
Finland	4	*	3	55
Norway	6	68	3	44
Sweden	6	52	6	32
France	11	60	10	50
Great Britain	14	74	4	56
west Germany	20	70	3	55

\* Not asked

Source: World Values Survey, conducted 1981-1983.

Table 1 shows those nations of Europe that have been cited as the primary examples of secularized societies. On the basis of their low church attendance rates, especially in the Scandinavian nations, religion appears to be restricted to a small minority — perhaps involving only a "backward" remnant of the population, as so many have claimed (Wallace 1966; Wilson 1966, 1982; Wallis 1986) But, the picture changes dramatically when we examine subjective measures of individual faith. In each nation, the majority (often a very substantial majority) express belief in God, while convinced atheists are few. Moreover, except for Norway and Sweden, the majority of persons in each nation characterizes himself or herself as a "religious person."<sup>17</sup> However, a decade later few Norwegians said they were "not religious" — as can be seen in Table 2. These data cover fewer nations, but sustain the same conclusions. The contrasts in personal religiousness between the "secularized" nations and the "pious" nations are far less than the secularization theorists must expect. In all seven nations most people believe in life after death, and think the Bible is inspired by God, and fewer than a third regard themselves as "not religious."

In our judgment these data fully justify the supply-side interpretation of Northern Europe's low levels of religious participation. The data show that **potential demand varies** little across these nations, so lack of demand cannot account for their low levels of religious participation. What varies is the vitality and variety of religious suppliers. It seems to us

17. There is a Bible in 90% of Swedish households (Hansson 1990).

that it trivializes the concept of secularization to identify nations as secularized, when all that seems to be lacking is religious mobilization — a lack of active participation in organized religion. Indeed, it seems remarkable that such high levels of subjective faith can be found in nations where, for lack of church participation, organized religious socialization is largely lacking.

TABLE 2  
PERSONAL RELIGIOUSNESS, 1991

	% Who Believe Bible is "Inspired by God"	% Who Believe in Life After Death	% "Not Religious"
Norway	52	60	21
West Germany	63	54	31
Netherlands	57	53	21
Great Britain	49	54	26
United States	85	78	9
Ireland	50	50	14
Poland	76	74	11

Source: International Social Survey Program, 1991, courtesy of Andrew M. Greeley.

In any event, if we shift our attention away from individual religiousness and back to religious organizations, the compelling question is what would happen to the levels of religious mobilization in these nations if or when they become fully deregulated and develop a set of vigorous religious firms? Our analysis implies that European nations eventually will display high levels of religious participation similar to those found in the United States and Canada. Confronted with a North American style religious *economy* — competitive, deregulated, and filled with a wide range of motivated suppliers — Europeans will respond as have their American and Canadian cousins. Before we address that issue directly, it will be instructive to summarize recent developments in Latin America.

#### PROTESTANT GROWTH IN LATIN AMERICA

Several years ago, when David Martin<sup>18</sup> (1989:31) told one of his English colleagues that he was planning to write a book about Protestantism in Latin America, the response he received was "A very small book, surely." Yet when Martin's *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* appeared in 1990, it was in fact the second book on the topic that year, preceded by David Stoll's *Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth*.

Until these books were published, the steady and rapid growth of pluralism in Latin America and the successful entry of highly competitive firms, had gone largely unnoticed in scholarly circles. Indeed, the scholarly world assumed that such changes *were* impossible. Some agreed that Catholic Liberation Theology had a bright future in Latin nations, but a successful outbreak of evangelical Protestantism was dismissed as absurd — hence *the*

18. Martin is one of the two or three most prominent sociologists of religion in Europe, widely admired for his studies of secularization.

haughty reactions Martin experienced when he began his study (Martin 1989). Ironically, while both Martin and Stoll deserve great credit, their books were not all that timely. A very good study could have been done in the 1960s — Evangelical Protestants had already achieved "lift-off" by then. For example, they had converted about 12% of the population of Chile by 1960. When we remember the very low *rates* of participation by nominal Catholics in Latin America (Barrett 1982; Stark 1992), rather small evangelical "minorities" *will* make up a very substantial proportion of those active in religion. Just as in Sweden, where most of those in church on Sunday belong to denominations other than the state church, so too in many Latin American nations most of churchgoers are Protestants despite the huge, nominally Catholic majority. Hence, Protestant growth during the 1950s was far more significant than it might have appeared to outsiders.

In any event, what seems highly significant is that much was being written about the rapid gains of Protestantism in Latin America as early as the 1950s. However, because it appeared only in sectarian publications such as the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (founded in New Haven in 1950) and *the Mission Handbook* (now in its 15th edition), only the millions of Americans and Canadians who regularly contributed funds to support missions to Latin America knew about the "explosion of Protestantism" South of the border. It took the scholarly world thirty or forty years longer to catch on.

Given the lag time involved in the scholarly discovery of the religious reshaping of Latin America, it would not seem premature today to begin assessing the possibility of the rise of highly pluralistic European religious economies, well stocked with highly motivated firms offering well-tested product lines, with the result that widespread religious mobilization occurs. Moreover, since that is precisely where our theoretical reflections lead, it seems appropriate for us to initiate this assessment.

#### THE CHURCHING OF EUROPE

The obvious place to start is with the same sources that so accurately reported the growth of evangelical Protestantism in Latin America. What these sources are reporting is a rapidly growing mission effort all across Europe. William Dymess (1989:17) noted in the 14th edition of the *Mission Handbook* that Europe was "the place from which We first modern missionaries emanated, yet today, ironically, it has itself become a mission field." Consequently, there has been a substantial allocation of missionaries and mission resources from North America to Europe. Table 3 summarizes these efforts. Overall, the number of American and Canadian *full-time* Protestant missionaries in Europe has grown from 1,871 in 1972 to 5,122 in 1992 — nearly a threefold increase (Stewart and Kenyon 1993). Germany has the largest number, closely followed by France, the United Kingdom, and Spain. Keep in mind that these totals omit more than 6,000 full-time Mormon missionaries — nearly a thousand of them in Spain alone — as well as a number of American Catholic missionaries assigned to Scandinavia. Nor do these totals include the many thousands of part-time Jehovah's Witness missionaries active in all parts of the continent. Of course, the mere presence of missionaries does not guarantee converts. But what data are available show rapid rates of growth. For example, the Jehovah's Witnesses grew by 72% in Europe from 1980 through 1992, as compared with a 59% increase in the United States. In fact, the Witnesses now have more members in Europe than in the United States, albeit their overall rate *per* million population still is substantially lower. However, the Witnesses already are relatively stronger in Portugal and Finland than in America and Italy's rate should soon be higher, too (Stark 1993).

Moreover, Europe's fate does not await religious instruction from North America. Locally led evangelical Protestant movements are growing *all* across Europe. For example, in France the Assemblies of God grew by 333% between 1980 and 1990 and the Baptists

grew by 43% (King 1989). Granted that these Protestant movements are still small in Northern and Western Europe (although they have emerged as major factors in Eastern Europe), nevertheless in Scandinavia most churchgoers belong to one of these groups. That is, although the active consumer market in these nations is small, it is dominated by whatever competing firms exist in opposition to the state church. A major consequence has been increased pressure for disestablishment and deregulation. To the extent that truly free religious economies develop, these new, energetic firms are likely to grow rapidly — if we are correct that it is a supply-side problem.

TABLE 3

## AMERICAN AND CANADIAN PROTESTANT MISSIONARIES IN EUROPE

	1972	1975	1979	1992
Austria		165	220	356
Belgium		156	226	346
Denmark		13	10	9
Finland		4	43	17
France	372	416	652	626
Greece		42	65	76
Iceland		2	1	11
Ireland		55	89	166
Italy		190	246	295
Netherlands		151	124	212
Norway		26	23	32
Portugal		53	109	197
Spain		226	346	573
Sweden		34	55	46
Switzerland		79	10	69
United Kingdom	139	170	504	657
Germany*	391	445	616	842
Other	1,069	77	124	350
TOTAL	1,671	2,306	3,625	6,122

\* Totals prior to 1992 are for West Germany. No missionaries were permitted in East Germany.

A final basis for inference is that about half of the people in the set of “most secularized” European nations examined in Table 1 fault their local churches for not offering “adequate answers to the moral problems of the individual” The percentages taking this position vary from 57% in Sweden, 56% in Denmark, 54% in Finland and Iceland, down to 46% in Great Britain and Norway. This suggests that there may be many who are predisposed to respond to a more emphatic religious message sponsored by a more vigorous organization.

## HOW RELIGIOUS ARE “RELIGIOUS” SOCIETIES?

Earlier in this essay we noted that although societies with highly regulated religious economies often have been regarded as “universally” religious, in fact such societies exhibit very low levels of religious commitment and participation. Indeed, we predict that only in

unregulated religious economies with a multitude of competing religious firms will there be high levels of commitment. But how high is high? Put another way, if full-blown pluralism develops in Europe, how religious could we expect it to become?

Given the facts that religion is risky goods and that people often can increase their flow of immediate benefits through religious inactivity, it seems unlikely that any amount of pluralism and vigorous marketing can ever achieve anything close to total market penetration. The proportion of Americans who actually belong to a **specific** church congregation (as opposed to naming a religious preference when asked) has hovered around 65% for many decades — showing no tendency to respond even to major economic cycles. Perhaps that is about the ceiling under conditions of *modem* living. In any event, it is vital to keep *in* mind how long it took for the free play of pluralism in America **to** produce these results. It was not until the twentieth century that as many as half of Americans were churched. There is no reason to suppose that it will take a much shorter time to church Europe than it took to church the United States.

## CONCLUSIONS

The secularization thesis is as old as sociology. Indeed, it served as a major principle on which the field was founded — when Comte coined the word sociology he expected this new science soon to replace religion as the basis for moral judgments and thus to be the culmination of the secularization process. That the most famous early social scientists gave much of their scholarly attention to religion is best understood in terms of their fervent hopes that it soon would disappear (Martin 1969).

During most of the twentieth century, social scientific faith in **secularization** hardened *until* it seems fair to suggest that perhaps *no* other single social scientific proposition has been so widely accepted. Over the past decade, however, faith in the secularization thesis has been declining, particularly among sociologists and social historians who work in the area of religion — a development of such magnitude that Stephen Warner (1993) has labelled it a shift in scientific paradigms. As is typical of such shifts, too many inconvenient facts and too many contrary trends piled up, many of which we have noted in this essay. But perhaps the most devastatingly inconvenient fact is the growing awareness that claims about the progress of secularization, especially in *modem* Europe, rest on utterly false perceptions of the widespread piety of these same societies in earlier times. On these grounds Thomas (1971:173) chastised Durkheim and other “un-historically minded sociologists” for idealizing and romanticizing the Middle Ages, noting that “not enough justice has been done to the volume of apathy, heterodoxy and agnosticism which existed long before the onset of industrialism.” Indeed, Clifford Geertz (1966:43) has made the same point *vis-à-vis* far less developed societies: “the anthropological study of religious non-commitment is non-existent. The anthropology of religion will have come of age when some more subtle Malinowski writes a book called *Belief and Unbelief* (or even Faith and Hypocrisy) in a *Savage Society*.” But if far too little attention has been paid to unbelief in preindustrial societies, far too little attention has been paid to the volume of individual religious *belief* in those societies “everyone” believed to be highly secularized.

It seems clear that the secularization thesis has *been* falsified — that the evolutionary future of religion is not extinction. The empirical evidence is that the vitality of *religious* firms can fluctuate greatly over time, rising as well as falling, although subjective religiousness seems to vary *far* less. But to know that is to know rather little. What is needed is a set of theoretical propositions that explain and predict these fluctuations.

In this essay we have formulated such a set of propositions. We hope that they constitute a useful beginning to the task. In particular, we think it is important to shift the level of analysis from psychological postulates about religious needs and to give emphasis to *socio-*

logical postulates about how religious economies function to generate or stifle religious demand. Finally, we think the time has come for the notion of secularization per se to be returned to whence it came, to Comte's unscientific philosophizing on the brave new world to come. It turned out that humans do not live by sociological bread alone.

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# A Religious Revival in Russia?

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Data collected in a multistage probability sample of Russian-speaking citizens of the Russian Federation in the spring and summer of 1991 (as part of the International Social Survey Program's study of Religion) indicate a substantial increase in religious belief and affiliation in the Federation. A third of the Russian people who said they once did not believe in God now do believe in God — 22% of all Russians. There has also been a substantial affiliation with the Orthodox Church of those who were not previously members. The 'revivalists are disproportionately young and (relatively) disproportionately male. They tend to have become believers because of a "religious turning point" experience and to view the purpose of religion as giving a meaning and purpose to life. They propose to raise their children as religious and, like all Russians, to have a great respect for the Orthodox Church.

'But surely, my son, you were baptized?'  
'Holy Father, everyone is baptized!'

Alleged dialogue between Pope John Paul I and Mikhail Gorbachev

## INTRODUCTION

Although the Constitution of the Soviet Union guaranteed freedom of worship, there is little question that religion was repressed if not completely suppressed during the years of Socialist rule. The forms of repression changed from outright persecution during the Stalin years to grudging toleration with considerable civil disability during the more recent years — although there was an increase in antireligious pressure during the time of Nikita Khrushchev. If one wanted to get ahead in Russian society, one either professed atheism and stayed away from churches or kept one's religious propensities a secret. Seminaries were closed, churches turned into museums or centers for atheist propaganda, the clergy were rigidly controlled, and the bishops appointed by the state. As we shall see in this report, nine out of ten Russians were not raised in the Orthodox Church and three out of four did not believe in God. Never before in human history has there been such a concerted effort to stamp out not merely a religion but all trace of religion. Such a campaign was of course consistent with Karl Marx's conviction that religion was, as he said in his lectures on Feuerbach, the opiate of the people. Atheistic Communism thought of itself as pushing forward the inevitable process of secularization in which religion would disappear from the face of the earth — a process which, in perhaps a milder form, is an article of faith for many dogmatic social scientists.

What impact do seven decades of state atheism have on a religious tradition? What is left to be revived when state Socialism finally collapses? A few symbolic appearances by

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