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RÉSUMÉ – Depuis deux siècles, maintenant, deux traditions historiques et deux visions de la nation ont recherché une hégémonie de pensée sur le corps politique et sur la société aux États-Unis : une république séculière et une nation chrétienne. Il est maintenant à la mode de critiquer la thèse de la sécularisation en soulignant le retour de la religion et des conflits religieux dans le monde contemporain. Pour autant, la rhétorique de la politique et de la vie publique américaines ont en effet changé après 1976 et ce fut toujours plus le “discours de Dieu”, la situation actuelle du droit et au plan de la société illustrent parfaitement ce changement. Cette situation reflète l’impasse créée par une nation “50/50 rouge/bleue” où l’élite intellectuelle, et une grande partie de l’élite du business ne souscrit pas à l’agenda de la droite religieuse. En fait, au fil de la “guerre culturelle”, les revers subis par la religion traditionnelle et ses demandes ont été nombreux. Il y a eu un indéniable et mesurable déclin de la religiosité dans l’audience, l’influence de la religion sur les sphères économique et sociale aux États-Unis.

MOTS-CLÉS – sécularisation, guerre culturelle, État et Église, croyances, American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS)

ABSTRACT – For two centuries two distinct historic traditions and visions of the nation have striven for hegemony over the American body politic and American society –a Secular Republic and a Christian Nation. It is now fashionable to criticize the secularization thesis by pointing to the resurgence of religion and religious conflict in the contemporary world. Though the rhetoric of American politics and public life did indeed change after 1976 and there was more “God talk”, the actual situation in law and on the ground in society has not mirrored this change. This situation reflects the logjam created by a divided “50-50, red/blue nation” where the intellectual elite, and much of the business elite, do not subscribe to the agenda of the religious right. In fact in the course of the

“culture war” the reversals suffered by traditional religion and its claims have been manifold. There has been a measurable decline in religiosity among the public and also in religion’s influence and impact on the economic and social spheres in the U.S.

KEYWORDS – secularization, Culture War, Church and State, beliefs, American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS)

THE UNEXPECTED RISE OF SECULARITY IN THE UNITED STATES 1990-2008

THE AMERICAN CULTURE WAR

For two centuries two distinct historic traditions and visions of the nation have striven for hegemony over the American body politic and American society. The first is the Puritan, theocratic, “faith-based” tradition of the “Pilgrim Fathers” who established the colonies of New England in the 17th century with the goal of establishing what Governor John Winthrop described in his 1630 sermon as a “City upon a Hill”. The second is the tradition of the 18th century “Founding Fathers” –of Jefferson, Madison, Franklin and Paine– who led the American Revolution and established the world’s first secular republic based on Enlightenment principles. This rivalry has produced alternations between eras of Christian religious “awakenings” and periods of “secular” dominance and so in effect a continuous “culture war” about the nature and purpose of the American nation.

Until March 9, 2009 when we at the Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society & Culture at Trinity College released the findings of the 2008 American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS)¹, it was fashionable and widely accepted common knowledge in academia, among the media, and political elites that currently we were living through an era of faith and that the *Zeitgeist* and general ethos in the U.S. favored religion. It was widely proclaimed that Americans had gotten more religious in recent years and that was a great gulf in worldviews that separated Americans from other Westerners particularly the secular Europeans. It was only

1 Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, *Summary Report of the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) 2008*, Trinity College, Hartford, 2009.

admitted reluctantly that we might be slightly less religious than the Saudis or Indians. The most recent example of this fashion is the new book by Micklethwaite & Woodridge¹. This is not to say that the hysterical reaction to our ARIS finding that the proportion of Christians had fallen from 86% in 1990 to 76% in 2008 in the *Newsweek* cover story of April 4, 2009 entitled “The Decline and Fall of Christian America’ is justified either. Fortunately most of the massive amount of reportage, analysis and comment on TV, radio, newspapers, magazines and blogs on the rise of the “Nones” has been more balanced and objective.

My chosen task in this essay is to disabuse you of the idea that secularization was dormant in the U.S. until we released the fact that currently one in five Americans do not identify with a religion. We showed that the percentage of adult Americans replying “None or No religion” to the question *What is your religion, if any*, increased from 8 percent or 14 million adults in 1990 to 15% or 34 million people in 2008. This irreligious population is currently growing by around 750,000 persons a year². Furthermore, I plan to demonstrate that organized religion in America, which most people associate with the Christian Right, has not been on the march in most of the U.S. for some years. The social indicators show that in terms of the three Bs favored by sociologists of religion –belonging, belief and behavior– the average American has become markedly less religious over the past two decades and that the society as a whole has become more secular. This secularizing trend has not only affected public sentiment but also the law, the economy, education, and family life despite the valiant but largely ineffective effects of many Conservative clerics and Republican politicians to hold back the tide. With hindsight we can observe that the Christian Right failed to make its desired impact on law in areas they considered most critical to the nation’s moral health. My thesis is that the influence of organized religion in most of the U.S. has been overstated and I shall provide an evidence-based argument to this end.

1 John Micklethwaite and Adrian Woodridge, *God is Back: How the Global Revival of Religion is Changing the World*, New York, The Penguin Press, 2009.

2 “This is a diverse population comprising in terms of belief –an amalgam of atheists, agnostics, deists, anti-clericalists, etc.”. See Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar with Ryan Cragun and Juhem Navarro-Rivera, *American Nones: the Profile of the No Religion Population* (A Report Based on the American Religious Identification Survey 2008), Hartford, Trinity College, 2009.

In retrospect our ARIS survey data shows that the 1990s were the decade when nearly all the national social indicators and measures pointed in one direction –towards increased secularity. The *No Religion* population grew by one million people every year. This is not surprising from a sociological perspective. It was a period of prosperity with a corresponding emphasis on consumerism and materialism. If one accepts the old adage that religion is for the poor and fearful (the opium of the masses) then one theory for the loosening hold of religion particularly among younger Americans, is that this period of national security and prosperity was an ideal environment for the rise of individualism and its correlate secularity.

It is now fashionable to criticize the secularization thesis by pointing to the resurgence of religion and religious conflict in the contemporary world. Most critics accept that the thesis is accurate for Europe but then go on to claim that there is now a European “exceptionalism” and so deny its validity for the rest of the world. They often cite the supposed resurgence in the power and influence of religion over society and politics in the United States since the 1970s to make their case¹. This forms the basis for the myth of a growing “Transatlantic divide” between “secular Europe” and “religious America”. Though the rhetoric of American politics and public life did indeed change after 1976 and there was more “God talk”, the actual situation in law and on the ground in society has not mirrored this change. This situation reflects the logjam created by a divided “50-50, red/blue nation” where the intellectual elite, and much of the business elite, do not subscribe to the agenda of the religious right. In fact in the course of the “culture war” the reversals suffered by traditional religion and its claims have been manifold. There has been a measurable decline in religiosity and in religion’s impact in the economic and social sphere. Key indicators such as identification with religion, membership of congregations and attendance at worship services have all declined during the past two decades². The Sunday blue laws and restrictions on gambling have been abolished in most states. Abortion, contraception and pornogra-

1 David Westerlund, *Questioning the Secular State: The Worldwide Resurgence of religion in Politics*, London, C. Hurst, 1996.

2 Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, *Religion in a free market: Religious and Non-religious Americans*, Ithaca, NY, Paramount Market Publishing, 2006.

phy are available. Euthanasia and assisted suicide have been endorsed by courts and voters in Oregon and Washington. Mandatory prayer in public school remains banned. Homosexuality is no longer a crime and is largely accommodated in law and society. Civil unions of same sex couples are now recognized in several states and same sex marriage has been legislated.

THE FOG OF POLITICS

At the outset I would like to offer an explanation as to why so many otherwise sensible and observant people in the media and intelligentsia misinterpreted the evidence around them. One reason is that they are oriented to the dynamic of party politics and focused on the “horse race” outcomes of the electoral process. This as I shall demonstrate is the main arena where religion has had a real impact. The reason for this is that since the 1970s the center of gravity within American Protestantism has shifted from more liberal, mainline (sometimes now called old line) denominations whose adherents dominated the levers of power and government since the founding of the Republic, to more conservative, fundamentalist and evangelical denominations. In recent decades the connection between frequent religious service attendance and political, social, and religious conservatism became increasingly tight. In some cases, it has grown tighter because the most religiously active people have become more conservative over time. That concentration began to intensify in the 1970s, and it continues. This produced the so-called Culture Wars phenomenon of the 1980s and 1990s¹.

Another trend in the congregational organization of American religion also played its part. This was the Church growth movement which increased the number of very large churches across the country. This trend occurred in nearly every Protestant denomination on which we have data and it resulted in an increasing concentration of churchgoers within very large churches. The new phenomenon, especially in the

1 James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: the Struggle to define America*, Basic Books, New York, 1991

increasingly electorally powerful Sunbelt states, was the mega-church. This phenomenon with its impressive facilities and broad array of social and recreational activities was often led by a politically and media savvy Conservative charismatic preacher¹. The Megachurches were the natural home of the new brand label of “Non-denominational Christians” whose numbers recorded in ARIS rose from under 200,000 in 1990 to over 8 million in 2008. Pastors who could mobilize large numbers of congregants often became powerful political actors on the local media and political scene especially where they were linked to national organizations. These religious entrepreneurs were expert exponents of supply side religion. These trends combined with an increased affiliation among Protestants with conservative and evangelical denominations resulted in an increasing public presence, social prominence, and political influence for American religion, but really Evangelical and Conservative Protestantism. This is the social reality behind, and in part created by, the rise of the religious right in recent decades, a development that has tremendously increased religion’s visibility in politics at every level. The result was that there was an increasingly tight connection between religiosity and political and social conservatism and for the first time there was real religious divide between the constituencies comprising to two main political parties². The power and influence of the religious right in the Republican Party led many observers to claim that recent decades are ones of religious revival, awakening, or revitalization for all Americans.

RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENTS

In 2008 one of every three Americans, and 45% of all Christians, self-identified as “Born-again or Evangelical”. The energy and innovation of the Evangelicals and Fundamentalists allowed them also to successfully appropriate the terms “Christian” and even “religious”. They operated very efficient public relations and direct mail fundraising organizations

1 Scott Thumma and Dave Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths: What We Can Learn from America's Largest Churches*, San Francisco, CA, Jossey-Bass, 2007.

2 Kosmin and Keysar, *op. cit.*, 2006.

linked to televangelism. This religious entrepreneurialism had a short term success in dominating the debate on many aspects of the domestic and economic agenda in the public square through interest groups like the Moral Majority and Focus on the Family but the long term effect was to produce a reaction against the judgmentalism of the Religious Right, particularly among women and Generations X and Y, which created the increased secularity in society that is now becoming evident.

The Evangelicals were also able to dominate the political debate because of a greater diffidence among the largest American religious group, the Catholic Church to enter the arena of party and electoral politics. The Catholic community is literally a much broader and less cohesive church socially and politically. It is divided between liberals and conservative and cultural and practicing Catholics. As a result it was less willing and able to involve itself in party politics and mainly confined itself to moral issues particularly around abortion and sexuality. But the Catholic population has been eroded by defections particularly among young and middle-aged, white males since 1990. They have been replaced by Latino immigrants¹.

ARIS 2008 recorded the decline in the prestige and influence of the Catholic Church particularly in New England where the proportion of Catholics fell from 50% to 33% between 1990 and 2008. Sociological trends played their part but an anti-clerical reaction to the sexual scandals among the priesthood was obvious and the bad publicity continues. The Boston archdiocese alone shuttered 60 churches and paid out \$85 million in compensation in 2002-3. The trials and tribulations of the Catholic Church have not ended. A report issued March 13, 2009 by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (RNS) showed 803 allegations were filed by 706 victims in 2008 against 518 clergy. The church also spent more than \$436 million in legal settlements, attorney fees and counseling costs. This is a lot of collection plates. The Catholic Church lost 17% of its adherents between childhood and today. The main result of all this was secularization. In 2001 we found that 43% of all "New Nones" were former Catholics and in 2008 we found that 34% of all Nones claimed an Irish ethnic heritage. The revolt of the laity reached historic proportions in Connecticut in March 2009 when there was

1 William V. D'Antonio *et al.*, *American Catholics Today: New Realities of Their Faith and Their Church*, Lanham, Md., Rowman & Littlefield, 2007.

legislation before the State Assembly (since withdrawn) to take the administration and governance of the Church out of the hands of the clergy and hierarchy. This attempt at secularization was a response to several cases of theft of parish funds by priests.

Finally it is necessary to point out that many on the Left of the intellectual and political spectrum also enhanced the salience of religion. Antagonism to Modernity and Enlightenment values led the post-modernists and multi-culturalists in academe to valorize and exaggerate religious diversity and ethnic particularism resulting from immigration from the developing world. One would never learn from these studies that in total all the Non-Christian religious groups in the U.S. comprise less than 4% of the total population and that the challenge to the supremacy of Christianity comes not from other world religions or new religious movements but from irreligion. Studies of new immigrants funded by the Templeton, Lilly, Luce, Mellon, Carnegie and Ford foundations tended to emphasize their religiosity and difference as well as to overstate the numerical contribution of Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Santeria, Rastafarianism etc. to the American religious landscape¹. The fact that by far the largest religious group among Asians is Nones (27% in 2008) and that Hispanics without a religious identity far outnumber Latino Pentecostals by a factor of four to one and are only slightly under the national rate². Such facts were ignored and hidden by an intellectual and ideological outlook fascinated with the exotic that mimicked elements of Victorian anthropological essentialism. The multicultural school of scholars also tends to ignore the many immigrants to the U.S. attracted not by its guarantee of freedom of religion but by the possibility it offers for freedom from religion. This is especially true for secular and democratically oriented people from the Middle East and Asia seeking to escape from the restrictions of *Shari'a* law, Muslim fundamentalist persecution and Islamist violence.

1 Diana L. Eck, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation*, San Francisco, Harper, 1997; Yvonne Haddad and Jane Smith, *Mission to America: Five Islamic Sectarian Movements in North America*, Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1993; R. Stephen Warner, *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and New Immigration*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1998.

2 Juhem Navarro-Rivera, Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, *U.S. Latino Religious Identification 1990-2008: Growth, Diversity & Transformation*, Hartford, Trinity College, 2010.

CHURCH AND STATE

Having proven at the outset of this discussion that in terms of belonging i.e. rates of self-identification with religious organizations, there has been a measurable decrease since 1990 we can now turn to the realm of institutional secularism and the crucial area of separation of church and state. My first exhibit is the arena of jurisprudence. In the mid-20th century, strict separation made the running and succeeded in removing the daily prayer and Bible reading from the public schools, and set greater distance between religious practices and governmental settings than had previously been the case in American history. The conservative political reaction after 1970 limited the trend towards achieving a purer standard of social-structural secularization.

Admittedly, numerous court decisions since 1990 have reversed the locomotive of hard secularization of the public square, or at least complicated the course of this mode of secularization. The use of public monies to provide tuition vouchers at private, predominantly religious schools; the failure of legal challenges to arrest the progress of faith-based initiatives –federal funding for religious social service providers; or the symbolic retention of the phrase “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance and the public display of the Ten Commandments under certain circumstances, all illustrate the willingness of the present secular order to allow an institutional intimacy with the sacred order. From the point of view of the hard secular population and activist litigants, such as the Californian lawyer and doctor Michael Newdow, these legal decisions are setbacks. They can also be viewed as a reaffirmation of American Civil Religion and its non-sectarian sacred symbols¹.

Between 1970 and 1990, an additional challenge to secular institutions in the public square was that much of the American public and electorate came to regard the perceived social ills, dilemmas and challenges to family life and values as brought on by modernity, science, and too much freedom. This convinced the political elite to seek a

1 Robert Bellah, Civil Religion in America, *Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 1967, 96 (1), 1-21.

greater accommodation between church and state and a broader role for religion in society such as faith-based initiatives. The trend appears towards a “procedural secularism,” whereby religions converse in public discussions over sensitive issues of value and the state authority takes on the job of legal mediator or broker to balance and manage real differences. However, the middle ground position is not stable and the culture war continues.

Secularism and science have historical links through their mutual interest in secular values of free inquiry, empiricism and rationality. Religion has a history of trying to constrain or control scientific advance and science education where it conflicts with biblical revelation. Today the arena of this conflict is biology and particularly the teaching of evolution in public schools. Fundamentalist religious groups suffered a defeat in the Supreme Court in *Edwards v. Aguillard*, 1987. This decision made state attempts to mandate equal time for creation science and evolution, the so-called “balanced treatment” education approach illegal. The religious protagonists are persistent and do not accept defeat. Their response was to create the notion of Intelligent Design. In *Kitzmuller al v. Dover District School Board* 2008, the 1987 decision was upheld and Intelligent Design was designated as a “religious view” with scientific pretensions so its teaching in public schools is unconstitutional. Nevertheless there is still rearguard resistance in states where religious fundamentalism has popular support e.g. Louisiana Science Education Act, 2008. An analogous situation occurred with embryonic stem-cell research where Federal funding restrictions were imposed by the Bush administration. Interestingly this ban was reversed in March 2009 by the Obama administration which has made strong pronouncements in support of unfettered science¹.

1 Ariela Keysar and Barry A. Kosmin (eds.), *Secularism & Science in the xxist Century*, Hartford, ISSSC, 2008.

SEX AND MARRIAGE

In another area of major interest to the Religious Right, sexuality, marriage and abortion they failed to progress during the supposed era of their political ascendance in the 1980s and 1990s and since then they have lost ground. The *Roe v. Wade* decision was not reversed and the secularization of the family has been advanced. Initially Civil Unions of homosexual couples were recognized by several state courts during the 1990s but now the fight is about marriage itself. Marriage and matrimony are terms once reserved for “holy wedlock” and regarded as a sacrament. Recently marriage has been re-interpreted by the courts in Massachusetts, Connecticut and Iowa to allow homosexual unions. Elsewhere it is a political conflict between two views of liberty – Human Rights and the power of popular sovereignty to reinforce religious strictures. Increased secularity has meant that this battle has moved away from the legal elites and into the legislatures. Congress passed the Defense of Marriage Act and thirty states have passed constitutional amendments in effect banning homosexual marriage. In 2008 Proposition 8 passed in California and a similar measure in Florida. Arkansas traditionalists won state referenda both against gay marriage and adoptions by gays. But in Vermont, the most irreligious state in the Union where Nones have a plurality of religious identification (34%) a gay marriage bill passed the Senate and House and overrode the veto of Gov. Jim Douglas in April 2009. In New Hampshire (Nones 29%) and Maine (Nones 25%) similar legislation on marriage “equality” quickly followed. Interestingly, the New Hampshire State Senate is the only legislative body in the U.S. with a majority of women members. Given that 25% of GenX (those aged 29 to 42 years) and GenY (ages 18 to 28) are Nones, this is where many other states are headed. This can be seen as a standoff between young people with a tremendous sympathy for civil rights and what appear to be biblical injunctions from religion. And the civil rights argument is making inroads in public opinion.

Organized religion has traditionally placed great emphasis on control and supervision of marriage and support for its traditional notion of the family. Significantly marriage as an institution has been eroded

in societal significance in recent decades. Rates of divorce increased rapidly from the 1960s until the 1980s but they tended to flatten after that paradoxically because of a decline in the number and rate of marriage. Young adults tended to postpone marriage or abandon interest in it entirely. Marriage as an institution lost its monopoly on sex and procreation. The number of single people living with a partner and rate of non-marital parenting –the number of children born out of wedlock has increased annually for decades and reached 37 percent of all live births in 2005¹. Religion has lost ground as a result of these trends. The decline in church membership and worship among young adults can be traced back to the decline in the rate of marriage and its delay which has caused a rise in the age of marriage among those who eventually enter into it. This trend increases measures of secularity in the population. What we can see here is the way in which advances in institutional secularism and secularity among the population interact and create a loop which reinforces secularization as a general trend in society.

THE ELIMINATION OF THE SUNDAY “BLUE LAWS”

Another behavioral issue that illustrates the strides made by secular forces in society at the expense of religion is the fate of laws restricting Sunday activities. America has long been envisioned as a nation that observes and preserves Sunday as a sacred time, protected from the mundane and the profane. This normative American Sunday emerged from the Puritan notion of the Christian Sabbath, inspired by the fourth of the biblical Ten Commandments. This meant the exclusion of economic production and the marketplace and the avoidance of any pleasurable consumption.

Biblical injunctions were formally legislated into English law under the Lord’s Day Act of 1676, which mandated church attendance and expected the people to observe them “... by exercising themselves

1 U.S Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the U.S. 2009*, Washington, DC, 2009.

thereon in the Duties of Piety and true Religion, publicly and privately¹.” The first Sunday law enacted in an American colony in Virginia, 1610 actually preceded the English one. It required church attendance, prescribing the death penalty for third-time offenders². Penalties, for sins of omission or commission, were clearly laid down under a similar New Haven Colony law enacted in 1656.

To protect the sacred time, the profane was defined not only as the commercial, but also as any amusement devoid of an uplifting message. Exhilaration through inebriation has been correctly viewed as the antithesis of Puritan sobriety and austerity. If it could not be expunged during the six days of the secular work week, at least one day would be kept pure. Bible-inspired laws, forbidding numerous activities (“Blue Laws”) have been a part of the American Sunday culture, symbolically and practically, and formalized what became known as the Puritan Sabbath, a day of rest, worship and sobriety in every sense. This complex of normative Sunday behaviors marked the young American republic. De Tocqueville gave us a general description of the American Sunday in the first half of the nineteenth century:

In the United States on the seventh day of every week the trading and working life of the nation seems suspended... On this day the marts of traffic are deserted; every member of the community, accompanied by his children, goes to church³.

H. L. Mencken described Sunday as “a day given over by Americans to wishing that they themselves were dead and in Heaven, and that their neighbors were dead and in Hell.”⁴ There has been a coalition of forces fighting for the preservation of Sunday, mostly a variety of religious lobbies. The coalition fighting to secularize Sunday has been most visibly made up of business organizations and secular individuals. The history of these struggles illustrates the various steps in the secularization of Sunday. Secularization may be described as the continuing process of devaluing religious ideas and religious authority has become marginalized.

1 Great Britain Parliament 1763, p. 388.

2 Lutz, Donald S., (ed.), *Colonial Origins of the American Constitution: A Documentary History*, Indianapolis, IN, Liberty Fund, 1998.

3 Alexis de Tocqueville, 1994. *Democracy in America*. London, Fontana, p. 1

4 H.L. Mencken, *A Book of Burlesques*, 1916.

Athletic competition on a Sunday was banned since it was traditionally regarded as frivolous entertainment. At the turn of the 20th century, Newton considered Sunday observance a matter of choice, regarded the prohibition of sports as fully justified and in keeping with the spirit of his enlightened times¹. Nevertheless, in 1934 religion lost the struggle over Sunday baseball (Bevis 2003). The growing influence of major sports corporations in the transformation of Sunday is best expressed in the history of the National Football League's Super Bowl. It has been played on Sunday since 1967 and it is now widely recognized as a national secular holiday².

The rise of the consumer economy in the 20th century created new businesses, ranging from sports franchises to amusement parks to retailers, with the power and motivation to seek the repeal or loosening of Blue Laws. The elimination of Sunday laws has been a gradual and complex process. In 1872 California became the first state to abolish all restrictions on Sunday business. After 1960, rising disposable incomes enhanced the forces of individualism and consumerism which operated to eliminate Sunday laws gained much strength³. With the accelerated pace of opposition to, and elimination of, Sunday laws, religious leaders of all Christian denominations were speaking out against the new trend, with no visible impact⁴. During the decades of the 1950s and 1960s four states repealed them. In 1970s seven more states and 1980s and 1990s six states followed suit. The final act of removing the law from the books may be the culmination of a long process in which secularizing forces have emerged victorious. The creation of the two-day weekend in the twentieth century meant that Americans had much more time to pursue secular activities on weekends, and might have left more time available for religious activities, but this has not happened. It seems that the secular activities of shopping and entertainment on Saturday have invaded the Sunday space.

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- 1 Henry G. Newton, Blue Laws of New Haven. *The Yale Law Journal* 7, no. 2 (November 1897), p. 75-85.
 - 2 Michael MacCambridge, *America's Game: The Epic Story of How Pro Football Captured a Nation*, New York, Random House, 2004.
 - 3 Jonathan Gruber and Daniel M. Hungerman, The Church versus the Mall: What Happens When Religion Faces Increased Secular Competition?, *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 123 (2) 2008, p. 831-862.
 - 4 Richard P. McBrien, *Caesar's Coin: Religion and Politics in America*, New York, MacMillan, 1987.

Between 2002 and 2005, 12 states took legislative action scaling back restrictions on Sunday alcohol sales despite facing opposition from religious organizations¹. Objections by religious leaders were overcome by arguments promising increased tax revenues. The abolition of the Sunday alcohol ban in Massachusetts can be regarded as the symbolic end to the tradition of the Puritan Sabbath, and an obvious victory of “filthy lucre” over holiness and devotion². It can also be seen as the final vanquishing of the once powerful Temperance Movement, led by the Protestant churches that created Prohibition in the early 20th century.

GAMBLING

Now let's turn to another controversial behavioral arena, the topic of gambling. At the turn of the xxth century the founder of the Social Gospel movement the Baptist Minister Walter Rauschenbusch described gambling as the “vice of the savage... a true civilization ought to outgrow it, as it has tattooing and cannibalism.”³ Billy Sunday also opposed gambling and it was forbidden to his followers. This was the period when Religious Right nurtured strong anti-capitalist sentiments. They opposed gambling of course, because Greed is one of the 7 deadly sins; as well as an addiction, a regressive tax on poor people, and a habit that causes family break-up, etc. So what happened?

In 1964 – only one state New Hampshire had a lottery. Now state lotteries operate in 41 states. Forty years ago only Nevada had legal casinos. Now 10 states have casinos and 11 have race-track betting. It's estimated that 1 in 4 Americans visited a casino in 2006. Interestingly, in 1997 the Southern Baptist Convention passed a resolution –that Christians should refuse to participate or promote gambling. And they called on politicians to prohibit gambling and its advertisement. No national movement of religious opposition to gambling emerged.

1 Jonathan Finer, Old Blue Laws are hitting red lights: Statutes rolled back as anachronisms. *Washington Post*, December 4, 2004

2 Sara B. Miller, In Battle for Sunday, The “Blue Laws” are falling, *The Christian Science Monitor*, December 5, 2003.

3 Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, New York, MacMillan, 1907.

Opposition to gambling has gone the way of Prohibition where the religious right failed completely in its moral crusade. The SBC's only success against state legalization of gambling was in Alabama where casinos were defeated largely by religious opposition¹.

BELIEFS

Having illustrated the trend towards increased secularization in the realms of belonging and behavior we can now look at the third B of religiosity i.e. belief. There has been an erosion in the underlying levels of religious belief. Some key indicators are a reduced belief in an inerrant Bible; reduced confidence in the leaders of religious organizations; reduced tolerance of certain kinds of religious involvement in the public sphere.

ARIS 2008 revealed that 70% of Americans subscribe to a belief in a personal God. This is lower than earlier surveys reported. Part of the reason is the more nuanced nature of the responses options which offered including a Deist-style option of a "higher power" (12%) as well as agnostic (10%) and atheist theological response categories (2%). What is interesting here is that theological questions reveal much greater numbers of atheists and agnostics among the American public than do self-identification i.e. "belonging" questions. The General Social Surveys (GSS) of recent years provide supporting evidence that both illustrates and explains these data. GSS has shown a decline in proportion public who have "great confidence" in organized religion from 32% in 1976 to 20% in 2008. The American public now expresses as low a degree of confidence in religious leaders as they do, on average, in leaders of other major institutions. The percentage strongly agreeing that "religious leaders should not try to influence government decisions" increased from 22 percent in 1991 to 31 percent in 1998. More recently, according to Gallup polls, the percent of people who agree that organized religion should have less influence in this nation increased from 22 percent in 2001 to 34 percent in 2008.

1 Alan Wolfe and Erik C. Owens (Eds), *Gambling: Mapping the American Moral Landscape*, Baltimore, MD, Baylor University Press, 2009.

The inter-relationship of belief and behavior plays out in a number of different ways. ARIS 2008 discovered that 27% of Americans do not expect to have a religious funeral, Since religion deals with mortality and has traditionally placed much emphasis on providing a gateway to salvation and the afterlife, this is another indicator of Americans' lack of attachment to religion,. According to the General Social Survey the percentage of people who never attend religious services, while still relatively small, has increased from 13 percent in 1990 to 23 percent in 2006. A gradual but steady decline in belief in an inerrant Bible is underway. Over the past 30 years, the percentage of people who say they believe that the Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word has decreased. This trend appears in two different time series (Gallup polls as well as the GSS), which both show generation gaps with younger cohorts less likely to believe in an inerrant Bible than those born earlier.

One way to illustrate the current secularity of the American population would be to follow the example of Zuckerman and go through all the Ten Commandments to see how far contemporary Americans adhere or stray from their strictures and traditional religious norms¹. From adultery to stealing and murder they demonstrate far higher rates of "sin" than secular Scandinavians or Americans of earlier generations. Rather than an academic paper it could easily be a suitable subject for a satire or comedy hour. For instance, Americans lie about their rate of attendance in religious worship. Is this another sin or an indication of a sense of guilt and hence a religious emotion? Is an exaggeration of piety hypocrisy?

There are other windows into this domain, such as measures and illustrations of irreligion, religious doubt, unbelief or non-belief, free thought, agnosticism, (secular) humanism, rationalism, materialism, positivism, empiricism, and (religious) skepticism, among others. There have been countless historical, philosophical, polemic, and apologetic treatments of these subjects, but social scientific research that focuses directly on them has been limited and sporadic. However, as a result of the ARIS findings and similar results from other recent social inquiries indicating a greater secularity among the public, there are signs

1 Phil Zuckerman, *Society without God*, New York, NYU Press, 2008.

of increasing public interest in secularism, atheism, irreligion, and related subjects.

Since there is a battle between two American ideological traditions it is not surprising that social scientists take sides as propagandists. One prime example is Robert Putnam of Harvard and “Bowling Alone” fame. His latest project, massively funded by the Templeton Foundation, is entitled *American Grace*. It claims that half the nation’s social capital comes from religion. Putnam admits religious people are more Republican, more conservative and less tolerant but claims religious Americans are happier and better citizens. They are “more generous, volunteer more, better neighbors, more civically engaged.” He claims that even religious liberals are better citizens than secular liberals. Participation is the key to all this (i.e. attending services). Having friends is good. Having church friends is very good. Church friends make you “nicer.” According to Putnam, America’s grace is that Americans are very religious, which makes them “nicer¹.”

THE ADVANCE OF SECULARIZATION

Despite such rhetoric the social facts on the ground show that secularization in America continues in American society. The salience of religious strictures and practices in the lives of most people has clearly diminished, particularly during the past two decades. The evidence validates the secularization thesis of British sociologist Steve Bruce². Bruce believes that the motive for religion lies in the interplay between social structure and leisure time. As alternative ways of filling leisure time develop that offer individual structuring of leisure, large parts of the populace, especially its male half, cease to attend church. In turn that development creates the possibility of a non-religious emotional life, one centered round free time more than around the interplay between family and religion.

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- 1 Robert D. Putman and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion is Reshaping our Civic and Political Lives*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2010.
 - 2 Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West*, Malden, MA, Blackwell, 2002.

Bruce also subscribes to the idea that secularization is linked to autonomy. He views the process of secularization as an individual process. While it can be characterized as affecting large collectivities, the decision to be secular is not a decision that is made at the group level. For Bruce, this decision is reached on an individual level. Each single individual makes up his or her own mind, however affected they may be by others, and therefore they all experience secularization as affirming their individual autonomy.

This process does not mean that organized religion will vanish; according to some psychologists and neuro-scientists some form of religious thinking seems to be the path of least resistance for our cognitive systems¹. By contrast, disbelief is generally the result of deliberate, effortful work against our natural cognitive dispositions — hardly the easiest ideology to propagate. Religion is also a commodity far too valuable (in every sense of the word) to many of its purveyors in America for that to happen. But if present trends continue within a few decades it will become a diminishing concern and an episodic involvement for most Americans other than a pious remnant.

Of course, it bears repeating that, by world standards, Americans still remain remarkably religious in both belief and practice but they have come a long way from the truly religious society and theocracy established by legislation in colonial Massachusetts². Yet today, half of U.S households do NOT currently belong to a religious congregation and on the average Sunday 73% of Americans do NOT go to Church. 27% of American do NOT anticipate a religious funeral. 30% of Americans do NOT believe in a personal biblical style God. I believe this evidence demonstrates that the *Zeitgeist*, if not the Force, is with the Nones. Secularization in America has occurred, is occurring and will continue to occur as the authority of religion and clergy erodes in society.

Nevertheless the *kulturkampf* between the partisans of a secular republic and those of a Christian nation continues with a conflict over the re-writing or revision of American history. There are numerous authors dedicated to appropriating American history and the “Founding

1 E. P. Shafranske (ed.), *Religion and the Clinical Practice of Psychology*. Washington, D.C., American Psychological Association, 1996.

2 *The Laws and Liberties of Massachusetts of 1648*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1929.

Fathers” into the Christian nation camp using dubious assertions and out of context quotations. The most remarkable example relates to Tom Paine who has been described as a “good” and religious man by conservative media pundit and the Tea-Party’s favorite public intellectual Glenn Beck¹. The most publicized political clash along these lines occurred in 2010 with a battle over the Texas textbook standards for the history curriculum in public schools which was orchestrated by the religious right and the partisans of the “Pilgrim Fathers” viewpoint. This provoked a backlash from the “Founding Fathers” proponents in academia, the schools and concerned parents that made it into a national debate about ideology in education. This move into the educational realm, which in the United States is run by local school boards and so is open to political interference, is in some ways an admission of the failure of previous strategies to make the “City on the Hill” a reality and so a testament by its opponents to the strength of contemporary American secularity.

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1 Glenn Beck, *Glenn Beck's Common Sense: The Case Against an Out-Of-Control Government, Inspired by Thomas Paine*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2009.