

# Changing our Mind on Secularization

*The contemporary debate  
about sacred and secular  
in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*



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about sacred and secular  
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Papers delivered at the Twenty-Ninth Annual  
Atlantic Theological Conference  
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Edited by  
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## Acknowledgements

Once again, St. Peter Publications is pleased to present the annual report of the Atlantic Theological Conference. This volume contains the papers presented at the 2009 Conference, which took place in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, June 23 to 26, 2009. The Conference was called “Changing Our Mind on Secularization” and explored the topic of the contemporary debate about sacred and secular in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. As always, the papers presented at this conference represent a faithful and thoughtful contribution to the Christian theological scene by a number of scholars. We are grateful to all the contributors for their comprehensive consideration of the topic.

The annual conference reports are really a labour of love—not only the thinking and writing of the contributors, but also the long hours devoted to the preparation and formatting of the materials for publication. We thank Dr. Wayne Hankey and Nicholas Hatt for editing this volume.

The Rev'd Canon Peter W. Harris  
*Chairman of St. Peter Publications*



## Foreword

During the thirty years of the Atlantic Theological Conferences one of the constants has been the contributions to each of them by the members and graduates of the Department of Classics at Dalhousie University and King's College. These contributors, both lay and clerical, most notably the Rev'd Dr Robert Crouse, have been prominent, yea, even indispensable, among all those who have delivered and replied to papers, inspired, organised, prayed, preached, listened, asked questions, and discussed. The very recent addition to its work, the Programme in Religious Studies, has made the Department even more apt as a supporting pillar to these Conferences, which are one of the most enduring intellectual enterprises outside the universities and schools of the Atlantic Provinces. Consequently, as the present Chairman of the Department, it gives me great pleasure to join with a graduate and research student in it, the Dean of Residence of the University of King's College, in presenting to you the volume containing the papers and responses of the 2009 Conference.

Although all except one of the contributors (as well as Peter Bryson, whose presentation was not able to be included) is either a graduate or a present member of the Department (or both), together they have a wonderful breadth, both in terms of the religious communities they represent, and in terms of expertise. This is only possible because Religious Studies enables the Classics Department to extend its theological consideration to the non-Christian world with which Atlantic Canadians are becoming more and more linked both within and without. Christian theology began within and grew by continually feeding upon what the pagan Greeks and Romans said, sung, thought, and revered about the divine, the human, and the cosmos. It cannot continue in truthful and persuasive strength unless it reiterate a like relation to the divine manifestations in our own world. To aid in that we remain at your service.

Wayne Hankey and Nicholas Hatt  
*St Monnica, 2010*





**Problematic:  
Changing our Mind on Secularization.  
The Contemporary Debate about  
Secular and Sacred in Judaism,  
Christianity and Islam**

Wayne J. Hankey  
Dalhousie University & University of King's College

***CAUSA CONVOCATIONIS***

In common with conservative Christians generally, since the inauguration of these conferences, participants have habitually complained about secularization as one of the chief enemies to living an authentic Christian life. However, since September 11, 2001, and the turn of our attention to world-changing “fundamentalism” among Jews, Christians, and Muslims, there has been a striking reversal. On the one hand, Islam and Zionist Judaism are accused of lacking a proper basis for the secular. On the other hand, Christians now lay claim as a point of pride to being the originators of the secular, and, thus, of a space wherein religious differences can be mediated and peaceful coexistence fostered. For Christian Westerners, secularism is presented “within a continuum of social and historical ‘progress’ that portray[s] it as the highest achievement” of our own culture, so that we are not alienated from our religious and cultural traditions by it; moreover, we are confident that what originated with us will be the future of all mankind.<sup>1</sup> In this shift, or reversal for conservatives, it remains agreed that secularization is a product of Christianity; the point of difference is how we evaluate it.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard W. Bulliet, *Islam: the View from the Edge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 199. Bulliet is contrasting Western students to students within the Islamic world before 9/11, but the contrast has only intensified since then.

It had been a threat; it has now become our pride. Our aim in this conference is to note this shift, to reconsider the basis of our previous evaluation of secularization as ‘a bad thing’, and reflect on whether we want to join in the enthusiasm for it and in the praise of Christianity as its originator. Within this enterprise, the purposes of this introductory paper are two: first, I shall deal with language and try to suggest a set of common terms enabling us to talk about the subject with less than the usual confusion; second, I shall raise some of the questions which will be developed in the subsequent papers, so that at the end we will have the basis for a reflection together on what our conclusions ought to be.

**TERMS: POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE SECULARIZATION, *LAÏCITÉ***

A great virtue of our theological conferences is their historical approach. In respect to the question of secularization, this gives superiority to any other treatment of the matter, but it also poses a gigantic problem. The advantage is straightforward and may be put as follows: a shift from secularization as *positive* to *negative*, in respect to living a religious life, occurs within the history we shall cover and is perfectly comprehensible within that history. Thus, at the end of this conference we should have a deeper understanding of secularization than available elsewhere. The problem goes with the advantage: to describe the phenomena we need more terms than are used in English language discussions, and we need terms which do not apply only to the contemporary world.

The French originated the most radical secularization and developed the most sophisticated necessary language. In consequence, we can usefully start with distinctions made in Olivier Roy’s *Secularism Confronts Islam*.

Contemporary Western societies...are, in fact, secularized, either because the separation of church and state is a constitutional principle (the United States), because civil society no longer defines itself through faith and religious practice (the United Kingdom, Germany, the Scandinavian countries, [Canada]), or because these two forms of

secularism converge and reinforce each other, thus giving birth to what the French call *laïcité*.<sup>2</sup>

Later Roy compares secularization and *laïcité*:

Secularization is not antireligious or anticlerical: people merely stop worshipping and stop talking about religion. *Laïcité*, on the contrary, is explicit; it is a political choice that defines the place of religion in an authoritarian, legal manner. *Laïcité* is decreed by the state, which then organizes the public sphere...<sup>3</sup>

We may regard *laïcité* as possible only at the point in negative secularization when the state can determine the place of religion in a society because the bond between religion and public life has been sundered. Positive secularization occurs when the state uses its power to impose the forms and institutions of a particular religion on social life.

While secularization is an ancient phenomenon, *laïcité* is a new one emerging out of and dependent upon the revolutions at the end of the eighteenth century. It exists in both Islamic majority countries like Turkey, and in Christian majority countries like France and the United States. It need not be antireligious; indeed, at least two laic states, Turkey and the United States, have high levels of religious practice. In France the state provides for the upkeep of houses of worship. The same is true in Turkey where this upkeep includes Christian churches and where the state also provides benefits for the Muslim clergy. However, both are determined to keep religion in a certain limited place. Thus, for example, both forbid the wearing of the hijab in schools and universities. It has occurred in circumstances where the state felt the need to constitute itself against a powerful religious reality: Roman Catholicism in France and Islam in Turkey. The United States was constituted in the face of colonies with opposed dominant churches, where some of them were

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<sup>2</sup> Olivier Roy, *Secularism Confronts Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), viii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

“established” and used state force to impose positive secularization, such as Puritanism in Massachusetts, and the Church of England in Virginia, Maryland, and Georgia. Others were founded on the principle of limited religious tolerance, such as Rhode Island and Connecticut. The First Amendment to the American Constitution preventing establishment was not applied to the individual states until 1868.<sup>4</sup> Roy’s important thesis is that *laïcité*, and the new Jewish, Christian, and Islamic fundamentalisms, certainly as they operate in the West, assume and foster one another because the fundamentalists have left the old politically created amalgams between religion and society behind, have no interest in state power, and, instead of this, want to live religion intensely as individuals or in small groups.

For Roy, as well as for other shrewd observers like Richard Bulliet, Islam is hugely multiform,<sup>5</sup> and has no inherent theory or model of state or church. It did not develop a strong religious organization equivalent to the church—nothing remotely like the Papacy, territorial bishops, synods, or presbyteries, for example. Moreover, until the nineteenth century, when Islamic governments began imitating European models of the state—beginning significantly with Napoleon, the originator of *laïcité*—it had no strong state structures with codes of law. Consequently, secularization dividing the state and the religious sphere did not occur within Islam. Western Christian secularization happened in the conflict between a strong state and a strong church, both claiming to be absolute. In the Christian West, the state won and the clergy were “tamed”,<sup>6</sup> so that, in Canada, for example, even Christian conservatives repeat the mantra that “the church should stay out of politics.” Nonetheless, theocracy—government directly by a clergy—is far from being either

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<sup>4</sup> By way of the Fourteenth Amendment.

<sup>5</sup> Roy is primarily interested in how Islam is lived in Western countries in some of which it has been a minority religion since the eleventh century. It adapts itself quickly—so that, for example, minority Muslims soon have the same level of religious observance as adherents of the majority religions where they live.

<sup>6</sup> Richard W. Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 38 & 93.

characteristic or possible within Islam—except in the special case of Iran where it is constitutionally excluded.<sup>7</sup>

*Laïcité* as a term enables us to consider contemporary forms in their difference from ancient, medieval and modern ones, but, while *laïcité* matches contemporary fundamentalism, its strength is no greater than that of the contemporary state, an institution under severe stress. Charles Taylor’s massive work, *A Secular Age*,<sup>8</sup> has even less geographical and historical extent than Roy’s tiny *Secularism Confronts Islam*; nonetheless, it has some uses for us. Taylor reminds us that secularism in northwestern Protestant Europe and its dependencies, especially as it turns hostile to religion and becomes atheistic, is a product of reform movements within Christianity. Intensified personal religion develops a bad conscience in respect to what it comes to regard as the frauds and props of Christian dogma. Just as *laïcité* depends on a state which acquired the transcendent authority once belonging to the sacred-secular pairing, the modern secular, both in Christian majority and other states, acquires the marks and evils of religion without any checks. Obvious examples are Communist, Fascist, and Nazi states. We must note that the optimistic progressivism of the so-called “free” economy also absorbs and transmutes the sacred. By the miraculous operation of the invisible hand (god behind the curtain), moral and spiritual evils are transformed into goods. Thus, what traditional religion regarded as vices of excess—like lust, greed, and gluttony—which destroy the soul, become virtues in the free market economy where the expansion of desire and consumption are the iron ruling necessity. Certainly consumption is required by the American state religion, as President Bush made clear immediately following 9/11. Just as Roy is forced by the weakness of the laic state to consider its limits, Taylor suggests ways in which the Christian religion, having assumed

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<sup>7</sup> Iran is a republic with a democratic aspect functioning better than in many other Middle Eastern countries and where an important engagement with modernity is happening. See the recent series of articles in the *New York Times* by Roger Cohen of which that for March 16, 2009, “Iran, Jews and Pragmatism” is a good example. The events occurring before and after the elections give further evidence that the Iranian polity is complex with competing forces not resolvable by a clergy which is itself divided.

<sup>8</sup> C. Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belkap Press, 2007).

secularization, returns, at least around its edge. How is this revived religion to be judged? Can it reclaim any of its old content? These questions take us to the papers of this conference.

**PRE-CHRISTIAN PARADIGMS  
AND THEIR CHRISTIAN REITERATIONS**

It is frequently alleged that, in contrast to Islam, Christianity was given a theory for the relation of church and state by its founder with his cryptic command to “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22.21). If so, the separation Christ made was immediately undermined by the Pauline “The powers that be are ordained by God” (Romans 13.1), which puts God behind Caesar, and the Petrine “Submit yourself to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake” (1 Peter 2.13), which has the same effect. More importantly, the power to which Jesus referred predated Christianity and was certainly not secular in the modern sense. Here we come to what I regard as the most important point for understanding first the Christian and then the Islamic relation to the secular.

Until the revolutions of the eighteenth century, governing authority needed divine sanction—there is a sense in which this was true also of the modern regimes based in a divinely ordained natural order, but as the emergence of *laïcité* makes clear, something new happened with the revolutions. Normally, in the ancient world, this authority was derived from the fact that the magistrate or king was also a priest or in some sense a god or the functioning image of a god. Although Caesar exercised power in this present world, his *imperium* was the will of Jupiter and fulfilled the *FAS*, the decree of the gods; it was fate. Julius Caesar and his nephew Augustus, like ancient magistrates generally, were priests, and Augustus had himself depicted as the heroic son of a god and as a priest. The Caesars would be honoured as gods. Incense was burned to the Imperial Genius (divinity) and his business was conducted in a *basilica*, the hall of a royal priest (*Basileus*) with an altar for the taking of oaths—thus

they were ready-made for their future use as Christian churches.<sup>9</sup> Christianity came to be in a world of priest kings and sacred magistrates, and that authoritative heritage was endlessly worked and reworked to various and opposed ends within Christendom. Here are some diverse examples.<sup>10</sup>

I. When, after being crowned Holy Roman Emperor by Pope Sylvester on Christmas Day, 800, Charlemagne and his successors established connections between themselves and Caesar as he continued to reign as the *Basileus* (the old pagan name for a sacred king) in Constantinople. We can see this in the architecture of his palace chapel, in his depiction of himself on his coins, and in his educational policy which required the cathedrals and monasteries of his realm to become schools. The emperor undertook the spiritual education of his people.

II. When, in the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas wanted to justify the Pope giving university professorships to Dominican and Franciscan friars, he used as his argument the power of the head of the Greek *polis* over the education of the young, arguing that the Pope stood in the same relation to the Christian republic as did the ancient pagan ruler.<sup>11</sup> Aquinas has

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<sup>9</sup> Thus, in the Melkite Church of St Sergius and Bacchus, finished before 325, and one of the oldest Christian churches still existent, the main altar has the shape and form (a high raised edge to prevent the blood from spilling down the sides) of pagan altars (there is, however, despite the guide books, no hole to drain the non-existent blood of the Christian bloodless sacrifice). The Church and Monastery stand above the village of Maaloula, the last Christian community where the language is that of Jesus, Aramaic (there are two neighbouring Muslim Aramaic villages). It is also significant that, while, under the first Caliphate, the Umayyad, Islam constructed mosques with a basilica form (importantly modified), this did not continue later.

<sup>10</sup> This paper was delivered as an illustrated lecture; slides showed what is described here verbally.

<sup>11</sup> See Aquinas, *Contra Impugnantes* (Leonine edition, vol. 41, 1970), pars 2, cap. 2, ad 10: *patet quod ordinare de studio pertinet ad eum qui praeest reipublicae, et praecipue ad auctoritatem apostolicae sedis, qua universalis Ecclesia gubernatur, cui per generale studium providetur*. See pars 2, cap. 3, co. et ad 6, ad 7, ad 8, ad 21, ad 23, ad 24 and my “Dionysius dixit, Lex divinitatis est ultima per media

melded together Aristotle's Greek *polis*, the Roman *res publica*, and Christendom.

- III. If you visit Constantinople and, with Hagia Sophia<sup>12</sup> at your back, you head left towards the Blue Mosque, on your right, still standing, perfectly intact, bas reliefs and all, you will find an Obelisk in the remains of the old Hippodrome. It was shipped from Egypt and erected by the Christian Emperor Theodosius (Reigned AD 349-395, baptised in 380) in 390. Theodosius made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire in 391. With this symbol of his royal priesthood above him, Theodosius may still be seen crowning the victors in the races with their laurel crowns. The emperor who made Christianity the established religion asserted his authority by means of sacred symbol of an Egyptian Pharaoh; his pagan predecessors in Rome had used the same symbol to the same effect, asserting the unification of divine and human powers under the Pontifex Maximus. Both the Pope in Rome and the Emperor in Constantinople took over this pagan title designating the headship of the college of Roman priests.<sup>13</sup> Its use provided one basis for the Byzantine practice of having the Emperor invest the Patriarch with the symbols of his office. After the conquest of 1453, the Muslim Sultan invested the Patriarch with the sacred symbols (robe, staff, and pectoral cross).<sup>14</sup>
- IV. Visiting the Vatican today, you cannot fail to confront a much larger obelisk, this one created in Egypt in the thirteenth century BC and first erected in Rome by the Emperor Caligula

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reducere': Aquinas, hierocracy and the 'augustinisme politique,'" in *Tommaso D'Aquino: proposte nuove di lettura. Festschrift Antonio Tognolo*, edited Ilario Tolomio, *Medioevo. Rivista di Storia della Filosofia Medievale* 18 (Padova: Editrice Antenore, 1992): 119–150.

<sup>12</sup> Built 532-537 by the Emperor Justinian.

<sup>13</sup> Gratian (co-Augustus 367, Emperor in the West, d. 383), was "the first Emperor to refuse the title and insignia of *Pontifex Maximus*", John Julius Norwich, *Byzantium: The Early Centuries* (London: Penguin, 1990), 109.

<sup>14</sup> John Julius Norwich, *Byzantium: The Decline and Fall* (London: Penguin, 1996), 442.

in 37 AD. It was moved to St Peter's in 1586 and belongs to a series erected at the beginning of the modern period at the great cruces of Papal power in the eternal city,<sup>15</sup> reasserting that the royal Priesthood of the Pontifex Maximus has divine sanction and includes both powers (both swords).

V. The connection between Charlemagne and his successors and the Christian Caesar in Constantine was reciprocal. In 827, the Byzantine Basileus Michael the Stammerer sent the Frankish king Louis the Pious the gift of a manuscript which changed western history profoundly. The writings of Dionysius the Areopagite, who presented himself as the convert of St Paul in Athens, authoritatively transferred to Christians the deepest theological, philosophical, and political teachings, and the spiritual methods of the pagan Neoplatonists. In 1302 in the Bull "Unam Sanctam", Pope Boniface VIII (AD 1235-1303) made the greatest of all assertions of papal power using this law: "the divine law is that the lowest is reduced to the highest through a middle term." In other words, all things are not led back equally and immediately to their source, but mediately, according to their proper order. The greater dignity and nobility of the spiritual in respect to the earthly power requires that the spiritual direct the earthly as its subordinated means, in order for the good to be done. The papal use of this law made the Bishop of Rome into the Vicar of Christ standing between the heavenly and the earthly hierarchies, so that kings must be obedient to popes. This "divine law" Boniface found in Dionysius; Dionysius, however, got it from Iamblichus, a third-century pagan philosophical theologian who used it in justifying pagan sacraments (theurgies) and other paths to God.

VI. In the sixteenth century when the definitive Anglican theologian, Richard Hooker (AD ca. 1554 to 1600), wished to justify the fundamental principle of the Church of England—

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<sup>15</sup> Santa Maria Maggiore, St Giovanni Laterano, the Piazza Navona, etc.

that the monarch is the Supreme Governor of the Church—he referred back to “Blessed Dionysius,” and quoted the same text of Dionysius used by Pope Boniface VIII.<sup>16</sup> He made only one tiny but decisive alteration: where the Pope placed himself, Hooker placed the English monarch. The king is supreme except for “*God* himself, the king of all the kinges of the earth.” For both Pope Boniface and Richard Hooker, the mediation of heaven and earth which belongs to Christ must also belong to an earthly hierarch. Thus the mediating hierarch, who had been identified with the Roman Pontiff in his possession of the two swords, makes another appearance. Here, in seventeenth century England, the hierarch, Elizabeth I or James I and VI unifies the sacred and the secular powers.

VII. Despite continuing allegiance to the Roman Church, the continental Catholic monarchs were scarcely less determined than the English, Swedish, and Danish Protestant kings to

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<sup>16</sup> “Hooker’s Autograph notes,” in *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, W. Speed Hill, General Editor, vol. 3, edited P.G. Stanwood, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Belknap Press, 1981), Supplement II, 493–94: “If you take away order, of necessity confusion follows, whence arises division and from division destruction...Therefore, the Apostle has said that all things should be done in order...This order consists in distinction of degree, so that one differs from his fellow in power and the lesser obeys the greater, otherwise society cannot hold together. And so it is a divine law, says St. Dionysius, for the lowest things to be led back to the highest by those that are intermediate. There should then be one in the Church who possesses supreme power, supreme and widest right over all.” See my “Augustinian Immediacy and Dionysian Mediation in John Colet, Edmund Spenser, Richard Hooker and the Cardinal de Bérulle,” *Augustinus in der Neuzeit, Colloque de la Herzog August Bibliothek de Wolfenbüttel, 14-17 octobre, 1996*, sous la direction de Kurt Flasch et Dominique de Courcelles, éd. Dominique de Courcelles (Turnhout: Editions Brepols, 1998), 1251–60 and W.J.T. Kirby, “The Neoplatonic Logic of Richard Hooker’s Generic Division of Law,” *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 22 (1998), 49–67 at note 2; idem, “The Charge of Religion Belongeth unto Princes’: Peter Martyr Vermigli on the Unity of Civil and Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte / Archive for Reformation History* 94 (2003): 162–175 at 167, note 25; idem, “Grace and Hierarchy: Richard Hooker’s Two Platonisms,” in idem, *Richard Hooker and the English Reformation* (Netherlands: Kluwer, 2003), 25–40 at 26, n. 8; 35, n. 46; 37, n. 48 and idem, *Richard Hooker, Reformer and Platonist* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 30, 34, 38, 40, 132.

control the church within their territories and to provide themselves with a political theology which would justify this. In 1563 Philip II of Spain began erecting the most austere of all the great royal palaces of Europe, the Escorial, designed according to Augustinian aesthetic principles. He united in one vast complex a residence, an administrative headquarters, a monastery of Augustinian friars, a library, a vast reliquary, a royal mausoleum and a great basilica church, all laid out on the pattern of the grill where St Lawrence was martyred. This was the spiritual fortress of the ascetic friar king who sent the Armada against the Supreme Governor of the Church of England. He had been the husband of her sister and they shared more than that. The façade of the basilica provided in stone the political theology of the regime. It is fronted with named, crowned, sceptred, and gilded statues of the six good builder kings of Israel, with David and Solomon at their centre. Like the English Supreme Governor, the Most Catholic King established his own immediate connection to sacred authority.

To what do these examples and many more like them point, relative to our questions at this Conference?

#### **CHRISTIAN PARADIGMS:**

##### **THE SACRED SECULAR AND THE SECULAR SACRED**

Christianity as Jewish sect stood on the notion of a Kingdom of God institutionalized in the High Priest, prescribed by the sacred Law, and anointed Kings, all of which were rivals for rule in Israel. It was also first *a* and then *the* religion of the Roman Empire; its creed asserts that the Saviour God was crucified under Pontius Pilate. Its greatest missionary claimed with pride that he was a Roman citizen. Thus, on both its pagan and Jewish sides, it knew nothing except sacredly authorized power over heaven and earth. We can say that whether Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant, Enlightenment Deist, or humanist atheist, there has been and still is no basis for political power in the Christian West which is not religious—even if that religion has been in the last three centuries sometimes a rationalist and often a

humanist immanentizing of transcendence and its symbols. We remain within a dialectic in which the poles are the *Sacred Secular* and the *Secular Sacred*.

For the *Sacred Secular*, Emperors and Kings are ordained by God so that their rule includes care for the Church. The constitution of the Christian Roman Empire as preached by Bishop Eusebius and inaugurated by Constantine depended on a likeness between Jesus Christ as the divine-human mediator and the Emperor as carrying out his work on earth as Viceroy (or Vicar). For Eusebius, Constantine was a “general bishop,” in respect to the Church. The governing authority of Jesus Christ, his saving and preserving work, sacrifice and priesthood, and his shepherding are all ascribed in an earthy form to the Christian Emperor. Part of the Emperor’s work of presenting a pure sacrifice even required him to rid the Empire and Church of pagans, unbelievers, and Christian heretics.<sup>17</sup> In the East, following Constantine, the bishops and priests are subordinated to the sacred Emperor. Because as a warrior he spills blood, he cannot offer the unbloody sacrifice of the Divine Liturgy, however, emperors could, and several did, often preach.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> In his *On the Life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine*, Bishop Eusebius, positively compares Constantine to Moses, as depicted in the *Life of Moses* by Philo Judaeus. Philo had made Moses the perfect Philosopher-King, Legislator, Prophet, and Priest, the “living (ensouled) law,” “*cosmopolites*: citizen of the cosmos,” quasi-divine super human mediator between God and the human. Eusebius justifies Constantine’s calling, presiding over, and intervening in the Council of Nicaea (many scholars think that the *homoousios* formula—of the same substance as the Father—came from Constantine), as follows: “he, like some general bishop constituted by God, convened synods of his ministers. Nor did he disdain to be present and sit with them in their assembly, but bore a share in their deliberations, ministering to all that pertained to the peace of God.” (I.44). The *Tricennial Oration*, delivered in the presence of Constantine, confers the reigning, saving, preserving, priestly, sacrificing, and shepherding language belonging to Jesus Christ as mediator on the Christian Emperor.

<sup>18</sup> See Steven Runciman, *The Byzantine Theocracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 68 and 112; John Julius Norwich, *Byzantium: The Apogee* (London: Penguin, 1993), 103 (on the Basileus, Leo the Wise, reigned AD 886-912).

The same happens in the medieval West after Charlemagne takes up the sacred imperial mantle,<sup>19</sup> in the Protestant North when the English monarch becomes Supreme Governor of the Church, and in Denmark and Sweden where the clergy become civil servants. The English Coronation liturgy, with its anointing and clothing with the sacred alb and dalmatic, took up elements from the Byzantine coronation of the *Basileus* and of the Holy Roman Emperor.

The *Secular Sacred* is primarily a phenomenon of the Latin world. In the Latin West, owing to the transfer of the imperial capital from Rome to Constantinople in 330, the Roman Pontiff gradually acquired both the sacred and the secular imperial power.<sup>20</sup> The Pope's claims are represented in his use of the obelisks once associated with the divine Pharaoh and the divine pagan Roman Emperor as Pontifex Maximus. The Popes as heads of the priestly order claim both the sacred and the secular swords, thus including the secular authorities within their rule. We may use as a sign of that power the so-called "Donation of Constantine" which not only represented the Emperor as donating territory, a crown, and wealth to the Pope, but turned him into a papal groom!<sup>21</sup>

It is in this context that secularization appears as *positive*. The archetype imitated by western mediaevals and moderns is Constantine's Christian Roman Empire which "was based on a clear religious conviction that it was the earthly copy of the Kingdom of Heaven."<sup>22</sup> Secularization in this sense is simply the relation of church and state where they use coercive and financial power to

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<sup>19</sup> Believing, or claiming to believe, with European prejudice, that the Imperial throne in Byzantium was vacant because possessed by a woman!

<sup>20</sup> The power of the priestly sacred in the West was strikingly manifest when Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan, forced Theodosius to make public penance in 391; and the critical necessity of its assumption of secular responsibility stood out when Pope Leo saved Rome from the Huns in 453 and mitigated the sack by the Vandals in 456.

<sup>21</sup> The Byzantine emperors accepted this forged document; see Norwich, *Byzantium, The Early Centuries*, 379, idem, *Byzantium: The Apogee*, 334.

<sup>22</sup> Runciman, *The Byzantine Theocracy*, 1. This was intensified when on February 7, 457 an Emperor was crowned by a Patriarch of Constantinople (Leo by Anatolius): "the old order was beginning to change: away from the venerable military traditions on which the Empire had been founded and towards that religious, mystical concept of sovereignty which was to grow ever more insistent as the centuries went by" Norwich, *Byzantium: Early*, 164.

make the Christian order effective in the world. Thus, laws and institutions are created to do everything from preventing infanticide to founding universities and hospitals, building churches and chapels, paying the clergy and musicians, and persecuting heretics, non-Christians, and dissenters. In England, the United Kingdom, and their dependencies, the effects of such positive secularization include such things as: a) the foundation of schools like Eton, colleges like King's, Cambridge, Christ Church, Oxford, Trinity College, Dublin, and King's College, Windsor, Nova Scotia, and churches like St Paul's, in Charlottetown and Halifax, and St John's in Lunenburg; b) that the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, which alone could give degrees in England, and all their colleges, must be Anglican foundations; c) that, at the English, Irish, and Nova Scotian universities, taking degrees required subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England; d) that, of the Nova Scotian colleges, only the Anglican King's College in Windsor received British government support; e) persecutions or inhibitions against Jews, Protestant dissenters, heretics, and "Papists"; f) punishment of infractions against the rubrics of the *Book of Common Prayer* by imprisonment; g) that the church of largely Catholic Ireland to which its population paid its tithes was Protestant; h) the criminalization of abortion; i) that only clergy of the Church of England could perform marriages in Nova Scotia; and, finally, j) the extreme difficulty of divorce so that it was only a recourse for the wealthy. A great part of negative or laicizing secularization during the last two centuries is a reaction against this positive effort to embed religion in everyday life by means of the power of the state and her agencies.

#### **ISLAM AND THE WESTERN SACRED SECULAR DIALECTIC**

So far as Islam comes into the world in relation to any state, it comes, as Christianity had, in relation to foreign *imperium*. For Islam, emerging out of tribal Arabia, there were both the Christianised Roman Empire and the Zoroastrian Persian Empire. No oriental sacralised monarchy emerged from the Arabian peninsula, and ideologically it is far distant from Islam. As with Christianity, the *Sacred Secular* was necessarily encountered and engaged as believers communicated their message of salvation. In contrast to Christianity,

it is remarkable how little of the forms of sacred *imperium* were taken into Islam.

The last part of this introductory talk will briefly sketch Islam's engagement with Western sacred *imperium* and secularity in terms of four moments:

- I. the Umayyad Caliphate,
- II. the Abbassid Caliphate and a new and renewed secular,
- III. Thomas Aquinas as heir of the Islamic secular: the Secular of Natural Reason, Virtue, and Law,
- IV. What Islam did not take from Christendom: Roman law,
- V. the present state of the Islamic secular: consequences of Western European and American imperial dominance.

### **I. The Umayyad Caliphate**

As is well-known, the Arabic followers of the Prophet conquered North Africa, Western Europe—including all of Spain and the southwest of France—the Fertile Crescent, Persia, and as far east as the borders of India and China in the seventh and eighth centuries, at an extraordinarily rapid rate. Constantinople was besieged between 670 and 677, however, efforts to resist succeeded, and the great cosmopolis survived to be the ideal, educator, and rival of Islam for more than seven centuries.<sup>23</sup> Those who picture the conquest of much of the Christian world as a matter of the sword forget that the Umayyads, far from being interested in converting Christians, undertook no missionary endeavours and made conversion extremely difficult.<sup>24</sup> They took over the local governmental structures they found, especially in the East where these were very old and sophisticated, left them intact, and used them, often including the families who had previously administered them, in

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<sup>23</sup> See Nadia Maria El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs* (Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press, 2004) and Norwich, *Byzantium: The Apogee*, 42: on the Basileus Theophilus [reigned AD 829-42] who “was an aesthete and a patron of the arts, with a particular love and understanding...for the culture of the Islamic world. Far more than any Christian Emperor, he took as his exemplar an Abbasid Caliph: the great Harun al-Rashid...”

<sup>24</sup> See Bulliet, *Islam: the View from the Edge*, especially chapters 1-3.

order to tax the conquered in the traditional imperial way.<sup>25</sup> The Muslim conquerors, like their Christian imperial predecessors, tolerated those who differed from them religiously, by the payment of a tax. The Christians in Muslim lands continued to regard “the Orthodox Emperor as their sovereign lord; and this was accepted by the Caliph.”<sup>26</sup> The primary difference is that toleration by Muslims is embedded in the Qur’an itself and it was extended to other monotheists on religious principle.<sup>27</sup> Thus, religious toleration was better established among Muslims than what prevailed for Jews and Muslims in Christian lands.<sup>28</sup> This continued into modern times.

After his conquest of Constantinople, Mehmet the Conqueror insisted on the continuation of Christian craftsmen and traders there. This policy enabled “Greeks and other Christian minorities such as Armenians to become prominent traders, administrators and diplomats. When the Sephardic Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492, they found a new home in Constantinople, which accepted their Ladino dialect and Judaic traditions.”<sup>29</sup> The effects of the fact that the Ottoman Sultan regarded himself as the protector of the Jews come out in an interesting way in the history of a Christian city like Dubrovnik which was on the border of the Ottoman Empire and depended on trade with it for its economic life. The prosperous

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<sup>25</sup> E.g. the family from which St John Damascene descended; writing within Muslim lands, he produced the most important defence of Orthodoxy and criticism of Islam (as a Christian heresy) in the first Christian millennium.

<sup>26</sup> Runciman, *The Byzantine Theocracy*, 58. Thus, the imperial two-headed eagle, now the symbol of the Ecumenical Patriarch in Istanbul, still fronts the lecterns of the two ambos of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchal Cathedral in Damascus (Al Mariamiya on Straight Street). With the two keys of binding and loosing under it, the eagle of the Ecumenical Patriarch holds in its claws the orb and the cross which signified the possession of both powers by the *Basileus*. The devise would seem to respond to the Roman Pontiff’s claims.

<sup>27</sup> In practice this was extended to include religions beyond those of “the Book”, like Zoroastrians; see Bulliet, *The Case*, 18.

<sup>28</sup> See my “Judaism, Islam, and Christianity in Mediaeval Europe, Difference and Unity: the ‘religions of the Book’ and their assimilation of Hellenistic philosophical theology” for *Multiculturalism and Religious Freedom: The 24th Annual Atlantic Theological Conference* (St Peter Publications, Charlottetown, 2005), 72–114.

<sup>29</sup> Judith Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire* (London: Penguin, 2008), 334.

Jewish community began when itinerant Jewish traders were tolerated from 1352. Residence was allowed later and the community seems to have grown owing to the activity of the Ragusans in helping to transport the up to 100,000 Jews and *Marranos* forced out of Spain and received into the Ottoman Empire after the fall of the last Islamic state there. Ill treatment of the Jews by the Christians of this region was prevented by the activities of the Sultan as their protector.<sup>30</sup>

The conservative relation of Umayyad Islam to the Greco-Roman-Christian civilization it conquered may be seen in the three greatest architectural monuments it has left us: two basilica-style mosques, one in Damascus and other in Cordoba, and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, a distant successor of Hadrian's domed Pantheon in pagan Rome. The Dome of the Rock (erected between 687 and 691) proclaims Islamic ascendancy in the sacred city; nonetheless, it is entirely constructed and decorated (except for the Arabic inscriptions from the Qur'an—the first written text of the "dictation")—on local Byzantine Christian models. As in the Great Mosque of Damascus and in Christian churches and mausolea, the mosaic represents Paradisal life.<sup>31</sup> The entire building might be viewed as the last blossoming of the Hellenistic tradition.<sup>32</sup>

It is significant that in the great mosque in Damascus (begun 706) the head of St John Baptist is still venerated as it was in the Christian basilica previously on the same site, and that some of the workmen who produced the wall mosaics, the most extensive expanse created in the ancient world, were sent to Damascus by the *Basileus* in Constantinople.<sup>33</sup> It is equally significant that the mosaics

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<sup>30</sup> See Robin Harris, *Dubrovnik. A History* (London: SAQI, 2003), 171–2 and 198–201.

<sup>31</sup> See Oleg Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Belknap Press, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> Dogan Kuban, *Muslim Religious Architecture* (Leiden: Brill, 1974).

<sup>33</sup> The extent and inclusiveness of the Umayyad Islamic community is represented in the mosaic and in structural elements of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. In the mosaic, among trees and foliage like gigantic living flames, are represented everything from the Corinthian capped pillars of the Hellenes to garden pavilions of the Far East, all united with the oasis gardens, streams, and palaces of Damascus. The basilica structure of the mosque itself uses all three Greek orders of capitals as well as Byzantine

of the Mihrab of the Umayyad Mesquita in Cordoba (begun in 784) were a gift of the Byzantine *Basileus* Nicoforos in the tenth century, and, unlike the mosaics earlier created in Damascus, did not include figurative representation.

With the Umayyads, Greco-Roman-Christian culture, whether on administrative, architectural, decorative, and even religious levels, provided a medium for their own religious and political purposes and provided a common realm where they could meet their Christian, Jewish, and Gnostic contemporaries. Nonetheless, it remained external. It could be used for religious purposes but it was not the sacred secular.

## **II. The Abbasid Caliphate: a new and renewed philosophical and technological secular**

The Abbasid successors of the Umayyads pursued the opposite policy in respect to assimilating Greco-Roman-Christian culture.<sup>34</sup> They were determined to build a distinctively Islamic culture and they began this with the construction of a new capital according to a plan and architectural forms taken from the Persian world and developed within Islam. Abbasid Baghdad was an Islamic Rome created from scratch. It had an even more radical relation to the Umayyad capital Damascus than Christian Constantinople had to pagan Rome. In Baghdad, the Abbasids set out to assimilate the secular inheritance of Greco-Roman Christian civilization:

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elements including delicate capitals, a dome, the head of St John Baptist, and a tower (the “minaret of Jesus”) remaining from the Basilica dedicated to the Baptist by the Christians (and shared by the Muslims for worship during the first 70 years of their rule there). The relic of St John and the body of Hussein, son of Ali and grandson of The Prophet attract multitudes of religiously diverse pilgrims. The sacred site (*temenos*) had contained a temple to Hadad (ninth century, on the relations of King Hadad with Israel, see I and II Kings) which, when later identified with Jupiter, was greatly expanded.

<sup>34</sup> Although the caliphs in Cordoba were Umayyad in descent, the founder of the line having escaped the Abbasid massacre of his family, they not only pursued the Abbasid cultural policy, but made Andalucia an eminent centre of its flourishing.

[F]rom about the middle of the eighth century to the end of the tenth, almost *all* non-literary and non-historical secular Greek books that were available throughout the Eastern Byzantine Empire and Near East were translated into Arabic...: astronomy and alchemy and the rest of the occult sciences; the subjects of the quadrivium: arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and theory of music; the entire field of Aristotelian philosophy throughout its history: metaphysics, ethics, physics, zoology, botany, and especially logic—the *Organon*; all the health sciences: medicine, pharmacology, and veterinary science; and various other marginal genres of writings, such as Byzantine handbooks on military science (the *tactica*), popular collections of wisdom sayings, and even books on falconry.<sup>35</sup>

Institutions for translation were established, like the House of Wisdom in Baghdad presided over by Hunayn, a Nestorian Christian. There were colleges and hospitals, which continued and advanced Hellenistic medicine. Three aspects require our notice: 1) the cultural push is now from east to west; 2) a secular philosophical culture is built again, strengthened, deepened, and extended; 3) unlike the Christians, Muslims did not take over the Roman legal heritage.

As to the first, although France and northern Spain were lost, and although Byzantium regained strength and territory, the Islamic world, connected at its centre by the Abbasids until the mid-thirteenth century,<sup>36</sup> was more inclusive than any yet known. By its uniting of Atlantic Spain, the southern and eastern Mediterranean, the Maghreb, Egypt, Arabia, Syria, Persia, and things east as far as India and China, Islam became the greatest-ever medium of cultural transmission. Significantly, many of the most important intellectuals who contributed to what I am calling the new philosophical and technological secular came from the northeast, places in or close to

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<sup>35</sup> Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* (London: Routledge, 1998), 1.

<sup>36</sup> See Bulliet, *Islam, A View*, 146.

present day Afghanistan.<sup>37</sup> This movement of culture from east to west may be signified for us by the Islamic origins of the elements from which northern Europe created the Gothic: the quadripartite ribbed vault and the pointed arch, but it would be wrong to forget the mathematical, computational, astronomical, and navigational ideas and techniques, as well as institutions like the madrasa or college, which Muslim believers transmitted from east to west and developed.<sup>38</sup>

As to the second, the Greco-Roman secular philosophical culture was rebuilt, strengthened, deepened, and extended. This quotation from Mark Cohen hints enough:

Philosophy was studied by Jews, Muslims, and Christians in interdenominational settings, where the particularities of each religion hardly made a difference. In fact, the Jews—the elite of course—participated in this as well as other intellectual endeavours as near-equals with Muslims in what has long been called ‘the Renaissance of Islam’ in the tenth century. In the words of Joel Kraemer, ‘[c]osmopolitanism, tolerance, reason, and friendship made possible the convocation of these societies [of learning], devoted to a common pursuit of the truth and preservation of ancient wisdom, by surmounting particular religious ties in favor of a shared human experience.’ ... This world of shared intellectual discourse could exist because, in origin and content, much of it was neither Islamic nor Jewish nor Christian: it was Greek. Moreover, Arabic was not just the language of the dominant, and hostile, majority religion, but

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<sup>37</sup> Thus one of Ibn Sina’s (Avicenna, c980-1037) first enterprises in Aristotelian interpretation was to articulate the differences between “the positions of the ‘Easterners’ (i.e. Khurāsānīs and Transoxonians) and ‘Westerners’ (i.e. Baghdādīs)” [Robert Wisnovsky, *Avicenna’s Metaphysics in Context* (Ithaca: Cornell, 2003), 118.]

<sup>38</sup> On the madrasa see Bulliet, *Islam: the View from the Edge*, 147 ff. and idem, *The Case*, 26–27.

also the linguistic medium of mathematics, logic, and medicine, subjects that we call (and they felt were) secular.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, the revival in 1045 of advanced studies in several disciplines in Constantinople resulted in northern Christians and Muslim Arabs flocking to the Greek city, despite the hostile relations between the three societies.<sup>40</sup> Caliphs in Baghdad and Christian kings and emperors tried to attract eminent scholars whatever their religious affiliation. The first essential element in the birth of the university in Christian Europe was the translation into Latin of the Arabic secular philosophical and technological culture, which had enabled Moses Maimonides to be a physician to Muslim rulers and enabled other Jews and Muslims to serve Christians similarly. This new and renewed Islamic secular had profound consequences for the Christian West.

The result of Mehmet the Conqueror's entry into Constantinople in 1453 was not interruption, but intensified continuity. His first concern was to rebuild the city not only as the glory of another Islamic empire, but as a trading and cultural cosmopolis. A sign of this is what happened to Hagia Sophia. Certainly, it became a mosque, but it also became the model, both to be imitated and outdone, in Istanbul and throughout the Ottoman Empire. A direct consequence of the conquest for the West was the flight of the scholars from Constantinople, and the addition of the texts of Plato and of Greek literature to the foundations of Renaissance humanism previously laid in mediaeval Europe. This fifteenth-century development strengthened a new sense of the secular in the Christian West which the translations into Latin from Arabic and Greek made in Toledo and elsewhere from the mid-twelfth century onwards had already inaugurated. This secular we can see determining the point of departure of the Latin West's most

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<sup>39</sup> Mark R. Cohen, "Medieval Jewry in the World of Islam," in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, ed. Martin Goodman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 204.

<sup>40</sup> Norwich, *Byzantium: The Apogee*, 323.

important theologian of the secular, St Thomas Aquinas.<sup>41</sup> In the course of saying something about his ideas, we shall draw attention to what Muslims did not follow the Christians in taking from the Romans, namely law.

### **III. The Secular of Natural Reason and Virtue:**

#### **Thomas Aquinas as heir of the Islamic secular**

The most radical and stunning feature of the beginning of Thomas' *Summa theologiae* is the first question he poses: "Whether it is necessary besides the philosophical disciplines to have another teaching?" The question assumes a true knowledge based in the natural powers of reason, asks whether this is all humans could or should know, and whether there is room for any other knowledge. Revealed religion here sets herself the task of finding a place and a necessity for herself relative to natural human knowledge, virtues, and, thus, institutions, enabling humans to construct a world aiming for, and, to some measure achieving, human happiness. In commentaries and extended disputations occupying the last years of his life, St Thomas laboured to establish what he assumed; what we might call a secular humanism provided by philosophy.<sup>42</sup> In order to construct the true knowledge of God, the human, and the natural world which philosophy had in its power, Aquinas had to cross the institutional boundaries of the medieval university and, although a theologian, he used the methods and arguments, and entered the conflicts of the "camp of philosophy," the Faculty of Arts.<sup>43</sup>

The philosophical sciences at which Aquinas laboured are usually attributed to Aristotle. In fact, it was because of their systematization in the late ancient schools, on the one hand, and, because of the Islamic Arabic mediation of Aristotle and of the philosophical and technological secular to the Latins, on the other, that the philosophical world was established as a totality over against

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<sup>41</sup> See my "Aquinas at the Origins of Secular Humanism? Sources and innovation in *Summa Theologiae* 1.1.1," *Nova et Vetera* 5:1 (2007): 17–40.

<sup>42</sup> This is because grace does not destroy nature but perfects it and thus assumes it (see *ST* 1.1.8 ad 2).

<sup>43</sup> See my "Why Philosophy Abides for Aquinas," *The Heythrop Journal* 42:3 (2001): 329–348.

what is made known by religious revelation.<sup>44</sup> Of course, Aquinas showed that something else besides what philosophy knows is both possible and necessary—otherwise the Bible and Christian doctrine would not be required at all! However, he accepts, wills, and contributes to the existence of a complete philosophical account of reality effective in constructing a human world as what Christians must now presuppose. The demand that divine revelation and grace divide reality with the secular is something altogether new for Latin Christians, and, by making it, Aquinas changed the world we now occupy as his successors.

For Aquinas, although nature must be perfected by grace, philosophy continues to be a way of life for Christians. Even when contained within theological and religious structures which enable what philosophy cannot attain, Christians, as well as pagans, Jews, and Muslims, have philosophy which gives them a common way of life and truth transforming them towards likeness to God, and provides a common standard of the true and the good, even if it will not save them eternally.<sup>45</sup> Aquinas' answer is radical and new within Christendom, but in making it he shows his dependence on theologians and philosophers in the Arabic Muslim and Jewish tradition. Besides al-Farabi, Avicenna, and Averroes there were al-Ghazali and Maimonides; they preceded Aquinas in setting limits to what philosophy could give believers. Aquinas' ordering of the relation of nature and grace is essential to the division of sciences and faculties in the university and to the Western move to knowledge as a secular activity of human individuals working together to know reality by our natural powers. It is important that the Islamic world not only developed a philosophical and technological secular, but that it was also crucial in making ours. It is, thus, ironic that two

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<sup>44</sup>Alain de Libera, *Penser au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), 20: the Arabs mediated the texts of Aristotle to the Latins as “a total philosophic corpus, into which the whole of Hellenistic thought...had surreptitiously crept.” For a brief description of this Islamic Aristotelianism, see idem, *La querelle des universaux: De Platon à la fin du Moyen Âge*, Des travaux (Paris: Seuil, 1996), 117 and 68–124.

<sup>45</sup> See my “Philosophy as Way of Life for Christians? Iamblichan and Porphyrian Reflections on Religion, Virtue, and Philosophy in Thomas Aquinas,” *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 59:2 [Le Néoplatonisme ] (Juin 2003): 193–224.

crucial elements of Aquinas' and our own general Western Christian secularity were not developed in the pre-Modern Islamic world: state or secular law, and the institutional setting for philosophy to be studied apart from religion, namely, the university Faculty of Arts.

Although philosophy was developed to the highest levels by Muslims, and although it continues within Islamic lands to this day,<sup>46</sup> and although madrasas were created and very widely disseminated in pre-Modern Islamic countries, no institution served, protected, and supported philosophy and the liberal arts, which would have provided a home for the secular. Aquinas' adversaries in the Faculty of Arts at Paris were accused of everything from paganism and sympathy with Islam, to magic, and many members of the Faculty were persecuted, but it had means at its disposal which were used against the ecclesiastical authorities, including the strike, a device it frequently employed in the cause of freedom. Philosophy in Islamic lands had no such institutional weapons.

#### **IV. What Islam did not take from Christendom: Roman Law**

If there are sciences and methods for finding truths which are not eternal, nor about the realm of grace and salvation, there can also be binding laws which are neither eternal nor given by God in Scripture. Aquinas' philosophical reasons for establishing a realm of temporal knowledge were used to establish a realm of secular law based on the decrees of appropriate human authorities.<sup>47</sup> Much of this law, its rationale, and authorities, the Christians inherited from the pagan Romans (and even from the Greeks, as we saw in the example cited from Aquinas earlier). Christian Emperors like Justinian were as keen to be remembered as codifiers and rationalisers of law as they were to be known as great builders or conquerors. The builders of *summae* of theology were accompanied and preceded in the Middle Ages by builders of *summae* of the law like Gratian, and indeed the two kinds of books used many of the same methods.<sup>48</sup> In consequence, in the

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<sup>46</sup> See my "9/11 and the History of Philosophy," *Animus* 11 (2006): 1–26.<http://www2.swgc.mun.ca/animus/Articles/Volume%2011/Hankey.pdf>

<sup>47</sup> See my "Dionysius dixit, ..."

<sup>48</sup> See my "Magis... Pro Nostra Sententia': John Wyclif, his mediaeval Predecessors and reformed Successors, and a pseudo-Augustinian

Christian Middle Ages, secular law as both a body of knowledge and practice became even better founded both theoretically and institutionally. Nothing like this happened within Islam.

We may sum up what Roman law, as developed within the Christian empires, bequeathed to the Middle Ages, and from them to us, by noting the opinion of a great Byzantine canonist writing in 1180. As the originating authority of both laws, “the Emperor was above the law, both secular and sacred.”<sup>49</sup> Recollect that the constitution of the Christian Roman Empire as inaugurated by Constantine, and articulated by Bishop Eusebius, depended on a likeness between Jesus Christ as the divine-human mediator and the Emperor as caring out his work on earth as Viceroy or Vicar (to use the title the Pope took, adopting the same model for himself). Precisely because there is no divine-human mediator for Islam—Mohammed is prophet or messenger, self-consciously rejecting Christian assertions which would unite humanity and divinity in Jesus Christ—there can be no viceroy of God on earth. The caliph is a representative of the messenger and has the title “Commander of the Faithful,” but there is neither a *Sacred Secular* nor a *Secular Sacred* for Islam. Consequently, for classical Islam, the principles of the law, the *shari‘a*, are divine, not human: “all Muslim rulers must abide by the same divine ordinances that are incumbent on other believers, and they must uphold those laws in their governance.”<sup>50</sup>

Early in the history of Islam, “the *ulama*, ‘possessors of religious knowledge’, groupings of men in every sizable community [arose] who gained popular, that is nongovernmental, recognition as authorities on Muslim lore and legal understandings.”<sup>51</sup> The *ulama* had no hierarchical organization and, thus, as a whole, never engaged in an all-out contest to the end with rulers in the way the Catholic Church did. However, on their part, Muslim rulers lacked legitimate grounds for establishing royal courts—one of the most important creations of the Latin Middle Ages—and, as we see even at present,

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Eucharistic Decretal,” *Augustiniana* [Institutum Historicum Augustianum Lovanii], 45, fasc. 3-4 (1995), 213–245.

<sup>49</sup> Runciman, *The Byzantine Theocracy*, 140.

<sup>50</sup> Bulliet, *The Case*, 64.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

“in the long run, the *ulama* protected their role as interpreters of the law more effectively” than the church did.<sup>52</sup> Thus, “Islamic law, in the abstract, remained universal and unchallenged while the canon law” of the church receded in the face of secular law—a Christian can no longer choose to be tried by the canon law instead of the law of the state, even in respect to matrimony and probate which in England remained within the jurisdiction of ecclesiastical lawyers into the nineteenth century.<sup>53</sup> When Western modernisers sided with the tyrannical modern states of the Islamic world constructed on Western models against *sharia* and the *ulama* as its interpreters, they leave Muslims without a well-founded recourse against the state totalitarianism. The history we have been considering shows why that totalitarianism is a Western creation which, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, has spread to parts of the Islamic East.<sup>54</sup>

#### **V. Returning to the present: The consequences of Western European and American imperial dominance on the Islamic Secular**

Considering the current state of the Islamic secular brings us back to the beginning of this paper and this return will function as its conclusion. Since Arabic and Persian Islam developed and transmitted the Greco-Roman-Christian secular in a new way, the vast and diverse Muslim world has been subjected to a European and American imperial remaking in forms which ignored, destroyed, or radically altered its old structures. What has been destroyed includes structures which enabled minority Christians, Jews, Hindus and others to live alongside Muslims. Two examples come immediately to mind, and in the creation of both the British Empire in its fading days played the crucial role. These are the erection of two religiously defined states: Muslim Pakistan (and its correlatives Afghanistan and India, the second now as a Hindu nation) and Jewish Israel.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>54</sup> This is Bulliet’s fundamental argument in *The Case and Islam, A View*; see especially *Islam, A View*, 185–207

<sup>55</sup> For another earlier and murderous destruction of Muslim *convivencia* for which romantic and careless British encouragement of nationalism in the form of the Greek attempt to regain Istanbul and Anatolia was significant,

It did not improve Islamic trust of what European-American hegemony would provide that the partition of Muslim India and the creation of Jewish Israel went forward at the same time. The first of these replaced, among other entities, the Mughal Empire which had as its first principle the prevention of the very conflict between Hindus and Muslims which the British raj exacerbated as part of its strategy of divide and rule.<sup>56</sup> Syncretism, partly under Sufi auspices, had been the old way, and this had attracted “White Mughals” before the Empire turned racist and Evangelical simultaneously.<sup>57</sup> On the shore of the Mediterranean, another religiously defined state was set up by the West, one of which has proven unable to include the Muslim and Christian people of the land it now occupies. In neither Israel, nor in the Afghanistan-Pakistan entity, with its impossible and externally imposed border, has a mediating modern secular developed to replace what has been destroyed by the Western refashioning of the world. India, once the defining centre of religious syncretism and tolerance, succumbs from time to time to the temptation to become a Hindu “nation,” facing down its former citizens who, like it, are armed with nuclear weapons. Both the new Hindu and the Muslim nations which the partition erected ceaselessly renew their enmity around one of the worst of the many territorial disputes the British bequeathed their former subjects.

In these places, as elsewhere, the Western modern has been less successful than the old Greco-Roman-Christian-Islamic secular in

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see Giles Milton, *Paradise Lost. Smyrna 1922: The Destruction of Islam's City of Tolerance* (London: Sceptre, 2008).

<sup>56</sup> See William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty. Delhi, 1857* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 58–84, which must be read against his *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century India* (London: Penguin, 2004). It describes the life of the British in India before the nineteenth-century raj with its racism and murderous religious bigotry. For a description of the blood drenched carelessness with which the British created Pakistan, see Alex von Tunzelmann, *Indian Summer: The Secret History of the End of an Empire* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2007).

<sup>57</sup> In the last stage of the Raj, the leading opponent of independence was a secular racist, Winston Churchill, who loathed and feared Gandhi in considerable part because his position was fundamentally religious. For the evidence, see Arthur Herman, *Gandhi and Churchill: The Epic Rivalry That Destroyed an Empire and Forged Our Age* (New York: Bantam, 2008), especially 29, 92, 97–100, 359, 465–466, 415–478, 506–507, 518–519, 523, 601–608.

providing a mediating space in which co-operation and tolerance can grow. Except for Syria, there is not a single country from India to the Maghreb where the imposition or adoption of modern Western forms has not destroyed the old *convivencia* formed over millennia with all its extraordinary diversity and subtlety. The European national state, born and nurtured in a murderous search for linguistic, religious, and, in some instances, racial identity, has also proved a deadly model when spread elsewhere. National unity prevents the secular from providing open space. The empires, even Western ones, were often by nature and necessity more open. Here we had Quebec, where, until Confederation, the British Empire paid the salaries of the Catholic bishops while the King and government at home in both England and Ireland continued to impose inhibitions on Papists.<sup>58</sup> It is hard to think that modern Turkey would make today the offer to the Spanish Jews which the Ottoman Sultan made.

For a small picture of the ugly wasteland the new Western secular has created in the Muslim world, I leave you with a quotation from Olivier Roy:

We can, of course, consider democratization in the Middle East and the relation between democracy and Islam, but we ought not to forget that the principal obstacles to

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<sup>58</sup> See Terence J. Fay, *A History of Canadian Catholics*, McGill-Queens Studies in the History of Religion (Montréal-Kingston: McGill-Queens, 2002), 31, on the stipend for Briand the first Bishop after the Conquest. Under subsequent bishops the grant was increased, and it continued until Confederation; see Lucia Ferretti, *Brève histoire de l'Église catholique au Québec* (Montréal: Boréal, 1999), 41. In their endeavour not to reproduce in Québec what British policy had produced in Ireland, Parliament even confirmed in 1840 the Sulpician Seigneurie of Montréal by means of what the Superior of the Seminary, who negotiated it, called “the most Catholic and Papist law that it had sanctioned in over three hundred years”, see Quiblier quoted in Brian Young, *In Its Corporate Capacity: The Seminary of Montréal as a Business Institution, 1816-1876* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986), 59, my “From St Augustine and St Denys to Olier and Bérulle's Spiritual Revolution: Patristic and Seventeenth-Century Foundations of the Relations between Church and State in Québec,” *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 63:3 (octobre 2007): 515–559 at 531–532 & 548–550, and generally *Les Sulpiciens de Montréal: Une histoire de pouvoir et de discrétion 1657-2007*, sous la direction de Dominique Deslandres, John A. Dickinson, Ollivier Hubert (Québec: Fides, 2007).

democracy in the Middle East are posed by secular regimes (Tunisia, Baathist Syria [where, as in Lebanon, Christians pray, and their bishops work, against democracy], the National Liberation Front and the army in Algeria, Egypt) and that their political model (one party and president for life) is borrowed from European fascism or Third World socialism, very distant from the Koran and the tradition of the prophet.<sup>59</sup>

#### **A REMARK TOWARDS A CONCLUDING DISCUSSION**

These introductory observations indicate that the sacred-secular formation and relation predate both Christianity and Islam, that these monotheisms inherit, mutate, and exchange them. The sacred and secular assume several opposed forms. In claiming or confronting any one of them, knowing what we are dealing with is worth the immense trouble of finding out. Part of what we shall discover are theological and religious differences which secularity may bridge but cannot dissolve. This intractable irreducibility challenges some of the fondest and most destructive imaginations of our modern hearts. +

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<sup>59</sup> Roy, *Secularism Confronts Islam*, 14.





## Response to Wayne Hankey

Gary Thorne

University of King's College & Dalhousie University

**D**r Hankey's inaugural paper is a superb beginning to our gathering, an historical and philosophical account of the roots of secularism that will inform and guide our thinking in the days of this Conference.

In his historical survey Dr Hankey suggests two different traditions of the modern secular. First he outlines the emergence of the Christian political secular, and then the Islamic philosophical and technological secular. Both these traditions come together in the thinking of Saint Thomas Aquinas who posits an autonomy for human reason that will allow the development of the modern secular.

Dr Hankey begins by describing the formation of two Christian paradigms in the first millennium CE: the *Secular Sacred* and the *Sacred Secular*.

The beginnings of the notion of the *Sacred Secular* are set in the environment of the Roman Empire as Christianity begins to identify itself as more than a sect of Judaism. From the beginning, Christians rejected worship of the emperor, offering the *proskynesis* of honour but not the *proskynesis* of adoration reserved for the God of divine revelation. The early Christians prayed *for* the emperor, but refused to pray *to* the emperor. Nevertheless, emperors were seen to be God's representative on earth, deriving their legitimacy directly from Him. For example, we have the following description of a soldier's oath at the beginning of the fourth century:

They swore by God, by Christ, by the Holy Spirit and by the majesty of the emperor who, immediately after God, ought to be venerated and adored by the human race. Because once he has received the name of Augustus, loyal devotion and unwavering submission are owed to the

emperor, as to a physically present god (*tanquam praesenti et corporali deo*). In fact, it is God whom a civilian or a soldier serves when he faithfully cherishes he who reigns at God's instigation.<sup>1</sup>

In his own masterly account of the *Sacred Secular* in *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, Gilbert Dagron writes:

No one objected when the synod which condemned the heretic Eutyches at Constantinople in 448 acclaimed Theodosius II by saying: 'Great is the faith of the emperors! Long live the guardian of the faith! Long live the pious emperor, long live the emperor-bishop (*to archierei basilei*). Nor did anyone object, a little later, at the council of Chalcedon, to acclaiming Marcian "priest and emperor", as well as "restorer of the Church, *didaskalos* of the faith, New Constantine, New Paul and New David".<sup>2</sup>

Dr Hankey notes that a distinctively Western notion of the *Secular Sacred* begins to take shape in the eighth century with the establishment of 'the Republic of Saint Peter'.<sup>3</sup> At the same time in the East the notion of the *Sacred Secular* develops in a particular way in response to the challenge of the iconoclastic controversy. As the controversy begins, iconoclast Emperor Leo III issues a challenge to Pope Gregory II: "I am emperor and priest" and Pope Gregory responds in the following manner:

You know, *Basileus*, that the dogmas of the holy Church do not fall within the province of emperors, but of bishops, and require to be dealt with very prudently. It is for this that bishops have been established for the Churches, keeping apart from public affairs, and emperors similarly in

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<sup>1</sup> Gilbert Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium* Trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 130–31. As reported by Vegetius.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>3</sup> See Thomas F.X. Noble, *The Republic of Saint Peter: the Birth of the Papal State 680-825* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984).

order to keep them apart from ecclesiastical affairs and apply themselves to those which have been entrusted to them. The harmony between emperors dear to Christ and pious bishops forms one single power when affairs are dealt with in peace and in charity.<sup>4</sup>

Although this letter of Pope Gregory points to the development of the notion that the metaphor of emperor as priest and bishop is effective only insofar as the emperor is orthodox, this understanding does not lead to the notion of the sacred and secular as two distinct powers, but, as Gregory makes clear “one single power”. Just a few years before the fall of Constantinople in 1450, the patriarch Antonios IV writes a letter of chastisement to the Grand Duke of Moscow who had forbidden the metropolitan of Moscow to mention the Byzantine emperor in the diptychs:

Even if God has permitted the Nations to encircle the seat of imperial authority, the emperor has nevertheless still received until now the same consecration on the part of the Church, the same rank and the same prayers; he is anointed with the prestigious *myroni*, consecrated as *basileus* of the Roman, that is, of all Christians, and his name is commemorated everywhere by all the patriarchs, metropolitans and bishops, wherever people call themselves Christians, which is the privilege of no other local prince or sovereign.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, as late as the fifteenth century in the East (even as the *Secular Sacred* is fully developed in the West) the two ‘powers’ of the secular and the sacred are understood to be but one universal power, the *Sacred Secular*, invested in the emperor who rules the world justly and within an orthodoxy determined by the Church that controls the liturgy and provides effective intercession for the emperor.

Dr Hankey next describes the development in the Abbasid Caliphate (from the transfer of the capital from Damascus to

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<sup>4</sup> Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 160.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 312.

Baghdad in the mid-eighth to the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols in the mid-thirteenth century) of what he calls “a new and renewed philosophical and technological secular”. These centuries witnessed a spectacular flowering of knowledge, philosophy and scientific discovery. The Abbasids championed the cause of knowledge and established the House of Wisdom in Baghdad, where both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars sought to translate and gather all the world’s knowledge of science, philosophy, medicine and education into Arabic. During this period the Muslim world was a cauldron of cultures which collected, synthesized and significantly advanced the knowledge gained from the ancient Roman, Chinese, Indian, Persian, Egyptian, North African, Greek and Byzantine civilizations. Thus Christians, Jews, Muslims and others were joined in a common *convivencia* where together they copied, studied, commented upon, and developed the entire inheritance of Greco-Roman intellectual culture.

And now we come to the crux of Dr Hankey’s argument. Saint Thomas Aquinas receives from the Islamic world the fruits of this *convivencia*: a new and renewed philosophical and technological secular, including the works of Aristotle with brilliant commentary; and he receives this in his own political and cultural environment defined by both the *Sacred Secular* and the *Secular Sacred*. Inheriting both the Christian political and legal secular (in both forms of the *Secular Sacred* and *Sacred Secular*), and the Islamic philosophical and technological secular, Saint Thomas Aquinas allows these two seculars to inform one another and give rise to the modern secular.

Dr Hankey presents in abbreviated form an argument that he has worked out in detail in the past decade in many scholarly papers. St Thomas achieves a ‘secular humanism’ (dependent upon philosophy alone apart from the revealed truth of religion) that is a rediscovery of the ancient understanding of philosophy as not only something that is ‘thought’ but also ‘lived’. Dr Hankey describes:

Christians, as well as pagans, Jews, and Muslims, have philosophy which gives them a common way of life and truth transforming them towards likeness to God and providing a common standard of the true and the good even if it will not save them eternally.

Dr Hankey attributes this radical secularity of Aquinas directly to what he inherits from the theologians and philosophers in the Arabic Muslim and Jewish tradition, including al-Farabi, Avicenna, Averroes, al-Ghazali and Maimonides. Aquinas' ordering of the relation of nature and grace is essential to the division of sciences and faculties in the university and to the Western move to knowledge as a secular activity of human individuals working together in a communal effort to know reality by our natural powers. Thus, argues Dr Hankey, Christians, Jews and Muslims once held in common the one and the same philosophical and technological secular that provided the necessary basis for a true, creative and universal secular humanism.

Such a secular is not opposed to the sacred—philosophy is not opposed to theology—but the secular and the sacred each has its own autonomy and coherence, and each acknowledges its own limits and the limits of the other.

But this Greco-Roman-Christian-Islamic secular has been lost. On the one hand, there was no institutional form within Islam through which it could be embedded and passed on—Islam had neither the distinct university faculty in which to locate secular philosophy nor codes of law to define and protect the positive secular. On the other hand, in Christian lands this positive secular was strangled by the disappearance of Empire. The creation of the European nation state,

born and nurtured in a murderous search for linguistic, religious and in some instances racial identity...prevents the secular from providing open space.

The resulting contemporary secular that has emerged is one that deserves a distinct term to distance itself from former notions of the secular. Dr Hankey suggests we adopt the language of *laïcité* to designate a political secular that understands itself not only as autonomous and complete in itself, but a secular that defines “the place of religion in a society because the bond between religion and public life has been sundered.”

In Western countries this strong *laïcité* is friendly to the new fundamentalisms of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic. In fact, *laïcité* and fundamentalist religions assume and foster one another because fundamentalists do not seek to transform society, but rather “to live religion intensely as individuals or in small groups.”

Thus Dr Hankey has given an historical understanding of the secular that not only reveals the inadequacy of our contemporary understanding of it, but more importantly, his analysis helps us to understand the possibility of a proper, true and positive secular. In this, Dr Hankey has set the stage for the remaining papers of this Conference.

### **Comment and Conclusion**

Although the secular is increasingly seen to be the only basis for the organization of modern society in our global environment, it is clear that such secularity has not chased religion away. *Laïcité* is one political technique to manage the religious in a secular society: but it is a response that satisfies only the fundamentalist Christian, Jew or Muslim who simply wants to live out her/his religion individually or in introspective like-minded fellowships.

A more positive approach is that of the ‘post-secular’ solution which is a call for the autonomous secular and sacred to be in dialogue and to inform each other. This post-secular solution was the subject of a debate in 2004 between the philosopher Jürgen Habermas and Cardinal Ratzinger, then the Prefect of the Roman Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Considering whether a stable secular state is possible today—a state whose legitimacy is independent of religious and metaphysical traditions—Habermas concludes:

The expression ‘postsecular’ does more than give public recognition to religious fellowships in view of the functional contributions they make to the reproduction of motivations and attitudes that are societally desirable. The public awareness of a ‘post-secular’ society also reflects a normative insight that has consequences for the political dealings of unbelieving citizens with believing citizens. In

the postsecular society, there is an increasing consensus that certain phases of the “modernization of the public consciousness” involve the assimilation and the reflexive transformation of both religious and secular mentalities. If both sides agree to understand the secularization of society as a complementary learning process, then they will also have cognitive reasons to take seriously each other’s contributions to controversial subjects in the public debate.<sup>6</sup>

Cardinal Ratzinger’s concluding remarks were even more hopeful. He suggests that religion and reason “restrict each other and remind each other where their limits are”.<sup>7</sup> He argues that the sources of the ethical principles of law in a secular, pluralistic society must be sought not in faith, nor even in a natural law, but upon reason alone. The reasonableness of the notion of ‘human rights’ can be defended purely on the basis of man *qua* man, and Cardinal Ratzinger would add that a doctrine of human obligations and of human limitations might also be reasonably demonstrated. Ratzinger concludes that the response to the secular must not be a desire simply to return to faith. Rather,

I would speak of a necessary relatedness between reason and faith and between reason and religion, which are called to purify and help one another. They need one another and they must acknowledge this mutual need...It is important that both great components of the Western culture [Christian faith and Western secular rationality] learn to listen and to accept a genuine relatedness to other cultures too. It is important to include the other cultures in the attempt at a polyphonic relatedness, in which they themselves are receptive to the essential complementarity of reason and faith, so that a universal process of purifications (in the plural!) can proceed. Ultimately, the

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<sup>6</sup> Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2005), 46–47.

<sup>7</sup> Habermas and Ratzinger, 66.

essential values and norms that are in some way known or sensed by all men will take on a new brightness in such a process, so that that which holds the world together can once again become an effective force in mankind.<sup>8</sup>

In previous Conferences Dr Hankey has cautioned us that it is not possible for us to crawl out of our modern skins and return to a 'pristine' era of Christian history. Thus I understand Dr Hankey's argument not to be an invitation to return to an older *convivencia*, but rather to learn from it so that we can wisely build on the modern secular as we know it. We must celebrate the aspects of the modern secular that have been true to its historic philosophical principles, and reject those aspects of the modern secular that will eventually turn in upon itself and destroy it, if not checked. Our hope must be in an intentional and renewed *convivencia* that can emerge from the contemporary post-secular.

It is my joy to thank Dr Hankey for a splendid first paper of this Conference, pointing us already to the possibility of a renewed and urgently needed *convivencia* in the world today. +

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<sup>8</sup> Habermas and Ratzinger, 80.



## **Origins: From Royal Priesthood to Hellenic Kingship to Roman Sacred *Imperium*<sup>1</sup>**

Peter O'Brien  
Dalhousie University

In his introductory paper, Dr. Hankey set down the terms of the discussions on the sacred and secular for this conference. He also made the important point that in the ancient world, the two sides of human experience, secular and sacred, or as we might put it, human and divine, were never conceived as absolutely separable categories in need of splicing together. Instead, the very conception of human community was necessarily rooted in the conception of divinity. In ancient cities, kingdoms, and empires, the gods were therefore considered integral members of the community. Dr. Hankey has suggested ways in which that separation did begin to take hold at the conventional end of antiquity in the West, with both fruitful and destructive implications for those who believe that God has a vital place in human culture.

Nevertheless, we cannot rest content with the cliché that “there was no distinction of church and state in the ancient world” if we are to appreciate the fascinating dynamics of human-divine relationships in ancient communities, or if we are to understand the separation as it would eventually manifest itself. It had to have come from somewhere. My task in speaking about “origins” is to explore the

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank Canon John Matheson and the Conference Organizing Committee for inviting me to participate in this conference. I thank Dr. Wayne Hankey for his kind encouragement; Ms. Emily Parker for her stimulating response; all the other conference contributors and attendees for their discussion and constructive criticism; Canon Peter Harris and the parishioners of St. Peter's Cathedral for their warm hospitality; and finally, Karl and Donalda Winter for opening their home to me while in Charlottetown.

distinction as it existed in its implicit, then embryonic stages, so as to set up a loosely chronological, but also cross-cultural account of ancient Mediterranean thinking about the *Sacred Secular*. The format of a conference paper requires me to be very selective, so I will proceed by making a few general remarks about the Classical and Hellenistic Greek, and the Hebraic formulations of that relationship. I shall then move to explore more deeply some key conceptions of the secular and sacred in the Roman world. I dwell on Rome because it is there that the problem takes shape in ways which are most immediately antecedent to other areas to be examined over the coming days, and because the fourth and fifth century thinkers and doers I will ultimately focus upon, namely Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea (AD ca. 260-339), the pagan Emperor Julian (AD 331-363), and St. Augustine (AD 354-430), understood Roman culture as being comprehensive of all human experience, as having accomplished the perfection of history. This included the Hellenic, the Hebrew and the Christian achievements. I shall stop with St. Augustine because he stands as a familiar signpost between Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, between polytheistic and Christian Europe, and the implications of his immensely influential thinking on the subject will be taken up by subsequent speakers.

All ancient conceptions of human community assume that the universe is a tripartite cosmos, a hierarchical order of nature, humanity, and the gods.<sup>2</sup> In that hierarchy, humanity occupies a difficult intermediate position. On the one hand, limited by natural necessities, humans are like other animals. On the other hand, like the gods, they are endowed with the power of reason. In ancient conceptions of community, it is pre-eminently the bond of reason—not the natural ties of family or kinship—that collects individuals and tribes into states like cities and kingdoms. And because reason is in its purest essence a divine attribute, all institutions and laws that govern these states derive their ultimate authority from heaven.

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<sup>2</sup> One finds a particularly clear and succinct presentation of the “locative” view of the cosmos in Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 9.

Across the roughly 1200 years I have in my purview, the general situation I have described manifests itself in many different ways in different religious conceptions, practices, and as well in different political constitutions. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify three common trends in such communities that highlight the coalescence of sacred and secular, the implicit divine dimension in human activity and patterns of organization: (1) The cult of the gods (religion) is a civic or national duty, to which other civic institutions are analogically related and to which domestic institutions are subordinate. Citizen piety and virtue provide the standards and motives for conducting religious and civic processes properly and for the common good. (2) A universal standard of equity is discerned. Justice is inherently rational and therefore has its origins in heaven, as do the laws by which it is administered. (3) The presence of human mediators of divine reason to the earthly community at large. These appear in different modes in different historical contexts, in greater or lesser prominence, and in different combinations. They may include mediators of individual, corporate, or institutional character; they may take shape as kings, prophets, priests, citizen bodies, philosophers, or emperors. They regulate human behaviour by orienting it to the divine in various ways: administratively, legally, ritually, and educationally, the latter by means of prophecy, myth or philosophy. Within this range of possibilities, however, Dr. Hankey correctly points out that “[n]ormally, in the ancient world, [governing] authority was derived from the fact that the magistrate or king was also a priest or in some sense a god or the functioning image of god.”

### **I. Classical Greece**

The major achievement of Classical Greece, so far as our topic is concerned, is the development of the city, or *polis*.<sup>3</sup> Beginning about the eighth century BC, the notion that the community or commonwealth is the possession of all citizen members occurs in

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<sup>3</sup> There is a useful and clear overview of religion and the *polis* in Patrick Atherton, “The City in Ancient Religious Experience,” in A.H. Armstrong, ed. *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman. World Spirituality* 15 (New York: Crossroads, 1986), 314–336.

contrast to prior and coexistent notions of sacred kingship. The latter were prevalent in various Near Eastern cultures from the beginnings of civilization in the fourth millennium Fertile Crescent; they left their mark on archaic and then classical Greece in the memories of Mycenaean culture preserved by Homer. In the *polis*, the ultimate arbitration of justice was not left up to a king, but rather preserved in a constitution that marked out the various proportions and shares belonging to the disparate groups that made up the collective whole. This system was often endorsed by the oracle of Apollo at Delphi. It also had sanction in the mythical models of Zeus' rational distribution of justice, *dike*, in the Homeric poems, and in the splendid archaic succession myth of Hesiod. Enshrining divinely sanctioned laws in the constitution allowed a distribution of responsibilities amongst a citizen body which had previously been the prerogatives of kings. At the most superficial level, this meant state-appointed priesthoods. But the religious foundations of the *polis* in fact ran far deeper. The classical democratic *polis* was emphatically *not* a form of community that had emancipated itself from the bonds of religion.<sup>4</sup>

Civic duty and civic piety was demonstrated, tested, and strengthened, for example, in annual religious festivals in honour of the god Dionysus. Here tragedies, plays written on themes provided by the "rich banquet" of Homeric myth, were presented for the edification of the citizen audience.<sup>5</sup> In the tragic theatre of the god, tensions and conflicts between the competing interests of individual and collective, family and state, humanity and nature, and even human and divine could be therapeutically explored, and the institutions designed to reconcile them explained. One only need recall the struggle between house and city in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, or in

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<sup>4</sup> In the PowerPoint presentation that accompanied the reading of this paper, a slide representing Phidios' fifth-century cult statue of Athena Parthenos, originally found within the Parthenon on the Athenian Acropolis, was displayed. A convenient image of the Parthenos is available here: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athena\\_Parthenos](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athena_Parthenos) .

<sup>5</sup> In the original PowerPoint presentation, an image of the Athenian Acropolis, showing the proximity of the Parthenon and the Theatre of Dionysus, was displayed. Convenient images, as well as a site plan, are available here: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acropolis\\_Athens](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acropolis_Athens) .

Sophocles' *Antigone*, to envision the subtle tensions that preserved balance in the *polis*. In plays like this the numinous, as well as the practical, value of the virtues of moderation, which held competing interests in a mutually beneficial harmony, was proved. By this sublime civic art form—which was also an educational drama and a religious ritual—the *polis* was reaffirmed as the place where human and divine were reconciled in their difference, where the infinity of particular human interests could be ordered and prioritised by divine reason.

As is generally the case in historical analysis, however, the wonderful resilience of the classical *polis* becomes most evident at precisely the point where we see it begin to crumble. The causes of this dissolution in the last third of the fifth century BC are multiple, but we can reduce them for our purposes by linking the symptoms of decline to a certain forgetfulness of the divine source of political authority. With this came a relaxation of the citizen moderation that controlled not only relationships within the *polis*, but also the relationship of various *poleis* with one another. To begin with, individual *poleis* did not share citizen rights with one another. Conflicts arose between cities when the self-containing virtue of moderation failed and there was a desire to acquire power or wealth beyond the *polis*' means. There is a most memorable example of this failing in the fifth-century historian Thucydides' criticism of the Athenian empire of Pericles. Such betrayal of the foundational principles of moderation led to a forgetfulness of many of the characteristic civic pieties in the course of the enervating and mutually destructive Peloponnesian wars at the end of the fifth century.<sup>6</sup>

In the midst of such confidence-shaking cataclysms, we see flashes of what we might be tempted to call an ancient Greek secularity. When the moderating virtues that reflected the equilibrium

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<sup>6</sup> Some particularly poignant passages include Thucydides' account of the social and spiritual consequences of the plague in Athens in 430 BC (Thuc. 2.52-53), his report on the aftermath of revolutions in Greece following that in Corcyra in 427 (Thuc. 3.82-84), and his chilling "Melian dialogue" (Thuc. 5.85-113) in which the Athenian delegates are made to espouse a "might is right" doctrine against an inferior enemy whom they subsequently utterly destroy.

of divine reason had been put aside, a deracinated rationality began to assert itself. Protagoras' declaration that "man is the measure of all things" provides a handy emblem for the sophistic movement, an expression of Greek "enlightenment" that used an extremely incisive, free-ranging rationality to question the traditional cosmic hierarchy. In this atmosphere, Attic tragedy itself turns to irresolution, a trend we can recall by thinking of certain plays by Euripides.<sup>7</sup>

Yet even as tragedy ceases to be adequate to the conditions of the declining *polis*, a new kind of tragic hero emerges. In his youth in the middle of the fifth century, as the story goes, an Athenian stonemason was told by the Oracle of Apollo that there was no man wiser than he. Feeling this to be improbable, but believing the bright sun-god incapable of falsehood, Socrates made it his sacred duty to prove the god right. By the relentless activity of questioning, he concluded that he (as with other humans) could only know that he did not know, and that only the gods had positive knowledge. The city, incapable of grasping the implications of Socrates' discovery, condemned him to death, mistaking his attempts at restoring the proper relationship of human reason with the divine as heretical innovation. Still, paradoxical to the end, Socrates willingly went to his death, dutiful to the city and to the gods, refusing opportunities of easy escape and requesting, as his last earthly act, the sacrifice of a cock to Asclepius.<sup>8</sup>

The Socrates I describe is the Socrates of Plato, who, from the perspective of the first half of the fourth century, made his immensely influential attempt to bring the *polis* back into accord with

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<sup>7</sup> Euripides' *Bacchae* can be read as a mythico-dramatic rendering of the crisis. A new Olympian, Dionysus, has entered Thebes, and a conservative ruler (Pentheus), gone reactionary in his desperation to hold on to a treasured past, denies his godhead. In a scene wrenching for its conscious perversion of the generic tradition, Cadmus, the archetypal culture hero and statesman appears with Teiresias, the archetypal prophet of divine truths. Both old men totter, leaning on each other for support, ludicrously got up in the garb of orgiastic revel. Their incongruous appearance shocks less than their words. Cadmus counsels the worship of this new god with the most cynical of utilitarian pleading. Teiresias justifies his acceptance of the deity with a bloodless analysis of the deity's naturalistic benefits, resorting to the cant of contemporary pseudo-science (Eur. *Bacch.* 170-369).

<sup>8</sup> For the classic account of Socrates' life and death, see Plato's *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*.

divine reason. Yet Plato found that the justice previously lived out in civic piety and in citizen moderation could be discovered again only in a radical idealization of the traditional cosmic community of gods and human beings. What had been lost could only be claimed again in the rigorous self-consciousness of philosophy. What Plato's republic retained of the old *polis* it did in strictly intellectual terms. Plato made the old *polis* truly universal by removing it from history. According to the new pattern he sets down, a truly secure community is attainable only in a *polis* from which all the contradiction of particular condition has been purged, and in which an unimpeded access to divine rationality is possible. Myth, the material of civic education, is cleansed of all reference to the gods' moral turpitude and is purged of any other inconsistency.<sup>9</sup> Tragic conflict is done away by obliterating all particular interests, including those of family and party.<sup>10</sup> Finally, governance is entrusted to philosophers, lovers of wisdom, in whom the city has inculcated the most exquisite faculties of intellect, even to the point that they can glimpse the sun-like divine source of all rationality.<sup>11</sup> Plato's philosophers are kings, which is to say educators and legislators, but also, in their mediation of divine rationality, priests and prophets as well, who pay no small attention to the management of religion.

## II. The Hellenistic World

Plato's ideal reconstruction of the *polis* was never implemented anywhere, although it influenced many subsequent theories and ideologies. At the end of the fourth century BC, Macedonian kings stepped into the power vacuum left by the failure of the *polis*. When, under Alexander the Great, the northern Greek kingdom pushed its version of Hellenism into territory cultivated by much older Near Eastern civilizations, a new form of community, with an altered configuration of the relationship of secular and sacred, came to be. A system of dynastic kingship had been the norm in the Near East for centuries; very often the king was viewed as an earthly vice-regent of the supreme god of one or another pantheon. Here too, solar

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Pl. *Resp.* 377e-403c; 595a-608a.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Pl. *Resp.* 449a-471c.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Pl. *Resp.* 473c-e.

associations were very common.<sup>12</sup> Within this context, political philosophy seems to have developed trends of idealised monarchy already set down in Plato and Aristotle. The following fragment of Diotogenes is emblematic:

The most just man would be king, and the most lawful would be most just. For without justice no one would be king, and without law [there would be no] justice. For justice is in the law, and the law is the source [*aitios*] of justice. But the king is Animate Law [*nomos empsuchos*], or is a legal ruler [*nomimos archon*]. So for this reason he is most just and most lawful.<sup>13</sup>

However generous the Hellenistic account of the ideal ruler (and ignoring the record of the fallible individuals to whom we might apply it), such a theory, removed from the context of the historical *polis*, or indeed from Plato's consideration of the total state, risks isolating the individual ruler from the interests of his subjects and consequently of diluting their apprehension of the divine source of his authority. Compared with the Classical *polis*, constituent members of the Hellenistic kingdom appear excessively disparate and unconnected. Political philosophy in this period begins to speak of the individual citizens of a vast *cosmopolis*, or *polis* of the world.<sup>14</sup> There is a broad recognition of citizen equality in this formulation, but less opportunity for individuals to participate directly in their total community. At this period, significantly, the popularity of religions offering personal salvation to individual adherents increases.

While still in the geographical context of the Hellenistic diffusion, I should mention one more conception of the *Sacred Secular*

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<sup>12</sup> In the PowerPoint presentation that accompanied the reading of this paper, a slide depicting the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten and his family suffused with the rays of the sun was displayed. A convenient image is available here: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akhenaten> .

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in E. R. Goodenough, "The Political Philosophy of Hellenistic Kingship," *YCS* I (1928): 65.

<sup>14</sup> It is commonly observed that the Hellenistic schools of philosophy take the individual, rather than the community, to be prior. Rather than the corporate virtue of justice, it is *ataraxia*, freedom from anxiety, which is the primary goal of living.

which is both distinct in its formulation and subsequent influence: that of the Hebrews. Of all the cultures we have examined thus far, this one appears to be the only that does not take kingship to be the logically (and historically) prior form of community governance. Instead, the *Sacred Secular* community is figured on the existence first of a nation whose mediation of the divine is expressed in the form of laws, which are in turn interpreted by priests. Yet the book of Exodus calls Israel a “kingdom of priests,” which implies that kingship is not an entirely alien concept.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Yahweh is held to be an eternal king.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, within the context of the priestly nation, an anointed kingship is tolerable. This explains not only the relatively short-lived kingdoms of Hebrew history, but also the relationships—both ideological and practical—of Israel to larger imperial powers with which it is continually associated in Biblical and post Biblical times. In the Roman period, for example, Hellenised Jews like Philo of Alexandria (ca. 15 BC-AD 50) will attempt a fusion of the Biblical priest-prophet figure with that of a Platonised model of ideal kingship, whose mediating power is explained within the reality of the Roman Empire.

### III. Rome

And so, at this point in our historical survey, we reach the world of Rome. Though the Roman form of community, the *Res Publica*, can be viewed to a certain extent through the lens of Greek political philosophy, something quite distinct happens in the conceptualization of sacred and secular in this state. At the outset (its traditional foundation date is 753 BC), Rome appears to have organised itself as a monarchy, with kings elected by an aristocratic body.

Prone to the excesses of tyranny, the Romans rejected the monarchy in the sixth century BC and developed a republican constitution, in which governance was shared amongst aristocratic and popular assemblies, and in which the monarchy was limited to a yearly elected magistracy, the consulship, shared by two men. This constitution matured in response to perceived threats from external

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<sup>15</sup> Exod. 19.6.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Exod. 15.11-18.

enemies, and, by the second century BC, the small city had grown into a very large empire. The Romans learned to deal with the foreign in an unprecedented way: by incorporating defeated enemies into the imperial body politic, rather than annihilating or simply subjugating them. In Rome's dominion, conquered peoples were allowed to maintain their local governments, gods and religions so long as these cults did not interfere with the good order of Roman rule or deny the divine patronage of that city. There is more religious significance in this process than pragmatic toleration, which recognises the truth and necessity of all religions only insofar as doing so preserves good order. In the first century BC, when the Romans began to ask themselves why they had been successful as no other empire known to them, they concluded that their ability to conquer and maintain order was not just sanctioned by the gods, but indeed that it was their destiny, or *fatum*—the *word spoken* by Jupiter, the King of heaven himself—to do so.

As was the case in the Greek *polis*, this ideology became especially clear at the point of greatest crisis for the Republic. Having exhausted the commonwealth's appetite for acquiring more territory in the first century BC, the great men of Rome instead turned their competitive energies against each other. Though famous statesmen like Cicero could protest that the Republic's divine foundation was preserved in its laws, after nearly a century of civil war, renewed stability could not be achieved by a straightforward return to the old constitution. Instead Romans turned—with great hesitation—to an individual who could rule to restore the community to its prior unity. Such an individual would behave neither as a warlord nor as a tyrant, but would function in accord with the best traditions of civilised rulership known at the time. In executing human governance, this man would also be an effective mediator of the divine will and beneficence. Julius Caesar, chief priest, *Pontifex Maximus*, was a heroic figure who could trace his ancestry to the founder gods of the city. He was the first both to understand what was needed and to attempt its implementation. His mistake was to move too directly towards the office of king, an office traditionally reviled by the Romans and, in the forms in which it had appeared heretofore, inadequate to the Roman predicament. After his assassination, his adopted son

Octavian took up that role with greater circumspection.<sup>17</sup> Without taking on the most overt trappings of a Hellenistic king, he promoted an ideology of renovation and restoration in which he took the role of *princeps*, first citizen, retained the role of *Pontifex Maximus*, and cultivated an *Apollonian* iconography to underscore the sure and rational guidance he gave.<sup>18</sup> Octavian Caesar, under the honorific title “Augustus” is conventionally accounted the first emperor of Rome.

The Roman conceptualization of the state’s relation to the divine is not, however, that of the Hellenistic Kingdom. In a remarkable development of the doctrine of fated *imperium*, Romans of the Augustan period began to think of the state, in its ideal, historical, and indeed material dimensions, to be *eternal*. In such an ideology, civic piety had its goal in perpetuating the endless cycle that the state realises in history. One can find no more eloquent and influential statement of this than in the epic poet Virgil. In creatively expressing Roman relief at the end of civil strife, and awe at the salvation of the commonwealth, Virgil wrote an epic poem, the *Aeneid*, about the establishment of the Roman race in Italy. In that poem Jupiter, king of gods and men, says the following to his daughter Venus: “For these [the Romans] I set no limits, world or time, But make the gift of empire without end [...] The Trojan Caesar comes to circumscribe/Empire with Ocean, fame with heaven’s stars [...] And he with you shall be invoked with prayers.”<sup>19</sup>

In accordance with Hellenistic principles, the Roman emperor will receive his own form of divination, and enjoy a public cult after death. But the emperor is not, at least in the Virgilian conception,

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<sup>17</sup> For a nuanced positive account of the Augustan restoration, see still Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine*, rev. ed. (New York; Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1957), 1–176.

<sup>18</sup> In the original PowerPoint presentation, Augustus’ *Apollonian* iconography was suggested with a slide juxtaposing the fifth-century BC statue of Apollo from the pediment of the temple of Zeus at Olympia with the first-century BC “Prima Porta” statue of Augustus. Convenient images of these two statues are available at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apollon\\_of\\_Olympia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apollon_of_Olympia) and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustus\\_of\\_Prima\\_Porta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustus_of_Prima_Porta) respectively.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Verg. *Aen.* 1.278-290. The excerpted translation is that of Robert Fitzgerald, trans, *Virgil: The Aeneid* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 13.

living, or “Animate Law.” Greater than the emperor or any other individual in the eternal Republic is Roma herself, the universal, ever-present civilizing pattern, with its laws and gods, that informs, completes, and *is* history. In order to accommodate this remarkable ideology to the tradition he inherits, Virgil resorts to a poeticised Platonic metaphysics. In his voyage to the underworld, the hero Aeneas has a vision of Roman souls, the past and future of the eternal Republic, being stripped of their personal memory and being reborn to live virtuous lives in fresh circumstances.<sup>20</sup> In Virgil’s cosmic economy, public virtue *is* religious piety. Service to the state consists in the continual sacrifice of individuality. Such service is rewarded by enshrining exemplary figures in the collective memory. In this conception, as in classical Athens, edifying tragedy (albeit not in the same literary or performative mode) is possible, and the best of emperors (as well as other pious individuals) are remembered for suffering in the service of the state.

#### **IV. Rome and Christianity**

The power and resilience of this view is attested by its endurance. Three centuries later, there is ample evidence in poetry, history and the visual arts that the idea was alive even after Christianity began to take hold at the highest levels of late Roman society. Many (then and since) have taken Christianity to be a radically new religion with a totalizing and altogether different approach to the secular and sacred than the pagan cults of antiquity. Dr. Hankey reminds us, however, that in several senses Christianity was itself a religion of empire, and not inherently opposed to the sacred secular *imperium*. Indeed, between the first quarter of the fourth century, when the emperor Constantine first legalised and then adopted Christianity for himself, and the last quarter, when Theodosius made it Rome’s official religion, Christians were able with relative ease to blend their centuries-old system of education and oversight into the old administrative systems. To cite the most famous example, bishops

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<sup>20</sup> Verg. *Aen.* 6.679-901.

come to rival, then take the place of, provincial governors, and Constantine himself takes his seat along with the bishops.<sup>21</sup>

Be this as it may, within one hundred years of Constantine's conversion the idea of eternal Rome received a grave, if largely symbolic, blow. In 410 the Goths of Alaric sacked the city, the first time that a foreign army had violated the sacral ground in some eight centuries. When outraged pagans alleged divine retribution for the abandonment of the old gods, St. Augustine began his massive reassessment of Rome's claim to universal dominion in the *City of God*. Augustine was a great lover of Virgil in his youth, who could speak with enthusiasm even after his conversion about the divine (Christian) mission of the empire. But time, and perhaps, too, the spectacle of old Rome overwhelmed and led him to a new position, one which made a distinction between the City of Man and the City of God. It would not be right to characterise his thesis as an absolute separation of secular and sacred, much less of church and state. But it would be hard to deny that Augustine's theory gave serious impetus to the development of those ideas. Drawing the name of the City of God from the Hebrew Scriptures, Augustine envisions it as the ultimate fatherland and haven of the community of Christians bound together by love. While the City of Man is not necessarily opposed to the Christian Republic, and while it can and should assist mortals in orienting themselves to the truest form of community, the inevitable limitations of mortal foresight, and the uncontrollable appetites of mortal will, prevent the temporal community from possessing all the means and succours for leading its citizens home to their true *patria*. In that sense, above all, the imperial republic, with its false gods and contradictory logic of dominion, failed.<sup>22</sup>

I said at the outset of this paper that Augustine would mark the limit of my discussion. But in introducing his more familiar theory now, I have purposefully gotten ahead of myself. I want to spend the space remaining by looking at two responses to imperial fourth-

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Eusebius' description of the emperor's participation in the Council of Nicaea in 325 (Euseb. *Vit. Const.* 2.10).

<sup>22</sup> For a more detailed examination of the *City of God* in a similar context, see Colin J. Starnes, "The Doctrine of Man in the Church Fathers," in *Christian Anthropology: The Trinitarian Theology of Man*, eds. Susan E. Harris and Robert D. Crouse (Charlottetown, P.E.I.: St. Peter's Publications, 1997), 35–55.

century Christianity that accept and adapt, in their own very distinct ways, the old Roman ideology. I thereby hope to underscore Augustine's shift away from the ancient mainstream, and provide a suitable starting point for the subsequent paper in these proceedings.

The terms and quality of Constantine's conversion have been the subjects of endless debate, which I don't intend to repeat now. But at the very least, it should be mentioned that Constantine grew into his role as the first Christian emperor gradually. From his vision of the Chi-Rho "*labarum*" (under which he would conquer), to his defeat of Maxentius at the Milvian bridge, to his legalization of Christianity with the Edict of Milan, to his direct involvement as emperor in the Donatist controversies and the Council of Nicaea, we can trace an incremental growth in the emperor's Christian identity. It is also worth noting that, before Constantine became an overt follower of Christ, he had developed strong associations with the late antique cult of *Sol Invictus*—the unconquered sun—a syncretistic and henotheistic supreme god over all others.<sup>23</sup> The best accounting of the *effect* of the conversion, however, is that of Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, the greatest ideologue of Constantine's Christian Empire.

Eusebius was a survivor of the Diocletianic persecutions, and a prodigious biblical exegete. His extensive historical writings make him the father of Church history. In theorizing Constantine's reign, Eusebius is unrelenting in his insistence that the old gods be swept away and the world purged of religious error. But it must be emphasised that he does so within the broad framework of traditional imperial structures and within the continuum of Graeco-

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<sup>23</sup> For accessible, up-to-date, and fair-minded discussions of Constantine's conversion see Noel Emmanuel Lenski, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Section II: Religion and Spiritual Life. One PowerPoint slide in the original presentation juxtaposed head-shots of the Olympian Apollo, the young Augustus, the young Constantine, and the colossal head of Constantine now in the Capitoline Museums, in order to suggest the persistence of *Apollonian* associations in Constantine's iconography. See n. 18 for Apollo and Augustus; the Constantinian images are available here: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantine\\_I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantine_I). Another slide presented the remarkable silver medallion image of Constantine in three-quarter profile, his helmet crowned with the Chi-Rho and his shield bearing the pagan image of Romulus and Remus suckled by the she-wolf! A reproduction of the latter is available in *Ibid.*, Coin 1.

Roman thinking on the nature of human community and the duties of its rulers. So, for example, in his *Life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine*, Eusebius can adapt the theory of divine kingship as expressed by Philo Judaeus in his *Life of Moses*.<sup>24</sup> For Eusebius, Constantine stands as a type of the scriptural Moses, but as interpreted through the lens of the Platonic philosopher king and the Hellenistic theory of “Animate [i.e. living, ensouled] Law.” Constantine, the Christian Emperor, is thus king, legislator, prophet and priest. It is, in this sense, no innovation that he can become the “general bishop” who still retains the title of *Pontifex Maximus*, and who convokes, and participates in, synods.<sup>25</sup>

From his Christian perspective, however, Eusebius does not limit Constantine’s role as mediator between humanity and heaven to the Mosaic paradigm. Boldly (some might say dangerously), he made an analogy between Christ (the *Logos* of the Trinity), the divine-human mediator, and the emperor, the human-divine mediator, whose purpose in the earthly community was to purify, educate, and direct his people to God’s kingdom through Christ. The central text for this doctrine is his *Tricennial Oration*, delivered in 336 to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of Constantine’s accession to imperial office. It is a courtly document, panegyric to a degree that does not accord with our tastes. But its high-blown rhetoric discloses a very clear tendency of thought. The following excerpts from the second chapter of the *Oration* illustrate Eusebius’ designation of Constantine as Christ’s viceroy in all of His mediating personae:

1. This only begotten Word of God reigns, from ages which had no beginning, to infinite and endless ages, the partner of his Father’s kingdom. And [our emperor] ever beloved by him, *who derives the source of imperial authority from above*, and is strong in the power of his sacred title has controlled the empire of the world for a long period of years.

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<sup>24</sup> On which, see Emily Parker’s response to this paper.

<sup>25</sup> On Eusebius’ political philosophy of divine kingship, see Dominic J. O’Meara, *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 144–151.

2. Again, that *Preserver* of the universe orders these heavens and earth, and the celestial kingdom, consistently with his Father's will. Even so our emperor, whom he loves, by bringing those whom he rules on earth to the only begotten Word and Saviour, renders them fit subjects of his kingdom.

3. And, as he who is the common *Saviour* of mankind, by his invisible and Divine power as the good shepherd, drives far away from his flock, like savage beasts, those apostate spirits which once flew through the airy tracts above this earth, and fastened on the souls of men, so this his friend, graced by his heavenly favour with victory over all his foes, subdues and chastens the open adversaries of the truth in accordance with the usages of war.

4. He who is the pre-existent Word, the Preserver of all things, imparts to his disciples the seeds of true wisdom and salvation, and at once enlightens and gives them understanding in the knowledge of his Father's kingdom. *Our emperor, his friend, acting as interpreter to the Word of God, aims at recalling the whole human race to the knowledge of God; proclaiming clearly in the ears of all, and declaring with powerful voice the laws of truth and godliness to all who dwell on the earth.*

5. Once more, the universal Saviour opens the heavenly gates of his Father's kingdom to those whose course is thitherward from this world. Our emperor, emulous of his Divine example, having purged his earthly dominion from every stain of impious error, invites each holy and pious worshiper within his imperial mansions, earnestly desiring to save with all its crew that mighty vessel of which he is the appointed pilot. And he alone of all who have wielded the imperial power of Rome, being honoured by the Supreme Sovereign with a reign of three decennial

periods, now celebrates this festival, not, as his ancestors might have done, in honour of infernal demons, or the apparitions of seducing spirits, or of the fraud and deceitful arts of impious men; but as an act of thanksgiving to him by whom he has thus been honoured, and in acknowledgment of the blessings he has received at his hands. He does not, in imitation of ancient usage, defile his imperial mansions with blood and gore, nor propitiate the infernal deities with fire and smoke, and sacrificial offerings; but *dedicates to the universal Sovereign a pleasant and acceptable sacrifice, even his own imperial soul, and a mind truly fitted for the service of God.*

6. For this sacrifice alone is grateful to him: and this sacrifice our emperor has learned, with purified mind and thoughts, to present as an offering without the intervention of fire and blood, while his own piety, strengthened by the truthful doctrines with which his soul is stored, he sets forth in magnificent language the praises of God, and imitates his Divine philanthropy by his own imperial acts. Wholly devoted to him, *he dedicates himself as a noble offering*, a first-fruit of that world, the government of which is entrusted to his charge. This first and greatest sacrifice our emperor first dedicates to God; and then, as a faithful shepherd, he offers, not “famous hecatombs of firstling lambs,” but the souls of that flock which is the object of his care, those rational beings whom he leads to the knowledge and pious worship of God.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, in the first paragraph Constantine derives his imperial authority from heaven; in the second paragraph, he acts as a beneficent overseer of earthly concerns, orienting them in accordance with divine will; in the third paragraph, he fulfills the

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<sup>26</sup> Euseb. *Triac.* 2.1-6. The translation is the one provided by Philip Schaff and Henry Ware, *Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, Oration in Praise of Constantine* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 583–584. Emphases mine.

office of earthly Saviour, protecting citizens as a shepherd from marauders (both pagans and heretics) outside the fold. In the surprising fourth paragraph, Eusebius alleges that Constantine, philosopher-like, interprets the Word of God for the people, and, like a prophet, proclaims it to them. But the bishop “pulls out all the stops” in the fifth and sixth paragraphs, where he makes the quite astonishing analogy of Christ’s self-sacrifice for the atonement of all, and the Emperor’s own self-sacrifice. Of the latter there are two aspects: firstly, the emperor “sacrifices” by doing away with animal sacrifice, the defining operation of ancient pagan religiosity, the repeated and necessary expression of humanity’s communication with the divine; secondly, apparently by discharging all the responsibilities of his office, he sacrifices his own interests to those of the entire Christian empire. I suspect that even in this overwhelmingly Christian context, the traditional understanding of the emperor’s self-submersion in the service of Roman eternity lingers. Indeed, in one of his more enthusiastic rhetorical spirals, Eusebius appears to claim that Constantine’s rule will actually *be* eternal. The fact that Constantine was dead within eight months of the oration encourages the explanation that Eusebius was speaking only in paradigmatic terms. Indeed, Eusebius’ conception remained basically intact in the Byzantine ideology of empire which extended another eleven centuries in the eastern half of the old Roman Empire, and St. Constantine, “the Thirteenth Apostle,” was to be remembered as its originator.<sup>27</sup> In the West, by contrast, where Augustine was writing, a process of political decentralisation ensued, and a different conceptualisation of the secular and sacred developed.

I want to end by taking a look at one final Roman configuration of the *Sacred Secular*, in the thought and reign of the emperor Julian, called the Apostate. Julian was the nephew of Constantine the Great and one of only two male relatives (besides the emperor’s three sons) who survived an army purge of potential successors after his death in 337. Raised in close custody and educated by learned bishops, Julian

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<sup>27</sup> Constantine was entombed in the Church of the Holy Apostles which he had built. “Isapostolos”, “Equal to the Apostles,” a title he used for himself, became a standard designation of the Byzantine emperors.

nevertheless conceived an early devotion for the traditional gods and venerated them in secret. At maturity he began a philosophical education in the Neoplatonic schools of Athens. When his cousin Constantius II unexpectedly elevated him to junior imperial rank in 355, Julian began to contemplate an elaborate imperial theology that would answer Constantine's Christian assault on the Eternal Empire. When he became sole Augustus in 360, he openly declared his apostasy and made plans to "restore the cults of the gods."<sup>28</sup>

Julian was by no means alone in his pagan or philosophical sympathies. In one sense, his remarkable mission was not unlike that devised for Constantine by Eusebius: Julian developed a heavily Platonised theory to help explain his role in the empire, and he also had the opportunity to put his theory to the test. In another sense, Julian's innovations must be seen as reactive. His deep conservatism prompted him to meet the challenge of Constantine's *Sacred Secular* state in ways that had never been tried before. In so doing, Julian's reforms are unexampled—and unrepeated—in subsequent history.<sup>29</sup>

The lineaments of Julian's imperial theory as preserved in his extant writings make for interesting comparisons with Eusebius' Constantinian ideology.<sup>30</sup> For Julian, as for Eusebius (and for the whole Graeco-Roman tradition before them), kingly authority came from heaven. Julian himself relates a charming autobiographical myth to explain his ascent to Olympus, where he receives Zeus's commission as emperor, and his subsequent descent to earth as a

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<sup>28</sup> Amm. Marc. 22.5.2. The pagan historian Ammianus offers the single most complete and sympathetic contemporary account of Julian's reign. At this point in the original presentation, PowerPoint slides of two Julianic coins were shown to illustrate the ways in which his ideological shift was reflected in his iconography. First was a coin depicting Julian as Caesar under Constantius II—he is represented here clean-shaven and very much in line with the Constantinian-*Apollonian* style. The second coin, depicting Julian as sole Augustus, shows him bearded in the ancient style of the philosopher, an effect also cultivated by Marcus Aurelius. An image of the beardless Julian may be found at <http://www.roman-emperors.org/julian.htm>; the bearded emperor is represented at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julian\\_the\\_Apostate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julian_the_Apostate).

<sup>29</sup> A full intellectual biography of Julian is provided by P. Athanassiadi-Fowden, *Julian and Hellenism. An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).

<sup>30</sup> Julian's theory is distilled neatly in O'Meara, *Platonopolis*, 120–123.

philosopher king.<sup>31</sup> True to that Platonic conception, but also in his role as *Pontifex Maximus*, Julian devised a complex network of pagan clergy to assist with his work: priests (corresponding loosely to their Christian counterparts) and archpriests (corresponding to Christian bishops) who would oversee all religious activity. As in the Christian church, these offices corresponded to pre-existing imperial administrative divisions, and the goals of their activity were in no way separate from those of the empire itself. The duties of these officials, modelled after their supreme chief, the Emperor, included teaching the populace, using the language of myth for the less educated, in order to draw them into the holiness of the state, a movement that could eventually lead to their individual salvation. The public piety that these religious figures taught tended first to strengthening the communal fabric. For Julian it is the principle of *philanthropia* (in place of Christian love) that brings the community together and orientates it correctly under the divine law. In the name of this binding force a network of charitable institutions like hospitals and almshouses, overseen by the pagan clergy, were to be founded.<sup>32</sup>

The points of difference are, of course, striking. The whole impulse of Julian's renovation of cult was not to efface the plurality of polytheism, but rather to preserve, order, and redeem it. While Julian too believes in a transcendent godhead beyond all divisions, his mediators are numerous. As emperor he has special devotion to Zeus, the king of gods and god of kings, and to Helios, the divine sun, whose light penetrates all and who stands above all other gods. But true to the oldest imperial principles of inclusivity, Julian's system not only tolerates, but indeed *requires* local and national gods, conceiving them as emanations of the highest divinity, and necessary to relate diverse groups to the universality of the highest sacred god and the highest secular authority of the Empire. Among these ethnic gods he includes the god of the Jews, as an ancient and venerable divinity, but not that of the Christians, who, with wayward

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<sup>31</sup> Jul. *Or.* 7.227c-234c.

<sup>32</sup> Julian outlines his programme in a letter to Theodorus, High Priest of the Province of Asia (Jul. *Ep.* 82).

innovation, have perverted and distorted that ancient local god to a false eminence and unwarranted exclusivity.<sup>33</sup>

On the point of sacrifice too, Julian's example is in stark contrast with Constantine's. Under Julian animal sacrifice was carried out to a degree that shocked even some of his ardent pagan admirers.<sup>34</sup> But this learned pagan viewed it as a necessary communal expression of the connectedness of human life with the gods. Furthermore, for Julian the notion of self-sacrifice stands on quite different terms. For Julian, the sacred imperial office is not in any way analogous to that of the Christian saviour divinity, as Eusebius claimed for Constantine, and neither does Julian anywhere claim to be the "living law" of Hellenistic tradition, so favoured by Eusebius.<sup>35</sup> As an inheritor of the rich Greek philosophical tradition, this Roman emperor was nevertheless always mindful of the principle of Roman eternity, and his role as the temporal guide of the Republic was limited and fragile.<sup>36</sup> His destiny was to lose himself tragically in the name of Rome's greater universal goal. He speaks of taking up this role in his own writings,<sup>37</sup> and after his death on a battlefield in Persia, just three years after his reign began, and with his lofty plans mainly unrealised, his most faithful defenders will characterise his death that way too.<sup>38</sup> It may perhaps strike us as odd that Julian's ideal Roman eternity could accommodate Christian emperors within it—for he believed that, however disordered their cult, the continuity of Rome could never be suppressed. But neither Julian's tragic sensibility nor Eusebius' triumphalism could encompass a reformulation of the *Secular Sacred* as Augustine would have it. +

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<sup>33</sup> Julian's plans to restore the temples famously includes an attempt to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem (Amm. Marc. 23.1.2). See Julian's *Contra Galilaeos* for his anti-Christian sentiments, and Athanassiadi-Fowden, *Julian and Hellenism. An Intellectual Biography*, 161–191 for the place of local cults within his universalizing religion.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Amm. Marc. 22.12.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Athanassiadi-Fowden, *Julian and Hellenism*.175.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 158; 171–4.

<sup>38</sup> Ammianus and Libanius of Antioch are chief among them. On the former, see Jacques Fontaine, "Le Julien d'Ammien Marcellin," in *L'Empereur Julien, De l'Histoire à La Legend, 331-1715*, eds. René Braun and Jean Richer (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1978), 31–65, and Peter O'Brien, "Ammianus Epicus: Virgilian Allusion in the Res Gestae," *Phoenix* 60, no. 3-4 (2006): 274–303.





## Reflecting the Divine: Philo's Moses and the Roman Ideal

### Response to Peter O'Brien

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In response to the rich survey that Dr. O'Brien has presented, I intend to introduce you to the thought of Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE-50 CE), which was the subject of my recent graduate research. In relation to our overall theme of secularization, and specifically to Dr O'Brien's paper on the origins of the *Sacred Secular*, Philo is especially important. In Philo, we find a unique synthesis of the Greek, Roman, and Jewish notions of divine kingship, which attracted the attention of the early Christian fathers. Eusebius was the great promoter of Philo to the Christians, and it is through him that much of Philo's writing is preserved. As we illumine Philo's notion of divine kingship in Moses, let us keep in mind that this is the foundation from which Eusebius' Constantine arises.

Let us remind ourselves of the three general features of the *Sacred Secular* community, which Dr. O'Brien has identified: (1) the cult of the gods as a civic, or national duty; (2) a universal standard of equity, founded on cosmic justice which is administered by universal law, and; (3) mediation of divine reason through individuals in various public offices, or through larger groups, that administer human activity, turning them to the divine. As we examine Philo's social context in light of these three trends, it will become clear that Philo values the *Sacred Secular* state and is well aware of the disastrous consequences that follow upon his loss of religious freedom, which should have been protected by Roman constitution. However, does Philo only value Roman rule insofar as it does not oppose Jewish custom? Does he hope for the realization of the nation of Israel,

under a *Secular Sacred* authority? Philo's commitment to the *Sacred Secular* society is reiterated when we examine his presentation of Moses, in whom the ideal king, lawgiver, priest, and prophet are united.

Philo was a member of the Jewish community in Alexandria, Egypt, which had autonomy in civil matters and freedom to uphold religious custom. With the accession of Roman Emperor Gaius Caesar (more popularly known by his nickname Caligula) the community began to disintegrate. Philo describes the Jewish pogrom in 37 CE, launched by the Alexandrian mob with permission (or at least without resistance) from the prefect Flaccus. The emperor had installed his statues in synagogues across the empire with the order to worship them as God. When the Jews in Alexandria refused to recognize the statues, the mob, encouraged by Flaccus, seized this opportunity to attack the community, claiming that they were defending Rome from Jewish dissent. In response, Philo led an embassy to Rome, in order to persuade Gaius that he should (1) not condone the violence against the Jews, and (2) not order the Jews to propitiate his statue as God.

What are we to make of this? Did Philo oppose the Roman ideal? While some scholars argue that Philo secretly opposed Rome, such a claim is analogous to the argument that the separation of church and state can be founded upon Christ's imperative that we "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22.21). As Dr. Hankey has pointed out in his conference paper, such an argument is undermined by other biblical passages (Romans 13.1, 1 Peter 2.13), and it ignores the "most important point for understanding first the Christian and then the Islamic relation to the secular." As this point is also crucial for Philo, it is worth reiterating Dr Hankey's point: "Christianity as Jewish sect stood on the notion of a Kingdom of God institutionalized in the High Priest and the anointed Kings, rivals for rule in Israel. It was also a religion of the Roman Empire...its greatest missionary claimed with pride that he was a Roman citizen." If we think that Philo hated Rome, it is precisely this point we

neglect, and by doing so, we impart to Philo's Judaism a narrow nationalism, which devalues humanity, and by implication, we assign to God notions that Philo would abhor. Philo embraces the Roman ideal state. It is the antithesis of the *Sacred Secular* society, with which Philo is concerned.

Within the Roman constitution—when functioning as it should—the three trends common to the *Sacred Secular* are maintained and reinforced. However, when the law breaks down, the three trends are lost. Philo argued that when Gaius ordered the installation and propitiation of idols in the Jewish temples, he was violating Roman law which upheld the rights of the Jews to conduct customary religious observances. Moreover, when Flaccus desecrated the synagogues in Alexandria, he destroyed the means by which the Jews lawfully offered sacrifice and prayers to God *in the name of the emperor*. “[U]nderstand that everywhere in the habitable world the religious veneration of the Jews for the Augustan house has its basis, as all may see, in the meeting houses, and if we have these destroyed, no place, no method is left to us for paying this homage.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, Flaccus and Gaius overturn the cult of gods by denying the Jews the right to practice according to their custom, which is also their means to fulfilling civic and national duties. Furthermore, the universal standard of equity disappears when they breach Roman (universal) law. Finally, by dictating religious worship and disregarding universal law, Gaius and Flaccus falsely assert themselves not to be simply mediators of divine reason, but to be the measure itself. Philo recognizes a great danger for the Jews, dispersed throughout the empire, who would rally against a secular power that dictates, as opposed to protects, their sacred customs. Philo knows that a Jewish uprising would force Rome to a counter attack, which was exactly what would transpire under his nephew Tiberius Alexander. In an uprising between the Egyptians and the Jews in 60 CE, Tiberius Alexander used Roman forces to quiet the discontented Jews, killing 50,000 people. Moreover, Philo's

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<sup>1</sup> Philo, *In Flaccum (On Flaccus)*, 49.

commitment to the *Sacred Secular* state goes beyond immediate concerns for his welfare: the *Sacred Secular* state is an image of the cosmos itself.

Dr O'Brien has mentioned that the Hellenistic context allows for the fusion of the philosopher king/virtuous law-giver and the Jewish high priest and prophet. We find this in Philo's biography of Moses, which is loosely based on events in Exodus and Numbers. In *De Vita Mosis* (*On the Life of Moses*), Philo states: "Moses, through God's providence, became king and lawgiver and high priest and prophet, and in each function he won the highest place."<sup>2</sup> Even though Philo unifies the four offices in Moses, the function of each is nonetheless clearly distinguished as different from the others. Through the activities of king and legislator, Moses manifests God's creative and providential powers by founding and governing a spiritual community, which itself becomes a medium of the well-ordered cosmos. Philo has extended the operation of the Platonic and Aristotelian philosopher king from a specific city, to a universal city. In order to earn the titles associated with kingship, *theos* (god), and lawgiving, *kyrios* (lord), Moses must undertake theoretical contemplation of the cosmos, and make his knowledge actual through virtue; in this way, Moses becomes the *nomos empsuchos* (animate, or living, law). But, before theoretical contemplation, Moses must pass through the traditional Greek encyclical curriculum—a prerequisite to the loftier pursuit of philosophy. In the regal and legislative functions, Philo makes the particular a faithful medium of the universal; accordingly, he shows again and again that the written law *is* the law of nature. The individual mastery of philosophy through both theory and practice necessarily precedes ruling and governing insofar as the ruler must become a paradigmatic mediator of the divine reason before he creates many others in its image. Here we might notice that Philo reflects Diotogenes' emblematic statement which Dr O'Brien included in his discussion on how authority in the Hellenic *polis* is amplified in the Hellenistic

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<sup>2</sup> Philo, *De Vita Mosis*, 2.3.

*cosmopolis*. Such an authority figure—Jewish, or not—embodies Philo’s *Sacred Secular* ideal, and must become a divine mediator and arbiter of universal justice through the individual pursuit of philosophy and virtue before he can rule and govern others.

That a secular authority can accurately represent the divine is better apprehended when we note that, for Philo, the term “Israel” does not indicate a place in the physical world. For Philo, the name Israel means “seeing God” or “vision of God” and corresponds to the highest human conception of the divine. In *De Congressu Eruditionis Gratia* (*On the Preliminary Studies*), Philo writes, “Now, allotted to the best of races is to see the best thing, that which truly exists, for Israel means seeing God. To those in second place, the second best thing is seen, that is the heaven of our senses.”<sup>3</sup> Israel is the name that Philo gives to a universal truth, the apprehension of which is allotted only to those who have dedicated their lives to the correct pursuit of wisdom and to the life of virtue. In *De Confusione Linguarum* (*On the Confusion of Tongues*), Philo tells us that:

[It is] the special mark of those who serve the existent that...in their thoughts they ascend to the heavenly height, setting before them Moses, the nature beloved by God, to lead them on the way. For then they shall behold the place which is in fact the *logos*, where God stands, never changing, never turning, and also what lies under his feet like the work of a brick of sapphire, like the form of the firmament of heaven [Exodus 24.10].<sup>4</sup>

This incorporeal place is where the universal standard of justice is discerned by both Jews and non-Jews. The name Israel indicates the summit of human wisdom and corresponds to the most accurate way that a human can know God; this is obtained only after knowing all things in the sensible world.

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<sup>3</sup> Philo, *De Congressu*, 51.

<sup>4</sup> Philo, *De Confusione*, 95-96.

As king and lawgiver, Moses illumines the way to the divine, beginning from the very bottom of creation. However, as high priest, Moses implements sacred rites on the basis of the knowledge he receives from the top down, through divine inspiration. Philo describes Moses' ascent on Sinai, where he enters into the darkness of God and emerges illumined to such a degree "that the eyes of those who saw him could not continue to bear the dazzling brightness that flashed from him like the rays of the sun."<sup>5</sup> Having descended, Philo relates that Moses immediately begins the construction of the tabernacle, a symbolic representation of the entire cosmos. Through instructing his people in the proper performance of sacred rites, Moses gives the body of worshippers the means to dispose themselves to the divine and to preserve the cosmic order.

As the perfect king and legislator, Moses has illumined the path which the human individual must travel. This is the way of gradual ascent through progressive stages of theoretical contemplation, which correspond to higher forms of activity, manifest as virtue. Only an individual in harmony with cosmic justice—and familiar with the trials that are presented along the way—can become a good king and legislator. The Augustan ideal is based on the exact same principle of universal justice that is discerned in Philo's Israel. Philo would not deny that the virtuous person, having undergone the prerequisite training, is well suited to hold political office and rule in accordance with the will of God. This does not, however, entitle the ruler (whether a Jew or not) to claim the authority of priest and prophet. As the messengers of God, priests and prophets must receive their appointment from the divine realm. However, in Moses, Philo has shown that the knowledge of God gained through learning does not conflict with inspired teachings; rather, learning and inspiration complement and perfect each other. In the same way, the interests of the Roman Emperor and the Jewish Priest are not in conflict; rather, through their respective roles, they mutually

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<sup>5</sup> Philo, *De Vita Mosis*, 2.70.

reinforce and strengthen their equally necessary activities. By means of the harmonious *Sacred Secular* partnership, Rome is a concrete image of divine justice and universal equality; it is the place through which the earthly manifestation of the heavenly vision—Israel—is possible. Accordingly, we now understand that Philo valued Rome precisely because, as an image of the cosmos, it constitutes a whole in which its various parts are retained and preserved in their differences. In turn, Rome provides the container and paradigm where smaller communities, families, and individuals are unified while retaining their differences.

So, what exactly is the nature of Moses, the figure who embodied both sacred and secular perfection? If we look to the end of *De Vita Mosis*, where Moses' essential nature is restored, Philo provides a clear answer:

Later, the time came when he was ready to migrate from here into heaven, leaving the mortal life, aimed at immortality, summoned there by the father who, realigning his dyadic existence, body and soul, into the monad, resolved his whole entire nature into *the most sun-like mind*.<sup>6</sup>

As pure mind, Moses is the undivided light, the perfect activity, which is the source and end of all things. Through his embodied existence, Moses mediates his higher nature by means of encompassing and actualizing each of the four mental faculties that correspond to the four offices. Moses' nature in itself is whole, which we as mortal humans know in virtue of its distinct division into parts. In the realm of generation, these parts must remain distinct for the sake of human nature, and in this way, the Roman ideal state is the whole in which both sacred and secular parts are retained. +

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<sup>6</sup> Philo, *De Vita Mosis*, 2.287-292.





## Enlightenment Claims for a *Sacred Secular*

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During the 22<sup>nd</sup> Atlantic Theological Conference in 2002, Dr Robert Crouse<sup>1</sup> cited a remarkable passage from St Augustine's *City of God* [Book V.9] in which Augustine describes "the religious mind" as one that "chooses both, confesses both, and maintains both by the piety of faith..." Under discussion is the apparent paradox, even contradiction, between the immutable divine foreknowledge and human freedom of the will. The religious mind requires "both that God knows all things before they come to pass, and that we do by our free will whatsoever we know and feel to be done by us only because we will it..." The same deep sense of the paradoxes that govern our faith was already present in Augustine's famous *Confessions*, where he tells both God and his readers that his former insanity was a moment in his "recovering health", and that the agony of death he was dying manifested his coming to life [VIII, viii (19)].

The form of reasoning Augustine is forced to adopt here may be classified as "dialectical". I say "forced to adopt", because it is required by the subject matter itself. It is not some alien imposition of aimless, pointless human speculation: it is, rather, the only form of thinking which can ever hope to do justice to the complexity, richness and variety of all our human experience. When you take the time to consider whatever might be meant by our slogan of "a sacred secular", please, bear in mind that what we are emphasizing is that

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<sup>1</sup> See Robert D. Crouse, "The Doctrine of Providence in Patristic and Medieval Theology," in *Providence: The Will of God in Human Affairs*, edited by Susan Harris [Proceedings of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Atlantic Theological Conference, 2002] (Charlottetown, P.E.I.: St Peter Publications, 2004), 27–37 at 30.

the truth in things abides so long as we remember that they always have two sides, and nothing is ever conveniently, or simply, univocal. The Psalmist already points us in the right direction (62:11): “God spake once, and twice I have also heard the same.”

While I am firmly convinced that dialectical reason is what is required by the Christian faith, and that its theologians have always employed it, my remarks are restricted to a half-dozen German-language thinkers, who make the journey from what is called the Enlightenment to nineteenth-century Romanticism; in travelling this highway, they both illustrate how this dialectical reasoning must be employed, and also, I contend, change our attitudes towards secularization. To stand at the end of this development offers a huge advantage. Out of that massive exercise of intellectual labour, it is possible to extract a relatively straightforward definition of what we mean by dialectic, or dialectical reasoning. The German philosopher Hegel is often pilloried as the most obscure of the lot, but his definitions are both crisp and brief. This form of thinking (Hegel asserts) is the discovery of unity in difference, the discovery of the positive in the negative, and consists in our grasping the unity of ourselves with what is set over against us.<sup>2</sup> This path of simultaneous affirmation and negation is not the invention of these thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—but if we allow them to guide us, perhaps our forum considering “secularization” may be both better informed and more subtle.

To give us a sense of direction, I simply announce that the Kingdom of Prussia was established in 1701, and that Berlin was its capital. Remarkably, Berlin had no university, and a year earlier (in 1700) this deficiency was addressed by the establishment in the capital of an “Academy of Sciences”, whose first head was the great philosopher and mathematician, Leibniz. Just a few years before the

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<sup>2</sup> These definitions are taken from G.W.F. Hegel’s Introduction to his *Science of Logic* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) and from his lecture notes for students at the Gymnasium in Nürnberg in the years 1808 and following. Also from Hegel’s correspondence concerning the educational curriculum in Bavaria (October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1812).

establishment of this new Prussian Kingdom, the French monarchy had stripped French Protestants (the Huguenots) of their religious freedom by the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685); these displaced persons were, however, officially welcomed to Berlin, by a mirror proclamation, its direct corresponding reversal, in the Edict of Potsdam of the same year. These two Edicts (renounced and proclaimed) changed the character of that capital city forever. The massive decamping of the Huguenots to Berlin had the effect of transforming this Teutonic capital into a great cosmopolitan haven, where naked monarchical self-interest simply demanded a settled religious toleration. And this toleration had to extend well beyond that initially required between Lutheran and Reformed Protestants; it had to be extended to all its landed, mercantile citizens if there was to be effective civic peace. Dignified and courteous religious toleration was simply a pre-condition for peace and good government in the modern state.

This appropriation of religious toleration as a key to civic order, of course, produced its own intellectual apparatus...to speak very crudely. I don't want to suggest the practice appeared first, followed by theory, but it was now mandatory that the intellectual grounds for toleration be explored, and perhaps this exploration can be seen to have assisted what history already required in any case. The Academy of Sciences in Berlin gave a certain lead; to us it must seem remarkable that the proceedings of this Prussian Academy in the capital city were both conducted and published in French.

This obscure detail of a remote history is, however, of significance, because with Leibniz, the founding President of the Academy, to the best of my knowledge, we have the first formulation of the chief axiom of the enlightened toleration of all points of view. Before I reveal this simple governing proposition, allow me to emphasize that underlying our capacity for true toleration is the conviction (taken from classical antiquity) that no one is ever completely mistaken. To say this same thing another way: no one is ever so completely wrong, that such a person is incapable of articulating something of real value, however one-sided and

incomplete the proposition remains. The problem always arises (in judgments) when we seek to make our valid, worthwhile, necessary, invaluable insights take the place of the whole. “No one is ever completely wrong” is a proposition that must be balanced by an equivalent and complementary assertion: it is our *incapacity* to see the relevance and necessity of other propositions, doctrines and perspectives which tempts us, again and again, and despite all experience, to see our fragmentary insight enthroned in the monarchical place of government. To give this doctrine its axiomatic formula, the settled version (in Coleridge) reads: people are right in what they affirm and wrong in what they deny.<sup>3</sup>

What this means in practice is already clear enough. We are, all of us, both the possessors and conveyors of truth, but whenever we seek to establish our truth at the expense of the insights of others, we are bound to lapse into error through myopia, exaggeration, or denigration, which most often appears in the form of a sneering and sarcastic *reductio ad absurdum*. It is much easier to see the flaws in the opponent’s position, when we (wilfully) inflate that position according to some extreme of judgment. It requires great discipline and a heroic turn of mind to discover the genuine principle at work in the interlocutor’s halting and inadequate exposition, since that insight must also form a necessary moment in the completion of human truths, if we are truly to possess all of them.

If you will allow the axiomatic formula: “People are right in what they assert, and wrong in what they deny” then you will see, I believe, that the toleration which we most urgently require in our public life is at the same time a rational proposition that is demanded by the insights of our human reason. To say the same thing again: according to the Enlightenment principles of sovereign human rationality, religious toleration is not only a practical necessity, it is itself required by our reason.

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<sup>3</sup> See Alec R. Vidler, *The Church in an Age of Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), 84.

Lessing sought in his play *Nathan der Weise*, Nathan the Wise (1779), to give this insight dramatic shape in the form of a parable—and although the religion of the Ganges is not neglected in the play, the chief interlocutors are indeed the heirs of Abraham, the three religions which are the subject of this conference. I cannot discuss this significant dramatic achievement here, apart from re-iterating the obvious point that the accident of our births, whether into Jewish, Christian or Islamic families and nations, does not, in itself, make our allegiance to our various religions either rational or necessary. Following Leibniz's dictum above, we need also to remember that our having a native home in a religious tradition for domestic or historical reasons is not, in itself, an impediment to reason either. The bare fact of our being born into a tradition does not, by itself and alone, make these traditions invalid or irrational. As always, both sides need to be preserved and protected. What we are familiar with is not, on those grounds alone, rational; but what we are familiar with is not, on those grounds alone, irrational either. As we might expect, Lessing has a pithy formula for this. I paraphrase: the more fervently a polemic sought to persuade Lessing of the truth of Christianity, the more determined he was to find fault with the argument; the more fervently the polemic sought "to trample it [Christianity] underfoot", the more driven Lessing was to defend the faith of his nation and to see its necessary principles. This is a form of the dialectical thinking that has been attributed to the fifth-century doctrines of the Neoplatonic philosopher Proclus: for him the dialectical method was the discovery of difference in things which were similar, and similarity in things which were different; or to reformulate: finding likenesses in things that are not alike; finding differences in things that seem identical. Lessing is clearly partial to this way of thinking: he has found his own particular variation on the Leibniz/Coleridge axiom which we have repeated above: "People are right in what they affirm..."

A pressing form (for Enlightenment thinkers) of this advocacy of the principles of toleration is their determination to re-open forcefully the questions concerning predestination. Their criticisms

and insights need not be all that new or original, but they are certainly vital and urgent. Both Leibniz and Lessing were actively involved in the debate—which arose directly out of these discussions of religious truth and toleration. In a nutshell, the question became: is it possible, is it *reasonable*, that there can be anything other than a single destiny for all of mankind? Remember how questions of the brotherhood, the fraternity of all mankind, are active convictions and slogans of the age. If there is not one common end which embraces all, one universal truth which governs all, then particular, isolated and partial judgments can apparently re-assert themselves against the claims of universal human rationality.

The Enlightenment thinkers stake their claim to principles which are applicable to “the whole of mankind”; and in the German-speaking states this vital *practical* question achieved its most influential definition in the academic world, and particularly in the university careers of Kant and Hegel. Take, for instance, aesthetic discussions of the principle of the “sublime” (*das Erhabene*); this aesthetic judgment, which was employed with respect to the contemporary compositions of Joseph Haydn, comes, in philosophical hands, to be a guiding principle both for ethical behaviour and practical judgment. The name of Haydn is most appropriate here, as Dalhousie music professor, David Schroeder, has written a book in which he seeks to demonstrate the spirit of Enlightenment tolerance consciously at work in Haydn’s late symphonies, where the composer presents his public (in the Paris symphonies, for instance) with a plea for “tolerance, intelligence, and morality.”<sup>4</sup>

To enter the debate concerning morality, we cite the conclusion of Moses Mendelssohn (a friend of Lessing and, remarkably, the model for the eponymous Nathan the Wise)—in 1758 Mendelssohn<sup>5</sup> determined that there is no more “sublime spectacle”, dramatically speaking, than when the artist depicts a hero or heroine “willing to

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<sup>4</sup> David P. Schroeder, *Haydn and the Enlightenment: The Late Symphonies and their Audience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 35.

<sup>5</sup> Conveniently translated by Frederick Beiser in *Schiller as Philosopher: A Re-Examination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 258.

sacrifice life and happiness for the sake of duty.” Immanuel Kant, taking up this teaching, consequently declares that tragedy alone is sublime, because “we feel the dignity of our own nature in tragedy...because we see people acting virtuously in the face of misfortune.”

Please do not receive this uncompromising Kantian view as a distraction from the issues at hand: this judgment goes to the very heart of the ethical demands made in practical life. The essential point, for Kant, is as follows: for him there can be/must be “a metaphysic of morals”. This language may at first sight appear quite strange, but its intention is actually perfectly clear: in a word, the principles governing human behaviour in the ethical realm can be known by all mankind, if only human beings make the choice diligently to employ their reason. Consequently, these ethical propositions can be discovered by anyone, anywhere and at any time; they are always true, they are unalterable, and apply equally to all rational beings. Most importantly, the employment of these principles in daily activity, as also in explicitly ethical conduct, is available to the individual *without any reference to the immediate circumstances, the larger context, or the probable, expected or longed for outcome.*

That is to say, we are informed by Kant that each of us has the capacity to discover, within ourselves, within our own reason, what we need to know to behave ethically, justly and appropriately (thus instantiating the sublime). This knowledge is available regardless of circumstances, and following our contemporary formulae, without distinction of persons with respect to race, colour, ethnicity, gender etc. This represents an amazing moment in our history. What should have been available to us, as provided by Scripture, viz. the knowledge of how to act in each and every God-given situation, in accordance with divine will and law, becomes, as the Enlightenment develops, the subject of the most intense battles especially among the faithful. Think of our own contemporary religious controversies, played out virtually on a daily basis. If the principles of ethical behaviour were self-evident, as a matter of pure reason, to those who

read Scripture, how can we possibly account for the endless controversies which govern ecclesiastical polity?

However, by way of contrast, in Kant, once you discover your ethical duty, which is unalterable, invariable and absolute, you have access, for the first time it seems, to the principles of absolute ethical demand without respect to welfare, outcome, benefit or desire. Just to cite the most famous example (and I follow Kant here strictly), there are never any circumstances whatsoever, there is no justification for the good of self or other, that can ever provide a single instance in which a lie, or lying in general, can be “metaphysically” justified. We lie, that is to say neglect our duty, because of some perceived worthwhile—even just or good—end, wilfully forgetting that the world does not care about our good intentions, and that the world may as easily convert our good intentions into natural and societal tragedies and disasters. Our majestic plans and purposes almost never turn out as we wish or intend. But, even more importantly, since our ethics are rooted in the metaphysical—which is to say, what is always true at all times, for all persons, everywhere—there are no choices to be made, there is only the call of “sublime” duty, by which we discover the divine dignity of human nature.

How different this is from my reading of Holy Scripture: “Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day” ...*unless, of course*, the keeping of the Sabbath is undertaken at the expense of the welfare and justice of individuals or mankind generally [cf. Mark 2: “The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath”]...For me, Christian ethical life (as discovered in the sayings of the Gospels), presents us with a conundrum and not a metaphysic; each decision, each act, each word must be weighed according to principles of compassion (or, to use the currently fashionable legal concept, “empathy”). The Scriptures force the individual believer vigilantly to enquire, will my behaviour benefit or harm my neighbour? Indeed, the rigorous keeping of the law to the letter as God-given may, in Scripture, incur Messianic opprobrium. The righteous man, who revels in the dignity of his humanity as he

performs his duty to the letter, is as likely to be denounced as a Pharisee, as to be praised for his strict adherence to duty.

There is an absolute ethical demand provided in the Gospels (Matthew 23:23): “these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.” But what are “these” exactly? Fortunately the answer is also provided: “the weightier [matters] of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith”. It would be difficult to exaggerate the implications of this staggering reversal. How truly amazing it is to discover *in reason alone* the absolute and incontrovertible demands of the divine law. By way of contrast, the chief thing we are able to discover from evangelical revelation is that every act, every utterance, and every decision must be referred to “the love of God and neighbour”. Amongst Jesus’ final words to his followers (John 13:34), we record: “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another”. If the content of this *mandatum*, this commandment, were as self-evident as is often supposed, it would presumably be very difficult to enter into the disputes which are always threatening to tear us apart.

To make matters worse, Martin Luther placed himself firmly in that tradition which insists on pointing out that we have been given absolute divine decrees, which, by definition, we are simply unable to keep: following that tradition, Luther re-affirms the telling psychological insight that nobody ever sets out with any determination, or as a matter of principle, to break the Tenth Commandment which prohibits the interior sin of coveting; the discovery of the infraction (without pre-mediation) is always simultaneous with the doing, with the breaking of God’s eternal law.

In Kant’s “metaphysic of morals”, we do ultimately attain to a “golden rule”, but one in which all traces of human psychology have been expunged. The weighing of motives and the presumption of desired outcomes with respect to human actions would reduce the decision making in the ethical realm into a matter of (often private) judgments. This, a “metaphysic” of morals, always true, at all times, and for everyone, could never allow. So the mandate achieves a “scientific” precision, for instance, in this Kantian formula: “Act

only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.”<sup>6</sup> It is easy to demonstrate how this axiom acts as a check to one of the most common temptations to avoid the absolute ethical demands of unalterable human reason: if you ever decide to lie, wilfully to offer an untruth, or even to offer only a partial truth, to anyone for any reason whatsoever, you are permitting, even willing that all mankind be permitted to do the same—always, and everywhere without respect to circumstances. In effect, you are proposing *for all mankind* that this is a rational course of action that can be pursued at any time, in any context, by anyone. Here, what “ye ought to do” is elevated to an indubitable metaphysical principle; and, as universal axiom, it also leaves the Gospel far behind, because, as Kant makes clear, any morality or ethical behaviour which is derived “from examples”<sup>7</sup> is fundamentally the enemy of “metaphysic of morals”. Ethical behaviour, in Kant, cannot be governed by the riddling world of the parable, and will never achieve its necessary, universal status by the pious desire for saintly imitation.

Fortunately, for some of us at any rate, Kant is neither the end of this particular story, nor even the end of the ethical journey of mankind for this period of our history. Kant’s unalterable metaphysical insight into the demands of duty elicited what, in shorthand, I shall call a Romantic reaction. This is a crude way of speaking, but eases us gently into the astonishing new views which appeared at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The famous poet and playwright, Friedrich Schiller, who spent a decade fiercely engaged with Kant’s philosophy, was deeply troubled by a notion of duty articulated without any regard—indeed, properly speaking, repudiating—the noble aspirations of human sentiment.

There was in Schiller, and in others, a profound attempt to delve more fully into that Gospel saying: “this ye must do, without neglecting the other”. For Schiller, this “without neglecting the

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<sup>6</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., and tr. by James W. Ellington (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1993), 30.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

other” would only be possible in what he called “the aesthetic education of mankind”, where human sentiment and aspiration were trained in tandem with mankind’s insight into the absolutes of metaphysical reason. Schiller offers this “Aesthetic Education” to his public in a “series of letters”, and it is in the Eighteenth Letter that Schiller, for the first time, suggests a vocabulary which will, in time, come to dominate the further German philosophical discussion of these questions. Schiller’s Eighteenth Letter stresses and highlights the German language ambiguities of the cognates *Aufhebung* (as noun) and *aufheben* (as verb). This single root can call forth a contradiction of meaning, since it may be translated as either “nullification” or “preservation”. Destruction and retention, negation and transcendence are implied equally by this prevaricating vocabulary, and in this way our use of language introduces us to the mystery of the dialectic at the heart of Christianity: “...as dying, and, behold, we live...As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing...” (II Corinthians 6: 9-10). The dialectical tradition, which has its roots here, wants always, and in every circumstance, to hold to both sides of the equation, to assert *this* and its opposite, always together and in the same breath. Schiller’s enigmatic first formulation in the Eighteenth Letter reads this way:

Beauty, it was said, unites two conditions *which are diametrically opposed* and can never become One. It is from this opposition that we have to start...so that these two conditions are distinguished with the utmost precision...In the second place, it was said, beauty *unites* these two opposed conditions and thus [both nullifies and preserves; both destroys and retains (= *aufheben*)] the opposition.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man: In a Series of Letters*, edited & tr. by E.M. Wilkinson & L.A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 122–123. With respect to this vocabulary, see also the helpful “Note on the Text and Translation” in G.W.F. Hegel, *Introduction to The Philosophy of History*, tr. by Leo Rauch (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Pub., 1988), x–xii at xi.

This should really be understood as a re-iteration of my very first remarks: if we are ever to approach the divine truth we seek, we have constantly to see the subject from both sides, from apparently opposing points of view, and it is from this “opposition that we have to start”...only by holding both sides firmly together *and* apart, and by grasping “the positive in the negative” can we ever hope to approach the Father “in spirit and in truth”.

This phrase, the discovery of “the positive in the negative”, is Hegel’s very simple, very clear definition of speculative reason: that is its task, that is its duty, and that is its glory. And that is also our task as we address the question of “secularization”...a multiplicity of perspectives may be placed before us in this Conference, but, in the end, the dialectical character of the Christian religion requires us, rigorously, piously and faithfully to uncover and even to celebrate the positive in the negative in all of them. We look now to Hegel’s professorial career to see how this dialectical form of reasoning might assist us with our Conference topic.

The University of Berlin was founded in 1810, and Hegel was the second occupant there of the Chair of Philosophy. His lectures at the University, only edited and published after his death, are amongst the most influential ever given at that institution we designate as “a university”...and amongst these lectures, certainly the most controversial, and most abused, are his “Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion”, delivered four times in 1821, 1824, 1827, and finally, in the year of his death, 1831. Obviously, I am an enthusiast. The immediate occasion for the first series in 1821 was Hegel’s astonishment at what (in his view) passed for Christian theology in the Faculty of Theology at Berlin under Professor Friedrich Schleiermacher (mostly in theological circles, regarded as the single most important Protestant theologian since Calvin). Here we cannot assess the alleged inadequacies of Schleiermacher’s doctrinal method. Let this be sufficient as a summary of Hegel’s attitude: if students wanted to study Christian theology (especially as a preparation for ministry), they would be better advised to study in

the Faculty of Philosophy than in the Faculty of Theology. In fact, students in their hundreds revered them both, Schleiermacher and Hegel together, and attended their lectures with equal enthusiasm. After the death of these two professors in the 1830s, there were repeated attempts to reconcile the two positions to one another.

Here I conclude with just two aspects of Hegel's "Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion". First, Hegel's oft-repeated assertion that while religion can go about its business without resort to philosophy (at least, in religion's pastoral capacity, I suppose), it would be impossible for philosophy to find its completion without religion, since we have now well established that the truth resides in all; also that the affirmations of religion (more certainly than its denials) are the agents by which our reason is able concretely to ascend to the truth.

The second point, which I bring before you, in this context of secularization, is the deep pessimism that Hegel displayed at the conclusion of the first series of lectures in 1821. This resignation is not repeated subsequently, but it is instructive for our Conference. From Hegel's own 1821 lecture manuscript we have left only a few fragmentary concluding notations including: "Religion in die Philosophie sich flüchten...Aber Philosophie partiell—Priesterstand isoliert—Heligthum—Unbekümmert wie es der Welt gehen mag...Wie sich *gestalte* ist nicht *unsre Sache*." Filling the gaps, the translation of his lecture notes might read: "Religion [must] take refuge in philosophy...But philosophy, [as we have said, is also] partial: [it forms] an isolated order of priests—a sanctuary—...How things turn out [in the world] is not our affair."<sup>9</sup> [9] What all of this means for Hegel, in 1821 at any rate, is that for religion to survive, and (after reading Schleiermacher, it is clear that Hegel means), for the Christian religion to survive, it will have "to flee into" philosophy's concept, and there abide as an isolated priesthood, set

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<sup>9</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*. Volume 17: *Vorlesungsmanuskripte I (1816-1831)*, edited by Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: F. Meiner, 1987), 300. See Volume 3 of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Peter C. Hodgson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 162.

apart, preserving religion's "holy of holies" until such time as the world is once again capable of appropriating its sublime teaching. Following this conclusion in 1821, then, "the sacred secular" is not only an aspect of Christianity's fullness, it is indeed essential to its survival.

These considerations are helpfully reinforced by Hegel in the Preface he provided to his theory of government, which we have come to know as his "Philosophy of Right". Towards the end of this Preface, Hegel famously declares that philosophy is in no position to instruct the world how it ought to be...On the contrary, philosophy's highest vocation is to realize itself "as its own time apprehended in thought" [so ist auch die Philosophie, *ihre Zeit in Gedanken erfaßt*.]<sup>10</sup> If any aspect of this discussion of dialectical reasoning, or of Hegel's professorial insights at the University of Berlin, speaks to your own experience, then I submit we have the beginnings of an approach which does not just regard our modern secularity as our enemy, but, on the contrary, as a necessary (perhaps even providential) expression both of ourselves and our religion. +

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<sup>10</sup> Preface to *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, edited & tr. by T.M. Knox (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 11. See Volume 7 of Hegel, *Sämtliche Werke* [Jubiläumsausgabe edited by Hermann Glöckner] (Stuttgart: F. Frommann Verlag, 1952), 35 of the *Vorrede*.



## The Iconography of the European *Sacred Secular*

Peter Bryson

**T**he western European tradition of the *Sacred Secular* evolved separately from that of the east. But the two have a common beginning.

We can see a charming example of iconography that influenced the west in the sixth century Church of San Vitale, Ravenna, the result of a brief re-conquest of Italy by the generals of Justinian. Christ's Imperial authority here finds worldly expression in the Emperor. A youthful Christ, haloed and wearing the Imperial Purple, sits astride the orb of universal dominion. On his left the Church is presented to Him. With his right hand, Christ offers the crown of martyrdom to St. Vitalis. However, the Emperor, as well as the martyr, is also on Christ's right at a lower level in the chancel mosaic and Christ's conferral of a crown can also be interpreted as a delegation of Imperial authority to Justinian. Like Christ, Justinian is haloed and garbed in the Imperial Purple. He appears frontally, flanked on the left by the clergy and on the right by Imperial officials and soldiers. He is the unity of both and he pays homage to Christ by holding the Eucharistic paten. He is Christ's vice regent on earth.

The figures depicted here are not naturally represented. They are superimposed on the wall's surface, unconnected to their background. But they glitter and glow with an unearthly, magical light, the result of the highly polished mosaics from which they are formed. The tactility of the wall dissolves into this insubstantial light.

The building itself spatially emulates the insubstantiality of the mosaic figures. The central space merges into the semi-darkness beyond the surrounding arcades, whose semi-circular columns project from the central space ambiguously concealing and revealing the partially known semi-darkness that surrounds it.

In the year 771, Charlemagne became King of the Franks. The pope appealed to him for aid against the Lombard Kingdom in Northern Italy. Charlemagne annexed that kingdom and became *de facto* protector of the Papacy. He was crowned Roman Emperor by the Pope in the year 800. But Charlemagne's royal authority was not mediated by the Pope. This is obvious from his palace chapel at Aachen or Aix-la-Chapelle. Aachen was inspired by San Vitale in Ravenna which Charlemagne often visited. Like San Vitale, Aachen's eight sides are symbolic of the new life—but unlike the mysterious floating space of San Vitale, Aachen is simpler and cruder. It lacks the mystical spatial and decorative qualities of San Vitale. The chapel has three "levels". The cupola was originally decorated with mosaics showing Christ enthroned amongst the four evangelists and 24 elders. This apocalyptic image of the end of time is mediated by Charlemagne whose Imperial Gallery on the second story allowed him to sit enthroned in the West, gazing down on the altar in the East. The earthly sphere is represented by the ground floor—the place where people enter "from the world" to "communicate" with the spiritual world.

Following Charlemagne's death, his Empire broke up and Western Europe was assailed on all sides: on north by the Normans; in the east by the Magyars and in the south by Arab Muslims. The French ceded what is now known as Normandy to the Normans. The Magyars were defeated in 955 by the German king, Otto I. Subsequently, he established himself as King of Italy and protector of the Papacy. He was crowned in 962 as Emperor by the Pope. The Ottonian desire to restore a universal Christian Monarchy in the west, independent of Papal authority, finds expression in a tenth century ivory, depicting Christ crowning the Emperor, Otto II, and his Empress, Theophanou, (reigned 973-83). This ivory emulates a Byzantine example illustrating Christ crowning the eastern Emperor, Romanos (reigned 948-63) and the Empress, Eudoxia.

Otto's successors played a dominant role in church affairs, deposing a Pope and appointing others. Influenced both by his Byzantine mother and "Eastern" education, Otto III tried to

combine in his person two ideas inherited from Roman antiquity: the notions of a world monarchy and of a world religion. He styled himself: “servant of Jesus Christ”, “consul of the Roman Senate and People” and “Emperor of the World”. In an illustration from his Book of Hours, Otto appears flanked by clerical and imperial figures. They are equally dependent upon him. He is centrally placed, larger than all. The Eagle and Sceptre in his right hand, he wears the Imperial Purple, crowned and Christ-like, seated in Majesty.

In like manner, German Romanesque cathedrals were modeled on Roman Imperial precedents. Pope and Emperor have distinct jurisdictions but are both contained in the Church. Speyer was built about 1030. It is massive, fortress-like; wholly imperial. It is 400 feet long and 105 feet high. The walls are like cliffs of stone. There is a deliberate adoption of Imperial Roman forms (basilica, triumphal arch, arcades), modelled on Constantine’s basilica at Trier. The east end contains the altar and the area of sacred space of the Pope and his delegate, the Bishop. The massive “west wall” is the Emperor’s space, protecting the entrance to the church. This “contained opposition” of Pope and Emperor is more explicit at Hildesheim (about 1010), which has papal and imperial apses opposed to one another but enclosed by the abbey church itself.

A more dramatic expression of unmediated Imperial power is exemplified by the Cross of Lothair (circa 990). This remarkable object is adorned on one side by a first century cameo of a Roman Emperor, probably Augustus himself, crowned with a laurel wreath. The cameo is placed where the intersecting “forces” of the Cross meet. On the other side is engraved the crucified Christ, who is being crowned by the hand of the invisible God the Father with another laurel wreath—symbol of victory. The intimacy and proximity of these symbols emphasises the unmediated character of the Emperor’s temporal and spiritual authority.

The Popes resisted Imperial control of their affairs. The Papal Church first became a great international institution in the eleventh century with the assistance of the Benedictine Order of Cluny. The initial abbey was founded by William the Good, Duke of Aquitaine

in 910. Unlike many churches and abbeys founded at this time, the Duke subordinated the abbey directly to the Pope, who appointed its abbots. Cluny became the centre of a broad reforming movement which the Emperors initially supported as part of an effort to regenerate the Church and the Papacy. In the eleventh century the cardinals became the electors of the Pope—an effort to emancipate the Papacy from lay and imperial interference. Simony was abolished and celibacy enforced to avoid the alienation of Church property to clerical families. The Popes asserted the primacy of their spiritual authority. Henry IV was excommunicated. The Emperor was forced to humiliate himself at Canossa, exemplified by a book of hours belonging to Countess Matilda (approximately 1115). Here we can see the Emperor, Henry IV, supplicating Matilda and Hugh, Abbot of Cluny, to intervene for him with the Pope to lift the ban of excommunication. The diminished figure of the Emperor appearing in the lowest portion of the illumination, tells us all we need to know. It is a measure of the Popes' success in seizing leadership from the Emperors at this time that the first collective political act of Western Europe—the Crusades—was inspired by Popes, not Emperors.

A further example of Papal propaganda appears in the thirteenth century mural at the Augustinian Monastery of the Santi Quattro Coronati, which depicts the donation of Constantine—a papal myth later exploded by Renaissance scholarship.

The increasing power of the Papacy was associated with the growth of Cluny—an organization of Benedictine monasteries directly loyal to the Pope and subordinate neither to local bishops nor lords. Cluny's response to Speyer (1030) is Cluny III built between 1088 and 1122. Located in Burgundy, the Church was massive. The nave was 614 feet long, 49 feet wide and 97 feet high (higher than most later Gothic Cathedrals for some time). The monasteries subordinate to Cluny emulated the mother house by building massive churches, mostly on pilgrimage routes with many chapels. There was a new focus on the liturgy, because unlike earlier Benedictines, Cluniac monks were also priests and were required to

say mass everyday. Their churches were large to permit the veneration of saints and relics by large crowds attracted to them.

We can also see another example of clerical appropriation of Imperial forms in the last Judgment of Moissac (1115) where a large Christ, Judge-King, assesses us at the end of time. The centralized figure staring out at us grimly and revered by the 24 elders of the apocalypse is iconographically similar to the puppet-like figures venerating the Emperor Constantine on the arch bearing his name in Rome, erected in 315.

The fate of the Emperors was not shared by that of the French kings. They allied themselves with the Pope against the Emperor and relations with the Papacy were generally strong, largely through the efforts of such brilliant churchmen as Suger, Abbot of St. Denis. A remarkable statesman, Suger was advisor to the kings of France and served as regent of the Kingdom on two occasions. He is generally credited as the originator of the Gothic style, being responsible for the first Gothic choir and façade, that of the Royal mortuary Abbey of St. Denis, outside Paris.

The new Gothic style quickly gained popularity. Suger's friend Geoffrey of Leves, Bishop of Chartres, brought the New Style to the re-building of his cathedral. The portals of the west façade of Chartres depict Christ as containing revealed and philosophical truth (the right portal, *sedes sapientia*), Nature and the Heavens (the left portal, signs of the zodiac, monthly labours), and Eternity (last Judgment, central portal). The jamb figures, past whom bishops and kings processed through the great west doors to enter the Church, are kings and queens, priests and prophets of the Old Testament, whose authority anticipates and is completed by Christ, Priest and King, and his new successors. The message is clear: regal and priestly authority have their source in Christ and kings and bishops are his anointed successors on earth.

In the Renaissance, the Popes go beyond asserting the primacy of an ecclesiastical authority over the Emperor. They wish to become secular rulers in their own right. Julius II is typical. He is often regarded as the founder—or the re-founder—of the Papal

States. Comfortable on horseback and with sword in hand, he brought much of central Italy under direct Papal rule. Julius' appropriation of Roman Imperial Power is evident in his architectural and artistic projects. He pulled down St. Peter's—the most venerated church in Western Christendom, and replaced it with an Imperial Temple. The new St. Peter's was originally designed as a centrally planned building with massive triumphal arches—the examples of which we can see in Constantine's Basilica Nuova. In the adjacent Papal apartments, Julius had Raphael paint the famous "School of Athens", where ancient scholars abound, led by Aristotle and Plato. And in "Parnassus" Apollo leads pagan and Christian figures of "poetic" knowledge. So in the heart of Latin Christendom, we have this explicit resurrection and union of "pagan" truth, accessible to human reason, with Revelation.

And just as we can see the Popes becoming kings, so kings want to become Popes. For Henry VIII and his daughter, Elizabeth, civil and ecclesiastical jurisdiction cohere in the person of the prince. The Act of Supremacy proclaims:

...the King...shall be taken...the only supreme head in earth of the Church of England...and shall have and enjoy, annexed and united to the imperial crown of this realm...and shall have full power and authority to...order, correct, amend all such heresies, abuses...which by any manner, spiritual authority or jurisdiction ought or may lawfully be reformed...

In this view of the world, the Church is a body politic, like the state, and is equally subordinate to the Christian Sovereign. For England in the sixteenth century, the Church and the commonwealth constitute the same people and they have the same sovereign.

Louis XIV is the pre-eminent example of the seventeenth century appropriation of the *Sacred Secular* by a Christian King. The "Sun King" (reigned 1643-1715) becomes associated with both Christian and pagan emperors, (see for example LeBrun's portrait of

the Royal Family as Olympian Gods). Just as Henry the VIII had united a spiritual and secular authority in the King in parliament, so Louis asserted the rights of the French church against the papacy, (the income of the regale and the appointment of bishops by the King), while at the same time both converting and suppressing the Protestants and eliminating Jansenism. The suppression of Protestantism was especially popular in France and won Louis accolades as the “New Constantine”, the “New Theodosius”, and the “New Charlemagne”, clear allusions to a union of sacred secular authority. Thus we find the King represented as a Roman Emperor on coinage and medallions as well as in Mignard’s portrait of him. This transformation of the *Sacred Secular* into an instrument of national policy both permitted and justified Louis’ opposition to other Catholic powers. His foreign policy favoured Protestant Sweden and the Muslim Turks against the Catholic Empire, when it suited the policy of France.

Louis’ new palace at Versailles epitomizes royal power. And just as Louis imposed his will on the social order by drawing the nobility to Versailles, so he did on nature with the construction of his new palace and grounds. The Sun King’s bedroom was in the centre of the palace and was oriented eastward so that Louis’ rising could coincide with that of his symbol—an event witnessed by privileged members of the court. Equally, the court could experience the setting of the sun in the west through the “infinite view” from the Gallery des Glaces in the west where the gardens and central canal disappear into infinity—a characteristically Baroque union of temporal and eternal.

Louis’ mediating capacity between this world and the next is also reflected in the palace chapel at Versailles (constructed about 1710), which situates the king in the western gallery looking east, halfway between the ground floor and the images of heaven in the chapel’s ceiling, reminiscent of Charlemagne’s chapel at Aachen.

At the end of the eighteenth century, the old imagery of the *Sacred Secular* is replaced by a new revolutionary but not less religious form. With David’s “Oath of the Horatii” (1784), we see an explicit

identification of the whole personality of the citizen with the state. The oath is sworn by the Horatii brothers to Rome as they set off to combat the warriors of the neighbouring city Alba Longa. In the background are two swooning and despairing women. One is engaged to one of the Curiatii, whom the Horatii are about to fight, and the other is a sister of the Curiatii, married to one of the Horatii. Upon the defeat of the Curiatii, the remaining Horatius returned home to find his sister cursing Rome over the death of her fiancé. Shocked that anyone should curse Rome, he immediately killed his sister—the religion of the republic subsuming all other loyalties.

We conclude with Ingres' (1806) portrait of Napoleon as King of the French (Franks). Adopting a frontal pose, Napoleon sits, enthroned with Charlemagne's hand of justice on his left, Charlemagne's sword in his lap and on his right a staff with a statuette of Charlemagne at the head. Napoleon here adopts the Imperial frontal pose (e.g. compare with Emperor Otto III) which is also reminiscent of portraits of Christ, but this portrait is completely devoid of Christian imagery. Indeed, no priests are present. Napoleon had crowned himself. The secular here has totally adsorbed the sacred.+



## The Sacred and Secular in Islam

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In his keynote address, Dr Wayne Hankey pointed out a recent shift in our understanding of the secular. On the one hand, he argues, secularization has been regarded by “conservative Christians” as “one of the chief enemies to living an authentic Christian life” in contemporary world. On the other hand,

since September 11, 2001, and the turn of our attention to world-changing “fundamentalism” among Jews, Christians, and Muslims, there has been a striking reversal. [...] Christians now lay claim as a point of pride to being the originators of the secular, and, thus, of a space wherein religious differences can be mediated and peaceful coexistence fostered. [...] In this shift, or reversal for conservatives, it remains agreed that secularization is a product of Christianity; the point of difference is how we evaluate it. It had been a threat; it has now become our pride.<sup>1</sup>

At the risk of oversimplification, let me restate some of Dr Hankey’s important conclusions. First, he argues that Western Christians cannot take credit for being the originators of the positive aspect of the secular. This positive aspect of the secular originates, rather, in the “Greco-Roman secular philosophical culture [...] rebuilt,

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne J. Hankey, “Problematic: Changing our Mind on Secularization: The Contemporary Debate about Secular and Sacred in Judaism, Christianity and Islam,” 11. I am grateful to Dr Hankey for his insightful comments and corrections to an earlier draft of this paper.

strengthened, deepened, and extended” in the multicultural and multi-religious *convivencia* of the Islamic Caliphate.<sup>2</sup> Second, this “Islamic secular” was later on transferred to Christian Europe through translations from Arabic into Latin, as evidenced by the example of Thomas Aquinas, who is a true “heir of the Islamic secular.”<sup>3</sup> Third, the negative aspect of the secular seems to originate in the West; this is the “Western modern [secular],” which, in Dr Hankey’s words, “has been less successful than the old Greco-Roman-Christian-Islamic secular in providing a mediating space in which co-operation and tolerance can grow.”<sup>4</sup> This Western modern secular, which is being continuously imposed on Muslim societies by the Western powers, Europe and more recently America, has sown discord and destroyed the old *convivencia* throughout the Muslim world.

In my paper I am going to build upon these important insights by looking at this process from a slightly different angle and by adding to the analysis another voice, the voice of the indigenous Christians of the Islamic lands. This is an important voice to listen to and to incorporate within the general picture because the conditions of Middle-Eastern Christianity, as it developed in the Islamic (or, more precisely, Muslim-governed) societies will allow us, much like a litmus test, more accurately to assess the state of the Islamic secular in the past and today.

In my paper, I shall make the following four points:

- (1) That the negative, modern aspect of secularism in the West is a result of the centrifugal motion of the Western world away from its Christian roots—this is of course a rather obvious point, but I hope to refine it by looking at the secular understanding of the cosmos, contrasting it with the traditional Biblical and Christian cosmology;

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 40.

(2) That the notion of the sacred and the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular (or the profane), which are endemic to Christianity, are, by and large, alien to Islam—this is a point which is rarely made and whose significance is often underestimated;

(3) That though they were important participants in, and contributors to, the secular Islamic *convivencia*, Christians living in Islamic lands were at the same time subjected to much criticism, even pressure, on account of their understanding of the sacred (as well as for a variety of social reasons); thus the Islamic secular could be as much of an obstacle to an authentic Christian life as the modern secular. This point, too, is very rarely made and often overlooked, but it comes out quite clearly in texts written in Arabic by Arabic-speaking Christians who were subjects of the Islamic empire. I shall elaborate on what these texts tell us about the complex relationship between the Islamic secular and the Christian sacred.

Finally, (4) I shall again build on Dr Hankey's conclusions and elaborate on how and why the continuous colonial and post-colonial attempts to impose Western values, norms, and ways of thinking, in short the Western modern secular, on Islamic societies have led to the destruction of the traditional Islamic secular and the multi-religious and multiethnic *convivencia* that had characterized Islamic societies in the past. I shall also show how this process is reflected in the contemporary situation of the Middle-Eastern Christians, in the past important contributors to the Islamic secular, who are now feeling increasingly unwelcome in their own homeland.

### **1. Negative Secularism is a Result of the Western World's Centrifugal Motion away from Its Christian Roots**

The Western world's path to secularism has been a long one, and not being a social historian of Europe I am not qualified to even attempt

to chart it. I shall say the following. Secularism, understood as the social and political doctrine demanding separation of Church and state, has its roots in the underlying cosmological and theological worldview insisting on the separation between God and the world. This worldview, which I shall call “theological secularism,” to distinguish it from its corollary, social and political secularism, gradually evolved in Europe (and later America) in the second millennium of our era. What is important for our purposes is that this theological secularism is the exact opposite of the traditional Biblical and especially Christian view of the universe.

The secular, by definition, is that which is not sacred, unsanctified, devoid of holiness, devoid of divine presence. On the Biblical view, by contrast, God (YHWH) never leaves the world devoid of His presence. Rather, He acts continuously *in* the created world and *in* history and reveals Himself in a series of theophanies. Thus, YHWH manifests Himself in the burning bush and on Mount Sinai and is physically present, in His *kavod*, or glory, with the People of Israel during their journey to the Promised Land. He dwells *in* the Tabernacle—the portable temple built by the Israelites in the wilderness—and later on *in* the First and the Second Temples built in Jerusalem. God’s presence *in* the Temple in Jerusalem became the focus of sacrificial rites performed by a caste of hereditary priests, which continued up until the Temple’s destruction by the Romans in the year 70AD.

Christianity, which inherits and expands upon this Biblical worldview, builds on this series of divine self-revelations and proclaims that it has reached its climax in the ultimate theophany: the revelation of God *in* His own person, *in* the God-man Jesus Christ. In the Christian worldview, this ultimate theophany allows, for the first time since the Fall, full communion between man and God within the Church, construed as the mystical body of Christ (Eph. 4:4-13; John 15:5-8).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, traditional Christianity—and I

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<sup>5</sup> Incidentally, Christianity also inherits from the Temple sacred priesthood and the sacrifices, though the latter have been transformed into—in the

am thinking here especially of the Eastern Christian tradition—insists that this ultimate self-revelation of God in His own person *sanctifies* the created, material world and endows matter itself with salvific power.

This comes out perhaps the most emphatically in the Iconoclastic controversy that tore the Byzantine Church apart in the eighth and ninth centuries. The defenders of the icons, both in Byzantium itself, like Theodore the Studite (d. 826), and in the neighbouring Islamic Caliphate, like John of Damascus (d. 749) and Theodore Abu Qurra (d. ca. 830), spoke forcefully on the significance of the icons, and by extension, of matter in general. They expressed their firm conviction that in the Incarnation, specific material objects have been sanctified, i.e. infused with the grace of the Holy Spirit and endowed with divine salvific power, and therefore have become worthy of veneration.

Here is a characteristic passage from John of Damascus' *First Oration against the Calumniators of the Icons*:

I do not venerate matter, I venerate the [F]ashioner of matter, who became matter for my sake and accepted to dwell in matter and through matter worked my salvation, and I will not cease from reverencing matter, through which my salvation was worked. [But] I do not reverence it as God. [...] I reverence the rest of matter and hold in respect that through which my salvation came, because it is filled with divine energy and grace. Is not the thrice-precious and thrice-blessed wood of the cross matter? Is not the holy and august mountain, the place of the skull [Golgotha], matter? Is not the life-giving and life-bearing rock, the holy tomb, the source of the resurrection, matter? Is not the ink and the all-holy book of the Gospels matter? Is not the life-bearing table, which offers to us the bread of life [the Eucharist],

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words of the Eastern Orthodox liturgy of St. John Chrysostom—a “bloodless” sacrifice (the Eucharist).

matter? Is not the gold and silver matter, out of which crosses and tablets [diskoses] and bowls [chalices] are fashioned? And, before all these things, is not the body and blood of my Lord matter? Either do away with reverence and veneration for all these or submit to the tradition of the Church and allow the veneration of images of God and friends of God, sanctified by name and therefore overshadowed by the grace of the divine Spirit.<sup>6</sup>

This understanding of the Incarnation as a world-sanctifying event that endows matter itself with salvific power is at the heart of the traditional Christian attitude to the sacred. Once this traditional understanding of the Incarnation is lost, however, as gradually happened in the West in the second millennium of our era, the material world gets re-imagined as being devoid of sacredness, devoid of salvific power, devoid of the presence of God. From this perspective, it is the gradual drifting away of the Western world from the traditional understanding of the Incarnation that is the root-cause of theological—and consequently also of social and political—secularism.<sup>7</sup>

## **2. The Notion of the Sacred, Thus Understood, though Endemic to Christianity, is Alien to the Islamic Tradition**

Moving now to the Islamic tradition, I should like to comment first on the overarching principle of Islam, the principle of *Tawhid*, literally “oneness of God.” *Tawhid* means that God is both *numerically* one and also *internally* simple and uncompounded. This means that the principle of *Tawhid* is formulated both against the polytheistic notion of multiple divinities, prevalent in Arabia before Islam, and

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<sup>6</sup> John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, §1.16ff., tr. Andrew Louth (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003), 29–30.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. some interesting remarks on the significance of the Iconoclastic controversy for today’s world in the translator’s introduction to the St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press translation of St. Theodore the Studite’s *On the Holy Icons*.

against the Christian notion of an internally complex—triune—God.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the Qur'an criticizes the Christian notion of the Trinity in a great number of passages, such as the following:

Infidels indeed are those who claim that God is a third in a trinity. There is no divinity but one God. If they do not desist from what they claim, the infidels among them shall incur a painful retribution (Qur'an 5:73).

Say: God is one, God the everlasting. He did not beget nor was He begotten. There is nothing equal to Him (Qur'an 112:1-4).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> To be sure, some degree of internal “complexity” is tolerated by several Muslim theological trends (notably Hanbali Islam and Ash'ariyya), which point out that God has attributes (knowledge, power, etc.), which cannot be said to be identical with the divine essence. Other Muslim theologians (notably the Mu'tazila) denied even this limited “complexity” as being at odds with their understanding of *Tawhid*: in their understanding God's knowledge, power, etc. are identical with God's very essence. It is the former approach that eventually prevailed in Sunni Islam, but not without a struggle.

<sup>9</sup> The last verse is likely a rejection of the *homoousios* clause of the Nicene Creed. I owe this point to Prof. Angelika Neuwirth, whose lecture on the subject I attended at Yale in the winter of 2007/08.

In a private communication, Dr Hankey pointed out to me that, despite the Qur'anic denial of the “begetting” of the Son of God (the Word/Logos) by the Father and of the Son-Word's subsequent Incarnation, the mainstream (non-Mu'tazili) Islamic view of the Qur'an itself is strikingly similar. The Qur'an is considered to be the “uncreated” Speech of God (*kalam Allah*), which at a certain point in time became “inlibrated” (H.A. Wolfson's term, see below) in a concrete, physical object—not a man to be sure, but a book. I could perhaps continue this analogy by suggesting that the role of Muhammad as the “bearer” or “deliverer” of the Speech of God and the human instrument of the Qur'an's inlibration is thus parallel to the role of the Virgin Mary as the Theotokos, the “bearer” and “deliverer” of the Word of God and the human instrument of the Incarnation (strikingly, both Muhammad and Mary the Theotokos were visited by the angel Gabriel/Jibril!); furthermore, the role of listening to and absorbing the Qur'an (the Speech of God inlibrated) is structurally similar to consuming and absorbing the Eucharist (the Word of God incarnate).

When the Umayyad Caliph Abd al-Malik (reigned AD 685-705) ordered the construction of the magnificent Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem—in the seventh century still a predominately Christian city—he made sure that such anti-Trinitarian verses featured prominently in the calligraphy of the Dome. This way the Islamic polemical message against the Christian notion of the Trinity was embodied in Jerusalem’s most important Islamic architectural edifice.<sup>10</sup>

Islam also rejects the Incarnation. While the Qur’an considers Jesus to be “the Messiah / Christ,” a “messenger of God,” and even

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Indeed, several scholars went in this direction. H.A. Wolfson spoke of “inlibration” of the Logos in Islam, as opposed to Incarnation of the Logos in Christian theology (*The Philosophy of the Kalam* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976], 63f., 244ff.). Carl W. Ernst drew a parallel between listening to the Qur’an and the Eucharist: “In a very real sense, the Qur’an as the Word of God for Muslims is parallel to Jesus as the Word of God for Christians. If one extends this analogy into religious practice, the most important ritual for Christians is Holy Communion or the Eucharist, by which the believer assimilates the body and blood of Jesus either in reality (for Catholics [and indeed all traditional Christianity, including Eastern and Oriental Christians, whom Ernst unfortunately forgets]) or symbolically (for Protestants). In a similar way, when a Muslim recites the Qur’an, the Word of God is expressed directly on the tongue in a way that is charged with divine power. It is this experience that makes the Qur’an such a central part of Muslim religious life” (*Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003], 105). Similarly, A. Neuwirth: “Der Islam kennt keine Sakramente, keine Kommunion. Statt dessen erfährt der Mensch die Nähe Gottes und die Begegnung mit ihm im Hören seinen Wortes” (“Das islamische Dogma der ‘Unnachahmlichkeit des Korans’ in literaturwissenschaftlicher Sicht,” *Der Islam*, 60 [1983]: 166–183, at 170).

Despite all this, however, it remains a fact that these parallels have not been articulated and problematized *from within* the Islamic tradition. Though the theological status of the Qur’an does admit of a comparison with Christ, the Islamic tradition itself has eschewed such a comparison, undoubtedly because it would undermine its systematic and unequivocal denial of Christ’s sonship and the Incarnation.

<sup>10</sup> O. Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Belknap Press, 2006); A. Kaplony, *The Haram of Jerusalem, 324-1099: Temple, Friday Mosque, Area of Spiritual Power* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2002); H. Busse, “Monotheismus und islamische Christologie in der Bauinschrift des Felsendoms in Jerusalem,” *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 161 (1981): 168–178.

“God’s word, which He cast upon Mary,” and a “spirit from God,” it nevertheless emphatically denies that he is the Son of God and that he is divine.<sup>11</sup> The Qur’an affirms that Jesus was born of a virgin (Qur’an 19:19-22), performed miracles, and was “supported” by the Holy Spirit (*ruh al-qudus*) (Qur’an 2:87, 2:253, 5:110), but denies that he died on the cross and rose from the dead. A famous Qur’anic verse argues—in a docetic manner—that it only *appeared* to people that Jesus was crucified; in reality, however, God raised him up to Himself (Qur’an 4:157). This point would be later repeated over and over again—*ad nauseam*—in Muslim-Christian polemic throughout centuries and, interestingly enough, has been recently dramatized in an Iranian movie about Jesus.<sup>12</sup>

Islam also rejects the notion of divine manifestation, or theophany, in the Biblical and Christian sense of the term. The basic Islamic intuition is that God cannot become manifest *in* matter, because God’s manifestation would cause the annihilation of that to which He manifests Himself. God’s complete manifestation to the world would result not in the world’s sanctification, as the Biblical and Christian tradition emphatically argues, but in the world’s complete annihilation.

This sentiment is expressed in the famous saying, attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, the so-called “Veils hadith”:

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<sup>11</sup> Qur’an 4:171: “O people of the Scripture, do not go to an extreme in your religion and do not say about God except the truth. The Christ Jesus son of Mary is just a messenger of God, and His word which he cast upon Mary, and a spirit from Him. Believe, therefore, in God and His messengers, and do not say ‘Trinity.’ Stop it for your own good! God is only one God. He is much too glorious to have a son. To Him belongs everything in the heavens and everything upon the earth. He alone is sufficient as a Master.”

<sup>12</sup> “The Messiah” (2007), also known as “Jesus, the Spirit of God.” The movie has two endings, one according to the canonical gospels, the other according to the Qur’an and the non-canonical Gospel of Barnabas (a late medieval forgery, partially based on the Qur’anic understanding of Jesus, but believed by many Muslims to contain the authentic narrative of Jesus’ life, supposedly censored and distorted by the Church). For an interesting interview with the film director Nader Talebzadeh see: <http://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/story?id=4297085&page=1> (accessed June 15, 2009).

God has seventy veils of light and darkness. Were He to lift them, the majestic glories of His face would burn completely anyone whose eyesight perceived Him.<sup>13</sup>

According to this saying, the “veils” separating the created world from God in fact protect the world, paradoxically, from complete annihilation.

Significantly also, the Qur’anic description of the Sinai theophany differs in one important respect from the Biblical description of this event: in the Qur’an God manifests Himself to the mountain, and as a result the mountain is shattered into pieces.

When Moses came at our appointed time, and his Lord spoke with him, he said, “My Lord, show me so that I may look at You.” He said, “You cannot see Me, but look at the mountain; if it stays in its place, then you shall see Me.” Then, when his Lord manifested Himself to the mountain, this caused it to crumble. Moses fell down unconscious. When he recovered his senses, he said, “Praise be to You. I repent to You, and I am the first among the believers” (Qur’an 7:143).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> For a fascinating commentary on this saying see the third part of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali’s *The Niche of Light*, available now in the English translation by D. Buchman (ed. and tr.), *al-Ghazali, The Niche of Lights* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> Compare Exodus 33:18-23:

And he said, “Please, show me Your glory.” (19) Then He said, “I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” (20) But He said, “You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.” (21) And the Lord said, “Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. (22) So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. (23) Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen.”

The Qur'anic version of the Sinai theophany, thus, explicitly denies that God can reveal Himself *in* matter, without annihilating that to which He is revealed.

Islam, consequently, also most emphatically denies the possibility that material objects can be infused with divine grace and serve as intermediaries between man and God. Use of such supposed “intermediaries” in worship is prohibited in the Qur'an.

They [the idolaters] worship beside God beings that can neither harm nor benefit, claiming, “These are our intercessors with God.” Say: “Are you informing God of something He does not know in the heavens or the earth?!” May [God] be glorified and exalted above needing the partners that you associate with Him! (Qur'an 10:18).

Those who took other patrons beside God, claiming “We worship them only so that they bring us nearer to God [i.e. as intermediaries],” will receive the judgment of God in the matter they contend. God will not guide the liar and the infidel (Qur'an 39:3).

This is why the Muslims were, and are, opposed to the Christian practice of venerating the Cross and the icons. When John of Damascus wrote against the iconoclasts, he was not referring only to the iconoclasm in far-off Byzantium. He was referring also, and perhaps especially, to the Muslim iconoclasm of his native Umayyad Damascus, where the Muslims' disapproval and criticism of such Christian practices as veneration of the icons had begun to influence,

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For an illuminating and original analysis of Biblical and Islamic approaches to theophany see W. Williams, “A Body Unlike Bodies: Transcendent Anthropomorphism in Ancient Semitic Tradition and Early Islam,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 129:1 (2009): 19–44 and the same author's Ph.D. dissertation *Tajalli wa-Ru'ya: A Study of Anthropomorphic Theophany and Visio Dei in the Hebrew Bible, the Qur'an and Early Sunni Islam*, University of Michigan, 2008.

and spread among, the local Christians themselves.<sup>15</sup> I shall return to this point later on.

Since Islam rejects precisely those aspects of the Biblical and Christian tradition that constitute the foundation of the Biblical and Christian notion of the sacred—understood as the divine self-manifestation *within* the created world, culminating in the Incarnation—it will come as no surprise that the sacred would not play in Islam the same role that it plays in the Christian tradition.

Indeed, one can say that, on the whole, the Islamic tradition has a highly ambivalent attitude towards the sacred. This ambivalent attitude is evident, for instance, in the following report about the second caliph Umar (reigned AD 634-644), who only reluctantly agreed to kiss the Black Stone, a piece of rock, probably a meteorite, fixed in the eastern corner of the Ka'ba in Mecca:

Abis ibn Rabi'a said: "I saw Umar kiss the stone and say: 'I well know that you are merely a stone that can bring neither harm nor benefit. Had I not seen the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) kiss you, I would not have done so'."<sup>16</sup>

The underlying idea is that in the Islamic tradition God alone is worthy of worship and veneration. Only God is "sacred" in the real

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<sup>15</sup> For a reading of John of Damascus in his native, Damascene context see Sidney H. Griffith, "John of Damascus and the Church in Syria in the Umayyad Era: The Intellectual and Cultural Milieu of Orthodox Christians in the World of Islam," *Hugoye* 11:2 (2008): <http://syrcom.cua.edu/Hugoye/Vol11No2/HV11N2Griffith.html> (the author's thesis is summarized succinctly in §32). For an earlier publication making the same point see idem, "'Melkites', 'Jacobites' and the Christological Controversies in Arabic in Third/Ninth-Century Syria," in D. Thomas (ed.), *Syrian Christians under Islam: The First Thousand Years* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 9–55, esp. 26–34.

<sup>16</sup> Ibn Kathir, *The Life of the Prophet Muhammad*, tr. Trevor Le Gassick, vol. 4 (Reading, UK: Garnet & Ithaca Press, 2000), 218.

sense of the term.<sup>17</sup> Kissing the Black Stone appears dangerously similar to the Christian practices of venerating the Cross and the icons, practices that are regarded as idolatrous by the Islamic tradition.<sup>18</sup> This is why, according to the above report, it is only with great reluctance that Umar venerated the Black Stone, doing so only because he knew that the Prophet Muhammad himself had done so.

Another report tells us about the Prophet himself destroying the idols and the paintings in the Ka'ba in Mecca. Curiously enough, one version of this report claims that he spared two of the images (icons?) that had been kept in the sanctuary: the images of Jesus and Mary. The reason provided for his having spared these two images is an interesting one. Here is what the report says:

The Quraysh [Muhammad's tribesmen] had put pictures in the Ka'ba including two of Jesus son of Mary and Mary, on both of whom be peace. Ibn Shihab said: Asma the daughter of Shaqr said that a woman of the Banu Ghassan [another tribe, discussed below] had joined in the pilgrimage of the Arabs and when she saw a picture of Mary in the Ka'ba she said: "My father and my mother be your ransom! (Mary), you are surely an Arab woman!" The Messenger

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<sup>17</sup> This is related to yet another dimension of the Islamic understanding of *Tawhid*, implying that God's qualities belong to Him exclusively and cannot be shared with other, created beings.

<sup>18</sup> The Muslims were of course not receptive to the Byzantine Christian distinction between "worship" (*latreia*), due to God alone, and "veneration" (*proskynesis*), rendered to sacred objects. It is interesting to note that St. John of Damascus, who is well aware of the Muslim accusation that Christians worship the Cross, retorts that by the same token Muslims themselves are guilty of idolatry by worshipping the Ka'ba – for more information see the indispensable reference work by D. Thomas and B. Roggema (eds.), *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 298; for related arguments by other Christian polemicists, writing in Arabic and Syriac, see *ibid.*, 520 and 609.

[Muhammad] ordered that the pictures be erased, except those of Jesus and Mary.<sup>19</sup>

This event is often quoted, but seldom commented upon. First, it is worth noting that the Banu Ghassan (or the Ghassanids), the tribe to which the woman who spoke to the Prophet belonged, was a Christian Arab tribe from the North of the Arabian peninsula (present-day southern Jordan).<sup>20</sup> The woman, thus, was a Christian Arab. She had surely seen images of Christ and Mary the Mother of God before, but was struck by those particular images. The reason she was struck by them was apparently that Jesus and Mary were painted very Arab-looking. It may well be that she pointed out this fact in order to save the images from destruction. If so, hers was a clever stratagem. The Prophet, so the report goes, spared the images. He was of course no iconophile and did not share the Christian understanding of, and reverential attitude to, the sacred. He spared the images, rather, in the name of their supposed “Arabness.” There is of course no guarantee that the story is historically accurate (the event might not have happened as described, or at all); yet it is still significant that the people who cited this report, Muslim hadith transmitters and historians, who of course knew that the Banu Ghassan was a Christian Arab tribe, found the report credible and worth transmitting.

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<sup>19</sup> A. Guillaume (tr.), *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 552. Cf. Sidney H. Griffith, “Christians, Muslims and the Image of the One God: Iconophilia and Iconophobia in the World of Islam in Umayyad and Early Abbasid Times,” in B. Groneberg et al. (eds.), *Die Welt der Götterbilder* (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 347–380, at 358, n47; S. Bashear, “The Images of Mecca: A Case-Study in Early Muslim Iconography,” *Le Muséon* 105:3-4 (1992): 361–377 [repr. in S. Bashear, *Studies in Early Islamic Tradition* (Jerusalem: Printiv Press, 2004), Essay X], 369–372. The analysis below is my own.

<sup>20</sup> On the Ghassanids see, most recently, T. Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam: Verbreitung und konfessionelle Zugehörigkeit: Eine Hinführung*, *Eastern Christian Studies* 7 (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 67ff. with references to earlier literature.

To proceed with our analysis of the Islamic ambivalent attitude to the sacred, it is worth noting that Islamic texts often give the impression of deliberately avoiding the most straightforward Arabic word for “sacred,” in Arabic *muqaddas*, and more generally the root *q-d-s*, the cognate of the Hebrew *qadosh*, holy or sacred, where this word and this root would seem to be called for.<sup>21</sup>

This is especially noticeable if we compare Islamic texts with Christian Arabic texts. In Christian Arabic usage, the word *muqaddas* and other words derived from the same root are ubiquitous, translating the Hebrew and Aramaic *qadosh* / *qaddisha* and the Greek *hagios*. In the Islamic context, however, holy places and holy objects are hardly ever called *muqaddasa*.<sup>22</sup> Mecca is called *Makka al-mukarrama* (the “noble” Mecca). Medina is called *al-Madina al-munawwara* (the “illuminated,” “glorious” Medina). Jerusalem is called *al-Quds al-sharif* (the “honourable” Jerusalem).<sup>23</sup> The Qur’an is called *al-Qur’an al-karim* (the “noble” Qur’an). The sacred precincts of Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem, and Hebron are called *haram*, a word which is difficult to translate but which seems to mean, originally, a

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<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, Talal Asad notes that it is difficult to find one word that adequately translates “the sacred” into Arabic: “[A]lthough the Arabic word *qadāsa* is usually glossed as ‘sacredness’ in English, it remains the case that it will not do in all the contexts where the English term is now used. Translation of ‘the sacred’ calls for a variety of words (*mubarram*, *mutabbar*, *mukhtass bi-l-‘ibāda*, and so on), each of which connects with different kinds of behavior” Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 36f., n. 41.

<sup>22</sup> In the Qur’an itself the only exceptions are the “holy valley Tuwa”—the Qur’anic name for the location of the burning bush, mentioned twice (Qur’an 20:12, 79:16, cf. “holy ground,” Heb. *admat qodesh* in Ex. 3:5)—and the “Holy Land” mentioned once (Qur’an 5:21), mirroring Christian usage.

<sup>23</sup> The Arabic name of Jerusalem, “al-Quds,” literally “the sanctuary,” is of course derived from the root *q-d-s*, but this almost certainly goes back to earlier Christian and Jewish usage. Another traditional Arabic name of Jerusalem is *bayt al-maqdis*, still preserved in the Persian name of Jerusalem *beit-ol-moghaddas*. This expression is a calque of the Hebrew *beth ham-miqdash*, which means, literally, the “place of the sanctuary,” i.e. the Temple.

restricted area.<sup>24</sup> The Prophet Muhammad is called *al-mustafa* (the “chosen one”). Even Sufi holy men, the Islamic mystics, are called *awliya*’ (friends of God), and never *qiddisun*. The word *qiddis* refers exclusively to Christian saints.

Only God is called in Islamic texts “holy,” *quddus* (Qur’an 59:23, 62:1).<sup>25</sup> When an Islamic text says that God is *muqaddas* (holy or sacred), this usually means that God is transcendent.<sup>26</sup> The corresponding verbal noun *taqdis* means the same as *tanzih* (literally: purification), which refers to an approach to theology that affirms God’s complete transcendence and denies any compatibility between God and the created world, i.e. denies that God has any of the created world’s features and characteristics. This, so to speak, “apophatic” approach to theology once again implicitly denies the possibility of God becoming manifest *in* the created world.

Before moving on to the third part of this study, I should point out that there are varieties of Islam which are significantly more

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<sup>24</sup> *Haram* is derived from the same root as *ibtiram*, “honour.” It is also the same root as *harim*, meaning “harem,” women’s section of the house, and *harâm*, meaning “that which is prohibited.”

<sup>25</sup> God is probably also the referent in the following exclamation reportedly made by Waraqa ibn Nawfal, a Christian cousin of Muhammad’s first wife Khadija, when he learned of Muhammad’s first prophetic experience: “Holy! Holy! [*quddus quddus*] Verily by Him in whose hand is Waraqa’s soul, if thou hast spoken to me the truth, O Khadija, there hath come unto him the greatest Namus [=Greek *nomos*] who came to Moses aforetime, and lo, he is the prophet of his people. Bid him be of good heart” (A. Guillaume [tr.], *The Life of Muhammad*, 107). The exclamation “Holy! Holy!” ultimately goes back to Isaiah 6:3, which features prominently in the *Trisagion* of the Christian liturgy. Cf. Claude Gilliot, “Reconsidering the Authorship of the Qur’an: Is the Qur’an partly the Fruit of a Progressive and Collective Work?” in G.S. Reynolds (ed.), *The Qur’an in Its Historical Context* (London: Routledge, 2008), 88–108, at 91–92.

Similarly, *hadith qudsi* (“sacred” hadith) is the kind of hadith in which God, rather than the Prophet Muhammad, is the speaker. See William A. Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam: A Reconsideration of the Sources, with Special Reference to the Divine Saying or Hadith Qudsi* (The Hague: Mouton, 1977). The term “God” (*Allāh*) in Muslim Arabic is often followed by the benediction *taqaddasat asma’uhū*, “hallowed be His names.”

<sup>26</sup> This is why the participle *muqaddas* often governs the preposition *‘an*, followed by a noun referring to that which God is said to transcend.

tolerant toward the notion of the sacred, or at least reflect this notion, *de facto*, in their religious practice. The situation is particularly complex in the mystical variety of Islam, Sufism,<sup>27</sup> which has absorbed and amalgamated numerous local Middle-Eastern (and Christian!) customs and practices, including visitation of shrines and tombs of holy men (*ziyarat al-qubur*),<sup>28</sup> the belief in the holy men's mediation (*tamassul*) and intercession (*shafa'a*), in the spiritual energy (*baraka*) inhering in their tombs and material remains, and so on.<sup>29</sup> It is also important to point out that holy places were frequently *shared* by members of different religions (by Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Middle East and by Muslims and Hindus in India), and that some Muslims did in the past, and do today, visit and venerate Christian holy places (e.g. the Orthodox Monastery of Our Lady the Saydnaya in Syria).<sup>30</sup> All these practices, however, are systematically

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<sup>27</sup> On the problematic nature of the term Sufism see Carl W. Ernst, "Between Orientalism and Fundamentalism: Problematizing the Teaching of Sufism," in B. Wheeler (ed.), *Teaching Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 108–123. Ernst argues convincingly that the construction of "Sufism" as a separate category, distinct from "Islam," is a joint result of Orientalist and Fundamentalist attitudes.

<sup>28</sup> E.g. the tomb of the Prophet himself in Medina, the tombs of his companions, and—for the Shi'i Islam—the tombs of the Shi'i imams, who are descendents of 'Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, from the Prophet's daughter Fatima. On Islamic attitudes towards *ziyarat al-qubur* see e.g. C.S. Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous: Ziyāra and the Veneration of Muslim Saints in Late Medieval Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Y. Nakash, "The Visitation of the Shrines of the Imams and the Shi'i Mujtahids in the Early Twentieth Century," *Studia Islamica* 81 (1995): 153–164 (I owe this latter reference, and the one in the next footnote, to my student Elise Findlay).

<sup>29</sup> S. Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality, and Sacred Power in Islam* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2007).

It is interesting that some Sufi texts do use the root *q-d-s* ("holy" or "sacred") in a popular benediction applied to deceased Sufi holy men: *qaddasa Allahu ruhahu*, "may God sanctify his spirit." This benediction may be related to the Avicennian theory of a "sanctified soul" or "sanctified intellect," on which see S. Nusseibeh, "*al-'Aql al-Qudsī*: Avicenna's Subjective Theory of Knowledge," *Studia Islamica* 69 (1989): 39–54.

<sup>30</sup> E.K. Fowden, "Sharing Holy Places," *Common Knowledge* 8.1 (2002): 124–146 and W. Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain* (London: Penguin, 1997), 73–77 and 186–191.

branded by fundamentalist hardliners as forbidden innovations (*bid'a*), inconsistent with “true Islam” and with the principle of *Tawhid* (more on this below). For a fuller treatment of the questions discussed in this paper a detailed analysis of Sufism as well as of numerous varieties of local and “popular” Islam would be necessary, but it cannot be undertaken here.<sup>31</sup>

### 3. Christians of the Islamic Lands: Between the Christian Sacred and the Islamic Secular

The Abbasid capital Baghdad in the ninth century is often cited as an example of *convivencia*—or in William Dalrymple’s terms “pluralist equilibrium”—between Muslims, Christians, Jews, and other religious groups.<sup>32</sup> This is of course quite correct. Baghdad was

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<sup>31</sup> In this connection the following observation of the eleventh-century Muslim polymath al-Biruni (d. after 1050) is pertinent: “It is known that the vulgar nature leans toward the sensible and avoids the intelligible, which is comprehended only by intellectuals who are few in every time and place. It is due to their propensity to the symbol (*mīthal*) that many people of [different] religions (*mīlal*) turn to making images (*taswīr*) in books and temples, as do Jews and Christians, and especially Manichaeans. Sufficient evidence for what I have said is provided by the fact that if you were to show an image (*ṣūra*) of the Prophet [Muhammad], may God pray for him, or of Mecca and the Ka’ba to an ordinary [Muslim] person (*‘ammī*) or a woman, you would find in them as a result of their joy [such] actions as kissing, dusting the cheeks, and wallowing [in the dust], as if they had seen [not a mere representation but] the object represented (*musawwar*) and performed by virtue of this the rites of the greater and lesser pilgrimage (*manāsik al-hajj wa-l-‘umra*)!” (my translation from E. Sachau (ed.), *Alberuni’s India: An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India about A.D. 1030* [London: Trübner & Co., 1887], 53).

<sup>32</sup> One should not understand from the term *convivencia* that the status of minorities (Christians, Jews, and others) was equal to that of the Muslims. William Dalrymple perhaps defines it best when he calls it a “pluralist equilibrium”: “Though by modern standards Muslims [sic! read: Christians] and Jews—the *dhimmi*—were often treated as second-class citizens, there was at least a kind of pluralist equilibrium (what Spanish historians have called *convivencia* or living together) which had no parallel in medieval Christendom” (William Dalrymple, “[Review of:] *The Court of the Caliphs* by Hugh Kennedy,” *The Times*, September 4, 2004, <http://entertainment>.

deliberately built and populated by the Abbasid caliphs in such a way that no religious or ethnic group would have predominance over other groups and be disproportionately represented at the expense of other populations. In this respect, Baghdad was markedly different from the Umayyad capital Damascus, where the old Byzantine, predominantly Christian elites still wielded enormous political power under the Umayyads.

It is also correct that Christians made important, indeed crucial contributions to the philosophical and scientific culture that was being developed in Abbasid Baghdad. The famous ninth-century Arabic litterateur al-Jahiz (d. 868 or 869), himself a Baghdadi, though of Basran origin, notes that among the Christians there were “secretaries to the government, attendants of kings, doctors to the nobility, sellers of perfume and financiers.”<sup>33</sup> The Christians were especially renowned, as is well known, as translators of Greek (and Syriac) philosophical, scientific, and medical works into Arabic.<sup>34</sup> The sheer volume of these Christian intellectuals’ translation activity is startling. The quotation from Dimitri Gutas’ recent study of the translation movement, already cited by Dr Hankey in his keynote address, is worth repeating:

[F]rom about the middle of the eighth century to the end of the tenth, almost *all* non-literary and non-historical secular Greek books that were available throughout the Eastern Byzantine Empire and Near East were translated into Arabic [...]: astronomy and alchemy and the rest of the occult sciences; the subjects of the quadrivium: arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and theory of music; the entire field

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[timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/books/article477668.ece](http://timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/books/article477668.ece), (accessed June 15, 2009).

<sup>33</sup> Cited in David Thomas, *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity: Abū ʿIsā al-Warrāq’s Against the Incarnation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 6.

<sup>34</sup> Almost all translators of Greek and Syriac works were Christians of various denominations. (Thabit ibn Qurra, who was a Pagan from Harran, is the only notable exception.)

of Aristotelian philosophy throughout its history: metaphysics, ethics, physics, zoology, botany, and especially logic—the *Organon*; all the health sciences: medicine, pharmacology, and veterinary science; and various other marginal genres of writings, such as Byzantine handbooks on military science (the *tactica*), popular collections of wisdom sayings, and even books on falconry.<sup>35</sup>

All this is of course undeniable. Yet, it is also important to realize that the relations between the Muslims and the local Christians were never entirely free of tension. The same al-Jahiz, whom I have already quoted, wrote a polemical tract, one could even say an invective, against the Christians, in which he attacks them not only for their beliefs but also for their, in his eyes unacceptable, social behaviour. al-Jahiz complains bitterly about the fact that the Christians enjoy virtually the same rights in the Baghdadi society as the Muslims and that they act in defiance of the legal restrictions imposed on them (and on other religious minorities) under the Muslim law.

Many of them have stopped wearing their belts, *zunna* [a legal requirement imposed on the Christians], while others wear them beneath their clothes. Many of the powerful people among them refrain from paying the poll tax, *jizya* [the tax imposed on the religious minorities], and although they have the means refuse to give it. They insult those who insult them, and hit those who hit them. And why should they not do this or even more, when our judges, or the majority, consider the blood of a patriarch, metropolitan or bishop to be equivalent to the blood of Ja'far, 'Ali, 'Abbas or Hamza [typical Muslim names]?<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* (London: Routledge, 1998), 1.

<sup>36</sup> Cited in David Thomas, *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity*, 7.

Al-Jahiz's position is clearly that, though the Christians are welcome to contribute to the Islamic culture, as long as this serves the interests of the Muslim rulers, they should nevertheless know their place and willingly submit to the legal restrictions imposed on them.<sup>37</sup>

More important for our purposes, however, is the fact that frictions not infrequently arose between the Muslims and the local Christians because of the tension between the Islamic secular and the Christian sacred. The "foundational dimension to the discussion" between Muslims and Christians has to do, according to Sidney H. Griffith, a preeminent scholar of Arab Christianity, "with Christian and Muslim ideas about the role of matter, of the body, in the mediation of the divine to the human, the theological issue at the heart of the Christian confession of the doctrine of the Incarnation and the Muslim rejection of it."<sup>38</sup>

This was the primary focus of the Muslim-Christian polemic throughout the centuries. In the Abbasid period, this polemic often happened in special pre-arranged gatherings, called *majalis* and conducted in front of an audience, where a Muslim ruler granted a Christian theologian the permission to present his views and to argue against a Muslim interlocutor or even against the ruler himself. We have transcripts of several such debates, perhaps the most famous

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<sup>37</sup> Though granted religious autonomy and exempt from military service in exchange for paying a poll tax (*jizya*), Christians were nevertheless placed under a number of severe restrictions. These restrictions included prohibition on building new and repairing old churches and monasteries, proselytizing among the Muslims, and dissuading anyone, even next of kin, from conversion to Islam. Christians were also prohibited from riding horses and girding swords and, more generally, from imitating the Muslims' clothing, speech, and behaviour. Instead, they were expected to always wear distinctive clothes, including a characteristic belt (*zunnar*, from the Greek word *zonarion*), and to differentiate themselves from the Muslims. Though not uniformly enforced, these stipulations were nevertheless always on the books and could be implemented any time at the discretion of the Muslim rulers, as was done, for instance, by the Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil (reigned AD 847-861), under whose tutelage al-Jahiz wrote his anti-Christian invective, and the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim (reigned AD 996-1021).

<sup>38</sup> Griffith, "Christians, Muslims and the Image of the One God," 375.

among which is the debate between the head of the Church of the East, the Catholicos-Patriarch Timothy I (reigned AD 780-823) and the Abbasid caliph al-Mahdi (reigned AD 775-785).<sup>39</sup>

But interreligious debates happened also in less controlled environments. The interlocutors did not have to be theologians; they could be ordinary people, Muslims and Christians, who encountered each other in public spaces. In such cases it often happened that Muslims criticized fundamental Christian beliefs and practices, especially those they saw as idolatrous, such as the practice of venerating the Cross and the icons, and Christians had to go on the defence. To quote Sidney Griffith again:

A prominent feature of Christian public behavior in this context was their display of and veneration paid to crosses and icons and this behavior quickly became the occasion for Muslim/Christian confrontation and arguments about religion which hinged not only on the issue of the worship of the crosses and icons themselves, but on the Christian teachings which the crosses and icons proclaimed and which the Qur'ān and Islamic tradition emphatically denied. In this context, it became a commonplace in the anti-Christian controversial literature of the Muslims in the early Islamic period for authors to accuse the Christians of idolatry for their worship of crosses and icons.<sup>40</sup>

This is the kind of social situation that we encounter in Edessa (present-day Urfa, or “Şanlıurfa”, in southeastern Turkey) in the early Abbasid period. Edessa was the city that held—until the tenth

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<sup>39</sup> For the original Syriac text and an English translation of the dialogue see Alphonse Mingana, *Woodbrooke Studies*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), 1–162. See also H. Putman, *L'église et l'islam sous Timothée I (780-823): Étude sur l'église nestorienne au temps des premiers Abbassides avec nouvelle édition et traduction du dialogue entre Timothée et al-Mahdi* (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1975), which includes a translation and an edition of the popular Arabic version of the dialogue.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 352.

century—the miraculous image of Christ, produced, according to the tradition, by Christ himself, when he wiped his face with a towel (*mandylion*).<sup>41</sup> This image was subsequently sent to the King of Edessa Abgar, who was cured by it from a terminal illness. What is important for our purposes is that, in the early ninth century, there was apparently much reluctance among Edessene Christians to venerate the holy image; they were apparently simply embarrassed to do so, due to the pressure from the Muslims, who saw the Christian practice of performing prostrations before the icon as idolatrous.

The ninth-century Arab Christian theologian Theodore Abu Qurra, the bishop of the neighbouring city of Harran, responded to this challenge by writing a treatise in defence of the icons. In doing so he followed in the footsteps of John of Damascus, though unlike John of Damascus he wrote his treatise in Arabic and not in Greek, having as his audience the by then largely Arabic-speaking indigenous Edessene Christian community. It is noteworthy that we do not hear about this tension between the Islamic secular and the Christian sacred from Muslim sources; we hear about it solely from Theodore Abu Qurra's introduction to his treatise, where he says the following:

Abba Yannah, our brother, you who are here with us in Edessa, have informed us that many Christians are abandoning the prostration to the icon of Christ our God. In his compassion, for the sake of our salvation, he made it possible for there to be an icon of him, due to his incarnation from the Holy Spirit and from the virgin Mary. [...] Anti-Christians [Theodore's term for Muslims as well as Jews], especially ones claiming to have in hand a scripture sent down from God, are reprimanding them for their prostration to these icons, and because of it they are imputing to them the worship of idols, and the transgression of what God

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<sup>41</sup> Mark Guscini, *The Image of Edessa* (Leiden: Brill, 2009) (I am grateful to Dr Wayne Hankey for this reference).

commanded in the Torah and the Prophets, and they sneer at them.<sup>42</sup>

The evidence presented so far, though by no means exhaustive, is nevertheless sufficient to establish that the traditional Islamic society, while welcoming and integrating Christian contributions to the Islamic secular, such as the work of the Christian translators of the Abbasid period, was still very much opposed to certain Christian perceptions of the sacred. All things considered, I would argue that the Islamic secular, qua secular, was not unlike the modern secular in its opposition to core Christian beliefs.

This would imply that the distinction between the negative secular and the positive secular is mostly a distinction of perception; in reality, however, the secular as such is neither exclusively negative nor exclusively positive, but has both these aspects inherent to it. It is we the observers who regard the secular positively insofar as it is perceived as fostering *convivencia*, and negatively insofar as it is perceived as being an obstacle to Christian life. Both aspects are equally present both to the modern Western and to the medieval Islamic secular. Depending on the political and cultural circumstances, however, one or the other aspect of the secular comes to the fore, affecting also our perceptions of the secular, as evidenced in the case of the post-9/11 “reversal” in Western attitudes to the secular, pointed out by Dr Hankey.

It is true of course that the medieval *pax Islamica* was more successful in maintaining the traditional *convivencia* between Muslims, Christians, and others in the Middle East than the modern colonial and post-colonial *pax Britannica*, *Gallica*, and *Americana*. But this, I believe, has to do with the fact that, unlike the *pax Islamica*, the latter three have been imposed on the Middle East *from the outside*. It is to an analysis of this recent imposition and its disastrous effects that I shall now turn.

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<sup>42</sup> Theodore Abu Qurrah, *A Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons*, tr. S.H. Griffith (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 28–29.

#### 4. The Imposition of the Modern Secular on the Islamic World, and Its Disastrous Effects

The process of the gradual imposition of the modern secular on the Middle East by the Western powers, which had begun in the eighteenth century, reached a critical point by the end of World War I, when the Ottoman Empire, an ally of Germany and Austria-Hungary, was defeated, the Caliphate—the traditional Muslim polity—was abolished, and the Middle East was divided between the British and the French spheres of influence and cut into European-style nation states.

I shall comment briefly, first, on the disastrous effects of the abolition of the Caliphate, and second, on the equally detrimental results of the imposition of European-style nationalism in the Middle East. I shall argue that the former is intimately connected with the rise of political Islam, a movement that is inimical, among other things, to the old Islamic secular, while the latter is largely responsible for the destruction of the traditional multi-religious and multiethnic *convivencia* that, with some exceptions, had characterized Islamic societies in the past.

Turning first to the abolition of the caliphate, we need to keep in mind that throughout Islamic history, the Caliph, literally the Prophet's successor or *locum tenens*, was widely seen as the divinely ordained ruler. Though the Caliph did not wield religious but only political power (religious power was vested in the religious scholars, the *ulama'*), he was nevertheless regarded as an important religious symbol.<sup>43</sup> The Caliphs, as a rule, also considered and presented themselves to their subjects as heirs to ancient kingdoms, seeking thereby to enhance the legitimacy of their rule. Thus the Abbasids, the dynasty that ruled the Islamic world from Baghdad for five centuries (749-1258), saw themselves as descendants of the ancient Iranian kings. The Ottomans, who conquered Constantinople in

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<sup>43</sup> The attempt of the ninth-century caliph al-Ma'mun to impose a particular religious view on the entire Muslim community was an exception and was abolished soon after his death.

1453, putting an end to the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire and proclaiming themselves caliphs, considered and presented themselves as descendents of the Roman Caesars. The conqueror of Constantinople Mehmet II even proclaimed himself, officially, a Roman (Byzantine) Caesar, *Qaysar-i Rum*.

When on March 3rd, 1924, following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish Grand National Assembly, on the initiative of Kemal Ataturk, abolished the office of the caliphate, as part of Ataturk's far-reaching reforms aiming at the modernization and secularization of Turkey, this came as a painful shock to the entire Muslim world.<sup>44</sup>

In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood (al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun) was established in 1928 as a reaction to the abolition of the caliphate. The Muslim Brotherhood is the oldest militant, "Islamist" organization in the Muslim world; it constitutes the powerful, and often violently repressed, Islamist opposition to the Western-backed secular governments of Egypt, up to, and including, the present administration of the Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak (1981-present). The birth of modern "Islamism," understood as an ideology holding that Islam is not only a "personal" religion but also, and perhaps primarily, a political system, is therefore intimately connected to the abolition of the caliphate and the concurrent political fragmentation of the Middle East in the wake of World War

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<sup>44</sup> The Germany-based anti-Kemalist website of the "Ottoman Committee of Freedom" <http://www.osmanli-komitesi.de/> (accessed June 15, 2009) welcomes visitors with a counter of years, months, days, hours, and minutes since the abolition of the Ottoman Empire. It mentions that the current 43rd head of the House of Osman, the ninety-six year old His Imperial Highness Prince Şehzade Ertuğrul Osman (b. 1912 [deceased September 23, 2009]), if proclaimed sultan, would bear the title of, among other things, caliph and Roman emperor (the full title, in a mixture of German and Turkish, would be "Seine Majestät Sultan Ertuğrul Osman V. Han Hazretleri Kalif und Sultan der Sultane, Oberhaupt des Hause Osman, Hünkar und Şah der schiitischen Untertanen; Hakan ül-Berreyn vel-Bahreyn; Khan der Khane; Schützer der Heiligen Städte Mekka, Medina und Jerusalem; Caesar des Oströmischen Imperium; Eroberer der drei Städte Konstantinopel, Adrianopel und Bursa, und von den Städten Damaskus und Kairo").

I. The “Islamist” ideology resists—often by violent means—continuous Western attempts at controlling and dominating the Middle East. Its strategic goal is to reverse this process by, first, establishing local governments built on Islamist principles, which would later, so it envisions, coalesce into a unified Caliphate, encompassing the entire Muslim world and beyond.

This goal is well expressed in the writings of one of the most influential ideologues of the movement Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), who, incidentally, had visited the United States in 1948-1950 and reacted rather negatively to what he saw as the “brutish” and “decadent” character of the American society.<sup>45</sup> In his famous book *Milestones*, written in the Egyptian prison, Sayyid Qutb says the following about Islam as a political system and about the political regime required by it:

This religion [Islam] is really a universal declaration of the human freedom from slavery to other humans and to [one’s] own desires, which is also a form of human servitude. It is a declaration that the sovereignty belongs only to God, the Lord of all the worlds. It challenges all systems based on human sovereignty, i.e., where humans attempt to usurp the attribute of Divine sovereignty. Any system in which final decisions are referred to human beings, and in which the source of all authority are humans, deifies humans by designating others than God as lords over other people. [...] To proclaim the authority and sovereignty of God means to eliminate all human kingship and to announce the rule of the Sustainer of the universe over the entire earth. To establish God’s rule means that His

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<sup>45</sup> John Calvert, “The World is an Undutiful Boy!": Sayyid Qutb’s American Experience,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 2.1 (2000): 87–103.

laws be enforced and that the final decision in all affairs be according to these laws.<sup>46</sup>

Human freedom, in Sayyid Qutb's analysis, is only attainable in a society founded on total submission to God's rule, which is the same as submission to God's law, the *shari'a*. All other forms of governance—including, notably, democracy—are rejected, because they effectively deny human freedom "by designating others than God as lords over other people." Political authority, according to Sayyid Qutb and other Islamists, should belong to God and God alone, in accordance with a political interpretation of the Qur'anic verse: "The authority (*al-hukm*) belongs to God alone. He commands you not to worship anyone except Him. This is the right religion" (Qur'an 12:40).

Significantly, Sayyid Qutb is profoundly opposed to major aspects of what we have called the Islamic secular, i.e. the traditional multi-religious and multiethnic culture of the Islamic lands, based on Greek philosophy and science, to which, as we have noted above, Christian subjects of the Islamic empire were important contributors. Qutb, like other Islamic fundamentalists, the Salafis, rejects this Islamic secular as being effectively un-Islamic. Instead, he constructs and preaches a "pristine," "unadulterated" form of Islam, an Islam the way it had supposedly existed at the time of the Prophet and his companions, the "pious forebears" (*al-salaf al-salih*), before getting mixed with, and corrupted by, foreign influences. The first generation of Muslims, in Qutb's view, was unique precisely because it followed the Qur'an and the Qur'an alone. Later generations, by contrast, had this pure source sullied by foreign influences.

This [first] generation [of Muslims], then, drank solely from this spring [the Qur'an] and thus attained a unique distinction in history. In later times it happened that other

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<sup>46</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, Chapter 4. I am using the translation available online: [http://web.youngmuslims.ca/online\\_library/books/milestones/hold/index\\_2.htm](http://web.youngmuslims.ca/online_library/books/milestones/hold/index_2.htm) (accessed June 15, 2009).

sources mingled with it. Other sources used by later generations included Greek philosophy and logic, ancient Persian legends and their ideas, Jewish scriptures and traditions, Christian theology, and, in addition to these, fragments of other religions and civilizations. These mingled with the commentaries on the Qur'an and with scholastic theology, as they were mingled with jurisprudence and its principles. Later generations after this [first] generation obtained their training from this mixed source, and hence the like of this [first] generation never arose again. Thus we can say without any reservations that the main reason for the difference between the first unique and distinguished group of Muslims and later Muslims is that the purity of the first source of Islamic guidance was mixed with various other sources, as we have indicated.<sup>47</sup>

Anything falling short of this “pure,” “pristine” Islam is, for Qutb, an instance of “Jahiliya” (un-Islamic and anti-Islamic ignorance).<sup>48</sup> This includes much of what is often—in Qutb’s view, erroneously—considered Islamic culture. The fact that the Islamic secular is ultimately a synthesis of numerous foreign influences (Greek, Persian, Jewish, Christian, etc.) is, for Sayyid Qutb, precisely what makes it un-Islamic, what makes it “Jahiliya,” and what necessitates, in his view, that it be rejected as resolutely as the modern European and American culture, which is equally un-Islamic and anti-Islamic.

We are also surrounded by Jahiliya today, which is of the same nature as it was during the first period of Islam, perhaps a little deeper. Our whole environment, people’s

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<sup>47</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, Chapter 1.

<sup>48</sup> The word Jahiliya (literally: the era of ignorance) originally refers, in Arabic Islamic usage, to the pre-Islamic era, before the emergence of Islam as God’s final revelation to mankind. Sayyid Qutb uses the term in a much more general sense, which he himself originated, of anything contrary to true Islam.

beliefs and ideas, habits and art, rules and laws—is Jahiliya, even to the extent that what we consider to be Islamic culture, Islamic sources, Islamic philosophy, and Islamic thought are also constructs of Jahiliya!<sup>49</sup>

Moving now to the second aspect of the modern secular imposed on the Middle East, nationalism, perhaps no one has described its destructive effects on Middle-Eastern societies as clearly and as vividly as William Dalrymple. His *From the Holy Mountain*, a fascinating and at the same time deeply depressing account of the plight of Middle-Eastern Christians, written in the 1990s (i.e. before the second Gulf War and the destruction of Iraq), makes it abundantly clear that only vestiges of the old *convivencia* remain to the present day.<sup>50</sup>

There are a number of factors contributing to this development. By far the most important one is, surely, that indigenous Christians of the Middle East have been experiencing a vehement and often violent backlash, caused by the fact that in the eyes of many Muslims they get associated (erroneously) with the Western powers and their destructive policies towards the Muslim world. As William Dalrymple formulates it laconically, “As at the time of the Crusades, it is the eastern Christians who are getting it in the neck for what the people perceive as the anti-Islamic policies of the west.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, Chapter 1.

<sup>50</sup> Of all countries of the Middle East, it is Syria that has preserved the old *convivencia* the most, perhaps due to the fact that it is currently ruled by a secular dynasty of presidents who are Alawites, i.e. come themselves from a minority background.

<sup>51</sup> William Dalrymple, “Copts and [Muslim] Brothers,” *New Statesman*, December 13, 2007, <http://www.newstatesman.com/religion/2007/12/egypt-coptic-muslim-copts>. Dalrymple is referring to the fact that Middle-Eastern Christians experienced a violent backlash, including outright massacres, at the hands of the Muslims in the wake of the Crusades (as well as other events, such as the Byzantine reconquest of Antioch and northern Syria in the tenth century and the Mongol invasion of the Middle East in the thirteenth—the latter, to a large degree welcomed and supported by Middle-

This process had begun under the Ottomans, largely in reaction to European and Russian diplomatic and military interventions on behalf of the Christian minorities of the Ottoman Empire, and resulted in the systematic decimation and expulsion of the Christian populations of Anatolia and Eastern Thrace during, and in the wake of, World War I—a series of events known as the Armenian genocide, the Assyrian *sayfo* (genocide or massacre), and the Greek “Catastrophe of Asia Minor” (*mikrasiatiki katastrofi*). Its effects continue to be felt throughout the old Ottoman territories. To quote William Dalrymple again:

[T]he pre-first-world-war tolerance, and the bloody fragmentation of that multicultural world as the empire collapsed, were part of a wider pattern across Ottoman lands. [...] [A]cross the Ottoman world, eastern Christians, Jews and Muslims lived side by side for nearly one and a half millenniums. By modern standards, the Christians and Jews (the *dhimmi*) were often treated as second-class citizens, but it was at least a kind of pluralist equilibrium that had no parallel in Europe until the 1950s. What one historian has called this hybrid “multiconfessional, extraordinarily polyglot Ottoman” multiculturalism where even “bootblacks commanded a working knowledge of six or seven languages” survived until European ideas of the nation state shattered the mosaic in the early 20th century. Across the Ottoman empire, the century saw the bloody unravelling of that tapestry—most recently in Kosovo and Bosnia, but before that in Cyprus, Palestine, Greece and Anatolia. In each, pluralism was replaced by a savage polarisation as minorities fled or were driven to places where they could be majorities.<sup>52</sup>

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Eastern Christians, who in turn initially enjoyed the protection of the Mongol rulers).

<sup>52</sup> William Dalrymple, “[Review of:] *Paradise Lost Smyrna 1922: The Destruction of Islam’s City of Tolerance* by Giles Milton,” *The Sunday Times*, June 15, 2008,

A similar backlash was faced by indigenous Jews of the Arab lands since the 1930s, and especially since 1948. It resulted, similarly, from the fact that these indigenous communities—which had lived in the Middle East for centuries, and predated Islam—were associated (equally erroneously) with the Zionist movement and the newly established, Western-backed State of Israel and were held accountable for the suffering inflicted by their co-religionists on the Palestinian population. In both cases, that of the indigenous Middle-Eastern Christians and that of the indigenous Middle-Eastern Jews, this process has led to a lamentable impoverishment of the traditional multiethnic and multi-religious mosaic of the Middle-Eastern societies, where Muslims, Christians, Jews, and other minorities had lived for centuries side by side in a kind of *convivencia* or “pluralist equilibrium.”

To summarize, the contemporary situation in the Middle East is quite dire (this would of course be obvious to anyone who is following the news), and the prospects of improvement look rather bleak. The old Islamic secular is being increasingly replaced by a different, less tolerant, and more politicized form of Islam, which emerged in the twentieth century in reaction to the Western domination and the resulting political fragmentation of the Middle East. The situation of the Middle-Eastern Christians reflects this dire state of the Islamic secular. Once important contributors to that secular, Middle-Eastern Christians increasingly feel unwelcome in their homeland (where their existence had predated Islam for several centuries), as that secular itself, which had tolerated them in the past and integrated their cultural input, is now on the brink of disappearing in the face of other, much more insidious and dangerous internal and external forces. +

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[http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/books/book\\_reviews/article4114380.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/books/book_reviews/article4114380.ece) (accessed June 15, 2009).



## Response to Alexander Treiger

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I would like to begin by thanking the organizing committee of the Atlantic Theological Conference for entrusting me with the response to this very fine paper by Dr Alexander Treiger. In keeping with the role of responder, I shall do my best to focus on the topics raised by Dr Treiger, looking at them from a somewhat different perspective so that these vital issues can be seen in sharp relief. In other words, he is the text, and I am the footnotes.

There are at least four large topics in Dr Treiger's paper which merit sustained attention. For my part, I shall offer a few remarks on Christian cosmology, on the Islamic doctrine of *tawhid* or the oneness of God, on the impact of the modern West upon the Islamic world, and on our conference theme of rethinking secularism.

First, Dr Treiger notes that in the West, social and political secularism grew out of a prior understanding of reality which he calls "theological secularism"—the idea that God is ontologically separate from the created world. He goes on to suggest, "this theological secularism is the exact opposite of the traditional Biblical and especially Christian view of the universe." His core point here is that the Christian worldview is necessarily shaped by the doctrine of the Incarnation, which teaches that theophanies—some of them at least—are real: the divine or the sacred can and does manifest itself in matter or the profane.

This is certainly true and well put. However, I believe that this sort of discussion needs to be broadened beyond the dichotomy between what we might call a theophanic perspective on the one hand, and theological secularism on the other. To my admittedly simple mind, there are three basic worldviews competing for our allegiance in the modern West. One is indeed the Biblical, Christian worldview, which holds that the sacred and the profane are both real, and yet distinct from each other. The Creator is self-existent, but His creation is no less real just because it is temporal. Both the theophanic perspective and theological secularism operate within this framework, because they both require God and the world to be real and yet distinct at the same time. At that fundamental level, I would suggest that the other Abrahamic religions, Judaism and Islam in their traditional forms, operate within this framework as well.

Theological secularism and a theophanic perspective are not in my view direct opposites, because they are both grounded in this Abrahamic worldview. Moreover, they can and arguably should be harmonized by a recognition of the role of grace in Christian theology. Simply put, God and the world are distinct and separate by nature, but God manifests Himself in the world by grace, by choosing to reveal Himself in specific events, through physical means like burning bushes or icons, and especially, for us Christians, in the personal form of His incarnate Son.

Over and against this Biblical, Christian, Abrahamic perspective are two fundamentally different alternatives. One is the purely secular as we have come to know it in the West, secularism as conventionally understood, which marginalizes or denies the sacred altogether. As Dr. Hankey noted, this form of materialistic, rationalistic secularism has long been an antagonist of traditional Christianity. He also pointed out that Christians' attitude towards secularism has become more positive since 9/11. It is worth noting that this change of attitude has not been reciprocated on the other side. It is also since 9/11 that we have witnessed the rise of a new breed of atheist evangelists like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, who seek the final triumph of complete secularism.

But this is not all. A third worldview is also in contention in our times, one which I usually identify as neo-paganism. This view holds that the sacred and the profane are both real, but are not distinct. Rather, the sacred is universally immanent in the profane. Spirituality pervades the material world in such a way that it is always accessible, in nature, in experience, and most immediately within the deep self. Wiccans and goddess worshippers have been somewhat less newsworthy since 9/11, but they have not disappeared by any means.

More importantly, neo-pagan principles underlie a number of dubious (or worse) ideologies, ranging from the National Socialism of Himmler and Rosenberg through radical gender feminism to Afrocentrism. Neo-paganism's highest court of appeal is neither revelation nor reason, but personal experience. As such, it is a perfect fit with the internet age, where anyone can disseminate views on anything, free of all quality control, provided one acquires a minimal level of programming skill. I believe it is important for Christians to maintain clarity about the difference between occasional theophanies rooted in the grace of God, which we see in the Abrahamic religions, and the mysticism-on-demand which is practiced in occult and magical circles.

The second issue I wish to stress is the Islamic principle of *tawhid*. Here I must simply add emphasis to what Dr Treiger has already said, for in many ways this is the single defining idea of genuine Islamic thought. So much else flows directly from it that we cannot have any reliable grasp of Islam without taking it into account. Most particularly, it is *tawhid* which pits Islam against the core Christian doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity.

According to one presentation of the idea, *tawhid* represents the oneness of God in three particular ways. First is the singleness of God, the fact that there is one God and no more. This means that the one God is the sole creator of all that exists, without exception, and that His will alone governs the entire universe. The sense of God's control over the created order is so strong that it accounts for the note of fatalism one sometimes finds in Islamic thought.

Secondly, *tawhid* means that God is absolutely unique. No created thing resembles Him, nothing can encompass anything like the glory and majesty of God Himself. This partly accounts for the absence of Christian-style theophany in Islam; as Dr Treiger notes, the gap between God and material things is so drastic that matter could not survive direct contact with the divine. Even the Qur'an was sent down by means of the angel Gabriel, not through a direct encounter between God and the prophet. This principle also accounts for the sheer horror directed towards idolatry and, as a consequence, the widespread prohibition on representative art of all kinds, whether sacred or secular.

Thirdly, *tawhid* indicates totality. God alone deserves all of our worship, all of our service, all of our allegiance. Some modern Muslims highlight this principle as a declaration of human dignity and equality, for it suggests that we must never give our allegiance and servitude to another mere human being. At the same time, totality implies that no area of life is exempt from the will of God, including science and morality, politics and economics. Modern Islamists who oppose the traditional Islamic secular are not fabricating their position out of whole cloth; to some extent, it flows from a profound allegiance to, and a specific interpretation of, the core doctrine of Islam itself.

The third issue I wish to address is the impact of the West on the Islamic world. Here of course I can offer only a few superficial observations, but given the short historical memory of the modern West, some of the obvious facts do need restating from time to time. The most obvious and significant of all is the fact that almost none of nation-states in the Middle East existed before 1919 in their present forms.

Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and various smaller principalities were assigned their borders, and indeed their national identities, during the peace process following World War I—largely by people who had never set eye or foot on the region itself. What made anyone think it was appropriate to unite Mesopotamia with its Arabs, Assyrians, Persians and Kurds, its Sunnis, Shi'ites, Jews and Christians into a single nation-state called Iraq, but at the same time to divide the Arabs of the Levant into Syrians, Lebanese, Jordanians, and Palestinians? These developments reflected almost entirely the political interests of Britain and France, not the will and wishes of these peoples themselves.

Until the Great War, the Ottoman Empire and Caliphate still encompassed almost the entire heartland of the Islamic world, from North Africa to Mesopotamia, although Persia had long maintained its independence. After the Ottoman defeat, only three significant areas in this region avoided outright occupation and colonization by the West, and remained at least somewhat capable of charting their own course. It is interesting to note which ones they are, and what their experience of modern secularism has been. This quick survey will illustrate Dr Hankey's point that Islam did not come on the scene with a ready-made answer to the thematic question of our conference.

First there is Turkey itself. Despite the defeat of the Ottomans, the Turkish heartland escaped occupation after the War only because Mustafa Kemal rallied the surviving Turkish forces more effectively than the Allies were able to carry out their plans. As Drs Hankey and Treiger pointed out, Kemal carried out a wide-ranging secularization program rooted in his own distaste for religion. He dismantled both the Sultanate and the Caliphate, and went so far as to restrict or abolish such entrenched practices as the use of the Arabic alphabet and the wearing of visible religious garb such as the hijab. As a result, Turkey is the leading example of self-generated *laïcité* in the Muslim world. I would be interested to hear from Dr Treiger whether the Christians of Turkey were generally better off under the old Ottoman millet system which recognized them as a distinct community, as opposed to the Kemalist system which disestablished Islam. Were they perhaps analogous to the politically disengaged fundamentalisms of which Dr Hankey spoke?

The second example is Iran. While it was never directly colonized, Iran did come under considerable Western pressure in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Britain and then America attempted to turn Iran to their advantage against Imperial Russia, Nazi Germany, or the Soviet Union as circumstances dictated. Under this Western tutelage, the Pahlavi Shahs pursued a top-down policy of modernization and secularization which bears some outward similarity to that pursued by Kemal. I recall that when I was in graduate school, we were given career advice to the effect that the Iranian government was investing considerably in the development of Zoroastrian studies as part of its attempt to counterbalance the influence of the Shi'ite clergy.

The outcome, of course, was vastly different from the Turkish experience. The last Shah alienated much of the population and incurred the unremitting hostility of the religious establishment. When it came, the Khomeini revolution of 1979 took Iran in a very different direction from that pursued by Turkey. The ayatollahs' institutionalized control over the elective parliamentary process is unique in the Muslim world. While there is no exact counterpart to Christendom's concept of the emperor occupying a Christ-like role, the traditional notion that the ayatollahs act on behalf of the Hidden Imam may play an analogous role. As we all know, however, the very survival of the so-called Islamic Republic in its current form is the most urgent unanswered question of contemporary events.

The third example is Islam's original home, Arabia itself. Here the opportunity for autonomous development was more pronounced, for not even the Ottomans exerted consistent control over the Arabian interior. The alliance between the House of Sa'ud and the heirs of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the founder of an exceptionally strict Sunni reform and purification movement, dates back to the mid-1700s. Both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries witnessed the establishment of Sa'udi states in Arabia which were eventually vanquished by Turkish expeditions, but the Sa'udi-Wahhabi alliance persisted. Incidentally, the term "Wahhabi" is used

by outsiders; their own name for themselves is in fact derived from the term *tanbid*, emphasizing their devotion to that principle.

During the Paris peace conference, the Hashemite Prince Feisal, son of the hereditary Sharif of Mecca, hoped to become ruler of a greater Arabia encompassing Mesopotamia and the Levant as well as the Arabian peninsula. As events unfolded, he was gradually reduced to a pawn in the French and British manoeuvring over their Middle Eastern mandates. Meanwhile the Sa'ud clan made its third strike for power, and decisively overthrew its various Arabian rivals. The present Kingdom of Sa'udi Arabia was formally established in 1932, before the discovery of oil led the rest of the world to take any interest in this territory. As a result, foreign influence in Arabia has been extensively curtailed in keeping with Wahhabi principles, although not enough so to satisfy the likes of Osama bin Laden. The establishment of the Sa'udi state has had wide-ranging consequences, not least because oil wealth has permitted the Sa'udis to fund Wahhabi-style schools and training programs in other parts of the Islamic world.

Of these three examples, Turkey has pursued its secularization to the point of seeking membership in the European Union, while Saudi Arabia and Iran both aspire to leadership roles in the Islamic world over against the West. Both of the latter are presently governed under explicitly ideological systems which exclude the secular as we understand it. Both are also notorious for their rejection of the traditional Islamic *convivencia* in their treatment of religious minorities.

Dr Treiger concludes that prospects in the Middle East look rather bleak, and I am not the one to gainsay him on that matter. I do applaud his emphasis on the voice of Middle Eastern Christians who are so often ignored in discussions of the region. My final observation has to do with us, the Christians of the West. We are now faced with rethinking the idea of secularism at the same time as we confront yet again the thorny matter of our relationship and dealings with the followers of the Arabian prophet.

This is a situation where there is no simple either/or for us to contemplate. Where do we go from here? In the wake of 9/11, should we ally ourselves with the beneficial aspects of Western secularism so as to counter the spread of Islam, or at least of Islamism? As people of faith ourselves, perhaps we have something to offer here that the merely secular cannot provide.

Alternatively, can and should we ally ourselves with Western Muslims to oppose the negative effects of secularism? Together, we might better reassert the legitimate role of faith communities in public life. Perhaps by joining hands with moderate Muslims, we might strengthen their standing over against their more radical confreres.

Or instead of that, should we go our own way, chart our own course, and hold both the other religions and the non-religious at a distance? It's not entirely clear to me where that path leads. If we dedicate ourselves to an explicit re-Christianizing of Western civilization, we will need at some point to get political, whether we join the so-called "religious right" or find some other vehicle. On the other hand, we might have to accept that we have become outsiders in contemporary culture, and concentrate on preserving the distinctiveness of our witness. This might allow us to reclaim more of the heritage of the pre-Constantinian Church, but somehow it sounds more Anabaptist than Anglican.

The topic of our conference raises questions which go right to the heart of our place as Christians in the world, and the answers are not simple. I'm just a humble responder, so I shall conclude by thanking Dr Treiger for presenting us with such a clear, cogent, informative and thought-provoking paper, and I trust the ensuing discussion will shed further light on these extraordinary issues which dominate our times. +



## John Calvin and the Secularization of Religion? A Twentieth-Century Debate

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In her 2004 book *When Islam and Democracy Meet: Muslims in Europe and in the United States* Jocelyn Cesari argues that, cut off from national cultures, Muslims have demonstrated a distinct shift towards individualism similar to Christian experiences.<sup>1</sup> The resulting religiosity is often characterized by privatized, cultural, or ethical Islam, as well as by voluntary attachment to fundamentalism. This secularization of Islam in Western society, according to Cesari, is comparable to the fate of Protestantism. The argument is compelling. No one who has lived in the United Kingdom over the past fifteen years can but be sensitive to the profound shift towards radicalization engendered by the unresolved tensions in a British society which saw the election in 2009 to the European Parliament of members of the racist BNP.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jocelyn Cesari, *When Islam and Democracy Meet: Muslims in Europe and in the United States* (New York: Palgrave, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> This was highlighted in a report by Christiane Amanpour for CNN entitled, 'Radical, Moderate Muslims Battle for Young English Minds', (January 22, 2007). <http://www.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/europe/01/17/warwithin.amanpour/index.html>. For a thorough study of the development of groups in London, see Quintan Wiktorowacz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).

But what of Protestantism? What is its relationship to secularism? In America, where I am now living, one quickly becomes aware of how, for many Christians, the terms ‘secular’ and ‘secularism’ conjure nightmarish images of a menacing foe, sometimes visible, but often not, threatening the fabric of society. The debate has innumerable, and familiar, manifestations; the presence of the Ten Commandments in courthouses, school prayer, or Christmas trees in front of public buildings. All involve an elemental struggle over the place of religion in the public domain, pitting those who argue for its removal to private spheres against those who decry the creeping menace of ungodly secularism.<sup>3</sup> The positions are so polarized that discussion is hardly possible, leaving little agreement on what terms such as secular and secularization might mean. Some common language has been found in the elastic designation ‘Judeo-Christian’, which at least permits liberals and conservative evangelical Christians to participate in national discussions, though only through particular accepted channels.<sup>4</sup>

### **Introduction**

The rapid decline of America as a Protestant country after the Second World War which presaged the marginalization of liberal Christianity and the sectarianism of the right has led to a great deal of reflection on the place of the churches in the secular world, a debate only intensified by the shock of September 11.<sup>5</sup> My purpose is not to rehearse that story, but to reflect on one particular path, that of

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<sup>3</sup> The vicious and even absurd nature of this debate was in evidence in the 2008 American elections in the senate race in North Carolina. The incumbent Elizabeth Dole made much of the fact that her opponent Kay Hagan had attended a fundraiser for the Secular Coalition of America. In television advertisements the Dole campaign suggested that Ms Hagan supported the abolition of Christmas.

<sup>4</sup> Angela M. Lahr, *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares. The Cold War Origins of Political Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 73.

<sup>5</sup> See Emilio Gentile, *God's Democracy, American Religion after September 11*, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008). Gentile examines the manner in which the Bush administration linked its campaign against Islam to fundamentalist Christianity.

Reformed Christianity, and its place in the development of a new relationship of the sacred and secular. I want to draw attention to the origins of the problem in the Reformation itself with its crisis over the question of authority. In attempting to secure the place of the Church, John Calvin consciously turned to Augustine, seeing in the church father a distinction between temporal and sacred power which he believed essential to the renewal of Christian society. This distinction remained a powerful and enduring element of the reformer's thought and, although in practice it failed to carry the day, it nevertheless left within the Reformed tradition an unresolved tension: a recognition of a separation of the sacred/secular with a profound concern that the former not be subsumed by the latter. I want to draw attention briefly to this argument in Calvin and then turn to significant moments in the history of Reformed tradition when it has emerged in sharp relief. I shall look to the work of Abraham Kuyper, the Dutch Calvinist writer and politician, whose thought has inspired the re-emergence of Neo-Calvinism in the United States (named by *Time Magazine* as one of the ten ideas shaping America!) and the theologian Karl Barth, who attempted to reclaim the theology of Calvin for the twentieth century, harnessing it to his revolt against cultural Protestantism as well as to his understanding of the sacred/secular balance in shadow of the Third Reich.

### **The Calvinist Myth**

To understand the force of debates about the place of the Reformed tradition in America we need to remind ourselves that until the early decades of the twentieth century a powerful narrative was preserved that linked Calvinism with the democratic origins of the United States. Long before Max Weber's famous, though little read essay *Protestantism and the Rise of Capitalism* (1905) leading writers in America linked Reformed theology with political liberty, declaring Calvin's Geneva and its heirs in Puritan England and the Dutch Republic to

be the cradles of democracy.<sup>6</sup> The Scotsman John Witherspoon, later president of Princeton in the eighteenth century and advocate of American independence, set the tone with his assertion that knowledge of God is confined to where liberty and political justice are found.<sup>7</sup> Half a century later in 1855, Charles Hodge, another president of Princeton and a prominent defender of Calvinism in nineteenth-century America, declared that liberty and order in Presbyterianism were the parents of the civilized world. Such confidence, however, belied profound changes in nineteenth-century religious culture, when, in both North America and Europe, Calvinism began to lose its force. As Garry Wills has recounted in his recent *Head and Heart. American Christianities*, the doctrinal content of Calvinism largely drained from the movement during the nineteenth century as considerable accommodation was made with secular culture.<sup>8</sup> As a narrative, however, the link between Calvinism and democracy continued to enjoy currency in the United States until the 1920s.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps its last prominent exponent was Woodrow Wilson,

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<sup>6</sup> This view is clearly set out in a recent article, Damon Linker, "Calvin and American Exceptionalism," *The New Republic*, The Book, an online review, (July 9, 2009). Linker concludes, "No commemoration of John Calvin's birth can be complete without recognizing this momentous American legacy. Whatever our views of American exceptionalism and its complicated human consequences, it is Calvin who deserves to be recognized as its unintended instigator." For a more nuanced historical treatment, see Mark Valeri, "Religion and the Market in Early New England," in Peter W. Williams (ed), *Perspectives on American Religion and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 92–104, and D.G. Hart, *The Last Soul of American Protestantism* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey H. Morrison. *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005)

<sup>8</sup> Garry Wills, *Head and Heart. American Christianities* (New York: Penguin, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> This protean character of Calvinism was nothing new. In the Dutch Republic and the Atlantic colonies the Reformed teachings on natural law and predestination were adapted to form the foundations of civic stability and economic prosperity. The Huguenot merchants of Charleston, pious Calvinists that they were, understood the Reformed teaching of transforming the world as the backbone for a progressive financial and mercantile activity. See Mark Valeri, *Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy's New*

another Princeton man, whose providential view of America's place in the world following the First World War was profoundly shaped by his Calvinist piety.<sup>10</sup> In these various iterations of Calvinism, Geneva and the legacy of the sixteenth-century reformer were heartily invoked. To begin to understand the ways in which the tradition was reconfigured we must return to Calvin and the origins of the debate.

### **John Calvin (1509-1564)**

John Calvin urgently fought for the separation of the spiritual and temporal in Geneva, and he lost. In the first version of his *Institutes* from 1536, he wrote that the spiritual and the temporal “are always to be viewed on their own and separately. When one is being considered, we should carefully avert our minds from considering the other.”<sup>11</sup> This rhetorical flourish is somewhat misleading, for Calvin, following Luther and Zwingli, held the spiritual and temporal to be united together under God's sovereignty—they could never be entirely separated. He was taking issue with those whom he believed had subordinated the spiritual to temporal authority. With his return to Geneva in 1541 the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, which he largely drafted, envisaged a Church that would educate and ordain its own ministers, make decisions about questions of doctrine, and excommunicate and reconcile Christians through public acts of discipline.<sup>12</sup> In contrast to Zwingli in Zurich and Luther in Wittenberg Calvin, drawing on the Gallic liberties of his native

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*England: The Origins of the New Divinity in Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> J.W. Schulte Nordholt, Woodrow Wilson. *A Life for World Peace* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1991) discusses how contemporaries saw Wilson as a rigid Calvinist. (41f) What Nordholt struggles to understand is how Wilson could combine elements of Calvinist doctrines with his essential optimism about human nature. This emerged out of the reformulation of Calvinist thought in the nineteenth century and is evident in the work of Abraham Kuyper discussed below.

<sup>11</sup> *Institutes*, 3.19.15

<sup>12</sup> On this see, Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (London, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 121–143.

France and his training in Roman law, Calvin rejected the subordination of the Church to civil authorities, whose duty was to rule through positive laws drawn from Christian principles, to defend the Church, and to maintain order.<sup>13</sup> The Church in its prophetic witness should speak to the magistrates as Nathan to David, never ceasing to scold or upbraid as the Word requires. Following a series of painful defeats, Calvin, like the other reformers, was required to accept the rule of the magistrates.<sup>14</sup> Whatever Calvin might write in his letters, when Michael Servetus and his books were set alight in Geneva for blasphemy, the council made sure that everyone knew it was by their order and not the Frenchman's. Only in Scotland, with its Catholic queen, a country Calvin never saw, did something akin to his vision of a separate church appear.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, although full victory was denied, what emerged under Calvin, his successor Theodore Beza, and the 'Calvinists' of subsequent generations was indeed a separation of the sacred and temporal.<sup>16</sup>

Calvin's earliest position on the place of the Christian in the world was shaped by his reading of Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms (the earthly kingdom of reason, law, and passion: and the heavenly kingdom of faith, hope and charity). The Christian, for Luther, as we know, is a citizen of both.<sup>17</sup> For Calvin, the two

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<sup>13</sup> The literature on this topic is enormous. See Harro Höpfel, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), Ralph Hancock, *Calvinism and the Foundation of Modern Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), William R Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace, The Place and Significance of Christian Freedom in John Calvin's Political Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), and John Witte Jr., *The Reformation of Rights. Law, Religion and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> William G. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 167–207.

<sup>15</sup> On the emergence of the Calvinist order in Scotland, see Jane Dawson E.A. Dawson, *Scotland Re-Formed 1488-1587* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 200–242.

<sup>16</sup> This is sketched out in Philip Benedict, *Christ's Church Purely Reformed. A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> John M Headley, "Luther and the Problem of Secularization," *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 55 (1987): 21–37.

kingdoms were not simply about the world. The doctrine spoke to his understanding of body and soul; it was how he distinguished between political and spiritual liberty.<sup>18</sup> Calvin was distinct from Luther and Zwingli, the reformers of the first generation, in his fear of how the spiritual liberties of the Christian, and of the Church in particular, could be endangered by an overly powerful prince or civil ruler. Very much the student of Roman law, he opted for a refinement of the two kingdoms teaching, which, in many ways, was more reminiscent of the medieval doctrine of the two swords (temporal and spiritual). From his commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia*, written early in his life, he alighted on the classical and humanist principle of equity.<sup>19</sup> This tempering of the law for the good of the community was, in Calvin's eyes, the means of maintaining societies in which various necessities had to be balanced. Most significantly for the Christian state was the balance between freedom and order.

Calvin, like all those who had witnessed the chaos of the Reformation gone wrong in the Anabaptist Kingdom of Münster in the 1530s, feared the abuse of freedom and rejected the idea that the freedom of the Gospel was liberation from order. The Christian is made free by God's gift of grace in election, he declared, but that freedom finds expression in obedience to the law. Hence, key to Calvin is the place of the conscience, the assuaging of which is central to his story of his conversion. It is on the conscience that God has written the spiritual laws in the form of the Ten Commandments and Scripture.<sup>20</sup> They teach what God holds to be

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<sup>18</sup> Institutes 3.19.15. Calvin makes the crucial point, "Through this distinction it comes about that we are not to misapply to the political order the gospel teaching on spiritual freedom, as if the Christian were less subject, as concerns outward government, to human laws, because their consciences had been set free in God's sight; as if they were released from all bodily servitude because they are free according to the spirit."

<sup>19</sup> Gordon, *Calvin*, 22–29.

<sup>20</sup> On the role of conscience in Calvin, see Randall C. Zachman, *The Assurance of Faith. Conscience in the Theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 91–254, and David Bosco,

right and wrong. On account of the fall, no person is able to fulfil that law, leaving our consciences to prosecute us, but freedom comes in God's gift of grace, which releases the conscience and allows the Christian to live in "spiritual liberty". It is this notion of liberty that was taken up by later interpreters of Calvin, such as Max Weber, as the foundation for a new human relationship with the world. Freed from the concern of salvation, the individual is liberated to pursue other ends.

Calvin saw it differently. Grace, he was adamant, indeed frees believers from the necessity to earn salvation, but it requires them to live by the law. God has cancelled the condemnation of the law, but not freed the individual from the force of its commandments. The Christian lives every moment *coram deo*, in the face of imminent judgement. This brings us to the other danger of which Calvin was sensible: the balance of freedom of conscience with the necessity of the Church to defend, preserve, and teach pure doctrine. How do "liberty of conscience" and maintenance of order relate in Calvin? This strikes me as a central question and a place where Calvin the lawyer and Church reformer finds his voice. The laws of the church are to be obeyed insofar as they preserve order (discipline) and true doctrine (Calvin always uses the term *doctrina* and not *theologia*), but in matters not essential (*adiaphora*, see the debate with Melancthon) the faithful must not have their consciences bound. In short, according to Calvin, a Christian was to follow God's commandments with a free conscience.

Although, for Calvin, civil jurisdiction was a completely separate matter, the same balance was to be sought by which magistrates rule by written laws, not by fiat, providing justice and protection. The laws of the state were to be expressions of foundational principles of love of God and neighbour, but rulers were not charged with the establishment of true religion. That is to say, Calvin would not allow political overlords to determine matters of doctrine, which were to

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"Conscience as Court and Worm: Calvin and the Three Elements of Conscience," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14 (1986): 333–355.

be left to the Church. As to the nature of secular government (democracy, aristocracy, monarchy), Calvin was clear that it did not matter, though from 1543 he demonstrated a preference for aristocratic forms of government.<sup>21</sup>

Calvin does not argue for any particular political liberties for Christians. The duty of a Christian is to obey, and for Calvin, but not his followers, resistance to tyranny was not sanctioned by Scripture. The freedom won in Christ is manifested in the community of the church. The individual is liberated from the guilt of sin, but that liberation links the individual to God through God's creational and redemptive structures.<sup>22</sup> This is Calvin's balancing of order and freedom, which was his way of giving nuance to Luther's Two Kingdoms theories: it is through the institution (church) that the individual is led to wholeness. Christian freedom is not freedom from obedience. This takes us to a very brief consideration of Calvin's understanding of the individual Christian, who is partial and incomplete. Justification reveals our dependency on God, that we belong wholly to God. What God reveals to the elect is not independence, but dependence. Once again, the conscience is essential, for it not only convicts the individual, but it reveals the Christian's need for institutions.

The godly must maintain hope in the providence of God and that providence will be manifested in the restoration of the persecuted Church, and also in the working of human society. God's providential care is evident in the life of the Church, even when he appears absent. Calvin seeks to orient the faithful towards reading the signs of creation, being sensible of God's judgement in the world. The eye is trained in this by scripture, which teaches.

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<sup>21</sup> For an interpretation that continues to emphasize Calvin as a supporter of democratic government, see John Witte, *The Reformation of Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 55.

<sup>22</sup> William Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace, The Place and Significance of Christian Freedom in John Calvin's Political Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 36

For Calvin, therefore, human beings find themselves under a *duplex regime*—the spiritual and political—which reveals God’s sovereignty. The spiritual is the conscience instructed by piety, while the political is membership in the state. The two mirror the distinction of the two tables of the law. The life-long path of sanctification takes place within the community, not simply the Church, and requires the law as a guide. The individual cannot dispense with the instruction of the Church, the correction and protection of civil authority, or the edification of the community of believers. The Holy Spirit acts through both civil and political institutions. Each believer must see him/herself in the context of God’s creation and redemption as manifested in the law and incarnated in the Church and civic polity. This makes each individual recognize his/her insufficiency and incompleteness. At the same time it brings the joy of the community’s love and care: the enactment of the commandment of love. Calvin feared every notion of individual liberty, which he associated with chaos. Liberty was anchored within an institutional context.

Calvin’s position on the relationship of sacred and secular was not only opposed by the magistrates in Geneva, who sought control over their church, but, more significantly, by other leading voices of the Reformed tradition. Most notably, Zurich, under the leadership of Heinrich Bullinger, advocated a polity in which the church served as supplicant to the political masters, and it was this tradition, as Tory Kirby has persuasively argued, that proved so influential on the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559.<sup>23</sup> Like so many battles of the sixteenth century, it was a struggle for the legacy of Augustine, to whose teaching on the two cities both parties appealed.

### **Abraham Kuyper and Reclaiming the Sacred**

The Dutch theologian, minister, and prime minister, Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) is a fascinating study of the conflicting impulses

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<sup>23</sup> Torrance Kirby, *The Zurich Connection and Tudor Political Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 25–41.

within Calvinism and the development of nineteenth-century cultural Christianity.<sup>24</sup> Clearly horrified by what he saw as the secularization of liberalism and socialism, which he incorrectly identified as the by-products of the atheism and anticlericalism of the French Revolution, Kuyper sought an alternative account for the social, economic, and political problems of the late nineteenth century. Yet his solution remained deeply wedded to cultural assumptions of his day. He turned to Calvin and to the Calvinist heritage of his native Netherlands, where, he believed, the Reformed tradition derived from Augustine and Calvin had generated a constitutional polity in which persecuted peoples, such as Spanish Jews, the Huguenots, and English Puritans had taken refuge. As such, his endeavour should not surprise us as, in the Tractarian movement in England and in Catholic social thought post Vatican I, similar efforts were made to mine pre-modern sources to address contemporary problems.<sup>25</sup>

Kuyper was by no means a lone rider. He was well acquainted with leading thinkers of his age, having studied and written against Marx, and personally known Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch. He heartily approved of the *Rerum novarum* (1891) of Pope Leo XIII concerning the rights and duties of capital and labour. To a certain extent, he sought to find in the Reformed tradition a similar Christian response to the question of religion and society. At the core of his return to the past was a thoroughly modern problem: how to find the basis for a pluralistic, morally sound and spiritually meaningful society as a bulwark against secular revolution from either the left or right. His natural assumption was that, while other denominations, and even religions, were perfectly acceptable, the truth resided in Calvinism. What Kuyper understood as Calvinism, however, requires some investigation, as does the historical

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<sup>24</sup> Frank Van den Berg, *Abraham Kuyper: A Biography* (St. Catherine's, Ont.: Paideia Press, 1978).

<sup>25</sup> Paul E. Sigmund, "Subsidiarity, Solidarity, and Liberation: Alternative Approaches in Catholic Social Thought," in Luis E. Lugo (ed.), *Religion, Pluralism, and Public Life: Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for the Twenty-first century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 205–220.

justification of his writing. By the end of the nineteenth century, the classical language of Calvinism had been largely discarded in theological debates, and Kuyper's undertaking was a thoroughly modernist venture in which he picked and chose from the Reformed tradition.<sup>26</sup>

In 1874 Kuyper wrote his *Calvinism, the Origin and Safeguard of Our Constitutional Liberties* against the claims of liberals that the principles of freedom and democracy were the fruit of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. His argument was that such liberties arose first in countries where Calvinism had flourished (Netherlands, Scotland, Switzerland, and England). He created a powerful, though questionable, historical narrative that enlisted the Dutch Revolt, the Glorious Revolution (1688) and the American Declaration of Independence (1776) as manifestations of Calvinist doctrines of liberty.<sup>27</sup> Central to this historical tale was a misreading of Calvin that held the reformer to favour democratic government.<sup>28</sup> Kuyper drew from a distinctly Romantic tradition of history fired by Dutch patriotism to craft a Protestant democratic narrative of progress which set the French Revolution, with its promotion of individual liberty and popular sovereignty, against the Calvinist tradition, dating back to Calvin himself, which was rooted in faith. The acknowledgement of God's sovereignty, according to Kuyper, defied all notions of state supremacy and popular sovereignty, and constitutional freedoms arose from the freedom of worship and conscience.

It was his Stone Lectures, delivered in Princeton in 1898, that transplanted Kuyper's thinking into the English-speaking world,

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<sup>26</sup> James D. Bratt, "Abraham Kuyper: Puritan, Victorian, Modern," in Lugo, *Religion, Pluralism and Public Life*, 18–19.

<sup>27</sup> Jan de Bruijn, "Calvinism and Romanticism: Abraham Kuyper as a Calvinist Politician," in Lugo, *Religion, Pluralism and Public Life*, 53.

<sup>28</sup> For a treatment of Kuyper's misreading of Calvin, see Peter S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 144–147.

where it quickly gained currency in America.<sup>29</sup> Kuyper had much to say that would please his hosts: he praised American religious liberty and pluralism—this was the promised land:

A traveller from the old European Continent, disembarking on the shore of this New World, feels as the Psalmist says, that “His thoughts crowd upon him like a multitude.” Compared with the eddying waters of your new stream of life, the old stream in which he was moving seems almost frost bound and dull; and here, on American ground, for the first time, he realizes how so many divine potencies, which were hidden away in the bosom of mankind from our very creation, but which our old world was incapable of developing, are now beginning to disclose their inward splendour, thus promising a still richer store of surprises for the future.<sup>30</sup>

Linking Calvinist and American political thought, Kuyper added, “Conscience is the source of human personality, the root of civil rights, and the source of national identity.” He further praised the concept of separation of church and state as a “better guarantee [of] ecclesiastical liberty than anything that now prevails in Europe,” though he did not mean by this a fencing-off of religion from politics.<sup>31</sup> Rulers were to be God fearing and the constitution itself declared the sovereignty of God, though Kuyper ignored any of the deistic implications. His reading of Calvin allowed him to declare how the separation of church and state granted churches freedom from interference by the state in doctrine and forms of worship.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> These are available online at [http://www.lgmarshall.org/Reformed/kuyper\\_lecturescalvinism.html](http://www.lgmarshall.org/Reformed/kuyper_lecturescalvinism.html).

<sup>30</sup> [http://www.lgmarshall.org/Reformed/kuyper\\_lecturescalvinism.htm](http://www.lgmarshall.org/Reformed/kuyper_lecturescalvinism.htm).

<sup>31</sup> John Witte Jr., “The Biography and Biology of Liberty: Abraham Kuyper and the American Experiment,” in Lugo, *Religion, Pluralism and Public Life*, 245.

<sup>32</sup> Kuyper’s account of the development of religion in America is almost entirely focused on the Puritans. He has no account of the rabid anti-

The state should proscribe nothing concerning the content of religion, nor should it support the churches in any material form, an argument clearly drawn not from Calvin, but from the later experience of the Reformed churches. For Kuyper, this formed the basis of his argument for a plurality of confessions: the state was to support the diversity of churches as a reflection of the multiplicity of the Church of Christ on earth.

This led to Kuyper's most significant idea, and one which is currently enjoying a strong revival in American Protestantism, that of the "Social Sphere".<sup>33</sup> For Kuyper, these social spheres include schools, churches, guilds, families, synagogues, mosques etc., all bodies protected by the civil authority of state (law, police etc). They are voluntary associations which are not, crucially, dependent on the state for their authority, but rather on God-given liberty. They are not a law unto themselves, just as individual freedom does not permit one to do as one might wish. Rather, they co-exist through a balance of rights and respect for the liberties of other groups. Kuyper saw in America the embodiment of Calvinist balance of liberty and order. Paralleling Weber, he believed that this was what would enable America to wrest from Europe leadership of the world.

This takes us briefly to Kuyper's understanding of what constituted Calvinism. Like his American hosts, he looked to a historical lineage that ran from Geneva to Holland to England to America, which he believed could realise Calvin's vision where Europe had failed. "Hence, as a central phenomenon in the development of humanity," he wrote, "Calvinism is not only entitled to an honourable position by the side of Paganistic, Islamistic and Romanistic forms, since like these it represents a peculiar principle dominating the whole of life, but it also meets every required

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Catholicism of many of the founding fathers. See, Steven Waldmen, *Founding Faith. Providence, Politics, and the Birth of Religious Freedom in America* (New York: Random House, 2008), 40–55.

<sup>33</sup> Jonathan Chaplin, "Civil Society and the state: A Neo-Calvinist Perspective," in Jeanne Heffernan Schindler (ed), *Christianity and Civil Society. Catholic and Neo-Calvinist Perspectives* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 67–96.

condition for the advancement of human development to a higher stage.”<sup>34</sup> Historically, this was a gross oversimplification, but it proved a powerful vision. “The twentieth Chapter of the fourth book of Calvin’s *Institutes*,” Kuyper wrote, “is the starting point. Everything that later came forth in reformed theology is nothing but a repetition of foundational insights of Calvin’s work.”<sup>35</sup> Calvin had bequeathed to America through the Puritans the dual gifts of freedom of conscience and liberty from interference by the magistrate in a person’s innermost beliefs. Calvinists, according to Kuyper, brought about modernity by realizing the consequences that flowed from this liberty: freedom of speech, liberty of worship, and free expression of thought.<sup>36</sup> Significantly, he attributed to the Calvinists the separation of church and state, that the church derives its authority directly from God and is not mediated through the state. He further attributed to Calvinists the principles of mixed government that had developed into federalism and republicanism.<sup>37</sup>

Two of the most controversial, though also enduring aspects of Kuyper’s thought concerned his notion of the relationship of religion to culture and the necessity of multiple confessions, or even religions within society. In addressing the nature of religious plurality in

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<sup>34</sup> Kuyper, Stone Lectures, Lecture One, “Calvinism as Life System.”

<sup>35</sup> Cited in John Witte, *The Reformation of Rights: Law, religion and human rights in early modern Calvinism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 252.

<sup>36</sup> “Call to mind that this turn in the history of the world could not have been brought about except by the implanting of another principle in the human heart, and by the disclosing of another world of thought to the human mind; that only by Calvinism the psalm of liberty found its way from the troubled conscience to the lips; that Calvinism has captured and guaranteed to us our constitutional civil rights; and that simultaneously with this there went out from Western Europe that mighty movement which promoted the revival of science and art, opened new avenues to commerce and trade, beautified domestic and social life, exalted the middle classes to positions of honor, caused philanthropy to abound, and more than all this, elevated, purified, and ennobled moral life by puritanic seriousness; and then judge for yourselves whether it will do to banish any longer this God-given Calvinism to the archives of history, and whether it is so much of a dream to conceive that Calvinism has yet a blessing to bring and a bright hope to unveil for the future.” Stone Lectures, “Calvinism as Life System.”

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

society, Kuyper clearly accommodated Calvinism to certain liberal principles, while on points concerning the nature of religion he parted company with many of his contemporaries.<sup>38</sup>

Kuyper's concept of culture was drawn from his idea of "common grace" by which he coupled Calvin's teaching on the divine will to a modern notion of progress towards an industrial, Protestant, democratic state. Kuyper distinguished between "particular grace" by which the "elect" are saved and a "common grace" that infuses creation, sanctifying the world. This is achieved by a wishful reading of Calvin's doctrine of total depravity in book two of the *Institutes*.<sup>39</sup> While Calvin suggests the possibility of general grace, he focuses almost exclusively on corruption and humanity's dependence on God's grace. Kuyper, however, develops the possibility of "common grace" to speak of the divine nature of human culture, science, and industry. Kuyper's thought was grounded in a distinction of civil society and the state. In civil society humanity actualizes the potentials of God's creation.<sup>40</sup> The state, again echoing Calvin, copes with the effects of sin and organizes society in which God has granted to individuals the right to cultivate the gifts they have received. These gifts are developed in cultural and social life.

Kuyper argues for a two track position in which both government and the people receive authority directly from God: the state to protect and organize and society to further social and cultural development. Both must come to an arrangement that honours the majesty of the supreme authority, God. It is not the individual's rights that must be protected from the state, but the dynamic quality of civil society. As Nicholas Woltersdorff has observed, "...in his thought are the outlines of a strikingly original account of a

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<sup>38</sup> Nicholas Woltersdorff, "Abraham Kuyper's Model of a Democratic Polity for Societies with a Religiously Diverse Citizenry," in Cornelis van der Kooi and Jan de Bruijn (eds), *Kuyper Reconsidered. Aspects of his Life and Work* (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij: 1999), 197.

<sup>39</sup> *Institutes*, 2.2.12.

<sup>40</sup> Woltersdorff, "Abraham Kuyper's Model of a Democratic Polity," 203.

religiously pluralistic society with a limited, responsible and democratic government.”<sup>41</sup>

Kuyper marks an important moment in Reformed Christianity. Looking at the nineteenth century he reckoned that Reformed theology, having lost many of its doctrinal teeth, was in danger of becoming irrelevant to contemporary society. His project was to explain the diversity of religions, and in Calvinism he saw his means. To achieve it, however, he offered a selective and, at times, radical interpretation of Calvin. He accepted Weber’s idea that Calvinism was the epitome of religious rationalization, and he hitched his concept of the sacred/secular to a thoroughly modern belief in progress. The engagement of religion and culture would drive forward the state to something that was ultimately a Western Protestant hegemony. In America Kuyper’s teaching fell on fertile ground, represented in the worldview of Woodrow Wilson. In Europe, however, the slaughter in the trenches led to the dark works of Oswald Spengler and Johann Huizinga, and Kuyper’s identification of culture with Christianity found a harsh critic in another Reformed theologian who would appeal to the Reformation, Karl Barth.

### **Karl Barth and the Tenuousness of the Sacred and Secular**

Following the First World War the Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) turned his back on the nineteenth-century liberal theology in which he had been educated. Crucial to this dramatic move was his reading of Calvin while serving as a parish minister and subsequently as a professor at Göttingen. “Religion is not the sure ground on which human culture safely rests,” he wrote, “it is the place where civilization and its partner, barbarism, are rendered fundamentally questionable.”<sup>42</sup> Barth repudiated the association of Christ and culture which he saw embodied in eminent figures such as Adolf von Harnack, church historian and advisor to Kaiser Wilhelm.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Karl Barth, *The Theology of Schleiermacher, Lectures at Göttingen, winter semester of 1923-24* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 258.

It was Harnack who had written the Kaiser's speech in 1914 in which the Germans were identified as a holy people.<sup>43</sup> Writing in 1928 of Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1899), the great German liberal Protestant theologian, Barth declared that his was "the ethics of the bourgeoisie growing prosperous in the time of the consolidation of the Bismarckian Empire".<sup>44</sup> Barth's great enterprise in his study of Schleiermacher and liberal theology was to discover what made theology captive to culture.<sup>45</sup> Later in life this sentiment was most strikingly formulated in his charge that Nazi Germany was awash with the baptismal waters of Lutheranism.

Barth's response to the relationship of the sacred and secular is evident in his ambivalent, and often ambiguous, reading of John Calvin, with whom he had an almost love-hate relationship. He found most significant in Calvin the sixteenth-century reformer's emphatic emphasis on God's sovereignty, his unknowability, and the dependence of humanity on the Word of God. For Barth, in the wasteland that is modern culture, there is no possibility of an ascent to a God who is wholly other. The separation between the two cannot be bridged by sentiment or rationality—there can only be divine descent. This is not to deny that Barth was deeply engaged with contemporary culture. It was the damaging confusion of the human and divine, so much at the root of nineteenth-century theology that he sought to dispel, to turn away from a theology that divinized humanity.

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<sup>43</sup> The most significant study of the subject is Gangolf Hübinger, *Kulturprotestantismus und Politik: Zum Verhältnis von Liberalismus und Protestantismus im wilhelminischen Deutschland* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr Verlag, 1994). See also, Karl Hammer, *Deutsche Kriegstheologie 1870-1918* (Munich: Kosel, 1971). On Barth's rejection of the imperial theologians, see Wilfred Härle, "Der Aufruf der 93 Intellektuellen und Karl Barths Bruch mit der liberalen Theologie," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 72 (1975): 209–210.

<sup>44</sup> Karl Barth, "The Problem of Ethics Today," in *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (Peter Smith, 1958), 145.

<sup>45</sup> Timothy J. Gorringer, *Karl Barth Against Hegemony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 115.

Barth's Christological model became the basis for his understanding of God to the world and of Christ to culture.<sup>46</sup> The God who is unknowable speaks the Word to humanity, thereby establishing the only possible basis for knowledge. Barth expressed this clearly in his treatment of Anselm:

This attitude [Anselm desiring to pray] is not just that of a "pious" thinker who offers his work to the service of the divine work that his work may be done well. It is that of course. But, above and beyond that, it is a specific and perhaps the most decisive expression of his scientific objectivity. Everything depends not only on the fact that God grants him grace to think correctly about him, but also on the fact that God himself comes within his system as the object of his thinking, that he "shows" himself to the thinker and in so doing modifies "correct" thinking to an *intelligere esse in re* [knowledge of the thing itself]. Only thus does the grace of Christian knowledge become complete.<sup>47</sup>

This establishes a relationship and the only basis for knowledge of God and his Word. The Church lives in obedience to the Word as spoken to it by God and "in turn, speaks forth and acts in light of

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<sup>46</sup> Barth's route to this was through a return to the Chalcedonian formula, and his means was in part his reading of Calvin. Christ was of one nature with the Father, but also of one nature with humanity. Significant here was Barth's recourse to the classical Reformed tradition in speaking of the *communicatio idiomatum* in discussing the relation of human and divine natures of Christ. Barth wanted to strengthen the distinction found in the Reformed writers between the divine and human natures: whereas the divine is capable of the human, the human is not capable of the divine. Paul Luis Metzger, *The Word of Christ and the Word of Culture. Sacred and Secular through the Thought of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 52.

<sup>47</sup> Karl Barth, *Anselm: fides quaerens intellectum*, trans Ian W. Robertson (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1960), 39.

God's message of reconciliation through the Word, namely, Jesus Christ."<sup>48</sup>

The apparent ambivalence resides in Barth's desire to hold that culture is revelatory, and thereby preserve an important place for the secular. This argument needs to be distinguished from his loathing of those who have collapsed the distinction between the sacred and the secular. From his reading of Calvin, Barth is clear that Church and culture stand together, distinct though inseparable, united in the Word of God.<sup>49</sup> As Metzger argues, "the Word mediates the union of the two natures or spheres in such a way that the identity and characteristics of each is in no way communicated to the other."<sup>50</sup> It is the Chalcedonian formula on the two natures of Christ which will provide for him a model of unity and distinction.

Yet it is at this point that Barth and Calvin part ways. For the sixteenth-century reformer, the self-revelation of God in creation and natural law lead the human eye to the truth of God, even among those who are pagans. One of the reasons Calvin favoured rest on the Sabbath was so that the faithful might have time to ponder the wisdom and power of God as revealed in His works.<sup>51</sup> Barth in his debate with Emil Brunner famously rejected any suggestion of

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<sup>48</sup> See also, Graham Ward, "Barth, Modernity, and Postmodernity," in John Webster (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 274–295.

<sup>49</sup> Here we find in Barth the deployment of a major teaching of Calvin which became known as the "extra Calvinisticum". It derives from the debate between the Reformed and Lutherans over the Eucharist in the sixteenth century and the doctrine of ubiquity, which Zwingli and then Calvin robustly denied. In short, the Reformed, starting with Calvin, argued that the logos, incarnate in the Word "fills heaven and earth". To the Lutherans, this was nothing short of the old heresy of Nestorianism, but for the Reformed it was the expression of how the two natures related to one another through the person of the Word. This became Barth's model for the relationship of the Church to the world. On Barth's critical relationship to the "extra Calvinisticum", see Bruce McCormack, "Grace and Being: The Role of God's Gracious Election in Karl Barth's Theological Ontology," in Webster (ed), *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, 95–98.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>51</sup> On Calvin and vision, see Randall Zachman, *Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2007), 389–390.

natural law or theology, the relationship of church and society depending wholly on God's proclamation.<sup>52</sup>

Barth's understanding of the relationship of the sacred and secular takes us to his reading of history, and of the Reformation in particular. As Ralph Wood has noted, "Far from being an anti-modernist. Barth welcomes the radical distinction between church and culture which Western secularization has accomplished."<sup>53</sup> Barth did not praise secularism in its rejection of God or Christianity, but rather its repudiation of cultural Christianity. Secularization, according to Barth freed the Church from nominal Christianity by creating a sphere of human existence that stood over against the radical message of the Gospel. The Reformation, with its recovery of the "Church of the Word" had, in Barth's view, rescued humanity from the *corpus christianorum* of the medieval world. The Church is liberated from culture in order to develop a more critical and effective relationship with it.<sup>54</sup>

Barth's understanding of the Church and its relationship to God remains a disputed point among scholars.<sup>55</sup> He fiercely rejected Calvin's doctrine of double predestination in favour of a teaching on election that ventured towards universalism understood as a covenant of grace. One of the consequences of his reconfiguration of election was his casting of the divine-human relationship.<sup>56</sup> In this covenant the human partner is not merely passive, but actively

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<sup>52</sup> This debate is thoroughly discussed in John W. Hart, *Karl Barth vs. Emil Brunner. The Formation and Dissolution of a Theological Alliance* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001).

<sup>53</sup> Ralph C Wood, *The Comedy of Redemption: Christian Faith and Comic Vision in Four American Novelists* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1988), 68.

<sup>54</sup> Metzger, *Word of Christ*, 87

<sup>55</sup> Stanley Hauerwas argues that Barth is unable to supply a basis for communal ethics and that his Christianity remains highly individualistic. "On Honour: By Way of a Comparison of Barth and Trollope," in Nigel Biggar (ed), *Reckoning with Barth. Essays in Commemoration of the Centenary of Karl Barth's Birth* (London and Oxford: Mowbray, 1988), 145–169. A response is found in Paul T. Nimmo, *Being in Action. The Theological Shape of Barth's Ethical Vision* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 158–161.

<sup>56</sup> McCormack, *Grace and Being*, 99–100.

involved, responding to the Word by being obedient to the divine command.

What of the Church and its relationship to secular society? Following Barth's understanding of election, God wills the salvation of all, not simply those inside the Church.<sup>57</sup> God's speaking to humanity is not limited to the Church: as Barth once wrote, "God may speak to us through Russian communism, through a flute concerto, through a blossoming shrub or a dead dog. We shall do well to listen to him if he really does so."<sup>58</sup> For Barth, these revelations outside of the Church are authenticated by the testimony of Scripture and the Spirit. The church bears witness to God's revelation in its profession and life and should engage actively with the wider, non-Christian community, serving as a model and offering its prophetic voice. Barth opposed Christian political parties, but urged Christians to be involved in the life of the community. Barth does not rule out witness to Christ from outside the Church and embraces modernity insofar as it rips apart the old and false alignment of Christianity and culture.

Barth understood the relationship between sacred and secular in terms of a Reformed understanding of the sacrament far more akin to Zwingli than Calvin. He made a direct comparison in his *Church Dogmatics*:

...we are reminded of the eating and drinking of bread and wine, which do not have in themselves, but which, without ceasing to be what they are, acquire and have in the Lord's Supper, the function and capability of indicating and confirming the fellowship of the community with its Lord, its participation in His body and blood and its attachment to His person. Thus, even though these words do not cease

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<sup>57</sup> See the recent discussion of Barth on election in Matthias Gockel, *Barth and Schleiermacher on the Doctrine of Election: A Systematic-Theological Comparison* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), esp. 158–197.

<sup>58</sup> *Church Dogmatics* 1/1.60. Cited from Clifford J. Green, *Karl Barth. Theologian of Freedom* (San Francisco: Collins, 1989), 24.

to be elements of general human speech, which may be used and understood or misunderstood by all, nevertheless, not by the men who speak them, but by the omnipotent God who calls these men to the service of His Word and uses their secular words, they are given the power to bear testimony to His Word.<sup>59</sup>

Barth is clear, following Calvin, that Christ is Lord of both the civil and ecclesiastical spheres. Christians participate in the civil community out of a shared interest in the health of that community.<sup>60</sup> In Barth's words they "subordinate" themselves to the state because they belong to it, but this is to be distinguished from blind obedience. There is no rule for a Christian state, for, although the state is under God's rule, its primary functions (to offer protection of law, justice etc) are to be carried out regardless of whether the people are believers or not. Forms of government, therefore, are not essential, for they are human institutions and not bearers of revelation. This returns us to Barth on the church: to the civil community it proclaims Christ and renders judgement, but it does not offer a programmatic position.<sup>61</sup> It lives in light of God's

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<sup>59</sup> *Church Dogmatics*, IV/3.2, 737.

<sup>60</sup> "The Church is the fellowship of those who, as members of the one Body of the one Head, are bound and committed to this Lord of theirs and therefore to no other. It follows that the church will never understand and interpret political freedom and the basic law which the state must guarantee to the individual citizen other than in the sense of the basic duty of responsibility which is required of him. (This was never made particularly clear in the classic proclamations of so-called 'human rights' in America and France). The citizen is responsible in the whole sphere of his freedom, political and non-political alike. And the civil community is naturally responsible in the maintenance of its freedom as a whole." *The Christian Community and the Civil Community*, 285.

<sup>61</sup> "In the political sphere the Christian community can draw attention to its Gospel only indirectly, as reflected in its political decisions, and these decisions can be made intelligible and brought to victory not because they are based on Christian premises but only because they are politically better and more calculated to preserve and develop the communal life". *Christian Community and Civil Community*, 292. Further, "The opportunity that is offered

direct communication, and it is that inspiration which permits the Church to address each moment individually. It might, conceivably, arrive at two different judgements depending on changed circumstances. The state is a necessity in a fallen world; it knows nothing of the Kingdom of God except what it is told by the Church. The Church does its duty when it calls the state to its proper end: the preservation of humanity by the establishment of law. The church cannot favour tyranny or any form of government that usurps this—thus Barth’s revulsion at the compromises of German Protestant churches of the Third Reich.

Barth rejected religion, the sacraments, and essentially church structures themselves, because everything is dependent on the immediacy of contact between the community and God: God speaks, and so the community and individuals respond. It is a highly situational ethic which Barth himself lived and for which he was not infrequently criticized. Many of his supporters could not understand why he did not respond to the Russian invasion of Hungary in 1956 in the same way he had so thunderously denounced National Socialism. For Barth, that missed the essential point and returned Christian action back into the world of the merely human. Barth’s response to the danger posed by the domestication of Christianity begun with the Reformation was a radical reformulation of the relationship of the human and divine which made men and women attentive to God’s speaking in particular contexts.

### **Concluding Reflections**

Calvin’s distinction of the sacred and secular was largely derived from Augustine’s *City of God* and Luther’s teaching of the two kingdoms. Having been denied the independent church he had

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to fulfill this duty is simply the one that lies nearest to hand: the preaching of the whole gospel of God’s grace, which as such is the whole justification of the whole people – including politics. The gospel which proclaims the king and the kingdom that is now hidden but will one day be revealed, is political from the very outset, and if it is preached to real (Christian and non-Christian) people on the basis of a right interpretation of the Scriptures it will necessarily be prophetically political.” (293)

envisaged on his return to Geneva in 1541, Calvin held to the fundamental difference between the spiritual realities administered by the Church and the worldly affairs of the state. To confuse them, in his eyes, was to return to the theocracy of the Old Testament (this was his criticism of Zurich and, later, England). As witnessed in his own life, relations between the sacred and secular remained volatile and in constant danger of collapse. For the Protestant reformers this negotiated arrangement was often held together by their prophetic office. For Calvin, this distinction of the two realms fell under the sovereignty of God. What Max Weber identified, and Charles Taylor has recently discussed, are the consequences of the uncoupling of this separation of the sacred and secular from their theological roots. In moments of crisis both Abraham Kuyper and Karl Barth sought to reclaim the Reformed tradition to find alternatives to what they saw as atheistic secularism.

In their pursuit of ecumenism, the mainline Reformed churches of the twentieth century readily jettisoned their theological heritage, favouring in return a Christian engagement with the world and vague notions of agreement. But as even the doyen of cultural Christianity, and former Professor at Yale, H. Richard Niebuhr, once declared, had Jesus “undertaken to reform the religious and national culture, eliminating what is archaic in ceremonial and civil law, he might have been a great boon to his society, but instead of reforming culture he ignored it”.<sup>62</sup> Twentieth-century Protestantism has struggled to make a coherent case for explicitly religious involvement in the realms of politics and science. By failing to recognize a proper realm of the secular, and by entering into areas for which it could make no authoritative claim, Protestantism has given itself over to a type of identity religion which focuses on (or even obsesses with) the self and seeks to integrate religion with such identifiers as sexuality and politics. The consequence of this in the last ten years has been that even those on the liberal left are beginning to question the separation

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<sup>62</sup> Cited in Darryl Hart, *A Secular Faith. Why Christianity favours the separation of Church and State* (Chicago: I.R. Dee, 2006), 252.

of church and state, particularly if they can find church support for their social agendas. Consider, for example, the engagement of the churches in the debates over Proposition 8 in California in 2008 (the issue of same sex marriage).

A recovery of the Reformed/Augustinian distinction of the temporal and spiritual enables Christians to live in the world as religious citizens, to be obedient to God and ruler. To accept the distinction is, I think, to create space for other communities (Christians, Jews, Muslims, non-believers) and for differences of political opinion in a public space with decision making bodies. Calvin reminds us of the temporary and contingent nature of the state; it is part of God's created order established for the benefit of humanity. Recognizing the essential part of the secular in their religion, enables Reformed Protestants to put aside both a sectarian rejection of wider, diverse society or of politics and the retreat into private religion.

Central to this endeavour, I suggest, is something that links the Reformed with other traditions and religions: the recovery of civil society in relationship to the created order, the individual and the state. Creation, according to Calvin, is God's self manifestation by which humanity contemplates its creator through the lenses of Scripture and the testimony of the Holy Spirit.<sup>63</sup> We are to contemplate and meditate on that world as the living image of God. As Calvin writes in his Genesis commentary, we are to labour in the garden as God's stewards.<sup>64</sup> In different ways, Calvin, Kuyper, and Barth all affirmed the sacredness of individual humans as created in the image of God. But, as Calvin was always at pains to stress, the Christian life is lived in community. Civil society, by which we think of social relations and associations (families, neighbourhoods, churches, etc) that mediate between the individual and the state, is

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<sup>63</sup> Calvin on Psalm 104.1.

<sup>64</sup> "Moreover that this economy and this diligence, with respect to those good things which God has given us to enjoy, may flourish among us; let everyone regard himself as the steward of God in all things which he possesses". *Commentary on Genesis* 2:15, CTS 1:125.

where Christians live their vocation. Our society, as we know all too well, has reduced us to a polarity between the state and the individual, stripping away those communal bodies by which we are defined.

Twenty-five years ago Richard Neuhaus commented that mainline Protestant churches had essentially bought the idea that society is an individualistic contest of passions in which they had little to say.<sup>65</sup> The churches have readily abrogated any sense of cultivating morally responsible people in civil society, preferring to believe that religion should not intervene in politics and society. This privatization of religion, in which the mainline Reformed churches have so readily connived, has led to a “divorce of the state from culture, and from the religion that is at the heart of culture”.<sup>66</sup> The liberal view has long held that religion needs to be removed from the public sphere; mainline Protestantism has acquiesced and speaks in muted tones, willing and accepting its irrelevance.<sup>67</sup>

Barth and Kuiper turned to Calvin in different ways to speak to churches they believed had lost their way in culture. Kuiper could not ultimately account for a state that was not Christian; he looked to Calvinism as the solution and his vision was firmly tied to a western, imperial conception of religion. Nevertheless, it was a significant and important correction to the ossified Reformed Christianity of the nineteenth century. Barth’s position was similarly salutary, and few voices of the century were more powerful. He tore at the fabric of cultural Christianity and spoke articulately about witness to a dark world, but in so doing he left the church weak and indeterminate. Both, however, called the Reformed to recover their prophetic witness to civil society. My argument is that the challenge facing Reformed Christians, as it is all Christians, is to find ways of

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<sup>65</sup> Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 138.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> The argument for the removal of religion from the public sphere is clearly laid out in Ann Pellegrini and Janet R. Jakobsen, *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

participating in the broader civil society which is not Christian, but part of God's creation, and therefore to be engaged with and understood as part of God's revelation to us. We cannot own that public space because it must be shared with others, but it does not prevent us from working for its welfare and speaking from our Christian convictions.

Participation in the institutional life of society is not only good but obligatory, for religion and politics are not ultimately confined to separate spheres. We honour God in dutiful service by proclaiming the Gospel and celebrating the sacraments in our churches and by speaking out and working for the health of the public sphere. That public space, however, will have numerous voices of those of different religions and of no religion. The forms of these relations will vary according to cultures and circumstances—one of the greatest tragedies of recent times has been the belief that Christianity is inseparable from certain forms of government and I am delighted that Dr Hankey has launched this discussion by putting before us a broader vision. Calvin understood all too well that relations between the sacred and secular are constantly tense and fraught with complications, but as he also wrote, it is in our participation in both that we find our full humanity.+



## Response to Bruce Gordon

Rebecca Coughlin  
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In his paper, Dr Gordon presents us with a consideration of the relationship between secular and sacred within the thought of three Reformed Christian thinkers: John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper and Karl Barth. In keeping with the historical approach of this conference, Dr Gordon has clearly identified the historical contexts in which each of these theologians wrote and the impact this context had on their work.

As he traces the now familiar line from Reformed Protestantism to the emergence of the idea of the secular in the West, Dr Gordon challenges Reformed Christians to recognize the role of the secular in their own religious tradition and from this recognition to participate in “broader civil society” while rejecting the “retreat into private religion.”

Dr Gordon provides examples of more recent iterations of John Calvin’s position and argues that those thinkers had attempted to meet similar challenges in their own times; in the end, however, Dr Gordon suggests that neither Kuyper nor Barth provided a satisfactory answer to the current challenge.

In this brief response I would like to look a little more closely at the work of Karl Barth: how his distinctly political positions may or may not help to guide an answer to Dr Gordon’s call; and how we might learn from the possible failures of his system. First, however, I will turn to John Calvin, to expand a little on the description of the

Reformed position and elaborate on the role of the public sphere in the life of the Christian.

Dr Gordon ends his paper with the assertion that “As Calvin understood all too well, relations between the sacred and the secular are constantly tense and fraught with complications, but as he wrote, it is in our participation in both that we find our full humanity.” Taking up the position that the Reformation and, in particular, the work of John Calvin stand at the beginning of the development of the secular within the Early Modern period, Dr Torrance Kirby has recently argued that Calvin’s “public sphere” is necessary to the life of the Christian, as it is the very place of salvation. This stems from Calvin’s definition of a two-fold process of grace: the Christian is at once justified by faith received from Christ and also sanctified by the ongoing process of activity in the world which is born out of this primary passive reception.<sup>68</sup> This two-fold grace forms the theological basis of Calvin’s public sphere and the reason why he must at once maintain a clear distinction between the spiritual and temporal realms, and insist on their “intimate union.”<sup>69</sup> To do this, Dr Kirby argues that Calvin makes recourse to the Chalcedonian definition of the two natures of Christ.

This Christological and Incarnational exemplar has already been cited in this conference by both Drs Thorne and Curran as possibly a fruitful way to both strongly divide the temporal from the spiritual, and yet maintain their unity at the same time. The definition bears repeating here in part:

...we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one  
and the same Son, at once complete in Godhead and  
complete in manhood...recognized in Two Natures,  
without confusion, without change, without division,

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<sup>68</sup> Torrance Kirby, “Negotiating the *forum politicum* and the *forum conscientiae*: John Calvin and the religious origins of the modern public sphere,” in Angela Vanhaelen and Joseph Ward, eds. *Making Publics in Early Modern Europe: Publics and Spaces* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), in press.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence....<sup>70</sup>

Calvin employs this model to construct his conception of the temporal and spiritual. To quote Dr Kirby one last time:

while there are two distinct orders of reality (or “natures”) they are nonetheless hypostatically united within each individual conscience; Calvin insists that they are by no means antithetical, indeed [he says] “we must know that they are not at variance.”<sup>71</sup>

For Calvin, the public realm is where the grace of sanctification is worked out. As the locus of sanctifying grace, the public sphere is necessary to the fulfillment of Christian salvation; additionally, this public sphere was also, for Calvin, the place of civil government which Dr Gordon explained was charged with the protection of the freedom of conscience of its citizens. This reading highlights the public realm as the place of community, and insists on the community as that through which salvation is achieved.

I believe it is this insistence on community that can and should form the basis for a Reformed Christian response to Dr Gordon’s challenge. However, it is also the place where Dr Gordon suggests that Karl Barth’s response falls short. Dr Gordon has presented us with a somewhat critical depiction of Barth’s position; in the remaining portion of my response I will attempt to show how Barth, as self-consciously rooted within the Reformed-Calvinist tradition, offers some suggestions about how the Christian might proceed to engage fully with the secular world out of his or her Christian faith without falling victim to the retreat into private religion. Throughout

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<sup>70</sup> “The definition of Chalcedon, 451”, in *Documents of the Christian Church*, ed. Henry Bettenson, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (1963), 51.

<sup>71</sup> Kirby, “Negotiating the *forum politicum*?”

this account, I will attempt to situate the writings and works of Karl Barth historically. I want to highlight the very real implications of his work for the world in which he was living. These were no doubt always foremost in his mind as he wrote.

As Dr. Gordon noted in his paper, Barth's system was decidedly not prescriptive; he repeatedly refused to prescribe universal ethical formulations or support any particular political system. As was mentioned in our discussion briefly last night, this position grew out of Barth's witness of the rise of National Socialism under Hitler. "By April 1933 the National Socialists were demanding the full assimilation of the German churches, and Hitler gave Ludwig Müller full powers over church affairs as Reich Bishop of the Evangelical Church."<sup>72</sup> Among the guiding principles of the newly created Evangelical Church of the German Nation were the following statements:

We see in race, folk, nation, orders of existence granted and entrusted to us by God. God's law for us is that we look to the preservation of these orders...In the mission to the Jews we perceive a grave danger to our nationality. It is the entrance gate for alien blood into our body politic...In particular, marriage between Germans and Jews is to be forbidden. We want an evangelical Church that is rooted in our nationhood. We repudiate the spirit of Christian world citizenship. We want the degenerating manifestations of this spirit...overcome by a faith in our national mission that God has committed to us.<sup>73</sup>

Within the year, an opposition had begun to organize. Barth joined this group which came to be known as the Confessing Church. In May 1934 they organized a Synod in Barmen, and

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<sup>72</sup> James C. Livingstone, "The Theologies of Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer" *Modern Christian Thought Vol. 2* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1997), 99.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 99–100.

produced what is now known as the Barmen Declaration. The declaration was largely written by Barth, and we can clearly see the marks of his theological program in each of the six articles.

In the first article the authors reject the notion that the church “could or should recognize as a source of its proclamation, beyond and besides this one Word of God, yet other events, powers, historic figures, and truths as God’s revelation.”<sup>74</sup> The Word, Jesus Christ, as found in Scripture is the only basis for knowledge of God, and the only true foundation for Christian claims to truth. This statement is clearly intended to counter notions of natural theology, and especially, the kind of appeal to the “orders of creation” found in the guiding principles of the new Evangelical Church. In the second article, the declaration countered those who would claim that the church should stay out of politics, it declares: “We reject the false doctrine that there could be areas of our life in which we would belong not to Jesus Christ but to other lords, areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him.”<sup>75</sup> This reminds us of Calvin’s claim about the necessity of the public sphere for salvation, and also insists that it is imperative for the Christian to work for the preservation of freedom of conscience in the public sphere, which is essential for the working out of salvation.

Finally, the Barmen declaration attempted to set limits on the possible power that the state could hold over the Church, and equally to limit the Church’s power—denying that the Church should or could become an organ of the state.<sup>76</sup> It is important to note that Barth is not denying the secular here, nor suggesting that the Christian ignore the public realm and retreat into private religion. Rather, he is attempting to preserve both realms in their difference from one another—providing each with its proper sphere, without confusion. Moreover, it is clear from the first and second articles

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<sup>74</sup> Karl Barth, *Barmen Declaration*, Article 1, in Clifford Green, *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom* (London: Collins Publishers, 1989), 149.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

especially, that these two realms are and must be connected, as both exist out of and in subordination to the Word of God.

Barth would later come into conflict with one of his fellow German theologians, Emil Brunner, when, after WWII, he repudiated Barth in an open letter for not condemning communist totalitarianism as he had Nazi tyranny. Barth responded:

The church must not concern itself eternally with various 'isms' and systems, but with the historical realities as seen in the light of the Word of God and of faith. Its obligation lies, not in the direction of any fulfilling of a natural law, but towards its living Lord. Therefore the Church never thinks, speaks, or acts 'on principle.' Rather, it judges spiritually and by individual cases.<sup>77</sup>

This had been Barth's position for some time, as earlier in his *Commentary on Romans* he had insisted that all Christian ethics were situational:

From the final point of view that we must take in Christ, there is no ethics. There is only the activity of God, to which our knowledge of the situation and the action it requires of us must correspond in every moment...For our part, knowledge of God is necessary...but that is a knowledge which grasps the situation in the moment, in God, not in a formula which is equally true for today and tomorrow, for here and there.<sup>78</sup>

Knowledge of God must be grounded at every moment in God's self-revelation through Jesus Christ. For Barth, anything else is idolatrous as it places human knowing outside and above the truth

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<sup>77</sup> Karl Barth, *Against Abstract Anti-Communism; Answer to Brunner 1948*, in Green, *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom*, 297.

<sup>78</sup> Karl Barth, *Der Romerbrief*, 1st ed. (Bern, 1919), quoted in Livingstone "The Theologies of Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer," 101.

revealed through the Word. This is especially true for him in the case of political systems, as he had witnessed with the rise of National Socialism, and as I believe we have seen with the rise of what Dr Hankey has referred to as the laic state. For Barth, in order to avoid any possibility of a political party claiming divine support, all systems must be measured against the Word of God, in every moment.

Barth did not condemn all human knowledge outside of Scripture; he did, however, insist that elements such as natural law and natural theology could not hold the same status as revelation. In his essay *The Christian Community and The Civil Community*, Barth implores Christians to use the language of reason when speaking to the secular world:

In the political sphere the Christian community can draw attention to its Gospel only indirectly, as reflected in its political decisions, and these decisions can be made intelligible and brought to victory not because they are based on Christian premises but only because they are politically better and more calculated to preserve and develop the communal life.<sup>79</sup>

Moreover, as we saw, the Christian is called to actively engage in the political life of the community, to ensure the preservation of human freedom, since for Barth the civil community “serves to protect man from the invasion of chaos and therefore to give him time: time for the preaching of the gospel; time for repentance; time for faith.”<sup>80</sup> Barth also indicates that there may be a positive element to the activity of the state:

Safeguarding this humanity may yield “an external, relative, and provisional embodiment” of the Kingdom of God. The state, as “allegory, correspondence, and analogue” to

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<sup>79</sup> Karl Barth, *Christian Community and Civil Community*, in Green, *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom* (London: Collins Publishers, 1989), 292.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

the Kingdom, “may reflect indirectly the truth and reality which constitute the Christian community”. This is possible even though the state does not know of the Kingdom as the work of Jesus Christ and even though no appeal is or can be made to the Word of God in the running of its affairs.<sup>81</sup>

This again points to the utter grounding of Barth’s system in the self-revelation of God, though Jesus Christ the Word, and His continued revelation in and through the life of the Christian and the civil communities. Again it is not that Barth does not see God as active in the world, but rather, that he questions our ability to know that activity by any rational or universal law—for him this would be an affront to God’s freedom and power.

Finally, I turn very briefly to Barth’s doctrine of election, of which I am not capable of giving more than the most elementary of surveys. In his *Church Dogmatics*, Barth presents a vision of election that is very different from John Calvin’s, and which, as Dr Gordon has pointed out, verges on a doctrine of universal election. For Barth, “Jesus Christ represents ‘the original and all-inclusive election,’ for of none other can it be said that ‘his election carries in it and with it the election of the rest.’ Jesus is at once the elect for all and the reprobate for all. It, therefore, follows that...predestination is ‘the non-rejection of man’.”<sup>82</sup> Barth would not wholly insist on universal election, because he claimed this would limit the “freedom of the divine grace”.<sup>83</sup> However, he also said the he could not maintain the opposite. While I do not wish to discuss the finer points of Reformed predestination, I would say that Barth’s vision of election appears to open a space for real dialogue and community among

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<sup>81</sup> William Werpehowski, “Karl Barth and politics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 232–33.

<sup>82</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II, 2 in Livingstone, “The Theologies of Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer,” 108.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

believers and non-believers. This is because his doctrine is based squarely on his Christology and his vision of God, in that, in the Incarnation, God declares himself *for* all humanity. All of humanity is saved, and for Barth the only difference is that the Christian is aware of it and responds to God's gift of grace with gratitude in service to humanity.<sup>84</sup>

As Dr. Gordon alluded to in his paper, there are many ways in which Barth's system is lacking: without any prescriptions the Church can be seen as not having an authoritative basis for Scriptural interpretation or a foundation for action. This is compounded with elements of Barth's ecclesiology which effectively dismantle the sacramental and authoritative structure of the Church in its temporal ordering. Further, the Church is always left in a position of reacting to the secular systems with which it is in dialogue. While these could lead to a retreat into private religion, it is important to recognize that this was not an option for Barth.

Through the account of Calvin's view of sanctification in and through the world, as clearly taken up by Barth, and by a view of the central place of Christ in Barth's understanding of God *for* the world, I hope I have shown that there are some important elements within Reformed Christianity which can help to begin to formulate a vision of what an answer to Dr Gordon's challenge might look like. The three main points we have considered are: (1) that the Christian cannot and should not support particular religious regimes, but must challenge all political powers which do not ensure freedom of conscience for their citizens and foster the peaceful life of the community; (2) Barth calls the Christian to speak to the secular world on its own terms, relying on reason and argument to witness the gospel to humanity; and (3) Barth's doctrine of universal election opens a space for dialogue between believers and non-believers, as the Christian is not elevated above the non-believer, but called to gratitude and service to humanity in light of God's gift of grace.

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<sup>84</sup> See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II, 1 and II, 2.

While I cannot propose to offer a full or complete response to Dr Gordon's challenge, I hope that by examining the historical particulars of Barth's positions a little more closely, I have at least added to the possibilities available for a fuller response, and pointed to some of the dangers which Barth witnesses to in his theology. †



## Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

In recent years, some of the world's most prominent secular philosophers from various traditions have been turning their attention to traditional religious sources. Hilary Putnam, perhaps the foremost analytical philosopher of mind, language and science, has devoted his recent work to Judaism and Jewish philosophy, and has become a practicing Jew.<sup>2</sup> German philosopher Jürgen Habermas has recently turned to studying the relation between religion and secularity, concluding that modern secularity and its most important principles are developments from the Judaeo-Christian tradition, a tradition from which it will need to continually draw in rethinking what form the post-national state should take.<sup>3</sup> That a positive interest in Judaism and Christianity would emerge from these leaders

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Wayne Hankey, Dan Wilband, Christopher Rice and Ron Haflidson for our discussions of Taylor's book. I am especially grateful to Neil Robertson for his helpful advice during the writing of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> See Putnam's *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life: Rosenzweig, Buber, Levinas, Wittgenstein* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), and his earlier "Levinas and Judaism" in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, eds. Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 33–62.

<sup>3</sup> "Universalistic egalitarianism, from which sprang the ideals of freedom and a collective life in solidarity, the autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, the individual morality of conscience, human rights and democracy, is the direct legacy of the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love. This legacy, substantially unchanged, has been the object of continual critical appropriation and reinterpretation. To this day, there is no alternative to it. And in light of the current challenges of a postnational constellation, we continue to draw on the substance of this heritage. Everything else is just idle postmodern talk." "A Conversation About God and the World" in Jürgen Habermas, *Time of Transitions* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006).

of Anglo-American analytical philosophy and German Critical Theory, neither one known for its devout piety, indicates to what extent philosophers can no longer avoid thinking seriously about the relation of sacred to secular.

It comes as much less of a surprise that Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor would turn his attention to the relation between religion and secularity and the possibilities for religion in contemporary Western society, the subject of his 2007 book *A Secular Age*.<sup>4</sup> Taylor's influential *Sources of the Self* (1992) sought to articulate the various threads which make up the modern moral identity through an examination of the religious and philosophical historical sources which formed it. Many atheist critics of *Sources* charged Taylor of using the historical argument to show that the modern identity cannot sustain itself independently of a theological ground, regardless of its self-understanding. Some even accused him of being an "Augustinian", a charge which I hope will strike you as quite strange by the end of this talk.<sup>5</sup>

It is difficult to overstate Taylor's impact on contemporary philosophy. Besides *Sources of the Self*, he has made major contributions to all kinds of questions: his critique of psychological behaviourism played a significant role in overturning the reduction of mental processes to physical mechanism;<sup>6</sup> his two books on Hegel—whatever one makes of their adequacy as a reading of Hegel—served to revive the study of Hegel in Anglo-American philosophy;<sup>7</sup> his criticism of atomistic liberalism qualifies him as one of the most important communitarians in political philosophy, arguing for the inseparability of individuals from their social, cultural, linguistic

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Belknap Press, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> On the reception of Taylor's work in light of its implicit Christianity, see Michael Morgan, "Religion, history and moral discourse," in *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism: The Philosophy of Charles Taylor in Question*, ed. James Tully (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 49–66.

<sup>6</sup> *The Explanation of Behaviour* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964).

<sup>7</sup> *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); *Hegel and Modern Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

context. In addition, Taylor is probably the closest thing we Canadians have to a “public intellectual” (with apologies to the current Leader of Her Majesty’s Loyal Opposition). Besides running unsuccessfully four times for the federal NDP in Quebec—once against a young politician named Pierre Elliot Trudeau—he has published a series of influential articles on Canadian federalism and Quebec sovereignty. Just prior to the publication of *A Secular Age*, Taylor, along with Quebec sociologist Gerard Bouchard (Lucien’s younger brother), was appointed by Premier Jean Charest to conduct an inquiry into what constitutes “reasonable accommodation” of religious and ethnic minorities, examining what should be the limits of what we have been calling at this conference “negative secularization”; and the commission’s report has since been published.<sup>8</sup> In 2007 Taylor was awarded the extremely prestigious (and lucrative) Templeton prize, which “honors a living person who has made an exceptional contribution to affirming life’s spiritual dimension, whether through insight, discovery, or practical works.”

As I mentioned, Taylor’s readers had often speculated on the role of Taylor’s Catholicism in his philosophical work. In 1996, on the occasion of receiving the Marianist Award, Charles Taylor gave a lecture entitled “A Catholic Modernity?”<sup>9</sup> the first time he explicitly addressed in any detail the role of his Catholic faith in his philosophy. Although he says that the theological ideas he discusses in this lecture “have been at the centre of [his] concern for decades,” he had never made them explicit because of the nature of contemporary philosophical discourse, which “has to try to persuade honest thinkers of any and all metaphysical and theological commitments.”<sup>10</sup> It is a very nice, short essay: I can recommend it to

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<sup>8</sup> Charles Taylor and Gérard Bouchard, *Building the Future: A Time for Reconciliation. Final Abridged Report of the Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences* (Québec: Government of Québec, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Charles Taylor, “A Catholic Modernity,” in *A Catholic Modernity: Charles Taylor’s Marianist Award Lecture*, ed. James L. Heft (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 13–38.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

all of you, and I will be drawing upon it today in my treatment of *A Secular Age*.

The title I was originally given when asked to write this paper, which, in retrospect, I should have stuck with, was “What to do with Charles Taylor's Big Book”. The book is indeed big (850 pages), and its impressive size is matched by its ambitious scope—it is an attempt to analyze how Western secularity emerged out of reformed Latin Christianity,<sup>11</sup> and to articulate the contours of our contemporary self-understanding to discern what might be the future of religion. *A Secular Age* has been widely anticipated ever since Taylor delivered his 1999 Gifford Lectures on the subject, and has been extremely well received. My main goal today is to give you a sense of the argument of this ‘big book’, what I take to be its most important contributions to understanding secularization, some real problems I detect in Taylor’s account, and some suggestions about some directions our study of secularization might take in light of Taylor’s book and the contributions in this conference.

### **A Secular Age—Scope, Method, Central Claims**

At the outset, some things should be clarified in order to situate *A Secular Age* within our discussion at this conference. Taylor’s chief interest in this book is not the relation between ecclesiastical and secular authority, nor the primacy of an independent secular realm; rather, he focuses on the emergence of widespread atheism in the West. Shifting the argument from secularization to atheism sharpens one of the questions posed by Dr Hankey in his opening paper: “to reconsider the basis of our previous evaluation of secularization as ‘a bad thing’, and reflect on whether we want to join in the enthusiasm

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<sup>11</sup> Editors’ Note: It is important to note that, while, for Taylor, the new atheistical secularity emerges from the reforming spirit within Western Christianity, this reform is not identical with the magisterial Reformation and its diverse continuations. Certainly the Reformation is one manifestation of the Western Christian reforming spirit, *perhaps* its most important, but to distinguish “reform” for Taylor from the “Reformation” we write the first here with a lower case “r” and the second with an upper case “R”.

for it and in the praise of Christianity as its originator.”<sup>12</sup> If we change the word ‘secularization’ in this question to ‘atheism’, is there any question of praise or enthusiasm or pride that it originates out of Christianity? We will see that Taylor will still answer ‘yes’, with important reservations.

Normally, we distinguish between two chief senses of secularization. The first refers to a certain way of configuring our political and social institutions and practices. Here our public spaces lose their grounding in and reference to God, and so believers of various faiths, as well as atheists, can participate in the life of the state, a secular sphere. A second sense of secularization refers to the turn away from religious belief and practice for a growing number of individuals.

One of the distinctive features of Taylor’s analysis in *A Secular Age* is the way he directs our attention to a third meaning of secularity<sup>13</sup> that has not previously played a role in the analysis of secularization. What he seeks to define is variously called by Taylor the background understanding, the social imaginary, or the “conditions of belief”. These are made up of both explicitly formulated beliefs and the implicit, unarticulated, social backdrop against which any thought, belief, or action has its significance, the pre-theoretical way we take things to be prior to any puzzlement over them. What especially distinguishes these background conditions of belief for Taylor from previous, non-secular ages, is that belief in

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<sup>12</sup> Wayne J. Hankey, “Problematic: Changing our Mind on Secularization: The Contemporary Debate about Secular and Sacred in Judaism, Christianity and Islam,” 12.

<sup>13</sup> Later in his argument Taylor articulates a fourth sense of what we mean by secular: the fact that we live in purely profane time, where our various institutions and associations are not constituted by anything which transcends contemporary common action. There are no structures which are grounded in God, in the structure of the world, or which were constituted in some exalted time out of mind—no structure which has a non-negotiable status, not subject to our own power to alter, replace, or abolish. In this sense, our social and political lives occur in purely profane, secular time. (Whether this is a fair assessment of examples like the foundational documents of the United States, for example, is an important question).

God is now one among many available options for each individual. This is the background shared by staunch believers and staunch atheists, and the various permutations which fall between these extremes. This, Taylor argues, is what most remarkably distinguishes our secular age. It is this phenomenon which needs to be explained and articulated in order to properly grasp the significance of the other two senses of secularization, since it is the condition without which political secularization and decline of belief and practice could not have occurred.

This helps to keep at bay an objection which obscures rather than clarifies the debate about secularization. Surely there were individuals in every age who did not believe in transcendent divinities, or who thought that the immanent world was exhaustive of what is. One might think here of the Greek sophists for whom man and not the gods is the measure of all things, or the oft-cited example of Epicurus and his followers, for whom gods exist, but without any causal connection to the natural or human world. But the difference for Taylor is that while certain particular individuals were able to conceive the possibility of exclusive humanism, this was never a view widely held by the general population. As Taylor says, "...these weren't yet really available alternatives. I mean alternative construals of fullness which could really make sense to people, outside of a very few original spirits".<sup>14</sup> It is thus to this unarticulated background or social imaginary that he turns his analysis, to bring out just how radically new our contemporary situation really is.

Taylor belongs firmly in the camp of those who see secularity (including the growth of atheism) as a development of Christianity, who affirm the truth and value of the modern secular, and who hold it to be consistent with theism in general, and Christianity in particular. He writes:

Others, in which I place myself, think that the practical primacy of life has been a great gain for human kind, and

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<sup>14</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 27. Subsequent references will be in-text citations.

that there is some truth in the self-narrative of the Enlightenment: this gain was in fact unlikely to come about without some breach in the established religion...But we nevertheless think that the metaphysical primacy of life espoused by exclusive humanism is wrong, stifling, and that its continued dominance puts in danger its practical primacy (*A Secular Age*, 637).

In other words, Taylor is arguing that reformed Christianity produced a secular world in which atheism is a live and popular option, and that the secular world is not only fundamentally compatible with a belief in God, but also that the basic principles of modern secularity, such as individual rights and popular sovereignty, are most stably and reliably realized within a religious standpoint which recognizes a god transcendent of the secular sphere.

Though Taylor has plenty of criticisms of orthodox, conservative Christianity, it is not against them that the argument is primarily directed, for this is not the intellectual climate of the contemporary academy, which is overwhelmingly atheist. The book is primarily addressed to those who think modernity necessarily means the death of religion (this, admittedly, is a view that can also be shared by particularly faint-hearted anti-modern believers, as if a providential, omnipotent God could be overpowered by modern subjectivity!) This is a commonly shared assumption in the sociological subfield of secularization: that the independent, natural, free, scientific, atheistic human being was always hidden throughout history under the layers of authority, fear, and illusion, and that modernity, through urbanization, industrialization, or any number of its other features, has gradually stripped these away so that this genuine human nature can finally shine forth. These accounts are what Taylor refers to as “subtraction stories”.

By focusing on the background that makes sense of our beliefs and practices, Taylor argues that modernity is not a transition beyond the confining frameworks and assumptions of pre-modern societies, but rather that it has its own background framework, one that is so

close to us that it can seem like unmediated nature, but which is itself a particular self-understanding or moral order.<sup>15</sup> Beyond undermining the secularist claim to have reached a kind of natural bedrock through relativizing the modern moral order, this approach allows Taylor to articulate the shape of both the recognized and unrecognized assumptions of modern secularity, to see in what ways immanent humanism closes off the human connection to transcendent divinity, and in what ways it offers new opportunities for divine-human communion.

### **Taylor's History from Reformation to Exclusive Humanism**

Taylor opens his account with a wonderfully simple and direct question:

why is it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable? (*A Secular Age*, 26)

By investigating how features of pre-modern religion are transformed through the reforming spirit of Latin Christianity, Taylor strives to bring out just how remarkable and strange it is that masses of people could now live a life of “exclusive humanism,” humanism without any reference to something that transcends the natural, human sphere. That a human world without God could appear to have the worth, stability, fullness, and truth necessary for fulfilling our highest moral and intellectual aspirations, as it appears to have done for many exclusive humanists, a radical change in our conception of this world needs to have occurred. Most people in 1500 or earlier could simply not have conceived centering themselves on a realm of human flourishing to the exclusion of divine orientation towards a

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<sup>15</sup> “I will be steadily arguing that Western modernity, including its secularity, is the fruit of new inventions, newly constructed self-understandings and related practices, and can’t be explained in terms of perennial features of human life” (*A Secular Age*, 22).

goal beyond human flourishing. This only becomes possible through a gradual change in the religious view of the self and of the created, finite world. Only at the end of this *religious* development can people start to imagine, not only that they do not need God, but that there exists a ‘secular’ secular, purely immanent in the world, yet which contains within it all the moral and spiritual resources required for the fulfillment of human nature. Our religious sources, through the inward turn of religion, are made so immanent in the human and in its world that this world can come to seem self-sufficient and satisfying. The great irony of this result is that the move to atheism was made possible by thoroughly religious motives.

What one learns forcefully from Taylor’s history is that this secular age, in which non-belief has become a real option for people, comes about through an historical development in the understanding of Christianity, not from the outside by atheists who would want to destroy Christian belief. Atheism, on Taylor’s account, is made possible through the development of conceptions of God, humanity, nature, and reason, among those thoroughly committed to genuine Christian belief and worship. The history of Latin Christianity involves a long process of ordering and disciplining the self and society to the point that people might no longer feel the need to look beyond themselves to maintain this result.

The historical development outlined by Taylor is rich and complex. As he says, it is not a straight path but rather a zigzag account full of unintended consequences (*A Secular Age*, 95). In what follows I will try to bring forward the principal stages of the development that Taylor traces from the pre-modern to the modern. The end result of this historical development is a view of the human individual that Taylor calls the “buffered self”, an achievement which implies certain developments both on the side of the self, and on the side of our view of the world from which the self has become buffered. This “buffered self”, Taylor’s shorthand for modern self-consciousness, is defined by its sense of self-completeness, invulnerability, being author of our own laws and master of the meaning of things. On the side of the self, through a gradual

discipline, there emerges a rationality disengaged from powerful feeling and bodily processes, a narrowing of our sphere of intimacy and the emergence of an ideal of polite and civilized behaviour. On the side of the world, there is disenchantment of the world, a mechanized view of the universe, a view of time as homogeneous, and a leaving behind of a Platonic world of hierarchical complementarity. The result of this “buffered self” is the modern sense of power, an ability to self-govern, a feeling of self-reliance and self-sufficiency.

Taylor sees this process as a realization of “one of the main themes of Christianity, as faith in the Incarnation, which keeps recurring in form after form in Christian history: the aspiration to bring Christ to the people, among the people, who have been left out or kept at a distance in the previous spiritual dispensation...” (*A Secular Age*, 93). A growing focus on Christ’s humanity brings about a focus on the world: on nature in its independence, on ordinary people in their particularity and in their everyday lives. In this way the whole process is a matter of an ever-deepening sense of the divine in the world, of the transcendent as immanent, of the sacredness of humanity and nature. All this results in the possibility of looking at this world as an independent and closed system. In his “A Catholic Modernity?”, where Taylor feels more free to speak in an explicitly religious vocabulary, he looks at the secularization process as one in which, through “the logic of Incarnation, Christianity seems to be interwoven more and more in human life” (“A Catholic Modernity?”, 17).

The argument that Taylor gives here is not a continuous and systematic history. I freely confess that my own grasp of the details of the religious thought and culture of the Reformation is, to say the least, shaky. I wouldn’t say this in just any room, but in the context of this conference it is quite possible I know less about Reformation thought and history than anyone else present here this morning. For that reason I will not be evaluating the adequacy of Taylor’s account of the history he covers. I am very relieved to have you all here, able

to comment on the truth of Taylor's account, and fill in any gaps in the process that I will now summarize.

I identify five stages in the development described by Taylor: (1) Pre-Modern; (2) Reformation; (3) Early Modern; (4) Enlightenment Deism, which leads directly to exclusive humanism. At the culmination of these stages, Taylor's initial question is answered: how did it become imaginable for the general population to become exclusive humanists? He then turns to a further stage, (5) the Immanent Counter-Enlightenment, which helps us discern the limitations of the atheistic result of this development within Latin Christendom.

*(1) The Pre-Modern*

Taylor starts with an analysis of certain features of pre-modern religion. There is a huge generalization in this treatment, which problematically assimilates Christianity in 1500 to all religion that comes before it, but Taylor wants to bring out the broadest lines to show us how a world might have existed for which the general possibility of unbelief is not even thinkable.

For the pre-modern, the natural world is full of divine purpose and meaning; great events in the natural world are seen as acts of God. Further, the world is full of spirits, demons, and moral forces, and in the Christian context, the omnipotent Christian God is the only possible safeguard against what Taylor calls "the enchanted world". God is visibly present as a cosmic agent, either as the cause of droughts and floods, plagues and health, or else as that power which can keep other spirits at bay. One's direct experience of the natural world is a constant and immediate illustration of divine presence.

In a world like this, the distinction between mind and world is fluid. There are purposive forces in nature that have inherent meaning. For example, the assertion that people are possessed by demons illustrates that the line between inside and outside is not fixed. This pre-modern consciousness Taylor calls the "porous self", in contrast to the "buffered self" which will emerge.

Further, for pre-modern man, God is immediately present as the foundation of the kingdom or the church order, in the way that the founding gods lived in the *polis*. God plays, as Taylor calls it, the role of an “existential-foundational” in society. In this sense, individuals relate to God as a society. There is a thorough intertwining of the political and the sacred. Distinguishing religion from political, economic, or social life is thoroughly impossible. Heresy cannot be permitted by the community, since the continued existence and flourishing of the order as a whole depends on the correct piety of each individual.

Another aspect of this pre-modern world on Taylor’s view is the configuration of “hierarchical complementarity”—where distinct roles in the social structure are distinguished hierarchically, but in which every level of this order is necessary. The lower, more subservient orders are required by the higher—there are those who pray, those who fight, those who work. Often understood through analogies with the human body’s organic unity, this view of social arrangement requires ways of life opposed to, and in equilibrium with, the best, most holy way of life. This implies what he calls a multi-speed system of Christian life, where the top of the hierarchy lives a far more religiously rigorous life than the lower orders. For Taylor, principles of order based on Platonic metaphysics fall into this category, insofar as the necessity of preserving all levels of the ecclesiastical and social world are given in the divine, natural structure of reality—the order is sacrosanct and self-justifying, it is given and not made.

Related to this balanced differentiation of lower and higher spiritual lives is a phenomenon Taylor illustrates through a very interesting discussion of Carnival. These are moments in the life of a society where the social order is, for certain scheduled periods, turned upside down—a fool becomes king for the day, and people engage in all kinds of behaviour that would be otherwise strictly prohibited. What fascinates Taylor about events such as these is how they are in no way revolutionary—in fact, the overturning of order occurs for the sake of supporting the order. Like hierarchical

complementarity, and also like the balance between God and lesser spirits, Taylor takes these celebrations to show the mutual necessity of opposite principles which must be balanced.

*(2) The Reformation*

Three main tendencies characterize the Reformation on Taylor's account: the application of one single standard for all Christian lives, an increasing inwardness and intensification of the religious life, and the affirmation of ordinary life.

The spirit of reform has a homogenizing tendency, through an attempt to apply the same standards for a Christian life to all levels of society. This is to reject the multi-speed system of spiritual life. He writes: "many speeds were also very much in evidence in the Eastern Churches; not to speak of other major civilizations. What seems peculiar to Latin Christendom is rather the deep and growing dissatisfaction with it" (*A Secular Age*, 62). There is, on the one hand, a rejection of higher vocations devoted to contemplation, prayer and meditation, vocations which make a strong demand for renunciation of one's ordinary interests. On the other hand, there is an intensification of the demands on ordinary worshippers, for whom previously religious life had been focused on actions and not beliefs (*A Secular Age*, 63; 81-2). Think of the Lateran Council of 1215, where confession, absolution and communion at least once a year was made universal. This attempt to realize one homogenous set of Christian demands throughout society—to close the gap between elites and the masses, is a continuation of what Taylor calls a "rage for order," an impulse towards one comprehensive standard which contains the whole society beyond any opposition.

The demand that all Christians live according to one standard necessitates that ordinary life, including the everyday productive vocations as well as married and family life, be affirmed, and even sanctified. This is a way of exalting the weak over against subordination to elites, of levelling the playing field of holiness, as well as encouraging a crucial discipline relative to these ordinary roles. This development lies at the root of crucial aspects of the

modern moral order, making possible deeply held notions of equality, the dignity of work and the inherent value in ordinary or secular activities.

The search for a perfect, exception-less code without limit or opposition overturns the pre-modern oscillation between structure and anti-structure illustrated through something like Carnival. Any principle of opposition is given expression within the system or code, so that there is no need to suspend it, as opposed to striking a balance or complementarity between code and anti-code. Corresponding to what we saw at the individual level in the “buffered self”, one might call this the buffered social order or state. Taylor sees this “eclipse of anti-structure” as characterizing the Reformation—one can see this same logic repeated in secular form in the modern state, which in principle contains all opposition and division within itself.

Continuing certain developments in the late Medieval period, there is a revolt against the enchanted world, both good and evil spirits, or white church magic and black magic. These spirits cannot stand against the one omnipotent God, whose power cannot be contained and controlled by priests through the manipulation of sacred objects. Taylor’s point here is important—the disenchantment of the world is not the death of religion, for disenchantment is a process inherent to Judaism, Islam and Christianity.

The central issue of the Reformation, salvation by faith, illustrates the other crucial trend of the reforming spirit—the trend towards faith becoming more and more inward. Whereas this was already the trend for elite religion, Calvin’s position here shows how the tendency towards uniformity through the church and the trend towards inward religion come together. We are so hopeless and depraved that God does *everything* for our salvation. The power of God no longer operates in external sacramental objects at the mercy of human action—it is an inner transformation through God alone. And for those thus transformed, there is no distinction between the sacred and profane—God sanctifies the faithful in all facets of their ordinary lives. Inwardness and comprehensiveness coalesce. The

world has been stripped of its enchanted powers, and the self has become buffered against it, though still radically dependent upon the grace of God.

This sanctification of ordinary human life, Taylor shows, puts the Christian in the peculiar position of going beyond ordinary flourishing through submission to God, after which one can immerse oneself in the tasks of ordinary life for the glory of God. The key is to focus on developing the right inner motive. This focus on having the right motive makes religion even more inward and personal.

The result of this development is a strong development towards the disengaged, disciplined self, an intensification of the Augustinian turn away from the world in order to be related to God as an individual. There is a clear distinction between the inward life of the mind, the locus of purpose and meaning, and external nature, devoid of either.

### *(3) From the Reformation to Modernity*

Here Taylor's account makes a bit of a jump, from Calvin and Calvinists to seventeenth-century Natural Law theorists like John Locke. What is the connection? Taylor's argument, I think, is that when these seventeenth-century theorists speak of the rational, sociable individual, they assume the reformed, disciplined, buffered individual and not the porous, vulnerable pre-modern individual. While the state is no longer built according to a social hierarchy modeled on ontological distinctions divinely given, there remains this component built into the nature of things—in the form of a view of the individual which is the fruit of the reforming spirit. These individuals exist prior to the state, invested with certain pre-political rights. They form the state through an original consent—the concept of popular sovereignty. Society exists for the benefit of these individuals, and so should assure a certain equality and right to fulfill ordinary goals. Thus also assumed is the affirmation of ordinary life we saw in Calvin's view—it belongs to the origin of the modern standpoint that “all callings are equal in the sight of God” (*A Secular Age*, 165). The religious origins of these ideas are explicit in Locke—

that individuals who come together and act according to rational self-interest will ensure their mutual security and prosperity according to God's design.

*(4) Deism*

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, a new view of the relation between God and humans emerges, often referred to as deism. Taylor takes this to be the last stage of the development of Christianity on the way to opening up the possibility of exclusive humanism. From our perspective, it seems very obvious that this religious perspective will lead to atheism, but Taylor shows how, for proponents of this view, it was an open question whether the deist viewpoint would strengthen believers' ties to ancestral beliefs or not.

On the divine side, this involved a narrowing, downward turn for providence. God designs a natural and social order for our benefit, for human flourishing. That which is contained in divine purpose beyond this is excluded. God made this design transparent to reason, so the mysterious aspect of divine purpose fades. Crucially, this order is self-enclosed, in that it is not open to intervention from God within the order to overturn it in any of its particular details. Our communion with God is only through this impersonal order. On the side of the human, insofar as this order is for us and nothing else, we are independently capable of understanding it and acting it out independently of grace. Our confidence in our own power to create order is deepened. We have here the emergence of what Taylor calls the modern moral order in which exclusive humanism becomes possible:

What is the new framework?...Human beings, forming societies under the normative provisions of the Modern Moral Order, and fulfilling their purposes by using what Nature provides, through the accurate knowledge of this Nature, and the contrivances we will later call technology. Moreover, these agents acquire knowledge by exploring impersonal order with the aid of disengaged reason. This

now describes the human epistemic predicament (*A Secular Age*, 294).

That this exclusive humanism is built on religious principles brought into the secular world can be discerned by the sacred aura surrounding its central principles such as popular sovereignty and individual rights.

The result of this development is what Taylor calls the “immanent frame”, and for Taylor, this is the background in which we all now live. This is the end of the historical emergence for the possibility of widespread atheism. The question now is: how do we analyze our contemporary position to see whether this immanent frame, the modern moral order, is genuinely closed, as exclusive humanists argue, or whether it remains open to a transcendent God? The question hinges on whether modern self-consciousness, the “buffered self”, has the self-completeness it imagines. The last stage of the history in this summary of Taylor’s account treats the perspectives which spring up in reaction to a perceived inadequacy with the modern “buffered self”.

##### *(5) Romanticism and the Immanent Counter-Enlightenment*

Taylor looks to various intellectual movements from within this modern moral order that testify to a serious malaise with the ordinary life it affirms: a feeling of emptiness, flatness, lack of meaning which inspire a search for ways of transcending the disciplined or “buffered self” in order to connect with something more meaningful. Some look to art and aesthetic experience as the location of fulfillment, with the artistic genius, or the one who cultivates a deep appreciation of art, as the spiritual model. Some look to the untamed natural world, a return to nature and a search for wilderness. There is a tendency to look for the “holistic”, not to return into that intellectual part of us that distinguishes us from the natural, but to connect with that natural life force running through all things. There is the turn towards the Freudian view of the self not as disciplined and transparent to itself, but as having inexhaustible, unconscious depths.

A more Nietzschean stance will look to the darker side of what the modern moral order excludes, in a celebration of death, the heroic, the Dionysian, pure will, the violent, the irrational, all of which can only be lived by gigantic spirits, not by the masses. In all this, Taylor sees a solicitation for the spiritual beyond the confines of the modern moral order: this search for fulfillment in art, in nature, in what exceeds reason and discipline, is a search for mystery, strangeness, and otherness, both within and without the human.

Whatever truth is ignored comes back to reassert itself in some form against the one who excludes it. And the “buffered self” excludes a great deal. Counter-Enlightenment critiques of the disciplined self help clarify the limits of modern self-consciousness, but for Taylor they also threaten those achievements of modernity which almost no one would want to lose.

### **Modernity and the Possibility of Religion**

Taylor’s modern predicament is thus framed as a competition between three sets of views: exclusive humanists, neo-Nietzschean anti-humanists (both of whom are atheist), and theistic viewpoints, which acknowledge a transcendent God beyond our human sphere. There are various forces pulling at the modern human being on Taylor’s account, and the most satisfying position will be the one that can most fully satisfy them all. In the analysis of modern life, our question is as to which standpoint is most capable of giving an account of what is true in our condition: “who can make more sense of the life all of us are living?” (*A Secular Age*, 638). This is what Taylor calls the maximal demand, a demand already suggested by Plato in the conclusion of *Symposium*, whether one can reconcile the tragic perspective, the divine which lies beyond human interests, and the comic perspective, the divine within human interests? Taylor defines this maximal demand in the following terms:

how to define our highest spiritual or moral aspirations for human beings, while showing a path to the transformation

involved which doesn't crush, mutilate or deny what is essential to our humanity? (*A Secular Age*, 640)

This maximal demand cannot be satisfied if the desires become tamed or disappear in the light of the fulfillment of our highest spiritual aspirations. Taylor is explicit about this: he re-phrases this demand in terms of how we can have Christian transformation relative to a transcendent end “without becoming closet Platonists” (*A Secular Age*, 644).

Here we have a faint residue of Taylor's Hegelianism—there is truth in all three opposed viewpoints, but the most adequate and true is the one that will be able to do justice to and preserve the others most fully. Christianity, if we can think about the meaning of the Incarnation more deeply than in previous ages, will preserve the achievements of modernity and the modern, “buffered self”. The Christian gospel has already become Incarnate in the secular sphere through doctrines of equal human dignity and human rights, popular sovereignty, and so on. However, if this Incarnation can be deepened to embrace that which modern self-consciousness excludes—the body, emotion, sexuality, creativity, imagination, and violence, in other words, the Dionysian—and if it can embrace these not as tamed or transformed by reason, but in themselves, then these achievements of secular modernity will be more firmly secured. This is crucial—if we cannot find a way to acknowledge the Dionysian elements of the human person as transformed, we return to the repressive discipline of the modern “buffered self”. We must retain the Incarnation of Christian ideals in the modern secular, but overcome the “Excarnation” that this implied through disengagement from one's bodily existence and connection to the physical world. Just as Christianity through reform leads to the affirmation of ordinary life, Taylor's Christianity becomes even more deeply Incarnate in taking into itself all the difference and contingency the disciplined reformed self excludes: we are united to God in the wholeness of our human nature. In his paper, Dr Curran explained for us the way in which this resonates in the thought of

Schiller, and this should remind us just how influenced Taylor is by the Romantics.

Unlike Hegel, however, Taylor makes no *argument* for how these antagonists in our contemporary landscapes can be united, except that it will be through a restored connection with the transcendent beyond both atheistic perspectives. While he doesn't argue how this can be accomplished, he does argue against how it will not be accomplished. Understanding how Christianity can answer the maximal demand cannot be accomplished in a straightforward way, or by looking to any of its traditional forms as authoritative. In fact, it is the identification of Christianity with particular philosophical or ethical worldviews that has intensified the division between religion and secularity. In identifying Christianity with a particular form of pre-modern civilization or particular ethical codes, there emerge inevitable conflicts with our contemporary background assumptions.

Taylor mentions the "culture wars" in the United States, where the connection of a restrictive sexual ethics and particular codes of conduct are blended with Christianity and then opposed to secularity, which embraces the sexual revolutions of the 1960's. Collapsing the sacred with ethical codes of an earlier age not only alienates those who might otherwise find their path to God through the Church, but actually closes off what might be authentic moments of union with God in and through sensuality: "To undo the reduction would be to rediscover the way in which life in our natural surroundings, as well as bodily feeling, bodily action, and bodily expression, can be channels of contact with fullness" (*A Secular Age*, 767).

Therefore what is required of theology is "that we disentangle the Christian message from the matrix of our earlier history" (*A Secular Age*, 643). Here Taylor has in mind various syntheses of Christianity with Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy—there is no doubt that for him the Church Fathers and even the Church Councils would have little authority—but also any particular historical manifestation of Christianity. "The Gospel message doesn't fit into the categories which have come down to us through ages of

human history, and is recurrently being twisted, even by its own adherents, to make sense in these terms” (*A Secular Age*, 643).

Clearly this brings an abyssal indeterminacy to what constitutes the core of Christian faith. Though Taylor argues that “there are clearly wrong versions of Christian faith” (*A Secular Age*, 643), there is no single right version against which to measure them. What is called for is “an intellectual humility” (*A Secular Age*, 652), in which we can think the mysterious central images of the faith. The chief fault of the Christian tradition for Taylor is to have pressed the images into perverse consequences.

This separation seems to lead Taylor back to Scripture—he goes through a long list of difference between Greek and Christian thought by contrasting biblical stories with Platonic conceptions. As far as I can see, the core meaning of Taylor’s separation of Christianity from civilization is reduced almost completely to the notion of *agape*, which both defines God’s nature and defines the ethical demand on us to transcend the political community in an Incarnate encounter with the total particularity of another human. In other words, once Christianity has been separated from previous forms of civilization and philosophy, it emerges as identical to the twentieth-century French thinkers who have most influenced Taylor—a similar result would likely follow any attempt to perform this separation. Perhaps we might say in this age of authenticity, where every individual has to follow his own particular path to fulfillment, that Taylor fulfills the demand of the time through his highly personal and idiosyncratic re-imagination of Christianity. Though Taylor is looking for how religion can offer a critical standpoint upon which it could evaluate the implicit moral order behind its beliefs and actions, in practice this critical space becomes quickly assimilated to our contemporary assumptions.

Besides *agape*, the other Christian idea Taylor reinterprets is Incarnation. In one sense, on Taylor’s account, the whole process of secularization, a result of that two-sided movement of reform Christianity towards a more and more inward religion, and towards bringing all Christian life under one standard or principle, has led to a

secular world and this bringing the divine into the world should be understood as Incarnation. But this same process has the exact opposite effect, what Taylor calls “Excarnation”. The disciplined, “buffered self” emerges through the turn towards an inward religion and away from ritual, worship and practice, and this modern self involves the separation of the mind from its body, its emotions and from nature—this is an “excarinating” alienation of ourselves from embodied experience. For Taylor, all those aspects of our experience which have been excluded must also be taken up into union with the divine, as they too provide avenues to experience transcendence. Taylor writes that “Christianity, as the faith of the Incarnate God, is denying something essential to itself as long as it remains wedded to forms that excarinate” (*A Secular Age*, 771). The current challenge for Christianity is to recover a fuller sense of what Incarnation means by embracing those aspects of our existence which are excluded by abstract modern reason.

I want to now take a moment to demonstrate the nature of the theology produced by Taylor’s view. This seems important, not for the sake of getting Taylor’s particular beliefs sorted out, but rather because these beliefs represent what for Taylor is compatible with our contemporary background understanding, the modern social imaginary that he argues we all share. The contemporary Western landscape on his account is open to religion, in fact it shows signs of pining deeply for it. In light of Taylor’s argument, we need to think through: (1) the extent to which certain orthodox theological views will need to be rethought to cohere with modern self-understanding; (2) whether certain aspects of this social imaginary need to be themselves rethought in light of these orthodox truths; (3) whether Taylor is too quick to see incompatibility between the modern self-understanding and these orthodox views, by misinterpreting either one side or the other.

Taylor is firmly opposed to many traditional interpretations of central Christian doctrines, in particular those which are in excessive tension with the chief assumptions of the Modern Moral Order. The existence of Hell, damnation, the wrath of God, (especially Calvin’s

double predestination), original sin, and providence as a divine grasp of the total plan from an eternal perspective—none of these on their orthodox interpretations are compatible with our modern social imaginary, and holding to them can only drive people away who would otherwise be open to Christianity.

Throughout his book, Taylor stresses a certain repeated historical trend which determines his stance towards these orthodox doctrines: throughout history, overly stringent religious stances have driven people away from the faith. In contrast, flexibly adapting the faith to the spiritual needs of adherents has often bound them more firmly to the religion (see for example *A Secular Age*, 652). But his focus on this trend seems to undermine what is so provocative and useful in his historical account: that atheism is not produced by people feeling alienated and excluded from religion, but through Latin Christendom's transformation of the world into something so substantial that it can give people a sense of sufficient fulfillment. Even if one were to recognize this point, surely the opposite point can be made—that reformulating religion in order to adapt it to the contemporary moral sensibility can loosen a religion's binding force, since individuals will quickly come to see that they can attain such fulfillment with or without the religious dimension. This is certainly one lesson that could be taken from deism, which was so thoroughly adapted to secular human flourishing, that quickly people simply lopped off the extraneous reference to God.

Let's examine one brief example of how Taylor rethinks orthodox ideas. Consider his brief treatment of Providence. For Taylor, Providence has often been understood as a Total Plan from the divine perspective. This leads us into inevitable negations of human freedom, and creates inescapable questions of theodicy which can never be resolved. It is this view that, when followed through consistently, produces the morally repugnant consequences of a Calvin. "The main claimants to the Total Picture", Taylor writes, "are now atheists, wielding theodicy like a club." He suggests that the negation of contingency relative to the divine is opposed to the model of God's Providence found in the Bible, which he likens to a

skilled (I imagine he would allow ‘perfectly skilled’) tennis player, who can always return the serve (*A Secular Age*, 277). Strip away divine omniscience and omnipotence, and for Taylor the atheist is unarmed of his weapons of theodicy. Taylor argues in a similar vein about the need to reinterpret original sin, the wrath of God, and Hell.

Notice here what Taylor’s criterion for judging the truth of these views is: what is compatible with our deeply held sense of the modern moral order. Here is an impulse which implicitly guides so many changes to tradition in less orthodox churches, raised to the level of a systematic principle. The question about the truth of a view becomes a question of whether it can cohere with the prevailing moral sensibility.

Of course, this is not exactly fair to Taylor’s intention. With his expected pluralistic humility, Taylor outlines the task of contemporary theology:

taking our modern civilization for another one of those great cultural forms that have come and gone in human history, to see what it means to be a Christian here, to find our authentic voice in the eventual Catholic chorus... (“*A Catholic Modernity*,” 15).

An authentic voice is one that rethinks traditional theological concepts in accordance with the modern social imaginary which we all share. As he writes in *A Secular Age*, those who hold onto these orthodox views, insofar as they inevitably belong to the modern landscape, will inevitably have to “hide from themselves how much they contradict existentially and what they proclaim ideologically” (*A Secular Age*, 656).

Notice the tension between this impulse and the other recommendation in Taylor’s theological perspective. What we need to do is separate Christianity from any particular configuration or manifestation of civilization. Yet the result is that this separation

becomes a conforming of the religious content to our contemporary self-understanding.

At the very end of the book, Taylor singles out two modes of expression that are especially important for doing contemporary theology and forging our new spiritual itineraries. The first involves recounting the lives of those who have moved outside the given order of the modern world by forging new and unprecedented itineraries—telling and retelling the lives of saints, which has of course been an essential part of inspiring spiritual piety. Though I may not feel immediate contact with divine fullness, I know there are people who have, through whom I am inspired to remain within the religion, and who perhaps even invite me to transcend to this communion. These are the lives of figures who have lived in our contemporary landscape, because it is from within this landscape, which can appear self-enclosed and exclusive of anything beyond it, that we need to be reminded that an authentically lived union to God is both possible and desirable. These examples are especially important when our background assumptions are constantly suggesting the closure of modern life to the transcendent, and the details of the lives of these spiritual heroes are essential to a view where religion becomes focused on all the highly personal spiritual paths taken by each of us.

The other mode of expression crucial to our contemporary situation is poetry: “A new poetic language can serve to find its way back to the God of Abraham” (*A Secular Age*, 757). The poet can take “the theological language honed by tradition,” and by fusing it with his or her contemporary experience, can open this language up so that it can once again resonate with us, in that it is severed from a context which has become remote, and given new meaning within our own contemporary horizon. Taylor ends the book with a wonderful analysis of nineteenth-century Catholic poet Gerard Manley Hopkins as an illustration of how poetry can fulfill this function. Hopkins takes the language of Aquinas and Duns Scotus and, through relating it to his experience, redefines the meaning of words so that they can once again speak to the modern soul. I would

not want to deny the truth of what Taylor is arguing about the powerful potentiality of theological poetry as an important space for communion with the divine. But the structure of this gesture is revealing of Taylor's argument in its overturning of an older theological tradition. Where the crucial theological task initiated by Philo, and following him, patristic and medieval philosophy, is reconciling the stories, parables and images of the Bible with philosophy understood as Platonic/Aristotelian wisdom, translating images into philosophical prose, Taylor's theological poet is called on to take these prosaic ideas and reconcile them with our contemporary self-understanding and experience by translating prose into poetry. Both the recounting of great spiritual lives and the poetic revival of desiccated theological vocabulary are seen as a deeper Incarnation of the "excarnate" conceptual formulations of an over-intellectualizing tradition.

Ultimately Taylor's view in this perspective does involve a highly unorthodox intensification of the Augustinian inwardness that started our historical journey towards atheism. In important ways it is clearly different, even opposite to Augustine. Augustine, following the Platonists, responds to the sceptic by turning away from the natural, external world in which certain truth can be found, turning away from the body and the discursive mind to arrive at a discovery of God as the eternal Mind whose essence and existence are identical. Taylor argues that spiritual itineraries in our age will not occur through this negation of what is external to rational mind, but in and through those aspects of humanity that make us particular individuals, sensual pleasure, poetry and art, our feeling of the sublimity of nature. We overcome what he calls modern "excarnation" through these many Incarnate paths to union with God. In this way, our modern moral order, which prizes ordinary life, individual rights, and universal equality, is saved and stabilized. Indeed, because the individuality and contingency of the human which many come to feel this buffered, disciplined self lacks, and which forms the very basis for the various anti-modern critiques, are contained our *itinerarium* to God.

### **Conclusion: Problems and New Directions**

I want to conclude by raising a few general questions about Taylor's approach in *A Secular Age*.

I. By separating Christianity from its Platonic-Aristotelian manifestations, and by using his pragmatic criterion for the adequacy of previous views, it seems to me that religion loses serious terrain in terms of the secular challenges posed to it. As an alternative tactic, think of the Platonic response to Greek Enlightenment, illustrated beautifully in the dramatic context of the *Phaedo*. Confronted by a Greek rationalism and mathematical reason which can no longer comprehend the content of the religion that was believed by its ancestors, Plato seeks to restore the truth of these old religious views by showing how they are thinkable. In order to do so, Socrates must bring his interlocutors to expand their overly narrow sense of what reason is: beyond simple mathematical reasoning, reason can also recognize the qualitative essences or forms of things, and, beyond that, can seek to know the divine Mind which is their ground and cause. It is not the detail of the argument here, but its general structure, that I find important for our purposes. Rather than abandoning the aspects of those older religious doctrines, or separating Christianity from philosophical explanations through Greek categories of thought, we must return to these previous theological and philosophical formulations and understandings, not in order to test how they cohere with our moral sensibility, but to see what in them is thinkable, rational, and true—*that* can give us a critical space relative to our assumed background understanding. As Taylor argues, we should not choose one particular explanation and hold it to be authoritative, against which all other positions are measured, but seek to understand each on its own terms. It seems to me that only in this way can we allow the past to genuinely educate us, to test the soundness of what we hold dear in the modern moral order.

II. Taylor repeatedly concedes that he is not clear<sup>16</sup> *why* reformed Christianity develops in the way that it does to produce modernity and secularization<sup>17</sup>: why there is this impulse towards overcoming all opposition and infusing a single principle throughout society; or why the churches produced by Latin Christendom exhibit such an incomparable restlessness, constantly re-organizing and renewing themselves. I wonder if this is not symptomatic of his approach in focusing on unarticulated background conditions prior to any theoretical formulation. This tends towards underemphasizing the role of explicit doctrines and theological doctrine. But the drive to understand the content of faith is a remarkable feature of Latin Christendom; however much Taylor might lament this as excessive rationality, “the long-standing obsession in Latin Christendom to nail down with ultimate, unattainable and finally self-destructive precision the bases of final, unchallengeable, inerrant authority” (*A Secular Age*, 512).<sup>18</sup> Doctrinal formulations are underemphasized in *A Secular Age*. Take, for example, that in an eight hundred and fifty page book

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<sup>16</sup> See for example, p. 63: “I don’t pretend to have the explanation for this ‘rage for order’”; p. 242: “This is a remarkable fact, I don’t pretend to have an explanation for it”; p. 244: “...one might argue that reform, re-awakening, re-organization, renewed dedication and discipline has become part of the standing culture of all the Churches which have issued out of Western Christendom. Again, I don’t pretend to understand why; but it seems to me that this is a fact, and a rather significant one.”

<sup>17</sup> Taylor, wanting to distance himself from any teleological form of explanation, says that there is no explanation for the rise of exclusive humanism in the sense of “showing its inevitability, given certain conditions” (*A Secular Age*, 258).

<sup>18</sup> “this restraint requires a kind of intellectual humility, and this seems to have been in short supply in Latin Christendom, which has been the scene of total, almost obsessive identification with certain favorite schemes, driven to any wild or repellent consequences, justifying murderous schisms....we must at all costs avoid pushing the logic of any one of these concepts recklessly to their ultimate conclusions, no matter how paradoxical or repulsive” (*A Secular Age*, 652).

on Latin Christendom and its development, Taylor only mentions the Trinity in passing once!<sup>19</sup>

III. In explaining the distinctiveness of Western Secularity, it seems central to consider the distinctive theological beliefs of Christian doctrine, as formulated by the Bible, Church Fathers and the Councils. A Trinitarian God; creation *ex nihilo* of an irrational nature radically other than God and a rational creature in His image, the fall of the human away from God; the Incarnation of God in the Son, in whom the separation of God and humanity is preserved unmixed but united in the person of Christ, the death and resurrection of the Son in which the division of God and human is in principle overcome. If this is what distinguishes Christianity from Judaism, Islam, and other religions, then integrating some reflection on the role of these doctrinal points seems necessary. In the same way, if secularization occurs in a distinctive way in the Western Church, then we should reflect on how doctrinal differences between East and West are related to their different historical forms. It seems to me that one of the main correctives to Taylor that has emerged through this conference is that understanding secularity requires *comparison* between religions, in both doctrine and civilizational history, and that whatever advantages exist in Taylor's approach through unarticulated background assumptions, doctrine should remain at the centre of our concern, since serious religious communities reflect constantly on how best to realize their first principles.

IV. Taylor's own view insists on how one's view of religion, and specifically of Christianity and its doctrinal content, will greatly impact one's view of the history of secularization and the significance of the result, not in the sense that you ideologically seek to distort the

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<sup>19</sup> "...being made in the image of God, as a feature of each human being, is not something that can be characterized just by reference to this being alone. Our being in the image of God is also our standing among others in the stream of love which is that facet of god's life we try to grasp, very inadequately, in speaking of the Trinity" (*A Secular Age*, 701).

history, but rather “in the more subtle way that one’s own framework beliefs and values can constrict one’s theoretical imagination” (*A Secular Age*, 428). In this light it is worthwhile thinking through Taylor’s explanation of the historical development and about the ways his own religious view might shape and possibly distort that history. This brings up the important question: what is the understanding of religion in general, and Christianity in particular, which promises to yield the best account of the historical genesis of secularization and atheism? +