

## **Secularization is Real:**

### **Bruce & Sommerville Respond to Stark**

Bruce claims that Stark is committed to rejecting evidence for secularization in Great Britain because it doesn't fit with his theoretical assumptions: (1) because religion can provide rewards in the next life, there will always be a demand for it; and (2) religious competition has increased so religious participation should have increased. Thus, Stark argues that the past was less religious and the present more religious than is commonly thought.

Bruce marshals evidence from church attendance and membership figures, Sunday school participation, number of clergy, participation in baptism and church weddings, affiliation with new religious movements, and public opinion polling to make the case the Great Britain has become increasingly secularized over the past 50 to 100 years.

According to Sommerville, thinking of an "Age of Faith" is wrong because medieval times are better characterized as an "Age of Religious Culture." "Faith" suggests conscious belief and perhaps some awareness of alternatives." During the medieval period, people "literally could not think or express themselves outside of a religious idiom."

Secularization (much of it done forcibly by Protestants) involved secularizing concepts of time and space (allowing science), personal identity, social relation and political activities (allowing social science), language and literature (allowing secular education), work, and, finally, theories of religion.

An Age of Faith may not even be possible until things are secularized.

"The disappearance of medieval religious culture was so complete that we can't even imagine that lost world. We assume that religion is a thing to think about when it used to be a way of thinking. That is the secularization that deserves to be considered the biggest change in the last several millennia, rather than to be denied outright."

Also, Stark is being inconsistent since he argues that all religion must be counted (not just Christianity), but then uses the failure of Christianity to dislodge paganism as evidence of disbelief. "When he wants to argue that there was very little religion back then, he concentrates on a narrow definition of Christianity. When he wants to argue that there is a lot now, he remembers to include everything."

"[A] society can be entirely secular in its structures and processes, but contain people of a religious bent. Where that is the case, there has been a secularization of things, though not of people."