

BEYOND SECULARIZATION: RELIGION'S DYNAMIC STATUS AND CONTESTED ROLES IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF THE 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

The first quarter of the 21st century has presented a complex and often contradictory picture of religion, fundamentally challenging classical secularization theories that predicted its decline with modernization. This article argues that religion is not disappearing but is undergoing profound transformations, marked by resilience and dynamic adaptation, manifesting as a "post-secular turn." We analyze this evolution through four interconnected lenses: the Transformation Paradigm, which views religion as an evolving institution; significant Geographic Shifts in religious demographics, particularly the rise of the Global South; the increasing prominence of Identity Politics, where religion serves as a potent tool for national identity and political mobilization; and the pervasive impact of Digital Transformation on religious practices, communities, and dissemination. Drawing on extensive documentary research from 2001-2025, synthesizing cross-disciplinary and cross-regional perspectives, the study examines Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. It explores critical cross-religious phenomena, including religious nationalism, interfaith dialogue, religious violence, and evolving roles of women in religious leadership. The findings reveal that religion during this period is a multifaceted social phenomenon capable of fostering both conflict and cooperation and a vital force shaping societies, politics, and cultures globally. A nuanced understanding of these ongoing dynamics is crucial for scholars, policymakers, and religious leaders.

Keywords: Religious Transformation, Secularization Theory, Post-Secularism, Identity Politics, Digital Religion

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