

Education and the Objects of Ultimate Concern: A Tillichian Hypothesis on the Decline of Institutional Religiosity

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ABSTRACT

A substantial body of empirical research reports a negative correlation between education and religiosity, a finding often read as evidence that educational expansion drives secularization. This narrative review reexamines that inference by asking what the underlying studies measure and what their findings can support. The first section synthesizes causal and descriptive studies of schooling and religion, which are concentrated in Western, predominantly Christian contexts, and organizes them by research design, educational exposure, religiosity measure, and principal limitation. Read together, the studies indicate that expanding secular schooling reduces institutional indicators such as affiliation, attendance, and prayer, while other dimensions of religion are preserved or reshaped rather than eliminated. Because these indicators operationalize institutional or conventional religiosity, they leave open the question of whether religiosity in a broader sense declines with them. The second section introduces Paul Tillich's concept of faith as "ultimate concern" as one theological alternative, states the criteria that distinguish ultimate concern from ordinary strong commitments, considers the choice between functional and substantive definitions of religion, and applies the framework, illustratively rather than conclusively, to modern nationalism and to the Cult of the Supreme Being of the French Revolution. The final section develops a hypothesis rather than an established conclusion: that formal schooling is one institution among several through which the objects of ultimate concern are redirected. The review closes by identifying the framework's contested premises and the measurement and comparative research that could test it.

Keywords: Religiosity; secularization; education; ultimate concern; Paul Tillich; civil religion; political religion; measurement of religion

INTRODUCTION

Max Weber's account of what modern education does to the world is that it brings disenchantment. Intellectualization and rationalization, he argued, do

not give people more knowledge of the conditions of their lives; they spread the belief that "one can, in principle, master all things by calculation," so that one need no longer have recourse to magical means (1, p. 139). Yet Weber also observed that this process cannot eliminate the human need for ultimate meaning: in the disenchanted world, "the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life," but they have not vanished (1, p. 155).

The relationship Weber described has since become a standard subject of quantitative social science. A

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series of empirical studies reports a negative correlation between educational attainment, or societal investment in secular schooling, and religiosity (2–5). These studies are methodologically sound within the scope of their investigations. The question this review raises is not whether their measures are adequate for their stated constructs, but what those constructs are: quantitative studies generally operationalize institutional or conventional religiosity, while theological accounts define religiosity in broader, functional terms, and the two kinds of definition answer different questions. By reviewing the empirical literature and then examining cases in which strong unconditional commitments flourished outside institutional religion, this review asks how much of the inverse-correlation proposition survives a change of definition.

Because several key terms are used differently across disciplines, their usage here is fixed at the outset. Religion denotes historically institutionalized systems of belief and practice oriented toward God or the sacred; institutional religiosity denotes participation in such systems, as recorded by indicators such as affiliation, attendance at services, and prayer; secularization denotes the long-run decline of institutional religion's social significance (6). Disenchantment translates Weber's *Entzauberung*, the retreat of mystery before calculation (1). Faith and ultimate concern are used in Tillich's sense, defined below under "Tillich's Concept of Faith and Its Criteria" (7). Ideology denotes a comprehensive secular system of political meaning; civil religion and political religion denote the sacralization of the nation or polity in democratic and totalitarian forms respectively (8, 9). Education, unless otherwise specified, means formal schooling: state-organized instruction of the young, secular in the settings the empirical studies examine. Table 2 summarizes the relations among these concepts.

Three limitations of scope should also be stated at the

outset. The empirical literature reviewed is concentrated in Western, predominantly Christian societies, with one extension to a Muslim-majority country (5); the theoretical framework is drawn from a single theologian; and the historical cases are European. The conclusions offered are correspondingly an interpretation, a Tillichian reading of the evidence, rather than established general findings.

The argument proceeds in three steps. The first main section examines the validity and the limits of quantitative research on education and religiosity. The second introduces Paul Tillich's concept of "ultimate concern," specifies its criteria, defends the choice of a functional definition, and illustrates the framework through two historical cases. The third then addresses causality directly and advances a hypothesis: it is not that education causes religion or irreligion, but that the human need for meaning, which moral education directly addresses, may connect the two.

THE EMPIRICAL LITERATURE AND ITS LIMITS

The studies reviewed in this section differ in country, historical period, educational exposure, religiosity measure, unit of analysis, and identification strategy; Table 1 summarizes these features and each study's principal limitation. Compulsory-schooling years, advanced-school enrollment, and college attendance are distinct exposures; non-affiliation, attendance, prayer, and literal belief are distinct outcomes; and an effect estimated for one pairing does not automatically transfer to another. The synthesis below is therefore organized by research design, from natural experiments through panel and longitudinal studies to descriptive comparisons, and it treats each finding as evidence about the specific exposure and outcome studied.

Table 1. Empirical studies of education and religiosity reviewed in this article, organized by research design. Each row lists the study's setting, educational exposure, religiosity measure, design, main finding, and the principal limitation relevant to interpreting the education-religiosity relationship.

Study	Country and period	Educational exposure	Religiosity measure	Research design	Main finding	Principal limitation
Hungerman (2)	Canada; censuses 1971–2001	Compulsory-schooling years (school-leaving laws)	Religious affiliation (share reporting none)	Natural experiment; provincial law changes as instrument	One additional year of schooling raises non-affiliation by about 4 percentage points; schooling explains most of the rise in non-affiliation	Institutional indicator only; single country; denominational breakdowns imprecise

Continued Table 1. Empirical studies of education and religiosity reviewed in this article, organized by research design. Each row lists the study's setting, educational exposure, religiosity measure, design, main finding, and the principal limitation relevant to interpreting the education–religiosity relationship.

Study	Country and period	Educational exposure	Religiosity measure	Research design	Main finding	Principal limitation
Becker, Nagler, and Woessmann (3)	German cities, 1890–1930	Advanced-school enrollment per capita	Protestant church attendance (communion participation)	City-level panel; fixed effects, timing, and instrumental-variable checks	Faster school expansion precedes faster decline in attendance; income and urbanization do not predict the decline	Historical Protestant setting; city-level (ecological) inference
Mocan and Pogorelova (4)	14 European countries; reforms c. 1960s–1970s	Compulsory-schooling reforms	Self-reported religiosity, attendance, prayer	Pooled natural experiments (European Social Survey microdata)	Additional schooling reduces religiosity, attendance, and prayer	European, mostly Christian-heritage contexts; self-reported outcomes
Cesur and Mocan (5)	Turkey; 1997 reform	Compulsory secular schooling extension (5 to 8 years)	Religious self-identification, head covering, religious-party voting	Natural experiment; exposure to reform	Education reduces women's religiosity and religious-party voting; effects concentrated among urban women; no measurable effect on men	Single country and cohort; gender-specific effects
Glaeser and Sacerdote (10)	United States; 20th-century surveys	Years of education	Attendance; religious beliefs	Cross-sectional descriptive analysis with interpretation	Attendance rises with education across individuals but falls across denominations; doctrinal belief declines	Not causal; United States Christian context
Schwadel (11)	United States	Years of education	Practices, beliefs, affiliation	Cross-sectional survey analysis	Education raises attendance and devotional practice, lowers literalism and exclusivism; no effect on disaffiliation	Not causal; single country
Mayrl and Uecker (12)	United States; 2000s	College attendance	Content of religious beliefs (liberalization)	Longitudinal panel (National Study of Youth and Religion)	College students are no more likely than non-students to liberalize beliefs; some are more likely to retain beliefs	Young adults only; measures belief content, not ultimacy
Pew Research Center (13)	United States; 2014 Religious Landscape Study	Educational attainment	Attendance, identification, commitment index	Descriptive subgroup comparison	Among Christians, college graduates attend at higher rates (52% vs 46% weekly); overall affiliation lower among graduates	Descriptive only; selection into identification uncontrolled

Natural-Experiment Evidence That Schooling Reduces Institutional Religiosity

The claim that secular education weakens religiosity rests on an increasingly sophisticated causal literature. Hungerman uses changes in Canadian compulsory schooling laws as a source of exogenous variation in completed education: the more years of schooling the state mandates, the greater the educational attainment of the affected cohorts, independent of their prior religiosity. Drawing on the Canadian censuses of 1971 through 2001, he finds that one additional year of schooling raises the probability that an individual reports no religious affiliation by roughly four percentage points, and he estimates that rising schooling can account for most of the growth of non-affiliation in Canada over those decades (2).

Becker, Nagler, and Woessmann reach a similar conclusion with historical data. In a panel of German cities between 1890 and 1930, they measure educational expansion by enrollment in advanced schools and religious participation by Protestant church attendance, proxied by participation in Holy Communion. Cities where schooling expanded faster subsequently saw quicker declines in religious participation; notably, education, but not income or urbanization, predicts the decline, and the timing runs from educational expansion to secularization rather than the reverse (3). Mocan and Pogorelova extend the compulsory-schooling design across fourteen European countries and find that additional schooling reduces self-reported religiosity, attendance at religious services, and the frequency of prayer (4). Cesur and Mocan carry the same logic beyond Christian-majority settings: using Turkey's 1997 extension of compulsory secular schooling, they find that additional education reduced women's propensity to identify as religious, to wear a religious head covering, and to vote for religious parties, with effects concentrated among urban women and no measurable effect on men (5). Within their designs, these studies identify causal effects of mandated schooling on institutional indicators: affiliation, service attendance, prayer, and religious self-identification.

Evidence That Education Reshapes Rather Than Uniformly Reduces Religion

Other findings, however, resist the simple story. Glaeser and Sacerdote document what they call the education–religion puzzle in the United States: religious attendance rises sharply with education across individuals, even though attendance declines

with education across denominations and education erodes belief in the literal truth of religious doctrine. Their explanation is that education raises the returns to social connection, and church attendance is among the most social of activities; education thereby strengthens the communal practice of religion while weakening its supernatural content (10). Schwadel, using American survey data, likewise finds that each additional year of education increases the odds of attending religious services and of devotional practice, reduces biblical literalism and religious exclusivism, and has no effect on disaffiliation: education reshapes American religion rather than destroying it (11). Longitudinal evidence points in the same direction. Mayrl and Uecker, following American young adults in the National Study of Youth and Religion, find that college students are no more likely to develop liberal religious beliefs than non-students, and in some cases are more likely to retain their initial beliefs (12). At the population level, the Pew Research Center reports that among American Christians, college graduates attend services at higher rates than those with a high school education or less, 52 percent weekly compared with 46 percent (13).

The inferential role of these comparisons should be stated precisely. The Pew figures describe subgroups rather than causal effects: attendance differences between more and less educated Christians may reflect selection into and out of Christian identification, denominational composition, cohort, and social-network differences rather than any effect of education itself (13). Subgroup patterns of this kind therefore complicate, without contradicting, the population-level evidence of rising non-affiliation reviewed under “Natural-Experiment Evidence That Schooling Reduces Institutional Religiosity”. What they do establish is that education's association with religion is not uniformly negative across dimensions: participation, belief, affiliation, and devotional practice can move in different directions at once.

Coexistence and Common-Cause Considerations

Institutional data add a further caution, though of a different kind. In the United States, a highly modernized and heavily schooled society, 5,905 Catholic schools enroll 1,693,327 students (14). Substantial educational resources flow through religious institutions, and substantial religious resources into education. Such figures demonstrate institutional coexistence: they show that education and organized religion are not mutually exclusive as institutions, and that the character of a community can determine which of its institutions

receive resources. They do not test whether secular education changes individual religiosity, and they are cited here only in that limited role.

A third strand of research suggests that both education and religiosity respond to a deeper process. Norris and Inglehart's theory of existential security holds that modernization, by making life more secure, erodes the demand for traditional religion at the same time as it expands education; on this account, neither education nor religion directly causes the decline of the other, since both are downstream of development itself (15). Cross-country evidence that economic development predicts declining religious participation points the same way (16), and even Bruce's classic defense of the secularization thesis treats educational rationalization as one component of a broader modernization process rather than an isolated cause (6). Under this channel the observed correlation between education and religiosity is real, but the strictly causal relationship is questionable.

Constructs and Measures: What the Studies Do and Do Not Establish

The empirical studies, taken together, neither establish a ubiquitous inverse correlation between education and religiosity nor reveal a universal causal law. Different mechanisms operate on different dimensions of religion, in different societies, and at different historical moments. What the studies share is a common operationalization: religiosity is measured by church attendance, self-reported affiliation, prayer, and participation in institutional rituals. These indicators capture institutional religiosity well, and for the questions those studies pose, they are appropriate measures of their stated constructs. The point of this review is accordingly not that the quantitative literature is mismeasuring its own object. Sociologists have long treated religiosity as multidimensional, distinguishing ideological, ritualistic, experiential, intellectual, and consequential dimensions that need not move together (17), and psychologists have catalogued well over one hundred distinct operationalizations of religiousness (18). The studies above measure chiefly the ritualistic and affiliational dimensions. The limitation identified here is therefore a construct difference rather than a measurement inadequacy: theological, sociological, psychological, and behavioral definitions of religiosity answer different questions. Whether the institutional indicators capture religiosity as such, in the broadest sense a definition can defend, is a conceptual question rather than an empirical one, and it is the question the next section takes up.

RELIGIOSITY AS ULTIMATE CONCERN: A THEOLOGICAL REFRAMING

Tillich's Concept of Faith and Its Criteria

Paul Tillich defines faith as "the state of being ultimately concerned": an unconditional commitment that promises total fulfillment and demands total surrender (7, p. 1). On this definition, the boundary of religiosity does not coincide with the boundary of the churches. Whenever a finite object—the nation, virtue, success—is elevated to the position of ultimate concern, it "is made into a god," acquiring the qualities and the demands of a god-like being (7, p. 44). Conversely, the absence of institutional affiliation does not indicate the absence of faith. Even the serious skeptic, Tillich writes, "is not without faith, even though it has no concrete content" (7, p. 20). Survey instruments that record affiliation and attendance are, by construction, blind to this dimension of religiosity: the redirection of ultimate concern toward secular objects.

For the category to do analytical work, ultimate concern must be distinguishable from strong commitment in general; otherwise every intense interest would count as religious and the concept would explain nothing. Three features mark the difference in Tillich's account. The first is unconditionality: an ultimate concern is not weighed against other goods but overrides them, demanding that all other concerns be subordinated or sacrificed to it (7, pp. 1–2). The second is totality: faith is an act of the whole personality, integrating other concerns rather than sitting alongside them as one interest among many (7, pp. 4–5). The third is existential stakes: the concern carries a promise of ultimate fulfillment and a threat of exclusion from it, so that its loss is experienced not as disappointment but as the collapse of meaning (7, pp. 1–2). A political preference, a career ambition, or a moral conviction becomes religious in this sense only when it acquires these features. Tillich later coined the term "quasi-religions" for secular systems, nationalism, socialism, and liberal humanism among them, in which precisely this happens (19).

So specified, the concept has observable implications and is not unfalsifiable. Whether a given commitment is unconditional, central, and existentially freighted can in principle be assessed: by the ordering of priorities under conflict, by what a person will sacrifice, and by the reactions that follow the object's loss. The psychology of religion already measures adjacent constructs. The Centrality of Religiosity Scale quantifies how central religious meanings are within personality (20), and

meaning-in-life instruments quantify the presence of, and search for, integrating purpose (21). Analogous instruments directed at secular objects could show ultimate concern to be absent, weak, or fragmented: a population whose commitments were plural, conditional, and readily traded off would count as one in which religiosity in Tillich's sense had genuinely declined. The claim that every human being in fact has an ultimate concern is accordingly Tillich's substantive anthropological thesis, not a definitional truism, and it is treated as contested under "A Contested Premise: The Universal Need for Ultimate Meaning" (7).

Functional and Substantive Definitions of Religion

Tillich's is a functional definition: it identifies religion by the role a concern plays in a life, not by the kind of object the concern addresses. The choice between functional and substantive definitions matters for everything that follows, and it should be made explicitly. Substantive definitions, defended influentially by Berger, reserve the term religion for systems that refer to sacred, transcendent, or supernatural realities; on such a definition, nationalism is by stipulation not a religion, however religiously it may behave (22). Functional definitions, descending from Durkheim's account of religion as a system of beliefs and practices that unites a community around what it holds sacred, classify by role rather than by object (23). Neither type of definition is simply correct; they serve different analytical purposes. This review adopts the functional definition for a stated reason: the question at issue is whether the need that institutional religion once served persists when its institutional form declines. A substantive definition would close that question by fiat, since whatever succeeded the churches would be non-religion by definition. A functional definition keeps the question open, at an acknowledged cost: it classifies as religious some phenomena that other scholars treat as merely analogous to religion, and the analysis that follows inherits that contestable choice.

Nationalism as Religion: Structural Parallels and Their Limits

Nationalism supplies the clearest modern example, and it is the example Tillich himself chooses: when the nation is someone's ultimate concern, "the nation receives divine qualities" and stands for the true ultimate, but in an idolatrous way (7, p. 44). Hayes argued that nationalism reproduces the principal structural features of a religion: sacred scripture in national catechisms

and founding declarations, rituals in flag ceremonies and national holidays, saints in national heroes, and a theology of sacrifice in which dying for the nation is the highest fulfillment a person can reach (24). Bellah's account of American civil religion and Gentile's analysis of political religion describe the same structure in democratic and totalitarian settings respectively (8, 9). The supreme concept is sovereignty, and it demands precisely what Tillich means by faith: total surrender, and the willingness to subordinate every other good. Devoting one's life to the nation means participating in something that outlasts oneself. Within this structure, national traitors are not merely criminals; they are apostates. And when national claims break down, the reaction is not political disappointment but existential devastation; Tillich calls the despair of those who have lived through such a collapse "an irrefutable proof of the idolatrous character of their national concern" (7, pp. 17–18). They did not simply lose a political cause. They lost their god.

Whether these parallels make nationalism literally a religion is contested, and the case is offered here as an illustration of Tillich's category rather than as proof of it. Gentile treats civil religion and political religion as genuine sacralizations of politics, democratic and totalitarian in form respectively (9), and Bellah described American civil religion as an elaborate and well-institutionalized reality alongside the churches (8). Skeptics reply that ritual, sacrifice, sacred symbols, and unconditional loyalty may resemble religion without constituting theological faith, and that the category of political religion can mislead if the analogy is taken for an identity: Roberts argues that it inflates timeless religious impulses at the expense of what was historically novel and secular in the totalitarian movements (25). On a substantive definition the dispute is settled by stipulation; on the functional definition adopted here, it becomes the empirical question specified by the three criteria above, whether national commitment in a given population exhibits unconditionality, centrality, and existential stakes. The historical record of martyrdom, apostasy language, and despair at national collapse suggests that at least sometimes it does, and that is all the illustration requires.

The Cult of the Supreme Being

A second case connects this structure directly to education. Tillich describes the "faith of the fighters for enlightenment since the eighteenth century" as a humanist faith of the moral type: faith, rather than

rational calculation (7, p. 69). What radical Enlightenment moral education conveyed to a generation of French revolutionaries was an unconditional commitment to virtue and justice as the highest obligation of life, with the Republic as the integration of those commitments. Edelstein argues that Jacobin ideology was not simply a political program: the Jacobins resisted popular sovereignty and grounded their authority in nature and natural right rather than in the will of the people, substituting “a ‘discourse of reason’ for a ‘discourse of will’” (26, p. 214). Nature and virtue functioned as the absolute authority that justified everything the Revolution did, including the Terror itself. For Robespierre, virtue was not a policy objective; it was an absolute and unconditional commitment, structurally analogous to a worshipper’s commitment to God. The Festival of the Supreme Being of 8 June 1794, staged by Jacques-Louis David around an artificial mountain erected on the Champ de Mars, made this commitment visible and collective: the hymns and processions were not merely political activities but the ceremony through which an unconditional commitment to virtue was enacted in public (27). By any institutional measure, revolutionary France was dechristianizing; on Tillich’s definition, the festival is evidence that unconditional commitment had found a new public object. The case is illustrative: it shows that the category can be applied, not that it must be.

In both cases the structure Tillich describes—unconditional demand, promise of ultimate fulfillment, and the risk of total breakdown—is fully present, and in both cases it is invisible to church attendance rates and self-reported affiliation. Complemented by this theological observation, the inverse correlation appears not as a law about religiosity as such but as a statement about one of its institutional forms, provided one accepts the functional definition on which this reading depends.

RETHINKING CAUSATION: EDUCATION, MEANING, AND THE OBJECTS OF ULTIMATE CONCERN

A Common-Cause Hypothesis

A question remains. Even if the cases above are granted, they do not establish causation: showing that Enlightenment education and the Cult of the Supreme Being occurred in the same historical moment does not prove that one caused the other. Departing from the theory of ultimate concern, this review proposes a different hypothesis: neither education nor religiosity

causes the other; both are driven by the same underlying need for the ultimate meaning of life. This is consistent with Weber’s observation that the ultimate values displaced from public life retreat into other spheres rather than disappearing, so that disenchantment changes the objects toward which the need for meaning is directed (1). The question is therefore not “does educational expansion cause religiosity to decline?” but “can human beings dispense with the need for ultimate meaning that generates both?” On Weber’s and Tillich’s accounts alike, the answer is no. Every human being, Tillich insists, has an ultimate concern; on his account the question is never whether a person has faith but what the faith is directed toward (7). The decline of church attendance is accordingly not, by itself, a signal of declining religiosity in the Tillichian sense: the need to be unconditionally committed to something does not disappear; its object shifts. This is offered as an interpretation consistent with the evidence reviewed, not as a conclusion the evidence compels.

Moral Education as One Mechanism Among Several

What still requires explanation is why education, specifically, should help redirect the object of ultimate concern. Durkheim’s sociology of moral education supplies a candidate mechanism. Moral education, he argues, is the process by which society instills in individuals a spirit of discipline and an attachment to social groups: a sense of obligation that goes beyond personal interest, teaching what matters, what is worth sacrificing for, and what gives life its meaning (28). Formal schooling is, on this account, a social institution with an explicit mandate and near-universal reach whose function includes answering the question Tillich holds every human being faces: what deserves absolute commitment. Where the content of schooling is secular, the objects it proposes are secular. When that object is God, the result is called revealed religion; when it is virtue or the nation, it is called ideology. On the hypothesis advanced here, the need is identical; the object and the form of religiosity change while the mechanism remains the same.

Durkheim’s account identifies a mechanism, not the mechanism, and the claim must be qualified accordingly. Values and identity are formed by many agents besides the school. Longitudinal research on religious transmission finds that families, and parental warmth in particular, are the strongest documented channel through which religious commitment passes between generations (29), and the religion of American adolescents overwhelmingly

mirrors that of their parents and congregations (30). Peers, media, political movements, economic conditions, and historical events shape commitments as well. The historical cases reviewed above do not establish that schooling produced nationalism or the revolutionary cults, and no such claim is made. The claim this review can support is more modest: formal schooling is one institution among several through which the objects of commitment are shaped in each generation, distinctive in its explicit mandate, its compulsory reach, and its control by the state, and the empirical literature reviewed above shows that its expansion coincides with measurable declines in institutional religious participation. Whether schooling is the primary such institution, and how it interacts with family, congregation, and polity, are open empirical questions.

A Contested Premise: The Universal Need for Ultimate Meaning

The hypothesis rests on a premise that must be made explicit: that human beings constantly need ultimate meaning, so that concern displaced from one object must reattach to another. This is Tillich's theological anthropology, and it is contested. Naturalist and secular accounts hold that lives can be organized around finite goods without any integrating ultimate; Taylor calls this "exclusive humanism" and treats it as a genuinely available modern option rather than a disguised faith (31). Some contemplative traditions, on some readings, commend the dissolution of ultimate attachments rather than their redirection, a possibility Tillich himself confronted in his late encounter with Buddhism (19). Psychological research on meaning suggests that most people experience life as meaningful through mundane sources, coherence, routine, and relationships, without any single integrating concern, so that meaning may be plural and distributed rather than ultimate and unified

(32). If any of these accounts is right, ultimate concern is not a constant of human nature but a variable: present in some lives and epochs, attenuated or absent in others. The framework of this review then changes status. Instead of guaranteeing that religiosity persists under new objects, it poses an empirical question, answerable in principle with the kinds of measures sketched above: how widespread ultimate concern in Tillich's sense actually is, and whether education redirects it, dilutes it, or leaves it untouched. The broader argument survives in conditional form: to the extent that people do invest unconditional commitment somewhere, education helps determine where.

CONCLUSION

The empirical literature indicates that expanding secular education reduces institutional religious practice: affiliation, attendance, and ritual participation decline where schooling expands. Whether religiosity in a broader sense declines with them depends on the definition of religiosity, and that is a conceptual choice rather than an empirical finding. Read through Tillich's functional definition, the same history admits a different description: the post-Enlightenment era did not produce less unconditional commitment; it produced new objects for the structure that revealed religion once served. This reading is offered as an interpretive proposal. It rests on a functional definition of religion and on Tillich's contested claim that ultimate concern is universal, and it is illustrated, not established, by the cases of nationalism and the revolutionary cults.

The proposal's value is that it generates a research agenda. Measurement would come first: instruments that distinguish institutional religiosity, spirituality, meaning in life, ideological commitment, civil religion, political religion, and ultimate concern (Table 2), so

Table 2. Conceptual comparison of institutional religiosity, spirituality, civil religion, political religion, and Tillichian ultimate concern, as the terms are used in this review. Definitions follow Bellah (8), Gentile (9), and Tillich (7, 19); indicator examples follow the measurement literature (17, 18, 20, 21).

Concept	Object of commitment	Typical institutional form	Typical indicators	Relation to ultimate concern
Institutional religiosity	God or the sacred as defined by a historical tradition	Churches, denominations, congregations	Affiliation, service attendance, prayer, ritual participation	One historically dominant vehicle of ultimate concern
Spirituality	The sacred or transcendent, individually construed	Weakly institutionalized or private practice	Self-reported spirituality, private practice, religious experience	Can carry ultimate concern outside institutions

Continued Table 2. Conceptual comparison of institutional religiosity, spirituality, civil religion, political religion, and Tillichian ultimate concern, as the terms are used in this review. Definitions follow Bellah (8), Gentile (9), and Tillich (7, 19); indicator examples follow the measurement literature (17, 18, 20, 21).

Concept	Object of commitment	Typical institutional form	Typical indicators	Relation to ultimate concern
Civil religion	The nation understood under transcendent reference	Public rituals, founding documents, national holidays	Participation in civic ritual, sacralized public rhetoric	Democratic sacralization of the polity, compatible with churches
Political religion	Party, state, nation, race, or class treated as ultimate	Movement liturgies, cults of leaders and martyrs	Mobilization, cult participation, exclusivity of loyalty	Totalitarian sacralization of politics; an exclusive secular object of ultimate concern
Ultimate concern (Tillich)	Whatever concerns a person unconditionally	None required	Unconditionality, centrality of the concern, willingness to sacrifice, despair at the object's loss	The generic structure of which the other four are possible vehicles

that the secular objects of commitment can be studied with the same rigor now applied to religious ones. Comparative work would come next: studies across cultures, religious traditions, and educational systems, including non-Western and non-Christian societies, to determine whether education suppresses, preserves, reshapes, or redirects different forms of commitment in different settings. Weber was right that modernity disenchant the world. The artificial mountain raised on the Champ de Mars for Robespierre's festival does not prove that the need once served by enchantment survives disenchantment intact, but it remains a vivid emblem of that possibility, and a reminder of what purely institutional measures of religion may fail to see.

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