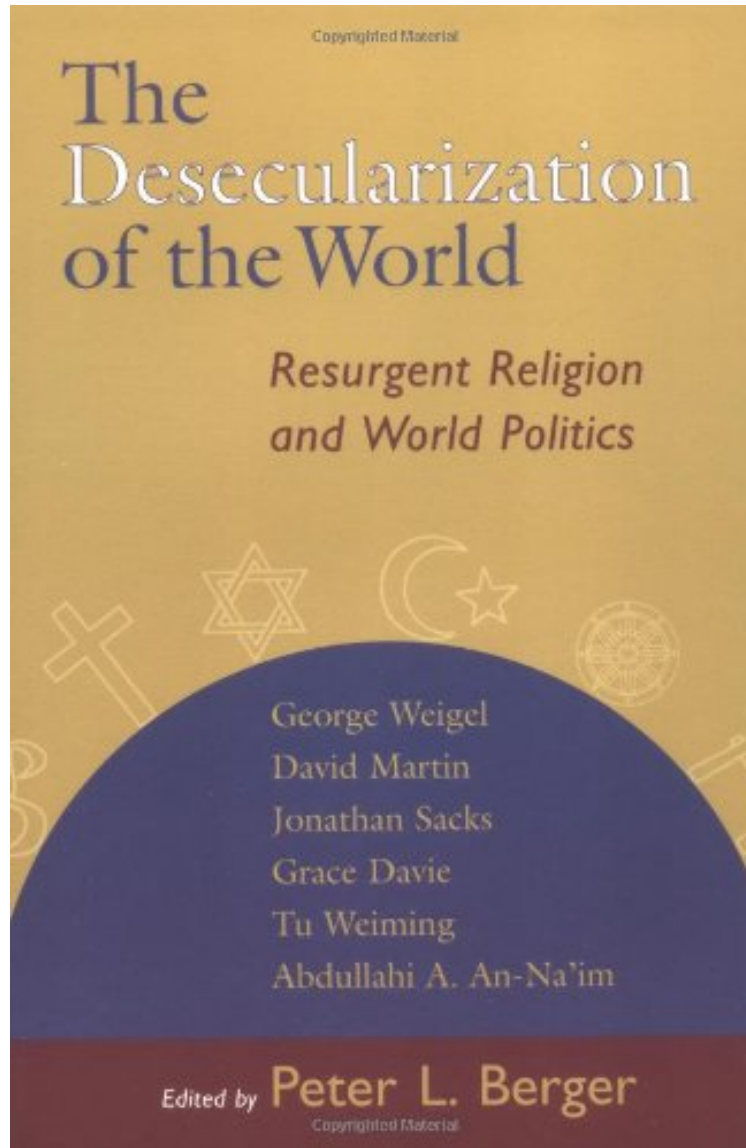


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The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics

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From Eerdmans Publishing Company : The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics:

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. To disabuse you of 'post-Modernism'By Peter OliphantScientific

reductionism is so attractive in the academy, that college teachers drool in anticipation that religion will 'wither away,' in Marxist cant. Being intellectuals, academics believe that someday logical rationalism will take over the world and we will all live on Vulcan with Mr. Spock. For the moment, they say we live in a 'post-modern era,' because Kant showed that neither physical nor metaphysical absolutism is possible. Kant may have shown this, but religion has very little interest in science, or logic, or the academy. Religion is about people's feelings (something academics dislike). Berger demonstrates that religion is growing mightily and has been growing all through the post-modern era of supposed 'secularization' that the academy so religiously desires. Berger explores how secularization is the ideology of the American and European elite and reviews how the waves of religious fervor that stir America and the Near and Far East show the academics that the Reign of Reason has been a short one. He reviews the last millennium of religious thought in the West -- Christianity, Judaism, and a little Islam. His review of the trends from the Reformation toward today's varieties of Protestantism and Catholicism will bring you up do date. Most important, he shows how any religion and all religion provokes sectarian divisions. It is this endemic sectarianism that gives academics 'hope' that religion is fading away in hopeless divisions; but the divisions themselves demonstrate how religious orientation actually constitutes culture.²¹ of 26 people found the following review helpful. Exceptional By Brett Williams Berger is brilliant, funny and wise - an academic that thinks like a real person. His writing is insightful, flows with ease and engages the reader with mini-revelations. Though he writes only the first chapter, a few others are equally enthralling, especially those on Pope John Paul II's philosophy and that concerning Islam. Unfortunately a few others belong only to sociologists - lists, speculation and esoteric social theories, which often sound as though from an ivory tower on another planet, where social theorists debate whether their world is made all of one thing or all of another. In the John Paul chapter we find the Pope concretely defeating postmodern silliness in its rejection of universality. The chapter on Islam teaches much and provides reasoned, balanced direction toward Islamic change for the better, though some of that is perhaps a bit idyllic when it comes to fundamentalist Islam as one may as well preach peace to a charging grizzly. Berger's premise is this: To assume we are living in a secular world is wrong. The world today "is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more than ever". Though modernity has secularizing effects it has provoked powerful movements of counter-secularization. Which harkens back to the Brooks Adams 1896 classic, "The Law Of Civilization And Decay". In it Adams notes with no one left to defeat, ideas from round the Empire flooded Rome causing a near universal dis-ease among its population. Their response? Extreme religious eagerness, the sprouting of new mystery religions of which Christianity was but one of hundreds. Our upsurge today is primarily among conservative, traditionalist orthodox movements of Islam and in the Christian world among Pentecostals and other Evangelicals at the expense of Catholicism and mainline Protestantism like Lutheran, Episcopalian and Methodists. Why has modernity had this affect? Berger is clear, because modernity has removed all the old certainties and most people find it impossible to live with uncertainty. Any movement that "promises to provide or renew certainty has a ready market". Those "dripping with supernaturalism have widely succeeded". Berger does not note the 60's source of modern Liberal promoters of their paradox that "the truth is there is no truth", but he does say while thin on the ground in numbers they wield excess influence by their control of the media and university (of which he is a member - Boston U). This is the "culture elite" Berger notes that some fraction of the movements resent and battle in America's Culture Wars - and not necessarily for religious reasons. Without mention of lacking higher education among the masses, Berger clarifies the chasm between secular (of comparatively what little there is) and non-secular, "The religious impulse, the quest for meaning that transcends the restricted space of empirical existence in this world, has been a perennial feature of humanity. It would require something close to a mutation of the species to extinguish this impulse for good... The critique of secularity common to all the resurgent movements is that human existence bereft of transcendence is an impoverished and finally untenable condition." Like it or not religion, mysticism, mythology have been and will remain part of humans. Finding a path to balance in the face of warring zealotry - which was of such concern to The Founders - is a subject of concern in this extraordinary book.⁴⁵ of 47 people found the following review helpful. Pseudo or Real Desecularization? By Wayne C. Lusvardi Second submittal (revised) Sociologist Peter L. Berger's 1974 book *Pyramids of Sacrifice: Political Ethics and Social Change* foresaw what we now call "globalization." His 1983 book with sociologist Brigitte Berger *The War Over The Family* anticipated what has been dubbed as the "cultural wars." And his 1966 classic *The Social Construction of Reality* was way ahead of its time with regard to what is currently termed "postmodernism." But Berger admits in *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (1999) that he was mistaken in some of his other earlier works that modernization inevitably leads to a decline in religion. As Berger states: "To say the least, the relation between religion and modernity is rather complicated." *The Desecularization of the World* was written two years before 9-11. One can only guess that Berger was not as surprised as most at such a world-changing event, ostensibly motivated by religious fundamentalism, but less apparently orchestrated by failed secular elites from a politically destabilizing Saudi Arabia. As Berger has written elsewhere: "upsurges of religion" in the modern era are, in most cases, politicized movements "that use religion as a convenient legitimation for political agendas based on non-religious interests" in contrast with "movements genuinely inspired by religion." (Berger, *National Interest*, Winter 1996-97:3). This more certainly was the case in the recent past Balkan Wars in the Yugoslav states (see V. Perica,

Balkan Idols, Oxford, 2002). Berger points out that we have been misled to believe that modernization resulted in secularization mainly because the elite cultural carriers of secularization have been a minority of highly visible academics who have myopically led everyone to believe this is the case. But beyond the headline events, religion, especially "fundamentalist" religion is growing in every modernizing country, with the exception of already-modernized Europe. Berger has assembled some of the most eminent observers to report on this upsurge. George Weigel, scholar and official biographer of Pope John Paul II, provides a Catholic perspective on the phenomenon. Citing Pope John Paul II, Weigel perhaps presaged 9-11 and the ensuing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq with the following question: "Is pre-emptive military action legitimate against rogue regimes threatening the use of weapons of mass destruction? How is the just-war tradition, which was designed to regulate international public life in a world of sovereign states, to address the serious moral problems for world politics posed by non-state actors - ranging from financial institutions to terrorist organizations - today?" Sociologist David Martin, sociologist emeritus at the London School of Economics, provides a masterful overview of the upsurge of "evangelical" Christian religion mainly in Africa and South America and its political implications. Martin reports that the political stance of evangelical Christians is often erroneously viewed by outsiders with suspicion as similar to radical Islam or some violent cult. Rather, Martin reports that the most potent contribution of evangelical movements is their creation of voluntary associations that tend to foster democracy rather than totalitarianism or attempts at creating a "Christian society." Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of Britain, observes that history is the tale of vacillating attempts by Jews to define themselves as either a people or a religion. Sacks states that historically Jews defined themselves as the "people of God," but more recently have defined themselves as the "people hated by Gentiles." Many Jews have abandoned their religious roots and embraced secularism to solve their identity conflict and end persecution. But that hasn't diminished the attempts by many neighboring nations to exterminate the nation of Israel. British sociologist Grace Davie provides a well-written account of how Europe is an exception to these trends, as, unlike the rest of the world, religion has declined precipitously. Perhaps Davie doesn't emphasize enough that this might be the consequence of the sponsorship of Christian religion by many European states. Also, Davie is curiously silent about the influx of Muslims into Europe and the likelihood that Islamic populations may soon dominate some large cities such as Rotterdam, Netherlands. Davie doesn't tell us if the demographic decline of indigenous Europeans is in any way related to secularization. Tu Weiming, a history professor at Harvard University, reports on the resurgence of Christianity, Buddhism, and Confucianism following the collapse of worldwide communism. Interestingly, Weiming states that higher education in China has been heavily and positively influenced by Chinese-Christian universities, unlike higher education in the West which is nearly all secularized. Weiming doesn't tell us if China may be motivated by religion to resist modernization or will religion form the impetus to some form of capitalism? Abdullah An-Na'im, a law professor at Emory University, provides an overview of political Islam and international affairs up to 1999. An-Na'im states that the idea that there is an unfolding "clash of religious civilizations" between the West and Islam is a self-fulfilling prophecy and is not inevitable. But An-Na'im is not a sociologist and doesn't tell us how Muslims can embrace modernization without leaving the "closed circle" of the family and kinship and the "sacred canopy" of the mosque in order to work in the impersonal corporations and bureaucracies of modern societies. The assumption of most people is that modernization is good and thus religion is backward because it impedes modernization. But, as the world is painfully coming to understand, modernization must also come to recognize and respect socially sacred shelters of meaning. Moreover, those societies that have historically become test cases for pure secularization, such as the former U.S.S.R., Mao's China, and Pol Pot's Cambodia, have made present-day religious conflicts look mild compared to the murdering of millions for the sake of creating a secular rational utopia. For those who want to get a handle on these issues, this is an outstanding overview that neither blindly embraces religion or modernization. Other books I have found of related interest are Steve Bruce, *Politics and Religion* (2003), Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslavia* (2002) and Douglas Johnston, *Faith-Based Diplomacy: Trumping Realpolitik* (2003).

Theorists of "secularization" have for two centuries been saying that religion must inevitably decline in the modern world. But today, much of the world is as religious as ever. This volume challenges the belief that the modern world is increasingly secular, showing instead that modernization more often strengthens religion. Seven leading cultural observers examine several regions and several religions and explain the resurgence of religion in world politics. Peter L. Berger opens with a global overview. The other six writers deal with particular aspects of the religious scene: George Weigel, with Roman Catholicism; David Martin, with the evangelical Protestant upsurge not only in the Western world but also in Latin America, Africa, the Pacific rim, China, and Eastern Europe; Jonathan Sacks, with Jews and politics in the modern world; Abdullahi A. An-Na'im, with political Islam in national politics and international relations; Grace Davie, with Europe as perhaps the exception to the desecularization thesis; and Tu Weiming, with religion in the People's Republic of China.

From Publishers Weekly In the 1950s and 1960s, Berger, Harvey Cox and others were fearless proponents of "secularization theory." This theory held that as technology improved and modernity advanced upon culture, religion

would begin to decline and we would live, according to Cox, in a "secular city." Cox reversed himself in *Religion in the Secular City* (1984), declaring that the future of religion lay in grassroots movements such as fundamentalism, Pentecostalism and liberation theology. Now, Berger gathers a number of essays contending that, far from being in decline in the modern world, religion is actually experiencing a resurgence. In his opening essay, Berger asserts that "the assumption we live in a secularized world is false.... The world today is as furiously religious as it ever was." He points out that religious movements have not adapted to secular culture in order to survive but have successfully developed their own identities and retained a focus on the supernatural in their beliefs and practices. Berger then examines the origins, and ponders the future, of this global religious resurgence. While he acknowledges that he cannot predict the future course, he maintains that the "critique of secularity common to all resurgent movements is that human existence bereft of transcendence is an impoverished and finally untenable condition." Berger argues that the desire for transcendence is an integral part of the human psyche. He also provides a brief overview of the impact of religion on economic development, war and peace, human rights and social justice. Other essayists contribute "Roman Catholicism in the Age of John Paul II" (George Weigel), "The Evangelical Protestant Upsurge and Its Political Implications" (David Martin), "Judaism and Politics in the Modern World" (Jonathan Sacks), "Europe: The Exception That Proves the Rule?" (Grace Davie), "The Quest for Meaning: Religion in the People's Republic of China" (Tu Weiming) and "Political Islam in National Politics and International Relations" (Abdullahi A. An-Na'im). Berger's collection is replete with compelling writing about the relationship of religion and politics. (Aug.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. Publishers Weekly "Berger's collection is replete with compelling writing about the relationship of religion and politics." *Vidyajyoti* "This is a very useful collection of studies that can help religious leaders to reorient their strategies and political involvement."