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# Sociology of the Sacred

*Religion, Embodiment  
and Social Change*



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## Introduction

This book explores the relationship between religion and secularization in the contemporary global era. In so doing, it seeks to advance sociological debates about how an increasing range of phenomena have come to be constructed and experienced as sacred, or extraordinary, and thereby contain the potential to shape social action in significant ways. These debates characteristically treat the category of the sacred as unitary, typically reflecting religious or quasi-religious processes. In contrast, we argue that there exist distinct, competing and interacting modalities of the sacred; a position attentive to the existence of this-worldly (secular) as well as the other-worldly (religious) manifestations of objects, relationships and ideas that are set apart from the mundane. Introducing what we identify as socio-religious, transcendent, bio-political and bio-economic modalities of the sacred, we seek to re-structure discussions of secularization by focusing on the variable capacities of these very different extraordinary forces to enframe and shape people's embodied experiences. These modalities are especially important for our concerns because of their implications for the corporeal and cognitive terrain on which forms of religious habitus are nurtured or impeded, and it is the future of these forms of habitus that remain vital for, yet are marginalized within, recent debates about secularization and the revitalization of religion.

In broad terms, these debates about religion and secularization appear for many to have been settled. Most recent analysts agree that there has, during the last few decades, been a global resurgence of particular religions, as well as a growth in social and cultural phenomena designated sacred. It is now common, indeed, to regard previously influential sociological models of secularization as fundamentally mistaken, with visions of a 'post-secular' age promoted as preferable bases from which to assess these issues (e.g. Berger, 1999; Habermas, 2008, 2010). Opposing this growing consensus, we suggest that processes of secularization remain central to the extraordinary power and status accorded to bio-economic and bio-political forces affecting the

world today.<sup>1</sup> Before developing this argument, though, it is necessary to disentangle the claims and analytical confluences characteristic of discussions in this area in order to show why they are problematic.

Secularization is commonly understood in existing debates as a process of change wherein the expanding scope and importance of non-religious aspects of social and cultural life marginalize both religion *and* the sacred. Conversely, de-secularization is frequently depicted as a reassertion of the significance of religion *and* the sacred relative to the secular (Demerath, 2000, 2007). The problem with such conceptions, however, is not only that 'the sacred' is assumed always to be in opposition to 'the secular', but also that it is regularly conflated with 'religion'. Insofar as religion is distinguished from the sacred, it tends to be seen as a particular institutional form of, or pattern of regulation relative to, experiences, beliefs, objects and practices that have an extraordinary character. Within this formulation, there is no space for recognizing that the sacred can assume secular as well as religious or quasi-religious manifestations.

These conceptions of religion, the sacred and the secular, are common, but do not help us understand the varied relationships that exist between these phenomena. In addressing this situation, we seek to enhance understandings of secularization, in terms of the declining social significance of religion, by examining how such processes can include the colonization of religious forms and identities by bio-economic and bio-political modalities of the sacred. Here, we view religion specifically as forms of belief and practice oriented towards other-worldly forms of sacred authority that have implications for this-worldly existence. Thus, while particular religions operationalized on the basis of strong conceptions of the sacred have endured and expanded, we also identify circumstances wherein *secularizing modalities of the sacred* threaten to marginalize religion.

In developing our understanding of religion and secularization processes, we also highlight the significance of embodiment (i.e. the socially shaped, organic foundations associated with human frailties, capabilities and proficiencies). There has been much recent interest in the body and religion, but this is seldom evident in secularization debates. Yet religious and secular modalities of the sacred enframe embodied experiences in diverse ways. The significance of this is that such enframings can shape people's practices and beliefs, thereby structuring the terrain on which dispositional orientations towards religion (what we refer to as forms of religious

habitus) are created or obstructed. The widely contrasting ways in which lived experience can be shaped means that we should not expect there to be a unitary experience of any of these modalities (in terms, for example, of a universal, phenomenological encounter with the 'numinous' ([Otto, 1958; Eliade, 1959; James, 1983])). Nevertheless, the parameters in which particular forms of religious habitus can be forged are context specific, and are threatened by a secular colonization of experience.

The following chapters develop these introductory comments by examining how religious and secular modalities of the sacred enframe and shape embodied experiences in distinctive and sometimes radically opposed ways. Chapter 2 explicates the main features of these socio-religious, transcendent, bio-political and bio-economic modalities, before Chapters 3 to 6 focus on how they shape key areas of embodied experience identified within classical sociological theory as offering potential bridges into religious forms of life. Chapter 7 then explores the general terrain on which experience can nurture or impede forms of religious habitus in the contemporary era. Here, we suggest that people's unprecedented knowledge about, and experience of, coexisting and competing religious and secular modalities of the sacred (as a result of the global extension of capitalism, accelerated flows of information through digital media, and large scale migration) has *undermined* the traditional means through which forms of religious habitus are constructed, but *opens up* opportunities for the reflexive instauration of religious modes of being (Latour, 2011).

The aim of this first chapter, however, is to contextualize our approach within sociological theories of secularization, religion and the sacred. We begin by suggesting that common conceptions of the relationship between modernization and secularization actually *under-estimate* the importance of contemporary secularizing processes, before arguing that there is a tendency for analyses of social differentiation to overlook how segmentation not only constrains the exercise of religious authority, but also creates space for the expansion of *non-religious* modalities of sacred authority. Finally, we engage with the 'turn to the body' in sociological studies of religion by emphasizing the importance of *embodiment as a whole* (body and mind, feeling and cognition) for the construction of religious experiences, while also highlighting the capacity of contrasting modalities of the sacred to reinforce or undermine the grounds on which forms of religious habitus are created.

## Modernization and Secularization

For much of the twentieth century, discussions about the fate of religion were contextualized within secularization narratives. There were dissenting voices, and debates about the variability of such processes (Martin, 1966, 1978, 1991), but the secularization thesis was unquestionably dominant, reflecting a broader sociological view that modernity was corrosive of religious identities and institutions. The central theoretical and methodological foundations for this thesis were established by sociology's founding figures, yet mirrored wider cultural assumptions: the declining significance of religion in technologically advanced societies was generally held to be self-evident. During the 1980s and 1990s, however, the public view of religion in the West began to change, and there also occurred a reorientation of the sociology of religion that resulted in the development of four ostensibly distinct positions regarding secularization.

The first, 'revitalization of religion', approach forcefully *rejects* the secularization thesis. Arguments concerning the revival of religion – including the renewed global prominence of religious conflict and the increasing use of religion in struggles for cultural recognition and citizenship – are here associated with theoretically oriented claims about humans' enduring religious needs. Whereas secularization theories argued that scientific knowledge and an emergent market of competing life-worlds 'disenchanted' the world, this approach emphasizes how such developments can *reinforce* religious identifications in contexts of rapid change. In assessing the influence of this argument, the volte-face of Berger (1999: 2) on the secularization thesis is particularly noteworthy. Previously one of its most influential exponents, Berger concluded that the world remains 'as furiously religious as ever' (see also Stark and Bainbridge, 1985, 1987; Warner, 1993; Riesebrodt, 2000, 2001).

A second position *moderates* rather than rejects secularization narratives, assessing them as useful insofar as they signal contingent, culturally and geographically partial and inherently reversible trends. From this perspective the secularization thesis was mistaken not in identifying elements of modernization that could corrode religion, but in assuming these resulted in *irreversible* and *uniform* change. The idea that secular elements *inevitably* marginalize, transform and undermine religious beliefs, practices and identities is, therefore, rejected. Norris and Inglehart (2004) provide a powerful articulation of this argument, exhibiting attentiveness to patterns of extensive

and limited secularization across the globe, *and* to contexts wherein rapid modernization has provoked significant de-secularization (see also Martin, 1966, 1978, 2005; Beyer, 2007; Demerath, 2007; Gorski and Altinordu, 2008).

While these 'revitalization of religion' and 'moderate secularization' positions focus on evolving relationships between religious and secular phenomena, a third, 'resurgence of the sacred', approach redirects attention away from the boundaries of the religious and the secular. Here, 'the sacred' is expanded to such a degree that it is understood to include, or transcend, both terms, while questions about secularization appear to be rendered irrelevant by this perspective. This is not because it holds that religion has necessarily been revitalized, but because of its identification of an increasingly significant and broad range of secular as well as 'spiritual' sacred phenomena. Lynch's (2012) outline of a 'sociology of the sacred' distinct from the 'sociology of religion' is one example of this argument: since the sacred is associated with a 'communicative structure' of non-contingent norms and values expressed through symbols, cognitive orientations and bodily emotions, recurrent patterns of sacralization become important *regardless* of whether these are categorized or experienced as secular or religious (see also Alexander, 1988; Knott, 2005; Knott and Franks, 2007; Nynäs et al., 2012).

A fourth position, in contrast, continues to espouse a 'strong secularization thesis'. This re-emphasizes a correlation between modernization and secularization with regard to the corrosive effects on religious belief and practice of post-traditional patterns of individualism. It also highlights the diminishing social and cultural significance of religion that follows from the structural and functional differentiation of modern societies. Supported by empirical data strongly indicative of a decline in explicit religious commitments in Europe and the US, alongside ambiguous but suggestive data in terms of secularization patterns across other parts of the globe, Bruce (2003, 2006) is a key exponent of this argument. This is evident in his scepticism concerning whether instances of religious revival or growth necessarily call into question a correlation between modernization and secularization, and in his criticisms of scholarly attempts to displace questions about secularization by renaming as 'religious' or 'sacred' an increasing range of secular phenomena (Inglehart, 1997; Norris and Inglehart, 2004).

These 'revitalization of religion', 'moderate secularization', 'resurgence of the sacred' and 'strong secularization' positions are often understood to be incommensurate, yet we suggest that, despite

appearances, they exhibit *considerable convergences* in recognizing the *advance of secularization*. Indeed, the correlation between modernization and secularization prominent in strong secularization accounts (viewed as setting these against their competitors [Berger, 1999; Bruce, 2006: 35; Davie, 2010]) is actually *presupposed* in numerous accounts of revitalized religion, as well as in moderate secularization accounts. This is evident in their acknowledgement of a global trend for modern societies to become structurally differentiated into a number of semi-autonomous spheres – the political, religious, economic, etc. – each possessed of their own character and rationality (Parsons, 1960; Bell, 1977; Martin, 1978; Luhmann, 1985; Mouzelis, 2012). The suggestion here is that religion is increasingly located – at least within the ‘macro’ level of society – in a distinctive institutional space, constraining its capacity to structure other institutions, and existing as one life sphere within an economy of others that shape human experience in diverse ways (Bruce, 2011; Mouzelis, 2012: 208–10). Indeed, Martin (2005, 2011), a long-standing critic of strong versions of secularization theory, has nonetheless argued that structural differentiation and the consequent institutional segmentation of religion is one aspect of secularization that is, ultimately, *irreversible* (Mouzelis, 2012: 213).

Accounts of the resurgent sacred appear to offer a greater challenge to claims of a correlation between modernization and secularization. This is again questionable, though, as evident in two key manifestations of this approach. First, following Durkheim’s (1995) focus on the role of the sacred in incorporating individuals into symbolic and experiential communities, a distinction is frequently drawn between orthodox, institutional forms of religion, *increasingly incapable of fulfilling this role*, and forms of heterodox spirituality or sacred norms and experiences of resurgent significance. Here, rather than being decisively rejected, the focus on the resurgent sacred cannot conceal the implicit acceptance of a correlation between modernization and secularization with regard to institutional religion. This mirrors Luckmann’s (1967) distinction between ‘visible’ and ‘invisible’ forms of religion, recapitulating his argument that secularization undermines the former in favour of the latter (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005; Heelas, 2006: 53; Lynch, 2012: 3–4, 17). In consequence, it might be said that such accounts actually *accept* key features of strong accounts of secularization, despite rejecting the idea that the sacred has been undermined.

A second manifestation of this resurgent sacred approach might be seen as more radical. This rejects the terms ‘religion’ and the ‘secular’,

and thus the notion that there exists a structural differentiation between them, on the basis that these reflect the ‘epistemic hegemony’ of a Western and Christian world-view and history, possessing little applicability to non-Western societies (Asad, 1993; Gorski and Altinordu, 2008; Turner, 2010a: xiv; Casanova, 2012: 253; King, 2013; see also Beckford, 2003). The problem with this stance, however, is that ignores the political *reality* of conflicts over the differentiation of the religious and the secular in contexts such as Eastern Europe, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, North Africa, Egypt, Israel, South East Asia and China (Demerath, 2007: 64). It also fails to grasp how differentiation has spread throughout globalized societies (even if non-Western regions of the world have appropriated it in a ‘glocalizing’ form, particularizing it according to local circumstances [Beyer, 2007: 110]). Casanova (2012: 41), for example, accepts that for Western *and* non-Western societies:

the cosmic order is increasingly defined by modern science and technology; the social order is increasingly defined by the interlocking of citizenship, ‘democratic’ states, market economies, and mediatic public spheres; and the moral order is increasingly defined by the calculations of rights-bearing individual agents, claiming human dignity, equality, and the pursuit of happiness.

In short, the four positions outlined are less distinct than they appear to be when it comes to acknowledging (even if only implicitly) the considerable importance of secularization, while there is also a tendency within them to elide the sacred with religion. The limited convergences between them, indeed, suggest that we need to interrogate further whether there exists a secularizing ‘socio-logic’ to modern societal changes (Bruce, 2006: 35), and what the precise role of the sacred is in such developments. Of immediate significance in this regard is the importance of social differentiation and de-differentiation, recognized variously in the above positions, for the scope of *worldly* and *other-worldly* authorities.

### **Differentiation, De-Differentiation and Other-Worldly Authority**

We have already noted that, despite ostensibly rejecting a correlation between secularization and modernization, accounts of the revitalization of religion tend to acknowledge a global trend for modern societies to become structurally differentiated into a

number of semi-autonomous spheres. In this respect, theorists espousing this position have mostly avoided pitching their arguments with reference to its 'macro-level' institutional location, focusing instead on 'meso-level' developments. It is *beneath* the institutional structures of society – but manifest variously in the civic sphere, social movements, local and regional groups, families, and the life-worlds of individuals – that religious resurgence is discovered (Martin, 1978, 2011; Riesebrodt, 2001; Norris and Inglehart, 2004; Beyer, 2007; Demerath, 2007; Gorski and Altinordu, 2008). The acknowledgement of a significant divide between macro- and meso-levels, however, has major implications for the scope and influence of religious authority.

This is clear in the writings of those rational choice theorists who argue for the revitalization of religion on the basis of a strong differentiation of macro- from meso-level. They identify the proliferation of religious options in the modern era as evidence of people's essential religiosity, explaining away *apparent* secularization as a 'supply-side' failure of religious organizations, largely within monopoly situations, to provide what consumers need (Warner, 1993; Stark, 1999; Gorski and Altinordu, 2008: 58). Nonetheless, rational choice theorists still accept that the differentiation of modern societies has reduced the power and social authority of churches: 'the primary aspects of public life' are no longer 'suffused with religious symbols, rhetoric or ritual' (Stark, 1999: 4–5; Demerath, 2007: 63).

A similar use of macro- and meso-level differentiation is made in relation to those contrasting claims regarding the revitalization of religion within an emergent 'post-secular' modernity (see Harrington, 2007; Boeve, 2008; Braidotti, 2008; Dalferth, 2010; Davie, 2010; Lyon, 2010; McLennan, 2010; Nynäs et al., 2012). Thus, Habermas's (2008) declaration of the arrival of a 'post-secular age' co-exists with his ongoing emphasis on the functional differentiation of religion at the macro-level of modern societies (Beckford, 2012: 8). Taylor (2007), similarly, identifies a powerful 'yearning for transcendence' in modern societies but recognizes the pervasive macro-level constraints upon it within the 'immanent frame' of modernity (Warner et al., 2010: 6). Sources of formal religious authority are, again, circumscribed within the differentiated spheres of polity and economy, if not in relation to the views and actions of private individuals.

This distinction between macro-level structural differentiation and meso-level religious vitality usefully enables us to identify distinctive religious trajectories within society and acknowledge the significance of patterns of de-secularization *within certain limits*.

Casanova (1994, 2006, 2012) exemplifies this when observing how macro-level secularization can actually encourage meso-level de-secularization. Shorn of its overarching legitimating role for society, 'religions can become movements and pressure groups that vie with rivals in the public sphere', with religious authority becoming increasingly efficacious *outside* the state (Dobbelaere, 1988, 1989; Gorski and Altinordu, 2008: 58). Nonetheless, while this distinction entails recognizing emergent 'levels' within society, and how the contrasting religious trajectories with which they may be associated can interact and change each other over time, these patterns of change are heavily weighted in one direction. There seems little scope for meso-level religious vitality to *enhance* the institutional reach of religious authority at a macro-level (Casanova, 2012: 30).

Contrary to how they are often perceived, then, accounts of the revitalization of religion and religious authority at the meso-level often *reinforce* conclusions about macro-level secularization. Nonetheless, as recent events in Egypt suggest, strong religious convictions can contest macro-level differentiation rather than exhibit passive acceptance of its irreversibility. As such, it would be wrong to assume that questions of the social significance of religious authority relative to patterns of differentiation are settled. It is equally questionable to exclude the possibility that the capacities of secularizing processes to spread in a de-differentiating manner are necessarily constrained by the meso-level resurgence of religion. Here, questions concerning the problematization of religious authority that is, in variable degrees, evident at macro-, meso-, and micro-levels of social life suggest a need for a more flexible understanding of how patterns of differentiation and de-differentiation shape the relationship between secularizing and de-secularizing processes.

In this respect, Chaves (1994: 751) has drawn upon contrasting assessments of differentiation in order to emphasize the contingent, political, and often conflict-ridden relationships between separate societal spheres (see Luhmann, 1982, 1990; Alexander, 1990; Coleman, 1990; Friedland and Alford, 1991). Utilizing Dobbelaere's (1981, 1985, 1987) multi-dimensional model of secularization, he identifies three levels at which declining religious authority can, but does not necessarily, occur. At the macro-level, it can be seen in the increasing inability of religious elites to exercise influence over other institutional sectors. At the meso-level, its evidence is manifest in the increasing tendency of many religious organizations to conform to, or reshape themselves in the light of, distinctively secular social, cultural or political concerns. At the micro-level, it

emerges through the degree to which individual choices and actions are increasingly free of religious control (Chaves, 1994: 757).

On this basis, it is possible to distinguish between high levels of macro-level secularization characteristic of Western societies, and low levels characteristic of societies such as Iran, where religious authority has been re-exerted over other institutional spheres, while also being attentive to intra-society variations. In certain areas of US culture, for example, meso- as well as micro-level secularization can be weak (e.g. among conservative Protestant and African American communities), though in the culture as a whole religion tends to operate restrictedly as a *cultural resource*, that is, as symbols or rhetorical sources which can be drawn upon voluntarily for various purposes (Chaves, 1994: 761). This is quite different from Iran, a country in which religious authorities control meso- and micro-level activities, though there are limits to this even in such a context. Beyer's (1993) account of how internal conflicts surrounding de-differentiation became apparent after the 'theocratic triumph' of the mullahs in the Iranian revolution, and continue to be evident, is relevant here. As Chaves (1994: 766) puts it, 'there seem to be structural limits to religious authority's capacity to impose itself in a society that participates at all in a global institutional environment that is highly secularized'.

These analyses of social differentiation helpfully contextualize debates about secularization in relation to the variable distribution of religious authority, but their focus on the relationship between religious and non-religious authority either conflates religion with the sacred, or makes the latter a residual category. Rather than being explored as important in their own right, sacred phenomena that effect a displacement of other-worldly referents by secular agents of various sorts (e.g. much of the 'civil religion' of the US) are simply judged to be *not religious* (Chaves, 1994: 771). This limitation is evident in Chaves's (1994: 750–2) proposal that studies of secularization should focus purely on religious authority (defined as control of access via *other-worldly legitimations* to certain cultural goods of a positive [e.g. eternal life] or negative [e.g. meaninglessness] nature). His suggestion envisages a neatly delineated field for analysis, but if we wish to comprehend the wider character of the world we should note Fenn's (1978, 1982) interest in how the decline of religious authority has been accompanied by an increase in the visibility and significance of *non-religious forms of sacred authority*. These forms have been manifest variously in secular agencies, and 'occult' spiritualities, that borrow the authority of sacred symbols for their own ends (Fenn, 1978: 25, 36–7).

Fenn is here pointing towards the possibility that secularization can be accompanied by both a shrinkage of religious forms of authority and an *expansion* of the scope of non-religious forms of sacred authority (see also Demerath, 2000: 3).

This concern with religious authority reinforces the importance of disentangling the sacred from the religious, yet if we are to extend further our understanding of debates about secularization we need to recognize how the issues we have been exploring are themselves grounded in contrasting embodied experiences, practices and cognitive orientations. Those who have written about the contemporary fate of religion and the sacred have tended to adopt one of two major approaches towards this grounding: one that focuses on cognitive issues of belief, the other on more obviously ‘enfleshed’ matters of sensation and emotion.

### Embodiment(s) of Religion and of the Sacred

In accounting for the inherently corrosive impact of modern life upon religion, exponents of secularization have focused frequently on issues of cognition, particularly in their explorations of the plausibility of religious *beliefs*. Berger (1967), for example, suggested that religion loses its capacity in increasingly differentiated societies to provide an overarching *meaningful* order, as its belief systems are relativized by a plurality of others and undermined by science. Similarly, Bruce’s (2010: 135) explorations of the political, structural and economic aspects of secularization identify the modern undermining of the plausibility of religious belief as ‘the bottom line’ in debates about the issue.

This focus on cognition highlights the importance of other-worldly belief systems for religious life, but others who share this concern for belief have drawn opposing conclusions about its sustainability in the contemporary era. The suggestion that modernity’s intellectual pluralism creates market conditions that allow religious certitudes to flourish is one example of this (Stark and Bainbridge, 1985, 1987; Warner, 1993, 1997; Iannaccone, 1995, 1997). A similarly cognitive focus informs Habermas’s post-secular view of religion as a source of *epistemic content* that can, under certain conditions, shape public debate and communicative interaction (Braeckman, 2009: 284). So too does it influence Giddens’s (1991) and Norris and Inglehart’s (2004) association of revitalized religion with *propositional certainties* that can shield people from the existential insecurities engendered by rapid social change. Here,

religious belief offers a cognitive prophylactic against societies characterized by accelerated rationalization and differentiation.

In contrast to this focus on belief, the second approach to questions concerning the persistence or diminution of religious or sacred forces within society adopts a more 'carnal' orientation. Here, conceptions of 'religion as belief' are judged to be predicated on early-modern Protestant models of religiosity, to some extent replicated in the Catholic Counter-Reformation, wherein enfolded forms of religious life gave way to those 'in the head' (Asad, 1993; Taylor, 2007: 554). Taking issue with this specificity, sociological and anthropological analyses of the ritual diversity, and the sensual and emotional experiences inherent to immersion within forms of sacred life, have focused on material culture (Morgan, 2010), 'aesthetic formations' (Meyer, 2010a, 2010b), and bodily and affectual reconstruction (Turner, 1984, 1991; Feder et al., 1989; Csordas, 1990, 1994; McGuire, 1990; Bell, 1992; Coakley, 1997; Vásquez, 2011). These approaches usefully highlight a broader range of enfolded phenomena central to experiences of the sacred, religious or otherwise, than those characteristic of cognitively-focused secularization narratives. Nevertheless, they tend to underplay the importance of people's reflexive engagements with doctrinal considerations, and at times overlook the constraints that rationalization and differentiation can place upon the social significance of bodily sensations of the religious or the sacred.

Rather than simply opposing the cognitive orientation of much secularization theory to the focus on sensory and sensual forms of religious or sacred life, we suggest it is necessary to adopt a broader view of the embodied, experiential grounding for religious and secular phenomena. Some religious forms are clearly more cognitively oriented than others, for example, but even those that exhibit a strong intellectual focus on regulating, domesticating or repressing certain emotional orientations can nonetheless be understood to be engaged in attempted *re-formations* of the embodied nature and experience of religious life (Mellor and Shilling, 1997). As constituted and enacted by embodied human beings, even religions of 'the head' are necessarily embodied (Taylor, 2007: 554; Strhan, 2012). Relatedly, while certain religions engage very directly with emotional and sensation forms, they nonetheless seek to enframe human feelings, thoughts and actions within other-worldly orientations, codified within systems of orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

In moving towards a broader view of embodied experience, we adopt here a simple but flexible approach that encompasses the

above concerns with both mind/belief and body/sensation. Developed and deployed in various ways within sociological writings on the socio-natural characteristics of human embodiment (e.g. Elias, 1991, 2000; Frank, 1995; Burkitt, 1999; Shilling, 2005a, 2012; Freund, 2006, 2011), this approach recognizes that our experiences are shaped culturally, and through individual reflection, while also acknowledging their underpinning and co-constitution by an organic stratum. Specifically, embodied experiences of both religious and secular life involve the mutual interactions and co-constitutions that occur among our *physiological responses* to stimuli, the culturally variable manner in which we *feel* those responses, and our own *interpretive classification* of and *reflections* on such feelings, as well as on our existence in the world and cosmos more generally.

We can illustrate this approach through the example of being threatened physically as a result of one's religious affiliation and practices. This experience is associated typically with a physiological response referred to as the 'fight or flight' mechanism (that prepares the body to respond through an increase in adrenaline which raises heart rate and blood pressure). Provoked instantaneously by the presence of threat, this stimulus is felt ordinarily in terms of fear or aggression, and can be reflected on (if often only quickly before acting) variously via concepts and impressions associated with ideas such as injustice, revenge, sorrow, and concern for one's safety. These are individual reflections, but use a language common to a wider group, and vary normatively depending on our cultural, gendered, religious and other upbringing, as well as the interdependencies in which we are enmeshed. Thus, the experience of being threatened may result in similar physiological responses between people belonging to very different religions, but these responses can be felt and reflected on very differently if the religion to which one is affiliated demands robust defensive response or forgiveness.

Reflecting upon an inspiring passage in a holy book provides us with a contrasting illustration of these distinctive components, one that shows how experience can be looked at from the starting point of deliberation and not just physiological stimuli. Acquiring renewed insight through such contemplative activity can produce feelings of elation, feelings that stimulate the nervous systems and lend physiological impetus to the intensity of this experience (Damasio, 2000: 59–60). Taking seriously the importance of reflexive activities such as these, indeed, implies that experiences can be at least potentially modified through a deliberative process wherein feelings are stimulated by, and directed towards, objects and situations on the basis of

their having been *appraised* as meaningful (Papoulias and Callard, 2010; Leys, 2011).<sup>2</sup>

This account can be employed to investigate broad swathes of human life. In the context of debates about secularization and the modern world, however, it has particular utility in helping us grasp the nature and variable social consequences of phenomena that are encountered, designated and experienced as being of extraordinary importance.<sup>3</sup> Sociology, religious studies and anthropology have long recognized the importance of the sacred for human experience. Etymologically rooted in ideas of ‘making holy’, consecrating or setting apart phenomena from mundane reality, Eliade’s (1963) conception of *hierophany* raises the possibility of experiences of something ‘wholly other’ in this world that can possess religious consequences in terms of stimulus, feeling and thought. So too does James’s (1983) interest in ineffable and noetic experiences provide insight into exceptional knowledge which can be reflected upon if not translated fully into cognitive conceptions. More foundational to sociology, Durkheim (1973, 1995) insists there are things considered sacred, ‘set apart’ from egoistic organic life, accessed through ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ rites that stimulate effervescent experiences possessed of the capacity to join to a collectivity imbued with forms of collective consciousness otherwise egoistic beings. Weber also explores how phenomena encountered as sacred, enchanted and charismatic stimulate in people an experience of a socially creative distance between extraordinary life and routinized existence (Weber, 1968: 789–90, 818–28, 1111–57; 1948 [1915]: 328; 1948 [1919a]: 155).

While writers such as Eliade and James tend to offer us a unitary, religious picture of sacred experience, however, Durkheim and Weber usefully examine how the sacred can be manifest in different, religious and secular, forms or, as we refer to them, modalities; modalities that serve to structure and pattern societies as well as the experiences of individuals within them. In this context, there are three particular aspects of their writings that have not been developed fully within contemporary debates on secularization, yet form a cornerstone of our approach. The first key feature is that, under certain circumstances and within particular limits, manifestations of the sacred can *steer* social life through the impact they have on people’s embodied thoughts as well as feelings and habits. For Durkheim, manifestations of the extraordinary during collective assemblies arouse in participants ‘passionate energies’ that restructure individuals’ feelings and thoughts in line with their symbolism, serving to

internalize social facts in the bodies of the social group (Durkheim, 1952: 57; 1973: 159–63; 1995: 138, 212). For Weber, extraordinary phenomena direct society by influencing the practical techniques through which bodies are trained, adjusting the ‘*psycho-physical apparatus*’ (the feelings and thoughts) of humans (Weber, 1968: 1156; 1975: 149; Maley, 2004: 75–9).

The second feature of Durkheim’s and Weber’s works core to our concerns is their recognition that, in assuming various forms, manifestations and experiences of sacred phenomena can possess strong but also weak/non-existent other-worldly dimensions possessed of variable relationships to religious and secular forces. Weber (1991) saw in Protestantism, for example, a distinctive religious ethic that promoted the extraordinary secular forces of rationalization and bureaucratization. These forces were bereft of other-worldly orientations, but nevertheless became consecrated as sacred within modern law and governance. Similarly, while Durkheim (1995) viewed *Gemeinschaft* societies as permeated by the sacred in the sense that there was a pervasive interpenetration of worldly and other-worldly elements, he identified the dynamic division of labour of modernity as fracturing and secularizing experiences of sacred phenomena, which henceforth have a more worldly character (Durkheim, 1952, 1984). This sense that the experience of the sacred can possess a this-worldly character has been explored more widely (Hammond, 1985, 2000; Hervieu-Léger, 2000: 106). Maffesoli’s (1996) analysis of the ‘return of the sacred’ as an emotionally constituted tribalism, for example, identifies the power of extraordinary experiences to shield people from modern disenchantment *without* this effervescence being linked to institutional religion (see also Demerath, 2000, 2007; Asad, 2002; Masuzawa, 2005; Scott and Hirschkind, 2006).

Third, if there are elements of convergence between Durkheim and Weber, an important difference between their theories enables us to identify variable constraints upon distinct forms of sacred experience relative to patterns of differentiation and de-differentiation. Weber’s (1991) engagement with the impact of Protestantism upon the emergence of modern capitalism suggests a proliferation of life-spheres wherein each is subject to what can be seen as the de-differentiating impact of rationalization and bureaucracy. In recent years, this has been manifest by the increasingly extraordinary forces of bio-political governance operating across *all* sections of the ‘iron cage’ of capitalism, resulting in progressively uniform modes of control (Agamben, 1998). In contrast, Durkheim (1952, 1984) insists modernity brought with

it increasingly complex levels of social differentiation, alongside a growing division of labour. These circumstances stimulated an increase in secularism, alongside the death of 'old gods', even if certain forms of sacred persist on the basis of personal preferences operating within segmented societies that prize 'the cult of the individual' (Durkheim, 1984: 122).

These features of Durkheim's and Weber's work have important implications not only for the conceptualization of distinct forms of sacred experience, but also for the potential of these experiences to contribute towards and culminate in the formation of religious forms of habitus. This issue, concerned with the development of general orientations and dispositions towards religion, has been marginalized within contemporary secularization debates, yet is recognized as important more generally within sociological studies of religion. There have been a number of valuable empirically-oriented studies that draw upon this notion of the religious habitus, moreover, with its view of embodiment as 'the principle generating and unifying all practices' (Bourdieu, 1977: 124). Prominent among these is Csordas's (1994) insightful analysis of the embodied character of Catholic charismatic healing. Yet the notion's importance for the sociology of religion goes beyond specific studies.

In a globalized world characterized by the increased interaction between religious and secular modalities of the sacred, we shall suggest that exploring the challenges facing the creation of a religious habitus enables us to identify the embodied bases upon which processes of secularization or the revitalization of religion are enacted. There is no guarantee that forms of religious habitus will endure or be reproduced in successive generations, and secular forces can shape people's embodied experiences in ways that challenge the viability of religious orientations. These dispositions and orientations towards religion cannot be considered apart from the structural position and authority of religious institutions in differentiated societies. Nevertheless, if a religion is to secure a firm basis for its reproduction amongst subsequent generations, the capacity of embodied experience to provide a route to the establishment of appropriate forms of religious habitus becomes a crucial issue.

## Chapter Outlines

Chapter 2 explicates the foundations of those religious and secular modalities of the sacred, and the engagements with sacrifice through which they are sustained, that we regard as central to debates about

secularization and the revitalization of religion. These modalities possess an ideal typical character. Nevertheless, they offer a useful framework for assessing questions about the correlation between modernization and secularization, processes of social differentiation and de-differentiation, issues of worldly and other-worldly influence and authority, and the role of embodiment in these processes. Assessments of secularization today have at their centre unanswered questions about the degree to which religious attempts to enframe human experience are successful or not, relative to non-religious modalities, and it is the interrogation of this question that occupies the following chapters. Here, via an examination of certain 'bridging experiences', we intend to cast fresh light on the operationalization of the sacred today and the conditions in which it remains possible for forms of religious habitus to be constructed.

This focus is important as questions concerning the incorporation of individuals into religious and non-religious modalities of the sacred direct attention to the embodied conditions of their co-habitation. These conditions are recognized in Taylor's (2007: 14) discussion of modernity's 'immanent frame'. He questions whether it is now possible for experience to be enframed in religious ways. What he does not do is examine specific types of experience sociologically, in relation to the practical, everyday encounters, negotiations and impacts of social life, exploring whether these can still constitute a bridge towards distinctively religious forms of life (Turner, 2010a: 659). In the classical sociological theories of Durkheim and Weber, however, and in contemporary developments of them, we can identify the basis for just such an examination.

We undertake these explorations within chapters that focus upon bridging experiences emergent from the work of Durkheim and Weber, though our analyses of them extend far beyond these figures and illustrate their significance by drawing on examples mostly from Pentecostal Christianity and Islam, two of the most resilient and globally 'vital' contemporary forms of religion (Cox, 2001; Martin, 2002, 2005; Westerlund, 2009; Thomas, 2010). The first of these, examined in Chapter 3, concerns *intoxication*, which – particularly in the work of Durkheim and his followers – is an embodied process through which religious experience occurs. In global modernity, however, intoxication has a more ambivalent relationship to society than implied in Durkheim's writings on the effervescent intoxication of traditional religious forms. It is also subject to a range of regulative and reflexive engagements that acknowledge its capacities for generating extraordinary experiences, yet seek to strip it of its religious potentialities.

Chapter 4 builds on another experience central to Durkheim's work – though it is also key to Weber's account of theodicy – by exploring how *pain* is productive of culture. Focusing on religious asceticism, we analyse how specific cultures engage with pain in distinctive ways (Durkheim, 1995: 316–7). The experience of pain has historically been a key means through which individuals develop religious identities. Contemporary Western culture, however, is characterized by a general aversion to pain, and a view of it as an unproductive threat to cultures and identities. In observing the cultural marginalization of Christian explorations of pain, and Western distaste for current Islamic engagements with pain, such phenomena can clearly be located within a narrative of secularization, but not a simple one.

In a discussion that builds on Weber's understanding of the otherworldly-oriented 'psycho-physical apparatus' of humans, Chapter 5 explores how *charisma* has historically constituted a route to religious experience. In contrast to Weber's analysis of the inevitable diminution of charisma, within his vision of modernity as an era of 'disenchantment' and relentless rationalization, we focus on the persistence of charisma in such secular contexts as consumer culture and business leadership. Distinguishing the pedagogic charisma associated with early Christian teaching communities, Weber's conception of the charismatic personality, and our own conception of a material and manufactured aesthetic charisma, we identify how these invocations of the extraordinary can be associated with distinct patterns of authority and contrasting experiences, including the bio-economic sacralization of the brand.

Chapter 6 examines *eroticism* as a bridging experience. While Weber and also Bataille identified eroticism as possessing religious potential, it has become a site of contestation between competing modalities of the sacred. On the one hand, the circulation of erotic experiences and identities within a bio-economic market of lifestyle choices is complemented by increasingly global bio-political dominance over matters of reproduction and fertility. On the other hand, however, Bataille's suggestion that images, icons, texts and other material phenomena possess the capacity to be fetishized provides continuing opportunities for institutions and individuals to harness eroticism to the promotion of religious experiences and identities. In confronting the challenge of retaining the extraordinary status and affectual charge of their own images, icons and objects, moreover, religious movements have engaged in processes of 'enhanced sacralization'; something most evident in cases of religious conflict and violence.

Chapters 3 to 6 investigate whether *particular* experiences still possess religious potentialities. Chapter 7, in contrast, moves away from analysing specifics to asking whether the contemporary enframing of experience *in general* remains conducive to the construction and maintenance of forms of religious habitus. Contrary to Bourdieu's (1987, 1991) use of this term, which reduces the habitus to a legitimating reflection of social inequalities, we understand the religious habitus as an active crafting of particular embodied subjectivities that can reshape social life in significant ways during an age in which reflexive knowledge of alternate beliefs, practices, and modalities of the sacred is greater than ever before. In so doing, we identify the existence of grounds on which it remains possible to *instaur* religious forms of habitus, from modes of experience that have become increasingly deliberative, yet also highlight the contingency of these forms in relation to their location within bio-economic and bio-political contexts.

Finally, Chapter 8 discusses more broadly the implications of our analysis of the secularization of the sacred. Here, we conclude that it is possible to acknowledge the value of a 'strong', albeit contextually variable, model of secularization, while also accounting for the contemporary vitality of certain forms of religion and, more broadly, the resurgent significance of specific constructions of the sacred.

## Notes

1. It has been noted that notions of the 'post-secular', which have been steadily proliferating in recent years, not only have a highly heterogeneous character, but also tend to trade on simplistic notions of the secular limited attentiveness to history, and to flatten out 'all the intricacies, contradictions, and problems of what counts as religion': indeed, frequently possessed of a literary, theological or philosophical character, it has been suggested that such notions imply an inherent antipathy to the social scientific study of religion (Beckford, 2012: 16–17). This antipathy is expressed in the association of the sociology of religion with the modern rationalism and secularism now understood to have been swept away by the 'return of the sacred' (Carruthers and Tate, 2010; D'Costa, 2010), rendering reflection on secularization processes outmoded and irrelevant. In what follows, however, we shall demonstrate that it is simply not possible to understand key manifestations of the sacred today unless we engage constructively, and afresh, with patterns of increasing secularization.

2. Ensuring that we do not 'write off' experience as either entirely 'socially' or 'biologically' constructed, this approach also allows us to explore the consequences for thought and feeling of religious and secular educational, disciplinary and training regimes referred to variously as 'techniques of the body' (Mauss, 1973a), 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 1986) and 'body pedagogics' (Shilling and Mellor, 2007; Mellor and Shilling, 2010a). Despite their references to the body, each of these approaches is concerned with the structuring of both flesh and thought. Indeed, Mauss's conception of religious and other body techniques possesses strong parallels with our conception of experience in its recognition of biological, cultural and psychological components to the manner in which people's capacities and orientations to life are formed. Recognizing the importance of these various components of experience also allows us to explore changes in their relative importance over time. Elias's (2000) historical study of 'civilizing processes', for example, suggests that long-term developments in the interdependent formation of society and personality have significantly *increased* the role of reflexivity in the formation of experience and reduced those occasions on which stimuli and feeling are translated into individual action irrespective of deliberation. This is something that we return to in our analysis of contemporary forms of religious habitus.
3. The relative simplicity and flexibility of this approach also, importantly, clears the way for us to concentrate on the relationship between religious and secular modalities of the sacred and embodied experience, without having to engage in the prolonged and unproductive *philosophical* discussions that have come to dominate contemporary debates on 'the body'. Our main concern is to utilize the approach outlined here in order to interrogate more adequately various issues involved in the secularization/revitalization of religion debate, not to become fixated upon the issue of embodied experience in relation to abstract issues unrelated to our theoretical and substantive investigations. Having said that, it is important to note that the multidimensional nature of this approach to experience enables us to avoid the analytical confluences evident in both neurological and culturalist theories that reduce religious and other feelings to either evolutionarily processes concerned with natural selection (e.g. Pyysiäinen, 2003; see Franks, 2010), or to volumes and intensities of affect that circulate beneath consciousness (e.g. Massumi, 2002; see Leys, 2011).