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A Religious Watershed? The ‹Long Sixties› in Long-Term Perspective

Hugh McLeod

We are still close emotionally to the 1960s, and that is as true for historians as for anyone else. Some look back to that decade as a golden age, while others find in those years the roots of everything that is wrong in our present world. Neutrality is rare. But historians of both kinds agree in seeing it as a time of decisive change.

I have myself suggested that future historians may see the ‹Long Sixties›, from about 1958 to 1974,[1] as a watershed in Europe's religious history as significant as the Reformation.[2] In saying this I had in mind the switch from a society seen by believers and non-believers alike as ‹Christian› to one which understood itself as ‹pluralist›, ‹post-Christian› or even ‹secular›. In particular I stressed the breakdown of the processes of Christian socialisation which had operated so powerfully for hundreds of years. I suggested that the ‹Long Sixties› marked the end of one phase of Europe's religious history, the era of Christendom. But I left it open what would take Christendom's place. Other historians have, however, made more confident predictions. Here I shall give three examples.

Three ‹Big Stories› of Contemporary Religious Change

Callum Brown, whose work has focussed mainly on Britain,[3] but has recently ranged more widely to include Canada, the United States (USA) and Ireland,[4]

[1] For the concept of a ‹Long Sixties›, see Arthur Marwick, The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c.1958–1974, Oxford 1998, 7; and for alternative chronologies of the religious ‹Sixties›, Hugh McLeod, The Sixties: writing the religious history of a crucial decade, in: Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte, 14/1 (2001), 36–48, here 39–40. The oil crisis of 1973–4 provides an obvious end-point, but it is less clear when the developments associated with the Sixties first became visible. 1956, 1957, 1958, 1960, as well as later dates, such as 1963, 1964 or even 1965, have all been suggested.

[2] Hugh McLeod, The Religious Crisis of the 1960s, Oxford 2007.

[3] See especially Callum G. Brown, The Death of Christian Britain, London [2]2009.

SZRKG, 107 (2013), 15–31

sees the central theme of the later twentieth century as being the growth in the numbers of people with no religion. This is in stark contrast to the situation obtaining in the 1950s, when a ‹Christian culture› was still dominant. The turning-point came in the 1960s, which he has called ‹the Secularisation Decade›.[5] It was then, Brown argues, that Humanism emerged as the dominant world-view in Western countries. The motor of change, he suggests, has been a revolt in the name of individual freedom against the moral disciplines imposed by the church. These newly dominant Humanist values centre on the individual's control over her or his own body, especially through complete sexual freedom and the right to abortion and assisted suicide. A distinctive feature of Brown's work is the key role he attributes to women. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, he suggests, the dominant ‹Christian culture› depended crucially on the piety of women; in the 1960s this culture collapsed as women refused to accept the sexual morality or the gender roles prescribed by the church, and stopped passing on the family religion to the next generation.

A very different view of the 1960s is presented by the American religious studies scholar Robert Ellwood in a book focused mainly on the USA.[6] His concern is with religious change, rather than religious decline. Indeed, he saw the 1960s as a time of ‹spiritual awakening› – comparable in scale and significance to the other ‹awakenings› in American history, such as those in the 1740s or the early 1800s. This most recent ‹awakening› did indeed mark a break from the past. In the 1800s the key players had been revivalists and other Evangelical preachers. But they played no part in the Sixties ‹awakening›, which was built upon the transition from ‹modern› to ‹post-modern›. Post-modern religion, Ellwood argues, means ‹a world without opposites›, where multiple truths and identities are possible. There are parallels here with the work not only of other American specialists, such as Robert Wuthnow,[7] but also with that of Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead,[8] who have described a ‹Spiritual Revolution› in later twentieth-century England. Here the emphasis is on self-realisation through a ‹holistic› integration of mind, body and spirit – as opposed to any acceptance of a pre-packaged set of beliefs and moral rules. As in Brown's account, individual autonomy is central. But this autonomy does not exclude the possibility of connection with a realm beyond the human. Indeed, slippery as the concept of ‹spirituality› can be, it certainly includes the assumption that the individual is part of a much larger whole, and that full self-realisation is not achieved by a mere self-

[4] Callum G. Brown, Religion and the Demographic Revolution: Women and Secularisation in Canada, Ireland, UK and USA since the 1960s, Woodbridge 2012.

[5] Callum G. Brown, The Secularisation Decade: What the 1960s have done to the study of religious history, in: Hugh McLeod/Werner Ustorf (Ed.), The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe 1750–2000, Cambridge 2003, 29–46.

[6] Robert S. Ellwood, Jr, The Sixties Spiritual Awakening: American Religion moving from Modern to Post-Modern, Brunswick, NJ, 1994.

[7] Robert Wuthnow, After Heaven, Berkeley 1998.

[8] Paul Heelas/Linda Woodhead, The Spiritual Revolution, Oxford 2005.

sufficiency, but requires connection with nature and/or the universe and/or God. Heelas and Woodhead have been criticised for making exaggerated claims for the ‹Spiritual Revolution›, mainly because the number of people actively involved in what they call the ‹holistic milieu› is relatively small.[9] But their most important point is that ideas emanating from this milieu have had a much wider influence on, for example, what people buy when they go shopping, what they read, how they respond to illness and to other personal crises, and perhaps most importantly on the kind of care available through the National Health Service.

A third view is offered by the British and Australian historians, John Wolffe and Mark Hutchinson.[10] They recognise the secularising trend in Europe, and, indeed, in Australia, New Zealand and Canada. And, so far as Britain is concerned, Wolffe has argued that the most important trend, even more important than secularisation, has been the increasing religious pluralism.[11] But in this book, Wolffe and Hutchinson are going global, and for them the biggest story of the Sixties and the decades following was the growth of Evangelical Protestantism. In the Western world, they suggest, the decline has been in liberal and Catholic forms of Christianity. The Evangelicals were certainly growing as a proportion of practising Christians, but maybe even as a proportion of the total population. Evangelical growth was most apparent in the United States. But Evangelical churches were also growing, albeit on a more modest scale, in other countries, such as Britain and Australia. However, the authors argue, we need to move beyond European provincialism. The world's population is moving ‹southwards› – as other scholars, such as Philip Jenkins, have also been emphasising.[12] Evangelical Christianity is growing rapidly in Africa, Latin America and parts of Asia. In the ‹South›, Evangelical Christians are those best adapted to local cultures; in the ‹North› they are better able than liberals and Catholics to survive in a secular climate. They have also been able to recruit disillusioned members of other Christian denominations as well as some of those raised in non-religious homes.

There is an obvious appeal in books which try to tell one big memorable story. They stimulate debate. They often provoke counter-histories, and they certainly sell better than those which stress the contradictions inherent in historical change. There is nonetheless a danger inherent in such projects. Authors have a tendency to get carried away by their enthusiasm for the trends which they are describing, and so are tempted to screen out other significant developments which do not fit into the central narrative. There have been four major religious trends in Western countries in the later twentieth century (three of which were those highlighted in the books mentioned above). They were the growth in con-

[9] Steve Bruce, Secularization: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory, Oxford 2011, 107–112.

[10] Mark Hutchison/John Wolffe, A Short History of Global Evangelicalism, New York 2012.

[11] In his presidential address to the Ecclesiastical History Society 17 July, 2013. See also Gerald Parsons/John Wolffe (Ed.), The Growth of Religious Diversity in Britain from 1945, 3 vols., Manchester 1993.

[12] Philip Jenkins, The Next Christendom, New York 2002.

servative (especially Evangelical Protestant) forms of Christianity; in ‹alternative› spiritualities; in the number of people with no religion; and in religions other than Christianity (especially Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism). While the relative importance of these four trends varied from country to country, each is an essential part of the overall picture. Rather than there being one big story, there are several stories to be told and to gain a balanced view of the changes in this period we need to be sensitive to the complex interaction between these contradictory trends. Maybe the historian who has come closest to doing this is Patrick Pasture, who has identified a number of major trends in later twentieth-century Europe, including not only dechristianisation, but also the blurring of boundaries between religious traditions and between the secular and the religious, and especially the impact of globalisation, which has brought increasing openness to influences from the United States and Asia.[13] He has interpreted these changes in terms of grid-group cultural theory. Grid refers to «the way people relate to each other through a ‹vertical› structure or hierarchy». Group refers to «the boundaries and interaction between ‹insiders› and ‹outsiders›». His argument is that these years saw, both in the USA and in western Europe «a decline of [...] structured human relations and hierarchy on the one hand, and a diminishing social cohesion on the other, leading to a situation of *collective liminality* in which the individual becomes free from ‹traditional› social constraints and must redefine himself.»[14] Here I want to follow his example by asking not so much (as each of studies mentioned above is, in its different ways doing) who were the winners in the religious conflicts of this era, but what were the more general processes of religious change.

Europe and the USA c. 1789–1970

My theme here will be two important processes of change in the 1960s and 1970s which have got overlooked because of a particular way of reading the religious history of the Western world which has become very influential in the early twenty-first century. My story is that it was in the 1960s and 1970s that the countries of western Europe began to *converge* religiously, just as Europe and the United States began to *diverge*.

To understand my argument we need to go back to the debates about ‹American Exceptionalism›, which have embraced politics, welfare, justice – and religion. The scholarly debate goes back at least as far as Werner Sombart's book on

[13] Patrick Pasture, Religious globalisation in post-war Europe, in: Archiv für Sozialgeschichte, 51 (2011), 63–108.

[14] Patrick Pasture, Dechristianization and the changing religious landscape in Europe and North America since 1950, in: Nancy Christie/Michael Gauvreau (Ed.), The Sixties and Beyond: Dechristianization in North America and Western Europe, 1945–2000, Toronto 2013, 367–402, here 370.

the lack of socialism in the United States.[15] More recently, the British sociologist, Grace Davie, focusing specifically on religion, has argued for a *European* Exceptionalism.[16] Her argument is that the low levels of belief and practice in the majority of European countries that are revealed by international surveys are exceptional in a worldwide perspective, and that the higher figures reported in the United States are more in line with the global situation. Davie collaborated with Peter Berger and Ellie Fokas to explore American/European differences in greater historical depth in a series of essays entitled *Religious America, Secular Europe?* While the title includes a question mark, Berger at least had no doubts.[17] He argued that present differences have deep historical roots, the key factor being the Enlightenment, which had a strongly anti-clerical, sometimes anti-Christian character in France, but not in North America. Secularism, he suggested, became a dominant influence in Europe in the nineteenth century, driven especially by intellectuals and by the education system.

In my opinion, this is a one-sided reading both of American and of European history. There are indeed important religious differences between the United States and most European countries at the present day. For example, more Americans go to church regularly, and Americans are more likely to say that they believe in God, that they pray regularly, and that religion is important in their lives. The clearest differences are in politics. Religious variables are among the best predictors of how people will vote, and religion has proved a powerful mobilising force. Professions of piety are expected of those seeking high office in the USA, while in Europe even those politicians who are committed believers seldom talk publicly about their religion.[18] However this clear division between a more ‹religious› America and a more ‹secular› Europe is a recent development.

Western Europe from the 1790s to the 1960s was highly diverse religiously.[19] It was characteristic of this period that huge differences opened up between the religiosity of nations, regions, social classes. In societies where both religion and politics were deeply divisive, loyalties to a community of fellow-believers were a central part of many people's lives. On top of the older divisions between Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed and Anglican, newer differences contributed to this diversity. The key factors influencing these differences were political. Churches and secularist movements were intimately involved in the processes of social emancipation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and sometimes in the powerful nationalist movements which developed in many parts of Europe in

15 Werner Sombart, Warum gibt es in den Vereinigten Staaten keinen Sozialismus?, Tübingen 1906.
16 Grace Davie, Europe, the Exceptional Case, London 2002.
17 Peter Berger/Grace Davie/Ellie Fokas, Religious America, Secular Europe? A Theme and Variations, Aldershot 2008, 17–20.
18 For a summary of present-day differences, see Davie, Europe (see note 16).
19 See Hugh McLeod, Religion and the People of Western Europe, 1789–1989, Oxford 1997, for an extended discussion of this theme.

the early nineteenth century.[20] Secularism was indeed an important part of this history, but so were the Christian churches. In religiously mixed countries, such as Britain, Ireland, Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands, Christian denominations were in competition with one another. Even in apparently homogeneous countries, such as Denmark or Spain, there were important divisions within the national church. At the same time, Christian churches everywhere recognised the threat of secularisation and formulated counter-strategies – strategies that were sometimes very effective, sometimes less effective or even counter-productive. The tragic history of Spain offers only the most extreme example of the depth of religious divisions in European countries in this period and the close interconnection of religion and politics.

Especially from the later nineteenth century churches and political parties built up a network of associated institutions which potentially enclosed their members within a self-contained world where religious and political beliefs and loyalties were reinforced by the fact that family, friends and neighbours all seemed to think alike.[21] Grace Davie famously defined the later twentieth century as a time of ‹believing without belonging›:[22] the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth were emphatically times of ‹belonging›. In the gradual transition from the hierarchical and highly controlled society of the *ancien régime* to one that was relatively democratic and provided a measure of individual freedom and opportunity, emancipation was a collective phenomenon. In the confessional state, religious minorities, whether Catholic, Protestant or Jewish, often suffered limits on their right to worship and always faced other forms of discrimination. Inevitably the fight for religious freedom and equality required collective political action. The later nineteenth century saw a proliferation of political parties with an explicitly religious basis, the prototype being the German Centre Party; meanwhile other parties, ranging from the strongly Protestant German Conservatives to the anti-clerical French Radicals, attracted voters by identifying with their religious or anti-religious convictions. But, equally, the struggles of subordinate social classes and subject peoples frequently had a religious dimension. In Britain the free churches were closely linked with labour organisation in certain industries, notably mining.[23] In the Netherlands the dissident Calvinist churches had their strongholds in the lower middle class and led

[20] See Sheridan Gilley/Brian Stanley (Ed.), Cambridge History of Christianity, Vol. VIII, World Christianities c.1815–c.1914, Cambridge 2006, which focuses especially on churches and national identities.

[21] McLeod, Religion and the People (see note 19), 36.

[22] Grace Davie, Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging, Oxford 1994.

[23] Hugh McLeod, Religion and the organization of the working class in Great Britain, c.1830–1960, in: Lex Heerma van Voss/Patrick Pasture/Jan De Maeyer (Ed.), Between Cross and Class: Comparative Histories of Christian Labour in Europe 1840–2000, Bern 2005, 285–304.

the opposition to bourgeois Liberalism.[24] In Germany, as in some other countries, Social Democracy came to be closely allied with Freethought. [25]And so on, and so on.

With the advent of mass politics in the later nineteenth century, political and religious differences were mutually reinforcing. Within most countries there was a deep divide between the intense religiosity of some sections of the population and the equally strongly felt secularism of other sections. This divisions followed a number of characteristic patterns. The most familiar is that of *polarised* societies, such as France or Spain, in which a Catholic Right confronted an anti-clerical and mainly secular Left. This is the model on which Berger mainly draws in juxtaposing European and American patterns of religious development. But there were also *pillarised* societies, such as the Netherlands, with a number of religio-political communities, in this instance Protestant, Catholic, Dissenting Calvinist and secularist, none strong enough to dominate the others, so that alliances between them had to be forged at the national level, although at the local level they were organised into tightly-knit sub-cultures. There were *pluralist* societies, such as Britain, with an established church and a multiplicity of smaller denominations, which together formed the bedrock of political Liberalism. There were societies whose religious culture was shaped by nationalism, such as Ireland where this nationalism was strongly Catholic, and the Czech Lands, where it was mainly secular. The Nordic countries also developed in a distinctive way. Lutheranism enjoyed a pervasive cultural influence and very high levels of church membership and participation in the rites of passage, but from the later nineteenth century onwards there were low levels of regular church-going.[26]

The USA in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth was *differently* religious from European countries but not *more* religious. The most obvious and widely discussed difference was the early separation of church and state in the First Amendment to the American Constitution in 1791. Admittedly the Netherlands followed in 1796, though arguably the continuing limits on religious freedom meant that this only became a reality after 1848.[27] But elsewhere in Europe separation came much later, the most influential example being France in 1905, and in circumstances that were sometimes very different. In countries such as France and Spain the separation was surrounded by an acrimony that was quite lacking in the USA. This had important implications for

[24] Peter van Rooden, Long-term religious developments in the Netherlands, c.1750–2000, in: Hugh McLeod/Werner Ustorf (Ed.), The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe 1750–2000, Cambridge 2003, 113–129, here 121–122.

[25] Todd Weir, Secularism and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Germany: The Fourth Confession (forthcoming, Cambridge University Press).

[26] For the Swedish example, see Erik Sidenvall, A classic case of de-christianisation? Religious change in Scandinavia, c.1750–2000, in Callum G. Brown/Michael Snape (Ed.), Secularisation in the Christian World, Farnham 2010, 119–133.

[27] James C. Kennedy/Jan P. Zwemer, Religion in the modern Netherlands and the problems of pluralism, in: The Low Countries Historical Review, 125/2–3 (2010), 237–268, here 243–247.

the political development of the USA. With no monarchy, aristocracy or state church, the kind of anti-clerical Liberalism and Radicalism that developed so strongly in many parts of Europe in the nineteenth century had little relevance. The ‹free exercise› clause of the Constitution and the lack of a privileged state church opened the field both legally and psychologically for the emergence of, and competition between, a huge variety of (mainly Evangelical Protestant) denominations. However, the uniqueness of the American situation should not be overstated. The existence of the established churches of England and Scotland did not prevent the emergence of an almost equally wide variety of (mainly Evangelical Protestant) denominations in Britain.[28] Moreover there were limits to America's religious freedom and equality. In what remained until the later nineteenth century an overwhelmingly Protestant nation, Catholics and Mormons faced discrimination and sometimes violence. Also the absence of a formal religious establishment in the USA did not preclude the existence well into the twentieth century of an informal religious establishment, whereby one or two denominations, most often the Episcopalians, Presbyterians or Congregationalists, stood far ahead of the others in wealth and status.[29]

Two other major differences between Europe and the USA are worth noting. First, foreign immigration has played a central role in the history of the USA. Its role in European history, at least until the later twentieth century, has been much more limited. Some American historians have gone so far as to posit an archetypal ‹immigrant experience›, of which religion was an integral part.[30] This overlooks the considerable differences between immigrant communities. Nonetheless it is true that churches and synagogues (and now mosques and temples) potentially have had a very important role in communities of first and second-generation immigrants. This was true, for example, of Irish immigrants in England and Scotland, and also of the larger communities of Irish immigrants in the United States. On the other hand, churches played a smaller role in the also very large and important immigration from Germany. And to take another very important group, it is arguable that immigration to the USA had on balance a secularising effect on Jewish migrants from eastern Europe.[31] Second, there was the existence of slavery in the USA until 1865 and the central role which race has continued to play in American society since then. In particular, the former slave states of the South have had a distinctive religious history since the Civil War, which has no parallel elsewhere in the Western world. In the period after the Civil War the church became a central institution both for black and for white Southerners, al-

[28] David W. Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain and America: A Comparison, in: George A. Rawlyk/Mark Noll (Ed.), Amazing Grace, Montreal 1994, 183–212, provides a well-balanced view both of similarities and of differences.

[29] For the example of New York, Hugh McLeod, Piety and Poverty: Working class Religion in Berlin, London/New York, 1870–1914, New York 1996, 50.

[30] Timothy Smith, Religion and ethnicity in America, in: American Historical Review, 83 (1978), 1155–1185.

[31] McLeod, Piety and Poverty (see note 29), 52–80.

beit for different reasons. In spite of denominational diversity, one form of Christianity, namely Evangelical Protestantism was heavily dominant. Moreover Southern churches were relatively little affected by the currents if liberalism and modernism which were powerfully influencing churches in the North by the early twentieth century. Southern churches continued to be not only conservative, but also well-attended and well-rooted in popular culture.[32] Even today, nine of the ten states with the highest reported church attendance are in the South.[33]

In the period from the Second World War to the early 1970s the religious trajectory of the USA was similar to that of many west European countries. Michael Snape has drawn strong parallels between the role of Christianity in the United States and the United Kingdom during World War II. In both countries governments saw religion as an essential foundation for the morale of the fighting forces and of those at home.[34] In the USA the later 1940s and '50s were the years of the ‹Religious Revival›, partly shaped by the experience first of war against the ‹pagan› Nazis, then of the Cold War against the ‹godless› Soviets, as well as by the unprecedented state investment in religion during World War II (in spite of the supposed separation of church and state). Both in the USA and in many parts of Europe the prestige and political influence of the church was at a high point in the post-war years. In terms of church-going, the USA stood above the European average, but on a level with such countries as Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy or Austria, and far below Ireland (and of course the more intensely Catholic regions in such polarised societies as France and Spain). Still in the 1950s there were very big differences in levels of church-going both between countries, and often within countries. France is the best-documented example. In 1958, in the Breton parish of Limerzel the subject of a fine study by Yves Lambert, 92% of the adult population went to mass regularly. At the other extreme in the Limousin there were many parishes where no men at all went to mass.[35] There were also huge class differences. A count of mass attendance in the diocese of Montpellier in 1962 found that among professionals 47% of women and 34% of men went to church on the census day, while among workers 11% of women and 4% of men did so.[36]

In terms of politics, this was the golden age of Christian Democracy, and the role of religion in politics was much more conspicuous in such European countries as Belgium, the Netherlands or Italy than it was in the USA. Right up to the

[32] See for example the essays in Charles Wilson/Mark Silk (Ed.), Religion and Public Life in the South, Walnut Creek 2005.

[33] Wikipedia article on ‹Church attendance in the USA› (accessed 22 January 2013), citing a Gallup Poll of 2009.

[34] Michael F. Snape, War, religion and revival: the United States, British and Canadian armies during the Second World War, in: Brown/Snape (Ed.), Secularisation (see note 26), 135–157.

[35] Yves Lambert, Dieu change en Bretagne, Paris 1985, 241–247; Gérard Cholvy/Yves-Marie Hilaire, Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine, 1930/1988, Toulouse 1988, 195.

[36] Gérard Cholvy, Sociologie religieuse de l'Hérault contemporain, Paris 1968.

1970s religion was a key influence on voting in many European countries. A handbook of electoral behaviour, drawing mainly on data from the 1960s and early 70s, concluded that «the general rule seems to be that religious differentiation intrudes on partisan political alignments in unexpectedly powerful ways wherever it conceivably can».[37] A comparison of voting patterns in twelve countries in western and northern Europe found that religious variables were the best predictors of voting behaviour in six, economic variables in five, and regional differences in one.[38] In recent years the clearest area of religious difference between the USA and western Europe has been the stronger connection between religion and politics in the former country. However, this is a recent development. The turning-point was the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 and his effective use of what political scientists have called the ‹God Strategy›.[39]

Then in the 1960s church-going was in decline, priests were resigning, atheists were ‹coming out›, and a huge variety of new ‹spiritual› options were opening up on both sides of the Atlantic. The religious trends in the USA and Europe seemed very similar. In fact many of the new trends in these years started in the USA before crossing the ocean.[40]

Europe and the USA since the 1970s

Only in the 1970s were the USA and Europe clearly moving in different directions. In fact the main trends mentioned above were common to both sides of the Atlantic, though the growth of conservative forms of Protestantism clearly went further in the USA than elsewhere and in some European countries, notably France and the Netherlands, the growth in the numbers both of Muslims and of those with no religion went much further than in the USA. The turning-point came about 1972. In the USA the level of church-going, which had been falling since the later 1950s, stabilised. By the middle and later 1970s there was a revival in new church-building, after the slump of the later '60s and early '70s, as well as a rise in the sale of religious books. Indeed several of the best-sellers of the decade were of an Evangelical nature, most notably Hal Lindsey's apocalyptic *Late Great Planet Earth* and Marabel Morgan's sex manual, *The Total Woman*. Most conspicuously the later Seventies saw the emergence of what came to be known as the Religious Right. The role of Evangelical preachers such as Jerry Falwell in the election of Ronald Reagan proved that politically

[37] Philip E. Converse, Some priority variables in comparative electoral research, in: Richard Rose (Ed.), Electoral Behavior: A Comparative Handbook, New York 1974, 734.

[38] Richard Rose, Comparability in electoral studies, in: Rose (Ed.), Electoral behavior (see note 37), 17.

[39] David Domke/Kevin Coe, The God Strategy: How Religion became a Political Weapon in America, New York 2008.

[40] McLeod, Religious Crisis (see note 2), 61, 124, 141 and passim.

conservative Christians were a force to be reckoned with, as they remained for at least the next thirty years.[41]

Meanwhile in Europe church-going continued to go down, as did attendance at Sunday Schools and catechism classes, and participation in the rites of passage. The growth in the numbers both of religious ‹Nones› and of Muslims (and to a lesser extent of Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists) was making for an increasingly pluralistic, even ‹post-Christian› context.[42]

If the extent of the difference between Europe and the USA was new, equally new was the degree of convergence between trends in different parts of non-Communist Europe. For example, only Ireland was not affected by the catastrophic decline in Christian religious practice in the 1960s and '70s. And it has been powerfully argued by Louise Fuller that there were secularising trends even in Ireland which prepared the way for the decline in church-going and the other problems faced by the Catholic church in Ireland in the 1990s.[43]

The distinctive social-political contexts that had shaped European religion for the past century and a half were beginning to disappear. It is important to note that political loyalties were loosening at the same time. The forms of ‹belonging› which had been so important for several generations now seemed less relevant. Indeed many people were coming to resent the limitations on their individual freedom that these presented. The later 1950s and '60s were the years of the West German ‹economic miracle›; of France's ‹thirty glorious years› of economic growth; the time when the British had ‹never had it so good›. In this period of unprecedented ‹affluence› large numbers of working-class and lower middle-class people were able for the first time to enjoy what had previously been luxuries available only to the wealthy – cars, washing machines, televisions, foreign holidays, owning their own home [...]. Subtle changes in life-styles ensued. Boundaries between social classes were blurred: certainly there was still a small minority of the rich and a larger minority of the poor, but, within the much larger category of those in-between, differences of class and status were less sharply defined than in earlier times. Affluence loosened ties with neighbours and kin as the younger generation felt less in need of the support they could provide, and better able to refuse the constraints these imposed (including, for example, the pressure to attend church, to have their child baptised, or to vote for a particular political party).[44]

41 For useful overviews of religious trends in the 1970s in the USA, see, for example, Ronald Flowers, Religion in Strange Times, no place of publication stated 1984; Paul Boyer, The Evangelical resurgence in 1970s American Protestantism, in: Bruce J. Schulman/Julian E. Zelizer (Ed.), Rightward Bound, Cambridge Mass. 2008, 29–51.

42 McLeod, Religion and the People (see note 19), 144–147; Jean-Louis Ormières, L'Europe désenchantée, Paris 2005, 28–29, 75; Grace Davie, Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates, Oxford 2000, 71–78.

43 Louise Fuller, Catholicism in twentieth-century Ireland: From ‹an atmosphere steeped in the faith› to *à la carte* Catholicism, in: Journal of Religion in Europe, 5/4 (2102), 484–513.

44 McLeod, Religious Crisis (see note 2), chapters 3 and 5.

At the same time the boundaries between Catholic and Protestant, and between the various branches of Protestantism were also becoming blurred. Sometimes this was because of indifference. But equally important was a growing openness among religious believers to other traditions. The key event here was the Second Vatican Council, which revolutionised relations between Catholics and other Christians at the grass-roots level. Vatican II encouraged lay Catholics to read the Bible, promoted the ‹apostolate of the laity› and, unintentionally, encouraged lay Catholics to adopt a ‹Protestant› degree of independence in ethical and even doctrinal matters. That was certainly one of the consequences, again obviously unintended, of *Humanae Vitae*. Meanwhile, many Protestants were borrowing from the Catholic and Orthodox repertoire of devotional practices – going on pilgrimages, lighting candles in front of icons, travelling to the *Protestant monastery* at Taizé. This openness went further still: the great efflorescence in the 1960s of ‹Eastern› religion, New Age practices, pagan revival, was partly in conscious reaction to anything Christian, but there were also points of overlap as the new ‹spirituality› influenced Christians and ‹religion› merged with the ‹spiritual›.[45]

As the religious and ‹spiritual› options multiplied and inherited religious identities were increasingly modified, or even rejected, individual choice had an increasing role. In societies where individual rights and individual freedom were valued more than national traditions or religious and moral rules, there has been an ironing out of the huge differences between and within countries. For example in Belgium church-going has declined both in the Dutch-speaking north and in the French-speaking south. But since the decline has been most rapid in the historically more ‹religious› north, the gap between them is now quite narrow. Between 1967 and 1993 average attendance at mass fell from 34% to 13% in the south, but in the north the drop was from 52% to 17%.[46] This is not to say that national differences have entirely disappeared. For example, a distinctive religious profile has developed in the Netherlands, including both an unusually high number of people declaring no religion, with a large element among them of militant secularists, and a ‹Bible Belt› where conservative Protestantism remains strong. England also has a distinctive character arising from the continuing presence of an Established Church which has a privileged position in public debate because of its representation in the upper house of the legislature and the assumption by the media that it is, whether for good or for ill, a necessary and important aspect of national life. Yet this contrasts with an unusual degree of practical religious pluralism, in that the majority of church-going Christians, let alone

[45] Pasture, Religious globalisation (see note 13), 96–105; Hugh McLeod, New forms of pilgrimage, in: Antón M. Pazos (Ed.), Pilgrims and Politics: Rediscovering the Power of Pilgrimage, Farnham 2012, 187–201, here 195–201.

[46] Liliane Voyé, Belgique: Crise de la civilisation paroissiale et recompositions du croire, in: Grave Davie/Danièle Hervieu-Léger (Ed.), Identités religieuses en Europe, Paris 1996, 195–213, here 203.

those belonging to other faiths, prefer places of worship outside the Establishment. One could certainly multiply these examples of distinctive religious profiles. Yet these national differences have narrowed very considerably since the 1950s, and the major trends are common to the various countries of western Europe.

The USA since the 1960s has had a religious history which in many respects parallels that of Europe. The most obvious similarity has been in the history of the Catholic church, where the impact of Vatican II, of *Humanae Vitae*, and later of John Paul II, as well as the decline in attendance at mass and the slump in vocations followed a similar pattern on either side of the Atlantic.[47] But there have also been important differences, some of which relate to the historic differences between Europe and the USA which were mentioned above.

Differences in the relationship between church and state are no longer so obvious, as most European states formally separated church and state at some point in the twentieth century, but neither in the USA nor in Europe does the formal relationship matter as much as a whole range of other factors relating to the place of religion in the education and welfare systems or to the ways in which churches can raise money.[48] In most parts of Europe, in fact, the rapid secularisation of individual behaviour since the 1960s contrasts with the continuing importance of the Churches as public institutions with an impact on many areas of life. For example, in Germany the Catholic Caritas and the Protestant Church's Diaconal Work have key roles in the welfare system; in England church schools are flourishing – their supporters and their critics disagree as to the reasons for their popularity, but nobody doubts that they are popular; and the Church has been in many countries one of the strongest voices in support of the rights of immigrants and asylum-seekers. One can see a measure of convergence in the field of church-state relations too. Even France, with its treasured *laicité,* has provided public money for church schools since 1959, and national differences in legislation relating to such controversial areas as divorce, homosexuality, contraception, abortion and Sunday observance have narrowed very considerably since the 1960s.

Other areas of difference between Europe and the USA are still relevant. To take the clearest example: immigration has continued to have a big influence on American religion, and an influence which has mainly been beneficial to the Christian churches. The USA, like western Europe, saw a massive influx of immigrants from other regions of the world in the later twentieth century. But whereas in Europe the majority of these immigrants were non-Christian, most often Muslim, in the USA the majority were Christian.[49] The Catholic church espe-

[47] Leslie Woodcock Tentler, Sex and subculture: American Catholicism since 1945, in: Christie/Gauvreau, Sixties and Beyond (see note 14), 157–185.

[48] See Gerhard Robbers (Ed.), Church and State in the European Union, Baden-Baden 1996; Corwin E. Smidt/Lyman A. Kellstedt/James L. Guth, The Oxford Handbook of Religion and American Politics, New York 2009.

[49] Barry A. Kosmin/Seymour P. Lachman, One Nation under God: Religion in Contemporary American Society, New York 1993, 125–126, 132–142, 147–151.

cially, and other churches too, have benefited from the religious commitment of many of these newcomers. Second, the strength of the Evangelical churches in the USA and especially their role in the South clearly marks an important area of difference between the USA and Europe. As Wolffe and Hutchinson show, Evangelical churches were growing in many countries in the 1970s. To take one example, Britain in that decade saw a mushrooming of ‹house churches›, ‹church centres› and ‹Christian fellowships› usually growing out of the Charismatic Movement. It is estimated that between 1975 and 1992, membership of British Pentecostal churches grew by 62% and of independent congregations by 42%. But they started from a much smaller base than their counterparts in the USA, and Evangelical growth was in no way sufficient to compensate for the losses suffered by other churches. In the same period it is estimated that overall church membership fell by 16%.[50] Moreover American Evangelicalism's bastion, the South, was economically booming and growing in political clout in the '70s. Most of the televangelists who became the Evangelical celebrities of the 1970s and '80s were Southerners, and the second major Evangelical stronghold, southern California, had been strongly influenced by migration from the rural South in the 1930s and '40s.[51]

However the biggest difference between the USA and Europe lay in the uniquely traumatic impact of ‹the Sixties› in the USA. The most important reason for this was the Vietnam War, bringing the deaths of many young Americans, and giving all Americans their first experience of defeat in a foreign war.[52] Few wars in the history of the USA, or of any other country, have provoked so much passionate opposition. For many Americans the war was a deep disgrace, a travesty of all that their nation claimed to stand for. But for many others the real disgrace was the disloyalty of so many of their compatriots, whose failure to support their president had brought a once invincible nation to defeat. The USA in the 1970s was undergoing a polarisation between ‹conservatives› and ‹liberals› rather like that in nineteenth-century France. Other aspects of the 1960s also played a part, albeit a smaller part, in this polarisation. The ‹sexual revolution› was of course as big a part of European as of American history in this period but in the USA the fact that it came to be associated with other more obviously political concerns provoked a stronger ‹backlash›.[53] Of these political concerns, the Civil Rights Movement was second only in importance to the war. For many Christians, white as well as black, it was an unquestionably righteous cause, and in particular Martin Luther King Jr was revered as an outstanding example of a Christian political leader fighting with Christian weapons. But there were also

[50] Davie, Religion in Britain (see note 22), 46
[51] Darren Dochuk, From Bible Belt to Sunbelt, New York 2011.
[52] Wade Clark Roof, A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation, San Francisco 1993, 38–41, discusses the deeply polarising effects of the war.
[53] Robert D. Putnam/David E. Campbell, American Grace, New York 2010, 114–119, goes much further than I would in identifying differing sexual ethics as the key to the religious divisions in the USA.

many white Americans, especially in the South, who saw things differently. They might no longer be prepared to defend segregation, but they believed that desegregation had gone too far too fast, and they were still smarting from the pain of the defeats they had suffered in the '60s. One response to the integration of the public schools was the foundation of a wave of ‹Christian schools› across the South. The number of children enrolled in these schools increased by 95% in the course of the '70s. ‹Christian› in this context meant conservative Evangelical and very largely white.[54]

As in nineteenth-century France those on either side of the divide became more active and militant. On the conservative side, Evangelical churches emerged as key players. They had been growing in the 1960s, and this continued in the '70s and into the '80s.[55] Membership of ‹mainline› Protestant churches was falling in this period, as was Catholic mass attendance. But so far as the overall statistics of church membership were concerned, these losses were counter-balanced by the impressive growth of Evangelical churches, as well as of some other conservative denominations, such as the Mormons. By far the largest of these Evangelical churches were the Southern Baptists, who continued to grow in the South, but were expanding into other regions. Evangelical churches were also growing in the West, historically the region where church membership was lowest. A variety of factors contributed to Evangelical growth. As already indicated, their political conservatism appealed to many of those who believed that America had taken a wrong turn – including many of those who had dropped out of church in the '60s, but were now married and bringing up children. But the Evangelicals also showed great energy and resourcefulness in reaching out to the younger generation and to non-church-goers by establishing new kinds of congregation and new forms of worship, or using new methods of evangelism.[56]

On the liberal side there were many members of the ‹mainline› Protestant churches, as well as Catholics and observant Jews. But the later '60s and the '70s also saw the growth of a more overtly secular section of the population.[57] This included political radicals, many of them Marxists; feminists and militant gays, who believed that the Christian and Jewish religions had played a major role in their oppression; and others whose better future was to be achieved through an individual liberation, in which sexual freedom or experimentation with prohibited drugs often played a major part. There were also civil libertarians who wanted a stricter separation of church and state. Meanwhile, there was increasing religious experimentation in terms of which individuals felt free to draw on a va-

[54] Erling Jorstad, Popular Religion in America: The Evangelical Voice, Westport Conn. 1993, 26–30.

[55] Mark Noll, A History of the Christian Churches in the United States and Canada, Grand Rapids 1992.

[56] Jorstad, Popular Religion (see note 54); Mark Shibley, Resurgent Evangelicalism in the United States, New York 1996; Stewart M. Hoover, The cross at Willow Creek, in: Bruce Forbes/Jeffrey Mahan (Ed.), Religion and Popular Culture in America, Berkeley 2000, 145–159.

[57] Roof, Generation of Seekers (see note 52), 54–60.

riety of traditions, rather than being constrained by the disciplines and dogmas of one church.[58] Each of the latter groups contributed to the growing and highly diverse constituency of religious ‹Nones›.

In the nineteenth century European countries became increasingly religiously diverse. Indeed, one European country, Great Britain, was closer religiously to the United States than to any other European country. In most European countries, in spite of the growing importance of secularism and religious doubt, the Christian churches remained central to the lives of large parts of the population. From about 1890 Britain and the USA began very gradually to move apart religiously as secularising trends moved faster in Britain than in the USA. But in many other parts of Europe levels of religious practice remained high until the 1960s. Still in the 1950s and early '60s the divisions in European societies between Catholic, Protestant and Jew, between the devout, the indifferent and the committed secularists remained highly visible and were familiar to everyone. Only in the 1970s can we begin to speak in general of a more ‹religious› America and a more ‹secular› Europe. Only then can we speak of an ‹American Exceptionalism› or a ‹European Exceptionalism› in religion. In a Western context this ‹Exceptionalism› was American; in a global context it was European. But whether this separation between ‹America› and ‹Europe› is a long-term trend, or just a blip, remains to be seen.

A Religious Watershed? The ‹Long Sixties› in Long-Term Perspective

The ‹Long Sixties› were a time of religious change throughout the Western world. But historians disagree fundamentally as to the central thrust of these changes. Was it, for example, a time of ‹spiritual awakening› (Ellwood), or the ‹secularisation decade› in which Humanism became the dominant world-view (Brown)? This raises further questions. Is there indeed one ‹big story› to tell about the Sixties, or should we think of a complex interweaving of a series of sometimes contradictory ‹smaller stories›? And is the European story different from the American?

The ‹Long Sixties – ‹spiritual awakening› – secularisation narrative – a number of ‹smaller stories› – religion in Europe and America.

Ein religiöser Wendepunkt? Die ‹langen Sechzigerjahre› in einer Langzeitperspektive

Die ‹langen Sechzigerjahre› waren eine Zeit religiösen Wandels in der ganzen westlichen Welt. Doch bestehen fundamentale Widersprüche der historischen Deutung bezüglich der Hauptausrichtung dieser Transformationen. Kann von einer Zeit ‹spirituellen Erwachens› (Ellwood) gesprochen werden, oder viel eher von einer ‹Dekade der Säkularisierung›, in welcher Humanismus die zentrale Weltanschauung wurde (Brown)? Damit sind weitere Fragen aufgeworfen. Kann wirklich eine ‹grosse Geschichte› der Sechziger erzählt werden, oder sollten wir nicht vielmehr von einer komplexen Verschränkung verschiedenster, zuweilen gegensätzlicher ‹kleinerer Geschichten› sprechen? Und ist die europäische Geschichte eine andere als die amerikanische?

Die ‹langen Sechzigerjahre – ‹spritiuelles Erwachen› – Säkularsierungsnarrativ – zahlreiche ‹kleinere Geschichten› – Religion in Europa und den USA.

[58] Robert Wuthnow, Experimentation in American Religion, Berkeley 1978.

Une péripétie religieuse? Les ‹longues années soixante› dans une perspective de longue durée

Les ‹longues années soixante› ont été une période de changement religieux dans tout le monde occidental. Mais les avis des historiens divergent quant à l'axe principal de ces développements. S'agissait-il par exemple d'un temps de ‹réveil spirituel› (Ellwood), ou d'une ‹décennie de sécularisation› au cours de laquelle l'humanisme s'est imposé en tant que vision du monde dominante (Brown)? Cette pensée soulève d'autres questions encore. Y a-t-il une seule ‹grande histoire› à raconter sur les années soixante, ou existe-t-il plutôt une série de ‹petites histoires› entremêlées, parfois contradictoires? Et l'histoire européenne est-elle différente de l'histoire américaine?

Les ‹longues années soixante› – ‹réveil spirituel› – le récit de sécularisation – une série de ‹petites histoires› – religion en Europe et aux Etats-Unis.

Una svolta religiosa? I ‹lunghi anni sessanta› in una prospettiva di lunga durata

Per il mondo occidentale i ‹lunghi anni sessanta› si sono rivelati un periodo di cambiamenti importanti nell'ambito religioso. Eppure gli storici non sono in accordo riguardo all'origine di questi cambiamenti. Si tratta per esempio di un periodo di ‹risveglio spirituale› (Ellwood) o di ‹secolarizzazione decadente› durante il quale l'umanesimo diventa la visione del mondo predominante (Brown)? Questa riflessione fa sorgere nuove domande. In effetti, riguardo agli anni sessanta possiamo raccontare una ‹grande storia› o dobbiamo piuttosto pensare a un complesso intreccio di una serie di ‹piccole storie› a volte contradittorie? Oltretutto, la storia europea è diversa da quella americana?

I ‹lunghi anni sessanta› – ‹risveglio spirituale› – la narrazione di secolarizzazione – una serie di ‹piccole storie› – religione in Europa e negli Stati Uniti.

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