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Shadows in Caves?

A Re-Assessment of Public Religion and Secularization in England Today

Abstract

Critics of secularization theory have recently focused upon religion's public role to put forward theses about de-differentiation, post-secularity and desecularization. A strong defence of secularization theory has not been forthcoming because its proponents have tended to assume, rather than demonstrate, that religion has lost social significance. Drawing upon a neosecularization theoretical approach that highlights the scope of religious authority, this article examines evidence from qualitative studies of the attempts of English mainstream Christian organizations to bring religious messages into the public space and to engage in welfare provision. This re-assessment shows that religious organizations are increasingly co-opted by secular authorities, in ways neither anticipated by, nor explored in, orthodox accounts of secularization. But rather than blurring "the religious" and "the secular," their distinction is heightened. This situation involves an interlinked and mutually-reinforced declining scope of religious authority at the macro-, meso- and micro-levels, which, it is proposed, constitutes a state of *advanced* secularization.

Keywords: Authority; Christianity; Deprivatization; Differentiation; Post-secularity; Public religion; Secularization; Welfare.

God is dead; but given the way people are, there may still for millennia be caves in which his shadow will be shown (Nietzsche 2001[1882]: 109).

The renewed interest in public religion

THE FIRST CLAUSE in the above quotation is justly famous, since it represents one of the foundational modern declarations that aimed to put religion in its place. What follows is less well known: drawing implicitly upon Plato's allegory of the cave, it indicates Nietzsche's

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recognition that religion would likely continue to be present in human life for a long time despite its originating spirit having vanished. Whilst Nietzsche was primarily concerned with the metaphysical status of God, one could re-read his statement in terms of the social status of religious institutions. Indeed, Nietzsche's metaphysical concern was embedded in a social context in which the power of religious institutions, beliefs and practices was seriously challenged by secular formations. Sociological declarations of the death of religion began to replace philosophical statements about the death of God. Whilst secularization theory did not necessarily assume the disappearance of religion, it purported that in a secular society religious institutions would be fundamentally changed, not least by being shorn of their previous power. Secularization theory has been hotly contested in recent years, with Nietzsche's death theme echoing from different positions in the debate [Stark 1999; Bruce 2002]. At the present time, the tide appears to have turned, on both sides of the Atlantic, against the proponents of secularization theory, at least in its orthodox form. That is especially due to the attention that has been paid to the role of religion in the public sphere. This paper argues that what has been largely missing from that line of argument, at least in British sociology, is a close, critical examination of the status and effects of religious public action. This is true of scholars across the debate. As a result, British proponents of secularization theory have often shied away from clearly investigating the manner in which religious institutions continue to act in social life and thus from identifying and discussing the mechanisms involved in the process of secularization. In other words, taking Nietzsche's cue, it is crucial for secularization theorists to begin to consider in more detail the nature of the shadows that we now see in our caves.

As a starting-point, this introduction will review relevant arguments and counter-arguments in debates about secularization by British sociologists before the rest of the article examines the evidence about public religion in Britain. In its orthodox formulation by Bryan Wilson [1969: 14], secularization refers to the declining social significance of religion. The focus here is upon social differentiation accompanying the shift from a community-basis to a societal-basis of social life [societalization] [Wilson 1982]. This did not, however, initiate a detailed examination about religion's public role in a secularizing society—such matters are sketched only briefly, although authoritatively [Wilson, 1969: 57-95; 1982: 36-52]. Developing Weberian themes, Wilson [1969: 96-108; 151-249; 1982: 89-147] instead focused

upon the changing nature of religious institutions, such as their increasing bureaucratization and ecumenicalism, and upon the growth of sects and new religious movements that he saw as evidence of secularization. Taking on the mantle of a central proponent of the orthodox secularization theory, Steve Bruce [2002; 2011] has produced an impressive body of work that develops many of Wilson's arguments and that elaborates upon the causes of secularization. In particular, Bruce has focused upon the interpretation of different measures of religiosity, the significance of the "New Age" and "spirituality," and the limited circumstances in which religion may continue to play a public role in contexts of "cultural defence" and "cultural transition." But the public role that religion may continue to play outside of such contexts is not examined in detail except in terms of what it tells us about individual religiosity: for example, in the chapter on "Religion Outside the Churches" in his book defending secularization theory, Bruce [2011: 79-99] does not address the role of religion in educational or welfare provision. Similarly, when Wilson [1998: 55; 62-63] considered the major criticisms put forward against secularization theory toward the end of his career he addressed the argument that "religion is today acquiring a new public role" only in terms of members of the clergy acting as commentators on social affairs, but not in terms of the other public roles that religion might play.

Gorski and Altinordu [2008: 66] note that sociologists' claims that religious institutions have lost many of their social functions are "often invoked but seldom investigated." Whilst they exonerate Bruce from the charge of operating with the teleological and ahistorical language of modernization theory, they nevertheless claim that he does not "delve deeply" enough into his cases to substantiate his hypotheses [Gorski and Altinordu 2008: 58-59]. Consequently, the strength of Wilson's and Bruce's positions has been undercut by other scholars' examinations of the mainstream (rather than marginal defensive or transitional) public role of religion. This second tradition within British sociology derives from the work of David Martin [1978], who attempted to ameliorate secularization theory by relating such processes more closely to specific historical configurations, thus emphasizing their contingency. Whilst Martin did not pay close attention to religion's public role [Chaves 1994: 771, n.3]¹, by drawing upon his approach and that of the French sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger [2000 (1993)], Grace Davie has explored the significance of religious

¹ Similarly, while Martin's [2011] most recent book discusses the relevance of secularization and desecularization worldwide, it

remains focused on general relations between religion, state and national identity.

discourses in the public sphere and broadcasting [1994: 84-91; 112-114; 2000: 98-114], religious schools and religious education [1994: 127-136; 2000: 82-97], and the role of religion in welfare provision [Bäckström, Davie, Edgardh and Petterson 2011]. Building on this tradition, British sociologists have increasingly begun to argue that the public role of religion is significant, extensive and growing. This is a major reason why Davie [2007: 1], in her overview of the sociology of religion, advises her readers that she will be “[a]ssuming the centrality of religion to late modern societies” (emphasis added). The research here tends to be based on qualitative methods, which are argued to provide evidence of the social significance of religion that is not reflected in statistical data or theoretical modeling [see, for example, Jenkins 1999: 33]. Thus, Wilson’s and Bruce’s tendency to *assume* rather than to *demonstrate* the public insignificance of religion, usually on the basis of descriptions of religion’s public role in the past, and not to engage in significant qualitative research, has left the orthodox secularization thesis open to criticism. This is one major reason why it has become commonplace to dismiss it or, in reference to the subtitle of Bruce’s [2011] most recent book on the topic, why it has become so “unfashionable.”

Sociological interest in public religion has been further encouraged by José Casanova’s [1994] *Public Religions in the Modern World*. This marked a turning-point in social theorizing about religion by arguing for an analytical separation between the thesis of functional differentiation, which purports that religion becomes separated from other functional sub-systems that emerge during modernization, and the thesis that modernization leads to the privatization of religion. Claiming that secularization theorists have often confused these two theses, Casanova examined various case studies from different countries to show how religion may emerge to play a public role precisely as a result of the progression of functional differentiation, since that frees religion from its previous overarching social role of legitimation and allows it to act in terms of social movements and pressure groups alongside others. As Gorski and Altinordu [2008: 58] explain, macro-level secularization as differentiation sets the stage for meso-level desecularization. Other scholars have not been so circumspect. Peter Berger rejected *in toto* the theory of secularization that he developed at around the same time as Bryan Wilson and in much the same terms—“the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols” [Berger 1973: 113]. He instead argues that there has more recently been a resurgence of religion across the world not only as a result of religion entering

the public sphere but also due to a breakdown in the functional differentiation between religion and other sub-systems [Berger 1999]. Gaining traction, this desecularization theory segued with ideas that the secularity that marked societies in the mid-20th century was now shifting into a phase of post-secularity in which religious and secular worldviews co-exist and enter into dialogue with one another, with a consequent blurring of the boundaries between them. These ideas have seen a range of prominent social theorists and philosophers enter the fray, such as Judith Butler, Jürgen Habermas and Charles Taylor [see Mendieta and VanAntwerpen 2011]. Whilst these figures have generally paid little attention to the details of sociological debates about secularization, especially as constructed through arguments over evidence, more empirically-minded sociologists and historians have also now begun to consider post-secularity as a defining feature of contemporary societies [Bender and Taves 2012; Gorski, Kim, Torpey and VanAntwerpen 2012].

The time is therefore ripe for a careful re-assessment of the arguments and evidence about the public significance of religion. This is vital to providing the basis for a more informed evaluation of the secularization thesis, before it is prematurely dismissed as of purely historical interest in the development of sociology. To date, there has been no such sustained re-assessment, despite the fact that a critical reading of these arguments and evidence suggests a number of recurrent weaknesses. Among these are contradictions in argumentation, unconvincing interpretations of qualitative data, and a lack of historical awareness. In fact, these weaknesses parallel those emphasized by Bruce [2002: 186-203; 2011] when he addresses other arguments, such as those about data concerning individual religious practice and belief. The aims of this paper are necessarily limited: an exhaustive survey and evaluation of the literature on public religion is impossible here. Nor does this paper attempt to evaluate the extent to which “historic churches” hold “significance as markers of religious identity,” as addressed by Davie [2006: 274] through her notions of “believing without belonging” and “vicarious religion.” Not least because there is little solid empirical evidence that directly tests these hypotheses, for example by measuring the extent to which the general public expects or cares about churches supposedly acting on their behalf. Instead, this paper seeks to outline how a re-assessment of the public significance of religion should proceed by examining a number of recent qualitative case studies, including from the author’s own research, which focus upon different sorts of public engagement and intervention by mainstream Christian organizations in

England. There have been studies of public engagements by the religious organizations of minority ethnic groups in England (for example Duffuor 2011 and Eade [1996])², and certainly the presence of some migrant groups has recently led to the re-opening of “debates about the place of religion in public as well as private life” [Davie 2006: 287]. However, despite their visibility, the impact upon the majority population has been slight, except for leading to calls for restrictions on minority religions. Thus, this paper’s focus is important in addressing the mainstream public role of religion that underlies this entire debate. These public engagements may be distinguished along two lines: religious organizations taking religious messages into public places (usually with the aim of encouraging the public to attend church-based activities), and religious organizations providing non-religious public provisions. It is noteworthy that the former is rarely considered in debates about secularization, even though it is very revealing of key issues. Furthermore, these two sorts of public engagements are rarely considered together (which is surprising since many churches attempt both). However, doing so enables a stronger and more coherent analysis to be constructed.

The examination of this evidence is underpinned by a focus upon the scope of religious authority, since that reveals power relations at the meso-level that can be more readily related to both macro-level structural differentiation and micro-level individual religiosity [Chaves, 1994]. Associated with “neosecularization theory” [Yamane, 1997], such an approach is informed by “new differentiation theory” [Alexander, 1990] that empirically examines the degree of autonomy of, and the nature of interactions between, different societal institutions or sub-systems, including religion. British sociologists of religion have paid little attention to these important theoretical developments, with the result that the sub-discipline continues to be marked by relatively simplistic accounts of both differentiation and de-differentiation. There is a pressing need, then, to apply the insights of these developments to the British situation; this article focuses on England alone for reasons of space since there is variation across the different nations that make up Britain or the United Kingdom in terms of state-religion relations and

2 More broadly, a large body of literature—relating to political responses to religious diversity rather than secularization—covers the ways in which minorities mobilize religious identities in the public sphere, in particular Islam (for example Fetzer and Soper, 2005; Statham *et al.*, 2005) and, as far as Britain is concerned, Hinduism [Knott, 2009; Zavos,

2009]. Studies of globalization and religion have discussed whether mobilizations and identity-claims of transnational religious communities such as Muslims challenge the sovereignty of nation states [Bruce and Voas, 2004]—another way of addressing religion’s influence (or lack of) in the public sphere.

levels of individual religiosity. The wealth of data about public religion generated by North American and continental European sociology, which similarly cannot be considered here, means that the exercise could be repeated, including by making regional comparisons.

The following re-assessment of the available evidence about public religion in England shows that when religious organizations take religious messages into public places they are largely unsuccessful in their aims; when they provide non-religious public provisions there is usually little that is religious about their endeavours. This indicates that sociologists must take care not to mistake the intentions of religious organizations for the actual outcomes of their campaigns, or to interpret their messages and actions as necessarily religious, or to claim that there has been a public resurgence of religion without this being clearly demonstrated. By paying attention to the scope of religious authority, this article shows that rather than the collapse of the distinction between “the religious” and “the secular” leading to a situation of de-differentiation, as some commentators have suggested [for example, Davie, 2007: 224], religious concerns and actions in the public sphere are increasingly fixed and re-fixed in secular structures as they are co-opted by secular authorities, in ways neither anticipated nor explored in Bruce’s account of secularization. This occurs in part because of the decline in individual and communal religiosity, which provides decreasing scope for these religious actions to escape their constraints and attain a wider impact. Thus, public religion and individual religiosity are in practice intimately linked, despite being irreducible to each other, throwing light on the relationship between different dimensions or levels of secularization that have hitherto not been well explored [Dobbelaere 2002: 165; Gorski and Altinordu 2008: 59]. It is proposed that the intensity of the links at different analytical levels can be well characterized as a situation of *advanced secularization*.

An examination of these case studies therefore leads neither to a wholehearted endorsement of Bruce’s position in the secularization debate nor to a middle way reconciling opposing sides in that debate. Instead, this paper purports that secularization is a much more complex and multifaceted set of social processes than is usually acknowledged, which involve diverse effects and consequences as they *continue* to unfold in different areas of social life over long periods of time. Whilst Bruce [2002: 37-41] recognizes this complexity, he pays little attention to it on the basis that it does not affect “the overall direction of trends and their long-term stability.” But given that religion appears to have greater public “visibility” in recent years [Beckford, 2012], detailed

attention is required, not least in order to test whether the situation has changed—as Bruce [2002: 37] correctly states that it could. By addressing these issues, this paper contends that even if we are watching shadows on a cave wall, the play of these shadows and their continuing projection are issues that require detailed investigation rather than being unduly dismissed as of little consequence or being taken at face value.

Public religion I: religious messages

In contrast to the United States, mainstream Christian organizations in England have not been extensively studied by sociologists. This means that there is relatively little evidence relating to such organizations' attempts to take religious messages into public places, in an effort to invite the general public into their own spaces. The most prominent and widespread example of such engagement is the Alpha Course, which has been heavily promoted by a broad denominational range of English churches. That has included the large-scale placement of public advertisements that stress connections and relevance to daily life whilst downplaying explicit Christian references. Hunt [2004], who has conducted the only in-depth sociological study on this, found that Alpha is not the national Christian renewal which it is sometimes represented as being, because a large majority of participants are already churchgoers. His survey shows that 66% of participants learnt about Alpha through their church and only 5% through posters, and that just over three-quarters of participants were already churchgoers (additionally, of those, only 14% are described as being on the “fringes” of their church) [Hunt, 2004: 171; 176]. Furthermore, only 11% of those who claimed to have “become a Christian as a result of taking Alpha” had no church background—this represents a tiny proportion given that only 47 respondents made this claim out of the 837 people who completed the survey [Hunt 2004: 187].

If Alpha represents a national, heavily-resourced and ecumenical attempt at public engagement, individual churches sometimes pursue their own. One such venture is discussed in Guest's [2007] study of an evangelical Anglican church in England. In the 1980s, younger members of that church, inspired by a trip to Greenbelt (a Christian music festival held each summer in southern England), set up a project in order to minimise “cultural distance” between the church and

non-Christians. This involved holding a Christian nightclub “event” in a disused warehouse and later establishing an alternative worship service aimed at clubbers, who were targeted by church members attending secular nightclubs [Guest 2007: 136-8]. Although the aim of this venture was evangelism, there is little evidence that it was successful: “the group would subsequently look back with humour on how few people they actually ‘converted’ to Christianity” [Guest 2007: 138]. Notably, by the time of Guest’s [2007: 139-142] research, this venture had faded and the small group had “turned inwards, to focus more upon servicing its own needs than those of a target audience”; many of the participants remained the original members of the venture.

These two studies indicate the general public’s lack of interest in the attempts of mainstream Christian organizations to bring religious messages into the public sphere in England, but they do not address the relationship between religious and secular authorities. Further insight is gained by examining Engelke’s [2011; 2012; 2013] ethnographic research into a Bible Advocacy programme run by the Bible Society of England and Wales. This research represents the most extensive study of a Christian organization’s attempts to engage with the general public in England. It deserves detailed consideration also because as an English case study it is rare in addressing two issues vital for understanding these sorts of public engagements: the nature of the relationship between religious organizations and secular authorities, and the extent of religious socialization amongst the general public. The Bible Advocacy programme aims to get people to begin reading the Bible and to start attending church, and as such may be interpreted as continuing the original aim of British evangelicalism: to convert or return people to Christianity [Bebbington 1989: 5-10]. According to Engelke [2012: 166], the separation of religion and politics in Britain involves a “further nesting of differentiations,” such as the public and the private, which the Bible Society attempted to contest by setting the terms for religion’s action in the public sphere: religion’s “manifestation not in politics per se but, rather, the market.” Two campaigns studied by Engelke were the provision of Christmas decorations for Swindon’s town centre in 2006 and a poster and events campaign in Greater Manchester in 2007. Primarily, he addresses the actions, discourses and intentions of Bible Society staff, including their interactions with secular authorities and professionals. Less extensive, but still highly revealing, research was focused upon the public reception of the Swindon and Manchester campaigns. Engelke uses the notion of “ambient faith” to describe what the Bible

Society intended to achieve, whilst his research with the general public is drawn upon to discuss whether these intentions were met. This attempt at establishing “ambient faith” in the public sphere leads Engelke [2011: 716] to conclude that a theory of secularization that depends on religious decline or disenchantment is unsustainable.

The Swindon campaign was seen by Bible Society staff as an opportunity to insert Christianity back into Christmas in Britain, which was felt to have become secular and to have lost its Christian meaning [Engelke 2012: 156-157]. By proposing to Swindon Borough Council that they provide the Christmas decorations for the town centre, the Bible Society aimed to publicly contest this irrelevance. A key part of Engelke’s discussion is that staff recognised that this could only be achieved if the biblical or Christian element or message in the decorations was muted or hidden. In a society in which Christianity is often mistrusted, reviled or ignored, any attempt at being too upfront, they believed, would provoke a negative reaction. Thus, a secular company that produces kites and banners was contracted to help design and to produce the decorations. The campaign staff had decided upon angels as the theme of the decorations because they saw these figures as representative of contemporary British “spirituality.” Engelke interprets this campaign as aiming for what he calls “ambient faith”: the establishment of a distinct sensual and material context out of which may arise a particular understanding by those who experience it. He provides the example of violin music and candlelight as providing the ambience for a romantic dinner [Engelke 2012: 158]. Although Engelke does not use the term “ambient faith” in relation to the Manchester campaign, it had similar aims to the Swindon one. The Bible Society bought space on public billboards, bus shelters and other public places in order to place advertisements designed to provoke thinking about the Bible, but without containing any “outward religiosity”: “to get that man on the street into a church, onto a website, or into conversation with a Christian friend or family member about what the Bible had to offer” [Engelke 2011: 717-718].

Although the Swindon campaign represents an example of a religious organization playing a public role in contemporary Britain, it is clear that this role could only be played within the limitations set by external authorities and that these limitations involved a significant denial of religiosity. So, the Bible Society had no automatic right to provide the decorations but had to seek the permission of the Borough Council: Engelke [2012: 159] explains that the latter were favourable to this because it would save them the cost of doing so. Thus, we may note that

the Council had no interest in attempting to religiously revitalize the public sphere. Indeed, it imposed a series of restrictions on the campaign, for example by not allowing the inclusion of a biblical message on the posters advertising the angels [Engelke 2012: 161]. The only time that the Bible Society did not retreat in the face of Council demands was when it fought against the naming of the decorations as “Swindon’s Mythical Christmas,” since that would imply that the angels were “make-believe”, rather than “Swindon’s Angelic Christmas” [Engelke 2012: 161].

The Bible Society’s relations with the banner designer involved a similar retreat. The designer’s view that the angels should not look like the traditional Christian depiction of angels but rather as figures from Japanese manga comics—a form of art in which he was interested—prevailed. Bible Society staff came to see this as a better way of appealing to people on their own cultural terms, rather than forcing Christianity upon them; furthermore, Engelke [2012: 160] writes, “to those who knew something about the history of manga, the style’s roots in the work of a 12th-century Buddhist monk [...] served to reinforce further the conceptual point of the project’s generic spirituality.” But this generic, even abstract, depiction of the angels may be seen as de-linking them from Christianity, rather than just temporarily obscuring their Christian signification. It is important to note that one condition for the success of the Bible Society’s campaign was that its Christian nature be hidden only at first sight, in order to attract people’s attention and not repulse them, after which it would need to be recognized so that people would (re)turn to the Bible or church. In fact, the data that Engelke collected about the public reception of this campaign does not provide any evidence that the banners were interpreted as Christian or that they led people to the Bible or church.

To measure the impact upon the general public, Engelke examines the posts made on a comment board on the BBC Wiltshire website that featured a picture slideshow of the angels. That board contained 13 posts by 12 people, eight of which Engelke [2012: 162-163] describes as “positive” and of these he considers two noteworthy because they mention the beauty of the angels and appreciate their placement. Engelke [2012: 163] writes that this provides a “hint” of the angels’ ambient effect—the extent to which their physicality and sensuality became affective. Engelke [2012: 163] remarks that “[i]t is not enough to conclude, however, that the angels were successfully ambient on the basis of a few comments on a website forum [...] the

success of this project is, it ought to go without saying, somewhat beside the point. I am not arguing on the basis of results but, rather, intention.” But more *can* be said here: it should be noted that the posts he discusses do not have anything to do with religion, spirituality or faith. Engelke implicitly recognizes this when he writes that the posts provide evidence for an “ambient effect”—here, he leaves out the notion of ambient *faith*. One might hypothesize that the ambience the angels contributed to was a general Christmas ambience, but not ambient faith. In short, when Engelke looks for evidence that ambient faith was achieved in Swindon, he finds none.

The situation is similar regarding the Manchester campaign. Engelke [2011: 726-727] discusses the focus groups he conducted for the Bible Society with the aim of providing qualitative feedback on the advertisements: “No one in the groups could recall the creatives [advertisements] without some prompting,” and only one person had thought that they had anything to do with religion or the Bible—compared to three who thought they were ads for crisps (potato chips). In other words, there is extremely scant evidence that the advertisements created “ambient faith” in the public sphere or marketplace. Other relevant data is provided by those who submitted entries to a competition linked to the advertisements. 46 out of 400 entrants filled in an online questionnaire: of those, every one self-identified as a Christian, 85% said they attended church at least once a week, and 74% said they read the Bible personally at least once a week; furthermore, and supporting the conclusion that ambient faith was not achieved by the public placement of the ads, only 4% stated that they had found the advertisements *in situ* [Engelke 2011: 729-730]. Thus, for this campaign as for the Swindon campaign, Engelke’s evidence suggests that the Bible Society overwhelmingly failed to have a religious impact upon the non-churchgoing and non-Bible-reading public.

Whilst Engelke is careful to state that he is examining the Bible Society’s intention to establish ambient faith and not whether this was achieved, a consideration of whether it was achieved or not enables a critical engagement with his views about secularization theory. This may be pursued by comparing the situation he describes to that of Egypt, since Engelke [2012: 159] develops his notion in part by drawing upon Charles Hirschkind’s [2006: 125] work on the use and place of audio cassette-recorded Islamic sermons in Cairo that he sees as constituting a “sensory environment” in which Islam forms an important part of the public space. Notably, when discussing Hirschkind’s work, Engelke is not concerned with the *intention* that

lies behind the playing of such cassettes in Cairene public spaces, but with their effects on the general public—that is, their achievement of ambient faith for pedestrians. But by using the term “ambient faith” to describe both situations, he implicitly suggests that something similar is, or could be, happening in Britain. The significant differences between the two situations explain why that is not the case: of interest here are the social and cultural conditions under which ambient faith may be achieved.

Of course, Engelke recognizes that the relationship between religion and the public sphere is different in Cairo and Britain. He points out that in Britain it is up to the general public to engage with the ambient faith that religious actors are trying to produce, whilst in Cairo “that engagement is often not negotiable” since religious messages are “megaphoned” [Engelke 2012: 165]. But this distinction is not the most important one that should be drawn: more significant is the fact that the general public in Egypt is much more predisposed to react to the religious messages they encounter than is the general public in Britain. Hirschkind [2001: 629-636] discusses the skills commonly learned by Egyptian Muslims in childhood and adolescence that involve listening to and reciting the Quran and other religious texts, and explains how are already familiar with the narratives of sermons. Thus, for ambient faith to be achieved people must be able to recognize the cues that have been inserted into the public space; they must be primed to experience these sensual and material aspects as religiously ambient, which stops them being *merely* noise or sights to which no significance is attached. This involves religious socialization: unless people have been socialized to recognize and so attach significance to certain things, that is to see them as religious cues, then ambience will not be achieved. Engelke’s example of the romantic dinner helps to illustrate this: violin music and candlelight will not establish a romantic ambience unless people in that situation know that these things signify romance. Given low and steadily falling rates of churchgoing, linked to low levels of the transmission of religion within families [Voas and Crockett 2005], Britain largely fails to provide the condition for the reception of religious cues by the general public. It is no surprise, then, that Engelke presents no evidence that ambient faith was achieved (rather than being intended) in any of the campaigns—with the exception of active Christians for the Manchester campaign. That reinforces this point: such people are precisely those who are socialized to

recognize and respond to the cues that the Bible Society put into the public space.

A comparison between Egypt and Britain therefore demonstrates the social and cultural conditions under which ambient faith may be achieved, and thus why it failed to be achieved by the Bible Society in the latter. This indicates that Engelke's [2011: 731] assessment that the Manchester campaign failed due to "a series of semiotic misfires and misapprehensions—a wrongly packaged product," is misplaced. It would not have mattered how the "product" was "packaged," since the non-churchgoing general public would always have missed the religious indicators contained in the cues aimed at them. Engelke's research was worth discussing at length because it raises a number of central issues in considering the attempts of mainstream Christian organizations to bring religious messages into the public space. These include the recognition and reception of such messages by the general public, but also the manner in which these attempts intersect with the concerns and demands of secular organizations and authorities. The latter issue is particularly relevant when considering the service provision of religious organizations, examined in the next section.

Public religion II: secular provisions

Whilst there has been little detailed research on the attempts of English religious organizations to take their religious messages into public places, there has been a growing body of research on their non-religious public provisions which, as Dinham [2009: 119] notes, is "numerically the biggest and most visible aspect of their activities in public space." For this reason, I do not here discuss other public presences that religion may have, such as in broadcasting [Knott, Poole and Taira, 2013], or politics and the law [Ganiel and Jones 2012]. Furthermore, studies of such public presences are of limited usefulness as regards the focus of this article, because the empirical research mostly examines discourses rather than either the struggles between religious and secular authorities or the public impact and reception of such discourses. The role of religion in the English educational system appears to be a special case of public provision: Wilson [1998: 52] writes that "[e]ducation is perhaps alone in retaining any sort of supernaturalist orientation," before adding that "even here there is strong evidence of decline, as monks and nuns are steadily

replaced by lay teachers, even in schools that are still nominally religious schools, whilst the educational curriculum tends everywhere to squeeze the time available for religious instruction.” As usual, however, Wilson does not provide an empirical investigation; nor does Bruce in his work. In contrast, Beckford [1998] examines the struggles in Britain over religious education, showing that, despite political lobbying by Christian groups, religious education was not adopted as part of the National Curriculum. When religion is addressed in schools it is usually in the multifaith terms that governments and lobby groups were precisely attempting to counter [Dinham and Jackson 2012: 282-283]. Dinham and Jackson [2012: 290] conclude that “the cumulative effect of changes in educational policy towards religious education in schools has been to remove the process of Christian socialization from state-funded community schools, even though it remains in the growing number of mainly state-funded voluntary-aided schools.”

Despite increasing attention to non-religious provisions by religious organizations, British sociological research on this topic remains relatively undeveloped. Nevertheless, as will be shown, it is increasingly held that such organizations now play a major role in the public sphere. It is here that ideas about post-secularity, desecularization and de-differentiation are most emphasized. Whilst a re-assessment of the available evidence does not demonstrate that to be the case, it does show the presence of religious organizations in the public sphere in a manner not anticipated by the orthodox theory of secularization. Although it is not possible in the space available here to discuss all the relevant literature, what follows indicates some important lines of enquiry that help to clarify the ways in which secularization is occurring in Britain today.

Typical of some of the sorts of claims currently made is Baker and Beaumont’s [2011: 33] discussion of “the *re-emergence* of public expressions of religion and spirituality” in what they call the “post-secular city” (emphasis added). The example of a mainstream Christian organization that they provide in support of this claim is a homeless project run by the Salvation Army in England, regarding which Baker and Beaumont [2011: 36-40] note that it depends upon non-Christian and non-religious volunteers, such that it is an “implicitly religious” space that tempers the explicit Christian identity and evangelistic mission of that organization. For Baker and Beaumont [2011: 41], this shows that a “functionalist or instrumentalist reading of this space,” for example as based on “religious vs. secular,” is not sufficient in explaining such “blurred encounters.” However, this

example hardly stands as evidence for the “re-emergence” of public religion: homeless projects have been run for many decades by the Salvation Army. Rather, secularization is clearly indicated in the way they are run today compared to the explicitly evangelical manner in which the Salvation Army used to operate—for example, it used to require that those who used its services attend Christian worship [Orwell 1974 [1933]: 127]. Thus, there is no evidence to assume that these projects are “implicitly religious” for their service-users, let alone for many of their volunteers. Instead, there is a clear contestation between the religious and the secular that has occurred over time and is continuing to take place. Indeed, Baker and Beaumont’s own evidence points to a sharpening of the distinction between them in that the Salvation Army has had to fundamentally change the way it operates in the public sphere in order to be acceptable to secular authorities and non-religious personnel. The relationship between religious and secular authorities in such cases is not necessarily conflictual or oppositional: Baker and Beaumont’s notion of “religious vs. secular” is misleading in that it precludes other relations whereby religious authorities become subordinated or subsumed by secular ones. Notably, Baker and Beaumont do not discuss the secular regulatory structures that govern such ventures to a far greater extent than in the past and that must be taken into consideration in any sociological assessment.

Dinham [2009: 119–161] provides an historical overview of such regulation. The widespread belief in the Victorian era that religion and the public good were inextricably linked led to the existence of “millions of religious associations providing essential services and a moral training for citizenry” [Proschaska 2006: 2], which extended especially into education and healthcare as well as the practice of “district visiting” to all the inhabitants of a neighbourhood. This changed fundamentally with the professionalization of social services and the emergence of the British welfare state. More recently, the introduction of a “mixed economy of welfare” from the 1980s “led to an enormous increase in regulation of non-government services which placed a massive bureaucratic strain, both on providers who had to demonstrate their effectiveness and efficiency at every turn, and on the civil service which had to monitor these aspects” [Dinham 2009: 125–126]. This entails particular difficulties for religious (or “faith-based”) service providers, since they frequently lack “skills, resources, partnerships skills and capacity, adaptability, governance know-how and ability, volunteers and staff and time,” as well as the “business ethos” that is

required due to their need to position themselves as “social enterprises” generating their own streams of income [Dinham, 2009: 142-147].

Highly instructive regarding these issues is Bunn’s [2012] detailed ethnographic research into Faithworks, a prominent Christian organization that campaigns for the political recognition of the welfare projects of Christian groups and offers practical support to such groups. Faithworks has played a key role in instructing local-based public ventures run by churches and other religious organizations (its “partners”) in how to govern themselves (including their discourses, objectives and modes of operation) in order to maximize their chances of obtaining local or national government grants and recognition. As part of this, Faithworks demands that its partners sign a Charter committing them to serve and respect people irrespective of, amongst other things, sexual orientation and religion, and to never impose Christian faith or belief on others. Faithworks’ adoption of this “equality and diversity” discourse, which is very often at odds with the evangelical culture in which it primarily operates, is matched by the adoption of an “audit culture” of transparency and accountability that enables it to connect meaningfully with secular authorities and which has come to dominate its discourse and practice. The result has been a thoroughgoing reformulation of these organizations’ public service provision along secular lines. Bunn’s work thus provides a striking illustration of what Chaves [1994: 766] calls “perhaps the most slippery of concepts within the secularization literature: internal secularization,” since it demonstrates changes within religious organizations as they adapt or accommodate to the demands of secular authorities.

The above examples show that service delivery is increasingly separated from the religious nature of its providers in England today. Dinham [2009: 136] notes that those successful in gaining public sector contracts are often “brands,” such as the YMCA, who “are no longer understood primarily or popularly as ‘faith based,’ but become dissociated from their ‘faith base’.” There is a widespread feeling amongst such groups that government pledges to work with “faith communities” amounts to little more than “lip service,” since they are not really part of the “joined-up” provision in communities [Dinham 2009: 137]. For example, Dinham [2009: 137] documents how one hospice started to “de-Christianise” its remembrance services to encourage wider participation and how a homeless project was eventually taken over by the public body from which they had won a contract, even though it continued to be run from the group’s premises. Similarly, Johnsen’s [2012: 296] study of service provision

for homeless people by “faith-based” organizations in England found that only a “small proportion” were clearly coupled to religion in terms of “the degree of influence faith has on their public identity, ethos and day-to-day practice,” with others “now faith-based ‘in name only’—some going so far as to self-identity and re-brand as ‘secular’.”

This discussion shows that the presence of religious organizations in the provision of public services may hide a number of processes that are associated with secularization: the decline or removal of religious messages and demands, the need to conform to strict requirements by secular authorities, and the need to act alongside a range of other sorts of service providers. These conclusions are confirmed by the English case study in the Welfare and Religion in a European Perspective (WREP) project: whilst parish priests and representatives of public authorities held a generally positive attitude concerning the role of the Church of England in welfare provision, the latter expected churches to provide services “with no strings attached, that is to say regardless of religious affiliation and without preaching” and took little or no account of them in the planning of welfare provision” [Middlemiss *Lé Mon* 2010: 122]. Thus, this may provide evidence for an expansion in the role of churches in welfare delivery [Bäckström, Davie, Edgardh and Petterson 2011: 12], but not for an expansion of religious authority in such delivery. All of this marks a significant difference from the past, as does today’s absence of religious organizations in service provision in some important areas in which they used to be highly prominent, such as healthcare and “district visiting.” There is, then, considerable inaccuracy in the view that religion has “re-emerged” in the public sphere or that society is becoming “post-secular.” This can be explored further through an example taken from ethnographic research conducted by the author.

Many Methodist churches in London have attempted to set up various types of projects for their local neighbourhoods, particularly for children [Wood 2005; Wood and Eade, forthcoming]. But their relations with local political authorities, secular charities, and even the workers that they employed, meant that not only were they constrained in their actions but also that these projects generally became devoid of religious content. One inner-London church, for example, had been part of an ecumenical grouping that had initiated and financed a community development project focused on a local housing estate. The senior full-time employee on this project was not a Christian and he explained to me that neither his post nor the project had anything to do with the churches that lay behind the initiative—indeed, he said that

he would not have taken the post if that had not been the case. Thus, religious messages and references to local churches were absent in the project's activities and documentation. This was accepted as perfectly normal by the church people involved, who exercised a very hands-off approach. My suggestion to the Methodist minister that the project could have the effect of increasing the church's membership, not least because the housing estate like the church was populated predominately by migrants from the Caribbean and Africa and their descendants, was quickly dismissed by her explaining that that was not the reason why it was set up.

Brian Frost and Stuart Jordan [2006: 42; 75], respectively a Methodist lay preacher and co-chair of the Methodist London District, ruefully discuss the onerous constraints upon such projects, including the complications that result from being dependent upon local and national government support. For example, the provision of short-term grants whose renewal depends upon "financial stringencies," and the professionalization of roles in welfare and charitable projects which "quickly moves the work beyond the competence of and voluntary ethos of the Church" and leads to "the search for significant funding needed to sustain growth [that] itself requires a new range of partnerships, often with public bodies and others who have their own agendas, criteria and ways of working that have to be negotiated." Furthermore, we should not over-estimate the significance of such ventures in comparison to the past: "the days of huge congregations and massive social enterprises are largely over" [Frost and Jordan 2006: 28].

By paying attention to the scope of religious authority, rather than merely the presence of religious organizations in service provision, the evidence points against the view, expressed by Dinham and Jackson [2012: 290], that "involvement in welfare [...] may have served to hold off some of the secularizing tendencies of the public sphere" or that this has "strengthened their hand once again." But even given the constraints on the service provision of religious organizations that have been described in this section, can they usefully be seen as religious in terms of their rationales, morals and ethos? As the case of the community development project described above indicates, this is largely not the case. That project was indistinguishable from a host of other projects run in London boroughs by a wide range of local government and charitable organizations; indeed, the senior employee had previously worked as a community worker in the same borough for local government. Furthermore, in contrast to today's situation, service provision by religious organizations in the past was very often

linked to evangelical attempts to Christianize recipients, by drawing them into churches or policing their behavior along explicitly Christian moral lines, as shown in the example of the Salvation Army's past operations.

Discussion: religious-secular interactions in a new context

The increasing attention paid by sociologists to the actions of religious organizations in the public sphere is to be welcomed, since it focuses attention on an area that has often been neglected in the past. However, it is important to construct sociological arguments upon a clear interpretation of empirical evidence that pays attention to the social, political and cultural contexts of such actions, and to their historical variations. This is particularly the case when assessing secularization theory, the rejection of which is too often associated with a celebratory appraisal of public religious actions. The case studies examined in this article provide evidence regarding two issues that require particular attention: the reception given by the general public to these actions, and the interaction between religious and secular organizations.

The first issue is pertinent for understanding the attempts of religious organizations to bring religious messages into England's public sphere. The evidence of Hunt, Guest and Engelke suggests that the general public provides very infertile ground for the recognition, let alone the positive reception, of these messages. This is true even if they are deliberately packaged to appeal to the general public by downplaying explicit Christian messages, aiming to foreground "spirituality" rather than religion, and linking with popular forms of entertainment. Not only must these attempts at engagement compete with the attempts of other sorts of organizations, such as business corporations or governments, but they must also try to connect with a public that is largely indifferent to religious (or "spiritual") messages due to the declining level of religious socialization. The evidence shows that only those who are already Christians are enchanted by these sorts of engagements, with the rest of the population left untouched. We may therefore contest Engelke's [2011: 716] view that a theory of secularization that depends on religious decline or disenchantment is unsustainable. These may be part of the "protective belt" of the secularization

“paradigm” in contrast to its “core” differentiation theory [Gorski 2000: 142], but they should not be dismissed—rather, they are likely to be strongly associated with differentiation in practice. The same applies to the deprivatization thesis, as the next paragraph will show.

The second issue, interactions between religious and secular organizations, is pertinent for understanding not only the attempts of religious organizations to bring religious messages into the British public sphere but also their attempts at providing public services. Regarding the former, religious organizations very often have to work with secular organizations that govern the public space and that produce materials and infrastructure, and which are therefore able to place severe restrictions on public religious activities—not least by rendering them less religious. That disrupts the positive judgement of Casanova’s [1994] discussion of religion in the public sphere made by Engelke [2012: 166] in support of his view that religion is able to find a place there. Whilst Engelke is careful to state that he is interested in the *intentions* of the Bible Society’s campaigns rather than whether these *achieved* their evangelical aims, his conclusions regarding secularization theory show that he does make a judgement about such achievements. Contrary to those conclusions, the evidence put forward demonstrates rather that the Bible Society failed to contest the public-private distinction that confines religion to the private sphere and that makes it extremely difficult for religion to enter the public marketplace. Rather than supporting Casanova, this suggests that, in England at least, the deprivatization of religion has not been achieved. In fact, it is rarely noted by commentators that Casanova’s [1994] case-studies of the role played by religion in the public sphere are mostly of exceptional and temporary nature: religious organizations playing a role in transitions to democracy, after which they often retreat once more from public life. Thus, whilst Casanova correctly wishes to establish an *analytical* break between the theses of social differentiation and religious privatisation, his own cases suggest that *in practice* the two tend to be strongly linked—as indicated by Bruce’s [2011: 38–39] version of secularization theory.

Similar conclusions may be drawn on the basis of empirical evidence regarding the nature of the interactions between religious and secular organizations when the former provide public services. The case studies considered in this article show that although there is still scope for such provision, the dominance of that sphere by secular authorities, organizations and discourses means that it is heavily constrained, despite a more promising political welcome for public

religion in England since the 1990s [Taylor 2003]. Such provision today therefore paradoxically entails secularization in the form of the re-shaping of religious discourses and practices that make them acceptable to secular society, along the lines dictated by secular authorities; it does not involve the mere movement, without any accompanying transformation, of religious discourses and practices into the public sphere. This is an issue that has not been explored in arguments about the deprivatization of religion, by either Casanova [1994] or those who draw on his work (such as Herbert [2003]). A related issue is the tendency for religious organizations to increasingly resemble secular ones through institutional isomorphism [Swartz 1998], something that is particularly highlighted in Bunn's [2012] study of Faithworks.

Of course, the situation may be different in other national contexts. Ebaugh, Pipes, Chafetz and Daniels [2003], for example, have discussed the growing scope for religious organizations to engage in government-funded social service programs in the United States without surrendering their religious character. As Dinham [2009: 159] notes, in the United States there is a widespread view that “by bringing aspects of faith itself into the services they provide, faiths can help bring about a re-moralisation of public space” that is associated with evangelical conservative values of family, community and duty. Other countries may also offer much greater opportunities for religious messages to be brought into the public space even when these are not attached to service provision. Turning once more to the case of Egypt, Hirschkind [2006: 107] explains that a half-century of Muslim reformers have successfully cut across public-private distinctions, with mosques becoming sites for new kinds of social and political organization and expression. This is precisely what enables ambient faith to be achieved there—indeed, the arrival of cassette-recorded sermons “coincided with the recuperation of the mosque as a center of public life within many of Cairo’s popular quarters” [Hirschkind 2006: 128]. Following that line of reasoning, it is possible that ambient faith may be achieved in certain local English contexts where significant public expressions of religiosity are more habitual and accepted, and where they coincide with a strong incidence of religious socialization. That could be the case in neighbourhoods with a high proportion of practising Muslims—as indicated by Eade’s [1996] study of the Islamisation of urban space in Tower Hamlets, East London, which pertinently includes a discussion of “urban noise.”

Re-formulating secularization theory: differentiation and co-optation

An examination of qualitative studies of the attempts of mainstream Christian organizations' attempts in England to bring religious messages into the public space and to provide public services therefore lends strong support for the secularization theory rather than undermining it. However, it also shows that processes of secularization involve complex relations between religious and secular organizations that have been reformulated over time and that vary contemporaneously according to different contexts. Proponents of the orthodox theory tend not to explore this complexity and historical contingency, suggesting instead an inexorable, linear process even if they formally acknowledge that this is not necessarily the case. This demonstrates the value of the approach to understanding secularization proposed by Chaves [1994], which focuses on the declining scope of religious authority by drawing attention to the struggles taking place amongst organizations.

As Chaves [1994: 754] explains, his approach enables the social significance of religion to be better understood "at all analytical levels, including the individual level," in contrast to the focus on either macro- or micro-level changes by proponents of the orthodox secularization theory. So, the case studies examined in this article have shown that religious organizations are able to exert little authority when acting in the public sphere, with the result that structural differentiation is unaffected (but may even be reinforced), and that their authority has little or no purchase upon individuals. This strongly suggests that secularizations at different analytical levels are linked. On the one hand, structural differentiation means that when religious organizations attempt to act in the public sphere, there are powerful pressures and incentives that lead to internal restructuring along the lines of the discourses, practices and modes of operation found in secular organizations. On the other hand, declines in the levels of individual religious practice and belief mean that attempts at such action are largely ignored when they involve explicit religious content and are not recognized as religious when they involve welfare provision. This linkage between different levels concurs with Dobbelaere's [2002: Part II] view of secularization. However, it should be noted that in contrast to the approach pursued here that focuses upon the meso-level of organizations, Dobbelaere [2002: 163] emphasizes instead the relationship between "societal" (macro) and "individual" (micro) secularization.

That makes it difficult for his analysis to capture some of the most important features of the decline in the scope of religious authority; indeed, when he addresses “organizational” (meso) secularization it is largely in terms of “religious pluralism” rather than the relationship between religious and secular organizations [Dobbelaere 2002: 163].

The situation presented above may be described as *advanced secularization*, whereby analytically separate processes of secularization (structural differentiation, the secular adaptations of religious organizations, and declining individual religiosity) increasingly reinforce each other in practice through continual feedback loops. Whilst Chaves [1994: 764-770] directs attention towards the decline of religious authority at each of these levels, he does not bring out the way in which they may feed into each other and in fact hints that secularization theory could be abandoned in favor of other general theories such as those concerning social movements, cultural innovation and its institutionalization, and organizational change. However, whilst these theories may be important for understanding the decline of religious authority, the fact that this decline occurs at different levels in ways that may be mutually reinforcing, points to the need to retain a general theory of secularization. Without such a general theory, it will be difficult to connect the changes occurring at different levels and thus to perceive any overall, profound transformation that is taking place.

Taking account of such connections suggests that something new is occurring in contemporary Britain: not the previous *relativization* of religious authorities in relation to those that were secular, resulting from the loss of a plausibility structure [Berger 1973] or the eclipse of community [Wilson 1982] that arises through religious pluralization, but the thoroughgoing *co-optation* of religious authorities by secular ones and the embracing of this by religious actors. This marks a form of social differentiation in which the ventures of religious organizations become subsumed into other societal sub-systems but without having any discernible impact upon those spheres. These ventures are simply rendered subservient to the secular regulations and modes of operation in those sub-systems. Whilst this, to a certain extent, brings religious organizations back into the public sphere, it paradoxically does so only through a furthering of privatization since the religious rationales, actions and values that underpin the interests of religious organizations and personnel in these ventures are now either excluded or pushed into the private background. Indeed, Glendinning and Bruce [2011] show that the British are strongly against religion having a high public profile and that this stance is spreading amongst those

who identify as religious, in contrast to what would be expected by proponents of the deprivatization thesis. What is occurring does not, then, represent the re-emergence of religion in the public sphere, the deprivatization of religion, or societal de-differentiation.

As such, these developments do not simply lie “in a direct line of descent from previous programmes of mutual engagement between the British state and religious interests,” which is how Beckford [2012: 15] interprets the growing public visibility of religion. Rather, co-optation represents a new relationship between secular and religious authorities, set within the new social context that I have described as advanced secularization. Beckford [2012: 13] argues that “the growing visibility of FBOs in social service delivery [...] signifies something more subtle and interesting than [...] the instrumentalization of religion,” dismissing this as evidence of post-secularity but also as irrelevant to the secularization debate. However, the evidence presented in this article suggests that such instrumentalization, in the form of co-optation, involves the reformulation of religious organizations and personnel as they engage with a new situation, leading to their involvement in public action that furthers both differentiation and privatization, and is thus highly relevant to the secularization debate. That religious organizations’ increased involvement in public action furthers both differentiation and privatization is a paradox that is both subtle and interesting.

One of the especially interesting features of this paradox is that it involves a close mixing of religion and secularity at the same time as the distinction and boundaries between them become more marked. Their closer association does not, then, lead to any blurring between them. This is because secular authorities, in true modernist fashion, classify those authorities which they regulate: as has been shown, religious organizations that are permitted to bring their messages into the public sphere or to engage in public provisions are required to submit themselves to scrutiny so that their differences from secular discourses and modes of operation can be effaced. As such, the “unitary actor model of public religion,” in which it is evident which actors or events are religious or not, remains heuristically important in these English contexts, despite Lichterman’s [2012: 16] critique of that model from an American perspective. Indeed, the monitoring and regulation of religion that is central to co-optation may be seen as a particularly intense form of the social construction of religion in secular societies discussed by Beckford [2003]. Most contestations over religion are now precisely about fixing distinctions between the religious and the secular: religion becomes ever more circumscribed as

it is co-opted, as shown for example in the words of the senior employee on the ecumenical-initiated community development project in London *and* by those of the Methodist minister involved.

New sociological theses about de-differentiation, desecularization and post-secularity need to be as carefully subjected to scrutiny as have theses about secularization. Whilst it is appropriate that sociologists have begun to pay more attention to religion, given the way in which it was sometimes neglected in the 20th century, we need to beware that although this may uncover many places where religion publicly exists, this does not necessarily mean that in contemporary societies religion has become *more* socially significant. This paper's re-assessment of the evidence about the actions of mainstream Christian organizations in the public sphere in contemporary England contributes to this debate by neither fully endorsing orthodox secularization theory nor suggesting a middle way between that and its critics. The picture provided is, instead, one of *advanced secularization* in which religious organizations come to have complex relations with secular authorities and organizations as they are regulated and subordinated by these through co-optation. Religion here is not being treated as a partner or interlocutor, as influential commentators have recently claimed; still less should it be interpreted as publicly resurgent. As I have already indicated, this situation may differ in other national contexts and even in very specific locales within England. However, this cannot be assumed to be the case: to date, there has been little thorough application of an analytical focus upon the scope of religious authority at the inter-organizational level. Pursuing such an approach may well challenge what we think we know about religion and secularization in different parts of the world, just as it challenges the emerging consensus amongst sociologists trying to understand England. Rather than England (or Europe) being seen as an "exceptional case," this promises to advance discussion about the nature of the relationship between secularization and modernization [Davie 2006: 291-292], assertions about the intrinsic connection between which have become, to echo Bruce, unfashionable.

I have argued, then, that the orthodox theory of secularization is strengthened by being taken in a neosecularization theoretical direction that focuses empirically upon the nature of the relationships between religious and secular authorities. What is significant here "is not the mere presence of religious voices," or of religious organizations and personnel, but their impact [Yamane 1997: 117]. Only a clear sociological focus on the authority of religious organizations and personnel

enables us to see how secularization proceeds *in practice*. That is why qualitative research is so important, since quantitative studies are much less able to explore these issues. The latter may tell us where religious organizations are operating in the public sphere and even the attitudes of its promoters and users, but not about the sort of relationships that these organizations have with secular ones and the outcomes of these relationships. In particular, we need more ethnographic studies of the sort carried out by Bunn [2012] with respect to Faithworks and by Engelke [2013] with respect to the Bible Society, which investigate the behind-the-scenes committee meetings and decision-making procedures through which religious organizations deal with and appropriate the demands of secular authorities, and in so doing become co-opted by relinquishing their authority. However, the co-optation of religion has not been anticipated or examined by proponents of the orthodox secularization theory due to their view that religion loses social significance by being *excluded* from societal sub-systems, and (relatedly) to their general inattention to the empirical interactions between religious and secular organizations. A neosecularization theoretical approach therefore adds flesh to the orthodox theory by directing us to focus on these interactions and thus upon changes to the scope of religious authority. Given the immense resources that many mainstream religious organizations have historically accumulated, we can expect that they attempt to deploy these in the public sphere and that secular authorities attempt to make use of them for their own aims and objectives when their own resources for achieving these are reduced. As Wilson [1998: 62] noted, “[s]uch entities do not easily disappear, even if they manifest steady diminution of affluence and influence.” In a heavily regulated and religiously antipathetic society, the outcome of these two attempts is the co-optation of religion. It is not surprising, then, that even today we see the shadows in caves that Nietzsche so prophetically described. However, whilst recognizing them as such we must not shy away from paying them careful attention in order to understand the precise role and position of religion in secular society.

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Résumé

Les critiques de la théorie de la sécularisation se sont intéressés au rôle public de la religion pour avancer différentes thèses caractérisées en termes de dédifférenciation, de post-laïcité ou encore de désécularisation. Une défense solide de la théorie de la sécularisation fait à ce jour encore défaut parce que ses promoteurs ont trop souvent tendance à supposer, plutôt qu’à démontrer, que la religion a perdu toute signification sociale. S’inspirant d’une approche de type néo-sécularisatrice, qui s’intéresse à la portée de l’autorité religieuse, cet article examine les résultats d’études qualitatives consacrées aux diverses tentatives des organisations chrétiennes traditionnelles anglaises pour investir l’espace public par leurs discours et leurs pratiques religieuses. Cette ré-évaluation montre que ces organisations sont de plus en plus cooptées par les autorités séculières, et d’une façon qui n’a été généralement ni anticipée ni étudiée par les approches traditionnelles de la sécularisation. La distinction entre les dimensions « religieuses » et le « séculière » s’en trouve dès lors non pas effacée mais bel et bien renforcée. Cet affaiblissement de l’autorité religieuse aux niveaux tant macro-, meso-, que micro- correspond, c’est du moins la thèse développée dans cet article, à un état de sécularisation avancée.

Mots-clés : Autorité ; Christianisme ; Déprivatisation ; Différenciation ; Post-laïcité ; Religion publique ; Sécularisation ; Bien-être social.

Zusammenfassung

Die Kritiken an der Säkularisierungstheorie konzentrieren sich auf die öffentliche Aufgabe der Religion, um Thesen über Entdifferenzierung, Post-Säkularisierung und Entsäkularisierung vorzustellen. Eine überzeugende Verteidigung der Säkularisierungstheorie ist dabei nicht zustande gekommen, weil ihre Befürworter mehr behaupten als beweisen, dass die Religion jegliche soziale Bedeutung verloren hat. Aufbauend auf einem theoretischen Ansatz der Neosäkularisierung, der die Tragweite der religiösen Autorität beleuchtet, untersucht dieser Beitrag die Ergebnisse qualitativer Studien, die den zahlreichen Versuchen traditioneller christlicher Verbände Englands verstärkt religiöse Botschaften an die Öffentlichkeit zu bringen und soziale Fürsorge zu betreiben gewidmet wurden. Der Neuansatz verdeutlicht, dass religiöse Verbände verstärkt von säkularen Behörden kooperiert werden, und dies auf eine Art und Weise, die traditionellere Ansätze der Säkularisierung weder vorhergesehen noch untersucht hätten können. Anstatt die Unterscheidung zwischen „religiös“ und „säkular“ zu verwischen, wird sie hierdurch verstärkt. Die Schwächung der religiösen Autorität sowohl auf Makro-, als auch auf Meso- und Mikroebene entspricht, so die These dieses Beitrags, einem vorangeschrittenen Säkularisierungsstadium.

Schlagwörter : Autorität; Christianismus; Entprivatisierung; Post-Säkularisierung; Öffentliche Religion; Säkularisierung; Wohlfahrt.