

Religion and Modernity in the French Context: For a New Approach to Secularization

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The notion that religion and modernity are mutually exclusive has been a leading theme of the sociology of religion in France and has been amply confirmed by empirical studies of religious practice, clerical vocations, and parish culture. But recent work on popular religion, post-1968 ideological communities, and new religious movements has called the presumption of secularization into question. In fact, the theoretical argument can now be advanced that, far from being antithetical to modernity, these "renewals" of religion are in harmony with modernity, especially in respect to the private and individualistic character of their beliefs and the fluidity of their organizational forms. Modernity therefore generates its own forms of religion by creating and filling the gaps between rational certainties. Modernity arouses expectations that it cannot satisfy without stimulating the religious imagination. Secularization is no longer simply the "decline" of religion but is the process whereby religion organizes itself to meet the challenges left by modernity.

"Modernity and religion are mutually exclusive": this expression has until recently represented the simplest way of formulating a major paradigm in the sociology of religious phenomena in Western societies. However, it has been interpreted in very different ways according to the cultural contexts to which it has been applied. Nowhere other than in France has the secularist hypothesis of the "end of religion" been understood in such a strict sense, not only in terms of the shrinking hold religious institutions maintain on society, but even more dramatically, in terms of the loss of a religious sense on the level of the social body as a whole. My aim will be to examine which arguments, based on an empirical analysis of the religious field up to the 1960s, could be advanced to support this hypothesis of secularization as a withering away of religion in society, then to focus on how it came to be called into question, and finally, to establish how this critical revival can lead, over and above the French case from which these reflexions initially arose, to a new conception of the relationships between religion and modernity.

THE DECLINE OF CATHOLICISM IN A MODERN SOCIETY

The idea that the decline of religion is inevitable in a society in which modernization is an ongoing process has long been confirmed in France by the empirical studies

of French Catholicism that formed the backbone of research in the sociology of religions until the late 1960s.

An overwhelming majority of these studies were essentially focused on religious practice among the French. This preference could be attributed to the quasi-hegemonic position occupied by Roman Catholicism on the French religious scene and the importance given to attending Mass in the eyes of the Church. Catholic authorities had long been concerned about this problem, because this lack of interest shown by practicing Catholics was the clearest indication of "the religious crisis of the modern world." From the thirties onward more and more pastoral initiatives had been taken by French Catholicism to "rechristianize" a France that had become less and less observant: the Mission of France, founded in 1941, and the Mission of Paris, founded in 1943, were both devoted to the training of missionary priests capable of reconquering the "new pagans" of the suburbs and the factories, and were also supposed to contact lay militants active in the *Action Catholique* movements. This vast project, which had been at the heart of a mass of literature since the 1930s (including the famous *France: Pays de Mission?* by Frs. Daniel and Godin, published in 1943), also nourished the sociological ambition of counting practicing Catholics, an ambition formulated by Gabriel le Bras as early as 1931 in his call "For a Detailed Examination and Historical Explanation of French Catholicism." The dean of the Paris's "Faculté de Droit" Law School, jurist, historian and devout Catholic, Le Bras deplored the lack of systematic studies of the religious life among France's 40,000 parishes: fulfilling his wish to remedy this situation became the foundation of the vast enterprise of self-examination launched by French Catholicism that was synonymous with the name of Fernand Boulard, prior to and after the war (Le Bras, 1931, 1955). To meet this challenge, Canon Boulard established a classification system based on the religious acts performed by Catholic adepts, divided into four groups: the "disaffected," the seasonal conformists, the regular practicing, and the "devout" or "fervent" Catholics. Adopted in most studies of Catholic religious practice in Europe, this classification system still haunts opinion polls and studies in the field of electoral sociology.¹

The drawbacks of this classificatory procedure have long been obvious and have often been emphasized. The principal shortcoming is that it has reduced the French religious field to the vision that the Catholic institution itself has of it. The application of this classification system to other religious confessions in which cult attendance is not as important has raised difficult problems, such as those which Emile Leonard, in his day, pointed out in the case of Protestantism (Leonard, 1955). Despite all its disadvantages, however, this classification system is still of use in the establishment of more and more sophisticated maps of rural as well as urban religious practice (Isambert and Terrenoire, 1980), providing an extremely useful instantaneous snapshot of the French religious scene, which not only shows the generally low rates of regular religious practice (13 percent in 1975), but also the magnitude of disparities among the regions of France. Boulard and Remy have been able to demonstrate how these disparities could be explained by the history of "pastoration" and how nuances had to be introduced into the commonly held opinion that the map of urbanized and industrialized

¹On this typology and its successors, see Desroche, 1968:46ff.

areas would coincide, if superimposed, over the map of religious disbelief (Boulard and Remy, 1968). However, although the working class North is indeed more observant than the rural Creuse region, the opposition between industrial and agricultural regions is insufficient to explain the contrasts of religious France. Nevertheless, the regions of communication and exchange that are also zones of intense economic activity (port cities, waterways, etc.) are the most “disaffected” regions. Inversely, the “devout regions,” bastions of local parish Christianity, are also the most isolated regions economically and the least culturally integrated into modernity.

This coincidence between the map of religious practice and the map of modern (cultural as well as economic) activity seemed to provide conclusive evidence to support the secularist hypothesis of religious decline. The modern world of industry, engineering, the city, and communication is a world in which the voice of the Church is no longer heard — or heard less and less. The latest surveys of practice, which indicate that levels of regular practice are sinking below the bar of 10 percent and do not exceed 4 percent among 18 to 25 year olds, do not contradict this general observation, even though 82 percent of the French continue to consider themselves “Catholic.”

The classic hypothesis concerning the decline of religion in the modern world has also been even more definitely confirmed by the numerous studies in the empirical sociology of Catholicism that were carried out on the clergy between the sixties and the eighties. It is certainly not something new in France to speak of a “crisis of the clergy”: the large number of historical studies devoted to the clergy on the eve of the Revolution attests sufficiently to this fact (Julia, 1967). However, it is clear that the sharp drop in religious and priestly vocations nowadays carries a special meaning, given that the Church no longer speaks from a central position in society. The statistics on this are very revealing: in 1948, there were 42,650 priests in France; in 1960, 41,600; in 1975, 36,000; in 1987, 28,000. Whereas 1,000 priests were ordained during the year 1950, since 1975 there have been fewer than 100 ordinations per year. Since 1959, this figure has moreover been consistently lower than the number of deaths. In addition, the number of departures must also be taken into account, although it has slowed down today after reaching a peak during the 1973-1979 period. (There have been an estimated 2,500 departures since 1965.) This diminishing number of priests is also accompanied by another striking phenomenon: aging. In 1965, 24.1 percent of all priests were under the age of 40, but only 7.4 percent in 1981. At present, 1 out of 10 priests is under the age of 40, while 1 out of 3 is over the age of 65 (Potel, 1977).

The crisis in regular practice and the sharp drop in clerical vocations taken together are clearly indicative of the disappearance of a “parochial civilization” and the end of a model of socioreligious organization that dominated France for centuries. This model of organization combined a mode of territorial Church presence, rendered visible by the multitude of emblematic steeples in the French countryside,² and a mode of social institutional presence, embodied in the figure of the priest. Today, churches close. The priests, who are no longer considered Notables, have joined the growing cohort of “proletaroid intellectuals” (as Max Weber might have said): cultural middlemen, teachers, social workers, and cultural agents who suffer more and more

²François Mitterrand made a very clever use of this emblem during his presidential campaign of 1981 by associating it with the theme of “quiet strength” on his electoral posters.

from the growing contradiction between the wealth of culture in their possession and the precariousness of their social and economic status. Not only from the point of view of the institution but also from that of the evolution of Catholicism as a system of belief, it is a world turned upside down. In a recently published book, Yves Lambert (1985) clearly demonstrated that in the very heartland of devout Brittany itself, the institutionally regulated pursuit of other-worldly salvation has been progressively replaced by a more diffuse and private religiosity, oriented toward the here and now and the psychological fulfillment of the individual.

Looked at in this light — based on the Catholic institution, its regulated practices and its personnel — the French religious field can be considered a shrinking social, cultural, and symbolic space, in which religion appears more and more often as a private matter for individuals and as a matter of voluntary groups.

SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT THE PARADIGM OF “DECLINE”

The theory that links the constant and inevitable shrinking of the religious field to the development of modernity implies, like a logical postulate which is at least implicit, that in pre-modern times, there was an almost total superimposition of social and religious space. It calls, more or less directly, for a reference to a “religious time” to which the gradual maturing of the world into the age of reason should have put an end. This perspective does not in itself imply the idea that such an evolution would connote “progress” in the individual and collective consciousness. A great many sociologists outside France have adopted a Weberian line of reasoning and focussed their attention on an examination of the risks involved for the well-being of society when there is a desymbolization of the modern world, of which the loss of credibility afflicting religious institutions constitutes the most visible proof.

Within the very specific context of what Emile Poulat (1987) calls “the war between the two Frances,” the sociological issue of religious decline has most often been considered a positive political assessment made in the revolutionary, republican and secular tradition that is vehemently opposed to the counterrevolutionary, anti-democratic and Catholic thinking associated with the refusal of Reason and an encouragement of obscurantism. This secular political tradition found an ally in the intellectuals of the academic positivist and rationalist tradition, for whom the end of religion had never ceased to be the prerequisite for entry into the age of science. It must be remembered that French sociology developed at the turn of the twentieth century under the dual auspices of the French School — whose founding father, Emile Durkheim, had engraved the secular ideal into the theoretical framework of sociological thought — and Marxism. It is not a mere coincidence that the translation into French of Max Weber’s major works dates only from 1968-1974!

Within this most peculiar context, the decline of religion was not only presented as an observable fact, one of the consequences of the processes of industrialization and urbanization affecting traditional modes of religious sociability, or even as a necessary prerequisite for freeing sociological discourse from all its attachments to the theologies of history: it also represented a normative horizon of research itself and was supposed to contribute, by its critical exigencies, towards ensuring the triumph of reason over

illusion. Whether they accepted or rejected this "mission" implicitly assigned to their work, sociologists of religious facts thus found themselves, more so than others, in an awkward posture: either they had to proclaim, as the sought-after objective, the destruction of their object of research, or postulate, at the cost of their scientific legitimacy, the irreducibility of this object of research. The theoretical development of this discipline since the end of World War II finally led to a solution of this dilemma, which is presented here in a deliberately "schematic" manner. The confrontation with historians, in particular with scholars of the Middle Ages whose work emphasizes the mythical dimension of the vision of "the all-religious France of yesteryear," soon provoked a reexamination of the "dechristianization" postulate (Le Bras, 1963; Remond, 1965). But this critical return of the French sociology of religions to its own hypotheses received powerful impetus from developments in the religious conjuncture itself from the 1960s onwards.

Three particularly important moments along this trajectory should be noted:

The first corresponds to the impressive development of theoretical and empirical work on so-called "popular religion" during the years 1965-70. In fact, this question of popular practice — pilgrimages, prayers, domestic rituals, healing practices — had never ceased to be of interest to French anthropologists and sociologists: they approached these phenomena, in the tradition of nineteenth century folklorists, as hallmarks of a disappearing traditional rural society, much like the residual expressions of an obsolete France, buried henceforth in the depths of history, whose final traces were soon to vanish completely. By provoking such violent and unexpected conflicts in a Catholic population removed from regular observance, the application of the liturgical reforms agreed by the Second Vatican Council had a genuine cathartic impact. The objective pursued by the reformers was, by simplifying the ritual, by tracking down the magical interpretations, by bringing the practice back to its "purely religious" meaning, to bring the language of the Church closer to that of the modern world, and thus to render the meaning of the sacraments accessible to a greater number. This enterprise was undertaken in recognition of the legitimate demands expressed by progressive priests and lay personnel who were concerned with the "credibility" of the Church in contemporary culture. At the same time, it revealed, through the resistance that it encountered, the existence of a "popular" religiosity that was almost entirely free of control by the clergy and its regulations, and which was more sensitive to the celebrational, emotional, and extraordinary dimensions of religious manifestations than to longwinded explanations of their theological and spiritual significance. This religion of nonscholars and nonpracticing Catholics caught the attention of researchers who laid emphasis on the dynamics of protest (both social and religious) in these sporadic demonstrations against the elimination of Solemn Communion or the performance of the Mass in French (CNRS, 1979). They also emphasized the importance of a celebratory religion that was only very partially controlled by an ecclesiastical institution managing to adapt itself to custom rather than controlling it, in order to preserve the local cultures and identities that had been undermined by the homogenization of life-styles. In the same vein, a fresh look was taken at traditional religious practices (pardons, display of relics, processions, etc.) whose popularity, instead of losing ground, tended to gain ground in the France of the 1980s (see, e.g., Lautman, 1983). Far from

attracting an audience only among the traditional social categories, these manifestations now attract a more and more middle-class public, whose role-identification and imagination feed on them. Far from subsisting solely as folklore in a forgotten France, these events may even become the cement of a new type of socioreligious relationship that could function as a pole of religious innovation in a less and less observant society.³

A second important moment for re-thinking the paradigm of religious decline came about from the social movement of May 1968, when the extent of utopian borrowings from the religious sphere was finally taken into account. From the political side, theoretically independent from religion, there was the discovery of the importance of beliefs, rituals, enthusiasm, devotion, ascetic practices, orthodox regulations and even experiences of ecstasy: all the phenomena that Max Weber had included in his descriptive definition of religion. More generally speaking, it became evident that art, the unconscious, the body, progress, engineering, and science itself could be the object of these same individual and collective quests, undergoing the same symbolic manipulations as the objects formally designated as "religious." Although the French sociology of religions became interested in the problem of "invisible religion" or "diffuse religion" only much later, a subject which had been a major preoccupation of Anglo-Saxon sociology as early as the late 1960s, it did elaborate issues, through the affinities between religion and (political) utopia, that contributed toward renewing the approach to the relationship between religion and modernity (Desroche, 1965).

Nevertheless, a major turning point in this field was reached in the late 1970s, when the classic paradigm of religious decline in the modern world was confronted, third, with the effervescent multitude of "new religious movements." Having sprung up within the sphere of the North American counterculture, the "new spiritual culture" was indelibly marked at first by "neo-oriental" syncretic tendencies. Unlike what happened in the United States and in most of the countries of Northern Europe, this aspect of religious renewal in the years 1975-1980 was negligible in France, where the success of Eastern sects remained relatively limited. The movements whose spiritual orientation was grafted onto an ecological criticism of the "Promethean drift" of the modern world did, however, develop in an original fashion which was a continuation, in another mode, of the post-1968 neo-rural communal experiences (Léger and Hervieu, 1983). Among the new forms of religious expression typical of the eighties, the success of a certain kind of pietistic evangelical Protestantism, which had long been marginalized by the predominant reformed Protestantism, should be stressed.⁴ In any case, the major trend since the years 1972-1973 has been the remarkable expansion of Catholic charismatic movements, presently numbering several tens of thousands of members and over 1,000 prayer groups, most often associated with large, highly structured communities such as *Emmanuel*, the *Chemin Neuf* (New Path), the *Lion de Juda*, and the like (Hebrard, 1979; Cohen 1986a, 1986b). These various charismatic families, which were looked upon at first with suspicion by a hierarchy shaped in the mold of *Action Catholique* and having a reserved attitude towards the more ecstatic forms of religious expression (healing practices, prophecies, glossolalia,

³The basic work on this topic is Isambert, 1982.

⁴See Bauberot (1988) on this rise of evangelical Protestantism.

etc.), have succeeded remarkably well — by quieting themselves down quite a bit — in their acculturation to the ecclesiastical apparatus. Their capacity to produce religious and priestly vocations is obviously the key to the recognition they have achieved today from bishops who are anxious to channel the religious dynamism created by these movements to the advantage of the institutional Church (Hervieu-Léger, 1987).

The sociological importance of these phenomena of renewal in the French Catholic context derives from the fact that these charismatic groups focus, in a very particular way, on a much more general trend in the religious field, namely, the characteristic religiosity of these emotional communities that also functions, in more or less euphemized forms, throughout the sphere of Christian institutions, both Catholic and Protestant: parishes, movements, seminaries, religious orders, faculties of theology, and so on. Everywhere, the intimacy of the community, its warmth, and the intensity of interactions within the small core of believers, the mutual recognition of subjective experiences, and the expression of personal emotions are sought after as the condition of, and the surest way to, personal conversion. This “Christianity of the heart” comes in sharp contrast to the social activism of a “militant” Christianity that was prevalent in the mid-1970s (Hervieu-Léger, 1973; Bauberot, 1983). All this has taken place within the French context as if the community’s reaffirmation of an emotional Christianity of personal identity was likely to compensate for the widening credibility gap between the various projects for Christian reconquest and a society hereafter recognized as being profoundly secularized.

FOR A NEW APPROACH TO SECULARIZATION

New religious movements are remarkably revealing about the tendencies of the whole religious domain. Significantly, in France and elsewhere, they do not appear first in the backward social categories or among the underprivileged rejects of modernity, even though they may play an effective role in the resocialization of individuals excluded from the advantages of the consumer society. Their leaders, militants, and very large numbers of their adepts come from the middle classes of intellectuals, technicians, and managers, along with some executives from big business and financial circles, whose role is far from negligible, especially in securing the economic and social stability of the Catholic charismatic movement. In any case, the classic grids of interpretation usually used to analyze “historical” charismatic movements (Pentecostalists) in terms of social frustration transcended by religious exaltation do not apply here. It is clear that the movements of religious renewal cannot be interpreted (or at least not exclusively interpreted) as the expression of demodernizing pressures brought to bear by the backward social categories or by people rejected from the spheres of modernity by the evolution of economic and social conditions.

More generally speaking, there is now some doubt about the popular view that these “returns to religion,” characteristic of advanced societies, are solely related to the shortcomings of modernity. When attempts are made to explain the effervescence of these new religious movements in terms of the bankruptcy of progressive ideals, the failure of the utopias of radical social change, and finally, the drifting of philosophies of history in the West that had become the secular replacement for religious promises

of salvation, it may be more or less explicitly postulated that the “de-utopianization” of social and political ideals inherited from the Enlightenment has tended to reactivate the religious sphere in modern societies. From a more psychological standpoint, the “return to religion” seems to correspond to the individual’s need for “reassurance” in a world no longer inhabited by the dream of progress, but by uncertainty and anxiety. In support of this argument, the concomitance between the economic crisis (with its long line of social, cultural, and psychological consequences) and the neoreligious outbreaks should be stressed. Crisis does, in fact, provoke destabilizing effects which could eventually lead to protest against the broken promises of progress and modernity. This protest may, in the absence of political prospects for change, be expressed in a religious form.

Now, the drawbacks of this interpretation which is popular today, stem from the fact that it remains entirely within the “decline of religion in the modern world” hypothesis. It tends to minimize the social impact of these phenomena (by reducing them to a transitory conjuncture). Thus, it does not take into account the long term dynamics of religious renewal (which, for the past fifteen years or so, has established itself for the duration). But most important, it tends to reject these movements because it perceives them only in terms of protest, anti-modernity, and irrationality; it totally ignores the fact that these phenomena (at least some of them) are the vehicles of an alternative rationality which is as much in harmony as in contrast with modernity. This particular ambivalence with respect to modernity is visible in the affinity of these movements with the processes of the privatization and individualization of beliefs, which is precisely characteristic of the situation of religion in modernity. It is visible in the mobility of religious networks that are founded on an associative basis, as well as in the emphasis that they place on personal experience and the individual’s “right to subjectivity.”

To make sense of this contradictory relationship between the new religious consciousness and the modern world, another direction must be taken: the idea that the crisis of modernity alone produces religion must be abandoned, and the logic of how modernity as such can produce its own religious universe must be examined. These are the theoretical issues underlying the argument that I would like to develop very briefly now.

Modernity has historically been built on the ruins of religion. Pitting history against eschatology, declaring the world of Man to be a world created by men, and men alone, modernity has broken radically with all the representations of divine creation revealing itself in history. The affirmation of the autonomy of Man and his ability to reason has been inseparably linked, especially from the time of the Enlightenment, to emancipation from religion. Nevertheless, the way in which modernity has thought of history still remains permanently fixed within the religious vision from which it set out to free itself to gain its autonomy: “secular” history is still thought along the lines of the Kingdom, in the mode of a complete recapitulation of the human experience and total accomplishment — that is, as the horizon of Progress. This affinity between the vision of the Kingdom and the modern vision of history simultaneously indicates the continuity and rupture of modernity with the religious universe and, more specifically, the Judeo-Christian tradition from which it springs.

Although this vision of history, which is analogous to religion, has been modified during the twentieth century, it is still true that the fundamental values of modernity such as reason, knowledge, progress, and so forth, retain their potential to mobilize and energize human efforts for which no limits can be assigned. The complete achievement of modernity, from the point of view of modernity itself, can only be an ever-receding horizon. There are numerous examples of this perpetual anticipation in the fields of science, economics, and so on. The cultural dynamics of modernity, its ferment and ethos, is the emphasis on innovation as such ("the imperative of change," according to Marcel Gauchet [1985]). Its driving force is insatiable desire. It is this projection in time, this utopian gap, that the modern ambition perfectly to control nature and uncertainties constantly recreates at precisely the same time as it abolishes religious utopia, which places the achievement of utopia beyond human efforts (even though it requires their collaboration), to affirm further still the creative autonomy of humanity.

The paradox of modernity stems from this "Promethean ambition" of modernity (Aron, 1969) while this utopian gap is constantly widening, and at the same time knowledge and techniques are developing at an accelerating pace. This logic of anticipation that lies at the very heart of a modern culture progressively dominated by instrumental reason (which knows only how to ask how), in fact constantly generates a space to be filled by the products of imagination, but rationalism just as unceasingly breaks it apart. It is through his imagination, in fact, that Man fills the gap between the world of concrete determination (the ordinary, everyday world, with its constraints and its routines) and the order of values and ends which motivates his efforts in the world (the aspiration toward the abolition of all uncertainties and constraints). The opposition between the limited world of the present, with its contradictions, and the unlimited world of the future (the horizon of progress) creates its own "space for belief" at the very heart of modernity (which can do without "religions"). This "believing" tension in modernity can be expressed in the very language of modernity itself: progress and development. Such is the case in periods of expansion and growth that also coincide with the emergence of political, scientific, and technological "secular religions" (as was the case during the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century or during the "Golden Sixties").

However, while it simultaneously secretes its own utopian dynamism, modernity also produces a new universe of uncertainties. The very dynamism of its movement implies that it continuously provokes its own crisis, which is the effect of social and cultural emptiness that is produced by change, and which individuals or groups experience as a threat. In certain periods of profound mutation, such as the present one, there may be a permanent lack of fit between the modern utopia and this space that is emptied by the process of change itself. This cultural imbalance often accompanies economic and more or less profound social imbalances. It can also anticipate them: such was the case in France in May 1968 when the prosperity of the 1960s had not yet been challenged by the crisis. Under these conditions, constituted religious systems, formidable reservoirs of symbolic protest against the nonsensical (and which are thus the first target of rationalism)⁵ may recover a great power of attraction over individuals and society.

⁵Lévi-Strauss (1962) defined myth as "une vigoureuse protestation contre le non-sens."

It must be noted, however, that these stages in the "de-utopianization" of modernity do not represent purely conjunctural imbalances. If, as stated by Hannah Arendt, modernity "constitutes history in an eternal quest," it has a very special way of postponing its realization indefinitely, given that it interprets this history as the result of human experience. In this way, at the same time that it may be possible for humanity to acquire a sense of total achievement, emphasis is laid upon the infinite variety of experiences through which this quest can be advanced and upon the complexity of the real world through which it hacks its way (Arendt, 1987). The structural tension in the experience of modernity stems from the fact that it *simultaneously* produces the expectations it is supposed to satisfy *and* the feeling of helplessness arising from the awareness that it provokes of the world's opaqueness. The affirmation of the reign of Man, his autonomy, his all-powerfulness, breaks down at the very moment and in the *very mechanism* through which it was made.

This method of constructing the ideal type of modernity, by portraying it as a producer of both utopia and opacity, appears to be infinitely more promising for a sociology of religious production in modern societies than the most prevalent viewpoint, which consists in associating religion in the modern world only with the "crisis" of modernity itself. In this way, the interpretation of the contemporary "returns" to religion need not be limited to the analysis of implicit or explicit protests provoked by advances in rationality, nor to that of the symbolic compensations produced by the shortcomings of progress. "Opacity," notes Arendt, "does not re-enchant the world." It accentuates the diversity of men and peoples, the irreversibility and the uniqueness of every human event. It produces the pluralization and individualization of the "truths" that claim to possess the meaning of this history that modernity is supposed to bring to fulfillment (although forever postponed). It is at the point where this dual movement of the modern reconstitution of the utopia of achievement, on the one hand, meets the dissemination of possible cases in which it could be achieved, on the other hand, that there seems to be an opportunity to grasp the work of religion in modern societies, in France and elsewhere.

These reflexions have thus led us to a new definition of *secularization*. It is no longer considered as the "decline" of religion in the modern world, but as a process of the reorganization of the work of religion in a society which can no longer satisfy (not temporarily, but structurally) the expectations it must arouse in order to exist as such, and which can find no better response (not temporarily, but structurally) to the uncertainties arising from the interminable quest for the means to satisfy these expectations.⁶

⁶For a fuller presentation of this theoretical shift in French sociology of religion, see Hervieu-Léger, 1986.

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