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Germain McKenzie, *Interpreting Charles Taylor's Social Theory on Religion and Secularization: A Comparative Study*. Springer, 2017.

Pascal once observed that what was true on one side of the Pyrenees Mountains was error on the other, a reflection (one of the "Pensees") that raises the issue of pluralism and religious truth. Scholars of religion today are sharply divided between those (e.g., Bryan Turner) convinced that increasing social and national pluralism since the end of the medieval order has fostered religious decline (what the author of this book terms the "orthodox" view) and those (e.g., Rodney Stark) who emphatically rebut that pluralism begets religious revitalization (the "counter-orthodox" view).

Into this debate the author of this book creatively inserts Charles Taylor's magisterial reflections on modern culture as a possible way forward. The title of Taylor's major work notwithstanding (*A Secular Age*), McKenzie ably shows that his thought has affinities with both views, and may point the way toward a creative synthesis that preserves the main points of both camps.

In Taylor's view, the rise of an immanent view of human flourishing, of meaning without recourse to transcendence, corresponded with the subjectivization of religious belief and practice and the corresponding marginalization of religious institutions. For Taylor, religion has not disappeared, as the early secular theorists predicted, but has been "relocated" to a less central place in modern society and in individual lives. Secularity is evidenced in the "the retreat of religion from the public space, the decline of religious belief and practice, and as changes in the conditions of belief for individuals"(29). The central self-understanding or "social imaginary" of our age places religious belief in an "immanent frame" that focuses, even for religious persons, on human fulfillment without reference to transcendence.

McKenzie's thesis is that "the Taylorean 'revisionist' account of secularization . . . transcends the polarization between 'orthodox' and 'counter-orthodox' theorists while affirming that religious motivation per se has remained operative, giving birth to new religious forms in the secular West." He points out that Christianity, according to Taylor, offers "a faith-based spiritual commitment for love or compassion which should be seen as unconditional and based on the notion of human persons as being images of God" (64). He cites here a lesser-known essay in which Taylor says: "It makes a whole lot of difference whether you think that this kind of love is a possibility for us humans. I think it is, but only to the extent that we

open ourselves to God, which means, in fact, overstepping the limits set in theory by exclusive humanisms" (64). In this "stance of humanism and unconditional love and compassion," McKenzie argues, Taylor not only creates a theoretical space for religion, but more particularly "sees a place for Catholicism in the West in times to come" (64). The coming of Pope Francis might be seen as a strong confirmation of this thesis.

As McKenzie shows repeatedly, the debate between secularization and revitalization theorists is driven by the theoretical distinction between structure and agency. The orthodox theorists uniformly adduce broad structural causes for secularization—the division of labor, segmentation of institutional spheres, global communication and travel—while the counter-orthodox point to localized agentic evidence of revitalization—the persistence of individual religious belief and practice, resurgent religious groups and movements, the rise of religious conflict and terrorism. In key sections of the book, McKenzie elaborates the former as central to Taylor's theory of social change, by the revision of "social imaginaries" driven by elite social movements, and the latter in terms of the transformative mutual influence of society and culture along the lines of Margaret Archer's theory of the continual replication of sociocultural structures (morphogenesis).

For most readers, however, the greatest value of this book will have little to do with the secularization debate. For any scholar attempting to bring Taylor's social theory to bear on current debates, the main difficulty is that Taylor does not have a "social theory" as such. For all its insight and perspicuity, Taylor's work is notoriously unsystematic, and often opaque regarding its assumptions about human society, qualities which have contributed to the widely held view that his corpus is a difficult read. As McKenzie explains, Taylor does not set forth a predictive social theory in the manner of Parsons, Spenser, or even Anthony Giddens, but he operates with "a set of concepts, guidelines and criteria which allow a hermeneutic understanding" of social facts and their meanings, as well as the self-understandings of social agents (ix). As an aid to discussing the secularization debates, therefore, McKenzie endeavors to provide a systematic exegesis of Taylor's thought in terms of a distinct theory of human society. The result is one of the most clear, accessible accounts of Taylor's major concepts in print. Occupying over half of the text, complete with glossary and helpful charts, this part of the book could serve by itself as a useful introduction or companion to Taylor's work for any scholar or university class reading it for the first time.

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