
Reviewed by Mike Collins, University of Gloucestershire, collinsclan@supanet.com

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These 12 chapters based on papers given since 2005, show Martin reviewing four of his great themes over four decades of work: magisterial, wide-ranging, complex, interlocking, challenging, but rewarding.

Chapters 1–9 are a hard but vital read for anyone interested in secularization. It should be said at the start that Martin, as a sociologist, continues to regard secularization as a differentiation process, whereby the state and other organizations have appropriated roles in administration, education, welfare and the arts that the church used to play in, and that this has been easier in Protestantism than Catholicism or Orthodoxy on account of its individualistic approach to God and salvation. He does not believe that the rest of the world is following in Europe’s wake.

While all three monotheistic religions have made huge global inroads in the last two millennia, Protestantism and Catholicism responded differently to the Enlightenment and modernity: the latter held its transnational blanket together (just, though with huge fraying, in Ireland now, for example), but Protestantism fragmented in its relations with individual nation-states, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, Secularization and the Future of Catholicism and Protestantism. There are also however other narratives: spirituality, and nature worship. Here Martin nails his colours to the mast: he sees Europe as the exception to a world in which inspired life is flourishing and Christianity is growing, especially in the two-thirds world. Thus, in Britain there is an embarrassed reticence regarding religious enthusiasm, which is conspicuously absent in the USA. (John Wesley would now have a harder time of it than he did in the eighteenth century!) So Mickelthwaite and Wooldridge (2009) are wrong. In Chapter 3, Master Narratives and the Future of Christianity, he explores individuality versus community, and particularism versus universalism.

Chapter 4 looks at the master narrative of Pentecostalism with its strongly inspired styles of belief and practice. Being a global movement that is outside church-state relationships has allowed it to successfully shift from traditional territorial links to trans-national voluntarism in the
global religious economy.

To the question, *Has Secularization Gone into Reverse?* (Chapter 5), Martin resoundingly says No, except where Marxism has dramatically receded, as in the Orthodox and Chinese worlds. Chapter 6, *Religious Responses to Modes of Secularism*, debates how the church has responded: while some worldly commentators see the church as the last-ditch attempt to “halt the liberation of human kind,” some current aggressive atheists see it as a growing danger to that liberation. Chapter 7, *Science and Secularization*, shows that the relationship varies with sociology and history: state centralization aided rampant secularization in France, Uruguay and East Germany, whereas decentralization in the USA resisted it, while the rise of consciously personal religion characterizes several developing societies (Singapore, Brazil, Turkey, and Indonesia—where Muslim women wear headscarves in order to be distinctive).

Then come two case-studies of secularization: in Chapter 8, *An Eastern European Pattern of Secularization*, he contrasts Orthodoxy, in which imagistic folk religion is reviving and resisting secularization, whereas, in removing objects of devotion and focusing on the purification of individuals’ hearts, Protestantism has abolished priestly power and converted it into a pastoral care that is prone to mutate into a utilitarian morality. Indeed, chapter 9 describes *East Germany as the World’s Most Secular State*. This he attributes to the state’s releasing its people from Nazi guilt if they accepted the secular package; and then, in laying waste the forests and producing horrendous pollution from its plastic chemical factories, it removed the source of a potential prosperity that might have sapped religion, yet broke the link with the sacred soil which stayed strong in Western Germany.

The third part looks at the inter-relations of the other three matters with Christianity. In Chapter 10, *The Religious and the Political*, Martin suggests that early Christianity set secularizing forces into play by removing the sacred aura of the chosen people, promised land, and holy city/temple. Later church incursions into the world meant accommodating to the ways of the world, and seeking to sustain the institution of the church, especially in Catholicism, with even religious protest movements succumbing to worldliness: monasteries funded crusades, and Quakers became respectable bankers, as well as opponents of slavery and builders of model townships. Second, states themselves were in the survival business, so the Catholic French allied themselves with the Ottoman Muslims against the Catholic Hapsburgs.
Chapter 11, *Christianity, Violence and Democracy*, shows how Christianity looks for a transcendent “peace on earth, good will toward men.” But it encounters the social sacred concept which involves issues of the just war and its just price, so the church supports the use of force against (some) absolute dictators and regimes. It also encounters the resistant secularity of power and politics: “states do not offer themselves up in love to redeem the international order” (181). Chapter 12, *Protestantism and Democracy*, says Protestantism has on several occasions helped states to move towards democracy, although in varying degrees, and Martin thinks it has no inherent link with democracy. Equally, evangelical and Pentecostal movements from outside the circles of power have challenged undemocratic situations, and in Latin America Catholicism has criticised oppressive capitalism.

Chapter 13, *Multiple Ironies and Necessary Paradoxes: a review of religion, fanaticism and violence*, grew from a review of three recent books by a Catholic theologian, a science fiction novelist and a Marxist! He finds none of them giving satisfactory answers as to what makes religion violent and intolerant. Christianity accommodated first to the ways of the Roman empire and then to the push-and-shove politics of European nation states which often constructed images of religious violence to set against secular ones, while Islam was always linked to Arab nationalism. He ends by suggesting (218–9) that “hope springs eternal,” for the future has a strong pull on the present, helping us to survive our travails better than Bertrand Russell’s “firm foundations of despair.”

I have grossly simplified some of Martin’s arguments in this brief space. This is not an easy read, not because it is not clearly written (which it is), nor because of the author’s erudition (to which he sits lightly) in four languages (to which he refers cogently), but because of the interlocked and nuanced arguments: basically each national situation is contingent, its path dependent on that society’s history.

It challenges me, for instance, in my own work on sport and faith, because in some cases Christianity has sold out to the power-hungry, money-grabbing, fame-bringing aspects of professional sport, particularly in the USA, as Shirl Hoffman (2010) excoriatingly revealed. Again: how can I effectively communicate a God of love (in whom I believe), when the use of drugs, and physical and psychological abuse of young athletes, is far from trivial, even among amateurs? Also, until I moved into sport, I thought town planning was a pretty secularized professional field, yet I am continuously discovering more green shoots from Christian involvement in British sport.
References