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Journal of British Studies 60 (April 2021): 310–333. doi:10.1017/jbr.2020.243
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Notes toward a Postsecular History of Modern British Secularization

Sam Brewitt-Taylor

Abstract This article argues that British historiography's secularization debate is largely misconceived, being enmeshed in secular ideological assumptions inherited from the West's secular revolution of the 1960s. It therefore introduces an alternative, postsecular paradigm for understanding British secularization, which conceptualizes *secularity* as an ideological culture in its own right, *religion* as secularity's othering category, and *secularization* as the positive dissemination and enactment of secularity. British Christianity declined gradually from around 1900, but widespread secularization in this positive sense could only happen once British public discussion had embraced secularity's ideological framework, which it did in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Before the mid-1950s, British discussion had routinely adhered to a "Christian civilization" metanarrative, which insisted that "religion" is essential to long-term social stability, such that "secularization" is a regrettable step *backward* in human development. Yet in the late 1950s and early 1960s British discussion abruptly embraced secularity's rival metanarrative, which states that "religion" is a primordial condition unnecessary in "advanced" societies, such that "secularization" is an irreversible step *forward* in human development. This conceptual revolution was contingent, culturally specific, and importantly influenced by radical rereadings of Christian eschatology. Nonetheless, it created both the secular revolution of the 1960s, and the ideological framework within which the British secularization debate continues to be conducted today.

I

From the 1960s until today, British historiography's secularization debate has been dominated by the secular model of secularization.[1] This model conceptualizes *religion* as a primordial, positively existing thing, and *secularity* as the relative lack of this thing, and it therefore defines *secularization* negatively, as the general and irreversible decline of the "social significance" of "religion."[2] Because these basic concepts are so widely accepted, British secularization scholarship has now spent the better part of

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[1] The seminal work was Edward Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City* (London, 1957).

[2] This definition was coined in 1966 in Bryan R. Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society: Fifty Years On*, ed. Steve Bruce (Oxford, 2016), 6. For its endorsement by recent commentators, see Hugh McLeod, *Secularisation in Western Europe, 1848–1914* (London, 2000), 13; S. J. D. Green, *The Passing of Protestant England: Secularisation and Social Change, c.1920–1960* (Cambridge, 2011), 32; Clive D. Field, *Britain's Last Religious Revival? Quantifying Belonging, Behaving, and Believing the Long 1950s* (Basingstoke, 2015), 2; Callum G. Brown, *Becoming Atheist: Humanism and the Secular West* (London, 2017), 4.

https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2020.243 Published online by Cambridge University Press

two generations arguing about when and why secularization in this negative sense occurred in Britain, especially about whether it was caused by modernization, and whether it should be understood as a gradual phenomenon dating from the eighteenth, nineteenth, or early twentieth centuries, or as a revolutionary phenomenon dating from the 1960s.[3] Recently, however, this entire historiography's underlying premise has been challenged by an international grouping of postsecular scholars, often of a postcolonial bent, who critique the concept of religion as ideological and analytically meaningless.[4] These scholars rightly observe that religion is a Western concept, that its equivalents are rarely found in non-Western cultures prior to Western colonialism, that it arbitrarily conflates a vast and varied array of cultural groups into a single category, and that nobody has ever found a satisfactory method of defining it. Their strong implication is that it is unfit for scholarly usage and should be downgraded from etic to emic status.[5] If accepted, this critique raises fundamental problems for the historiography of British secularization. While talk of Christian decline seems coherent enough, talk of religious decline is simply unverifiable if we cannot satisfactorily define what religion is.[6]

This article accepts that this postcolonial critique is correct, and it therefore introduces a distinctively postsecular framework for understanding British secularization whose defining methodological characteristic is that it uses the religion-secular binary as an emic rather than as an etic distinction.[7] This framework defines *secularity* as a positively existing ideological culture, comparable to Christianity and Islam, dominant in Britain since the secular revolution of the 1960s, which believes that it represents post-ideological neutrality and which uses *religion* as an othering category to denote all human cultures that are not secular.[8] Secularity's belief in its

[3] For reviews of the extensive literature, see Jeremy Morris, "The Strange Death of Christian Britain: Another Look at the Secularization Debate," *Historical Journal* 46, no. 4 (2003): 963–76; J. C. D. Clark, "Secularization and Modernization: The Failure of a 'Grand Narrative,'" *Historical Journal* 55, no. 1 (2012): 161–94; Jeremy Morris, "Secularization and Religious Experience: Arguments in the Historiography of Modern British Religion," *Historical Journal* 55, no. 1 (2012): 195–219.

[4] See, for example, Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago, 1982), xi; Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, 1993), 27–54, at 29; David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Cape Town, 1996); Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India, and "The Mystic East"* (London, 1999), chap. 2; Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (Oxford, 2000); Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology* (Baltimore, 2003); Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago, 2005); William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford, 2009), chap. 2.

[5] Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*, 57–59.

[6] See the intractable debates about whether Confucianism and Leninism are religions, debates that materially affect the global picture of secularization: Klaus-Georg Riegel, "Marxism-Leninism as a Political Religion," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 6, no. 1 (2005): 97–126; Anna Sun, *Confucianism as a World Religion: Contested Histories and Contemporary Realities* (Princeton, 2013). These issues are left undiscussed in Steve Bruce, "Defining Religion: A Practical Response," *International Review of Sociology* 21, no. 1 (2011): 107–20. For difficulties with definitions relating to "the supernatural," see Simon Dein, "The Category of the Supernatural: A Valid Anthropological Term?," *Religion Compass* 10, no. 2 (2016): 35–44.

[7] Though my focus is on the British case, it is possible that this approach might be fruitfully applied elsewhere.

[8] Umut Parmaksız, "Making Sense of the Postsecular," *European Journal of Social Theory* 21, no. 1 (2018): 98–116, at 109. The term *secular revolution* was, to the best of my knowledge, coined in Callum G. Brown, *Religion and the Demographic Revolution: Women and Secularization in Canada,*

https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2020.243 Published online by Cambridge University Press

own neutrality causes it to define "secularization" negatively, but this postsecular approach historicizes that belief, and it therefore defines *secularization* positively, as the dissemination and enactment of secularity, a contingent cultural phenomenon analogous to *Christianization* and *Islamization*.[9] Because the post-ideological society can imagined in many different ways, there are multiple kinds of secularity, analogous to the multiple kinds of Christianity and Islam, from Western secularity to that of the Soviet Union.[10] Thus historians of secularization must ultimately explain not merely the phenomenon of secularization but also why each particular secularity took the specific form that it did.[11]

This postsecular perspective is influenced by culturalist theories of human social life, and for this reason it explains secularization in terms of the acceptance and enactment of secularity's beliefs, just as Christianization can be explained in terms of the acceptance and enactment of Christianity's beliefs.[12] The crucial difference, however, is that secularity's beliefs are not about God but about the nature of secular societies, and so secularity is best understood not as a theological belief-system but as a

Ireland, UK and USA since the 1960s (Woodbridge, 2012), 252, but is retheorized here. The connection between debates about secularization and about the so-called *end of ideology* was pioneeringly observed by David Martin, *The Religious and the Secular: Studies in Secularization* (London, 1969), 24. I use the terms *secularity* and its adjective *secular* to refer to a specific ideological culture that envisions the permanent decline of "religion"; *secularism* and *secularist* to refer to the normative belief that religion should be excluded from the state; and *Secularism and Secularist* to refer to a specific ideological movement dating from the mid-nineteenth century that seeks to unite all kinds of people into a common attempt to improve the world. These three entities are different and should not be confused. Further, because the debate has for so long assumed that "religion" is a valid sociological category, wherever the context does not make it abundantly clear that I am referring to religion as a concept, I put the word in quotation marks.

[9] The idea that "there is a positive story to tell" is broached in Callum G. Brown, "The People of No Religion: The Demographics of Secularization in the English-Speaking World since c. 1900," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, no. 51 (2011): 37–61, at 41; see also Lois Lee, *Recognizing the Non-religious: Reimagining the Secular* (Oxford, 2015), 5.

[10] Ira Katznelson and Gareth Stedman Jones, "Introduction: Multiple Secularities" in *Religion and the Political Imagination*, ed. Ira Katznelson and G. Stedman Jones (Cambridge, 2010), 1–22; Monika Wohlrab-Sahr and Marian Burchardt, "Multiple Secularities: Toward a Cultural Sociology of Secular Modernities," *Comparative Sociology* 11, no. 6 (2012): 875–909.

[11] Although this task is beyond the scope of this article, for an initial attempt see Sam Brewitt-Taylor, *Christian Radicalism in the Church of England and the Invention of the British Sixties, 1957–1970: The Hope of a World Transformed* (Oxford, 2018), 24–27, 236.

[12] For theoretical context see Barbara Czarniawska-Joerges, *Narratives in Social Science Research* (London, 2004), 1–14. See also David S. Nash, "Believing in Secularisation—Stories of Decline, Potential, and Resurgence," *Journal of Religious History* 41, no. 4 (2017): 505–31. I use a structural-hermeneutical definition of the term *culture* to mean a collective classificatory framework that organizes and gives meaning to the world. This definition assumes that humans cannot make sense of the world without interpreting and radically simplifying it; that therefore everyone possesses such a framework; that most people assume most of their framework unselfconsciously rather than being fully aware of it; that communication and cooperation between individuals possessing very different assumed frameworks is difficult, requiring laborious efforts of translation and being liable to result in misunderstanding and mutual recrimination; and that stable cultures consequently tend to be dominated by one such framework, whose secondary elements may be readily modified, but whose core propositions tend to be generally accepted, except in times of cultural revolution. For this structural-hermeneutical approach, see Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Clifford Geertz and the Strong Program: The Human Sciences and Cultural Sociology," *Cultural Sociology* 2, no. 2 (2008): 157–68; William H. Sewell Jr., *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago, 2005), 164–74.

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sociological belief-system. In particular, secularity's core tenets state that it is possible for human societies to effect a permanent escape from collective ideology and that secular societies are successfully achieving this escape in practice.[13] This framework is ethnocentric because it problematizes the vast majority of human beliefs and practices by labeling them *religious* and therefore ideological, while normalizing a minority of mostly Western cultural norms by privileging them as *secular* and therefore post-ideological.[14] Nonetheless, this framework was an immensely influential cultural force in twentieth-century Western history, powerfully legitimating some cultural norms whilst subverting all others. Thus if the historiography of secularization is serious about shedding its ethnocentric secular bias, it must historicize secularity's ideological framework, reconceptualize itself as analogous to the historiographies of Christianity and Islam, and focus its attention on (1) why certain groups of people began to *believe* that they had permanently escaped collective ideology and (2) how they then altered their existing beliefs and practices in light of their new sociological faith.[15]

This postsecular approach allows the British secularization debate to be reframed in three specific ways. First, it implies that Christian decline and secularization are two quite distinct phenomena, each possessing different chronologies and sets of causes, with Christian decline being the decline of Britain's previously dominant moral culture, and secularization being the rise of its new one. In the British case, Christianity gradually declined from about 1900, but widespread secularization in this positive sense could not happen before the authoritative public dissemination of secularity's metanarrative, which first occurred in the late 1950s and early 1960s.[16] Second, by characterizing secularity as a specific ideological culture, this postsecular framework insists that widespread secularization was not the natural outcome of British Christianity's decline but was instead merely one of its many possible outcomes, such that historians need to identify the specific cultural mechanisms that enabled secularity's metanarrative, rather than any other, to gain such widespread acceptance in British society.[17] Finally, the postsecular characterization of secularity as a specific ideological culture suggests that secularization cannot proceed unless secularity's characteristic categories of *religion*, the *secular*, and *secularization* have all been invented and had secular meanings attributed to them; and because

[13] For these beliefs in secularization historiography, see, for examples, Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society*, 3; Steve Bruce, *Secularization: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory* (Oxford, 2015), 55; Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*: *Understanding Secularisation, 1800–2000* (London, 2001), 193–94.

[14] Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*, 58.

[15] For histories on equal terms, see Carole Dietze, "Toward a History on Equal Terms: A Discussion of 'Provincializing Europe,'" *History and Theory* 47, no. 1 (2008), 69–84.

[16] This chronology (as opposed to the theorization it relies on) is helpfully understood as a synthesis of the apparently irreconcilable interpretations of Callum Brown and Simon Green.

[17] This insistence echoes older arguments about the contingency of secularization, although most of these earlier arguments were actually about the contingency of Christian decline, not the contingency of secularization in the positive sense used here. For examples, see David Martin, "The Secularization Issue: Prospect and Retrospect," *British Journal of Sociology* 42, no. 3 (1991): 465–74, at 465; Grace Davie, *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates* (Oxford, 2000), 32, 73; Jeffrey Cox, "Provincializing Christendom: The Case of Great Britain," *Church History* 75, no. 1 (2006): 120–30, at 123; Sam Brewitt-Taylor, "The Invention of a 'Secular Society'? Christianity and the Sudden Appearance of Secularization Discourses in the British National Media, 1961–4," *Twentieth Century British History* 24, no. 3 (2013): 327–50, at 350.

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these categories originated in Christian theology, this requirement suggests that secularity should be regarded as possessing important linguistic and ideological debts to Christianity, which is why secularization has predominantly occurred in Christian countries rather than elsewhere.[18] This suggestion doubles down on Jeffrey Cox's "provincializing" argument by insisting that, because secularization is primarily a Western phenomenon, it cannot have primarily social causes, which would be repeatable elsewhere; instead, it must be chiefly caused by local cultural factors specific to the West.[19] Only by appreciating the cultural specificity of Western secularity, the radicalness of its break from Christianity, but also its substantial ideological and linguistic debts to Christianity, does it become possible to write a genuinely "provincial" history of modern Western secularization.[20]

This article offers an initial attempt at a postsecular history of British secularization, which focuses especially on how Christianity provided many of the cultural preconditions for the eventual invention of secularity in the mid-nineteenth century and how secularity came to achieve cultural dominance over British Christianity during the cultural revolution of the long 1960s, enabling the onset of mass British secularization.[21] This account can be summarized in five points. First, a long list of cultural preconditions must be fulfilled before secularity can even be imagined, let alone enacted, and these preconditions were not fulfilled in Western cultures until around 1800.[22] In particular, Western cultures prior to 1800 typically imagined "religion" to be characteristic of advanced societies only; thus, any general decline of "religion" was considered a step backward in human development, rather than forward, which is the belief required for secularity. Second, secularity first became imaginable in Western culture from the beginning of the nineteenth century because Christian theology slowly began to reimagine "religion" as the primordial condition of all human societies, thereby making it possible to envisage a general era of "religion" progressing into a general era of "non-religion." For this reason, the first European visions of irreversible "secularization" in the twentieth-century sense date from the 1830s.[23] Thirdly, however, though it existed in Britain, secularity's ideological metanarrative remained the preserve of radical intellectual minorities until the mid-1950s. Throughout the Second World War and the early Cold War, Britain's predominantly Christian public discussion continued to adhere to a "Christian civilization" metanarrative, which held that "religion" is essential to long-term

[18] This suggestion echoes major themes in the other, older, culturalist secularization debate, for which see Milan Babík, "Nazism as a Secular Religion," *History and Theory* 45, no. 3 (2006): 375–96, at 383–90, and, pioneeringly in the British case, Martin, *Religious and the Secular*, 24. For secularization having cultural causes, see Callum G. Brown, "A Revisionist Approach to Religious Change," in *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis*, ed. Steve Bruce (Oxford, 1992), 31–58, at 55–56.

[19] Cox, "Provincializing Christendom," 129–30.

[20] On provincialization, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, 2000), 3–6.

[21] This periodization of British secularization follows Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 15. For the long 1960s as witnessing a "cultural revolution," see Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c.1958–c.1974* (Oxford, 1998); Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford, 2007), 1.

[22] This section of the argument relies heavily on Ian Hunter, "Secularization: The Birth of a Modern Combat Concept," *Modern Intellectual History* 12, no. 1 (2015): 1–32, at 2–3.

[23] Hunter, "Secularization," 29–31.

https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2020.243 Published online by Cambridge University Press

social stability, and that therefore any post-Christian society would regress until it succumbed to a totalitarian ersatz-religion, as had apparently happened in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.[24] Because this "Christian civilization" perspective was the dominant cultural paradigm, it shaped British popular behavior throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The vast majority of Britons in this period acted on the assumptions that Christianity was normal in Britain, that Christianity was part of what made Britain great, and that they personally were Christians, even if they disagreed about the parameters of proper Christian behavior, such as whether it involved regular attendance at church.[25] Consequently, while the first half of the twentieth century was a period of Christian decline, it was not one of widespread secularization; from 1917, especially, the whole idea of secularity was frequently critiqued as tyrannical and potentially communist.[26] Fourth, British common sense about "religion" and "secularization" was radically altered in the late 1950s and early 1960s, in ways that still structure the British secularization debate today. By reimagining secularization as a natural and irreversible consequence of economic development, this paradigm shift radically rehabilitated secularity, cleansing it of its perceived association with totalitarianism, and simultaneously redefined religion as a primordial condition unusual in postwar Western societies.[27] Since social life is enacted narrative, this cultural transformation gradually caused massive social change. By authoritatively normalizing secularity and imaginatively dethroning Christianity, it made possible the secular revolution of the early 1960s and the slow but seismic enactment of secularization that followed.[28] Finally, this postsecular account explains the sudden dominance of British secularity in a formerly Christian moral culture by highlighting the role of radical Christian secular theologians in normalizing secularity's beliefs during the early phases of Britain's secular revolution.[29] On this argument, it was no coincidence that British secularity emerged from Britain's "Christian civilization" and that it depended on a reinterpretation of the Christian categories of religion and the secular. It was a specifically Christian vision of humanity's glorious new secular future that normalized secularity in British public discussion, thereby laying the necessary conceptual groundwork for the British secularization debate and for the widespread enactment of popular British secularization.[30]

II

Although secularity presents itself as post-ideological neutrality, and therefore as a complete break from what it characterizes as humanity's religious past, postsecular

[24] I place the term *Christian civilization* in quotation marks throughout to emphasize that I am using it as an emic rather than as an etic term.

[25] Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 1–7; Alister Chapman, "The International Context of Secularization in England: The End of Empire, Immigration, and the Decline of Christian National Identity, 1945–1970," *Journal of British Studies* 54, no. 1 (2015): 163–89, at 164–65.

[26] Paul Hanebrink, "European Protestants between Anti-communism and Anti-totalitarianism: The Other Interwar Kulturkampf?," *Journal of Contemporary History* 53, no. 3 (2018): 622–43, at 624.

[27] For an overview, see Brewitt-Taylor, "Invention of a 'Secular Society'?," 340–6.

[28] Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 190.

[29] For more detail, see Brewitt-Taylor, *Christian Radicalism in the Church of England*.

[30] Martin, *Religious and the Secular*, 24, 70–72.

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scholarship is now revealing that secularity can only be invented under certain specific cultural conditions, many of which are provided by Western Christianity.[31] A first requirement for inventing secularity is that the culture in question must possess the concept of "religion," but this requirement narrows the field to Western cultures and to world cultures after the advent of Western colonialism because religion is a Western category with roots in Latin Christianity.[32] In pre-Christian Rome, by contrast, an immanentist culture that did not distinguish between "religious" and "secular" spheres of life, *religio* simply meant the performance of obligatory rituals, whether directed to the gods, the emperor, or one's father. In this cultural context, there existed no conceptual means of distinguishing the decline of *religio* from the decline of culture more generally, and therefore no means of imagining secularization in the twentieth-century sense.[33]

The first step in the prehistory of Western secularization, consequently, was the Christianization of the Roman Empire, which was responsible for introducing the religious-secular binary into Western thought.[34] Because Christianity is transcendentalist and monotheistic, it posits a fundamental distinction between the eternal God and the created, temporary world.[35] This distinction ensured that Western Christendom always conceptualized the governance of Christian polities not as an undifferentiated unity but as a unified binary partnership, shared between the Christian state, which was responsible for temporal matters, and the Christian church or churches, which were responsible for eternal matters. This bifurcatory model of sovereignty, implicit in the Gospels, influentially expressed by Pope Gelasius I in 494 and debated for centuries afterward as the "two swords doctrine," was one of the central methods with which medieval Europeans conceptualized sovereignty, even though there were fierce disputes about whether Christian states held their temporal power directly from God or only on loan from the papacy.[36] By the early modern period, the Christian terms *religious* and *secular*, which had originally referred to different types of clergy, had come to name these two dimensions of Christendom's model of sovereignty.[37] In the aftermath of the Reformation, this nomenclature gave rise to the original use of the term *secularization*, which denoted the transfer

[31] See especially Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 22.

[32] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York, 1962), 18–19; cited in Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*, 62.

[33] Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*, 61; Charles Stewart, "Secularism as an Impediment to Anthropological Research," *Social Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (2001): 325–28, at 325–26. The transcendentalist/immanentist distinction is borrowed from Alan Strathern, *Unearthly Powers: Religious and Political Change in World History* (Cambridge, 2019), 27–106.

[34] Jacques Berlinerblau, "Political Secularism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Secularism*, ed. Phil Zuckerman and John R. Shook (Oxford, 2017), 85–102, at 86–88.

[35] See John 18:36; Matthew 22:21.

[36] David Knowles, "Church and State in Christian History," *Journal of Contemporary History* 2, no. 4 (1967): 3–15, at 4–13; Berlinerblau, "Political Secularism," 86–89; David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids, 2010), 32–42.

[37] Hunter, "Secularization," 9; Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*, 65; William H. Swatos Jr. and Kevin J. Christiano, "Secularization Theory: The Course of a Concept," *Sociology of Religion* 60, no. 3 (1999): 209–28, at 211; C. T. McIntire, "Transcending Dichotomies in History and Religion," *History and Theory* 45, no. 4 (2006): 80–92, at 82.

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of a person or thing from ecclesiastical to civic authority.[38] Crucially, however, this Christian usage cast Christian-secular and Christian-religious authorities as partners of each other, not as antagonists: religious and secular powers were both imagined as being permanent and cooperating components of Christendom until the awaited day of the Apocalypse, when they would be gloriously fused into an undifferentiated whole.[39] For this reason, this early modern Christian distinction between religious and secular powers was also not sufficient to imagine secularization in the twentieth-century sense.[40]

A further step in the prehistory of Western secularization also occurred in the early modern period, when Europeans began to apply the term *religion* to non-Christian cultures, as a category of cross-cultural comparison. This usage was also deeply embedded in Christian theological presuppositions. In the sixteenth century, it typically reflected medieval Catholicism by defining religion primarily in terms of ritual participation and community membership, but by the eighteenth century, it typically reflected Protestantism by defining religion primarily in terms of adherence to systems of doctrine.[41] Most centrally, however, by linking religion to cultural traits observable in the Christian West, these early modern European conceptions of religion implied that many non-European cultures were not religious because either they had never been or they had fallen from humanity's original pristine religion as apparently described in the book of Genesis.[42] Until the early nineteenth century, for example, European explorers almost universally denied that African and American indigenous cultures possessed religion, because they thought that religion implied a dedicated institutional and/or doctrinal apparatus, which, in their view, these cultures did not have.[43] Thus in the European encounter with non-Europeans between the sixteenth and late eighteenth centuries, European discussion drew a sharp categorical distinction between so-called civilized societies, which possessed religion, and so-called barbaric societies, which were thought to lack it.[44] "Look out for a people, entirely destitute of religion," warned David Hume's *The Natural History of Religion* in 1757. "If you find them at all, be assured, that they are but a few degrees removed from brutes."[45] These critiques were also directed at European societies that were considered to have abandoned religion. In the 1790s, at the height of the French revolution, British cartoons gleefully contrasted "British liberty," which consisted of "religion," "security" and "prosperity," with "French liberty," which con-

[38] Jan Bremmer, "Secularization: Notes towards a Genealogy," in *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, ed. Hent de Vries (New York, 2008), 432–37, at 433; Hunter, "Secularization," 2–3.

[39] See Revelation 21: 1–4, 22.

[40] Hunter, "Secularization," 3.

[41] Jonathan Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," 269–71, in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago, 1998), 269–84; John Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1985), 170–71; Jonathan Sheehan, "Enlightenment, Religion, and the Enigma of Secularization: A Review Essay," *American Historical Review* 108, no. 4 (2003): 1061–80, at 1074.

[42] Colin Kidd, *The World of Mr Casaubon: Britain's Wars of Mythography, 1700–1870* (Cambridge, 2016), 32.

[43] Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 11–16.

[44] Chidester, 35–38.

[45] David Hume, *The Natural History of Religion*, ed. A. Wayne Colver, and *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, ed. John Valdimir Price (Oxford, 1976), 94–95.

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sisted of "atheism," "anarchy," "cruelty," and "ruin."[46] In this cultural framework, "religion" was a precious cultural achievement, possessed only by the civilized, whose loss was a practical and moral step backward. Even the leading figures of the Enlightenment usually envisaged future societies as having a reformed and sometimes non-Christian "religion" rather than no "religion" at all.[47]

For Western secularity to become imaginable, therefore, it was first necessary to reimagine "religion" as a universal characteristic of premodern societies. This paradigm shift was influentially begun by Romantic theologians from the beginning of the nineteenth century.[48] Whereas the older definitions of "religion" had privileged observable criteria, thereby implying that "religion" had never existed everywhere, Romantic theology redefined "religion" as a wholly interior state, which allowed it to take the crucial step of positing that "religion" had always existed everywhere, even in the most apparently primitive societies.[49] The essence of "religion," argued Friedrich Schleiermacher's *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (1799), is humanity's innate response to the "infinite" nature of the universe; "religion" is therefore naturally possessed by all humanity, including "the ancients" and the civilizations of the "iron age."[50] Over the course of the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century, the new idea that all societies naturally possess some sort of "religion" slowly entered European conventional wisdom and became a central element in Christian apologetics.[51] The formal Western academic study of "religion," often dated from the publication of Max Mueller's *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (1873), defined "religion" as any expression of humanity's innate yearning for God, of which Christianity was considered the highest example.[52] As recent research has shown, however, this Western and Romantic-Christian concept of "religion" did not actually fit most human cultures, and so its universalization led to numerous cases in which imperialists or indigenous elites influentially reshaped indigenous practices to make them reflect Western categories, such as by enforcing greater doctrinal standardization, inventing scripture-

[46] See, for example, Thomas Rowlandson's famous 1792 cartoon "The Contrast," reprinted in David Duff, "Burke and Paine: Contrasts," in *The Cambridge Companion to British Literature of the French Revolution in the 1790s*, ed. Pamela Clemit (Cambridge, 2011), 47–70, at 60.

[47] Sheehan, "Enigma of Secularization," 1079–80. For examples, see *Voltaire's Philosophical Dictionary*, ed. and trans H. I. Woolf (New York, 1924), 265; Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. with an introduction and notes by Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York, 1960); Chris L. Firestone and Nathan A. Jacobs, eds., *The Persistence of the Sacred in Modern Thought* (Notre Dame, 2012). For post-Enlightenment examples, see Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason: Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology*, ed. M. D. Conway (New York, 1896), 6, 190; Mona Ozouf, "Revolutionary Religion," in *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, ed. François Furet and Mona Ozouf (Cambridge, MA, 1989), 560–70; Raymond Keith Williamson, *Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of Religion* (Albany, 1984), 122; Robert Owen, *Essays on the Formation of Human Character* (Manchester, 1837), 47; Dominic Erdozain, *The Soul of Doubt: The Religious Roots of Unbelief from Luther to Marx* (Oxford, 2015), 241.

[48] Peter Elliot, *Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis* (Milton Keynes, 2013), 6.

[49] Fitzgerald, *Ideology of Religious Studies*, 35.

[50] Friedrich Schleiermacher, "Second Speech: On the Essence of Religion," *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, ed. Richard Crouter (Cambridge, 1996), 24–26.

[51] Masuzawa, *Invention of World Religions*, 64.

[52] Masuzawa, 22–23; Fitzgerald, *Ideology of Religious Studies*, 35–36.

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based traditions, or by imposing new distinctions between "religious" and "secular" spheres of life.[53]

Thus it was only from the early nineteenth century that radical minorities of Europeans possessed the conceptual equipment to envision a universal age of "religion" giving way to a universal age of non-"religion," and they actually did so from the 1830s and 1840s.[54] One of the first groups to work within this framework was the Left Hegelians. In a central example, Karl Marx's *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843) described "religion" as a system of "illusions," "the sigh of the oppressed creature," whose eventual "abolition" was a crucial step on the path toward humanity's "true happiness."[55] Subsequently, significant numbers of European secularists, Marxists, and rationalists came to understand themselves as having departed from humanity's primordial condition of "religion" and therefore as having achieved historically unprecedented levels of epistemological clear-sightedness.[56] In a separate development, the British freethinker G. J. Holyoake coined the terms *Secularist* and *Secularism* in 1851 to refer to a new movement that would invite both "religious" and non-"religious" people into a common attempt to improve the world.[57] Nonetheless, outside Marxism, there was no consensus in Western sociology that religion would permanently diminish in modern societies. In 1848, Auguste Comte had imagined future societies being guided by a "religion of humanity."[58] In 1912, Émile Durkheim argued that the sacred is an enduring and necessary feature of human societies, such that the decline of Western Christianity would necessarily provoke the rise of new "gods" and "living cults."[59] In 1917, Max Weber spoke of "the disenchantment of the world," but, despite later misunderstandings, he was expressly referring to changes in the sacred's form, not in its power. In modern times, he argued, "The many gods of old, without their magic and therefore in the form of impersonal forces, rise up from their graves, strive for power over our lives, and begin their eternal struggle amongst themselves."[60] Marxist regimes were founded in Russia in 1917, in Eastern Europe in the late 1940s, and in China in 1949. Judging on the basis of headcount, they collectively comprised the twentieth century's most important cause of secularization.[61]

[53] Among many examples, see Fitzgerald, 164–67; King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 98–101; Brian K. Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians, and the Colonial Construction of Religion* (Oxford, 2005), 169–70; Jason Ananda Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan* (Chicago, 2012), 1.

[54] Hunter, "Secularization," 29.

[55] Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, ed. Joseph O'Malley, trans. Anette Jolin and Joseph O'Malley (Cambridge, 1970), 131.

[56] See, for examples, Edward Royle, *Victorian Infidels: The Origins of the British Secularist Movement, 1791–1866* (Manchester, 1974); Edward Royle, *Radicals, Secularists and Republicans: Popular Freethought in Britain, 1866–1915* (Manchester, 1980), x; Todd H. Weir, *Secularism and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Germany: The Rise of the Fourth Confession* (Cambridge, 2014), 3; Joshua Bennett, "A History of 'Rationalism' in Victorian Britain," *Modern Intellectual History* 15, no.1 (2018): 63–91.

[57] Michael Rectenwald, *Nineteenth-Century British Secularism: Science, Religion and Literature* (Basingstoke, 2016), 74.

[58] Auguste Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, trans. J. Bridges (London, 1865), chap. 6.

[59] Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Carol Cosman (Oxford, 2001), 322–23.

[60] Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in *Max Weber's "Science as a Vocation,"* ed. Peter Lassman and Irving Velody with Herminio Martins (London, 1988), 3–31, 23.

[61] For Soviet secularization, see Paul Froese, *The Plot to Kill God: Findings from the Soviet Experiment in Secularization* (Berkeley, 2008).

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III

In the British case, however, the "Christian civilization" metanarrative retained its cultural dominance into the mid-1950s, severely inhibiting the proliferation of secularity. This metanarrative held that the British had begun their history as uncivilized "pagans," but had been slowly "civilized" by Roman imperialism and Christianity, allowing Britain's emergence as a Christian technological colossus in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This framework insisted that humans have an innate desire for collective spirituality which causes chaos unless tamed by an orderly "religion," and it therefore conceptualized any decline of "religion" as a step *backward* in Western development, as a return to Europe's pre-Christian "barbarism," as it was called, a regression considered especially catastrophic in societies possessing advanced technology.[62] This "Christian civilization" ideology was especially influential during the Second World War and the early Cold War: the latter conflict, in particular, was routinely framed in British public discussion as a spiritual conflict between the Christian West and a secular Other.[63] Even in the early 1960s, about 93 percent of the British population identified as Christian, and about another 1 percent as members of non-Christian religions.[64] Conversely, the proportion of those actively defining themselves as belonging to no "religion" was no more than 6 percent and may have been more like 1 or 2 percent: people who publicly attacked Christianity were widely mistrusted in the 1950s, as indeed were atheists in general.[65]

This dominance of "Christian civilization" ideology ensured that prior to the mid-1950s, British public discussion did not primarily use secularity's distinction between religious and secular societies. Instead, it predominantly used Christian civilization's distinction between *religious* and *pagan* societies, a categorical pairing that distinguished well-ordered collective spiritualities from chaotic and destructive ones. "Beneath all our secondary troubles," argued a *Times* leader in 1933, lies "the plain issue of life or death, of Christianity or paganism, that confronts us today."[66] This pairing was also a frequent feature of ecclesiastical rhetoric, as when the bishop of Winchester identified "the most insidious foe which confronts Christianity" as "the paganism which has been spread through all classes."[67]

This category of paganism is important for cultural historians of British secularization, because prior to the secular revolution it provided the dominant means of

[62] For arguments that religion is a social necessity, see, for examples, Bernard Shaw's remarks reported in "Science and Happy Marriages," *Daily Mirror* (here and elsewhere, London), 6 May 1930, 22; T. S. Eliot, "Thoughts after Lambeth," *Criterion Miscellany*, no. 30 (1930): 13; Arnold Toynbee, *The Prospects of Western Civilization* (New York, 1949), 87–88.

[63] Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 9, 170–75; Dianne Kirby, "Ecclesiastical McCarthyism: Cold War Repression in the Church of England," *Contemporary British History* 19, no. 2 (2005): 187–203, at 188.

[64] Field, *Britain's Last Religious Revival?*, 19, table 2.2.

[65] Brown, *Religion and the Demographic Revolution*, 60–62; Callum G. Brown, "'The Unholy Mrs Knight' and the BBC: Secular Humanism and the Threat to the 'Christian Nation,' c.1945–60," *English Historical Review* 127, no. 525 (2012): 345–76, at 365; see esp. the statistics on public mistrust of atheists cited in Field, *Britain's Last Religious Revival?*, 83. The ambiguity between the 6 percent and the 1–2 percent figures arises because failing to answer the question "What is your religion?" with a positive response is not the same as unequivocally denying any religious affiliation.

[66] "The Triumph of the Cross," editorial, *Times* (here and elsewhere, London), 13 April 1933, 15.

[67] "'New Paganism' Attacked," *Daily Mail* (here and elsewhere, London), 9 October 1935, 7; see also "To Sit All Day in St Paul's," *Daily Mirror*, 22 May 1935, 1.

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describing people who reject all "religion." As one self-identified pagan complained in 1932, "Many people assumed that a Pagan was synonymous with an agnostic or an atheist."[68] Because the term *pagan* evoked European spiritual practices prior to Christianization, this usage expressly denied secularity's claims to modernity, insisting instead that people who reject organized "religion" are *less* advanced than Christians. Nations that became morally complacent and embraced "the paganism of modern living," warned the Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald in 1927, would surely be ruined, "as Rome was ruined."[69] Modernist calls for a "new morality," insisted representatives of the British churches in 1932, were merely "a revival of ancient paganism, which will assuredly be as completely defeated as was its forerunner."[70] Similarly, the historian Arnold Toynbee argued in 1937, "the really new thing in the world is not Paganism but Christianity. Our modern pagans are unconsciously looking at history in the short perspective of a pre-scientific age."[71]

This Christian characterization of secular people as regressive "pagans" carried real bite in the 1930s and 1940s because the same epithet was routinely applied to Nazism, with a view to positioning that ideology as a regression to Europe's pre-Christian Dark Ages.[72] In 1934, for example, the *Times* commented that Germany was experiencing "a struggle to save Christianity itself from being destroyed in a pagan Nazi Weltanschauung."[73] In 1938, the *Daily Mirror* described the pressure on German clergymen to "salute the Nazi paganism and worship its High Priest of the totalitarian sect."[74] Similarly, in March 1939, the *Sunday Express* printed a long profile of "Hitler's pagan priesthood," declaring that a mortal spiritual struggle was currently being waged between "the church" and "the dictators."[75] As these quotations suggest, the "Christian civilization" metanarrative made it seem quite natural to characterize twentieth-century geopolitics in terms of competing "religions" and quasi-"religions," and to classify Nazism and communism as spiritual rivals to Christianity.[76] While British commentators acknowledged the decline of British Christianity, most of them had little sense of any global decline of "religion."[77]

From September 1939, consequently, British discussion routinely framed the Second World War in spiritual terms, arguing that the defeat of Western Christianity at the hands of Nazi "pagans" would necessarily imply the collapse of Western

[68] "Pagan Organist Resigns," *Daily Mirror*, 24 September 1932, 6.

[69] "Dog Racing 'Poison,'" *Daily Mirror*, 3 October 1927, 2.

[70] "Churches Attack New Book," *Daily Express* (here and elsewhere, London), 6 October 1932, 1.

[71] Arnold Toynbee, "Post-war Paganism versus Christianity," *Listener* (here and elsewhere UK), 20 January 1937, 123–24.

[72] See, for examples, George Edinger, "Fingers in the Austrian Pie," *Daily Express*, 5 November 1934, 12; Viscount Castlerose, "Current Events," *Daily Express*, 10 July 1935, 10; Selkirk Panton, "Pope Attacks Hitler Cross," *Daily Express*, 5 May 1938, 1; "'Back to Barbaric Paganism,'" *Times*, 7 May 1935, 15; "Souls in Uniform," editorial, *Daily Mirror*, 5 January 1937, 11; Philip Williamson, "Christian Conservatives and the Totalitarian Challenge, 1933–1940," *English Historical Review* 115, no. 462 (2000): 607–42.

[73] "Church and State in Germany," editorial, *Times*, 13 December 1934, 17.

[74] "A Case of Conscience," editorial, *Daily Mirror*, 20 May 1938, 15.

[75] Shaw Desmond, "Hitler's Pagan Priesthood," *Sunday Express*, 12 March 1939, 16.

[76] For this idea in European discussion from the 1930s to the 1950s, see Milan Babik, "Beyond Totalitarianism: (Re)Introducing Secularization Theory to Liberal Narratives of Progress," *Politics, Religion and Ideology* 13, no. 3 (2012): 289–309, at 294–98.

[77] See, for examples, "European Unity," *Times*, 9 October 1948, 4; "Overcoming the World," *Times*, 15 April 1950, 8; "Mr Attlee's Call to the Nation," *Times*, 31 July 1950, 4.

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civilization.[78] "We are fighting to preserve Christianity, the Law, and the simple right to live decently," declared the *Daily Mirror* in November 1939.[79] "The Battle of Britain is about to begin," announced Winston Churchill in June 1940. "Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilization. If we fail, then the whole world . . . will fall into the abyss of a new dark age."[80] "By common consent we are fighting to uphold the law of CHRIST against the law of paganism and brute force," concluded the *Times* in August 1940.[81] The Allies, declared the *Daily Mail* in 1945, were "crusaders against a paganism which threatened to extinguish civilisation."[82] "Hitler attacked both the Greco-Roman heritage of Europe and its Christian tradition, substituting for them a new paganism in which were combined the worst vices of the worst ages of history," commented the *Manchester Guardian*.[83] In this cultural context, it made perfect sense for the government to call National Days of Prayer for the defeat of Nazi Germany.[84]

As long as Britain's "Christian civilization" framework retained its dominance, therefore, the term *secularization*, when it referred to any general decline of religion, would always be chiefly understood as a regressive phenomenon that would push European civilization backward, into its pre-Christian "Dark Ages." In 1934, for example, the *Daily Mirror* discussed the apparent "secularization of life" in Scotland under the headline "Is Scotland Going Pagan?"[85] In 1940, similarly, the Anglican historian Alec Vidler could warn his readers against the "secularization and paganization of society."[86] By the early 1940s, it had become commonplace for British commentators to tie these tropes together and to identify twentieth-century secularization as a central cause of totalitarianism. In this framework, humanity's innate hunger for meaning ensured that the decline of orderly "religion" had inevitably caused the rise of disorderly ersatz religions such as Nazism. "Hand in hand with secularization," the *Times* declared in 1935, commenting on Nazification in Germany, "goes the inculcation of the 'new religion.'"[87] "If you will not have God," remarked T. S. Eliot in 1939, "you should pay your respects to Hitler or Stalin."[88] Hitler had risen to power by manipulating "the deep religious instincts of his men" insisted the prominent free churchman Leslie Weatherhead in the *Daily Express* in June 1940: since humans "cannot tolerate . . . meaninglessness," "when you have dismissed all the Christian values," "the only religion alive" left was "the religion of the State," in which "the State is God."[89] "The secularization of the Western mind has now been going on for generations," commented a *Manchester Guardian* reviewer in

[78] Keith Robbins, *History, Religion and Identity in Modern Britain* (London, 1993), 197–202; McLeod, *Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, 31–32.

[79] "France," editorial, *Daily Mirror*, 18 November 1939, 9.

[80] "Premier's Speech," *Daily Express*, 19 June 1940, 7.

[81] "The Faith and the Future," editorial, *Times*, 26 August 1940, 5.

[82] "All at Once," editorial, *Daily Mail*, 1 May 1945, 2.

[83] "Hitler," editorial, *Manchester Guardian*, 2 May 1945, 4.

[84] Philip Williamson, "National Days of Prayer: The Churches, the State and Public Worship in Britain, 1899–1957," *English Historical Review* 128, no. 531 (2013): 323–66.

[85] "Is Scotland Going Pagan?," *Daily Mirror*, 14 May 1934, 13.

[86] A. R. Vidler, *God's Judgment on Europe* (London, 1940), 77.

[87] "Nazis and the Church," *Times*, 8 October 1935, 13.

[88] T. S. Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society* (London, 1939), 63.

[89] Leslie Weatherhead, "Is Your Religion Any Good to You Now?," *Daily Express*, 22 June 1940, 4.

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1943, "and we are beginning to see some of its results, notably the rise of substitute religions," such as those of "the race or the class"—that is, Nazism and communism.[90] "The alternative to religion is not irreligion, it is counter-religion," insisted the historian R. H. Tawney in 1949. "The house which is vacated by Christianity does not remain empty. It is occupied by some form of 'idolatry.'"[91] The decline of "religion," argued Arnold Toynbee in his 1953 Gifford lectures, had resulted in a "spiritual blank," and the result was a general search for "new objects of worship"; "distressed" modern civilization, he thought, was "ripe for deifying any new Caesar who might succeed in giving the world unity and peace."[92] "A completely secular society is already being found to be unworkable," commented a *Times* article in 1952. Any society that lacked "ultimate religious sanction" to inspire its citizens would be "compelled to deify itself, erecting its own claims into moral absolutes."[93]

These rejections of the empirical feasibility of permanently post-ideological societies were also widely echoed by social investigators in this period. "Events in the past two decades," commented Mass Observation's 1947 *Puzzled People* report, referring to the rise of Nazism in Germany, "have shown us what crazy, sinister and elaborate structures can be built in minds empty of firm aims and ideals," which meant that in England "the immediate actions of the established Church are of vital importance to future stabilities."[94] In 1951 the sociological researchers B. S. Rowntree and G. R. Lavers argued that "we are in fact living on the spiritual capital of the past"; the decline of British Christianity, they feared, might well create a "spiritual vacuum" that would be "filled in the future by an atheistic and totalitarian belief."[95] In 1953, in their famous discussion of Elizabeth II's coronation, the sociologists Edward Shils and Michael Young reiterated Durkheim's insistence that the sacred is an essential and enduring feature of modern societies.[96] In 1955, the anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer's survey of English religion similarly failed to advocate a secularization thesis, offering instead a "paganization thesis," according to which ordinary Britons, having come adrift from official church teaching, were becoming increasingly interested in ghosts, astrology, and lucky mascots.[97] "The abolition of God [has] left a perceptible void," commented Aldous Huxley in 1944. "Nation, Class and Party. . . have rushed in to fill the empty niche. For politicians . . . the new pseudo-religions have been, still are and (until they destroy the entire social structure) will continue to be extremely profitable superstitions."[98] "The old

[90] R. P. McDermott, "Other Altars," *Manchester Guardian*, 5 November 1944, 3.

[91] R. H. Tawney, "Speech to the William Temple Society, Cambridge, 1949," cited in Lawrence Goldman, *The Life of R. H. Tawney: Socialism and History* (London, 2013), 184. For the demonological reference see Matthew 12: 43–45.

[92] "Spiritual Vacuum of the West," *Times*, 7 November 1953, 3.

[93] "The Two Cities," *Times*, 22 March 1952, 8.

[94] Mass Observation, *Puzzled People: A Study in Popular Attitudes to Religion, Ethics, Progress and Politics in a London Borough* (London, 1947), 17, 159.

[95] B. S. Rowntree and G. R. Lavers, *English Life and Leisure: A Social Study* (London, 1951), 372.

[96] Edward Shils and Michael Young, "The Meaning of the Coronation," *Sociological Review* 1, no. 2 (1953): 63–81, at 66.

[97] Geoffrey Gorer, *Exploring English Character* (London, 1955), 259–70; Green, *Passing of Protestant England*, 265.

[98] Aldous Huxley, *Time Must Have a Stop* (London, 1945), 286. Cited in Mass Observation, *Puzzled People*, 90.

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dogmas have perhaps decayed," observed Bertrand Russell in 1949, "but new dogmas have arisen . . . New dogmas are much worse than old ones."[99]

In the late 1930s and 1940s, consequently, there existed a dominant though not unchallenged consensus that keeping Britain Christian was a necessary part of combating totalitarianism. "Communism, National Socialism and the rest are really religions," argued the philosopher and university administrator Walter Moberly in a BBC lecture in 1937. "You can only counter a religion by a religion."[100] In February 1940, in an editorial titled "Religion and National Life" that sold nearly 400,000 copies in pamphlet form in the first twelve days of its publication, the *Times* expressly placed reversing Christian decline on the same moral level as defeating Hitler. "The healthy life of a nation must be based on spiritual principles," it argued. "It will be of little use to fight, as we are fighting to-day, for the preservation of Christian principles, if Christianity itself is to have no future, or at immense cost to safeguard religion against attack from without, if we allow it to be starved by neglect from within."[101] In 1944, in a deliberate attempt to bolster Britain's "Christian civilization," the Butler Education Act created a legal obligation for every county and voluntary school in England and Wales to begin the school day with communal worship.[102] This institutional attempt to revive British Christianity matched large-scale efforts elsewhere, especially the successful experiments conducted within the US armed forces, which meaningfully strengthened American Christianity in the 1950s and 1960s.[103] Implicit in all these efforts was the assumption that the strength of Western Christianity was not dictated by invisible social forces but was a matter for human agency and so could be substantially increased by activism, persuasion, and education.

This insistence on the necessity of defending Western Christianity did not fade after 1945, but was immediately redeployed for Britain's Cold War against the atheistic Soviet Union.[104] Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech, given in March 1946, set the tone by attacking communism as "a growing challenge and peril to Christian civilisation."[105] In 1948, his opponent Clement Attlee declared "there is no more urgent need to-day than the reaffirmation of the absolute moral values on which our Christian civilisation is based."[106] The decline of Western Christianity, argued the *Times* in the same year, was putting Europe at risk of "infection by the pseudo-religion of

[99] Bertrand Russell, "Am I an Atheist or an Agnostic? A Plea for Tolerance in the Face of New Dogmas," in *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, vol. 11: *Last Philosophical Testament, 1943–68*, ed. John Slater (London, 1997), 89–92, at 92.

[100] Walter Moberly, "Church, Community and State: Challenge of the New Faiths," *Listener*, 13 January 1937, 49–50.

[101] "Religion and National Life," editorial, *Times*, 17 February 1940, 7. For the 400,000 figure, see "Religion in School and Home," editorial, *Times*, 9 March 1940, 7.

[102] Elizabeth "Libi" Sundermann, *For God and Country: Butler's 1944 Education Act* (Newcastle, 2015), 2.

[103] Michael Snape, "GI Religion and Post-war Revival in the United States and Great Britain," in *Secularization and Religious Innovation in the North Atlantic World*, ed. David Hempton and Hugh McLeod (Oxford, 2017), 213–33, esp. 231.

[104] Dianne Kirby, "Divinely Sanctioned: The Anglo-American Cold War Alliance and the Defence of Western Civilization and Christianity, 1945–48," *Journal of Contemporary History* 35, no. 3 (2000): 385–412.

[105] "Churchill's Fears of Soviet: Suggests Anglo-U.S. Pact," *Daily Mirror*, 6 March 1946, 1.

[106] Quoted in "Union Based on Christianity," *Times*, 26 April 1948, 3.

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Communism."[107] This Cold War rhetoric frequently cast secularity as regressive, as when in 1949 the *Times* praised the Catholic Church's leading role in "the struggle against Marxian paganism."[108] In 1952, similarly, the British press reported General Eisenhower's attack on "the reactionaries of Communist materialism, violent antagonists to any form of religion," whose "paganism" would necessarily "return man to a horrible bondage."[109] In 1955, while serving as foreign secretary, Harold Macmillan similarly called for "the forces of Communism" to be opposed by Christian "moral forces," which he saw as "really the strongest weapon in the fight for the reconversion of a pagan world, and the recreation of a free and Christian way of living."[110] In the same year, conversely, the humanist psychology lecturer Margaret Knight attacked Christianity on BBC radio but was widely condemned in the national press on the grounds that her atheism made Britain more vulnerable to communism.[111] Across the population as a whole, the strength of this "Christian civilization" framework was such that, even in the mid-1960s, pollsters National Opinion Polls and Opinion Research Centre found that 80 percent of respondents considered Britain a Christian country, and 81 percent considered it important that it should remain one.[112] In a much more restrained but still comparable equivalent of American McCarthyism, Christianity and anticommunism formed crucial intertwined components of British national identity throughout the early and mid-1950s.[113] In this early Cold War perspective, "religion" was not regressive: non-"religion" was regressive.

Thus when British Christians commented on the state of the British churches between the 1920s and the mid-1950s, they frequently bemoaned the decline of "religion," and sometimes used the term *secularization* to do so, but they did not understand this development to be irreversible, because within their interpretative framework that would have been tantamount to predicting the inevitable disintegration of Western civilization into totalitarianism.[114] In 1931, for example, the Roman Catholic historian Christopher Dawson argued on BBC radio, "there can . . . be little doubt that the present phase of intense secularization is a temporary one, and that it will be followed by a far-reaching reaction."[115] In 1944, the Church of England's *Towards the Conversion of England* report argued that most Britons were spiritually lost, but also that "man," being "created for God," "cannot long exist without

[107] "Crisis of the West," editorial, *Times*, 24 April 1948, 5.

[108] "Catholicism To-day," *Times*, 31 October 1949, 5.

[109] "The Communist Threat," *Times*, 27 August 1952, 3.

[110] "Mr. Macmillan on Prospects for Conference," *Times*, 29 September 1955, 8.

[111] Brown, "Unholy Mrs Knight," 365.

[112] Cited in Clive D. Field, "Another Window on British Secularization: Public Attitudes to Church and Clergy since the 1960s," *Contemporary British History* 28, no. 2 (2014): 190–218, at 213.

[113] Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 9; Matthew Grimley, "The Religion of Englishness: Puritanism, Providentialism, and 'National Character,' 1918–1945," *Journal of British Studies* 46, no. 4 (2007): 884–906, at 906; Chapman, "International Context of Secularization," 167–68; Kirby, "Ecclesiastical McCarthyism," 188. For Christianity and anticommunism in popular culture, see Tony Shaw, "'Martyrs, Miracles, and Martians': Religion and Cold War Cinematic Propaganda in the 1950s," in *Religion and the Cold War*, ed. Dianne Kirby (Basingstoke, 2003), 211–31; Michael Paris, "Red Menace! Russia and British Juvenile Fiction," *Contemporary British History* 19, no. 2 (2005): 117–32, at 123, 129.

[114] See Jeremy Morris, "Enemy Within? The Appeal of the Discipline of Sociology to Religious Professionals in Post-war Britain," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 9, no. 2–3 (2016): 177–200, at 186.

[115] Christopher Dawson, "The Religious Problem," *Listener*, 25 November 1931, 913.

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finding some outlet for his instinct for worship," and so Britons could never be irreversibly alienated from Christianity.[116] In 1955, the outgoing archbishop of York called on Christians to resist "modern paganism," but concluded by asserting, "there is a deep ground for hope and confidence in the future of our Church."[117]

Even in the early 1950s, consequently, most of the crucial cultural preconditions for widespread secularization did not exist in Britain. Despite the long-term declines in church attendance and doctrinal knowledge, the dominance of "Christian civilization" ideology still ensured that mainstream British discussion overwhelmingly described itself as Christian, normalized Christianity, and powerfully Othered secularity as irrational, regressive, and pagan.[118] Since secularity was considered a leading characteristic of the Soviet Union, it would take a dramatic conceptual shift for Cold War Britain to reimagine itself as permanently secular.

IV

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, such a paradigm shift actually happened: British public discussion abruptly abandoned the "Christian civilization" metanarrative in favor of secularity's rival metanarrative, thereby profoundly altering the course of British cultural and social history.[119] The crux of this shift was the acceptance of secularity's belief in the possibility of permanently post-ideological societies, a belief that the "Christian civilization" framework had always powerfully denied, the protests of radical minorities of secularists, Marxists, and rationalists notwithstanding.[120] This acceptance prompted a dramatic reordering of the ideological binaries with which British discussion categorized world cultures. Christian civilization's distinction between *religious* and *pagan* cultures, which denoted different types of collective ideology, was supplanted by secularity's distinction between *religious* and *secular* cultures, which classified societies as either ideological or post-ideological.[121] A second consequence was that "secular" societies were rehabilitated as normal and permanent entities in the modern world, rather than regressive routes into social pathology and totalitarianism. A third consequence was that religion was reimagined as atypical in the modern world rather than being an intrinsic feature of it, and so Nazism and communism ceased to be considered quasi-religions.[122] A fourth consequence was the acceptance of secularity's philosophical history of secularization, which powerfully normalized mass secularity by backdating its onset to the early

[116] Archbishops' Commission on Evangelism, *Towards the Conversion of England* (London, 1945), 15.

[117] Cyril Garbett, "The Church's Future," *Times*, 5 February 1955, 7.

[118] For the widespread persistence of Christian identity into the 1950s, see Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 9, 192; Chapman, "International Context of Secularization," 172.

[119] For the 1960s as witnessing a revolutionary turning point in religious and social history, see Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 1; McLeod, *Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, 1. See also Brewitt-Taylor, "The Invention of a 'Secular Society'?," 337–40.

[120] Brown, *Religion and the Demographic Revolution*, 26, 60–62.

[121] Secularity's binary classification of world cultures as either secular or religious is ideological because it implies that secular cultures are unique and that nonsecular cultures are all essentially the same, rather like British nationalism's classification of world cultures as either British or foreign.

[122] That is, until the secular religion scholarship of the 1990s.

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nineteenth century.[123] As a direct result of these developments, British Christianity abruptly lost most of its cultural legitimacy: rather than being interpreted as a necessary bedrock of British society, it was now widely interpreted, even by Christians, as a dying survival from premodernity. This was an astonishing reversal of the previous cultural framework, a transformation so fundamental that it is difficult to understand as anything less than revolutionary.[124] In a development of striking irony, Britain public discussion spent much of the early 1950s demonizing the Soviet Union for its secularity and then, just as the Cold War reached its most dangerous phase, embraced secularity for itself.[125]

As would have been natural in a predominantly Christian culture, secularity's ideological beliefs were initially disseminated in the British public sphere chiefly by radical Christians, who took the crucial step of reformulating the Christian categories of "religion," "the secular," and "secularization" to express the metanarrative of the end of ideology.[126] In the British context, the first major example of this reformulation was the Anglican clergyman E. R. Wickham's *Church and People in an Industrial City* (1957), which, as Jeremy Morris has observed, "was widely accepted in the 1960s and 1970s as a decisive intervention" in the field of secularization studies.[127] Drawing on his radical reinterpretation of Christian eschatology, Wickham argued that in modern times God was merging together heaven and earth and that consequently the natural/supernatural distinction was breaking down.[128] The result, he argued, was that "religion" was permanently declining due to the "emergence of a new type of man," who had "a new structure of thought and a new mode of apprehending reality," and who was determined to build "a wholly new society."[129] These futuristic "modern men," Wickham argued, were post-ideological and "secular," in the sense that they were using "empirical knowledge" and "science" to create "a new form of society."[130] This usage of the term "secular" to denote post-ideological humanity relied on a subtle but substantial reworking of older Christian categories. Because Wickham thought that God was inaugurating the end of history in his own era, he believed that Christendom's long-standing partnership between "religion" and "the secular" was now being ended, so that in modern times "the religious and the secular fall apart and cease

[123] Usually around the time of the Industrial Revolution. See, for examples, Wickham, *Church and People*, 12; Alan Gilbert, *The Making of Post-Christian Britain: A History of the Secularization of Modern Society* (London, 1980), 43. This radically wrong periodization of mass secularization was not corrected until Brown's 2001 *Death of Christian Britain*.

[124] See the debate between revolutionary and evolutionary readings of "secularization" described in Brown, "What Was the Religious Crisis of the 1960s," *Journal of Religious History* 34, no. 4 (2010): 469–73.

[125] On 1958 to 1962 as the Cold War's "years of maximum danger," see Robert McMahon, *The Cold War: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2003), 79–89.

[126] Brewitt-Taylor, "Invention of a 'Secular Society'?," 331.

[127] Morris, "Secularization and Religious Experience," 198. See also Sarah Williams, "The Language of Belief: An Alternative Agenda for the Study of Victorian Working-Class Religion," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 1, no. 2 (1996): 303–17, at 304. For earlier (though not major) examples, see Brewitt-Taylor, *Christian Radicalism*, 70–72, 134–39.

[128] Wickham, *Church and People*, 233.

[129] Wickham, 205, 230, 236. Wickham's gendered language is retained here, to emphasize the constructed nature of the original.

[130] Wickham, 182, 186.

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to co-inhere," creating two mutually uncomprehending cultures.[131] Rather than invoking *religion* and *the secular* to indicate the two components of Christendom, consequently, Wickham was using these categories to denote two distinct moral cultures, and to declare his radical Christian loyalty to the latter one.[132] This move allowed him to produce a radical reinterpretation of the decline of the British churches, a phenomenon that had been widely recognized since at least the 1920s.[133] Rather than interpreting church decline as evidence of Britain's increasing vulnerability to totalitarian ersatz-religions, as had been standard, he interpreted it as evidence of British society's entry into an irreversible new era of post-ideological secularity.[134]

Secularity was then vigorously disseminated in Britain's public sphere by radical figures within Britain's churches, who believed that worldwide secularization had been gloriously prophesied by the biblical book of Revelation.[135] The central example is John Robinson, whose international bestseller *Honest to God* (1963) eventually sold over a million copies, making it the most widely read British work of the 1960s to deal with "secularization."[136] "Modern man has opted for a secular world," argued Robinson in his high-profile *Observer* article: Christians should embrace "glad acceptance of secularisation as a God-given fact."[137] By mid-1963, the unavoidable dominance of secularity had been essentially conceded by the Anglican hierarchy, with Archbishop Ramsey being willing to characterize the present as a secular age to which Christians must adapt.[138] This was despite the fact that self-reported theists outnumbered self-reported atheists by about eight to one, and 93 percent of the British population still self-identified as Christians.[139]

By the mid-1960s, the belief that invisible social forces were irresistibly displacing British Christianity and inaugurating a new "secular society" had become an established commonplace in the British media, often articulated without specific reference to Christian theology, although it was still expressed in the distinctively Christian terminology of *religion*, *the secular*, and *secularization*.[140] In 1967, for example, the *Guardian* could comment, "Christianity as such" was "struggling to adapt historical beliefs and attitudes to the needs of human societies at different stages of secularization."[141] These ideological beliefs were then influentially reinforced by secular sociologists, especially by Bryan Wilson's *Religion in Secular Society* (1966), which came out just as the cultural paradigm shift was nearly complete, and which took the categories of religion, the secular society, and secularization almost for

[131] Wickham, 229. See Martin, *The Religious and the Secular*, 35–36.

[132] This becomes clearer in Wickham's later work. Edward Wickham, *Encounter with Modern Society* (London, 1964), 20.

[133] For earlier observations of church decline, see Morris, "Enemy Within?," 183–84.

[134] Wickham, *Church and People*, 211.

[135] Brewitt-Taylor, *Christian Radicalism*, 46–49.

[136] Brewitt-Taylor, "Invention of a 'Secular Society'?," 337–43.

[137] John Robinson, "Our Image of God Must Go," *Observer*, 17 March 1963, 21.

[138] Michael Wall, "Honest to God: A Day of Wrath," *Guardian*, 8 May 1963, 1.

[139] Field, *Britain's Last Religious Revival?*, 19, table 2.2. Robin Gill, C. Kirk Hadaway, and Penny Long Marler, "Is Religious Belief Declining in Britain?," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37, no. 3 (1998): 507–16, at 508–9, cites the theist-to-atheist ratio as 79:10.

[140] Brewitt-Taylor, "Invention of a 'Secular Society'?," 344.

[141] "Liverpool, Fatima, and Blackfriars," *Guardian*, 15 May 1967, 6.

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granted.[142] "Almost overnight," wrote Simon Green of 1963, it had become "educated common-sense to describe contemporary England as a secular society."[143] This, it must be emphasized, was a cultural paradigm shift in the absence of dramatic social change: as the revisionist interpretation of Britain's Sixties has now shown, the actual nature of British society altered quite slowly between 1955 and 1965.[144] Instead, as Jan Bremmer has observed, "The rise of the term [secularization] in the English world is clearly related to the theological debates of the early 1960s."[145]

Nonetheless, now that secularity's beliefs had been widely disseminated, British culture could, for the first time, experience mass secularization.[146] During the secular revolution of the 1960s, Britain's cultural elites adapted many aspects of British institutions to the imagined realities of the new post-ideological age, reforming moral legislation to allow greater personal autonomy, privileging secular moral perspectives in the national media, secularizing religious education in schools, and inventing a secular sexual revolution.[147] Among ordinary British people, by contrast, the enactment of secularization occurred much more slowly. As Brown's work on nonreligionism has shown, the secular revolution transformed the fortunes of nonreligious identities in Britain, but the initial increases occurred from a very low base, from no more than 6 percent during the 1950s to about 15 percent by 2001, with rapid takeoff only thereafter.[148] The idea that British society was now irreversibly departing from "religion" was also enacted in diverse ways on the personal level. Some felt that the apparent secular age implied adherence to a materialist atheism, some began to identify as "spiritual but not religious," some felt it implied the pursuit of radical politics, and many continued to identify as Christians but believed that they were henceforth a shrinking minority.[149] In all cases, though, the embrace of secularity also meant downplaying the religious beliefs of Britain's new Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh, and Hindu citizens, either by classifying these citizens in secular racial terms, or else by implicitly regarding them as premodern.[150] As Grace

[142] Green, *Passing of Protestant England*, 277.

[143] Green, 294.

[144] Helena Mills, "Using the Personal to Critique the Popular: Women's Memories of 1960s Youth," *Contemporary British History* 30, no. 4 (2016): 463–83, at 464; Brewitt-Taylor, *Christian Radicalism*, 11–13.

[145] Bremmer, "Secularization," 436.

[146] This chronology echoes Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 15.

[147] Matthew Grimley, "Law, Morality and Secularisation: The Church of England and the Wolfenden Report, 1954–1967," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 60, no. 4 (2009), 725–41, at 740; Brewitt-Taylor, *Christian Radicalism*, 144–45; Sam Brewitt-Taylor, "Christianity and the Invention of the Sexual Revolution in Britain, 1963–67," *Historical Journal* 60, no. 2 (2017): 519–46.

[148] Because of problems with the data, these numbers are approximate, but, as Brown observes, the overall trend seems clear. Brown, *Religion and the Demographic Revolution*, 62, 116–17; Brown, "People of No Religion," 56.

[149] Brown, *Becoming Atheist*; Linda A. Mercadante, *Belief without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but Not Religious* (Oxford, 2014); Sam Brewitt-Taylor, "From Religion to Revolution: Theologies of Secularisation in the British Student Christian Movement, 1963–1973," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 66, no. 4 (2015): 792–811.

[150] This seems to be the implication, for example, of Bruce, *Secularisation*, 181–82, 189; and of the views reported in Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*, chap. 1. For a contrasting view, see Alister Chapman, "Civil Religions in Derby, 1930–2000," *Historical Journal* 59, no. 3 (2016): 817–43.

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Davie's comparative work has shown, while secularity flourished in Western cultures, it did so to a much lesser extent elsewhere.[151]

A final and ironic consequence of Britain's secular revolution was that it embedded secularity's ideological account of its own origins into the British secularization debate.[152] Bryan Wilson's *Religion in Secular Society* (1966) set the parameters of the academic discussion by crystalizing secularity's ideology into two apparently objective claims: (1) secularization represents the irreversible decline of collective ideology, and (2) secularization is caused by the logic of "modernization."[153] The first claim concealed secularity's cultural inventedness by presenting it as post-ideological neutrality. The second successfully obscured the existence of twentieth-century Christian civilization, and of the abrupt secular revolution that eclipsed it, by retrospectively backdating the onset of mass British secularity to earlier centuries, an error that was not decisively corrected until Brown's *Death of Christian Britain* (2001), which rightly relocated the central turning point back in the long 1960s.[154] More subtly, this second thesis also successfully reinterpreted all the major modern social theorists as secularization theorists, thus making the secularization paradigm appear to be the only mainstream sociological option—this despite the fact that this paradigm had actually been a minority position in Western sociology until the long 1960s, and that this fact was well known in the 1950s.[155] Even today, though Wilson's second thesis has been successfully critiqued, his first—that secular societies are irreversibly post-ideological—remains a scholarly commonplace.[156] From the 1960s until very recently, British religious historiography internalized secularity's analytical terminology of *religion*, *the secular*, and *secularizatio*n sufficiently thoroughly to remain uninterested in these terms' historicity, and to ignore the fact that even the term *secularization* was only occasionally used in classical sociology, whereas it had long been a commonplace term in Christian discussion.[157] Individual critiques such as those of David Martin and Daniel Bell could do little to dislodge this general cultural consensus.[158] It was only from the early 2000s that a combination of wider events, including 9/11, the rise of postsecular multiculturalism, and the postcolonial turn in Western historiography, all began to unsettle secularity's belief that it represents humanity's post-ideological future, thereby making it possible

[151] Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case. Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London, 2002), x.

[152] Brown, *Religion and the Demographic Revolution*, 43.

[153] Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society*, 3–6, 208.

[154] Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 9. See, for example, Gilbert, *Post-Christian Britain*.

[155] For the persistence of this claim, see Clark, "Secularization and Modernization," 163. For its wrongness, see for example Lise Ann Tole, "Durkheim on Religion and Moral Community in Modernity," *Sociological Inquiry* 63, no. 1 (1993): 1–29; Peter Ghosh, *Max Weber and the Protestant Ethic: Twin Histories* (Oxford, 2014), 270, 290. For 1950s knowledge of its wrongness with respect to Weber (later lauded as the key figure in modern secularization theory), see Talcott Parsons, introduction to Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (London, 1965), xix–lxvii, at xxvii–xxviii.

[156] See, for example, Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 193–94; Bruce, *Secularization*, 55.

[157] For classical sociology, see Swatos and Christiano, "Secularization Theory," 209–10; Bremmer, "Secularization," 432–36. For discussion within Christian sociology, see Morris, "Enemy Within?," 186.

[158] Martin, *Religious and the Secular*; Daniel Bell, "The Return of the Sacred? The Argument about the Future of Religion," *British Journal of Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1977): 419–49.

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for British historians to write postsecular histories of modern British secularization.[159]

V

This article has argued that secularity is an ideological culture in its own right and that consequently the historiography of British secularization should be rewritten in terms of the rise of the culture of secularity. Whereas secularity had existed in Britain since the mid-nineteenth century, and whereas British Christianity began its long decline from about 1900, mass British secularization could not occur until the early 1960s, because until then secularity's ideological metanarrative was not widely believed in. On the contrary, the dominance of Britain's "Christian civilization" metanarrative during the Second World War and the early Cold War ensured that permanently post-ideological societies were typically decried as impossible, and secularity demonized as a regressive and unstable route into totalitarianism. It was only in the late 1950s and early 1960s that mainstream British public discussion, influenced by radical new ideologies of modernity, came to accept the secularization metanarrative's declaration of the irreversible rise of the post-ideological society, thereby making secular personal and collective identities newly available for widespread adoption. As with any other cultural revolution, the foundational tenets of Britain's secular revolution needed to be authoritatively disseminated before they could be widely internalized and enacted.[160] Yet once this internalization had taken place, it was only natural that British historians would conceal secularity's cultural specificity by narrating "secularization" as the automatic and irreversible consequence of the declining social significance of Christianity.

Once secularity is provincialized in this way, it becomes possible to readdress several points of contention in the British secularization debate. First and foremost, this postsecular approach supports Callum Brown's contention that mass British secularization was a revolutionary development originating in the long 1960s by suggesting that scholars who identify widespread British secularization earlier in the century are confusing secularization with Christian decline, which did indeed substantially predate the 1960s.[161] Second, by identifying secularity as a specific ideological culture, this postsecular account implies that widespread British secularization must have had primarily cultural causes rather than social ones, being much more a product of changes in dominant metanarratives than of economic conditions, which is why secularization has occurred predominantly in the West rather than in economically developed cultures more generally.[162] In particular, this culturalist

[159] For an earlier challenge to this assumption, see Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 1. A pivotal later contribution was Jürgen Habermas's lecture, "Notes on a Post-Secular Society," June 18, 2008, Sign and Sight: Let's Talk European (website), http://www.signandsight.com/features/1714.html (the original German version was first published in *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* in April 2008). In British historiography, the secular perspective was still confidently articulated in 2001 by Brown's *Death of Christian Britain*, which Eurocentrically associated secularity with postmodernity.

[160] See Sewell, *Logics of History*, 257–59.

[161] This particular dimension of the controversy is usefully summarized in Brown, "What Was the Religious Crisis of the 1960s?," 469–73.

[162] See Brown, "Revisionist Approach to Religious Change," 55–56.

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reading insists that any convincing account of British secularization must identify the specific cultural mechanisms through which secularity's ideology came to be authoritatively disseminated and normalized in Britain. Finally, while this article has not offered a full explanation of the secular revolution of the 1960s, it has suggested that this revolution's underlying beliefs were influentially disseminated and normalized by Christian clergy, who alone in the late 1950s and early 1960s possessed the cultural authority to speak on such controversial moral matters without being decisively marginalized.[163] This suggestion explains why subsequent debates on this subject revolved around the distinctively Christian terminology of *secularization*, even though this term was only occasionally used in classical sociology.[164] It also explains why, as David Martin argued in 1966, the basic teleology assumed by secular accounts of secularization—that history is a linear process in which the religious and the secular initially coexist, but then religion is irreversibly eclipsed by secularity—is a recognizable variation of the basic eschatology assumed by European Christendom—that history is a linear process in which the religious and the secular coexist but are unified at the end of time.[165] Because the 1960s metanarrative of permanent secularization was initially normalized through a radical reworking of Christian presuppositions, it was quite natural that the 1960s secular revolution occurred chiefly within Christian cultures or in cultures deeply affected by the assumptions of the newly secularizing Christian West.[166]

Most fundamentally, this account suggests that long-term disenchantment has never actually happened and that during the 1960s many Western cultures simply became enchanted with the idea that they, unlike all previous cultures, were entering a new age of unprecedented disenchantment.[167] On this view, the contest between "Christian civilization" and secularity in 1960s Britain was not a struggle of enchantment against disenchantment but of two rival enchantments against each other. As Durkheim persuasively observed in 1912, it does seem as though human societies need a dominant collective ideology to create social cohesion; if that ideology collapses, the result is not the creation of a secular society but the disintegration of society into competing ideological factions.[168] For these reasons, the secular model of secularization, which implies that Western secularity societies have indeed escaped collective ideology, must be regarded a powerful ethnocentric mythology, which, by abruptly entering British common sense in the early 1960s, itself changed the course of British history by successfully normalizing British

[163] See Brewitt-Taylor, *Christian Radicalism*, 15–24.

[164] Bremmer, "Secularization," 434, 436; Swatos and Christiano, "Secularization Theory," 209–10.

[165] Martin, *Religious and the Secular*, 24, 35–36.

[166] See Davie, *Europe*, x. This latter category is intended potentially to include Japan. See also Ian Reader, "Secularisation, R.I.P.? Nonsense! The 'Rush Hour away from the Gods' and the Decline of Religion in Contemporary Japan," *Journal of Religion in Japan* 1, no. 1 (2012): 7–36.

[167] In this paragraph I use *disenchantment* in its post-1960s sociological meaning of people losing their illusions and beginning to see the world more objectively. This usage is different from that of Weber's "Science as a Vocation," which denotes people imagining the sacred in impersonal rather than personal forms.

[168] Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 322. For the late Durkheimian tradition in recent cultural theory, which I follow here, see Jeffrey Alexander and Philip Smith, "The Discourse of American Civil Society: A New Proposal for Cultural Studies," *Theory and Society* 22, no. 2 (1993): 151–207, at 156–58.

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secularity. On this view, Martin's 1965 critique of the concept of secularization was correct: it was indeed "less a scientific concept than a tool of counter-religious ideologies."[169] The irony was that this reality went unrecognized precisely because secularity's claims to post-ideological neutrality were so widely believed. But if British historiography is serious about unmasking its own ethnocentricity, it must treat secularity as an invented culture, whose distinctive concepts and metanarrative possess no automatic claim to intellectual authority. Though secular cultures might dream of effecting an escape from history, a genuinely non-Eurocentric perspective must grapple with the possibility that they are still trapped inside it.[170]

[169] Martin, *Religious and the Secular*, 9.
[170] *Pace* Brown, "What Was the Religious Crisis of the 1960s?," 470.

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