

persists after death, per the initial quotation taken from the *Katha Upanishad*, is the sole consideration. All other more worldly considerations are dealt with through analytic methodological strategies for getting at the elusive object. However, there would be a truth found in the way humanity deals with questions of ultimate destiny of the person, had Ellwood followed his suggestion about the narrative character of human life. After all, our present human experience of life's incompleteness, that time has not yet finished with us, inspired in many ancient thinkers a pious disposition towards something Other, in which or whom we live and move and have our being.

Secularization and Its Discontents

Rob Warner. London and New York: Continuum. 2010.

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Secularization and Its Discontents represents Rob Warner's contribution to the growing number of sociological challenges to classical secularization theory in recent decades. The main thesis of the classical theory, according to Warner, is the "long-term, unidirectional and increasing marginalization of the Christian religion" (14). With this statement Warner locates the scope of his analysis to be primarily Western, beginning first with Britain but then expanding for comparisons with secularization in Europe and North America. He observes that many classical secularization theorists interpret sociological evidence gleaned from the West as pointing towards a cultural and religious departure that can only be described as post-Christian (14).

Without denying that something "seismic" has happened to religion in the modern West (37), Warner seeks to temper the classical theory's dismal assessment of the present and future of the Christian faith. His main claim is that religion has not been fated to an irreversible and terminal decline, but is instead going through a transformation. "Religion in the twenty-first century," Warner contends, "has become more contested, complex, diverse and inclined to subjectivized hybrids" (181). The difficult labour pains of secularization, modernization and globalization have resulted in a transformation such that both religion's power and significance have been radically altered today. While contemporary religion might be almost unrecognizable to those who pine for a return to some "golden age" of belief and practice, "global religion in all its proliferating diversity appears to be in vibrant good health, rapidly evolving and recruiting, in Asia, Africa, Latin America and North America," with signs of life evident even in Western Europe (181–182). Religion,

then, is not so much in decline as it is in transition, and as such is accompanied by labour pains typical to the birthing process.

Warner's transformation thesis is supported by the fourfold argument he develops in chapters 2–5. First, Warner casts doubt on the reliability of empirical data that points to declining church attendance as a key support for classical secularization theory. This is not to question whether church attendance is really in decline; it is, rather, to suggest that such data does not say enough about religious practice as a sociological phenomenon. Warner opts for a modified theory that complexifies secularization and provides a more hopeful account of religion by proposing that the classical theory represents an essentially incomplete sociological investigation (65).

Warner further justifies his discontent by turning to the American context where classical secularization seems to be turned on its head. Religious participation there does not appear to decline in the wake of modernization, but to flourish instead (69). The so-called "free market of religion" establishes a setting in which "religious choices are made like any other consumer choices, on the basis of cost-benefit analysis" (72, 121). In such a context religious vibrancy becomes "constantly dependent upon innovative entrepreneurialism, repackaging of faith for new cultural and consumer contexts" (75, 79). The obvious danger is that spirituality becomes reframed as "a mere lifestyle accessory to be selected according to personal taste," not unlike organic food or gym membership (85). Although the religious market in America might be bustling, markets often testify to passing fads and therefore might not suggest any enduring spiritual resilience (85).

To further complexify secularization, Warner questions in Chapter 4 whether Western society has undergone a spiritual revolution. On one hand, this question pushes against the classical theory by recognizing that even in the midst of institutional decline (e.g., low levels of church attendance), sociologists have seen the emergence of new holistic spiritualities (89, 96). On the other hand, however, Warner acknowledges that the spiritualities of this "New Age" could simply be residue from the older age which was dominated by religions now in terminal decline. Such seemingly inconsistent findings lead him to conclude that while there is no appetite for absolute secularity in Western Europe, there are also no prospects for a re-sacralization representing anything like the Christendom model (104). To speak of the death of religion, then, is greatly exaggerated, but talk of spiritual revolution is also premature (116).

Rounding Warner's argument off is his assertion that "conservative churches do better in terms of recruitment and resistance to trends of decline" right across the globe (119). This durability is largely characteristic of "moderate" evangelicals who maintain a "convertive optimism" that confidently expects new opportunities and growth, as well as a "missiological pragmatism" characterized by a positive and

energetic willingness to re-imagine church (148–149). It is not, then, religion itself that is necessarily in decline, or even the sustaining doctrines of various traditions (as the success of conservative churches seems to indicate). Rather, it is the forms and practices of belief that appear to be deteriorating and, in fact, are being replaced. To put it in Gospel terms, the wine remains while old wineskins are exchanged for new.

One of the values of Warner's brilliant sociological assessment is that it paves the way for some important theological questions to be asked. What forms and practices of belief will allow for religious individuals and communities to maintain their traditional identities in a changed and rapidly changing world? Must more conservative religious communities liberalize their doctrines in order to maintain relevance and respect today, or are they free to remain "illiberal" within their community while participating as full members of the broader society? And, fixing his gaze on the more particular subject of evangelicalism, how will the question of homosexuality define the more conservative strains of this movement moving forward?

It is with this latter question, upon which Warner only briefly touches (see pp. 139–140), that some areas of concern with his approach come to light. First of all, he appears to frame moral questions (at least this one) in more sociological than theological terms. To do so, however, seems to move from the task of gathering empirical data on religion to imposing a moral trajectory upon it. Second, even though evangelicalism figures prominently in his analysis, Warner provides a rather flat portrayal of this movement. Essential to understanding evangelicalism is to recognize: 1) its distinct nature as a movement rather than simply as a denomination; 2) the significant connection between theology and morality inherent to it; and 3) that as a movement there are more internal distinctions to be made than simply between moderate evangelicalism and Pentecostalism.

In all, I found *Secularization and Its Discontents* to be an extremely insightful project and a valuable resource as I consider the impact of secularization theses on my own research into religion and ethics in liberal society.

The Origins of Jewish Mysticism

Peter Schäfer. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009.

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When confronted with a work on Jewish mysticism by one of the foremost experts in the field, expectations are justifiably very high. In this densely packed work, Peter