A massive shift is occurring at the beginning of the twenty-first century in which millions of people are moving away from the religious traditions of their cultures and into the technological/commercial vortex of secularization, the process by which secularism is growing.

By and large, this change is not good for people. It is true that many people are thereby liberated from barbaric traditional practices and gross superstition in their native cultures, and secularization brings with it medical marvels and sometimes economic prosperity. But this does not always happen, and sometimes it is at a great cost. Lives that were centered are now adrift.

The cost of secularization does not matter, however. The trend is probably permanent. In fact, secularization seems to be picking up speed. Secularization did not begin in the twentieth century, and it will not end in the twenty-first century. I foresee its victory in the sense that secularism will no longer seem to be significant—it will just be the way things are—sometime after the year 2100.

What makes the process of secularization inevitable is that it works at the level of what is believable—what Charles Taylor calls the conditions of belief. According to the political philosopher Eric Voegelin, in his volume, In Search of Order, epiphanies—revelations of the truth of order, such as those that happened with Jesus and the Buddha—have occurred throughout history and will continue to occur. Each revelation succeeds to the extent that its new symbols express the “common sense” of people in a particular place and time with the “authority commonly present in everybody’s consciousness.” Religious images and stories today seem strange, whereas secularism expresses our common sense of how things are. It is not so much that we deny religious claims of miracles, for example, as that they do not seem possible and therefore do not really challenge us at all.

This is what happened to me. I began to sense that Our Religions were unreal. At one time I was a liberal Jewish believer. Then, at a certain point, it
took too much effort to listen to words that could not be true, and the worst part of this process—the part most revealing of how cut off you are from your religious tradition—is that you do not even feel you have lost anything. I can no longer believe, at least not in the old way. There are many others like me.

Our Religions do not disappear in this process of secularization. In fact, they remain robust, first in opposition to secularism and then later in dialogue with it. Many people who come from religious families will probably remain religious believers in every generation, but as the number of religious families declines, the total number of believers will also fall. The deterioration of religious civilization will take a long time. Even after the triumph of secularism is complete, Judaism, Christianity, and all Our Religions will still be present and viable to many. However, they will be secondary to the secular world, which will be normative.

This event—the displacement of Our Religions—although it will take place gradually, will signal a radically new era. There has never been a time in human history in which religion has not been the dominant worldview. Today, religion is still primary. The struggle against secularism is still ongoing. When that struggle ends, the world will look quite different.

This chapter lists some of the forces contributing to secularism. I believe these forces will triumph over religion. However, as the next chapter shows, these forces displace religion, but they do not replace it because they do not lead us to abundant life. For that, we need to achieve Hallowed Secularism.

**Science**

Science undermines religion in a number of ways. First, science shows that revelation, the most important source of our knowledge of God, is not wholly and uniquely reliable. Then, science shows us a universe in which God does not seem possible and certainly is not necessary. Finally, science shows us processes that do not bear the hand of a careful creator. Given all this, it is not surprising that religion begins to pale. Science displaces any supernatural account of the world.

Why is the success of science in explaining the world a threat to Our Religions? Why cannot religion be in charge of morality and science be in charge of material life? Even many atheists admit that moral values can be real and enduring. In a *Newsweek* debate about the reality of God, Sam Harris, representing the atheist side, said, “I’m not at all a moral relativist . . . I think there is an absolute right and wrong.” So why not divide the spheres of life with material life on the science side, morality on the religious side, and the field of history split between them? This sort of division is what liberals in America have been suggesting for years—that religion is a private matter and