

CHRISTENDOM AND THE LEGACY OF THE SIXTIES:
BETWEEN THE SECULAR CITY AND THE
AGE OF AQUARIUS ⁽¹⁾

Undoubtedly, the 1960s constitute a turning point in the history of the West, and the depth of the change comes clearly to the fore with regard to religion. Not only have the churches and denominations undergone dramatic changes in this period, but there is a case to be made that the significance of religion itself has changed.

However, developments regarding church and religion are often ignored, and if treated it is mostly in isolation, as if they were somewhat disconnected from society at large. Studies about the Sixties, for example, hardly pay any attention to religion ⁽²⁾. The reason for this omission is an alleged opposition between religion and modernity, expressed in the so-called 'secularization thesis' which argues that since some mythical 'Age of Faith', usually situated somewhere in the Middle Ages or the Ancien Regime, religion lost its all-embracing status, became privatized, and gradually lost its social significance ⁽³⁾. This view of history, however, is seriously being questioned since the 1970s ⁽⁴⁾. Some scholars even emphasize

(1) This essay was originally written as a discussion paper for the international workshop *The Turning Point of the Sixties as a Field for Historical Research*, organized by the Dipartimento di Politica, Istituzioni, Storia of the University of Bologna, 20-21 April 2001. A different version was presented at the colloquium of the Department of Religious Studies of the University of Pennsylvania, 17 April 2002. It is part of my ongoing research on the long-term socio-religious history of Western Europe and North America. — The Age of Aquarius: see note 81.

(2) The number of references to religion in Arthur MARWICK's 900-page socio-cultural history *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c.1958-c.1974*, Oxford, University Press (OUP), 1998, for example, can be counted on one hand.

(3) E.g. Steve BRUCE, *Religion in the Modern World. From Cathedrals to Cults*, Oxford, OUP, 1996.

(4) Steve BRUCE (ed), *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992; Hartmut LEHMANN (ed), *Säkularisierung, Dechristianisierung, Rechristianisierung im neuzeilli-*