

Lowery

*Ch. 1: A Secular Society*

- 0. Untitled introduction
  - A. There is both over- and under-estimation of the importance of religion in U.S. politics
  - B. Lots of evidence that religion was and remains an important political factor in U.S. politics
    - 1. Presidential candidates
      - A. 1952 and 1980: divorce
      - B. 1928 and 1960: Catholicism
      - C. 2000: Judaism
    - 2. Domestic policy issues
      - A. 1860: slavery
      - B. 1896: immigration
      - C. 1928: prohibition
      - D. 1932: welfare
      - E. 1980: abortion and environmentalism
      - F. 1994: gays in the military
    - 3. Foreign policy issues
      - A. Nuclear weapons – proliferation and use
      - B. Islamic fundamentalism - Middle East and Asia

- I. The puzzle of religious vitality pp. 4-13
  - A. “Neutral” theories of religious adaptation (to modernizing society)
    - 1. *Differentiation*
      - A. Definition: change in the *scope* of religion -- institutional specialization
      - B. Consequences:
        - (1) Religion retreats from its previously *dominant position* in other fields such as law, education, & medicine
        - (2) But, religion can still have an *important influence* in all these areas
    - 2. *Privatization*
      - A. Definition: change in *focus* of religion from a group to an individual phenomenon -- evolution of religion into a matter of personal judgment and choice
      - B. Consequences
        - (1) Greater diversity in religious beliefs means fewer theocracies
        - (2) But, religious denominations can still be important actors in pluralistic democracies
    - 3. *Desacralization*
      - A. Definition: changes in religious *thought processes*, i.e., tendency to describe and explain material reality in terms of natural (this-worldly) rather than supernatural (other-worldly) forces
      - B. Consequences
        - (1) Smaller role for religious values in decision making
        - (2) But, faith is not totally displaced by science and logic -- e.g., Einstein
    - 4. *Liberalization*
      - A. Definition: change in religious *tolerance*, i.e., ecumenicalism
      - B. Consequences
        - (1) Greater diversity in “acceptable” social behavior
        - (2) But, religious denominations can still be important teachers of social/econ./pol./moral values
  - B. “Naive” theories of inevitable religious decline
    - 1. Modernization theory (industrial revolution)
      - A. Social/economic changes
        - (1) Geographic mobility
        - (2) Mass communication
        - (3) Urbanization
        - (4) Upward social mobility
      - B. Ideological changes
        - (1) Mass market economy: emphasis on material values
        - (2) Bureaucratization: emphasis on objective decision criteria
        - (3) Scientific education: emphasis on logical proof & empirical evidence

2. Marxist/socialist (class-conflict) theory (communist revolution)

- A. Economic determinism
- B. Stages of history
  - (1) Economic cooperation (primitive socialism)
  - (2) Economic exploitation
    - (a) Feudalism
    - (b) Mercantilism
    - (c) Capitalism
  - (3) Return to economic cooperation
    - (a) Revolution of the proletariat
    - (b) State socialism
    - (c) Advanced industrial socialism

C. Religion as the “opiate” of the oppressed

3. Behavioral theory (information revolution)

A. Premodern forces: irrational group prejudice

- (1) Religion
- (2) Race/ethnicity
- (3) Region
- (4) Gender

B. Modern forces: rational self-interest

II. The persistence of religion

A. The U.S. as an exception to the modernization thesis

Figure 1.1, p. 9

B. Explanation offered by Norris & Inglehart (fn. 5, p. 22): because threats to economic security strengthen religion and because the U.S. has the highest degree of economic inequality & insecurity of any developed nation; therefore, it is not surprising that religiosity is high in the U.S.

C. Yardsticks of religious commitment

- 1. Institutions
- 2. Practices Figures 1.2 & 1.3, p. 11
- 3. Beliefs

III. Stability or change?

A. Wald & Calhoun-Brown argue that religion has adapted to changes in society

B. Others argue that the role of religion in the U.S. has fundamentally changed

- 1. Some argue religion has declined in influence
- 2. Others argue religion has become more powerful

IV. Possible explanations for resiliency of religion in America

A. Basic need: answers to questions about life and death

B. Failure of substitutes

- 1. Science
  - A. Technology creates new moral dilemmas
  - B. Empirical reason is not incompatible with religious faith
- 2. Politics (especially totalitarian communism on left and totalitarian fascism on right)
  - A. Fails to solve perennial problems: material or spiritual
  - B. Abuses and inadequacies encourage reform movements

V. Why the United States?

A. Cultural compatibility between religion and politics in the U.S.

- 1. Definition: similar values
- 2. Examples: individualism, voluntary affiliation, self-government,

B. Social identity provided by religion in the U.S.

- 1. Definition: sense of belonging with rules & guidelines
- 2. Examples: antidote to geographic, social, and economic mobility

C. Political independence of religion in the U.S.

- 1. Definition: separation of church and state
- 2. Examples: no-establishment and free-exercise clauses

D. Religious pluralism in U.S. society

- 1. Definition: overlapping and diverse group memberships
- 2. Examples: all U.S. denominations are minority religions; Roman Catholic is largest at 25%