

Week #11: Secularization and Contemporary Evangelical Renewal Movements:

- **How Economic Advance, Security and Secularization Are Related**
- **Why Churches Must Compete for Attention with Secular Leisure/Entertainment, Using Branding and Promotion**
- **Seeker Sensitive Churches and Secularization**
 - **Translating Basic Christian Beliefs into the Forms of Expression Used in North American Popular Culture**
 - **Leadership That Is Charismatic and Authentic to Experience**
 - **The Acculturation and Assimilation of North America Evangelicalism: Virtue or Vice?**

We talked last week about ways of defining secularization, which involves the declining influence of religious beliefs and practices on decision-making in public spheres of life.

- We noted that immigration has produced a higher degree of religious pluralism, which makes it hard for any one of these religious communities to make an uncontested claim for dominance over public life and public decision-making.
- The increase in religious pluralism was also supported by Christian renewal movements between 1660-1750 that were critical of the established churches and doubted their legitimacy.
 - By emphasizing inward personal experience as the criterion for authenticity and contrasting this with the inauthenticity of external religious institutions, these renewal movements inadvertently supported the development of religious individualism.
 - Religious individualism increased dissent, pluralism and non-participation in traditional religious institutions.
- Since 1690, the liberal political tradition in Western countries has tended to solve the problems raised by religious pluralism and conflicting religious visions by
 - tolerating religious belief within the sphere of private life (individual choice of beliefs and religious association).
 - constructing a civil order (political system, government-funded services, and sphere of economic production) without reference to the beliefs or practices of any one religious community.
 - Note that even the “Judaean-Christian ethic” espoused since the 1950’s in the USA is an ambiguous concept, since there is no Judaean-Christian institutional church.
 - To say that lawgiving provides a basis for civil order by emphasizing individual responsibility, egalitarianism, compassion for others (doing unto others as you would have them do unto you), the high value of marriage, etc.
 - does not link the statement to any one religious community and also
 - does not explain how disputes over the interpretation and content of these principles can be resolved. (For example, partisans and opponents of same-sex marriage both claim to assign a high value to marriage.)
 - Any negotiations of the interpretation of the content of these principles will also occur apart from any particular religious organization. Judgments will instead be made by reference to
 - rights existing within the civil order or
 - some benefit to be obtained for all within the civil order.

- With the expansion of government services, independent sub-spheres of services were created (education, social services, etc.), each of which had its own internal logic, accredited professionals, training systems, and procedures for professional evaluation. These sub-spheres of government funded services operate independently of religious communities, religious practices and religious rationales.

Thinking further about pluralism and religious individualism and their respective contributions to secularization:

- Pål Repstad, “The Powerlessness of Religious Power in a Pluralist Society,” *Social Compass* 50:2 (2003), pp. 161-173
 - Since modern individuals set the terms for their religious engagement, it is difficult to maintain stronger forms of public power over the people belonging to a religious group.
 - The sect could employ coercion, but this is now limited by the state and techniques like banning or shunning to produce conformity are most effective only when
 - the religious community functions as one’s total life-world, which is increasingly rare due to public schooling, geographic mobility, employment within secular organizations that may be subject to regulation by the state or the logic of a secularized profession, etc.
 - Religious groups are rarely able to monopolize and control members’ access to business and clients.
 - participation in the religious community is required for final salvation and the alternative to salvation is eternal damnation (fewer people have a strong adherence to this belief and it has a declining visibility in the public religious teaching of most Western churches)

The sect also will be condemned as a deviant/marginal and authoritarian/dangerous by the public media, which may hinder recruitment and retention in an anti-authoritarian society
 - The denomination has voluntary attendance but cannot control for movement to other churches or groups based on individual preference or perceived needs. The denomination has therefore limited power to enforce a narrower ideal or to require members to preserve a past ideal and practices. It must build consensus around a limited ideal and rely on normative power.
 - The state church has involuntary membership (baptized at birth) and low regular attendance, so has even weaker power. Because it may consist of individuals who completely reject the normative power of the church or the clergy and participate (if at all) only for their own purposes according to their own interpretations.
 - Less felt need for exclusive forms of religious affiliation (compare Hay, 153: “the need to maintain a particular kind of faith is weakened, without necessarily undermining the full structure of belief”)
 - Churches’ ways of responding to reduced public power may
 - include falling back on what their members find meaningful, which

- is shaped by extensive participation in the broader mass culture and
- may be linked to individual or societal ideas of what is necessary for their personal welfare or self-realization (to achieve certain benefits, feel that life is meaningful and purposeful, to find a role for oneself in relation to others, etc.)
- use of religious branding (brand is a mark that can secure adoption by individual consumer who is on a religious quest, in a broader marketplace where there is often intense competition from alternatives.

(Cf. Krönert and Hepp, “Religious Media Events and Branding Religion”: religion “has to present itself in the symbolic forms of a secularized media culture.”). Tice, “The Afterlife of Born Again Beauty Queens” provides an example of this; note the “extreme makeover” language to communicate the traditional notion of conversion.

Cf. also Miller and Carlin, “Joel Osteen as Cultural Selfobject,” where Osteen’s self-presentation and internet/media ministry represents a mirroring of an ideal, peaceful, prosperous, healing modern self, with a carefully structured presentation of emotion, but without publicly deploying traditional religious symbols and thus creating a neutral public space which is congruent with media/entertainment culture. One is invited to merge with this charismatic, depicted self and find some degree of completion and progress toward a “best self” through the self-presentation and the message of the teacher/leader/healer.)

- Branding can also communicate across different media and different spheres of life to convey different aspects of meaning (“religious lifestyle branding”).
 - In a world dominated by third-party media, however, one can never completely control one’s identity or message and can be reimaged or revalued by third parties. This again reflects a lessening of power of traditional religious institutions in the public sphere.
- providing multiple point of access to the church during transitions in life, which allow voluntary, selective participation which reflect one’s perceived needs (e.g. support groups; access to rites of baptism, marriage, funerals; etc.)
 - Like traditional pilgrimage, can visit without mandatory, ongoing involvement.
 - Participation is encouraged by providing incentives, but this may not ensure adoption of beliefs (particularly beliefs poorly compatible with religious individualism, historicism, and material/bodily well being)
 - If one church/religious community will not provide a service according to the client’s specifications, another, more client-based

religious community will, so it is difficult to maintain an absolute prohibition.

How do resources/affluence affect the progress of secularization?

(Norris and Inglehart on existential security)

- Lack consistent access to resources basic to life (incl. significant social insecurity and marked income inequality)--driven to prayer, rely on religious community
- Have not only consistent access to resources basic to life and a welfare/social safety net, but even sufficient resources to fund and pursue a diverse consumer market infrastructure/leisure culture--sense of personal moral autonomy (eventually also spiritual autonomy) and other ways of spending time, money and resources to express and divert themselves, form meaningful relationships, etc. (Compare Hirschle's conclusions.)

Modernization thus does affect religiosity and secularization, but not directly and in one way; rather, the progress of modernization affects people in different ways and thus, through one's perceptions of existential security, has important but indirect effects on the appeal of religion (that religion is important and meaningful in their lives) and the scope of the work that religion is expected to do.

- When one moves beyond acceptance of religious meaning, church involvement depends upon something further, i.e. social networks.
- Higher levels of education (allows greater religious literacy??) and connections with national elite culture can also separately increase church attendance for some people, but this tends to be shaped by local factors.
- In the long term, decreasing sense of religious meaning may decrease overall church attendance (cf. Hirschle).

How do women's roles affect secularization vs. religious observance?

--Kristin Aune, "Evangelical Christianity and Women's Changing Lives," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 15 (2008): 277-294

--James Kurth, "A Tale of Two Collapses: The Twin Declines of the Christian Faith and the Traditional Family," *Harvard Theological Review* 106:4 (2013):485-486

- Women's traditional roles as caregivers for the family shielded them to some extent from the secularization of the public sphere. Women also provided voluntary leadership for the church and a source of identity (defined roles and expectations) outside the family
- Women's full time work is negatively correlated with religious involvement and church attendance, which has an effect on religious socialization of children.
- Where
 - women choose to remain unmarried or in non-traditional relationships and
 - where church programs or public descriptions of the roles of women do not take account of women's changed roles,

it is increasingly common for women to disaffiliate from traditional religious communities.

- The previous defined roles and expectation may then be replaced with adherence to a less conservative, more egalitarian religious community or to new, detraditionalized forms of individual religious preference (self-help, therapeutic literature on emotions and relationships, New Age).