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2018

The changing face of Australia: From secular to post-secular identity

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Chapter 6. Reconsidering the Literature and Interviews

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 will reconsider the main themes raised by the literature, integrating these with the interviews and my written reflections throughout the research process. I aim to provide further insight and discussion of the implications of these perspectives. To achieve this I relived the interviews; that is, I re-listened to them and followed along with the transcripts to bring to mind the conversations and issues raised. I once again identified the key ideas and the way these were framed by the participants, as well as my reactions to them as reflected upon in my journaling. This aligns with hermeneutic phenomenological methods, which seek meanings and understandings from sustained reflections; for me, this meant returning to the texts for further insights and reconsidering the essential meanings considered so far.

Regan describes hermeneutics as a fluid set of guidelines that ‘aid the human search for truth’.⁶³³ This means that the research participant’s life experience ‘is in a sense not only their individual experience but also experience valued in relation to universality’.⁶³⁴ Through this possibility of universality I am able to consider the wider impacts of the participant’s ideas and experiences. I do so not to find the ‘truth’ – and therefore the ‘last word’ on the topic – but, rather, to open up partial truths and explore their implications. I hoped to tap into the participants *Dasein*, their being-in-the-world, and use that to inspire reflective moments for them, and for me, during the interviews. This chapter considers these moments and further ‘unpacks’ them.

In this first section, I discuss the secular. In writing this section I bring together the perspectives shared and touched on by the participants in the interviews to piece together

⁶³³Regan, 'Hans-Georg Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics: Concepts of Reading, Understanding and Interpretation', (pp .290–91.

⁶³⁴Ibid.

their thoughts into a summary of their positions. For this, I had to see the interviews as hermeneutic interviews. These are interviews in which meanings become known by being uncovered and explored, rather than viewed as pre-existing understandings. For these stories, I considered the way that interviewing supports a dialogic process in which both the participants and I co-create meanings.⁶³⁵ A fusion of our ideas took place, with a resultant opening up and merging of horizons.

Stories crafted in hermeneutic phenomenology are thus a provocative and powerful means of evoking shared pathic responses (van Manen, 2014). They can communicate the way we humans make sense of events and relationships, both with ourselves and with others. In a story, we encounter ourselves in dialogue and experience ourselves in different ways. As Gadamer (1976) explains, we are at once interpreting and making the story our own; understanding a story is to 'always and already' to understand and recognize ourselves within it.⁶³⁶

To do this, I have centred the sections of this chapter on what I consider the most significant reflections in my journals. They form the basis of the discussion in the chapter, together with the literature that underpins these ideas and the interviews. Each section in this chapter considers a key argument followed by a discussion. I found strong associations with and between some ideas, disagreed with a number, and recognised those I had taken for granted. This re-examination allowed me to distinguish my own blind spots. Throughout this process, I have paid close attention to the inner movements of my thinking to be aware of my responses, combining these with the discussion in this chapter. My reflections are found in text boxes and offer a sample of my thoughts throughout the research journey.

Horizons

To be able to consider the responses from the participants, I needed to reflect on their Gadamerian 'horizons', their range of vision, and be able to place their perspective within a

⁶³⁵ R Vandermause and S Fleming, 'Philosophical Hermeneutic Interviewing', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 10/4 (2011). p. 396.

⁶³⁶S. Crowther et al., 'Crafting Stories in Hermeneutic Phenomenology Research: A Methodological Device', *Qual Health Res*, (Jun 26 2016).p. 2.

hermeneutic framework. For the participants, this horizon indicates their understandings and unique vantage point, while also limiting their vision to what can be seen at any given time. For me as the researcher it was equally important to realise I was also 'limited' by my horizons. Most of the participants had worked many years in their field of inquiry and were situated in secular institutions and frameworks, which influenced the positions and issues they discussed. Their academic backgrounds were not solely from religious studies, but a mix of the liberal arts including psychology, sociology and history. Although most of them had been teaching and/or writing about religion and spirituality for many years, they were doing so framed by their horizon. This opened up a range of possibilities to me, as I discovered that their positions reflected this broad range of influences, yet were also intensely focused on a relationship to the secular that was open to change, an evolving perspective. The influence this may have on their responses was something I needed to deliberate on. Would it mean they were more, or less, sympathetic to secular and post-secular viewpoints? Regardless, Gadamer's horizon's suggests a person 'lives' in their horizon, influenced by their prejudgements and historical experiences.

The potential 'bias' or 'prejudice' that each participant brought to the discussions was important for me to think about. Although the participants are known as experts, and their contributions to the world of academia and beyond largely well-respected, I wondered if this was enough for the integrity of this research. Nevertheless, these participants brought their lived experience, their horizons, into my view. The fusion of horizons that occurred through these discussions led me to an enlightening conclusion as, according to Gadamer, 'what makes a limit a limit always also includes knowledge of what is on both sides of it'⁶³⁷. For me, this meant that understanding became a real possibility when I became aware of my

⁶³⁷Gadamer, *Truth and Method.*, p. 343.

limited horizon, and the potential for it to be expanded by my encounter with another's horizon.

REFLECTION

Secular influence is strongly viewed as a progressive agenda in some of the literature as it

- ❖ Empowers *freedom to choose* religion or not
- ❖ situates the individual as having progressed to the point that they are *self-authoring*
- ❖ is a further development of an historical process that seeks to *reform* religion

28/1/2011

THERE NEVER WAS A SECULAR AGE.

No discussion of the post-secular can ignore the claims and understandings underpinning the secular. Taylor, in *The Secular Age*, explores the secular not simply as a neutral idea of governance but as an ideological, philosophical position and, in reality, a way of living and being. The exploration below of ideas raised through this research looks beyond institutional and governmental demarcation, to those issues that affect individual beliefs and experiences.

The theoretical positions highlighted in this section explore the contested field in which understandings of the secular are situated. In response to the statement, 'there never was a secular age', the work of Taylor suggests a more critical consideration that encapsulates a multidimensional understanding of the secular (Figure 2). He asks us to reconsider the secular in the light of these understandings, which do not posit a blanket rejection of the secular age, but seek to understand the conditions under which such responses are made.

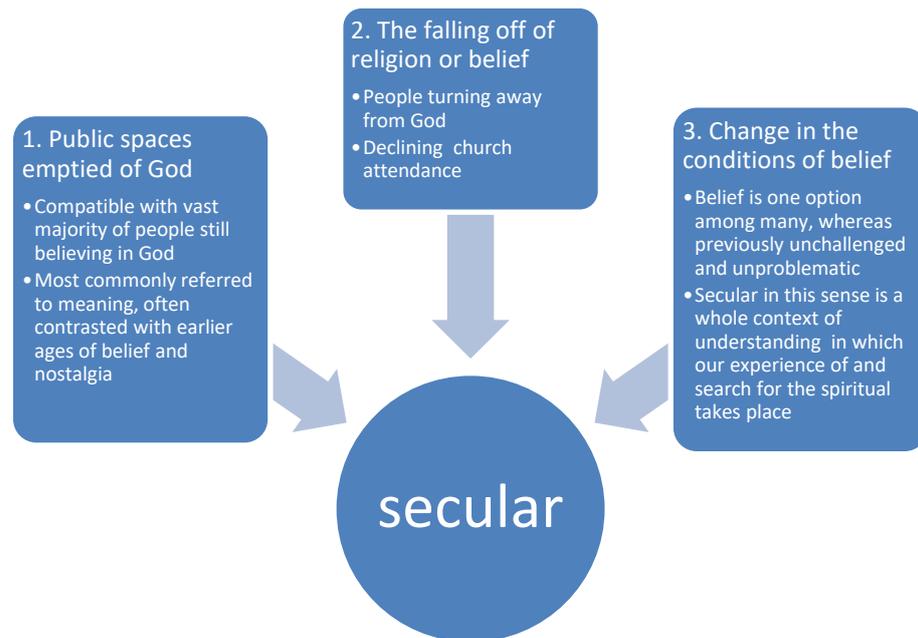


Figure 5: Taylor’s view of the secular.

In Figure 2, Taylor considers that whether one can say there is a secular age depends on what understanding of the secular is being used.⁶³⁸ This is a valid observation, as public demarcations have not historically meant less people believe. It also does not follow that the presence of secular institutional boundaries, such as those found in education, indicate an all-pervading secular milieu. Declining figures of church attendance, and the widely accepted decline of belief, may indicate the presence of a secular age but are countered by the rise in attendance and affiliation in other places. Secular is not, then, all-pervading presence but needs to be considered in all its variability, which is often influenced by other factors, including social and cultural context and time.

As comments from Carole Cusack suggest, an important position to consider is that there never was a secular age. In the light of this statement, the main issue – expressed by a number of authors, including Sophie Van Bijsterveld – is that it is a ‘fact that religion has never been

⁶³⁸ Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

away'.⁶³⁹ The abiding nature of religious belief and affiliation is one of the least discussed subjects in the secular debate, yet it offers grounds for rethinking the long-accepted notion that the secular age is a ubiquitous and uncontested presence. James Smith, in the *The Post-Secular in Question*, states that 'humans are inescapably religious animals'.⁶⁴⁰ If religious individuals are a demographic constant, this suggests that the secular age is a less monolithic presence than asserted by many, particularly those in the social sciences.⁶⁴¹ Smith notes that this does not mean all people are believers, but it does mean that all people have the potential to become believers through practice and, more precisely to him, through ritual formation.

Is the claim that an individual person has the 'potential' for belief discussed by Smith enough to nullify the existence of a secular age? The way belief is understood in modern terms would suggest otherwise. As further explored by Smith, the secular has an attendant

philosophical anthropology – an implicit picture of the human person. And this standard, assumed picture of the human person sees religion (1) as a basically 'optional' phenomenon and (2) as a primarily intellectual, propositional phenomenon... all humans eat, sleep, breathe, have sex, wear clothes... Then, in addition to that, some (perhaps even many) homo sapiens are 'religious': they are 'believers' who participate in religious rituals and practices, identify with religious communities, and hold religious beliefs.⁶⁴²

Accordingly, to secular observers religious belief is a 'curious supplement to being human', not an ever-present constant such as eating, sleeping and breathing.⁶⁴³

Smith criticises the way in which religion has primarily come to be understood by secularists

The 'standard (secularist) picture' of the human person is top-heavy: it still construes religion as primarily a cognitive-propositional phenomenon, as a set of beliefs or 'values'... It is this sort of epistemological fixation that makes it possible for secularist

⁶³⁹ Van Bijsterveld, 'Religion and the Secular State in the Netherlands'. p. 523.

⁶⁴⁰ James Smith, 'Secular Liturgies and the Prospects for a "Post-Secular" Sociology of Religion', in P. S. Gorski et al. (eds.), *The Post-Secular in Question* (New York: New York University Press, 2012). p. 165.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid.

⁶⁴² Ibid. pp.165–66.

⁶⁴³ Ibid.

anthropologists to see religion as an addendum, an optional supplement: clearly not all people have these sorts of beliefs or values; thus religion is not an essential feature of being human.

To say there never was a secular age, based on how the human person is understood, is an important consideration. It forms a central part of Taylor's understanding of the secular as a state in which the conditions of belief have changed, not just at the social and institutional level, but at an individual level. To him, there is a secular age based on the changes to these conditions of belief, more so than the other characteristics. It is also important to consider that secular positions exist alongside a range of others, including religious positions.

Smith notes that those who consider that we are in a secular age would align themselves with the above understanding of the human person as pursuing religion for adjunct reasons, rather than intrinsic ones. Taylor also rejects this notion, observing that the human aspiration to religion will not flag.⁶⁴⁴

For Smith, redefining of what is secular and what is religious is imperative to move beyond an understanding of religion as supplemental doctrines and belief, as well as discovering that the secular is not simply a space emptied of references to transcendence, and instead much that has been considered secular is actually religious.⁶⁴⁵ For Jose Casanova this relationship goes even further, as he states that the current global usage of religion was constructed by secular categorisation, which has given it a form that was hitherto alien to it.⁶⁴⁶ For me this is an important issue as, throughout this research, the question continually arises – how are we to define religion? What are the implications of these definitions? This has direct links to how the secular is understood, as the widely accepted definition of secular relies on the placement

⁶⁴⁴Taylor, *A Secular Age.*, p. 515.

⁶⁴⁵ Smith, 'Secular Liturgies and the Prospects for a "Post-Secular" Sociology of Religion'. p. 176.

⁶⁴⁶ José Casanova, 'A Secular Age: Dawn or Twilight?', in Michael Warner, Craig Calhoun, and Jonathan Vanantwerpen (eds.), *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010). p. 278.

of religion as an oppositional force in tension with it. Crucial, too, is the ‘new sense of self’ advocated by Taylor.⁶⁴⁷

To say there is no secular age due to ever-present religious belief is to critically question the long-held acceptance of the secular age as one of evolutionary progress. Even so, there are a number of other relevant factors. Accordingly, Taylor’s assertion that reference to the secular invokes less the tension between the secular and religion referred to above, and more the alternative visions of how the world is understood, is crucial.⁶⁴⁸ He also calls into question the defining of the secular as an emptying of public spaces of religion, as this is not a sufficiently strong indicator of declining religiosity and thus not evidence enough of the presence of a secular age. To say there never was a secular age does not take into account the significant insight into changes to the conditions of belief that Taylor’s work addresses. (Considerations of the existence of the secular age are separate to considerations of the validity of the ‘secularisation theory’, which, as previously discussed, have been significantly undermined).

RELIGIOUS REVIVAL IS PART OF THE SECULAR AGE

In my interview with Tracey Rowland, she expressed doubts about the notion of a religious revival linked specifically to the rise of the secular. In contrast, she saw the rise in influence of the secular in non-secular organisations as being a significant characteristic at this time. It would seem that both religious revivalism and secularism within religion are critical issues. Alternatively, a number of authors have asserted that the revitalisation of religion is indicative of a post-secular turn, instigated by the rise of the secular. Merlini considers this rise to be directly due to secular influence.⁶⁴⁹ One question of relevance here is at what point

⁶⁴⁷Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 27.

⁶⁴⁸Ibid. p. 5.

⁶⁴⁹Merlini, 'A Post-Secular World?', (, *ibid.* p. 123.

does the religious revival created by the drive towards a secular world become a manifestation of the post-secular? And at what point does the rise of the secular in non-secular arenas transform them into secular. On this question Merlini is silent; instead, he discusses how the rise of the secular has transformed societal structures and created a secular environment in which nations can cooperate without being hampered by overt religiosity. This perspective presupposes an understanding of the secular underpinned by ideas of order, rationality and reason, whereas the understanding of religion evokes myth and violence.⁶⁵⁰ The consideration that religious revival is part of the secular age is asserted by Merlini as ‘not a restoration of Church influence within and between nations but a renewal of the influence of confessions and sects on the secular polity’, as there is ‘a close link between secularization and religious revivalism not [as] a reaction against but a product of it’.⁶⁵¹

Acknowledging the revitalisation of a number of religions (including Islam and Christianity) in Dutch society, Sophie Van Bijsterveld sees this revitalisation as only one important factor in the changing relationship between church and state. So, although the long-accepted dictum of the separation of church and state is the most-cited characteristic of the secular in the public domain, other factors that affect this include the realisation that religion is

not an isolated area of life, but that it is intrinsically connected with views on the human being, on society, and on the state, and, therefore, with values and cultural patterns. Furthermore, religion has become entwined with huge societal and political issues such as integration and cannot be ignored in any debate on pluralism or social cohesion.⁶⁵²

Even though Merlini argues for the strong link between religion and secular influence, both at a state and individual level (which I also consider significant), stating that religious revival is a direct product of secular influence needs closer scrutiny. Is it due to resistance to secular influence by believers, or is there something intrinsic to secular systems that supports

⁶⁵⁰Wilson and Steger, 'Religious Globalisms in the Post-Secular Age', (pp. 21–22.

⁶⁵¹Merlini, 'A Post-Secular World?', (p. 123.

⁶⁵² Van Bijsterveld, 'Religion and the Secular State in the Netherlands'. p. 523.

religious growth? To consider this relationship only in opposition – i.e. that people are religious despite the presence of the secular and not because of it – gives only one side of the revival story. In light of this, Talal Asad considers the link between religion and the secular as one of both opposition and relationship.⁶⁵³

Religious revival due to the presence of secular worldviews suggests a growing realisation among authors such as Tacey of the inadequacies of such a position. To him, this worldview is incapable of understanding the religious movements within its domain. From this perspective, the link between religious revival and the secular is close, despite the obvious secular objective of a distancing from religion. For Tacey, secular institutions cannot cater to ‘significant dimensions of human experience’; hence, individuals seek these experiences outside the boundaries of the secular.⁶⁵⁴ Taylor concurs: ‘I hold that religious longing, the longing for and response to a more-than-immanent transformation perspective... remains a strong independent source of motivation’.⁶⁵⁵ From this it can be seen that, even though the secular influence has been acknowledged by many as significant, it has also caused what Lieven Boeve describes as the ‘transformation of religion’, rather than its disappearance.⁶⁵⁶

This is an unintended effect of secular influence and was not foreseen by commentators as being the most significant aspect of secular influence. Undeniably, the focus of secular considerations has been the diminishing and limiting of religious ideas and adherence, with less reflection on the ability of religion to adapt and develop.

THE SECULAR RISE SIGNALS THE DECLINE OF RELIGION

During my interview with Gary Bouma, he referred to Australian census data that draws a question mark around levels of decline in Australia. Worldwide statistics do not indicate with

⁶⁵³Talal Asad as quoted by Donnelly, 'We Are a Christian Nation under Threat', p. 7.

⁶⁵⁴Tacey, *The Spirituality Revolution: The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality*, pp. 16–17.

⁶⁵⁵Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 530.

⁶⁵⁶Boeve, 'Religion after Detraditionalization: Christian Faith in a Post-Secular Europe', (p. 101).

certainty the rise of the secular, or a concomitant decline in religiosity. Hence, the theory of the rise of secular influence correlated with the decline of religion is as problematic as its oppositional statement discussed above. Although most contemporary commentators of religion acknowledge the decrease of affiliation with some strands of mainstream religion, these levels of decline are not consistent across religions and nations and, therefore, are not entirely conclusive. The decline in religious affiliation in some areas is not a significant enough indicator to evidence the broad assertion that decline and containment is the main characteristic of the relationship between the secular and religion.

As the 'standard' sociological theory of decline, Casanova notes that the acceptance of the secular 'condition' as one in which religion has been overcome and replaced by a rejection of transcendence and a reliance on self-sufficiency is a significant anthropocentric shift.⁶⁵⁷ So although there is a decline in religious belief, the widespread understanding of this as a 'progressive emancipation' of humanity is a standard response to a far more complex phenomenon. If the rise of the secular worldview is affecting both religious revival and religious rejection, there are forces at work that have opposing yet related results.

For Taylor, these results are created by 'cross pressures'⁶⁵⁸ that make earlier forms of religious belief and life unviable, with new forms replacing these, while at the same time fostering a renewed outlook on unbelief. These cross pressures are those between 'the draw of the narratives of closed immanence' on the one side and 'the sense of their inadequacy on the other'.⁶⁵⁹ He sees the relationship between unbelief and belief 'reflected in a number of middle positions which have been drawn from both sides'.⁶⁶⁰ Some of the characteristics that may be found in these middle positions are understandings of materialism, science and moral

⁶⁵⁷ Casanova, 'A Secular Age: Dawn or Twilight?'.p. 266.

⁶⁵⁸Taylor, *A Secular Age.*, p. 595.

⁶⁵⁹Ibid. p. 595.

⁶⁶⁰Ibid.

good. Casanova considers these middle positions as ones where believers adopt ‘an engaged standpoint’ while simultaneously adopting a ‘disengaged standpoint’.⁶⁶¹ It could be considered that the reverse of this position is equally probable for unbelievers. As a standpoint, this position requires less justification than that of the believer who, according to Casanova, is required to justify their position more frequently than the unbeliever.⁶⁶²

Although the main consideration in discussions of secular influence is the decline of religious belief and affiliation, evidenced as it is by data collection and statistical analysis, these methods tend to shine a light on only one side of the secular story. The other side is less frequently discussed but is of far more interest –the continuing presence of religion. This ongoing presence, presented by some as a resurgence or revival, must be considered in discussions of the secular in order for a more accurate understanding of its influence to be achieved.

SECULAR IS A WORLDVIEW ALTERNATIVE TO RELIGIOUS BELIEF

In the interviews, both David Tacey and Scott Stephens were concerned with the notion that the secular has become an alternative worldview without its adherents even realising it. In their view, this worldview has become naturalised through its acceptance as the default human position, relegating religion to the status of a choice or option. How this condition came about is the subject of recent discussion. Taylor has noted how the secular has become the naturalised or default position for many people. As a normative category, the secular has been catapulted into a redefined role remote from original understandings. Taylor borrows the Foucauldian term ‘unthought’ in his discussion of the secularisation theory.⁶⁶³ This term could also be used in discussions of the secular, as Taylor’s claim is that the social sciences

⁶⁶¹ Casanova, 'A Secular Age: Dawn or Twilight?' p. 266.

⁶⁶² Ibid.

⁶⁶³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 428.

have presented declining religiosity and the word 'secular' as interchangeable, with little or no consideration of the range of interpretative judgements that could be used in these considerations. The unthought associated with the influence of the secular also points to the development of it as a worldview alternative.

This is because belief now exists along a spectrum that includes rejection and unbelief. This placement of a variety of positions as options removes the secular worldview as the kind of neutral default position and situates it as one position among many, and as being influenced by as many forces and changes as religious belief.

THE SECULAR AGE SAW THE WANING OF THE GOLDEN AGE OF RELIGION

When raised in the interview sessions, there was a consensus amongst participants that there was no such thing as a golden age of belief, in the west or elsewhere. One of the main assumptions held by those who view the move to a secular age as progressive and based predominantly on religious decline is that, in the past, religion and religious belief were positioned in such a golden age. Viewed nostalgically by some, this golden age is perceived as a time when majority of people were adherents of mainstream belief systems (in the Australian context, Christian faiths) that went largely unchallenged by social movements and social change. The invocation of a golden age of faith has been questioned and debunked through the work of key writers including Steve Bruce,⁶⁶⁴ Roger Finke and Rodney Stark.⁶⁶⁵ They have gone so far as to say that such a golden age never existed – neither in the United States nor in Britain and Europe. Referred to by Stark and Finke as the 'old' paradigm, Taylor raises two questions that are of importance here. First, what definition of religion is being used, and second, what past is this being compared to.⁶⁶⁶ More importantly, for Taylor,

⁶⁶⁴ Steve Bruce, 'The Pervasive World-View: Religion in Pre-Modern Britain', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 48/4 (1997), 667-80.

⁶⁶⁵ Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (2nd edn.; New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2005). p. 10.

⁶⁶⁶Taylor, *A Secular Age.*, p. 427.

the notion of a golden age situates the rise of the secular as a negative story of loss with a focus on a past that cannot be recaptured, instead of examining what characterises the present.⁶⁶⁷ He also considers whether things may have always been the same through the ages ‘beneath a changed exterior’.⁶⁶⁸

The golden age of religion also conjures up images of public displays and shared exhibitions of belief. Also noteworthy here is the conception that belief has now become ‘privatised’ and is no longer acceptable for open and public display. Casanova refutes this, citing the fact that religious questions and concerns are constantly being argued and negotiated in the public square as evidence of the public nature of religion and religious belief.⁶⁶⁹ John Torpey provides a helpful way of understanding the distinction that occurs in the public square, using the terms ‘latent’ and ‘active’.⁶⁷⁰

For Torpey, active religiosity refers to the activity that is undertaken in public worship and ritual as well as in the religious practices of individuals, while latent religiosity is the underlying historical foundation of religion that exists in many western countries. This religiosity is referred to by him as a ‘substratum’ and its presence complicates religious pluralism and public debates associated with its influence. It is manifested more subtly but ostensibly organises public space in, for example, Christmas holidays and other festivals.⁶⁷¹ For Torpey, the important question to ask in regard to the study of religion is ‘not the persistence of religion, but in its abeyance in particular times and places is what needs explanation and clarification’.⁶⁷² Torpey is justifiably cautious about suggesting that something may be viewed as being at the end of an era. The example he cites is that of the decline of religiosity as a product of the post-World War Two period in Europe. While this decline this is often considered directly linked to the post-war years, there was also a

⁶⁶⁷Ibid. p. 532.

⁶⁶⁸Ibid. p. 427.

⁶⁶⁹ J. Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (University of Chicago Press, 1994). p. 10.

⁶⁷⁰ John Torpey, 'Religion and Secularization in the United States and Europe', in Phillip Gorski, David Kim, and John Torpey (eds.), *The Post-Secular in Question: Religion in Contemporary Society* (New York: New York University, 2012). p 290

⁶⁷¹Ibid.

⁶⁷²Ibid. p. 297.

substantial rise in wealth at that time.⁶⁷³ Equally as important is the movement of immigrants since then, and the trend away from a predominantly white and Christian cultural dominance. So, on the one hand there was a decline in some circles – but, equally, a rise in others; hence the difficulty in interpretation, and the reticence in declaring the end of an era. This caution is as applicable to the claims of the end of the golden era of religion due to the influence of the secular as it is to the cited example.

Conclusion

Examination of the role of the secular is critical to this research. Charles Taylor's work looks beyond the institutional divisions often used to characterise the secular, and is viewed by this researcher as vital to the discussion.

1. It sees the secular as a way of living and being – not just an external rendering.
2. The secular is not a neutral stance on religion.
3. The secular is in relationship with religion – this relationship is one of both opposition and co-dependency.
4. The secular does not presuppose the decline of religion.
5. The secular manifests itself in diverse times, spaces and places differently – it is not a singular process

⁶⁷³Ibid. p. 297.

REFLECTION SUMMARY: THE ESSENCE OF THE SECULAR

- The secular originally referred to time, activities or actions that were outside the religious.
- During the Enlightenment, the secular came to represent the space or vacuum created by the separation of church and state, and now takes on meanings associated with exclusion of religion from political and other areas of public life.
- This led to the development of the secularisation thesis within the field of sociology, premised on the understanding that religion would disappear from public life and lead to the eventual extinction of religion across the public/private divide
- This secularisation thesis has been found to be only partially true, as religion did not disappear and has come to be expressed in ways that have evolved under the cross pressures of the secular.
- The secular is not a neutral stance on religion but is an ideological and theoretical term that positions religion in opposition to it.
- Far from removing religion from the public and private spheres, the secular has been seminal in the production of religious forms and experiences.
- Although the main consideration in discussions of secular influence is the decline of religious belief and affiliation, evidenced as it is by data collection and statistical analysis, these methods tend to shine a light on only one side of the secular story, and fail to address the continuing presence of religion.